

Changing Paths of Academic Lives

Revising How We Understand Higher Education,
1960s to 2020s and Beyond



Edited by Harvey J. Graff

CHANGING PATHS OF
ACADEMIC LIVES: REVISING
HOW WE UNDERSTAND
HIGHER EDUCATION, 1960s
TO 2020s AND BEYOND

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*To our colleagues and students,
on their many paths,
past, present, and future*

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CHANGING PATHS OF
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Introduction. Past, Presents, and Futures?

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What I call “academic paths,” or the variety of careers that constitute in full or in part higher education, constitute the subject of this collection of first-person autobiographical essays. “Academic paths” are commonly misunderstood. This is often for understandable reasons. More often than not, it results from the lack of historical understanding of careers both into and out of teaching positions of different kinds.

However contradictorily, higher education past and present is poorly studied and our understandings—*plural*—are dominated by myths and biases. By myths, I do not mean fictions but instead incomplete or stunted comprehension that is circulated and often accepted widely (for interpretation and evidence, see Graff, 2023g, 2023h, 2025 especially).

Incomplete ahistorical perceptions dominate conceptions of academic career paths—tending to focus on only recent “jobs crises,” the disappearance of tenure-track and full-time professorships, “contingent” and sessional appointments, time-limited perspectives based on experiences in only one discipline or sub-discipline, and challenges for women and two-career households. This collection contributes to a larger perspective and seeks to promote chronological and comparative understandings.

Few of the many complaints have comparative or chronological context. Through a series of unique personal accounts of those who developed “alternative” or “non-traditional academic careers” over more than one half century—from the 1960s to the present—this book presents a compelling counter, historically based understanding: both a corrective to general misunderstanding and an “alternative history,” especially when taken as a whole rather than as separate parts. That is one reason for the chronological organization.

This book contributes to the Practices & Possibilities series within the WAC Clearinghouse publishing collaborative. It does not focus on career paths within, into and out of, or out of and into the many different areas of writing studies. Although all the authors in this book taught writing within and across disciplines, at community colleges and high schools, to undergraduates and graduate students, only five were assigned directly or primarily to writing or composition studies (see essays by Civello, Ulman, Berry, Casey, and Brigley Thompson).

On the one hand, these five authors collectively offer a historical and chronological perspective needed to understand writing studies—among other post-postsecondary positions—*over time, place, disciplines, gender, and other life*

statuses. On the other hand, also unusual, they contribute to a *comparative perspective on the vexed questions of contingency and security*. Comparisons with the essays, for example, in edited collections by Kahn, Lalicker, and Lynch-Binieck (2017) and Dorfield (2022) are valuable (see also Doe et al., 2011; Doe & Palmquist 2013)

Whereas Civello, Ulman, Berry, Casey, and Brigley Thompson have had the closest connections to writing studies—from teaching high school, community college classes, and required and optional undergraduate classes to doctoral student supervision, and across specializations and genres—almost all the authors have held at least one contingent appointment, from graduate teaching assistant and preceptor at Princeton (Frisch) to cross-disciplinary senior lecturer (Brigley Thompson). Their experiences and understandings add to our comprehension of changing patterns of career paths, different forms of contingency, security and insecurity, and both continuities and transitions over time.

The essays in this book encourage comparisons that embrace both continuities and changes. Non-tenure-track positions have a long history across disciplines, just as “job crises” were experienced in almost every decade of the twentieth century, most emphatically beginning in the 1960s. The experiences of those in every cohort included herein demonstrate this. That is precisely why this original collection is organized by decade. Narratives that over-emphasize the recency of instability and insecurity are ahistorical and out of context (see Graff, 2025).

The power of the perspectives, narratives, arguments, and revisions of the powerful personal accounts brought together here cannot be underestimated. At once, the authors of the essays in this collection speak to the past, present, and plural possible futures of higher education and professional academic career paths. They open many doors toward understanding, and they close others.

Not of least consequence, they speak to the questions and the still developing paths and careers of the young and some not so young students, early-, and mid-career persons. Together, with the contributors, I hope to provide new insights and, when possible, hope and inspiration.

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Consider these titles of recent articles on academic careers in the higher education press. All lack historical perspective. All perpetuate myths of “unprecedented crises” of undefined “academic” positions and promote confusions that mislead more than promote understanding. Misuse of terms is a constant among both present and former English instructors and professors. They perpetuate dangerous mythologies and misunderstandings that negatively impact the shaping of future generations of scholars and professors.

- “After Learning Her TA Would Be Paid More Than She Was, This Lecturer Quit” (Lu, 2024). They were not paid on comparable terms.
- *Academic Failure and Success Redefined: New career trajectories, including those for scholars interested in leaving a tenure-track position, need to*

be normalized and valued (Dorr, 2024). None of the contributors to this book considered “leaving a tenure track position” to be “failure.” At least one did it by choice—successfully and happily (Civello). Others did not receive tenure (Brigley Thompson). After 18 years on contract with union protection, Elizabeth Cohen gained a tenure-track position, followed by promotion to associate professor with tenure, and then full professor.

- “Leaving Academe? You Need More than ‘Transferable Skills.’ To be a viable candidate beyond the campus, you have to get over your academic self” (Pannacker, 2023). Nowhere does the author pause to define “academic self.” Similarly, “transferable skills” are highly variable and context-dependent. All of the essays in this book speak to that issue.
- “How to Pilot a Postacademic Career: Two PhDs who left academe and now run their own businesses offer advice on professional transitions” (Pannacker & Polk, 2024). Neither of these authors “left academe”; they moved *within* its broad domains. None “got over their ‘academic self.’” They utilized their learning and skills in different professional contexts. In other words, they “transferred skills,” so to speak. That is so often missed, resulting in distortion. The essays in this collection may be read in that context. (See, in particular, Frisch, Mattingly, Civello, Herrington, Drucker, Schroedel, Ulman, Leyva, Berry.)
- “PhD students need better advice about non-academic career option” (Walsh, 2023). Writing this in 2023 underscores the depth of long-standing problems and the domination of both self-serving and negative mythologies. The experiences of the contributors to this collection contradict this critique from the 1960s forward.

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The plural worlds of higher education drown in a swamp of ahistorical myths and misconceptions. We have little useful historical memory. Thus, since 2000, and especially since 2008 with the “great recession,” and with better collection of data on posted jobs and job searches, all twists and turns, overwhelmingly negative, are characterized as “unprecedented,” regardless of evidence to the contrary. Plural, complicated, contradictory pasts that are potentially useful for learning and responding to current situations knowledgeably and constructively are ignored. They are neither remembered nor reconstructed factually. The essays in this book speak to different patterns and call for a different understanding over time, from Frisch to Thompson. That is, from the 1960s to the present.

Standing high among the many dangerously misleading myths and misconceptions are notions that *only* in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have established “traditional” academic career paths been shattered from a regular progression from undergraduate to graduate studies with solid financial support to tenure-track assistant professorships and then tenure and promotion.

By myths, I underscore, I do not mean fictions but conceptions that accord at least in small part with different persons' incomplete or partial sense of realities. As Antonio Gramsci, in particular, taught us, this sense of familiarity, however inaccurate, provides the foundation for cultural hegemony (see Graff, 2022d, 2024a, 2025). For example, the omnipresence of the hegemony of the "traditional" academic career especially for middle and upper-middle class white men erases historical memories. In fact, there has been a "job crisis" in every decade since the 1960s, long before the 1990s and especially the early 2010s when regular numerical records began.

In addition, there have always been "contingent" instructors. That is, nontenure-track appointments, full- and part-time lectureships, and adjuncts are not novel. These varied positions have a long history. In fact, if the *longue durée* of the history of higher education is considered, both tenure and tenure track have relatively short durations. Along with "academic freedom," they are developments of the 20th century (for an introduction, see Scott, 2019, and essays in this book).

In addition, while gender, race, and ethnicity are enormously important, there is a history of "trailing male spouses" in nontenure-track positions. So-called "spousal/partner hiring" merits its own study. The essays by the Cohens, Herrington, and Brigley Thompson, in particular, address this. We also forget that the struggles for Affirmative Action in admissions, support, and faculty hiring began actively in the 1960s and grew out of the civil rights movement, long before Diversity Equity Inclusivity (DEI) initiatives and notions of "quotas" dominated the media, politics, and the courts. The history of gender in universities since the 1960s is a prominent topic in this book, as well.

As I have argued elsewhere, historically most students were poor and most collegiate study was vocational. The dichotomies we encounter in higher education today developed in the second half of the 19th and especially the 20th centuries with the emergence of the liberal arts colleges and the modern American university (see Graff, 2024a, 2024b, 2025; compare with Mattingly, 2017; Veysey, 1965, 1981).

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A personal example and perspective:

I introduce many of this volume's major themes and reinterpretations by leading with a personal example (see Graff, 2024a). I discuss my own experience in detail in *My Life With Literacy: The Continuing Education of a Historian. Intersections of the Personal, the Political, the Academic, and Place*. When I entered graduate school at the University of Toronto in 1970, as a new Bachelor of Arts graduate in History and Sociology from Northwestern University, there were very few tenure-track positions on the so-called "academic job market," which never operated like either a "free" or a regulated "marketplace." Both my undergraduate advisor and graduate advisors mentioned this to me.

The opportunities that arose first in the post-World War Two expansion of public, especially state-based, higher education systems, followed by the proliferation of private universities, ended by the late 1960s and early 1970s. Faculty

positions ebbed and flowed with enrollment changes, state and external funding, and budgets. All function in relationship to the large political economy. After more than 100 years, astonishingly, Thorstein Veblen's 1918 *The Higher Learning in America: A Memorandum on the Conduct of Universities by Business Men* (2015) remains the best guide. It is repeatedly rediscovered and then forgotten.

In fact, every decade of the 20th century after the 1920s was punctuated by regular "academic job crises." This is absent from what passes for "historical memory" (see Graff, 2023c, 2025).

With the support first of a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, I chose to study in Canada. The program there offered a combination of intended fields of study (which changed), reasonable living costs, and sources of support including universal health care, and it enabled an alternate to the Vietnam War draft. Had I remained in my intended field of British history, I almost certainly would never have found a tenure-track position in the 1970s. My graduate school peers did not. Shifting to comparative social and cultural history of North America and Western Europe with training in "new social history" (i.e., new at the time) greatly enhanced my job prospects.

In 1975, when I received my PhD in history and history of education from the University of Toronto, there were almost no positions in Canada, my first choice of geographic location. This was especially true for Americans. In the United States, too, there were few jobs until the late 1970s and early 1980s (Graff, 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

The most attractive positions at that time were at the new University of Texas at Dallas. A research center founded by Texas Instruments expanded first into a graduate university in the sciences, and then in 1975 into an upper division so-called "interdisciplinary" university. As a result, more than 120 faculty—overwhelmingly assistant professors with no more than one or two years of previous nontenure-track teaching experience, if that—were hired to begin that fall semester. Few of us saw the campus before moving. I was hired following an interview at a Toronto airport hotel.

Only a handful of incoming faculty began with tenure, and most of these professors had been denied promotion in their previous positions at traditional institutions. Their contrast with the younger, "newly minted" assistant professors was striking. One Princeton-educated political economist quipped, more accurately than not, about his peers, "Aren't we all someone famous' best student?" There were also nontenure-track appointees including spouses. The latter was also true in my years at the also new, suburban University of Texas at San Antonio, 1998-2004 (the site of my brief administrative "career"), and the huge, now 150-year-old Ohio State University, 2004-2017.

We gathered from around North America and beyond in August 1975 at a suburban campus still under construction with little leadership, organization, and preparation, and almost no knowledge of its initial student population. I received no guidance from my "senior" colleagues. Major collegial advice came from somewhat older untenured faculty with previous full-time teaching experience.

“Interdisciplinarity,” we learned quickly, translated into a marketing slogan and major cost-saving. That is, there were no departments with offices and staff of their own. This framing motivated the new colleges of arts and humanities, social sciences, education and human development, and general education to join the science departments in UTD’s effort to gain approval for public university status and funding from the State of Texas. With no self-awareness or acknowledgement of the contradictions, the new colleges all operated degree programs in traditional disciplinary majors at the undergraduate level. The sciences continued as distinct departments as if in a different university (on interdisciplinarity, see Graff, 2015, 2024a, 2025).

Most students were “nontraditional.” They transferred from community colleges for their junior and senior years, often after military service. Many women students returned to college after their children were in school. They were among my best undergraduate and graduate students. The average student, to our surprise, was older than many of the new PhDs, including me.

These students had little or no idea about what “interdisciplinary” meant. Thus, many courses, in folklore and musicology, for example, where too many faculty—especially women—were hired initially, failed to “make.” That is, these classes didn’t attract the required minimum enrollment to be run. Many talented young professors, along with some of their peers, were terminated before the end of their third year without a full review. None of us were informed about that feature of the employment and tenure procedures at the University of Texas. Indeed, procedures like these are among the missing elements in writing about changing academic career paths and represent an underexplored form of contingency and insecurity.

Tenure-track faculty, contrary to common assumptions, were then as disposable as adjuncts and lecturers. We have no longitudinal data on numbers or rates of faculty leaving full-time positions either before or after tenure. “Academic couples” were treated unequally. Long-term professors recognize that “career changes” were never unusual. The essays by Frisch, Mattingly, Civello, Herrington, Drucker, Schroedel, Ulman, Leyva, and Berry all reflect this in different ways and different contexts.

Other outstanding new PhDs resigned after one or two years of full-time teaching. One gave a full year’s notice at the end of their first year. A university professorship, especially at the brand-new University of Texas at Dallas, was not what most of us had envisioned, prepared for, or desired. Importantly, in the cases with which I am familiar, these early career scholars were able to use—I will not write “transfer,” which I consider inappropriate—their knowledge and skills for fully productive, satisfying professional careers. This is a very important element of academic career paths that remains largely unrecognized and unstudied. See the essays by Civello, Herrington, for example, and for “late” movements toward academic positions, see the Civello, Drucker, Ulman, Schroedel, Leyva, Wilson, and Berry chapters (see also Graff publications in References, below).

In the University of Texas system, as in most four-year and graduate universities and systems, a faculty member’s fourth year requires a full review of “progress

toward tenure.” At some institutions, this is an exploratory diagnostic predictive or prognostic procedure or process with a supportive guidance function; at others, it is more critical, sometimes aimed at fault-finding and termination (see Graff, 2022b, 2022c, 2023a).

The circumstances at UTD foreshadowed today’s programs with insufficient numbers of tenured faculty, many of whom either or both lacked relevant prior experience in collegial evaluations or were scarred by their own personal experiences. This was especially a problem for the first cohort of new assistant professors. For example, one extremely well-qualified political scientist was denied tenure because his publications and teaching achievement exceeded that of his tenured colleagues. Using his knowledge and skills, he next led a Congressional subcommittee and then national political rights organizations. Personality clashes as well as jealousy and inferiority mixed inappropriately and unethically with academic protocols. In the end, most faculty concluded that the combination of the third- and fourth-year reviews of new faculty genuinely constituted (in the traditionally demeaning rhetoric) a “junior faculty massacre” (see Graff, 2022b, 2022c, 2024a, 2025).

Regarding my own experience, I was “put up,” or considered, for “early tenure.” My first book was under contract and moving into production, a colleague and I had an edited collection of essays from a conference under contract, and I had received a national competitive fellowship for the next year. In short, I was a strong candidate. Yet, British antisemitic faculty, who had been denied tenure at their previous institutions, led a dishonest, unprofessional, and unethical assault on me. Despite broad faculty pushback, I was denied early tenure because of “doubts about my collegiality,” as the university president’s official letter expressed it. Collegiality, it turns out, was not a stated condition for promotion and tenure.

When I was re-reviewed three years later—after National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Spencer Foundation fellowship years “in exile” at The Newberry Library—campus-wide support as well as my record of achievement ensured my relatively straight-forward process toward tenure and promotion. Antisemitism, among other forms of racial, gender, and ethnic prejudice, has always been common in higher education institutions. In fact, admissions “quotas” persisted well into the 1960s.

Of continuing relevance is the fact that I actively sought other positions for two years, 1979–1981, all university based but some in administration rather than teaching and research. More than a few posts were unacceptable on almost all grounds. Toward the end of that period, I was offered an excellent tenure-track position at the University of Massachusetts at Boston as head of an interdisciplinary program. Just before I sent my letter of resignation to UTD, the state of Massachusetts announced its Spring 1981 fiscal bankruptcy. The attractive position was canceled. Both public and private university economic perils are not novel (see Graff, 2024a, 2024b, 2025).

My career—as *My Life with Literacy*, my hybrid autobiography, explains—took me in and out of administrative positions and a series of joint and

cross-departmental and disciplinary academic career paths at three public universities. Two of these institutions were new. The third was the huge main campus of a long-established state university. My paths were multiple, not singular, constant, or consistent. All the contributors to this collection shed needed light on questions that have long shaped the experiences of faculty who seek to pursue meaningful and rewarding academic career paths.

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In the essays that follow, several key themes emerge. These themes are taken up in varying ways and combinations. They all speak to the wide range of paths followed by their authors and, by extension, by scholars more generally.

Theme 1. Field Changes

Unlike many peers then or later, I was educated and developed further as a comparative and interdisciplinary scholar, teacher, and program developer. I held appointments in history; humanities; social science; education; literacy, languages, and culture; and comparative studies. I earned tenure in history, humanities, and English. I supervised doctoral students in arts and humanities; English; history; literacy, language, and culture; education; art; and dance. I sought flexibility and new opportunities, their relationships, and their challenges. I learned with ever-expanding networks of colleges and students at every point.

Theme 2. The Advantages and Challenges of Interdisciplinarity

Often but far from always, my interdisciplinarity was a career advantage. Sometimes, however, I was asked, “Well, what are you?” “Where do you belong?” Knowing that my doctoral dissertation was based in part on quantitative and demographic analysis, one of the British antisemites in my department actually asked, “Do you speak in numbers?”

A social and cultural historian, I ended my career based in an English department (with a joint appointment) because the endowed inaugural Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies Chair was awarded to the department of English. Some members of that department never accepted a historian among their ranks. Of course, faculty in literary history, criticism, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing often clashed with each other, as well. Given the quantity of whining essays by English and other humanities instructors, silence on that issue is telling.

On questions of interdisciplinarity, see Drucker and Herrington among other chapters below. Compare with chapters by Frisch, Mattingly, Civello, Levya, Pooley, Berry, and Brigley Thompson.

Theme 3. The Enduring Reality of Contingent Positions

Along the way, at every university with which I was associated from 1967 to the present, there was always a wide and widening variety of nontenure-track positions, such as adjuncts and lecturers. Doctoral students long taught a number of undergraduate classes. In fact, I was a teaching assistant—compensated with course credit, not payment—as a college junior, I and taught graduate students at both Northwestern University (summer 1973) and the University of Toronto (1974) while a doctoral student myself.

In the first case, I took the place of graduate TAs who were conducting dissertation research abroad. In the latter two examples, I substituted for a professor away for the summer and a professor who had moved universities and was not replaced with a specialist in his field of expertise. Tenure-track faculty never dominated. Frisch, Elizabeth Cohen, Civello, Drucker, and Brigley Thompson illustrate these experiences.

Contemporary handwringing about the novelty and recency of professional academic employment crises and loss of a firm base in tenure-track positions is uninformed. There is a long, important history that is valuable to all parties, especially present and prospective graduate students.

On the always vexed issues associated with contingent positions, including “academic couples,” “spousal hires,” and “trailing spouses,” see chapters by Cohens, Herrington, Brigley Thompson.

Theme 4. The Enduring Myth of the Jobs Crisis

As the pages of *Inside Higher Ed*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Times Higher Education*, and professional society bulletin boards confirm daily, the question of the present and the future of academic positions attracts considerable attention. Almost tragically, little of that attention is accurate or useful. In part, that stems from historical and comparative neglect (see Graff, 2025). This book represents a step toward a remedy.

Almost all discussions and comments about academic career patterns focus on the present and very recent past, women and gender, and “job crises” of doctoral students and new PhDs. Focus falls overwhelmingly on the arts and humanities, despite the fact that the social and natural sciences share the same negative trends and impacts. In the sciences, in particular, paths are complicated—often but not always enhanced—by post-doctoral fellowships which sometimes but not always include teaching obligations.

There is little awareness that throughout the history of colleges and universities, and especially since the 1950s-1960s, variations in career paths have been common, indeed constant. By no means have these developments centered only on “the present” (invoking presentism), gender and marital status, disciplines and departments, or the changing availability of tenure-track positions or even

“dual career” couples. See, for example, chapters by Cohens, Herrington, and Brigley Thompson.

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This collection of 14 original, critical, and contextual autobiographical essays begins to revise the frequently uninformed and misleading commentaries that have shaped our collective perception of higher education career paths. It constitutes both an alternative history from the 1960s on as well as corrective examples, indeed lessons, on the great variety of academic paths. Individually and collectively, the chapters that follow begin to refute stereotypical assumptions of traditional paths, before and after scenarios, and recent crises. Taken together, they begin to pave paths to new understandings, and perhaps parts of solutions.

Reading Changing Academic Paths by Chronological Cohorts, 1960s to the Present

This volume is organized at the first level by cohorts defined by the decades during which they completed their postgraduate studies and entered professional job markets. They demonstrate the presence and the shifting patterns of both persisting and transitional opportunities. Both individual and collective choices and their constraints are revealed over time and in their complexity and contradictions, all in historical context. Compare, for example, the experiences of Frisch, Mattingly, and Thomas Cohen with Drucker, Schroedel, and Ulman, and then with Berry, Casey, Elizabeth Cohen, and Brigley Thompson. Compare time, places, specific institutions with fields of studies and opportunities. Note the roles of chance, changes, and continuities. These original essays explore and illuminate the key roles of personal choices, chance, opportunities, movement across academic positions, movement into and out of academia, gender and relationships, and more in specific historical contexts. Typically ignored but always powerful is the role of chance and luck.

Nothing in the published literature compares to this urgently needed original presentation. Compare this book, for example, with collections and discussions by Ryan and Sackrey (1984), Frost and Taylor (1996), Edgerton et al. (2003), Bowen and Schuster (1986), Blackburn and Lawrence (1993), Ferber and Loeb (1997), and Franklin (2009). For writing studies in particular, see Dorfeld (2022) and Kahn et al. (2017).

Central Themes across Experiences

In this volume, lines are crossed again and again: lines presumed to be fixed in only certain historical periods and lines involving fields of specialization, institutions, life course stages, and geography. The life course paths recounted herein cross time,

space, gender, generation, and the humanities, social sciences, and arts (on life course analysis, see, for example, Elder, 1986). Importantly, this set of autobiographical essays may be read in terms of each of these elements as well as chronologically.

Each essay is revealing, sometimes moving, in itself. As a whole, they are unusually compelling and valuable, a necessary and unprecedented contribution. There are no competing collections of academic lives. There are no comparable volumes. Other, often older books lack the specific focus, historical and contemporary context, timeliness, and combined historical, interdisciplinary, and cross-gender, marital, and generational emphasis. There are a small number of autobiographies, memoirs, and the like, but none based as this one is in comparative or historical contexts (see Graff, 2024a, Introduction).

The paths are revealing and diverse, and all are forms of nontraditional scholarly careers: some move back and forth between universities and other spheres; some move beyond academia and into successful different careers; some shift from success in traditional scholarship to more public involvement and civic engagement; some explore new fields of study; some involve dual career families, spousal or partner hiring, and divorce; some involve leaving academia early in careers, while others start later (see also Graff, 2022a, 2023a, 2023b, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f, 2024a, 2025).

In the fullest expression, the book is global. By that, I refer to the simultaneous profoundly and inescapably interconnectedness of these scholarly lives in transition during a critical but misunderstood three-quarters of a century in the recent history of higher education. Contributors' lives encompass Canada (Cohens), Wales and England (Brigley Thompson), as well as the United States.

The stories of these lives are infrequently heard, but here they are powerfully and originally taken together across time, gender, age, institutional and geographic locations, life circumstances, and disciplines. They contribute to our understanding in numerous ways. This is clear from the chapter highlights below. Indeed, these are powerful life histories by well-published, distinguished scholar-authors. Here, professional experiences are inseparably connected to personal life experiences.

Although the chapters—and the lives—are ordered chronologically, they may be read, understood, and used in classrooms and other discussion settings in different order and arrangements. They may inform reflection about personal and professional experiences. They may help us think differently about time and what is actually new these days.

Organizing Principles and Narrative Approaches

Chronology: change and continuity. Today's new is not unprecedented. Doctoral graduates of the late 1960s, 1970s, 1990s, and 2000s faced job crises and the lack of tenure-track positions in their fields of specialization, too. The contributors to this volume changed fields at times, and several helped to create new ones.

Others shifted careers entirely. Understanding these moves and decisions and the issues underlying them demands historical context. The history of higher education combines change *and* continuity inseparably. Too much is now presumed, erroneously, to be novel.

First-person testimonies. Through a collection of autobiographical essays, this book begins a new history and presents a set of human experiences that reveal both continuities and different kinds of movements or life transitions, individually and collectively.

The essays are arranged in chronological order to present a history and narrative of changes intertwined with continuities. The roles of chance, luck, opportunity, and contradictions appear at every turn. Both opportunities and surprise punctuate these experiences. Almost no career paths support the notion that academic progress was more often linear and regular than not. We need narratives—like these—of new, complicated, and multiple paths.

Recognizing, interrogating, and replacing myths. Myths, especially of crises and novelty, following expected linear patterns, are often more powerful taken in isolation and out of context than in documented realities and the narratives of actual lives. This collection testifies—literally and figuratively—to diversity, change, and a lack of continuity. Each essay explores unexpected and unpredictable, often surprising paths to academic careers. As we should expect, those paths include periods outside higher education as well as engaged with other forms of teaching, such as in high schools and community colleges. They also include mixes of tenure-track and nontenure-track positions and are informed by personal factors including gender and personal relationships.

More specifically, the essays highlight—and may be read with reference to:

- Roles of different kinds of institutions. In particular, this includes secondary schools, community colleges, non- or extra-institutional experiences as well as all forms of public and private, large and small universities.
- Gender and family relationships, and their changes over individuals' lives
- Patterns of hiring, tenure, and promotion or their absence
- Roles of institutional leadership, finances, opportunities, and limits
- Individual preferences and choices
- Institutional and disciplinary similarities and distinctions
- Main paths beyond normative and stereotypical careers
- Paths seldom as novel as typically and uninformatively portrayed
- The power of chance and accident

Take together, these essays highlight and explore the following topics:

- Conceptions of academic career paths are dominated by incomplete ahistorical perceptions that focus largely on jobs crises and challenges for women in particular with no comparative context. This book presents a compelling alternative understanding.

- Questions about the present and the futures of academic positions understandably attract considerable attention today and recently.
- There is little awareness that throughout the history of colleges and universities, and especially since the 1950s-1960s, variations in career paths—nontraditional or alternative—have been common. By no means have common human experiences centered on the present (or presentism), gender and marital status, or the changing availability of tenure-track positions or even dual career couples in isolation from other factors.
- The essays show that from the 1960s the presence and shifting patterns of both persisting and transitional opportunities and choices are revealed over time and in their complexity and contradictions, all in historical context. Nothing in the published literature compares to this urgently needed original presentation.

By way of concluding this introduction, I underscore these points that ring through all the essays: In their own distinct ways, they make the point that most faculty had faculty advisors and colleagues who supported their non-compartmentalized aims. These academics, unlike most administrators, breach the walls to support issues that are not traditional. Even more powerful, indeed inescapably compelling, is the persistence of the contributors across time, fields, space, and place. They all tolerate difficult, usually unexpected, challenges and transformations. They were resilient, listening to their inner drummers. They created the roles that made sense to them, within shifting opportunities and constraints, even when the drivers were outside the walls of academe. Many paths were not linear, were not singular. Together, the authors and editor call for others to join us in presenting exemplary experiences in academia in their own words.

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Section I. 1960s Cohort

Chapter 1. Weaving Career Trajectories: Academic, Professional, Intellectual, Personal

Michael Frisch

UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, SUNY

Michael Frisch graduated from Princeton University as part of an unusual cohort in a short-lived experiment in an Oxford-Cambridge-influenced, three-year PhD program with guaranteed sessional appointment. He then found a new career path in a tenure-track position at what was then named the State University of New York at Buffalo. That opportunity and its geographic location led him to change fields; merge labor, local, and oral histories in new ways; and reshape knowledge and how he developed it.

For more than fifty years, two interconnected threads have run through this historian's career. One involves the evolution of my interests, practice, and scholarship, both applied and theoretical—not so much a change as a broadening in substance, and a move toward engagement beyond the university and academe. The other involves a late-career shift in the locus but not the focus or substance of my work, which remains consistent and continuous: a shift from academic teaching and research to a consulting office pioneering new tools and applications. Taken together, the weave of these threads, traced through informal stories and reflections, speaks to the concerns underlying this volume's essays.

As an undergraduate at Tufts University, I was propelled, by inspiring freshman English and humanities courses, from a not-deeply-grounded pre-med path to an American History major. My history senior thesis drew on the teenage experience in Shaker Village Work Group, a summer project located in and helping to restore the 18th-19th century Shaker Village in New Lebanon, NY, one of the centers of this remarkable Utopian religious community.

Shaker Village Work Group—which lasted nearly 25 years—was an effort, utopian in its own way, for teenagers to imagine and build a kind of secular translation of the Shaker ethic—about the sanctity of craftsmanship and work, and about the grounding of individual creativity and social relations within a community defined by gender parity, collective respect, and inclusiveness. After two summers as a teenage “villager,” I returned for two summers on staff while in college. From that I had access to a trove of primary Shaker documents and resources that I plunged into for a transformative senior thesis, exploring the latter years of Shaker history.

Graduate school followed but kind of by accident. An older Tufts student in my dorm, recently returned from a year in England, told me about a tutorial program at the London School of Economics (LSE) where I could do independent

research on my own while enjoying a year in London. Eager for a “break” before graduate school, this was intoxicating. But thinking it obvious, my friend did *NOT* tell me that applying to LSE then was more or less like applying for a public library card—you’d be accepted automatically and be assigned a tutor to meet with you once or twice.

Given this omission, and not long past the stress of college admission decisions, I assumed I needed to have fallback options against possible rejection. And so I applied to American history graduate programs. My record was good if not compelling, and I was rejected by some and, of course, accepted for LSE. But then came a telephone call from Princeton, at the time recruiting for an American history program that was strong and growing, if not the strongest, in an eminent history department.

With a (then) rising demand for professional historians in an expanding university world, and with an eye to what was (then as now) considerable attrition in most graduate programs, Princeton offered *every* accepted grad student a complete four-year fellowship. When this was announced on the phone by Professor Wesley Frank Craven, a renowned colonial historian, I politely requested that the offer be postponed so I could spend my LSE year in London. In a gentle southern drawl and with a bemused smile I could imagine, Professor Craven said, “Well, Mr. Frisch, I’m afraid we really can’t do that. And, you know, admission IS getting MUCH tougher each year. ...”

Reality and a four-year fellowship beckoned, so I entered Princeton. I began my studies with a Shaker-thesis-inflected interest in artisans. This broadened into 19th century labor history and finally into the relatively new field of urban history, focused for me on the meanings and dimensions of community change in 19th century urbanization.

Still intent on getting a break from the university library, this led to field research in and on a target city—Springfield, Massachusetts, where I lived for a year. I completed my dissertation in a second writing year in Cambridge. Not quite LSE or London, but ...

Shortly after finishing, I was invited to join a group of graduate students, new assistant professors, and senior scholars locked up together for a long weekend conference on “The 19th Century City” at Yale University. The dissertation became my first (and tenure-earning) book, *Town into City: Springfield Massachusetts and the Meaning of Community, 1850-1880* (Frisch, 1972), one of a parade of single-city studies, many from the grad students and assistant professors at that Yale conference defining what was grandly called “The New Urban History.”

II

Nineteenth-century American urban history was the field for which I was then hired by the history department at the University at Buffalo (UB), at the time inelegantly known as SUNYAB, State University of New York at Buffalo. UB was a

private university incorporated in a new state university, on its way to becoming the system's flagship research university.

The transformed and expanding history department, with no room in its campus building, placed offices for me and several colleagues in one of several houses on a residential street bordering the campus. This led—not quite by accident, but certainly serendipitously—to a broadening that profoundly reshaped my academic, intellectual, professional, and personal trajectory.

The agent for this transformation was, literally, the house next door. This is where UB had located a new American studies program (AMS) grounded in cross-cultural anthropology and arts-focused multi-disciplinarity, rather than the conventional history/literature combination of leading programs—such as Yale's, from which Lawrence Chisolm and most of the initial UB faculty had happily decamped to build an entirely new program from their own imagination. The new program almost immediately attracted a remarkable cohort of graduate students, most of whom were already deeply involved in cultural/political activism.

This next-door AMS, along with lively and new history colleagues, became my community in the first few Buffalo years. It also drew on the expansive energy transforming UB across the board—especially in an already legendary English department featuring scholars, poets, and writers like Leslie Fiedler, Robert Creely, Robert Hass, John Barth, and a junior faculty member in my cohort later to earn the Nobel Prize in Literature, J.M. Coetzee. There were other such icons at UB, established and becoming, in music, theatre, media, and the arts. UB connections to the similarly and surprisingly electric (and eclectic) avant-garde cultural scene in Buffalo were extensive in both directions.

Meanwhile, in the AMS house next door, politicized new graduate students decided to launch an annunciatory journal of radical American studies. They secured funding, a printer, and an agent to obtain subscriptions from around the world, even before there was a first issue. Each issue was to be thematic, with the first on Native Americans—a defining axis of the new AMS, which had a Native American studies component created by students like the soon-to-be-renowned John Mohawk, and the professor these students recruited, the already-renowned Onondaga Faithkeeper, Oren Lyons.

To honor that focus, as well as the Buffalo setting and not incidentally their left politics, the students named the radical new journal *Red Buffalo*, and they planned a second issue on oral history. (It was also the last: for years, letters arrived from subscribing libraries as far away as New Zealand, asking when they would receive their remaining issues.)

As a next-door history professor informally part of the AMS community, I was asked if I could write something for the oral history issue. I told them I didn't know much at all about oral history, but that I was then reading Studs Terkel's book about the Depression for my American history survey course. I said, Well, I'm reading *Hard Times*, an oral history of The Great Depression, so perhaps I could write a review essay?

I knew what I might write in an article about the 1930s, but not for an oral history journal. I remember looking at the blurbs on my paperback's cover: "This is the voice of the people; It's an anthem in praise of the American Spirit; It's Carl Sandburg and the nobility of the ordinary; Just listen to these voices—this is the way it really was." I thought: that's not the book I just read, which seemed darker and much more complicated. I noticed Terkel's very first line: "This is a memory book." My review essay focused on what a "memory book" might mean—and what Terkel was doing and saying through his oral history.

Hard Times is a mosaic of 150+ interviews about American lives in the 1930s, collected and mediated by a Chicago radio interviewer with a gift for careful listening and thoughtful responses. I was struck by how well the book conveyed pain and lost dreams, how people felt they had failed rather than society failing them. My essay explored how these sensibilities informed Terkel's selection, editing, and presentation: he offered oral histories both as primary sources and as an historian's interpretation.

Side note: the *Red Buffalo* editors commissioned an introduction from a friend in Wisconsin. What they got uncritically celebrated Terkel's collected memories of ordinary people—a left-populist version of the paperback blurbs. The editors found that romanticism terrible, and so the issue appeared with two introductions, one as commissioned, the other their own left-theoretical critique of hegemony and false consciousness.

My review essay didn't have that tonality but it did explore—a new curiosity for me—the complexity of memory, given and received, as a source of history. This seemed to strike a chord with readers similarly looking beyond the romantic "blurbosphere." That was the beginning of oral and public history as an emerging, ongoing focus of my work, in both theory and practice.

Somehow, my little review essay came to the attention of Ronald Grele, then directing the Columbia University Oral History Office. Ron liked it, drew me to my first Oral History Association meeting, and put me in contact with a generation of writers, especially in Europe and the UK then beginning to converge on similar ideas and sensibilities—Alessandro Portelli, Luisa Passerini, and Paul Thompson, among others. I joke with friends that a great way to become known is to write a pretty good article that nobody can find: Well, I hear there's this interesting article in *Red Buffalo*. What is *Red Buffalo*? Anybody know where I can find *Red Buffalo*?

A related story involves Terkel himself. Ronald Grele's (1975) *Envelopes of Sound*, presented a panel with several leading oral historians—and Studs Terkel. At one point, Terkel said something to the effect of, "Well that kid, what's his name, Buffalo Red, he made a good point." Years later, the Oral History Association honored Terkel at a 1990s annual meeting in Milwaukee, a controversial step upsetting some who felt a best-selling popular author could not really be a legitimate, respectable Oral Historian. I had never met Terkel, but an elevator door opened and there he was, in trademark knit tie and checkered shirt. I was starstruck, but managed to say,

“Mr. Terkel! Great to meet you, I’m ...Buffalo Red!” He broke into an instant grin, gave me a big hug, and we talked about the essay.

III

In the years following this 1970s start, reflections on oral history and then practice, moved more and more to the center of my own work. They propelled my broader engagement in public history and the dialogue among historians and our different publics. Sometimes, this was in tandem with my formal history grounding in urban history, especially (but not exclusively) in projects and collaborations that engaged the fascinating and complex history of Buffalo, my adoptive home city.

Both dimensions of this broadened academic trajectory informed a 1990 collection of occasional pieces I’d written, drawn together as *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Frisch, 1990). *Shared Authority* proved an enduringly well-chosen title whether the book is still much read or not (I know it’s certainly not frequently purchased!)

By the 1990s, this balanced urban-oral/public history combination had become the center of my academic and professional life. This is embodied in *Portraits in Steel* (Rogovin & Frisch, 1993), oral histories and photographic portraits of Buffalo steelworkers and their families following the closing of most of the Buffalo region’s steel and iron facilities. This was a collaboration with the eminent documentary photographer Milton Rogovin—local, but already well known and respected world-wide. Rogovin had taught darkroom photography while completing, in his 70s, an unneeded but satisfying American studies MA degree.

For most of the 1990s, with an official joint appointment, I chaired the now PhD-granting multicultural American studies department, then also housing women’s studies and Native American studies, which later were to become independent departments. American studies also included Puerto Rican studies/Caribbean studies and developed close affiliations plus graduate degree tracks for African American studies at UB.

All this—and national visibility grounded in the broader developments at UB—led to my selection/election as President of the American Studies Association for 2000–2001, at the turn of the millennium. At this time I was also deeply involved in civic efforts to imagine and implement what the centennial of the 1901 Pan American Exposition in Buffalo could mean and do on an appropriately international stage—so that Pan-Am and Buffalo might be remembered not only for the assassination of President William McKinley in the Exposition’s Temple of Music.

In turn, this involvement also set the stage for a dramatic change in my academic trajectory at the start of the 21st century. Significantly, this in no way involved a change in the content and direction of my scholarship and practice. In fact, the impetus was the opposite. Understanding why requires a brief excursion into intertwined personal and institutional developments.

As it happened, at the end of the 1990s and the century's turn, I had been granted temporary release from major teaching in both AMS and History in support of the American Studies Association presidency and the Pan-Am Centennial efforts. In 2001-2002, I was due to return to a full-time workload in two departments. In a second marriage and with a later start, my wife Jo and I were then also parents of two daughters under age ten; Jo was (and remains) full-time UB faculty in Epidemiology and Public Health.

In this context, I began to think seriously about taking the early retirement for which I was newly eligible. When I shared these musings, friends uniformly had a single reaction: Oh, you want to spend more time with the kids! But that wasn't it at all. I explained to my friends how we each were doing and would *continue* to do as much as we *each* could with and for the kids. But were I to return to full-time teaching—four courses plus graduate advising and thesis direction, plus committees and leadership on recruitment—and in light of our family demands, I feared I might not be able to read a book or do urban research or develop public/oral history projects. And so, with decades of TIAA-CREF retirement resources, I approached my deans to explore early retirement options.

IV

Then, another surprise: Creative administrators faced their own dilemma—they found themselves bribing faculty into early retirement in order to free resources for hiring. And with UB in Buffalo, administrators said, some of the most productive faculty take the offer and move to New York City or Cambridge or Berkeley, where they did not need tenure-track jobs but wanted only appointments offering access to colleagues and graduate students.

In response, some university administrators began to imagine an in-between option. As our Bills-fan/football-savvy then-President Bill Greiner said to me, “You’re the experienced, high-priced lineman we need on the field and in the locker room. So why don’t we together ‘restructure your contract’ with regard to state resources, including both salary and pension, so that, as in the NFL, we can free up ‘room under the cap’ for going into the draft for new hiring.”

In this spirit, UB offered me an innovative in-between role: Senior Research Scholar, teaching one course, not four—but in every other way remaining a full citizen of two departments. As my dean said, “We don’t need you to teach the survey course for the 25th time. We need your experience and leadership for directing dissertations and senior theses, and graduate advising/on committees, search committees and internal leadership roles, not to mention the national visibility of your work.”

For this new role, UB provided around 40 percent of my former salary, not—as is otherwise common—a minimal adjunct fee for teaching one course. Overall, this was a win-win for me, as my entire impetus for early retirement was to continue meaningful work—NOT to step back from it. And it played out that way for

the fifteen years I continued in that Senior Research Scholar/two-department-citizenship role.

As President Greiner observed more generally, university manpower models desperately need reimagination. When I arrived at UB, my job description was as follows: teach four courses, do research, advise students, and serve administratively. On the verge of early retirement, with nationally visible work and leadership, my job description remained the same: teach four courses, do research, advise students, and serve administratively. What if, Greiner said, we approached our best scholars and teachers in their late 40s and early 50s, and invited them into a role as Senior Fellows—still active in departments but with reduced teaching, expanded graduate direction, and full-citizenship leadership—all for modest reductions in salary somewhat balanced by easier-to-supply office and research support?

UB hasn't yet gone down this workload path structurally, although it remains an intriguing alternative to losing some of its best to early retirement and, more importantly, a way to derive value from the unique institutional and national leadership capacities of senior faculty in whom so much has been invested for so long.

It worked well for me and, I think, my university: It led almost immediately to my 2002 initiation of an oral/public history consulting office, the Randforce Associates LLC, housed initially in UB's Technology Incubator, and more recently in The Innovation Center of the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus, with UB's relocated Jacobs School of Medicine downtown at its center. Randforce is now in its third decade, with a practice expanding in dramatic ways.

V

We have been at work for a good while now on the frontiers of oral history content management and new forms of generating multimedia documentation with immediate, expansive uses. For many years, the center of this practice involved a third-party software, InterClipper, with unrivaled capacities to annotate and cross-index source media directly as audio and video, without requiring transcription. Its definitive strength, not yet matched in the most advanced content-management programs today, lay in offering multiple metadata fields for coding passages, each with a customized taxonomy and deployable for sorting in any combination of independent and dependent variability (i.e., filtering by, in order, "military/race relations/Vietnam era," or "race relations/1950s/ business").

We've partnered in adding this capacity to major projects across the country and internationally, including five IMLS National Leadership Grants. InterClipper itself became functionally obsolete a few years ago, never ascending from local computers to the cloud. Its developers' interest turned instead to a new web-app, PixStori—a mode for gathering and sharing photo-prompted short-form oral history on an interactive social media platform offered via Talking Pictures, LLC, one of our partners. At the same time, Randforce's adaptations of

InterClipper-style cross-referencing and indexing for long-form audio and video collections have proven approachable on other software platforms, informing our ongoing consulting practice.

In the last few years, a host of new technologies and capacities, including but not limited to those inflected by AI, have suddenly and dramatically transformed the landscape of oral and public history—and our practice—at every level, from individual projects to large institutions. The biggest impact, initially at least, has been on transcription, for so long the major time- and cost-intensive obstacle to widespread access to and use of oral history collections. If AI is a transformative earthquake, for transcription it has thrown off two powerful aftershocks.

First, automatic transcription can produce an initial transcription with up to 90 percent accuracy. Second, auto-transcription can provide embedded time-codes to connect transcript and recording at precise points—read, click, and hear/watch that precise moment in the interview. This opens a new world of text-based access to recordings for examination, extraction, and multimedia use. Still, AI transcripts require aggressive correcting and formatting, filled as they are with every speaker utterance, every speaker-change broken out as a new paragraph, and time codes everywhere. But, more importantly, AI transcripts also invite editorial engagement to make the transcription, as a kind of translation from voice to text, readable and browsable.

Adding informed, responsive editing to the simpler process of correction has moved to the center of our current work. With new tools, we discovered that we could process the full transcription and move on, in one smooth arc, to produce with surprising efficiency and ease a series of parallel transcript iterations as distinct indexes for the collection.

We first consolidate the long AI transcription (which breaks at every speaker change) into an equally verbatim but infinitely more browsable “Transcript of Record,” consolidated at carefully chosen paragraph break points covering 2-4 minutes of recording, with a single timecode at the top. We then guide client project staff in dividing the interviews into content-driven 10-15-minute chapter-like “Units,” presented in a “Table of Contents” with brief content summaries describing the coverage in each named Unit. These then flow into distinct iterations, editing the speakers’ words first as concise “Unit Digests”—usually 25-40 percent of the unit’s Transcript of Record—and then “Story Digests,” for shorter thematically focused highlight passages selected collaboratively with the project.

With no loss of content or theme, Unit Digests are an accurate, readable, browsable distillation, while thematic, focused Story Digests are especially useful for educational settings and for publication in that they are wholly in the speaker’s own words. Finally, with the Unit and Story Digests providing content flow and thematic distillations, we and the project team return to the full Transcript of Record to identify and mark, with in-out points, passages available for media export or verbatim quotation, easily locatable and extractable by students, producers, or visitors. Keywords can then be assigned not only within and across

interviews, but up and down the “ladder” of these different iterations for any section, permitting easy drilling down for detailed exploration or zooming out for different views as needed.

Our work is only one vector in a field very much in motion from various directions and across many platforms, tools, and conceptual approaches. Each developments challenge conventional assumptions about oral history, from interviewing to archiving to transcribing to indexing to producing media to public sharing and involvement. It is difficult to predict exactly what the field will look like in even five or ten years, not to mention 50, and I won’t even dare to speculate on what AI will continue to add to the mix. We’re all in the boat with Bob Dylan: “You know there’s something happening here but you don’t know what it is, do you, Mr. Jones?” I don’t quite know either, but I can offer some informed guesses.

Oral and public history have for most of their history been defined by either an archival sensibility or a documentary sensibility: collect, store, and organize the material for any possible use. Or, a specific user reaches in to find a specific something for fashioning a specific output: a film, an exhibit, a research article, a website post.

In-between, and surprisingly unaddressed, lies an *instrumental* sensibility: organizing the collection to serve all those who want to *do something* with the material, and do something in ongoing ways that vary widely—over time and situation, and among what may be the very different needs and objectives of organizational users and the communities they engage.

This is the same instrumental sensibility that propelled my initial oral and public history steps beyond graduate training in my first years in Buffalo, as described above. Only recently I’ve come to recognize that this “do something” sensibility has been the consistent voice speaking to my curiosity and propelling whatever contributions I have been able to make in urban history, oral history, and public history, in modes that have appropriately taken very different forms, substantively and institutionally—over time.

It is this sensibility that led me to first sense and then identify an only-now emerging paradigm shift deeper than the transformative impacts of technology and broader than dramatic changes in a field once oriented to elite interviewing but now responsive to communities unrepresented in the historical record itself, not to mention excluded from participation in its construction, interrogation, and interpretation. The paradigm-shifting concept holds that it is not dramatic discoveries or inventions that are revolutionary. Rather, it is community-driven understandings that first lag behind, but finally—sometimes in a moment—catch up with the profoundly transformative implications of new discoveries or technologies. The revolution involves how this happens, and what difference it makes.

From the beginning, oral historians stubbornly tended to see the basic building-block elements of the field as independent and free-standing, however constellated and to what ends: Interviewing, by and for whom. Recordings. The transcript. Catalogs and finding aids. Search tools. Metadata. Indexing. Extracts

for publication or in research or in documentary production. Exhibits and community responses. Crowdsourcing.

But what if we see these elements, each and all, as facets or views of the same oral history thing—all there, all the time, all reachable, all variously usable? What if the transcript is no longer viewed as a flat one-dimensional representation of a recording? What if, instead, we can easily map interviews through different interconnected versions or views of recording-connected, verbatim transcriptions? Here, we might access a new capacity for oral history, but one totally familiar and ordinary to GPS users accustomed to pinch in or out to view a given map at various scales, from the broad region to street level, depending on what navigation is needed, what they need to see. What does shared and sharing authority in oral and public history—and history itself—look like then, and what will we be able to imagine doing with it?

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Chapter 2. Doing American History in the Recent Past, 1962-2023

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American history Ph.D. from public state University of Wisconsin at Madison, Paul Mattingly found employment in the College of Education at New York University. He then gained a joint appointment with the history department. In time, he became the director of one of the most pioneering public history programs in the United States. His teaching and research changed in direct and indirect relationships with shifting positions.

This essay analyzes my own trajectory, which links the arc of historical training to its 21st century achievement. It is a personal essay. This history is essential because interdisciplinary work is not formally taught in history departments; it can only be assessed through individual experience. Hence this essay moves through my own experience from a pragmatic specialization to an interdisciplinary standard. The story begins with a short summary of historical studies in the early 20th century and leads by several steps to my own interdisciplinary product. The trajectory differs from person to person but in the main, my experience permits the reader to see the change. There are unique experiences here but the endpoint underscores a varied and synthesizable product: a history that allows for everyone to be seen in the narrative, unlike the starting point. The history of the 21st century is a history of many parts, like the societies they describe. My own experience in the profession of history differs markedly from the place where patterns began in the late 19th century.

For much of the 20th century, historical analysis was largely descriptive and political, beginning with Henry Adams (1838-1918) and Herbert Baxter Adams (no relation) (1850-1901). They attempted to analyze American state and federal legislatures overexerting themselves to achieve the promise of the United States Constitution. The work—both Henry Adams' exploration of his grandfather's impact on the presidencies of Jefferson and Madison plus the German-influenced model *Johns Hopkins Studies in History and Political Science* (1883-1986), not to mention Herbert Baxter Adams' shaping of the American Historical Association and its professional standards—was gritty and undramatic.¹ These and other

1. Adams, H. B. (1889-91). *A history of the United States during the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1801-1817* (9 Vols). Library of America; Adams, H. B. (1883-1986). *Johns Hopkins University studies in historical and political science* (4 Vols). Johns Hopkins University Press. These two works by Adams will stand for a generation of individuals who formed the first generation of professional historians.

works explored the debates over the Constitution, *The Federalist Papers* and other communiques. They gathered a spate of laws, varying from place to place, but which worked toward an equitable conclusion. Much of a generation's work—the 1890s until after World War I—demonstrated how issues were stretched and bent to result in a more perfect union. The political inheritance of this first generation of professional historians lasted well into the 20th century.²

During the interwar period, some members of the historical profession moved gradually beyond this political schema to related issues. They did not move so far as to establish alternative specialties, remaining within reach of the political culture of their forebears. William A. Dunning (1857-1922) attempted a Southern version of his subject, which downplayed the force of Jim Crow and lionized the achievement of the New South (i.e., one nation).³ Dunning joined a host of scholars, like the founder of the *Journal of Political Science*, John Burgess, (1844-1931) who seconded his interpretation of a South unphased by its Civil War failure and by its unique contribution to a cohesive United States.⁴ This pre-Progressive interpretation ignored the geography and indeed the anthropology of the Southern states.

The average student of American history received these arguments in textbooks, many of which remained within the conceptual boundaries of their subject. Change proceeded from presidential election to presidential election, by the movement of the democratic process, with variants acknowledged only by military movements and wars. Politics, the military, and biographies accounted for the major changes in American society and have led to assumptions that persist today in America's book clubs and select sections of the country. This pragmatic tradition continued thru the 1950s, encapsulated in the textbook tradition of T. Harry Williams (1909-1979), Richard Current (1912-2012), and Frank Freidel (1916-1993), with their work *A History of the United States* (1959), and Samuel Eliot Morison (1887-1976) and Henry Steele Commager, (1902-1998) with their *The Growth of the American Republic* (1930, 7th ed 1980) which disseminated succinctly the hagiography of America's democratic Republic.⁵

American historians were trained to teach this subject matter at the university level after an arduous process of graduate instruction that included comprehensive examinations, multi-year study, several required languages (thought to keep Americans abreast of new European thought on their subject), and an expansive dissertation to demonstrate their intellectual prowess. In their wisdom, the premier universities provided support for no more than three years, though many

2. Banner, J. M., Jr. (2021). *Being a historian: An introduction to the professional world of history*. Cambridge University Press, Ch. 1.

3. Dunning, W. A. (1907). *Reconstruction: Political and economic, 1865-1877*. Harper & Bros.

4. Burgess, J. (1902). *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876*. Chas. Scribner's

5. Williams, T. H., Current, R., & Friedel, F. (1959). *A history of the United States*. Alfred Knopf; Morison, S. E., & Commager, H. S. (1930). *The growth of the American republic*. Oxford University Press.

campuses sported research institutes, experimental labs, and related museums to extend graduate assistance to talented students and to render trained labor at very competitive costs. The system developed and preserved by America's higher education institutions lasted largely intact for much of the 20th century. Variation from the established argument became cause for debate. Charles Beard (1874-1948), with *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1912),⁶ received flak for his efforts to argue that America's founders followed their economic interests. He long defended his book as fully documented and argued the necessity of going beyond political parameters. Gradually younger colleagues followed, especially C. Vann Woodward (1908-1999), whose *The Origins of the New South*, did yeoman work to establish a flawed legitimacy to the South's contribution to America's political achievement.⁷ Many others supported Beard's 1927 synthesis *The Rise of American Civilization*, a popular textbook that exemplified the limits of political analysis.⁸ Woodward (b. Arkansas) and Beard (b. Illinois) also personalized the forces of Southern and Midwestern origins that shaped a different view of American history. The historical canon dramatically reflected the external force of interpretation advanced by its handlers; America's became malleable.

Beard's economic interpretation of legislative direction stimulated alternative explorations. Thomas Cochran began his probe into business and capitalist practices at New York University after completing his doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania. By his 1972 presidential address to his colleagues in the American Historical Association, two world wars presented great challenges to democracy.⁹ Instead of confirming the triumph of the victory, Cochran argued that the outcome of the wars accentuated the meaning of democracy, instilling a more concrete version of the term.

College and university students increasingly leaned toward (or demanded by turns) that democratic equality deliver on its promise to every citizen. Populist movements influenced not only scholarship but the nature of government. The Civil Rights movement, the women's movement, and environmental activism rose up in many departments as legitimate subjects for exploration. These events made clear how important histories outside the walls were (and had been) to the operations within the halls of scholarship.

The dynamics of the wars also created a separate population of scholars escaping Nazi tyranny and emigrating to the United States for refuge. These scholars brought

6. Beard, C. A. (1913). *An economic interpretation of the constitution*. Macmillan.

7. Woodward, C. V. (1951). *The origins of the New South*. Louisiana State University Press.

8. Beard, C. A. (1927). *The rise of American civilization*. The Macmillan Co. See also Fox, R. W., & Kloppenberg, J. K. (Eds.). (1995). *A companion to American thought*. Blackwell Publishers, pp. 59-60, 745-746.

9. See <https://historians.org/about-aha-and-archives/presidential-addresses/Thomas-C.-Cochran>; https://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas-C.-Cochran_historian. **Note: Looks like link is insecure. Cut or fix. See also Novick, P. (1988). *That noble dream: The "objectivity question" and the American historical profession*. Cambridge University Press, Ch. 7.

new methodologies and theories of historical inquiry quite foreign to Americans. They studied problems of dictatorship, identity, crowd dynamics, and more.¹⁰

In particular, the French *Annales* school not only practiced a different historiography, but they also published their findings in a distinct, influential journal. That cohort in particular examined distinct social groups that influenced politics: labor, immigrants, family, schools, students, or, in a word, ordinary folk who often voted with their feet. Human migration became an important topic, as well as the normal transportation of citizens from one place to another. Initially this scholarship was considered hyper-specialized compared with the practice of American political inquiry. From the late 1950s and 1960s, the *Annales* alternative began to influence America's scholarly canon itself and cause a revolution in the methodology and interpretation of historical inquiry.

A postwar generation of scholars published on a range of new topics that by the early 21st century had yet to be synthesized into a new canon. In history at least, the American research experience has differed markedly from the collegiate experience. Graduate study in history during the 1960s and 1970s had several distinct characteristics. First, individual biography no longer became personalized or single person centered. Instead, biography illuminated larger historical trajectories. Second, institutions became the subject of historical inquiry; scholars studied step-by-step progressions which affected the many rather than the few. Third, new technological devices—computers and camcorders for documentaries—led to new forms of participation during the inquiry process itself; one's colleagues became sympathetic critics during the process of building an interpretation, rather than simply offering judgement at the end.

For the first time, large topics like 20th century cities became the target of group endeavors. Possibilities opened for humanists to follow the lead of physical and social scientists in group research. None of these developments occurred overnight; it took many years for older habits to break down and be replaced by new modular approaches. In many places today, the two traditions operate side by side.¹¹

In the early 1970s, as I began to search for employment opportunities, the academic door began to close. During the 1960s, medical schools, for example, looked with favor upon pre-meds who majored in non-scientific topics like philosophy, English, or history. Similarly, schools of education took advantage of the proliferation of graduates majoring in non-political topics: children, teachers, high schools, colleges and universities, research and professional associations, philanthropy.

My thoughts turned to the University of Wisconsin, drawn by Merle Curti's reputation. At the same time, such a choice brought with it considerable hesitation.

10. Banner, J. M., Jr. (2021). *The ever-changing past: Why all history is revisionist history*. Yale University Press, pp. 152; Mattingly, P. H. (2017). *American academic cultures*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 331-334.

11. Graff, H. J., Moch, L. P., & McMichael, P. (Eds.). (2000). *Looking backward, looking forward: Perspectives on social science history*. University of Wisconsin Press.

My own historical training had American History under my belt according to Morison and Commager; my training also included work by Curti's student Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in America*, a classic study of a major movement that required a number of outreaches and techniques that recently came into the historical canon.¹² Hofstadter's book was particularly intriguing to me.

In addition, Merle Curti stood out as the premiere scholar of the new intellectual history. His book, *The Growth of American Thought*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1944. That same year, he was elected president of both the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association. Notably, he began his career at Teachers College, Columbia University, where he produced his influential study *Social Ideas of American Educators*. Curti did not have to be persuaded to assist me, a flailing student who wished to explore the 19th century origins of professional educators.¹³ At the time, I could not see the advantage of career appointments that led from my topic to university teaching.

So, I was both in and out of the reigning wisdom. Fortunately, I quickly acquired Wisconsin roommates from Harvard and MIT, Don Scott and Lee Kelley, respectively. They were well versed in the study of sociology, anthropology, and psychology, now thought to be resources rather than competitors of history. I was also seriously dating a young woman, later my wife, who would complete her doctorate at Teachers College, Columbia University with a dissertation that relied heavily upon émigré scholars like Roman Jakobson and international scholars like Jean Piaget.¹⁴ In 1962, my own alma mater, Georgetown University, had still been under the influence of a traditional humanism that eschewed sociology and anthropology and quietly put psychology under the aegis of philosophy.¹⁵ I had superlative teachers at both Georgetown and Wisconsin. I did a great deal of reading to bring myself shoulder to shoulder with existing academic wisdom. This period represented the beginning of my interdisciplinary training, all beyond the courses I was enrolled in.

My teaching assistant (TA) position in Wisconsin's department of history began in my third year of graduate study. I received second-year funding from Curti's endowed chair, the Frederick Jackson Turner Chair of American History. That appointment was doubly fitting since Curti had been one of Turner's last students. The stipend offered to me was, unlike support from my TA position, non-taxable. I served as Curti's research assistant and worked hard to satisfy his

12. Hofstadter, R. (1944). *Social Darwinism in America*. University of Pennsylvania Press; Brown, D. S. (2006). *Richard Hofstadter: An intellectual biography*. University of Chicago Press.

13. Curti, M. E. (1943). *The growth of American thought*. Harpers and Sons; Curti, M. E. (1959). *The social ideas of American educators*. Littlefield Adams Co. (Original work published 1935);

14. Mattingly, J. (1978). Semantic relations and grammatical forms of language delayed preschoolers [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Teachers College, Columbia University.

15. Curran, R. E. (2010). *A history of Georgetown University*. Georgetown University Press; Curti, M. E., & Carstensen, V. (1949). *The University of Wisconsin*. University of Wisconsin Press.

requirements—researching the psychology of human nature via international scholars (hardly the focus of his discipline’s discourse), his current preoccupation. I pressed him to include American artists in his panoply, which never worked despite his own urging for someone to study the famous Wisconsin artist Georgia O’Keefe.

In the face of retirement, Curti taught the American history survey (a reassertion of his discipline’s political/military discourse) Once, attempting to corral his acquiescence in some project, I came late to his class for a permission or signature and simply sat and listened. I was stunned with the accuracy and simplicity of his presentation and had a bracing lesson in the merits of his own generation’s contribution, synthesis, when my generation cultivated analysis, a debunking of the current wisdom in whatever the topic. While he traveled, he urged me to use his carrell in the University of Wisconsin Memorial Library, where I spent many hours absorbing the literatures I needed for modern historiography.

My TA work was largely with William R. Taylor (1922-2014), who had been recruited from his Amherst and Harvard to replace the aging Curti.¹⁶ At the time, Amherst College was the basecamp for American studies, already interdisciplinary and receptive to Annales’ teachings. Many students gravitated to Taylor’s embrace of new topics—family, occupation, work, diet, etc.—to advance the cause of American intellectual/cultural history. I took his course before I served as his TA for the same course. Much later, I had a New York City lunch conversation with him about the disparity between the two courses. The notes for the two same lectures were dramatically different. “The exciting part was only partially the subject matter,” I confessed to him. “What was equally arresting was the fact that you were re-thinking the subject matter in front of the audience.” Ever since, I have tried to rework my subject matter before and during lecture and discussion sections, seeking to generate new insights from familiar texts in situ. My focus shifted to getting all the varied pieces into some essential focus rather than defending a discourse. It is possible, I have learned from experience, for every lecture to have the quality of drama and discovery of something new.

After working with Taylor for two years, I gravitated willingly to lecture work in the School of Education and to Merle Borrowman. Borrowman held a joint appointment with the educators as well as the historians, much like Lawrence Cremin, his friend and colleague at Wisconsin when he wrote his first Pulitzer Prize book, *The Transformation of the School* (1961), who held a joint appointment at Teachers College and Columbia University’s history department. Borrowman set a broad context in his course for my own work on teachers in the 19th century, especially members of the American Institute of Instruction. If he was not up to

16. Taylor, W. R. (1961). *Cavalier and Yankee: The old South and the American national character*. George Braziller. This book focuses on the mythologies of the South and the North and their tightening as 1860 approached. The book used rather than reported the intellectual changes to demonstrate a powerful national transformation, a tremendous, revolutionary alteration of the historical discipline.

speed on the Annales school, as Taylor was with the new features of his subject, Borrowman was always supportive of history students as his TAs, especially ones not enslaved to a discipline. He was not only instrumental in my completing the degree, but he was also strategically helpful in planting my early career in the School of Education at New York University, which sought faculty members with disciplinary specializations. It may have been Curti's association that advanced my prospects, but it was Borrowman who facilitated my transfer from Wisconsin to Manhattan. It isn't always one's major professor who makes the difference.¹⁷

The other factor influencing my six years (1962-1968) of graduate study (when the average was nine and counting) was the birth of my son, Stephen, in 1966. I had married in 1964, and my wife took, first, a teaching position in Mt. Horeb, the center of American chiropractic (in a house designed in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright by one of his students). Afterward (1966-68), Jane worked and studied psychology in the School of Education, working with Prof. Ted Harris, and his *Journal of Educational Research*, the outlet for the influential American Educational Research Association. She would drive me to my Park Street office in my later graduate years and say as I left, "Finish that thesis. You now have a child!"

Indeed, many of my colleagues had refrained from having children until 1964 when we all had at least one child. No one had money but we did have each other. The kids entertained themselves in one corner while their parents traded academic lore among themselves. These informal gatherings included fellow historians Steve Nissenbaum and his wife Judy, a creative musicologist; David Allmendinger, and his wife Susan, a computer maven; Don Scott and later his wife Joan, who finished a distinguished career in French and women's history in the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, New Jersey. Eventually, all had stellar academic careers.

Then we simply created our own seminar with food and made our own entertainment, mixing serious and frivolous talk. In this setting, we exchanged many ideas and books, a number far beyond our specializations. The major lesson in moving from a history degree (premised on a confined body of scholarship) to an interdisciplinary one is that it's the quality of the university and student interactions that counts for any degree program. Does it provide time and opportunity to engage folks unlike oneself? Does it encourage a mixing of talents and experiences? Does it provide space for informed, informal interchange?

The University of Wisconsin had a well-deserved reputation as a progressive institution, but in the 1960s, though it was impossibly frugal with salaries, it opened a vast array of visions and opportunities to advance intellectually. Its location on Lake Mendota (the site of many fishing expeditions), its nearby Picnic Point (where family and friends often walked), its size and mixture of

17. Borrowman, M. (1961). *The liberal and the technical in American education*. Teachers College Press; Cremin, L. (1964). *The transformation of the school: Progressivism in American education, 1876-1957*. Vintage Books. (Original work published 1961)

students (more than 25% from out of state), its respected history and tradition (“sifting and winnowing” were not mere words) made for an extraordinary place, one that gave me the ability to shift from existing coursework to something more, always educational.

In my final year at Wisconsin, I taught—as a departmental instructor—Biography in American History. I began with Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*. The course was a breakthrough in my own and the department’s history. It challenged the 18th-century commitment to religiosity, it established Franklin’s deism, and it exposed his expectation of the unexpected. The goal was to make Franklin’s the new voice of 18th-century values, distinctly 18th century even if one did not know the speaker. There were no long-term solutions, only short-term respites, not even Franklin’s long-term preoccupation with moral achievement, a major episode in his book and a parody of the ubiquitous divine from his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards. Franklin makes his own achievement of moral success a failure because of his achievement. His triumph would have made him proud of his moral superiority. The 18th-century thinker faced an endless array of contradictions. Nevertheless, he groped forward, experiment by experiment. What I established in the course was an 18th-century record that was problematic, permanently problematic in an 18th-century guise, unlike anything before or since. The course continued similarly through the 20th century, establishing a point of view distinctly time-bound. Each individual biography in the course represented a time-bound, historically distinct perspective. This interdisciplinary semester was for me life-changing, regardless of what it was for those enrolled.

At New York University (NYU), I taught many courses but the central one was History of American Education, where I elaborated on my Wisconsin course in biography but turned to “educational” voices. At the least, I communicated what history offered, and many students, after their coursework, came to me for doctoral guidance. This shift was a serious intellectual and economic problem, since most students had already fulfilled their course requirements. At that time, both departments History of Education and Philosophy of Education provided foundational courses for all students in the program. However, the Dean would not enforce “transfer equivalences” awarded by a student’s host department. As a result, many students entered the school with foundations requirements waived, (a curricular issue which I never solved, even as Chairman of Cultural Foundations [1974-81]).

My courses required reading in multiple subjects, not obviously historical. They attracted many students from departments that respected the foundations requirement, especially the department of higher education, the department of nursing (where the best prepared students congregated), and Neal Postman’s imaginative department of media ecology. In the 1970s, NYU was a distinctly urban university, where the students came from many occupations and ages and, in particular, wished to receive teaching credentials to stay out of the Vietnam War draft. There was never a problem initiating discussion with students who were labor leaders,

evangelical ministers, and so on: a real city congregation. The discussion went beyond history and drew us all into interdisciplinary realms, the morality of war, the responsibility of individuals, the legitimacy of government, etc.

During my time at NYU's School of Education, my student, Marilyn Tobias, persuaded me to create a process by which we could organize some research in the field of education. We compiled a roster of scholars with whom we would like to work and had them commit time to research. At the time, many organizations sought to bridge their work between the federal government and the university. Ms. Tobias went to Washington to raise money for such an enterprise. She called the organization Potomac Educational Resources Inc (PERI). After a good deal of work, she secured a grant to study a key program at the National Institute of Education (NIE). I researched and conducted interviews with her, and together we wrote a report: "Equity and the Educational Bureaucracy: An Episode at the National Institute of Education" (December, 1979), which we presented to the professionals, many of whom were players in the research. We circulated the document to other members of the program, a central strategy in public history. We then held a larger meeting with members of the NIE. The key feature and the novel dimension of this enterprise was an historical evaluation of NIE's Program to Increase Participation of Women and Minorities in Educational Research and Development. Revisions followed and larger issues emerged about engineering a democracy. The key person in the episode was Patricia Graham of Teachers College, Columbia University, who became the director of the NIE under President Jimmy Carter and the finest director in the history of NIE.¹⁸ In due course, the report took final form and was published in the *History of Education Quarterly* (after I had left the editorship) as "Race, Gender and Equity Policy: The Case of the National Institute of Education" in the Winter 1999 issue of the journal. Tobias and I thought it a high point of PERI's historical scholarship and a model of what historical evaluation could do for an ongoing program, many individuals of which were not historians.¹⁹

18. Graham, P. (2005). *Schooling America*. Oxford University Press. This book gives the framework for much of her decision making during her directorship. In all her administrative work as in her scholarship, Graham never questions why she did not get what she expected from her well-funded Ivy League colleagues. Did she not see that in the nation's schools which did the work of "advancement" there were teachers who could speak to her issues?

19. Mattingly, P. H., & Bernstein, R. (1998). The pedagogy of public history. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 18(1), 77-92. See, as well, the New York University Archives, Program in Public History, where one can begin with *The Public History Newsletter* [1984-2004]. The Newsletter accounted for all initial placements of the graduates of the program in Public History. I was fortunate in attracting superlative talent to the teaching portion of the program, blessedly outside the mainstream discipline of history: Rachel Bernstein, especially for oral history; Barbara Abrash in media and history; and particularly George C. Stoney, a consummate, award-winning documentarian (1916-2021), who came to New York University in 1971 and taught there (mostly in the Tisch Schools of the Arts) until

In 1981, NYU ordered that the School of Education's teaching staff produce sufficient revenue to cover their salaries. Educational values were set aside here, even though the School of Education usually carried NYU through its several economic dark nights. At the same time, the department of history, under the superlative leadership of its chair Carl Prince (the best chair during my tenure), sought to create a program in public history. Many of the older, tenured members of the department chose to avoid association with new professional developments. Only a few, like Prof. Danny Walkowitz (who trained at the University of Rochester under the aegis of Herbert Gutman [a distinguished graduate of the University of Wisconsin] and was an advocate of the Annales School and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*), looked forward to this new initiative. Prince extracted me from the School of Education and set the new program in motion, headed by myself and Walkowitz, who proved to be an exceptional colleague.

The program in public history was interdisciplinary with connections to the Tisch School of the Arts, an exceptional facility and group of scholars, and other departments. The program required a course in statistics plus Annales-inspired courses in social history, which, at the time, I had not completely mastered. In interdisciplinary work, learning is ongoing, never ending. Three courses structured the initial offering: Local and Community History, Media and History, and History and Public Policy. We later added a research course—Introduction to Public History—with a unifying topic (usually an urban space like Union Square or the Lower East Side, which had no archives as such) to which students were assigned in groups and produced ultimately a documentary on their research (with help from the Tisch faculty and students, especially their exceptional documentarian, Prof. George Stoney).

his death. He was “the father of public-access television.” The George Stoney Award is made annually by New York University's Alternate Media Center. He distinguished Rachel Bernstein, with her PhD in history from Rutgers, took her interests in working class history into her courses in Introduction to Public History and Oral History for more than 25 years. She currently works as director of Labor/Arts and is associated with NYU's Tamiment Library and Robert Wagner Archives. With Debra Rinehardt, she is a co-author of *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives* (2000, New York University Press).

Barbara Abrash has worked all her life in the documentary industry, serving as co-director of *The Molders of Troy* (1980) and *Still Waters: The Story of Angie Debo* (1984), an examination of the life of an Oklahoman native American with degrees in history from the University of Chicago. Abrash also co-produced *Perestroika from Below* (1992), a documentary on the Russian workers strike of 1989, and was an advisor on *The Brothers of Kappa Pi* (2009). She is a co-producer of one episode of *The American Experience* (1987) and co-editor of *Mediating History* (1992, New York University Press).

In my recommendations to the public history components of the University of Massachusetts (under David Glassberg) and American University (under Alan Kraut), the model stayed with me, as it did in my public history work for Lord Day Lord, the oldest law firm in New York City, and my entries for it in the *Encyclopedia of New York City* (1995, Yale University Press), edited by Kenneth Jackson.

Our learning curve was evident. Even when the best applicants to the department headed to the program, supportive colleagues at the elevator would ask (tongue in cheek), “What is public history? Then laugh. The achievement and placement of graduates told its own story, and the laughter became appreciative and full-throated. I directed the program for 25 years and never lost my enthusiasm for instruction, especially its interdisciplinary component. Everyone learned the advantages of oral history and the power of collective images, essential for collaborative research.

In the late 1980s, the course in Local and Community History received an additional bonus. Prof. Bert Salwen—professor of anthropology, “the father of urban archeology,” and former director of NYU Graduate Studies—discovered that the course fit well with his new invention, historical archeology. He and I created a doctoral program in the subject and began to involve his former and current students, including Nan Rothchild, Diana Wall, Rebecca Yemin, and Sarah Bridges, all who went on to achieve distinguished careers in New York and Philadelphia. They literally dug up artifacts relating to urban archeology, say with their Sullivan Street Project, where at one point a reconstructed outhouse gave up a gold wedding ring. Salwen got so much mileage out of “the construction of a context,” from “Opps” to “That Bastard!” Yet, the power of artifact and place was made manifest. We segued experiences like this into visits to local museums to consider how their imaginative staffers reconstructed historical contexts. The pattern taught us much about the careful calibration of context and the variety of narratives to be applied. Historians also learned how cavalier archeologists could be with dates.²⁰

The most important course I taught at NYU’s program in public history was *The Material Culture of American Life*.²¹ The course demanded that students become familiar with the use of a camcorder and film editing—and master a body of literature. That literature focused on things and stuff rather than documents by themselves. The endpoint was a documentary, for which everyone met with me one-on-one during the first three weeks of class. The assignment began with previewing the argument with five visuals. If they did not have the visuals, students had to describe what they needed. In the next three classes, we discussed required readings and previewed the research scenarios. Every member strived to be critical and supportive, knowing they would all be on the block before the next few weeks were over.

20. ²² Rothchild, N. A. (1990). Memorial: Bert Salwen, 1920-1988. *Historical Archeology*, 24(1), 104-109; Williams, L. E., Rothchild, N. A., & di Zerega Wall, D. (1993). Bert Salwen: Involvement with historical archeology and cultural resource management, late 1960s-1988. *Northwest Historical Archeology*, 22, 119-22.

21. See Conway, J. C. (1994). *True north*. Alfred Knopf. This book recounts autobiographically her time in the United States. Her later work—Conway, J. C. (1998). *When memory speaks: Exploring the art of autobiography*. Vintage Books—gives some indication of her originality in this field. As well, see Paul Bourke’s citation in the *Dictionary of Australian Biography*. See also Bourke, P., & DeBates, D. (1995). *Washington County: Politics and community in Antebellum America*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

My own criticism was minimal, since the varied views of all covered the waterfront. Everyone was aware of each other's interpretation. Criticism aimed to be constructive, and it was. Students were imaginative, hard-nosed but suggested how problems could be remedied. Their collective criticism came at a time when something could be done (i.e., incorporated into the final draft). The class explored required readings side by side with their critiques of their own work plus revisions. The constant back-and-forth of reading and collective, mutually supportive criticism enabled us all to see ourselves as working together on common projects. The semester ended with each student sharing their documentary over two days. George Stoney, the distinguished NYU documentarian, participated and was thrilled by what he witnessed. At one point, he turned to a student and said he would use her work rather than the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) documentary of New York architecture, represented by the simultaneous construction of the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building. The student, not a history major, was thrilled that he proposed to use her version of the same event. "I now have something," she said, "to show my parents about what I have done with all their tuition money." It was a singular moment! Not just hers, but every student's documentary was PBS worthy.

All the while exercising my intensively interdisciplinary outreach, I continued to edit the *History of Education Quarterly* from 1974 to 1985. I began my association with this international journal in 1968 as the book review editor. In this role, I had the extraordinary assistance of two part-time managing editors, Roberta Frankfort and Robin Berson, two savvy and witty colleagues (Dear Berson Person, one author wrote, not knowing whether Robin was a male or female). I shamelessly copied the *New York Review of Books* review model—several books together and sufficient space for reviewers to advance their own interpretations. This approach allowed me to assert more control over the contents of the journal even though I wasn't selecting research articles, like the editorial board. I sought to integrate many social historians who for one reason or another avoided education as a subject when they considered non-political themes.

Gradually, I incorporated a number of distinguished scholars like Charles Tilly, Daniel Walker Howe, and Christopher Hill, as well as singular scholars of American educational history like Michael B. Katz (1939-2014). These historians took their subjects beyond American borders and introduced readers to the methods of the Annales school and the new social history. In addition to extending the journal's range of approaches to education, I initiated special issues that showcased the superlative scholarship of individuals like Jill Conway (1934-2018) and Paul Bourke (1938-1999), both transplanted Australians,²² and I brought in new editors who could watch for emergent scholars. Financially, this outreach intersected with history of education associations world-wide at a time when, for example, China purchased the back issues of scholarly journals. The additional revenue translated into larger

22. Mattingly, P. H., & Banner, J. M., Jr. (2015). James McLachlan, historian of education, public historian, AHA member (1932-2015). *Perspectives on history*.

single issues, two indexes, and increased subscribership. Ultimately, I persuaded James McLachlan, a student of Richard Hofstadter at Columbia, to co-edit the journal, and, in the mid-1980s, the *HEQ* reached its apogee of contributors.²³

With the program in public history and the *HEQ* plus my teaching and administrative responsibilities, I had little time for my own scholarly and public writing. Unlike many of my colleagues, I could not teach and write without one or the other suffering. My writing moved slowly, first a few added chapters to my dissertation, published in 1976, *The Classless Profession: American Schoolmen in the Nineteenth Century*. That year I also initiated what I expected to be an ongoing relationship with New York University Press such that they would publish *HEQ* special issues as books. The first was in 1973 on women and education, followed by two others: one on Canadian education and the other on John Dewey. Unfortunately, only the Canadian issue ever materialized as a book and received the exposure that the scholarship merited.

Meanwhile, in Leonia, New Jersey—my family residence while teaching at NYU—the local mayor tasked me with securing funds for research about older buildings. I argued that we first needed to research and establish the need for preservation. I applied for and received a grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission. Those funds provided seed money for research on the town as well as acid-free containers and a nascent archive for the town of Leonia. In the course of training for the project, several well-educated residents—Stanford, Bryn Mawr, and Smith graduates—helped the team pursue an oral history of suburbanization, something about which I knew little.

Once the project was underway, I discovered in Leonia an art colony associated with Manhattan's burgeoning mass magazines and their need for illustration. One discovery led to others: the myopia of existing suburban literature as well as the short-sightedness of the available literature on American art. These topics began to fuse as we turned the subject matter of art and its influence on national tastes to the mythology of "country town" (a self-referent). Was it possible to make a case for the art and let it become historical evidence? What was really at issue when artists debated the relationship of easel art to objective art? Why did our national museums favor abstract art and modern art when there were other options, options that people seemed to appreciate more or at least recognize more readily? What, in fact, was meant by "a country town" in a community adjacent to a major metropolis? Did fictional myths illuminate living arrangements and historical aspirations? These questions led to new literatures and opportunities for thinking about social history beyond its relationship to actual political life. In turn, such public history investigations and considerations intensified my interdisciplinary work.

The local public became involved in ways we could not anticipated. For example, they collected art, hung it on their walls. My resident colleagues discovered the same. We began to see over time—three generations—that social

23. Burke, P. (2000). *The social history of knowledge*. Polity Press.

arrangements altered but the mythology of a country town did not, even after the last farm within town limits was gone. We discovered that art represented more than landscapes or portraits; it embodied the values of intellect and education and helped celebrate the town Nobel laureates, its movie stars, its university faculty, its schools, its quality of life. In retrospect, many individuals—few of them artists themselves—took pride in dubbing their community “the Athens of New Jersey,” an attribute that continues to this day. Suddenly mythology—which I had studied long ago in my work with William R. Taylor and the tightening ante-bellum mythology of Cavalier and Yankee—bore strange fruit. Finally, I wrote the history of the town over three generations and clocked its differences and similarities in *Suburban Landscapes: Culture and Politics in a New York Metropolitan Community*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 2001. This study was an interdisciplinary project that went far beyond the boundaries of a specific town, something that the reviewers typically did not see.

Much of this research found its way into the dynamics of the Social Science History Association (1997-2010) and my work with Harvey J. Graff, also a great student of mythology, whom I met in 1973 in Chicago.²⁴ He was a student of Michael B. Katz and the author of several books about the role of myth in society and culture. At the Social Science History Association annual meetings, Harvey and I organized a number of innovative panels that explored the discourse on cities, suburbs, and education. We used these sessions as an early warning system to probe and receive reactions concerning historical issues.

Such work represented, if I may, a model of what professional associations should do to advance their field’s multiple discourses. Many of these panels drew upon my work with the Elizabeth (NJ) Historical Society, which I helped found in 1999. In each subsequent year, I researched, wrote, and presented to Elizabethans an episode in the history of a major New Jersey city: Elizabeth, the home of Singer Sewing Machine (and my home after November 1, 1988). With Singer in town, Elizabeth also served as the godmother of many other corporations and experimental social organizations. For seven years—until 2014—I served as president of the Elizabeth Historical Society and even now work as a trustee from afar. Their website contains documentaries of each episode of the city’s history and is the equivalent of a book, unreviewed by the major journals and outlets of the profession. Why, after so many overtures? Among other innovations, each episode takes a documentable neighborhood and uses it as the center of ethnic life for relevant groups, a summa interdisciplinary experience, using photos (many taken by myself) as historical evidence, a model investigation into a city’s history.

In retirement, I developed my own reading of suburbs and higher education, publishing several books, including *American Academic Cultures*, published by

24. Graff, H. J. (1979). *The literacy myth: Literacy and social structure in the nineteenth century city*. Academic Press; Graff, H. J. (2008). *The Dallas myth: The making and unmaking of an American city*. University of Minnesota Press.

the University of Chicago Press. Every chapter provides a reworking, an innovation, of existing historical wisdom, this time taken from outside the walls academic spaces, something rarely done in the field. Much of the material may not seem at first glance educational, but, I contend, it was and is as higher education necessitates research into far-reaching materials.

With my contribution to suburban scholarship—*An American Art Colony*—I tried, especially in the first chapter, to make real a public history comment made by a cherished colleague, Michael Frisch, many years ago: “A true public history,” he argued, “would contain as part of the argument, the process of coming to the central issue, a history within the history.” I did my best in several italicized paragraphs to realize his admonition.²⁵ What emerged was an exploration of the possibilities of collective biography—170 profiles of artists over 3 generations and another kind of public history, one told through the lives of individuals, perhaps the only methodology for studying voluntary associations, like an art colony. Among other things, the study also advanced a new argument about the possibilities of collective lives and presented another perspective on modern art.²⁶ Alas, publishers are not interested; they remain in a backwater that belongs to an earlier stage of historical development, a long-standing, self-inflicted problem of this profession. What to do?

In the course of these endeavors, I began to grasp the priority of adjacent historical institutions and attendant historical work, like state historical societies, genealogical societies, museums, and historical disciplines in various venues, each with their distinctive publications. This insight channeled into my own personal genealogical work, which took me back to 17th century colonial Maryland. I had hard data on family births, marriages, occupations and deaths, but I had little else. Here, I understood that historical scholarship on colonial Maryland—superb and comprehensive work—could fill in the blanks about the growing of tobacco, the provision of food in early settlement life, the survival techniques of people without gunpowder in a hostile neighborhood, the number of family members, the relations with native Americans, etc. Accordingly, I synthesized this colonial literature and incorporated it into the genealogical matrix. When the colonial Mattingly family moved to Washington, DC—another place with a superb body of historical research and writing—I repeated my process to synthesize the literature with genealogical records to establish the context of mysterious lives. Gradually, general observations attached to particular profiles. What emerged from this endeavor is a new kind of genealogical cum historical symbiosis.²⁷

25. Frisch, M. (1990). *A shared authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history*. State University of New York Press.

26. Burke, P. (2001). *Eyewitnessing: The uses of images as historical evidence*. Cornell University Press.

27. Mattingly, P. H. (2023). *The descendants of Thomas Mattingly* (private printing). This application also occurred in my ten books on tourism, my memorials to my mother (*Memorial*) and my wife (*Dear Folks*), and an autobiography entitled *Until Now* (2023).

At this point, so much historical research has become so interdisciplinary that I no longer think of it as a special exercise. It is simply the way good history is done.²⁸ In the end, interdisciplinary history is an approach with many arrows in its quiver; it is not taught as such in American universities, but it can be learned.²⁹ It is an effort to avoid specialization, to register ordinary people's concerns in the history, to use ordinary folk/amateurs to focus historical issues, especially change, and to use all available assets and data, including new technologies and media. These days, new interdisciplinary work goes in many directions and now makes an earlier time, when synthesis was taken for granted, a virtual impossibility. While new scholarship has brought with it an intellectual problem that remains unsolved—what to do about synthesis—for the moment, let us enjoy our many-strand products.

28. Mattingly, P. H. (2005). Good history [a lecture presented to the history majors of New York University and their presents]. Ireland House, New York University. The lecture invokes my kinsman, Garrett Mattingly, whose major opus, *The Armada*, won the 1960 Pulitzer Prize and set a standard for me for the history discipline, blending both many disciplines and multiple languages as well as serving as both analysis and synthesis. See Gershoy, L. (1965). Garrett Mattingly: A personal appreciation. In C. H. Carter (Ed.), *From the Renaissance to the Counter Reformation: Essays in honor of Garrett Mattingly*. Random House; Hexter, J. H. (1971). Garrett Mattingly, historian. In *Doing History* (pp. 157-171, 178-179). Indiana University Press; Kingdon, R. (1982). Garrett Mattingly. *The American Scholar, Summer*. See also Thomson, V. (1966). *Virgil Thomson*. Alfred Knopf. See also Banner, J. M. (2012). *Being a Historian; An Introduction to the Professional World of History*. Cambridge University Press. One of the stellar features of this book is its sensitivity to non-academic adventures in historical research as well as public dissemination, especially in Chapter 2. Chapter 5 is the nearest thing we have to a history of the interdisciplinary effort, public history, which began in the early 1980s.

29. Boix, V., & Lenoir, Y. (2010). Interdisciplinarity in United States schools: Past, present, future. *Issues in Integrative Studies*, 28, 1-27. See also Jacobs, J. (2013). *In defense of disciplines: Interdisciplinarity and specialization in the research university*. University of Chicago Press; Graff, H. J. (2015). *Undisciplining knowledge: Interdisciplinarity in the twentieth century*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chapter 3. Two Historians, One Wedding, and Two Entangled Academic Careers Since the 1960s

Elizabeth S. Cohen and Thomas V. Cohen
YORK UNIVERSITY

Early modern historians Thomas and Elizabeth Cohen reveal the power of too rare opportunities for full two-career academic life patterns. Sharing the same field of specialization and marrying before graduate degree completion, they gained employment at the then-new York University in Toronto, where a nontenure-track faculty union permitted them both to have fully satisfying careers, Thomas in a tenure-track position and Elizabeth in a non-tenure-track one. After 18 years in contract positions with union protection, Elizabeth moved to a tenure-track appointment in 1996, gained tenure and promotion in 2000, and promotion to full professor in 2011. They published independently and together.

This is a story of two entangled academic lives, built by domestic partners, one male, one female, from start to (not quite) finish, over more than five decades from the 1960s. With an understanding—mutual but never spoken—Tom Cohen and Libby Cohen set out to build lives together professionally as well as personally. Although they share a curiosity about the world, present and past, they enjoyed marked differences of temperament and style between them. As Libby is several years behind Tom in age and schooling, their timetable for professional progress has been staggered, as well.

Improvising paths, with some steps conventional and others not, Tom and Libby succeeded in shaping two gratifying academic careers based in Canada but with a sustained European dimension, while steering two children into professional adulthood. Notably, those two separate careers rested on study of the same eras of European history and, later, research in the same archives. The long-term enterprise of their careers was often hard work and took good will, patience, mutual accommodation, and foregoing or postponing some steps to standard advancement. But the Cohens also had cultural assets and institutional support that helped make it work, as well as some good fortune.

For both Tom and Libby, their social and cultural background fostered eventual academic footing. They came from characteristically 1950s families with a professional father and a mother who raised kids and volunteered. Both families valued education and encouraged interest in the larger world. Thomas Cohen, the oldest of three brothers, grew up in suburban Philadelphia. His father was a professor of medicine at Temple University. As an undergraduate at the University

of Michigan, Tom adopted a Midwestern egalitarianism that helped him shed adolescent cultural snobbery and colored his later career. His childhood delight in collecting information was reinforced by family travels in the United States, Mexico, and Europe. During college, summer trips—with classmates or alone—took him to Costa Rica by car one year and across Europe another. On the road, Tom committed himself to speaking only the local language.

Also the oldest of three siblings, Elizabeth Storr, nicknamed Libby, grew up in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago. Her mother and both grandmothers, though none of them professionals, were college educated. Her father was a professor at the University of Chicago, specializing in the history of higher education in the United States. Conversations at the Storr family dinner table often featured animated discussions of the social roles of universities. The University's Laboratory School, an experimental foreign language program, introduced Libby to French in fourth grade, which she continued to study for the rest of her formal education. More broadly, a politically-engaged university community sparked an early awareness of a society's varied experiential realities and the need to address civil rights and women's rights.

Appropriately, Libby, an undergraduate, and Tom, a graduate student, met at Harvard as auditors in a lecture course on German history. Harvard in the 1960s provided rich resources for learning, and many students gained a measure of intellectual and social self-confidence. Those assets were delivered in an older model of academia that was patriarchal (only one female full professor in the entire university), self-important, and preoccupied with prestige. By the 1960s, those assumptions did not sit well with many at the university.

At Harvard, the academic interests of both Tom and Libby gravitated toward social history framed by the French *Annales* approach and toward Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. Consequently, with concepts from Tom's grad school historiography, Libby's senior thesis was a quantitative study of the early members of the Académie Française. For his PhD dissertation, Tom undertook a statistical analysis of first-generation Jesuits based on a precocious, biographic questionnaire to which all the European members replied in four languages. For him, Harvard provided little dissertation guidance but offered good funding to support a year of research abroad.

After Libby's graduation and their wedding in June 1967, the two Cohens embarked for a year in Rome. Tom undertook research in the Jesuit archive and, classically, returned from the first day in frustrated tears because he could not read the documents. Without clear plans for the future, Libby set out informally to learn Italian and pick up an odd job, such as reading old Italian newspapers for a British journalist's book about Mussolini. By its end, that year abroad delivered not only precious dissertation material, but also lessons in how to live together and among Italians.

The Cohens returned to Cambridge in the fall of 1968 for an eventful year. Libby had decided to begin grad school. She entered Harvard's PhD program in

history with good funding but a less easily satisfied emerging interest in studying women. The academic year 1968-1969 was eventful in both public and university politics, and several weeks of student strikes radically disrupted both their studies during the spring term.

That same spring, deep in coding data for his study of the Jesuits but still far from writing, Tom faced the end of his graduate fellowship and was urged to apply for jobs in an open and generous market. Assuming that Libby would continue in Cambridge, Tom interviewed promisingly at several New England schools. Meanwhile, in Canada, Ontario was busily recruiting faculty to expand its public university system. Unexpectedly, two Toronto universities reached out with offers of interviews.

Tom collected a medley of likely offers for a position as tenure-track Assistant Professor, the common currency of the job market at that time. Choosing among them, he and Libby made an unanticipated decision to leave Cambridge and move to Toronto. The prospect of commuting around Massachusetts among scattered work, studies, and residence felt strenuous. An appetite for fresh opportunities and the chance to live and work in one city propelled their choice, and not, though many asked, flight from the Vietnam War and the draft. Although Canada seemed appealing, learning the nuanced meaning of migration between national cultures lay ahead.

In accepting York University's offer of a cross-appointment in history and humanities, Tom opted for an institution that was young, flexible, and open-minded. In the early 1970s, York University was a fast-growing provincial institution in suburban Toronto designed to serve Ontario's swelling post-secondary population, many of them first-generation students, often recent immigrants. Committed to interdisciplinarity, general education as an undergraduate foundation, a mix of team-teaching and small classes, and instruction in French as well as English, the university's builders hired many young faculty in the humanities and social sciences. Intellectual vitality and administrative flexibility shaped the construction of new programs and courses. Committed teachers mentored the less experienced.

Tom learned much from colleagues as he experimented toward an effective pedagogy for a mass university. His joint appointment meant he had to stretch his intellectual range and his tricks of delivery. Team teaching in humanities offered gifted faculty, models, and mentors for classroom work. Tom loved teaching: the performance and the interactions with students. His pedagogy set the model for his writing and talks, infusing all his public work with drama and the unexpected. In those expansive years, York University was also liberal with research leaves and sometimes funding to help young faculty move ahead on their scholarship.

In their second year in Toronto, the Cohens moved onto York's new, suburban campus, where Tom accepted a supplementary post as senior tutor at Vanier College, one of the school's undergraduate colleges. This office had many parts. Tom became the resident overseer of dorm life, director of two dozen freshman seminars, and organizer with the students of varied extracurricular cultural events. The

Cohen apartment hosted some of these, including a feisty talk by a young Margaret Atwood and a concert of South Indian music. Resident and unofficial assistant to the senior tutor, Libby spent much time on the York campus, working as a teaching assistant (TA) and learning to teach among engaged faculty colleagues.

Meanwhile, for Libby, the move to Canada also offered an inviting professional opportunity: to move her PhD studies from a very familiar university with a dearth of like-minded faculty to the University of Toronto, where the recently organized Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies provided a multidisciplinary forum for studies in the period. Even better, at the University of Toronto in 1969, a new professor of French history, Natalie Zemon Davis, although not yet internationally famous, had begun to explore the study of women in early modern Europe. Burgeoning with sudden energy alongside second-wave feminism, the field of women's history was new and very exciting. After a year of course work, Libby began research for a thesis on young women and their socialization in early modern France.

It was a heady moment to launch a PhD in women's history. A great swell of enthusiasm and mutual support enveloped women academics—at the university and also at wide-reaching conferences that were crucial to the new field and to Libby's formation as an historian. From the mid-1970s, the triennial Berkshire Conference on the History of Women was a central hub. In the 1990s, the early modernists began to convene at *Attending to Early Modern Women* and the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women.

In addition, at the University of Toronto Libby was invited to be one of three TAs for a new full-year course, *Topics in the History of Women from the 15th to the 20th Centuries*, created from scratch by Natalie Davis and her close colleague, an Americanist, Jill Ker Conway. (Conway became the first female president of Smith College in 1975.) Finding materials for such a course was a major enterprise. Following the two faculty members' areas of expertise, the focus was on Europe for the earlier centuries and the U.S. for the 19th and 20th. In the absence of textbooks or printed collections of primary sources, the course syllabus drew on selections from long, mimeographed bibliographies, prepared and circulated by Davis and Conway, and excerpts of primary documents in varying typefaces. The Canadianist TA, Veronica Strong-Boag, later a prominent historian of women, prepared a supplementary bibliography for Canada. From this deeply collegial experience, Libby not only learned content and ideas about presentation but also enjoyed attentive mentoring by the course directors in how to be a female academic.

Natalie Davis left the University of Toronto in Libby's third year to teach at the University of California at Berkeley, and then she moved to Princeton University for the remainder of her influential career. Davis still served as an examiner at Libby's dissertation defense and, until her death in 2023, remained a supportive, stimulating mentor. Natalie and Chandler Davis, with a young marriage formed at Harvard and three children, offered an encouraging model for a two-career academic family.

The busy first Toronto years taught Tom and Libby much about becoming professional historians and teachers within a national culture new to them. The general social and intellectual environment of Toronto in the 1970s helped both Cohens initiate their academic careers. The city—and the whole of Canada—were politically lively, filled with civic idealism and cultural ferment in the wake of the 1967 Centennial. Pierre Trudeau brought the country intellectual flair.

Just as the Cohens set up house in Toronto, a civic protest movement that would beat back a planned expressway erupted in the city. They promptly joined the committee that steered the agitation. As senior tutor, Tom connected his suburban students in Vanier College to this downtown affray as an active part of their learning. For both Cohens, that experience launched a pattern of civic engagement. The end of the decade saw Tom on the board of the city's new zoo, with an education portfolio to bring in experts for public talks.

At the same time, Toronto's several universities provided a matrix for rich conversations across institutions in which early modern European social and cultural histories were central. An array of eminent visiting scholars in the field provoked debates: during the Cohens' early years, notable were several leading French historians associated with the *Annales* school and Lawrence Stone from Princeton. The Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium regularly brought speakers from across the city and the wider region. (Later, for many years Libby sat on steering committees for TRRC.)

Less formal, but very stimulating were multidisciplinary working groups that met in people's homes. A Social History Group, founded by the pioneering historical sociologist Charles Tilly and his social historian wife, Louise, who left for the University of Michigan before the Cohens arrived, was sustained by Natalie Davis and later by others. The rotating seminar shared work-in-progress, debated methodologies, and built alliances. Not only Tom but also Libby, although a grad student, took part. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, both belonged to a long-running informal group that linked historians and anthropologists.

The 1970s also saw a string of professional and personal milestones for the Cohens. They spent 1972-1973 in Paris for Libby's dissertation research, while Tom took leave to finish writing his quantitative PhD thesis. In 1974, he collected his (belated) degree from Harvard. Youthfully tolerant, York was willing to tenure him in 1976 for his teaching and for scholarly promise, despite his having few publications.

Meanwhile, Libby slowly produced thesis chapters. Although a student at the University of Toronto, she mostly taught part-time at York, where new graduate programs were only beginning to produce TAs. CUPE 3903, an assertive union for TAs and contract faculty, formed at York at this time. A notable exception for Libby's teaching appeared at the University of Toronto in 1974-1975. With another graduate student, she was asked to teach the women's history course, now entitled *Society and the Sexes*, after both Natalie Davis and Jill Conway had left the university.

In the fall of 1976, Libby delivered a first child. With Tom conveniently on sabbatical, they learned baby care together. Libby received her PhD in 1978 and had a second child in 1979. Though it was a stretch, the flexibility of academic schedules allowed the two parents to oversee most of the kids' time, both as toddlers and, once they were older, after school.

While Tom and, later, Libby were cross-appointed to the departments of history and humanities at York University, the history department was particularly crucial to their careers. It had a large faculty and a curriculum that ranged from ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome to 20th-century Canada, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The department taught multitudes of undergrads, for several years second only to the University of California at Los Angeles for the largest numbers of majors in North America.

While some fractiousness riled the department's earlier decades, in the mid-1980s internal politics became less divisive. Since then, the history department has cultivated a strong esprit de corps and aimed, with general success, to support its members' teaching and research. The local backing was very welcome for Tom and Libby, and they felt loyalty to their community of colleagues.

Tom's job at York included regular year-long sabbaticals, a benefit that favored European research. For his second, in 1983-1984, the family, now with two young children, set off again for Rome. With the older in Italian primary school and the other in daycare (*asilo*), mornings were free for both parents to pursue their scholarship. Long at work at turning his Jesuit thesis into a book, Tom planned to persevere at that.

Libby, meanwhile, had new plans. Having put aside her study of French women, she wanted to pursue early modern women and make use of Roman archives. Looking for market women in papal Rome, she set out to explore the criminal court records suggested by a historian friend who knew the city well. Tom volunteered to join her for a few days at the Archivio di Stato di Roma, centrally located at the old university building, to help her get started. Led by curiosity, here came another unplanned, unconventional career move. Although Libby never found market women, these little-exploited trial records proved a gold mine for social and cultural history of a different kind. Both Cohens were hooked.

Wisely or not, neither of them—Tom tenured, Libby independent of a full-time job—felt pressure to deliver scholarly products according to an institutional schedule. Neither of them published their dissertations as books. But the subsequent four decades of scholarship, tracing through the Roman trials many sorts of people—soldiers, lutemakers, confectioners, peasants, servants, and prostitutes—and a medley of themes—social practices and rituals, gender and family, violence, orality, magic, and value systems—made their international careers.

This terrain was altogether new for both Cohens, and they lacked training specifically as Italian historians. Yet they had several intellectual and professional assets as well as the support of home-based collaboration with one another. Early modern Europe as offered in the curricula of North American universities

typically involved teaching across many national settings. In addition, studies in the Renaissance and early modern centuries were maturing through an interdisciplinary approach that linked literature, art, music, and history.

In particular, the Toronto experience greatly enriched the Cohens' historical education and provided models of social history that, moving beyond numbers, incorporated anthropology and lively narrative. Although she was teaching in the United States, Natalie Davis remained a presence in Toronto. Her habits of close reading and her eye for stories left a strong impression on Tom and Libby, among many scholars.

Engaging the reservoir of Roman criminal trial records, Tom and Libby blundered into a space that was relatively empty of scholars. Earlier scholarship consulted this vast corpus only occasionally in search of famous people or important incidents. Among many series of documents from the Governor's criminal court, the trials (*processi*) are especially rich for social and cultural history because they transcribe close to verbatim the interrogations of both suspects and other witnesses. The speakers include many men and women of lower social rank, often illiterate, and their testimonies depict not only all sorts of criminal, violent, or deceptive acts, but also everyday behavior peripheral to the offenses.

Nevertheless, these precious manuscript papers are difficult to read. The testimonies, constructed by judicial procedures, appear as the exchanges of questions in formulaic Latin with the answers in lively, somewhat archaic Italian. The handwriting is variably legible, and the paper often ink-stained or fragile. Tom and Libby set out to teach themselves how to read these documents, which required patient transcription, fussy decoding, and methodical sifting of intricate legal procedures. It was certainly easier to share the learning, and, like reading detective stories, it was always fun. It took years, however, to become adept.

The huge corpus is also challenging to navigate. There are hundreds of large, leather-bound volumes—most of them several hundred folios each and some with as many as 1200, the equivalent of 2400 pages. At first, Tom and Libby responded somewhat haphazardly—to both legibility and clues about events or the kinds of people that caught their interest. Libby, for example, looked for women. They were also guided by old-fashioned, handwritten archival inventories. Tom opened the first volume, which covered the 16th century, while Libby started with the next, from 1600-1620. To this day, that impromptu decision governs the chronology on which each of them focuses. More generally, curiosity, practicality, and hunch rather than a concerted research program, shaped their inquiries.

The next step lay in reconstructing historical meanings from criminal trials. A first task was to figure out what—maybe—was going on. A second stage was to identify the players in their social contexts and then to look for patterns and motives in their behavior. The Cohens' goal of telling the stories of unknown individuals, however, did not fit much of the established practice for the social history of early modern Rome. Traditional historiography, based in notarial registers, contracts, and institutional paperwork, was uneasy about trials as sources. Although

a highly systematic process of judicial truth-making generated these accounts, the speakers often lacked status and education, and they easily might have been lying. Furthermore, some scholars, devotees of Renaissance high culture, were simply baffled about why they should slum among the banalities of mere ordinary lives.

Tom's sabbatical in 1991-1992, with teenaged children in Italian schools, consolidated the new research. Supported by his Rome Prize fellowship from the American Academy in Rome, the year was rich in new contacts and experiences for the whole family. It was especially useful for intellectual exchanges with archeologists and historians of art and architecture. Those interactions deepened the Cohens' feel for the physical city that early modern Romans occupied. The better they understood the surroundings, the more sense they could make of the past lives under study.

The first major product of their trials research, a book entitled *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome: Trials Before the Papal Magistrates* (E. Cohen & T. Cohen, 1993), was a joint effort. Over the years, they have written together intermittently. The process varies, but the final texts are always a product of drafting and redrafting, passing the keyboard back and forth. Collaborative writing—as with this essay—highlights the beneficial complementarities in their professional strengths and foci of attention. Relying on patience and generosity, the writing process is slow, but the results usually please their readers.

Words and Deeds is—perhaps no surprise!—not a typical, archive-based monograph. Instead, it presents in careful English translation the records of eight trials involving different cultural themes and human situations, complemented by an introduction to the judicial system and how to read trials and, for each one, by a short essay on the social contexts, transactions, and values. The writing itself often has a playful streak. For one trial the Cohens applied game theory to a love intrigue; for another they introduced the prosecution of a sacrilegious peasant play in an essay in the form of a modern playbill. In addition to showcasing the vitality of such documents, they sought to help both teachers and students explore a very foreign world in open, inquiring ways.

Words and Deeds garnered mixed reviews. Some denied the book's scholarly authenticity. From London, the *Times Literary Supplement* sniffed that it was quite suitable for “provincial” students. Many students and professors have enjoyed it, though, and it continues to be taught in anglophone classrooms internationally three decades later.

Later, what the Cohens wrote together was often synthetic, several articles and most notably a second, quite different book. In 1998, they were invited to prepare a volume on Renaissance Italy for Greenwood Press' daily-life series. While such books are often middle-brow compendia on the everyday details of life, the Cohens aimed higher, building a vision of how a whole social world transacted, quarreled, and cohered. Published in 2001 with a second edition in 2019, their anthropologically shaped overview on social transactions and mental and material culture serves a wide spectrum of readers and is frequently cited by students and scholars (E. Cohen & T. Cohen, 2019).

Besides jointly publishing these two books, Tom and Libby deliberately continued to craft independent professional personae. Throughout the decades, Tom remained a keen teacher. Thriving on interactions with students, he always offered a first-year undergraduate course in humanities and sometimes one in history. The history courses sometimes involved experiential exercises in recreating premodern societies, such as the saga world of medieval Iceland. After 2000, from time to time Tom added graduate courses and supervision to the mix. In 2004, he was promoted to full professor.

From the 1990s, as a scholar Tom was drawn to framing his trial findings as compact microhistories, dramatic stories, often told with a playful eye to the geometries of narrative plots and social dynamics. While several appeared as articles, in 2003 something more developed. Idled from the classroom and office by a months-long York strike, a recurring feature of the university's politics, Tom bundled a collection of unpublished stories into a book, with a title borrowed from Woody Allen, *Love and Death* (T. Cohen, 2004), this time set in Renaissance Italy.

Although it took chances, *Love and Death* did well. Tom modeled his chapters on *New Yorker* short stories; one of them, for example, about a failed wife-poisoning scheme, shaped as an epistolary novelette of plotters' letters. Another essay became a soap opera script, with dialogue lifted from a trial and stage directions that slipped into scholarly commentary. Tom tried this fanciful manuscript on a big trade publisher, which rejected it with stunning speed as "not commercial enough." But the University of Chicago Press, known among academic publishers for its agile marketing, took it on. In due course, the 2004 book won a Marraro Prize for Italian history awarded by the American Historical Association.

From writing his own microhistories full of quirky particularities, Tom's scholarship also moved to engaging this particular historical methodology alongside other practitioners. Beginning in 2014 and continuing, he participated in an informal network of international workshops on microhistory that gathered scholars and students from Canada, Iceland, Hungary, Russia, Germany, and the United States. The network soon began to publish. For one collection that he co-edited, Tom contributed a pithy overview, "The Macrohistory of Microhistory" (T. Cohen, 2017). For the Routledge microhistory book series, he wrote *Roman Tales* (T. Cohen, 2019), which married microhistories from the trials with commentary on how the method worked. Among several book translations on varied topics, Tom translated a microhistory from French for the same Routledge series. He currently is co-editing an ambitious *Handbook of Microhistory* with essays from around the globe.

In parallel with Tom's professional progress, Libby made choices about how best to build a career and a scholarly community of her own. Going back to the 1980s, with young children and a research partnership sited in Toronto, she faced a tightening job market. Her prospects for a full-time appointment were limited, and, even in southern Ontario, most jobs would likely entail a lot of commuting and general strain. A tenure-track position would also start a ticking clock on her scholarly output.

With Tom's job and income secure, Libby chose to continue contract teaching at York University, where her status was protected by the union, CUPE 3903. With the university's growing student body, demand for staffing both in the humanities program and in the department of history remained high. As tutorial instructor and as course director, she could teach in her own fields one or two courses at a time and not teach at all in the summer or when Tom had sabbaticals. Although she was ambivalent about some of the union's strategies, the contract did protect her and other members better than the situations at many other institutions. Besides seniority and pay quite decent by the standards of the time, she also received funding for conference travel and once for a major research trip.

Based on a long history of activity at York, Libby was well-known by the faculty and enjoyed a respected personal standing that rested on more than the union's measures. By 1990, she regularly directed courses both for humanities and history. Although not formally appointed, she was asked to propose and teach a new, full-year course on the history of European women. She was also a fellow of Vanier College, chaired the faculty of arts committee on academic policy and planning, and was a faculty representative to senate.

Alongside a regular, but finite roster of contract teaching, Libby invested part of her time and energy in scholarly research and writing. The work interested her and felt worthwhile. Although support at home was good, it also helped greatly to be part of an enthusiastic wave of historians of women, many of whom themselves knew atypical career timetables or pioneered the role of "independent scholar."

Libby always wrote slowly but began in the 1980s to present at conferences and to publish. A first single-authored paper on young French women (E. Cohen, 1986) appeared in a small Canadian journal. A second article, based on Roman trials, reached more prominent publication by a bizarre route. Libby sent the paper, in English, to a scholar friend in Rome to see what she thought of it. Without asking or telling Libby, the friend sent it to the editors of *Quaderni storici*, a major Italian journal. They must have liked it because it appeared, in Italian translation, a couple years later (E. Cohen, 1986). Libby found out about the publication only when, in a Canadian library, she casually picked up a current issue of the journal to check its contents. A revised English version came out in a collection a few years later (E. Cohen, 1991). Together, these tentative steps moved her toward a firmer sense of professional presence and credibility.

In the 1990s and since, Libby has continued to write many articles and chapters about women from the trial records. She has situated gender within a wide variety of themes, including—in rough order of appearance—street life and rituals, honor, prostitution, women's work, urban space and time, oral culture, girlhood, migrants, and also artists. Between 1998–2007, three articles won annual Honorable Mentions from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and Gender.

One direction led Libby into a notably fruitful scholarly conversation with art historians. One day in Rome, a friend took her to see a small exhibition of canvases by Artemisia Gentileschi, a woman baroque painter just then being

rediscovered. The trial record concerning her rape in 1612 by her father's colleague was among those in the volumes that Libby was reading at the archive. Setting out to read the trial carefully, she later wrote an article that sought to historicize the painter's experience of rape. This essay (E. Cohen, 2000) was destined to be the most widely cited piece of Libby's career. Later, she was invited to consult and publish as part of a project on the beginnings of the Roman academy of painters at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts in Washington, DC (E. Cohen, 2009). Recently, this conjunction with art history has led to essays for the catalogues of two European exhibitions focused on biblical stories: *Judith and Holofernes* (Rome, 2021) and *Susanna and the Elders* (Cologne, Germany, 2022).

In the mid-1990s, history and humanities jointly nominated Libby for a tenure-track appointment, to be chosen among the long-service contract faculty across the university. The decision to seek a full-time position for her recognized her proven and distinctive contribution, even though in both units, Tom "covered" slots defined similarly by time and space. According to the CUPE union contract at that time, a few permanent appointments were made available each year, and units wishing to win one had to stage a formal process and make a case for their candidate according to standing procedures and departmental criteria for a tenure-track hire.

In a competition in which departments bid against one another on the strengths of their candidate, Libby's fifteen years of independent archival research and published scholarship was crucial. Her cross-appointment as Assistant Professor in History and Humanities came in 1996, promotion to associate professor in 2000, and, after a transfer wholly to history, full professor in 2011. Between 2003 and 2017, she served six years in departmental leadership in history as director of undergraduate studies, department chair, and director of graduate studies.

When Libby received her permanent appointment, she was well known as an independent member of the faculty. Although York did not have a policy that favored spousal hires, it had no problem with couples in the same department. At one point, the history department, then with more than 45 members including cross-appointments, had three couples among its members. Symbolically, perhaps, at department meetings and university social occasions, Libby and Tom usually sat in different places and talked to different people. In colleagues' eyes, they were clearly distinct.

At the turn of the millennium, with their son and daughter now off into worlds of their own, the Cohens' professional lives continued to expand to include friendships and alliances across North America and Europe. In Toronto and elsewhere, they became more involved in graduate teaching and supervision as well as volunteering support for interested students who were not their official responsibilities. They devoted time to the collegial business of scholarship, such as editing and reviewing manuscripts—informally for authors or formally for presses and journals. They often participated in academic conferences and sometimes organized them. Collaboration with other scholars, especially younger ones, and mentoring students were particularly gratifying.

Invitations also led to interesting academic visits abroad. For example, in Finland, as visiting professors at the University of Helsinki (2009), they together taught a short course. At another time, Libby sat on an international panel that assessed the research of the faculty of humanities at the University of Turku (2015). In 2018, they were both visiting professors one spring in Florence at Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. For love of Rome and their research, the Cohens continued to work in the archives most years, usually for a few weeks, as they had elderly parents to assist in Toronto.

In 2019, long past the standard retirement age and eight months before the pandemic struck, both Cohens retired, having, between them, given ninety-one years to York University, Tom 50, Libby 18 on contract, another 23 full-time.

By then, “the Cohens” were something of an institution, “two for the price of one,” as one grateful graduate student said at a conference honoring their retirement. Yet, the happy conclusion of this story of two careers—complete with idiosyncrasies and swerves—owes an important part not only to unity or effective collaboration, but also to recognizing and honoring the differences of the two protagonists.

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Section 2. 1970s Cohort

Chapter 4. Permanence and Flux: Forms of Feminism in an Academic Career

Catherine Civello
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

Catherine Civello illustrates a vital but little appreciated form of shifting academic career paths. First a high school English teacher, she began graduate studies part-time and shifted to full-time doctoral studies in a humanities PhD program. As she completed her studies, she found full-time university employment, and in time gained a tenure-track position in English. She published her dissertation as a book and achieved tenure. Realizing that she enjoyed teaching students at excellent secondary schools as well as her in-city public university, she returned happily to do that for more than three decades. In retirement, she has returned to publishing scholarship.

Their ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse.

- George Eliot, "Prelude," *Middlemarch*

The discussion was going well. Eighteen high school seniors huddled around the seminar table, focusing on Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, when I realized that they didn't recognize Morrison's allusion to Shirley Temple, whose iconic blue eyes are key to an understanding of the novel. I flipped open my laptop and in a matter of seconds projected little Shirley's blue-eyed blondness onto the large-screen television in the room. That led to a conversation about celebrities in the students' own culture, such as Chance the Rapper. "Who's that?" I asked. The room erupted into loud laughter, culminating in one usually calm 18-year-old young man, his voice dripping with mockery, shouting "Okay, boomer!" I froze. The look on my face and the silence of the room told him that he had gone too far. He apologized, I recovered my composure, and class resumed.

Later, I reflected on the effect that his use of "boomer" had on me. Why did this six-letter, two-syllable word have such power? Why had I experienced almost physical pain at the sound of a word that I had uttered so many times myself? The difference lay in the use of "boomer" by "boomers" and the assumptions made by a person so young that he very likely wouldn't have been able to get within a decade of identifying the dates of the population explosion that occurred in post-World War II America.

Acknowledging the dangers of generalizing about millions of heterogeneous human beings born in this country between 1946 and 1964, I nevertheless reflect

on this generation, connected to a particular historical and cultural world, and my own experience as a member of it, both my five-decade academic career, as well as my personal life.

Young 21st century Americans think of the sixties' in terms of marijuana, bell bottoms, and free love. But the student's use of boomer-as-accusation evoked in me images of napalm, protests, my brother's draft number (it was 30), and my high school classmate's husband's loss of both legs in Vietnam. I eventually listened to Chance the Rapper, but I still prefer Jagger, Lennon, Joni Mitchel, and Jerry Garcia. When Public Enemy sings "Had to kick it like that as we roll as one / One under the sun, to all the cities and to the side / Brothers and sister stateside and the whole worldwide / There it is, P-E-A-C-E, 1991," I simply don't feel the urgency of the Beatles when they sing "You say you got a real solution / Well, you know / We'd all love to see the plan / ... You say you'll change the constitution / Well, you know / We'd all love to change your head / You tell me it's the institution." Not only did we say goodbye to brothers and boyfriends at train stations and in college dorms almost every week, but we also lived in fear of others being drafted.

In my case, my father served as a non-commissioned officer in World War II. Only after his death and in preparation for a trip to France with my husband did I obtain the government records of his service in the Army Air Corps. This man, who lost life-long Italian-American friends due to his vocal opposition to the Vietnam War and his son's possible draft, fought on the beaches of Normandy and in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes Forest.

He never mentioned it. He was a union man, a child who had lost his mother at the age of 5 and had come of age in the Depression: "I'm for the underdog, Cathy, and you should be, too. That's my religion and my politics." A product of private education from elementary school through college, I recognize that familial influence on my philosophy of life and, therefore, teaching. Show me the underdogs—the poor kids, the kids who come from overcrowded high schools, the first-generation college kids, the refugees—and I'll try to empower them with linguistic competence so that they succeed in their own lives as well as contribute to the larger world.

Let's get this out of the way now: by 1996, I was a tenured associate professor in a state university system when, of my own free will, I decided to become a high school English teacher and subsequently an administrator at an all-girls Catholic school. I had published a book and several articles, delivered papers at conferences, was granted tenure and promoted, was not fired or guilty of immoral or unethical behavior.

But first, to go back. I loved the museums, restaurants, and opera in Houston where I taught university students for several years, as well as the company of cherished colleagues who often welcomed me into their homes and invited me to family weddings, holiday and holy day celebrations, and whom I visit to this day.

As well, I headed a large freshman English program and was assistant chair of the English department. I served on a departmental committee that re-envisioned its theoretical perspective to align an expanded literature canon with the theories

of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and other scholars whose ideas about marginality, the oppressed, and privilege both reflected and appealed to the diverse often first-generation college student population of our school and our city.

I also founded, at students' request, a Women's Studies Organization and enlarged Women's History Week into the month-long event mandated by Congress in the 1970s. While at the institution, I created new courses such as History of the Novel, Cultural Studies, Feminist Philosophy, Gender Studies, and Women and Work. These contributions were acknowledged, even celebrated, by my fellow professors. The dean of our college remains my personal friend. This, certainly, was the path to associate dean.

To explain what happened to alter the course of my career, I will take the long view and begin in 1961.

My experience as a student at Ursuline Academy of Dallas, a Catholic all-girls school, prepared me for college: four years of two foreign languages, four years of English and math, four years of science long before STEM was created, as well as history, logic, and philosophy. We were taught by learned, if stern, women whose international religious order dates from 16th-century Italy. Many held graduate degrees in such disparate fields as chemistry and Latin.

I can still visualize where I sat in the classroom when a black-robed teacher, holding a book open to a centerfold picture of Stonehenge, told us about her visit to the site. I was hooked on literature from that moment. I knew that I was born to devour it, that I was destined to learn and teach it.

The all-female atmosphere, moreover, afforded us all the leadership and honors opportunities: student body president, editor of the newspaper, valedictorian. There were no male students to declare their entitlement to attention and privilege. At the same time, I felt alienated both by my darker physical appearance and my somewhat nerdy behavior, as one of only two or three Italian-American girls in the school, and a resident of a less affluent neighborhood far to the south.

My high school education was so rigorous that I easily excelled during my freshman year at Marillac College. My social and academic skills, formed by well-intentioned semi-cloistered nuns, lay underdeveloped. In high school, everything was regimented, from the uniform I wore sitting in alphabetical order in class to the way I walked ("ladies don't swing their arms"); now, I drifted in a sea of freedom. I used to say that I didn't want my education to get in the way of my education. In other words, I attended every foreign film festival and participated in every political protest march that St. Louis, Missouri, offered. A more cosmopolitan city than Dallas, the urban landscape featured an Italian neighborhood, a healthy open housing movement, and friends who shared my activist leanings. I spent my spare time tutoring at elementary schools in blighted parts of the old city. Discussions with fellow students lasted far into the night as we solved social problems involving race and poverty.

My packed schedule left little time for studying and reading long novels and writing weekly papers, despite my English major. By the end of sophomore year, I plunged from Dean's List to academic probation. At age 19, I felt that college had

little to offer me and, anxious to change the world and put an end to segregation in the South (single handedly), I decided to leave college, much to my parents' horror and my professors' disapproval.

I had been in school since age four and needed a reshuffle. I could not connect the study of literature with the practice of life as I wanted to live it. Some of it had to do with the isolated "lab" that we were told to enter in order to "analyze" texts for their undisputed meaning, known only to the professor. Much of it had to do with me and my untested idealism.

Too young to be a Peace Corps or Vista volunteer, I found a job as a teacher's aide in a Catholic elementary school in southern Missouri. At that time, the Ozarks formed one of the top ten pockets of poverty in the country. My students were rural kids whose parents tried to save farms that had been in their families for generations. Despite an inescapable sadness and economic hardship that hovered over that part of America in the late 1960s, I also saw undaunted courage from people who gave me so much but had so little. That year not only supplied me with evidence against assertions that poor people were "lazy" or "welfare cheats," but also exposed me to a rural America that I had never experienced and from whom we hear today in our cultural and political wars.

I returned to college a more realistic person, no longer taking my unearned opportunities for granted and aware that I could use those gifts to change the system (as we used to say) from within. For example, we asked for and received a course in Contemporary Black Literature, and I wrote a paper on how I might teach the works of Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Gwendolyn Brooks in an inner-city classroom.

Required to take an Introduction to Sociology course, I focused my project on proposed state-funded child care designed to keep pregnant teenagers in school. I was assigned to write a regular international affairs column in the school newspaper, the first column featuring war protests on American college campuses. Did I know what I was doing? Were my ideas realistic? Probably not, but my heart and my education found purpose. What had appeared to be "selling out" prior to my conversations with struggling Missouri farmers and migrant workers—the parents of my students—now took the form of teaching students to read closely and write convincingly so that they might have meaningful lives.

I graduated from college in August 1971 since my year away had interrupted the prescribed English curriculum. This would not have happened in a larger school, but at that time, the Jesuit and other large Catholic colleges (as well as many of the Ivies) were not open to female undergraduates.

This changed about halfway through my college years, but there were no girls' dormitories for some time, so Catholic females didn't flock to the Loyolas or Notre Dames in the same numbers as their brothers. Too late to find a teaching position for fall, I returned to Dallas and wrote for a trade journal that covered the electronics industry in the northern half of Texas. Having worked on both high school and college newspapers, I thought that this was the beginning of a

career in journalism. I was mistaken. These were three of the most difficult years of my life, but I learned things about myself as a young woman trying to do business in a male-dominated business world. I developed skills that, although less than effective at the time, served me well later.

My first clue that something was amiss should have been my father thinking that I was referring to a weekly instead of a monthly amount when I told him my salary. Second, there would be no overtime or gasoline reimbursement for weekly all-nighters and assignments that took me to a neighboring city.

Another sign came in the form of vulgarity or, as a recent president has called it, “locker room talk.” Nothing prepared me for the f-bombs and sexual innuendo of the office. The final blow came one day as I stood in front of an open file cabinet. A large man who worked in sales came very close behind me, close enough to touch me. I quietly asked him to step back; he didn’t move or say anything. I said, “You’d better stop because I have a black belt in karate.” He mocked me loudly, so I replied, “You’d be pretty stupid to take a chance.” The entire office erupted in laughter, and I drove home congratulating myself on my clever retort. The next morning, I opened my desk drawer to find a dead rat. I quit the next day.

For years, though, I blamed myself for what had happened. I berated myself for publicly humiliating a co-worker and being too weak to pursue a career in journalism. This was the early 1970s. Given my Catholic schoolgirl education and my traditional Italian-American parents, my reaction was predictable, but the aftereffects were long term and somewhat destructive.

We had no words then for sexual harassment, no laws against such behavior in the workplace. It wasn’t even against the law for married men to rape their wives. Public statements on this issue from that time (“sex is a husband’s right”) reflect the uphill battle of women; they are chilling. Birth control was difficult for a single woman to obtain; abortion was illegal until 1973.

The following September, I began teaching English at my *alma mater*. While an excellent education was still at the core of the institution, almost everything else had changed. Girls talked and laughed in the hallways. Just a few years earlier, we had matriculated in silence and sat in alphabetical order in every class.

Individualized and experimental scheduling allowed students to take electives and study the language of their choice. When I was a student, we had had identical schooldays and everyone took French and Latin. (A few of the less academically inclined students were assigned to study Spanish, reflecting the racism of the city.) The new technology led to progressive projects across disciplines; we had made no such connections. In my enthusiasm, I agreed to teach every course, supervise every activity, monitor every club. Again, my monthly salary was paltry. I felt taken advantage of but lacked the confidence to ask for more money. I suspect that many young women were raised, as I was, to say “finances” instead of “money.”

I noticed that married women (who had a man observing their treatment) with children were not treated quite so shabbily. The fledgling women’s movement encouraged us to demand improvements in the workplace, but this was a

Catholic girls school in the South. The mostly female faculty were reminded that we were “doing the work of Christ.”

Progress for women in the mid-1970s consisted of speaking tentatively in sentences that ended in an interrogative tone. But at least we were finally speaking. A combination of profound boredom with teaching literature at such a rudimentary level and pressure from the administration to get a master’s degree led me to begin graduate work at a little-known university, The University of Texas at Dallas, in a program with a strange name: arts and humanities. I had no desire to have my parents pay for further education or to become indebted myself, so I enrolled. It was, on many levels, the best decision of my life.

Having turned down my father’s offer to attend Vanderbilt, I drove through my new campus where I was to pursue both an MA and a PhD for the next eight years. Compared to the midwestern fall foliage and spring forsythia of my established midwestern college, the sight of twigs that had yet to grow into trees and concrete-and-glass buildings disheartened me.

The neighborhood seemed undeveloped, lacking coffee shops, bookstores, and restaurants. Never a suburbanite, I was tempted to put the car in reverse. The coldness of the campus matched the chilly reception I received from the professor charged with advising me on my first-semester courses. His German-accented condescension probably stemmed from the fact that I planned to enroll in two night courses while continuing to teach full-time in a high school. He referred to the “advanced age” at which I was beginning graduate school: I was 29. This treatment flew in the face of the university’s marketing of their new and “interdisciplinary” graduate program whose low price could accommodate the “nontraditional” student. It seemed that no one had told some of the professors.

The university had recruited a group of brilliant young scholars, fresh out of graduate school themselves, with impressive credentials from distinguished universities in this country and abroad, but with little or no teaching experience. Oil money had lured many of them from the banks of the Charles and the halls of Cambridge to a town whose evangelical Christianity and conservative politics would alienate them from their students as well as from the university.

The job searches began before the ink was dry on their contracts. I couldn’t blame them; I had never felt anything but “other” there, and it was my hometown. I, however, celebrated their presence and vowed to absorb all the knowledge and ideas I could from them for as long as they stayed, and I was sure that they wouldn’t stay long. I was wrong, however. Some of them stayed for decades, their careers flourished, and they retired in Dallas.

This idealistic group eventually faced students—some of whom were restless wives of wealthy doctors and lawyers and high school teachers aiming for promotions—at possibly the most nerve-wracking time in their own careers, for most of them were untenured hires.

These collisions had a myriad of outcomes, ranging from many students’ unpreparedness for graduate work to their apoplexy at the mention of Darwin

and Marx to life-long friendships. I soon realized the incompatibility of doing work at the level that I was aiming for and part-time enrollment, so I became a full-time graduate student in my second year.

The mostly female students quickly sorted ourselves into new categories. Rather than housewives, high school teachers, and full-time grad students, we rejected roles based on gender, marital status, and occupation. We divided into students seeking academic careers and those who wanted fuller and refreshed educational opportunities.

We were, after all, “nontraditional.” There was a fair amount of overlap between the two columns, and categories blurred when people married, had children, and changed jobs, as human beings do over the course of decades. I tried to avoid political warfare among assistant professors vying for tenure and tenured professors evaluating them. Instead, I gravitated toward a small group of academics whom I call mentors to this day, an oasis in the intellectual desert of the southwestern part of the country at that time.

I had entered graduate school as a confirmed New Critic, proclaiming to “justify the ways of God to man” with Milton, lamenting that “’twas now a time of trouble” with Wordsworth, and parsing the life out of such lines in order to make perfect sense of an indivisible union of style and sense, of technique and meaning. My first mentor, a Cambridge-educated Romanticist with international standing, not only broadened our vision beyond the study of English literature but also demonstrated that any isolated study of literature was simply not accurate. It hadn’t happened that way historically.

She spoke of Schlegel’s “arbitrariness of the poet” and Brentano’s “Romanticizing force” and freed me to realize that I was reading “at the threshold that hovers between the work and the poet.” She linked such language to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and the evolving concept of the self that had emerged, quoting Freud to say “it is no sin to limp.”

Shortly after that first semester, she invited me to a national conference on Romanticism where she spoke on a panel. I heard her debate the topic of Romanticism’s “evolution or revolution” with M.H. Abrams and Morse Peckham and came to a realization: I was not in graduate school to increase my knowledge or to deepen my understanding of literature; rather, this was a process that had to do with thought *per se*.

Toward the end of the second year and in the semester before finishing my master’s degree in 1978, I enrolled in a required course, a course dreaded by many graduate students: Approaches to Research or, as we groaned, “5304.” Hadn’t we been doing research since we were in high school? college? for the previous two years? And who was this bearded young history professor who smoked Lucky Strikes, wore jeans, and drank cups of black coffee as he taught?

In spite of the interdisciplinary nature of the program, we still cordoned off ourselves (and many of the courses) into literature, art, and history. It took time and much debate to explore and perform the concept of interdisciplinarity. Many

students—and faculty—didn't and still haven't come close to accepting it, but I won't address that in this brief essay.

I will say that, as I have come to view interdisciplinarity in my work and in my teaching, we were ahead of our time and that many messengers were wounded along the way. As far as 5304 went, I realized on the first night of class that the course was somewhat misnamed and that the teacher would be life-altering for me.

Pivotal ideas emerged from that class that had to do with the nature of literature. More to the point, with the construction of ideas themselves. I had permission, for the first time, to think critically about an author's credibility, sources, and method. I was encouraged to examine an author's unstated assumptions—something that had eluded me until that night but has animated my work and my teaching, I am not exaggerating to say, to this day.

The idea of the complex ways that culture is transmitted through imaginative literature transformed my reading of and writing about George Eliot and her view of Middlemarch villagers for my dissertation—and Stevie Smith and her ambivalent female voices for my book.

The professor required us to read a literary critic who opened my eyes in both an intellectual and a very personal way, though he probably didn't know it at the time: Elaine Showalter (1977). How basic she seems now but how epiphanic in the 1970s. As I read her references to the women's movement and the then-new field of women's studies, and as she used phrases like "feminist criticism," "gynocritics," and "double-voiced discourse of the mute and the dominant," I remembered and began to grasp the sexism (some of it criminal) of the dead rat, the lack of female dorms, the "locker room talk," the salary inequity, and my "advanced" age. I was furious and, to a degree, saddened.

This temporary discouragement paralleled the feelings I had experienced in my youth at seeing signs that read "Colored Water Fountain" and "Colored Waiting Room" in my hometown and heard my mother say, "We don't think that way because we know how it feels to be discriminated against." I eventually channeled these revelations into a dissertation, directed by the teacher of the dreaded 5304, my mentor and my friend. In time, I found my niche in academic research and writing, thinking that my career would take this form for the rest of my life.

As I neared the end of graduate school, my father's doctors informed us that the heart disease that had plagued him for decades was now terminal. I halted my national job search, and, thanks to the same mentor who had invited me to my first conference, found a position at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

It soon became evident that what I had thought of as a temporary solution to a family problem was a full-time position as an adjunct assigned to four sections of Freshman English. I worked hard at balancing teaching with scholarship although that juggling act was not a requirement of the job.

The two-tiered system of professors and adjuncts stifled me; the workload was punishing. Along with others, I tried to write myself into a tenure-track position. The few male adjuncts closely followed their female counterparts' departmental

successes, such as appointments to committees, hostilely noting that they had “a family to support.” In addition to the appallingly low salary that we, mostly female, adjuncts received, the condescension of many of the tenured and tenure-track professors smacked of the Victorian system of upstairs/downstairs.

We were frequently reminded that we were forbidden to teach literature in our classes. Since most of us had earned a PhD in literature, we drew the conclusion that what we lacked was an Ivy League diploma and coastal birthplace. (In fact, more than once, tenured professors congratulated themselves—in my hearing—on keeping natives of the city out of the English department. I was supposed to feel flattered that my appearance did not betray my unworthy place of birth. This was in the very city where many of them prospered, owned homes, had families, and sent their children to schools where they were taught by “natives.”)

I despised being “downstairs” (my office was in a drafty basement with early 20th-century plumbing) since I had already out-published many of the “upstairs” folk who had been given tenure during an earlier time and in an outmoded campus culture at a school where football and fraternities recklessly reigned. I do not know the rules of football, and, as an Italian-American, would not have been admitted to a sorority. The culture was foreign to me, although I grew up within walking distance of the campus.

All the while, the specter of a bad job market loomed over us. Still, we futilely mailed hundreds of CVs in response to ads in the MLA Job List, then issued quarterly in print. Dreading having to terminate us after taking advantage of our situation for six years, the department chair and the program director frequently pressured us with transparent inquiries about our job searches.

I had nightmares about becoming what was then referred to as a “bag lady.” But, in a collective effort to avoid the draft, young men had gone straight through college to graduate school and were clinging for dear life to assistant professorships and experiencing their own nightmares about being denied tenure. The mostly unacknowledged job applications piled up for us non-traditional students, many of whom were women.

One semester in the late 1980s, having been asked to teach a Foundations class filled mainly by football players, I found myself embroiled in a pay-for-play scandal involving coaching staff, wealthy alumni, and athletes that eventually made national news. Although I was supported and even comforted by the administration after I dropped from the course roster a football player who had never appeared in class, I was immediately telephoned by a football coach, who begged me to reinstate the student whom I had never met.

I will never forget his guilt-inducing words: “You are taking away his shelter and the very food out of his mouth.” This young man had grown up in the projects of Detroit and was exactly the kind of student who had drawn me into teaching from the beginning.

During college, conscious of being a first-generation college student, I had read Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to confirm my commitment to

activist teaching, not to discover it. With my consent, a compromise was reached: if he made up every missed class-hour in the writing center, he could be reinstated in my class with a grade of F. He then would be eligible to play football, as well as to live (and eat) in the dorm reserved for the players.

During these office hours, I came to know this young man's intelligence, work ethic, and dedication to family. He was a gentle giant. I will never forget the productive hours I spent going over his drafts with him, especially the day he blurted out that "graffiti is art in the inner city." That sentence became the first line in a very solid essay, the first that he had ever written in his life.

Did I do the right thing? I think so, but the university eventually received the "Death Penalty" from the National Collegiate Athletic Association. He and many other mostly Black young men disappeared from our classes and our lives. They were barely given time to clean out their lockers. The university no longer had any use for them. The evening newspaper likened them to slaves and the university to a plantation.

When I received the contract for my sixth year as an adjunct, I was shocked to see TERMINAL stamped in several places on the document. I knew such notice was coming, but having received the highest possible ratings on teaching observation visits and student evaluations, I had hoped to be an exception. I had served on search committees, including one for a new Director of Freshman English, supervised groups of new adjuncts and graduate students, and had my course proposal accepted by the University Fellows for the second-semester Freshman English course. In that course, we took a thematic approach to the material and—*quelle surprise*—could include one work of fiction and some poetry, along with nonfiction works. For several years, this was somewhat humorously referred to as The Civello Plan among adjuncts and graduate students. For three consecutive summers, I taught a course, Composition Theory and Practice, to Advanced Placement English teachers in the city's public school system. Although I did not want to spend the rest of my years as an adjunct and yearned for the opportunity to earn tenure, the prospect of unemployment loomed over me as I job-searched in a bad market.

In April of 1990, I survived rounds of telephone calls and a campus visit to receive a contract for an assistant professorship at the downtown campus of The University of Houston. As I wrote earlier, my years there resulted in both professional and personal success and a reasonable degree of happiness.

As a downtown commuter campus, we attracted an even more diverse student body than did the flagship location. Two factors, however, prompted many of us to yearn for change. The first was salary. Since (again) there were no publication expectations, we were not paid on par with professors at the central campus. Yet (again), many of us were competitive with them in that area.

The budget book, available in the library, confirmed our suspicion that male assistant professors were hired at a substantially higher salary than females in the same department. In my case, the male candidate's moving expenses were paid by the university since he "had a family" whereas my widowed mother paid mine.

The second was race. Our students, especially in lower-division courses, paralleled the diverse population of the cosmopolitan nature of the city. As students entered the upper-division courses of their majors, however, retention was low. The connection we made was that the darker the students in the university system, the lower the pay—offensive on many levels and blatantly racist.

As Director of Freshman English, I was torn between remaining in that position and something I thought I'd never face again—a job search. I decided to look around. A colleague who had become my closest friend over the years remarked that, whereas she was married and had a child in elementary school, I was fortunate to be a single woman and childless and, thus, able to relocate easily. Agreeing with her in part, I sent out a few applications with good results though not anything I chose to accept.

Instead, I decided to remain there and become more active in the Faculty Senate and departmental affairs. I again advocated for change from within the system. I received a faculty grant and took a leave of absence for a semester in 1992 to work on a manuscript that resulted in a publication; I spent a summer at Berkeley at an NEH seminar that gave me more time to write. I was finding ways to navigate the minefield of academia and, at the same time, use literature to connect with young women who, on the one hand, disavowed feminism as outdated and unnecessary while, on the other, bemoaned youthful marriages and overwhelming child-rearing responsibilities.

I was content and somewhat relieved that I had escaped such domestic arrangements. I had never dreamed of weddings or children; the thought of home ownership panicked me.

And then the unthinkable happened: that same close friend was diagnosed with stage 4 inflammatory breast cancer at age 39. As assistant chair of the department, I was charged with visiting her classes and breaking the news to devastated undergraduates while experiencing kaleidoscopic memories of being invited to her home for shrimp boils, planning panels for Women's Month, sharing wine over dinner to celebrate its success, and endless hours of her listening to my stories of a broken engagement and the ensuing loneliness of being a single woman in a large city without once saying "enough" as others had.

Many people write papers on female friendship; we lived it daily. We couldn't have been more different. She was blond to my brunette, suburban to my urban, a published poet to my prose, married and mother to my single womanhood. As we discussed her terminal diagnosis during her three years of surgery and chemotherapy, she asked just one thing of me: to "keep an eye on her son" whom she had named after her favorite writer, Jane Austen.

At that point, I would have agreed to anything. As her condition worsened, her husband called and asked me to help him clean out her office. I refused, telling him that everybody had an office and that she often came in after a treatment to sit in her chair and peruse her books, but I assured him that I would help him when the time came. When she died, I made good on my promise. Reader, suffice

it to say that he and I have been married for almost 30 years, the boy is now a physician, and we are grandparents twice over.

George Eliot puts it best when, in the Prelude to *Middlemarch*, she writes of the “epic life” of Saint Theresa of Avila as well as “no epic life” for many latter-day Therasas, whose lives she associates with such words as “unfolding,” “mistakes,” “meanness of opportunity,” “tragic failure,” and “tangled circumstance,” saying that “to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and formlessness.” These words serve as the prelude to the 900-page life of Dorothea Brooke, using words that could have emerged from the pages of Kristeva or Cixous and applied to us as 21st-century feminists—who (returning to the epigram of this essay) juggle multitudes of “extravagances” and “lapses” in our daily lives filled with competing claims of paper grading, soccer games, grocery shopping, syllabuses, research, school plays, office hours, and cooking dinner.

So I left my tenured position and became a high school teacher and administrator. To be clear, a grieving child adds another dimension to the already complicated landscape of parenthood. Grief is subtle, unpredictable. Although I continued to write and present at conferences, I decided to spend the time that would have been required for a second book with my son.

The very humanness of such an existence invigorated and challenged me; at the same time, it exhausted me and caused me great stress. In the Finale of her (yes) feminist masterpiece, Eliot concludes, “The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts . . . half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”

I have told this story, in an abbreviated form, many times—at job interviews, in classrooms, as encouragement to younger colleagues. I have met with responses from “you must feel so guilty” and “I can’t believe you gave up tenure” to “I feel so much better now” and “I get it.”

But I have never told it in such detail as in these pages. If my stated purpose was to show the effects of cultural milieu—of people, place, and time—on career, then I hope that within the complexity and contradictions of five decades of one woman’s life, I’ve shown the connections between the woman and the work. I have outgrown the need for approval and even for understanding of my life choices, for choice is the essence of feminism and difference is crucial to an understanding of culture.

As for me, I have visited Dorothea’s tomb and understand.

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Chapter 5. From Racine's *Phèdre* to Common Core: One Woman's Journey through the Halls of Academe

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As half of another two-career family example, Carolyn Herrington accompanied her political scientist husband to his first position at a new university. She combined part-time teaching in French and French literature and administrative work. After they returned to Florida from Texas, she found the opportunity to establish a new career in the field of education. She taught, did research and published, worked with the state of Florida, edited one of the major journals in her new field, and served as a dean. New paths are indeed possible.

Academic lives can take unexpected turns. I entered graduate school in 1971, studying 17th century French literature with every expectation of being a professor of French literature—introducing students to and advancing understandings of Racine, Corneille, Molière, and their contemporaries. Looking back over five decades from when I entered the academy as an undergraduate to now, approaching 75 and retirement, I never spent a day teaching French literature.

I have, however, taught many students, supervised dissertations, advanced through the stages of academe from untenured research associate to professor. Along the way, I served as a department chair, an associate dean, and dean. I edited one of the most prestigious journals in my field.

This short essay reviews this trajectory, identifying key decision points and the mix of interests and opportunities that resulted in my professional career. This chapter identifies choices made along the way, how they interacted with preferences and opportunities in my personal life and my professional aspirations, and how one choice led to others.

My initial decision to major in literature was an expression of little more than pure love of reading. The decision to enter graduate school and switch from English literature to French literature was purely opportunistic: the French faculty offered me a teaching assistantship; the English department didn't.

Fast forward four years: I completed my course work and went on the job market. My intent to secure a university position teaching French literature to devotees of fine writing was stopped cold by a frozen labor market. I was heartbroken. My eventual work in non-academic sides of universities, in research institutes, and in other institutional models, including community colleges, eventually led to a professorship in a professional school (education).

What I initially thought to be a long way from the core of the academy—the arts and humanities—I first experienced as a compromise. This is the realm of education as itself an academic field. That was short-sighted on my part; it quickly proved to be an engaging career path every bit as interesting and compelling as studying 17th century French literature, if not as aesthetically enjoyable.

As I look back on my career, I worked in colleges of education both as a researcher and as an administrator, having followed the well-trodden steps from nontenured faculty to associate and full professor, from a yearly contract to the award of tenure, from a research associate to a department chair and deanship, and from editor of a tiny newsletter to editor of the top journal in my field. My trajectory is unusual if not, I suspect, unique.

In preparing to write this essay, I read a number of scholarly books about higher education in the West, some dating back to 11th century Italy and others to the post-World War II era. Both Axtell's (2016) and Mattingly's (2017) book-length studies outline the many paths that led to today's higher education system, documenting the remarkable endurance of some ideas and practices and their evolution, sometimes quite rapidly, in the face of different demands from society. Evidence of perhaps unjustified (or maybe just lazy) institutional isomorphism was frequent. But these same studies also noted considerable flux and flow as societies changed, economies prospered and faltered, scientific understandings were challenged and replaced, all leading to today's institutional organizations.

University of Florida: Undergraduate Studies 1967-1971

For me, going to college was always assumed. My father's college-going was interrupted by World War II. That made college even dearer to his family. My mother never attended college. From both my mother and my father, I received the same unspoken message: take advantage of the chance to go to college and spend time thinking and learning without any other responsibilities. Was the choice also probably gendered? Yes. My brothers all chose more career-oriented majors.

I think I benefited from a still present, although fast disappearing, ethos that college was about becoming educated, not primarily about preparing for a career.

I initially intended music (piano) as my major. I begged for piano lessons all my life and finally when I was 11, my parents bought an old run-down piano and told me if I practiced regularly, they would get a nicer one. They did that three years later. Any illusions about my piano skills crashed within days of arriving on campus, as I listened to other students play and realized I was out of my depth.

My major selections vacillated over the next year or so. I finally settled on English, my decision driven by nothing other than a love of reading. Possibilities for a career never occurred to me. Upon reflection, this was a great gift my parents gave me.

I had a very enjoyable undergraduate experience. I majored in English, took French literature courses—having studied French in high school—and also took

some German language courses. I spent my senior year of high school in Germany where my father was stationed for the U.S. military.

I once dabbled with becoming a physical therapist but quickly slid back to English. Not uncommonly at the time, I graduated four years later. I did spend a year at the University of Dijon, studying French literature, but mostly traveling around Europe. As my senior year approached, I briefly thought about teaching and took a couple education courses. I found them uninspiring and never thought about being a teacher again. Fortunately, graduate school came to the rescue.

University of Florida: Graduate Studies 1973-1975

At the last moment, I applied to the English department for my master's and was accepted but was not offered any support. I don't remember if someone suggested it to me or why, but I also applied to the French program. They offered a teaching assistantship, so I entered the master's program in French instead of English. I loved French literature, too, so in that sense I was fine. I was paid to read Racine and Proust. How bad could that be?

As I came to the end of my doctoral studies and was finishing my dissertation, I went on the job market in perhaps the worst time ever for someone seeking a position. I wrote hundreds of application letters and received virtually no indications of interest.

Looking back, I realize that many universities had too many French professors in the mid-1970s. That was because most high schools had too many French teachers. And that was because high school students were shifting from French as their preferred language to Spanish. I did secure some interviews at the Modern Language Association's annual conferences, but they led to nothing.

My husband was also on the job market in political science. He was in a more enviable position. He had strong quantitative skills at a time when political science was becoming more empirical, and he ended up accepting a position at the University of Texas at Dallas. We were both two years into writing our dissertations. At that time, it was not uncommon to accept a faculty position while still completing the dissertation. We decided to marry, and we moved to Dallas.

In Dallas, while I worked on my dissertation for the next two years, I faced a difficult time in some respects. I was lonely. I had no friends and no colleagues. I shed many tears. I feared that my career aspirations were dead. I was not sure if I would ever get a position in French. I didn't have a job and really didn't know anyone except my husband's colleagues.

However, there were two bright spots that only now I fully appreciate. One, my husband mostly hung out with his colleagues, and they were a fascinating group of people, all young academics starting their careers. While it stung quite a bit to know that they had all successfully found their first jobs out of graduate school while I had not, my husband and I also made lifelong friendships. I

learned a lot about other fields including the social sciences, such as economics, and other fields in the humanities, such as history, all with different academic norms and ways of valuing and documenting knowledge. I think those encounters helped to open me to other ways of knowing and other fields I might consider pursuing in an academic career.

Two, I had time to read broadly with only my interests to guide me. This was fortified by an opportunity, on and off for two years, to teach in the Dallas Community College system at two different campuses and two different subjects. I taught freshman English and a humanities survey course. In both cases, I ended up reading literature I had not read before, especially for the humanities survey course. While I had briefly taught some introductory humanities courses during graduate school, this opportunity to read widely in the humanities proved to be unimaginably valuable.

Teaching in a community college was invaluable in another way, too. I had the opportunity to teach and get to know students for whom higher education had been a difficult reach. It was the first time I thought about how our educational institutions are called upon to serve an amazingly diverse array of students and the challenges that arise—challenges for the students, for the institutions, and for society—from such an enterprise. At the time, this teaching was something I did just to keep my toes in higher education and to have somewhere to go in the morning. Looking back, I now see how it raised a host of questions that my future and current field of education is still trying to address.

I finished my dissertation during the first two years I was in Dallas. Both my husband and I mailed chapter after chapter to our advisors and committee members back in Florida. We both received our PhDs in the summer of 1977.

University of Texas at Dallas: Continuing Education Program Coordinator 1977-1980

Almost immediately after receiving my doctorate, I was offered a position at the University of Texas at Dallas as a continuing education program coordinator. My job was to develop noncredit offerings to serve those in the Dallas community who were interested in learning but not interested in or unable to commit to a degree program. As a new public university serving the rapidly growing metropolis of Dallas/Ft Worth, already served by private Southern Methodist University and by two other public institutions—the University of North Texas and the University of Texas at Arlington—UT-Dallas was trying to make a place for itself not just through its academic offerings but also as part of the community.

Specifically, I was asked to develop a more humanities-oriented set of noncredit courses that would be available to the Dallas community. In general, many people who enrolled in these fine arts, literature, and music courses were well-educated women who, for various reasons, were not employed or had chosen to stay

home or to raise a family. I was impressed with their appetite for learning and their desire to pursue education mainly to learn.

While I was happy to have a job, I never saw it as a replacement for what I assumed would be a traditional academic position in the future. In the two years I held this position, I enjoyed meeting the many people who taught these courses. I also interacted with the broader community. Some programming was co-sponsored by the Dallas Museum of Art. I was exposed to many people I otherwise would never have met.

Life intervened. I became pregnant with my first child. Then my father died unexpectedly. My husband and I decided to move back to Florida to be closer to my mother. We saw the move as temporary. I resigned my position. My husband took a leave of absence from UT-Dallas. However, we never returned to Dallas. We both took positions with the state of Florida, in the capitol, Tallahassee. We have lived in Tallahassee ever since.

Florida State Government: Education Policy Analyst 1982-1987

After a few months of looking, I was offered a policy analyst position with a recently created commission charged with reviewing the higher education landscape in the state of Florida and laying out a master plan for the upcoming ten years. The position was temporary at first but, within a year, made permanent.

As was the case around the country, higher education had expanded rapidly after World War II. There was a sense for some observers that the expansion happened too fast or at least too haphazardly. Before the commission was created, Florida lacked the capacity for centralized planning to guide decisions regarding the expansion of existing institutions, the need for any new institutions—and, if so, where they should be located, how they might compete with or add to existing institutional offerings, what programs should be supported, and how students could best be served. The commission functioned like a mini think-tank to make these decisions and respond effectively to the insistent demand for new institutions and new programs.

When the second year of my husband's leave of absence ended, we decided together that he would resign from his position at UT-Dallas, and we would live at least for a while in Tallahassee. I don't think we thought we'd be still living here 40 years later.

My work was interesting. It could not have been more different from studying and teaching French literature. It was clearly a research position but applied research. As a student of French, I was unfamiliar with this. There was a well-defined audience for the research and the clear assumption that many of the commission's ideas would be implemented according to clear deadlines. The reports we issued did not assign authorial ownership. There was intense

and immediate feedback both in-house and from affected parties. Sometimes, feedback came from policymakers who were eager to champion (or kill) some of the recommendations; other times, administrators of the state's colleges and universities weighed in with concerns that some of our ideas were threats to their institutional ambitions (which they could be).

In addition to the broad sweep of a master plan, the commission was also asked to study very specific issues that the state was facing. This included, for example, what was the role of community colleges in providing technical education and in providing the first two years of undergraduate education. And who should decide: the state or the market?

I produced a set of reports on health education, including medical education (Did Florida have enough medical schools or too few?), nursing education (Should the two-year degree or a four-year degree be required for state licensure?), and elderly care (Were the needs of Florida's elderly population reflected in the mix of medical and allied health programs?). I assisted in a study of the nascent film industry. There had been a long-standing ambition for Florida to compete with Los Angeles and New York City in the movie business, but unlike LA and New York, Florida did not have a film school. Ultimately, the study recommended that the state not authorize a film school, though one was established a few years later anyways.

Thus, I learned to be a policy analyst through on-the-job training. I became acquainted with policy mostly applied to higher education in a broad sense and to professional schools as opposed to the arts and sciences, the more traditional core of the university.

During the six years I worked for the state of Florida, I also had two more children. I was pregnant with my fourth when I returned to the academy.

Florida State University Associate Director, Education Policy Center 1988-1991

I was approached to consider a position as an associate director of a newly created educational policy center that the college of education at Florida State University in Tallahassee had established. The director, a senior faculty member, had studied at Stanford, which boasted an education program that had long recognized the need for students to be trained in educational policy.

I was in my new element. I had close ties with several senior members of the state education department and senior legislators on education committees. The position was temporary with an assurance of only two years with the expectation that the center would transition to be supported by external funds. Within a short period, the center secured grants in a number of areas, including one for \$1.5 million to review Florida's early childhood sector. The larger grants, like this one, allowed for full-time support staff as well as independent research.

The timing was great, but the work was subject to specific parameters. For most of its existence in the United States, the education policy sector was dominated by professionals in the field and by academics in universities. In the 1980s, this was changing rapidly. There was an increased understanding that a nation's economic health and the quality of schooling were inextricably linked. Interest in the condition of national and state educational systems expanded discussions to include non-educators, such as other academics outside colleges of education, including economists and sociologists; faculty in schools of public policy; and government employees, though not necessarily professional staff with a background in education policy.

The education community writ large witnessed their influence on the public discussion eroding. Issues that had been left to educators such as curricula, assessments, and teacher quality spilled over into conversations with more diverse stakeholders and these were becoming more contentious. The FSU College of Education wisely, I would argue, wanted to have a greater presence in the field through hiring academics specializing in policy.

I remained in that position for two years. I drew on my earlier experience with master planning and the precedent set by the California Education Policy Center (Policy Analysis for California Education). During my tenure, the center published a report: "Condition of Education in Florida." However, as the end of my second year approached, I was told that the college would continue to fund my salary at 50 percent for another year, but after that the center was expected to be fully funded through external contracts and grants. Before I decided to stay or not, much to my delight, I was offered a tenure-track position as an Associate Professor at Learning Systems Institute (LSI), one of the largest research centers on campus. I remained with the Institute for about a decade, eventually receiving tenure and teaching educational policy in the college of education.

Learning Systems Institute, Associate Professor 1991-2001

The Institute had a large presence in international development education and had been the beneficiary of a number of substantial long-term contracts with the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). Starting in the early 1970s, the Institute first worked with the South Korean government as it redesigned its educational system to keep pace with the meteoric rise in its economy. The eight-year contract proved consequential, and AID provided additional funds to expand the LSI model to a number of other countries over the next decade. The total amount of funds dispersed approached \$60 million, counting many large grants as well as smaller spin-offs, and including countries as different as Indonesia, Haiti, and several African countries.

I entered the picture as the international efforts wound down in the late 1980s. LSI approached the U.S. Department of Education seeking support to apply a

similar model of education reform in the United States. Despite some initially promising discussions at the federal level, a similar program, although greatly scaled down, began at the state level, with initial funding from the Florida legislature. That effort, however, received funding for only two of the planned ten years and at only \$2 million of the budgeted \$10 million.

Simultaneously, the FSU policy center became part of a network of other university-based, state-focused educational policy centers that the Kellogg Foundation helped to fund along with support from the Education Commission of the States and the National Conference of State Legislatures. The forerunner for this network of universities was an earlier effort headquartered at the University of California-Berkeley. It involved a partnership with Stanford, UC-Berkeley, and UCLA. It worked specifically on policy issues confronting the state of California.

With considerable encouragement from Michael Kirst, professor of policy at Stanford University, and one of the founders of California's policy center, I worked to establish a Florida educational policy center. Like the California center, Florida's was to focus on one state, and the audience for the research was state policymakers. The center gained a toehold with state government policymakers and over the years has been called on repeatedly. The center's physical location in the state capital of Tallahassee was critical in developing and nourishing the center and in influencing state policy.

Meanwhile, I continued to teach in my academic home, FSU's department of educational leadership, which would soon add "policy" to its name. I was awarded tenure and promoted to full professor in due course. After about a decade, the chair position opened, and I was asked to apply. In turn, I served as department chair, associate dean, and dean over the next ten years.

Chair, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy 2001-2005

Both the name change and my being asked to serve as chair represented a growing focus within the college of education to better understand and play a larger part in the state's myriad educational policies, including those pertaining to K-12 governance, funding, curriculum, and teacher credentialing. Although it was more limited, this question of focus was also true for higher education.

Along with other colleges of education across the country, policy became a new emphasis for FSU. In addition to the department's new name, new policy-focused faculty lines were approved. For example, a faculty position that focused previously on vocational education was repurposed into an economics-of-education position. When a senior faculty member in educational administration retired, the line was redefined to focus on policy, and a faculty member graduating from a public policy school was hired.

Associate Dean, College of Education

I served as chair for a year and then was asked by the dean of the college to consider also serving simultaneously as the college's associate dean for academic affairs. I kept both roles for three years. At the same time, other universities and head-hunting companies approached me about applying for deanships.

In time, I accepted an offer from the University of Missouri to become the dean of the college of education. At that point, I had lived in Tallahassee for almost 25 years. Our family had grown to four children. My mother had died, but I had other family members who lived in Florida with whom I was very close. The decision was difficult. In the end, my husband and I decided that I would accept the position, and he would stay in Tallahassee until our youngest child finished high school.

University of Missouri College of Education, Dean, 2005-2008

Being dean at a flagship state university, a university that was a founding member of the American Association of Universities, and for a college of education with a strong presence in a number of core areas was a delight and a challenge. I was struck with the degree of institutional morphism inflected by the specific demographic and economic differences between Florida, a rapidly growing southern state, and Missouri, a more settled state.

In some ways, Missouri was very similar to FSU and in other ways not. First, the size and types of programs were similar with a few notable exceptions. There was an underdeveloped policy program and a very strong technology program. Both proved consequential as I attempted to understand a new organizational pattern and to draw on its assets. Second, serving on the Council of Deans was a learning experience and a challenge. The trick was to understand how my college could be served best while also respecting university-wide priorities and the relative strengths of the other colleges.

The previous dean had nurtured close relationships with leaders in the K-12 public school community. The college was well-known and appreciated across the state, something that I came to appreciate more and more. That is not easy to do and requires a lot of time and patience.

On the other hand, there was little precedent for involvement in Missouri state-level education policy. After initial forays into what I considered my strength, I realized that as a dean I could not be as outspoken as when I was faculty. As an academic, my presentation of self was as a policy analyst, but as a dean, I was seen by others as representing the institution. It was difficult to articulate policy preferences based on my analytical skills as a policy researcher because, I soon realized, these preferences were often interpreted as positions that might benefit my college of education or colleges of education in general.

I was on safer ground staying within K-12 policy analyses than in higher education policy analyses, but still it was a difficult path to tread. As a dean, I wanted to use my position and skills to recommend policies that might strengthen Missouri's public education system without encroaching on higher educational issues that might conflict with the university's leaders' priorities.

My three years as dean passed quickly. My decision to step down as dean and return to Florida State University was difficult. I faced a choice between administrative responsibilities and opportunities, and returning to live closer to my immediate and extended family. While my husband was willing to join me in Missouri and the university offered him a spousal hire, the position for him was less interesting and I missed my family daily. A precipitating event was the unexpected death of one of my brothers; he was 61 and, by all signs, in excellent health. I asked myself if the rewards, personal and professional, were worth being 1000 miles from my husband and children and my extended family. The answer was no.

Florida State University (Again)

Since I had been granted a leave-of-absence by Florida State University, returning was not too difficult. At the same time, education policy only increased in local and national debates about the role of education in society. Although my academic scholarship had suffered under the demands of administrative positions, the field had not only grown but had become academically more exciting, the research more rigorous, and the potential for positive impact stronger. I returned as a full professor, with a significant set of experiences—and a broader and more expansive view of colleges of education and their place within the larger research university space, particularly within a major public research university.

I've spent my last fifteen years since stepping down as dean engaged in various efforts to strengthen the professional associations that focus on education policy research and, more broadly, on enlarging the reach of policy-focused education research. While dean, I served as head of the American Educational Research Association division on policy and had overseen the drafting of the first code of ethics for the Association. After returning to Florida State University, I was elected President of the Association for Educational Finance and Policy. Perhaps the most consequential opportunity was serving as editor-in-chief of the *Educational Researcher*, the signature journal of the American Educational Research Association, publishing nine issues a year.

These days, my service contributions remain focused on improving the quality of research and its potential to speak to policymakers. My current research focuses on the continuing evolution of the role of the state in governing and funding K-12 education. The pandemic tested some long-standing assumptions and showed the system resilient and capable of change but also revealed some stress points which need attention. Again, much of my focus remains state-specific, in this case, the state of Florida and its recent emergence as a state that has

adopted a set of policies around school choice that present a significant chance of upending a more than 150-year consensus on how public education should be governed, controlled, and delivered.

Coda

In toto, my journey over 40 years in academe has been both unexpected and unusual. One clear example of how it has challenged academic and institutional norms has been that every ten years, as FSU undergoes its regional accreditation process, my position is flagged as filled by someone not qualified for the job; that is, why is someone with a degree in French literature on the faculty in a college of education?

The question is put to rest easily with evidence of my contributions. One could argue, and I would, that it is appropriate for the accrediting body to pose the question, and it is a tribute to the responsiveness and resiliency of the institution that a good answer is found and is found to be credible.

Another question worth posing: is there something particular about colleges of education that might make them more accommodating to practices or norms outside their professional past? As argued in Lagemann (2000), colleges of education were late to the academy, with teacher preparation handled mostly in self-standing training colleges (normal schools), and when brought in under the academic fold were slow to be granted the respect of the older professional schools (law, medicine, and others). Furthermore, the scholarship was often assessed as low quality.

Colleges of education have had a distinctive professional trajectory. As just one example, Teachers College, long affiliated with Columbia University, was a self-standing higher education institution with a broad array of departments representing many disciplines related in some way to the study of education. Similarly, within most universities, some teacher preparation programs (e.g., physical education, arts education) are found in other colleges and departments and not just in colleges of education. Even decades after he left the University of Chicago (to move to Columbia), John Dewey bemoaned the isolation of teacher training in colleges of education—isolated in two ways: isolated from the day-to-day practice of teachers in schools and isolated on campus from other departments and colleges (see Lagemann, 2000).

Education schools, some argue, have never attained the respect and therefore discretion to establish their own norms as have the older, more highly respected and better compensated professional schools such as law and medicine, each of which have successfully implanted unique pedagogical approaches. One could argue that the loose toehold education has had traditionally within the academy has made education's walls more permeable.

A similar argument is advanced by Ris (2022) in tracing the opening of higher education to broader segments of the American population around the middle

of the last century. He places colleges of education in the large middle strata of learning institutions precisely because they did not have set institutional norms and their practices were more amenable to reformers' suggestions for innovation, such as moving teacher training into universities. Much is written about the rigid, walled-off, and inward-looking nature of the modern American university with faculty siloed in their disciplines and in their colleges and departments. It has been characterized as slow to change, stuck in outdated paradigms, and impervious to external pressures. My experience does not bear that out.

While much is made, not without reason, about the tight hold the academic disciplines exert over faculty and their ways of thinking—both as scholars and as members of a professional community—I have found more flexibility than I would have thought and more room to innovate and more opportunities to digress from expected paths.

I think current scholarship bears this out. Most overviews of higher education in the West, whether histories beginning in the Middle Ages or more recent overviews covering the rise of the modern research university, have emphasized both custom and change; persistence and innovation, and insularity and willingness to try the new. One would be hard-pressed to find in my experience evidence to dispute the narrative of higher education's adaptability. Based on my trajectory, it would be difficult to say that institutional norms are fixed or their applications rigid; rather, my career path suggests that there is considerable room to roam.

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Section 3. 1980s Cohort

Chapter 6. No Discipline!

Johanna Drucker
UCLA

Johanna Drucker's multiple career paths took her from success as a book artist to a self-defined interdisciplinary PhD program and a major transition to a significant research and teaching career across the arts and humanities. A pioneering interdisciplinary scholar from the 1980s on, she demonstrates achievement and recognition despite administrators' difficulty in placing her within their often-anachronistic disciplinary structures. She persevered and contributed substantively to the arts and scholarship advancing the field of visual studies and visual knowledge.

In 1998, justifying his Ivy League university's decision not to retain me, my then-dean called me a "scholar without a discipline." When I met him again a quarter of a century later at a meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he made the same remark about my profile, still constrained by the categorical definitions of conventional disciplines. Clearly, he was unable to transcend his own intellectual limitations. Evidently, no box was too small for him to think inside of.

Even in the 1990s, my work crossed several disciplines—visual epistemology, alphabet studies, and graphical forms of knowledge production—in systematic and highly rigorous ways. I was also a skilled artist and letterpress printer. But the conventional, departmentally defined fields of art history and literary studies, even graphic design and information studies, did not recognize these as integral to their methods or subject matter.

Why not? Look to the disciplines and their parochialism to answer this question. Art history is one of the worst, still anxious about its authority, unwilling to embrace visual studies and graphical instantiations of knowledge as central to its own domain, so terrified of studio artists that most research universities maintain strict physical distance between the makers and the scholars. A historical and critical analysis of these fields from socio-anthropological perspectives tells us much about why this narrowness persists. But that is not my focus here. Instead, I want to tell the tale of a career with no discipline.

Range and Variety

My academic experience was shaped by continual adaptation and repeated cycles of acceptance and expulsion from institutions. I taught at six universities over fourteen years and published five scholarly books, along with dozens of articles, before I got tenure—all while also producing and publishing creative work and exhibits. Then, almost immediately, I moved into a position as a chaired, full professor.

By the time I finished my academic career as the Breslauer Professor and Distinguished Professor in Information Studies at UCLA, I had taught 85 different courses in fields and subjects as diverse as environmental design, film theory, arts and performance, studio art (mainly drawing, but also artist book production), art history, graphic design history, introduction to media studies, digital media studies, history of media, experimental poetry in the 20th century, experimental prose, material texts, individual topics classes in the history of the book (alphabet books in the children's book collection, modern art of the book, artists' books, gender and genre in 17th and 18th century books, California fine press, activist publishing in the 20th century, activist publishing, the history of the book, and literacy technologies), digital humanities, artifacts and cultures, complexity theory, and sustainability in the information professions.

My profile is unusual, particularly since I also kept an artistic practice alive throughout. My artist's books are in special collections in libraries and museums throughout North America and elsewhere, and my papers are held at the Beinecke Library. Seems like plenty of evidence of discipline, if not adhering to "a" discipline.

Early Disciplines

My first disciplines were in the studio practices of drawing and printmaking. I learned to draw while I was a student at California College of Arts and Crafts, which I began to attend in the fall of 1970. I wasn't really taught, but rather, I applied myself with diligence to the study of organic forms and rendered them in pen and ink, pencil, and watercolor.

Printmaking was another matter, and I had to be introduced to its exigencies through the expertise of others. Learning to etch, do stone lithography, and hand-set metal type happened through apprenticeships, not simply through intuitive activity. I needed to develop the skills of creating a form with the right pressure, putting acid on a stone in the correct way, grinding it at the sink, and applying a soft or hard ground to a plate. These are disciplines, not hobbies, not superficial distractions.

Ignorance

Before I was involved with university life, the term "academic" had no value for me beyond serving as a slightly pejorative adjective applied by my poet friends to work they found predictably conventional. This was in the 1970s when the creative circles in which I moved had still not acknowledged that tenure-track jobs provided benefits that no life in experimental literature was likely to supply. Some of them ultimately followed my path or entered academia on what they believed were their own terms. Others had trust funds.

I was ignorant about academic life and its parameters. My father was a commercial artist who had two years of art school training. My mother had an

undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois where she had studied German romantic literature. Later, when she decided to go back into the workforce, she took courses in microbiology and organic chemistry. Then she managed a research lab in the anatomy department of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. Though both were intellectuals with strong interests in art, literature, politics, and other fields, my parents were never academics and only saw graduate work as valuable in the sciences. When a friend of theirs decided to get a doctorate in history, they dismissed the activity with a mixture of defensiveness and mockery. What could possibly justify such a degree?

Education

My early education was in the public schools in Philadelphia in a time when they were well-funded and even visionary. Through junior high, I had a good education; then in the Philadelphia High School for Girls, it faltered in the sciences. When I went to the University of Rochester for my first year of college in 1969, I found my preparation for calculus, astronomy, and physics far short of what was necessary to succeed.

I realized I had been shut out of the disciplines of science for lack of fundamental preparation. I could no sooner acquire these basics than I could fake ten years of ballet training. Intellectual discipline takes time.

So I decided to go to art school, thinking I could make a living doing graphic art and write my own creative books. At the California College of Arts and Crafts I found a wonderful mentor, Betsy Davids, who introduced me to letterpress as well as various forms of poetry, writing, and book arts.

After graduation, I pursued those activities, supporting myself as a waitress, typesetter, and temporary office worker. I worked at the West Coast Print Center for several years (1975-77) where I had access to letterpress equipment that I used to publish my own experimental works, learning about contemporary poetry in the process through immersion in a writing community.

I travelled abroad, and in Amsterdam I printed an etching portfolio with a theoretical text, *Experience of the Medium* (1978), a copy of which was purchased by the prestigious Stedelijk Museum. I returned to the United States and made my way back to California thinking I would continue an art career.

My aesthetic focus was on organic processes and the unfolding of complex systems of growth and decay. My conviction about the role of graphical instantiation of language as integral to meaning had increased through a decade of holding type in my hands. The poetry world was a competitive, combative place, and answering the demand to define your project and situate your work required intellectual rigor. We were serious writers. Our discipline was literary practice, and that meant reading the hard works (e.g., Ludwig Wittgenstein, Louis Zukofsky, Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein) and constantly clarifying and justifying our positions. Literary life is not for amateurs.

Professional Disciplines

Upon my return to the Bay Area in 1979, I found a paid internship working with the registrar in the history department of the Oakland Museum. The job was fascinating. The Museum was cataloguing its historical collections for the first time, and the registrar spent her days in the warehouse photographing and classifying the objects. Materials from the early history of California, a vast collection of artifacts from Indigenous peoples, and all kinds of ephemera, publications, costumes, and tools from every era up through the 20th century had to be identified and described.

My task was to type up the records on cards, carefully getting the information into the right subject fields. The cataloguing of cultural artifacts was in its early days, and I found the intellectual aspects of the undertaking to be a genuine education.

Structured data and metadata were not concepts to which I had been exposed previously. That these came from the discipline known as library and information science was a revelation. I had had very little exposure to this discipline's professional worlds and its specialized knowledge. Knowledge organization had rules that were very different from those of literature; it worked through consensus and administrative structures that were also part of its discipline, one organized in an entirely distinct social framework from those of the arts or even scholarship. The concept of a professional discipline appeared in my mind, building on insights provoked by learning the Dewey Decimal system in my first job, as a page shelving nonfiction books in the Philadelphia public library a decade earlier.

Research

Then, one day as I left a telephone message on the desk of the museum's history department director, my eyes landed on a truly bizarre publication, *Le Petit Journal des Refusées*, created in the Bohemian circles of California. Small in format, printed on wallpaper, cut with oblique angles wrapped in a cover printed in a design that smacked of the 1890s vogue for Aubrey Beardsley, the piece was irresistible.

I asked if I could research this amazing object, find out about its identity, conception, design, author(s), and situate it within the context of what, it turned out, was its 1896 date of publication. By some miracle, the director and the registrar approved my request. I cannot believe this now, but I was allowed full and free access to the archives of the Oakland Museum to research the *Petit Journal*. Every Friday afternoon I retreated to the subterranean space next to the bottom level of the parking garage and went through publication after publication from 1890s San Francisco to understand this incredible work by this remarkably original humorist, Gelett Burgess.

What I discovered about the piece was one thing. What I discovered about myself was a passion for research. The Museum even permitted me to give a public talk on magazines in the Bay Area in the 1890s. This experience changed my life,

opening a path to pursue a graduate degree. This, too, was a discipline for which I had no formal training, just an instinct that to understand the object I had to compare it with its contemporaries, situate it in cultural practices and graphic forms. I had stumbled into the world of scholarly research and was determined to continue.

Graduate Work

I knew some faculty in the department of visual studies at the University of California at Berkeley from Print Center activities a few years earlier. I talked with them, explained my interests in studying the history of the book, writing, and art publishing as a foundation for seeking a teaching job that might combine these interests with the hands-on abilities I had in printmaking.

This all made sense to them, and I was admitted to the School of Environmental Design to pursue an MA in visual studies. No structured program curriculum existed. We had one required seminar per year; for the rest, I pursued independent study work and took classes in other departments.

Within a month of enrolling, I had met the man who would become my mentor and inspiration, Bertrand Augst. Within another few months, I realized that a master's degree would not suffice to satisfy my appetites for knowledge. Augst had introduced me to the world of semiotics and structuralist theory. A distinguished senior linguist, Yakov Malkiel, provided a basic framework in the history of linguistics, reading his seminar notes from the back of envelopes on which he had jotted names like Max Müller, or the brothers Grimm, or Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir.

Entire new universes began to open. I had no real idea of what an academic life could be, or how one went about pursuing such a career. By this point I had published more than ten creative works under my own imprint or with small presses. I kept a firewall between this work and my academic pursuits, unwilling to let my creative practice be subject to academic review. Meanwhile, I fumbled forward trying to fit my intellectual passions to academic fields that felt ill-suited to the cross-disciplinary approaches I sought. But I was cherry-picking, taking bits from here and there piecemeal, rather than understanding how fields developed, differentiated, and policed themselves.

Creating a Discipline: *Écriture*

UC Berkeley had a provision in its graduate guidelines that allowed any student enrolled in a master's program that did not have a continuing doctoral degree to put together an ad hoc interdisciplinary agenda to pursue one. With the help of my mentors, Augst and Tony Dubovsky, I cobbled together the required five-person committee. Julian Boyd, a lovely but fallen spirit in the English department; James Melchert, an artist/intellectual who became head of the NEA; and Hayden White, a critical historian at UC Santa Cruz, all agreed to serve.

I put together a proposal pretentiously titled *Écriture: The history and theory of writing as the visual representation of language*. Three fields constituted my program: the history of writing, theories of visual representation, and semiotics and signification. The justification for these was that I needed a thorough knowledge of my topic, writing as a visual form, and the history of the field from antiquity to the present. I needed to know how visual forms were understood and theorized. I borrowed approaches from art history, graphic design, anthropology, and cognitive studies. Finally, I had to have a framework for analyzing meaning production in visual signs, hence the study of semiotics, structuralism, and symbolic forms. Each of these generated its own reading list.

In pursuit of these goals, I would focus on one single, individual topic at a time. For instance, I studied the reception history of hieroglyphics, borrowing heavily on the work of Erik Iversen but also tracking his references. Then I traced the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet from experiments going back to the Renaissance and efforts of George Dalgarno in creating signs for the deaf. I read across a library shelf that contained texts in the history of phonetics from Alexander Melville Bell and Henry Sweet and their work on visible speech. In related research, I became acquainted with Bishop John Wilkins and other individuals who created philosophical languages meant to communicate directly to the eye.

I wrote my master's thesis on alphabet symbolism. That later became the foundation of *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (Thames and Hudson, 1995) and in more mature form, *Inventing the Alphabet* (University of Chicago, 2022).

I knew that the discipline of writing studies, and its subset, alphabet studies, needed theoretical as well as historical foundations. I set out to formalize them, building on film theory, structuralism, and semiotics.

But I didn't want to pursue any of the established disciplines. Linguistics was dominated by Chomskian theory, which seemed contrived and artificial to me. Film history was too new, too limited, too brief. I was warned away from art history because the department was so resistant to theory. Literature programs repressed or ignored the visual aspects of texts—they still do. The communications department was largely quantitative in its orientation. Environmental studies was designed to prepare practitioners for implementation. Nothing felt like it gave me the basis for historical and theoretical depth in my field, *écriture*, the study of writing as the visual representation of language.

Bibliographic and Pedagogical Training

I had access to the fantastic resources of Berkeley's library. I plundered the Doe Library stacks, finding works no one had checked out in decades, even centuries. I strived to develop a theoretical framework for the ways in which visual presentation produced meaning, building on a long-held conviction I had developed as a typographic poet.

I worked constantly, furiously, passionately. I was a teaching assistant (TA) for Augst and taught sessions on semiotics and structuralism as well as silent film, experimental film, and classic cinema. I was also a TA for Dubofsky and taught the introduction to drawing and design for all undergraduate students in the College of Environmental Design. I was a volunteer at the Pacific Film Archive and worked with their clippings files, and I eventually served as a volunteer projectionist for researchers. I taught two courses of my own design: *Image/Structure/Culture*, a grab-bag of visual epistemology, and *Environmental Typography*. I straddled disciplines with a careless disregard for the realities of academic life, unaware of the liabilities that would eventually lead that narrow-minded dean to his pronouncements.

Dissertation Work

When it came time to formulate a dissertation, I was torn. I had become—who wouldn't—enamored of Athanasius Kircher. I toyed with the idea of working on the organization of his library. Luckily, Augst advised against this, saying my Latin was insufficient, the topic too obscure, and that I should situate myself in the modern period.

He was right. I decided to write about the typographic poetry of the early 20th century avant-garde, Dada and Futurism. This prompted me to create an intellectual foundation for the arguments I had been making in my creative work for a decade. And it would make my work legible within both literary and art historical studies.

The decision was a good one, though the whole enterprise of the ad hoc degree was pure foolishness. I should have had a discipline, a department, and an understanding of how the academic world worked. Instead, I did whatever I wanted, passionately following my interests, much-indulged as well as supported by a group of professors who probably should have sat me down (at least one of them) to let me know there were no departments of *écriture* anywhere in the world. I would have answered them by saying that the university would not exist without writing, though no one studied it. That was true. But it was not a career path.

In some ways, I worked with literary studies as a peripheral discipline, learning to read texts but adding the inflection of graphical form to the systems of meaning production. But I had no formal foundation in its traditions. I could not have taught an introductory survey in English literature.

Print history in technical as well as aesthetic terms informed my work as well as graphical study, but I was not a historian. The fact that I knew how to set letterpress type meant I could read visual poetry in terms of its production and conception, but I could not teach a standard graphic design class. I had disciplines, but no single discipline.

Visual Studies

In spring 1986, I conducted a series of visits with people at MIT and Harvard

and other places to see how the discipline of visual studies, where I felt I most belonged, was being taught. I had hopes that I might craft a systematic program for Berkeley or find a place in these other environments. Meanwhile, I applied for a job the University of Texas at Dallas. The job was in an interdisciplinary arts and humanities program that seemed like a good fit for my combination of abilities. Created with upper-division and graduate programs, the interdisciplinary approach included a combination of studio practice and critical work in arts and performance. The dean at the time, Robert Corrigan, had brought his theater experience to the program. At the time I arrived, the idea of a combined academic-arts practice doctoral program was still novel in American universities. The idea now seems prescient in its anticipation of the many “research-practice” degrees that sprung up decades later.

Interdisciplinary Arts and Humanities

My eclectic interests in what I would later call “visual epistemology” were suited to certain elements of this interdisciplinary program, which had a small and rather eclectic group of faculty. Our students included a few hand-picked and gifted individuals who were funded to pursue the PhD in our program, and many individuals finishing out an undergraduate degree. Many of the undergraduates and graduate students were women, returning students who had been stranded in Dallas because of the corporate relocation of their spouses.

These graduate students in particular were wonderful students—savvy, skeptical, disciplined, and hard-working. They questioned why we would read Antonin Artaud; he was “mentally unstable,” they said. But they were thrilled to be able to render an object realistically by the end of a semester or end the year with their own artist’s book in hand. They brought their worldly experience and healthy skepticism into the classroom. They also brought their jewelry. Many days I thought that if I took them to the parking lot, relieved them of their rings and things, I could retire immediately by fencing the fat carats and heavy gold on their necks and fingers.

The teaching experience I got at UT Dallas was invaluable. I taught the basics of drawing and performance art. Social and cultural historian Harvey J. Graff, then my colleague, collaborated with me on two graduate humanities courses: *Crises in Representation in 17th Century* and a parallel course about the 20th Century. Our areas of expertise were highly complementary, and the courses exposed me to scholarly work with which I had not been familiar, as well as to approaches to teaching that Graff had developed from his own experience. This was one of the few teaching collaborations I had, and a rare moment of generous exchange within an academic environment. I taught three classes a semester for two years at UT Dallas.

During my first year, I went to UT Austin to see the art historian Linda Henderson. She had been the mentor of a friend of mine in my Fulbright year in Paris

in 1984-85. Henderson was very direct and clear. The one-hour meeting I had with her also changed my life. She said, “teach the moderns.” So obvious. But so useful.

I created a series of classes at UT Dallas designed to formalize my learning about the history of modern art and the emerging critical discourse of postmodernism. I knew art history vaguely, as one does after art school, but I did not know the art historians, their work, or the field. I undertook to teach myself so I could teach others. This revelation never left me. I could—and did—assign myself courses to teach and then plunged into the bibliography in preparation. Who had written what, when, and what was the dialogue or conversation about now? I was not trying to be an art historian, only prepare to teach art history.

Teaching as Learning

The lesson about learning in order to teach meant I acquired a wide, sometimes superficial, knowledge on topic after topic. But I rarely knew how this material was codified within curricular parameters and disciplines. I learned and taught in short cycles. Sometimes I knew less than my students.

In 1988, the summer before I left Texas, I put together a course, *A Woman's Touch: Feminism and Art History*. Though I never taught the course, it was an excellent exercise in creating a course from scratch, reviewing the existing literature, structuring a syllabus, and considering the contribution to students' understanding of the intellectual stakes. I was in Austin much of that summer and had access to the UT Austin library.

We had to Xerox everything in those days, make physical copies of readings we wanted to use and consider how we would produce slides of those many (almost all) non-canonical works. These were realities. The personal and professional stakes were higher, however, as feminist art history was still marginal and considered a non-field in many circles, as I found out in the following few years. Was feminism a discipline? An approach? Method? Theoretical framework? I wasn't sure. A confusion between discourse and discipline arose in my thoughts.

The Discipline of Art History

After two years in Dallas, I received a Mellon Fellowship at Harvard. This post-doctoral position was among the most privileged years of my life. My major focus that year was to turn my dissertation on Dada and Futurist typography into a book for publication. Thanks to access to the Bow and Arrow Press, I also extended my typesetting and printing skills through publication of *The Word Made Flesh* (1989) and then *The History of the/my Wor(l)d* (1989).

Despite not having an art history degree, I was placed in the fine arts department at Harvard thanks to the generosity of their chair. I developed a course in postmodernism for the department as part of my fellowship. In 1988-89, such a course involved a radical combination of theory and contemporary art, both

anathema in many conservative art history departments. I stepped in for a colleague who became ill and taught her feminist art history course. And in summer school, before leaving, I taught the course *Art History Since 1945*, cramming for every lecture in a vicious cycle of catch-up.

But what kind of discipline was art history at that period? Rooted in connoisseurship, the aesthetic snobbery of German classical scholars, and pushed into iconographical and psychological realms by the next generation of German-Jewish scholars, it became a field full of assertions about the sociological and political force of aesthetics in the work of 20th century scholar-critics. I came into the picture about the time Meyer Schapiro and Clement Greenberg were being pushed aside by French semioticians, Frankfurt-school-influenced cultural theorists, and psychoanalytically inclined refugees from cinema studies. Formal reading practices were put aside in favor of studying the role of works of art in social realms and cultural history. The focus was shifting from traditional connoisseurship to the ideological critique.

While finishing my Harvard year, I applied for positions in studio art, design, art history, basically anything to keep me from returning to the personal isolation I had felt in Dallas. This included a job at Columbia, among the most sought-after positions in North America that year. When I went for the job interview, terrified by being in New York, only men were present. Those were the days. They asked how I would teach postmodernism, where would I begin, and which Critique of Kant's would I use to start the theoretical conversation. They asked if I were a feminist. "Aren't you all?" I replied. "I mean, who is in favor of the oppression of women?"

I was offered the job for what I brought *to* the discipline, not what I knew *of* the discipline. Semiotics, structuralism, psychoanalysis, and post-structuralism were much sought after. My job talk focused on Jackson Pollock's work, "Modernist Surface and the Hermeneutic Trace," and was structured around contrasts between phenomenological and semiotic approaches to interpretation. Doctoral students were eager for theory, though my colleagues felt it was most appropriate to contemporary art. Renaissance, Classical, and Medieval scholars in the field often remained aloof, as did those in 19th century specializations.

Heresy Against the Discipline

In my five years at Columbia, I taught courses across 20th century art at a time when modernism was largely considered European before WWII and American after. I had a broader scope, including a course on European post-WWII art called *Cobra, Lettrism, and Situationism*; *Modern Art in America 1890-1940*; *Theorizing Modernism*; *Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism*; and others. With three graduate students, I did an exhibit of Florine Stettin's then much-mocked and forgotten work.

Contemporary art was exploding in struggles over politics, identity, diversity, and work that broke with the decorum of minimalist abstraction. The field of art history was suffering various identity crises, including grappling with the reality

of living artists. The critical discussions ignored the role of markets, MFA programs, and ambition.

Careerism had replaced erudition in scholarship and in the art to which it attended. The formal analysis of objects, once central to the discipline, was sidelined. But the field was not ready to address the complicity between the realm of high art history and the market-driven discourse of supposed “critique” that dominated the 1990s.

I was expelled from Columbia’s department of art history by one of the high priestesses of the cult, Rosalind Krauss. From the time she was hired, Krauss was clear: she did not want me in the department. A former student of Clement Greenberg, she refused to entertain any disagreement with her own Adorno-ist stance which was the accepted doctrine of the time (and still persists).

Many in the field of modern art history remained convinced that artists were the research and development arm of culture, rather than the entertainment and consumer industries. They maintained this even as the rising stars of post-modernism clearly aspired to the influence and modalities of mainstream media culture. The ideological lines of the discipline were firmly drawn. So were the kinship ties and tribal loyalties. Krauss wanted my position for one of her own.

The writing was on the wall: heresy would not be tolerated within the strictly policed precincts of high art history. A job was open at Yale. They had searched the previous year and had not found a suitable candidate. They desperately needed someone who taught contemporary art. By that time, I had lectured regularly for the Whitney Museum for several years, and I was on the board of the *Art Journal*, the more nimble and contemporary-oriented of the College Art Association’s publications. I was writing bits of criticism, knew my way around the galleries, and was willing to remain in art history. Yale offered me a job before Columbia could terminate my contract.

Visual Studies

At Yale, my students had the last names of American appliances—Westinghouse, Ford, Dolby. They treated me like hired help. Faculty were only as useful as connections. But my classes were a success, graduate students knew they were getting theoretical frameworks they needed and wanted. My publication record at that point included one art history text, one study of the alphabet as a visual symbol, one volume focused on visual poetry in the avant-garde, and a forthcoming study of artists’ books. I taught courses on the critical intersections of graphic design and art history in the modern period as well as standard modern surveys, theory, and contemporary topics.

When my department wanted to advance my promotion, the administration refused to agree to approve a senior position. My three books published by the University of Chicago Press, Thames and Hudson, and Columbia University Press were too wide-ranging. I was told that the University did not trust prolific scholars.

Again, the art history mafia wanted the position for one of their own. My young colleagues in the department almost all were denied the chance for tenure. Yale's process required the solicitation of blind letters from senior scholars at comparable institutions to compile a list of suitable candidates. These people all knew I had the position at Yale, so it was not a coincidence when my name came up on none of the letters. The upshot was the appointment of Tom Crow, a conventional art historian who had studied with Tim Clark. Everyone was happy. Order was restored.

In my exit interview from Yale, the dean of Yale College called me a person "without a discipline." This was patently false. I was clearly in visual studies, but it was a discipline that did not fit their agenda. That was 40 years ago. The disciplinary rigidity and purity at Yale University was completely preserved. The renegade contrarian heretic had been expelled.

Media Studies

During a transition year at SUNY Purchase, I received a query from the University of Virginia about a position as the Robertson Chair of Media Studies. I had been to Virginia to lecture a few years earlier and fallen in love with the campus, the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance, the sublime light, and the excitement about the rapidly growing digital humanities community there.

I did several months of research in advance of the on-campus interview, studying the history of media studies from its origins in propaganda to cultural studies and science and technology as well as film, sociology, and print history. Once again, I entered a field in which I had no formal training or credentials. The reading I did was dizzying, exhilarating. Compared with art history, media studies seemed engaged with reality, economics, sociology, institutions, power, influence, technology, and the cutting-edge development of digital work in ways that felt open and exciting.

Creating the media studies program at the University of Virginia was exhilarating. My tenure line was held by the English department, and colleagues there wanted me to make media studies an extension of their particular brand of cultural studies. The art historians at the University were openly hostile to media studies, and to me personally, especially after I mounted a major exhibit at the Bayly Art Museum, *Complicit!*, about the relation between contemporary art and commercial culture—a slap in the face to the Adorno-ists and their ilk.

To create this new program, I promoted/developed a multifaceted approach that included topics such as forms, technologies, aesthetics, news, critical theory, digital studies, and the history of institutions. It became a department, the largest major in UVA's College of Arts and Sciences, though our program in digital humanities never got support from various deans (you know who you are).

When I suggested, in the context of an English department conference, that the future of literary studies was media studies (e.g., materiality, technology, audiences,

networks, production systems, and so on), I was attacked from all sides. So be it. This was an exciting time, and I had terrific collaborators and colleagues for creating the Speculative Computing Lab, building research agendas, and connecting with the community through helping build the Virginia Arts of the Book Center, passing on other disciplines to a new generation. On the Board of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities where I served several years, my non-disciplinary profile was a benefit, particularly in grants evaluation across programs.

Information Studies and Digital Humanities

The position as Breslauer Professor of Bibliographical Studies at UCLA was never on my radar. In 1999 a graduate student in the information studies program invited me to apply. The information studies department was the current iteration of what had been, originally, a School of Library Sciences focused on professional expertise. Knowledge organization, management, reference and cataloguing, user services, archival studies, bibliography, information systems and other technical areas were its intellectual core. By that time, visual forms of information and data were my topics of study and research. I found a receptive audience for these ideas within the department and in what would become the UCLA Digital Humanities Program.

Digital humanities barely existed in 2000 or 2001, when I received the first grant ever issued by the NEH to support the design of curricular materials for the emerging activity. I was at the University of Virginia at the time and had a stellar group of colleagues and collaborators with whom to develop a series of topics (from digitization and data modelling to programming languages and intellectual property) in a syllabus outline. Each topic paired hands-on and theoretical materials so that practice and critical reflection proceeded in tandem.

That syllabus was the foundation on which I was able to launch the course at UCLA and then build an online and finally published version of *The Digital Humanities Coursebook*. Although I continue to believe that digital humanities is a suite of auxiliary skills and practices, rather than a full field on its own, the crafting of that syllabus and coursebook were creative intellectual activities that provided a template for pedagogy and research—not quite a discipline, but a useful contribution. Digital humanities was founded on principles that required making explicit the interpretative practices that were implicit in humanistic scholarship. The guiding questions were what could be parameterized and what might be made computationally tractable?

I continued writing in various fields, finishing work with Emily McVarish on *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide*; in art history with *Sweet Dreams: Contemporary Art and Complicity*; *Digital_Humanities* with Anne Burdick, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp; *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production, Visualization and Interpretation*; *Iliazd: Metabiography of a Modernist*; and *Inventing the Alphabet*, among other titles produced during my

tenure at UCLA. Pushed to define my disciplinary profile at this point, I would say visual studies, with an epistemological focus, but also alphabet studies as a subset of the field of writing as a material practice. These persistent themes and areas of research have shaped my professional life in spite of academic provincialism.

I still believe that someone should have sat me down in 1982 or so and advised me to locate myself within a discipline—English, history, or art history—to secure a path forward. Instead, I got bruised and bumped around. But I had the great privilege of being able to constantly investigate new things, whole fields and topics. I also learned a great deal about the way the academic world works, its impulses toward conservatism that both preserve and destroy intellectual life and knowledge. Working only within the parameters of a single field would not have worked for me given my eclectic interests, and I was fortunate to be able to make a career that provided a view into so many areas of humanistic thought.

Conclusion

My conclusion? I think it was more important *to have discipline* than to be *in one*.

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Chapter 7. My Journey: Still Putting Parts on the Floor

Jean Reith Schroedel
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Jean Reith Schroedel exemplifies an unusual and under-appreciated academic career path. Born in a working-class family, from high school, she moved from manual to skilled labor and union activism and leadership. Before gaining an academic scholarship to a flagship state university, she drove a Seattle public bus. With the aid and advice of several professors, her paths extended from the University of Washington to a PhD at MIT in political science. Following a first position at Yale, she spent the majority of her career at the Claremont Graduate University with an endowed chair and deanship. She achieved intellectual distinction across research topics. She is currently a leader in studying the denial of rights to Indigenous Peoples in the United States.

Growing Up in Federal Way

For many years, I claimed that I was from Seattle. That wasn't a complete fabrication; I was born in Virginia Mason Hospital. But I grew up and was shaped by Federal Way, a 20-square-mile tract of land in the southwest corner of King County with Puget Sound to the west, Auburn to the east, and Tacoma immediately to the south. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was an unincorporated area without even a rudimentary downtown, just a few businesses located on opposite sides of Highway 99. The name was given in 1929 to a newly established school district with headquarters adjacent to the federal highway (Highway 99).

As a student in Federal Way schools, I never learned even this basic fact about Federal Way. It was a place without history.¹ I never met an adult who had grown up in Federal Way. The population was transient but rapidly growing due to good paying jobs at Boeing plants in nearby Auburn, Kent, Renton, and Seattle.

When my older brother Richard started school in 1954, there were only 1,860 students in the district. Two years later, when I started, there were 2,286 students, and by 1964, the district's enrollment was more than four times greater,

1. Federal Way did not have permanent Indigenous settlements, although the traditional homelands of the Muckleshoot are only a short distance to the east. Prior to the 1880s, there was a very limited Euro-American presence—just men engaged in trapping and lumber work and a small number of women working brothels. See Cater, D. (2005, January 5). *Native American presence in the Federal Way area*. https://federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Native_Presence.pdf.

up to 7,998 students.² Because the district was building new schools every year, I attended three different grade schools: Steel Lake, Mirror Lake, and Panther Lake.³ It also meant that the district was in desperate need of teachers; based on my experiences in those classrooms, the quality varied enormously.

My earliest memory begins with me as a two-year old laughing as my father pushes me higher and higher on a swing in our back yard. But then I remember excruciating pain and screaming, “Stop Daddy. Stop, it hurts.” My appendix had burst. This was before 911. I have no memories of the 10-mile car ride to St. Joe’s Hospital in Tacoma, but I do have vague memories of being in the hospital, although those might be from a later stretch in St. Joe’s. The basic take-away is bad stuff happens, but I had good parents and came out okay.

My parents—Robert and Genevieve—married shortly after V-J Day. My father was working at Todd Shipyards when Pearl Harbor was bombed. He could have spent the war building ships, but he enlisted. He had asked my mother to marry before he shipped out. She refused, saying that she did not want to be a widow. “Come back alive and I will marry you.”

They were an odd couple. Genevieve was 5 feet, 11 inches tall, and she never weighed more than 125 pounds. She had thick, straight, chin-length black hair, large dark eyes, and high cheekbones. Robert was at least an inch shorter, had a stocky build, and a square face with brown hair and eyes. His hair was slicked back with Brylcreem—famous for the jingle “Brylcreem, a little dab will do you.”

Known as Gen to her friends, my mother was smart and funny. She could knit a sweater in a day and type 80 words a minute. Mom had different clerical jobs, interspersed with time as a stay-at-home parent. Dad was the good guy, always ready to give a hug or go out for an ice cream cone, while Mom did the hard parenting stuff. Although he worked full time, Dad also built houses on the side. Most years, he headed out for a few days of deer hunting, usually returning with venison, as well as hides that were made into jackets and slippers.

The marriage was a partnership with complementary rather than adversarial differences. Mom smoked Kool menthol cigarettes, while Dad got his tobacco fix from Roi Tan cigars or an occasional corn cob pipe, lit in honor of General Douglas MacArthur. GIs with German parents, such as my father, were sent to

2. Caster, D. (2008, May 28). *Federal way school history*. <https://federalwayhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Federal-Way-Area-Schools-History-May282008.pdf>.

**Check link. Does not pull up a PDF

3. School district policy was to name grade schools after nearby lakes. That only lasted until they ran out of lakes. Then they switched to fairy tale characters. Junior high schools—grades seven, eight, and nine—were to be assigned Native American names to honor the original inhabitants of the country. But there was no attempt to name the schools after Indigenous peoples whose ancestral lands were in the Northwest. This meant that I attended Lakota Junior High, named after people indigenous to the Great Plains. I found this amusing after I began working closely with Lakota on voting rights issues in South and North Dakota.

the Pacific. At one point while acting as the general's bodyguard, he burned his hands due to firing the Thompson submachine gun so fast that it overheated.

My mother's family were wheat farmers in Nebraska, who became Dust Bowl refugees. They migrated west and settled near the Canadian border in Mount Vernon, where Grandpa got a laborer's job doing road repair for the county. The job carried them through the Depression, but still they were labeled "Okies."

When my mother was 11 or 12 years old, the school nurse came into the classroom and told the children how it was important that "human stock" be improved by encouraging those with good genes to reproduce and preventing those with bad genes from procreating. She then had my mother and a little blonde girl come to the front of the class. The nurse then explained that the other girl had good genes, but that my mother had bad genes and should be sterilized. This was life in pre-World War II America.

I remember my mother telling me this story and taking some pleasure in recounting that the other girl turned out to be a nymphomaniac. Yet she internalized some of the views. Mom often described my brother as her "beautiful blonde, blue-eyed son." Neither my younger sister nor I were ever described as "beautiful." Sara was blonde like Richard but lacked the blue eyes. I, however, look like my mother.

We lived in an area that was called Poverty Bay but was rebranded as the more upscale Marine View Estates. My folks built a house on a former goat farm. Our street (296th) was just east of a cliff that overlooked Puget Sound. My father cleared the land with a bulldozer, poured the cement foundation, and then framed and built the house, working weekends and nights for a year. The house included two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living/dining room, and a small laundry room that led to a one-car garage. After my sister was born, Dad added an attic bedroom above the garage for my brother, and my parents began saving to build a much larger house.

When we moved in, there was only one other family with children in the neighborhood. That family was scary. Mr. Williams yelled a lot. He had a thick leather belt that he used to whip his son Jimmy in the back yard. In turn, Jimmy terrorized the rest of us—my brother and me—and later the Hume children whose parents bought the house adjacent to the Williams. I remember Jimmy taking a hatchet and chasing my brother, threatening to "chop him into little pieces." Another time, Jimmy smeared dog feces on the Hume's station wagon and then claimed that my brother did it. That was one of the few times that my father took a belt to Richard.

Aside from Jimmy Williams, the neighborhood was great. By today's standards, Richard and I had tremendous freedom. Sara was too young to roam like we could. Our house was only a short walk from a trail and stairs that led down to the beach. Our parents allowed us to go there by ourselves. They warned us not to climb on the cliffs because the sand could collapse and someone could die. They never stopped us from riding our bikes wherever we wanted to go.

In summer, we biked two miles to a tiny grocery store for popsicles and learned to swim at Steel Lake. We played Robin Hood. Richard and Ann Hume took turns playing Robin. The loser was the sheriff. Susan Hume, who was one year older than me, liked to be Maid Marian. I was not the girly sort so was happy to be the stalwart Little John. The little kids were sheriff's men. I loved the three months of summer but hated the rest of the year.

In the neighborhood, I was accepted despite my physical disabilities. I was born with legs that bent inwards. At early ages, I wore braces at night. During the day, I wore high-top shoes that were dark brown and resembled baby shoes. I remember being teased about the shoes when I started school, but that was not the worst issue.

It was difficult for me to hold a pencil to write because I had a nasty fungal infection in my hands. The doctors thought that it might be a type of jungle rot that my father brought back from the war. Imagine peeling back the outer layer of skin on your fingers, leaving raw red flesh covered with white pus. It was both painful and ugly.

When the infection was bad, my fingers were covered with bandages. When it was not too bad, I wore white cotton gloves. During the good times, I could write using a pencil wrapped in foam padding. Removing either the bandages or gloves was excruciatingly painful because it pulled off scabs and skin. I can remember sitting in school and watching red lines going up my arms, signaling that I had blood poisoning and had to get to the hospital.

The doctors tried different treatments, including injecting penicillin directly into my fingers. That ended when I developed a severe penicillin allergy. Nothing helped until hydrocortisone cream became available by prescription in 1965. It transformed my life. None of what I've done over the past fifty years could have happened if the drug had not been invented.

Playing in the neighborhood was alright, whereas going to school was torture. There always were a few students who took pleasure from picking on me while urging others to join. They called me names, such as "Monster Hands." It was cruel.

The teachers were even worse. No teacher ever stepped in to halt the bullying. The first-grade teacher, Mrs. Justus, told my mother that I was "mentally deficient" and belonged in a class for slow learners. Fortunately, my mother refused to allow that. In fifth grade, Mr. Tabor stood in front of the class and poked fun at me for wearing raggedy gloves. "Couldn't your family at least afford to pay for decent gloves." The seventh-grade PE teacher, Miss Curly, gave me an F when I could not do a rope climb. Gosh, I couldn't always hold a pencil, but I was supposed to lift my body weight and climb up 20 feet holding on to a rope.

My time at Lakota Junior High was the worst. My best friend from grade school was not in any of my 7th grade classes; our friendship died. She became a popular cheerleader. I turned into myself, not speaking in class, sitting in the back row, and hiding at lunch time. I never shared this with my parents, not even when in ninth grade Richard told everyone that I was not related to him. He was a jock, lettering in football, basketball, and track.

My folks expected us to be tough and handle our business without them stepping in. In retrospect, I think they would have been appalled and raised bloody hell if I had told them about what was happening. But thanks to hydrocortisone, my life was going to get better.

The three years at Federal Way High School were a good period. For the first time in my life, I was like everyone else. Even better, there were students who had attended a different junior high school and had no prior knowledge of who I was. I was free to create a completely different persona. I made friends with students from Totem Junior High.

In classes, I began to sit near the front and speak up. I joined the swim and debate teams. It was as if all these things were germinating inside me and now finally emerged. While I never managed to bring home a straight-A report card, I always came close. Despite having standardized test scores showing a high IQ, no teacher or counselor suggested that I should go to college. The school had 3,000 students and only two counselors.⁴

I always modeled myself after my parents. While far from perfect human beings, they had great integrity. I see this in these examples. My father lost an early job as the foreman in a chemical plant because he refused to fire a worker, who belonged to the Communist Party. Despite being staunchly anti-Red, my father defended the man, stating that he was a good worker and didn't bring his politics into the plant.

In a similar vein, my mother made enemies when she refused to keep my brother home from the birthday party of the only Black boy in his class. Several mothers organized a boycott, saying it was unsafe to go to the child's home. Richard was the only child to attend. These were not political choices. My parents simply believed in doing the right thing.

Mom was a staunch Republican, as was my father. His political engagement was limited to voting. She was a mainstay of the local Republican Party and dragged us along to doorbell for conservative candidates. In 1964, Mom was a Goldwater delegate to the state Republican convention. Like Hillary Clinton, I was a Goldwater girl at the convention. The only time I ever saw my mother cry was on election night when Johnson was declared the winner.

I am certain that growing up watching my mother shaped my views of appropriate female behavior. But much of my embrace of feminism derived from Pastor Malkow at St. Luke's Lutheran Church. Some Lutheran churches are very liberal while others are extremely conservative. At the far right of the spectrum are Missouri Synod Lutheran churches, such as St. Luke's. The women did the behind-the-scenes labor to keep a church running, while public and leadership positions,

4. I only know of one other academic who graduated from Federal Way High School. I recently contacted Craig Dutton, an engineering professor at the University of Illinois. He could not identify any other Federal Way alumni who became professors. He also never received any guidance at Federal Way High.

such as altar boys, elders, liturgical readers, and pastors, are limited to males. The sexism was normalized, and I did not question it until I was 13 years old.

Along with Sunday school and church, for three years I went to Wednesday night classes that prepared us to be confirmed as 13-year-olds. I had to memorize responses to questions in *Luther's Small Catechism* and recite assigned Bible verses. During the last year, Pastor Malkow taught classes on Lutheran theology. None of this caused me difficulties until the final class.

On that night, Pastor Malkow's theme was how God wanted us to live when we became adults. He began by looking at the girls and telling us, "God placed man above woman because of Eve's sin in the Garden, and the pain of childbirth is punishment for the inherited sin of women." Then Pastor stated that when girls got married, we were to be totally subordinate to our husbands, that we could not even buy a blouse without our husband's permission.

I looked at the boys, preening and looking quite pleased with themselves. I thought, "Maybe that one is better than me, but not the rest of those pimple-faced jerks. No way." I raised my hand and all I got out was, "I don't understand," before Pastor Malkow launched into a tirade about the sin of pride and how I was going to burn in Hell if I took communion without having repented for questioning God's plan for humanity.

I spent four days praying to God for a sign that would allow me to understand why those boys were innately superior to me. No sign. I was confirmed and took communion to my damnation. I stopped attending church as soon as I left home, only returning many years later.

Working Class Life

My parents worked hard and assumed that their children would do so, too. Aside from babysitting, my first job was as a lifeguard and swim instructor for 50 cents an hour. When I was 17, I heard that the local Safeway Store decided to hire girls to work as "box boys," a position that required bagging groceries and carrying bags to customers' cars. I immediately applied and was ecstatic when I was hired, along with another girl, Beverly Smith.

It was a part-time, unionized job (UFCWA), paying \$1.82 an hour. I felt great pride dressing in my uniform of black slacks, black shoes, white shirt, red vest, and black bowtie. One of the first things that I discovered is that bosses like to pit workers against workers. The manager called all the male "box boys" into a meeting, where he told them they would all be replaced by girls if they did not work harder. Suffice it to say, Beverly and I were not welcomed by our male peers. But I loved the job. To this day, when I shop, I bag the groceries in the way that I was taught at the Safeway Store. I kept the job until I left for college in fall 1969.

My brother, sister, and I were "first gen" before anyone recognized that was something special. My parents decided that Richard must receive a quality education. That meant attending a private college, the University of Puget Sound. This

was a real stretch for my parents, who were still paying off house-building loans. Private school was never mentioned for me.

I wanted to enroll at the University of Washington, but my parents did not want me in the big city. I ended up at Washington State University. My parents paid for my first semester, but they weren't sure about the second semester. After arriving in Pullman, I applied for a job at the local grocery store. They didn't need box boys but hired me to wait tables in their cafeteria. I left college at the end of my second year. Unsure about almost everything in life, I decided to work for a few years, figure things out, and then perhaps return to school.

It was a tumultuous time in the country, with some youth embracing "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," and others protesting the Vietnam War. This left older people thinking the world had gone mad. My parents were appalled when Richard became a draft resister. My mother's inability to continue working made things even more difficult. Mom had suffered for many years from horrible headaches that doctors attributed to hay fever. By this point, the pain was so debilitating that she spent much of the day lying in bed with a heating pad against her head.

I moved to Tacoma where Richard helped me settle. I applied for work at a garment factory located in an industrial area on the waterfront, famous for the smell from its pulp mill. I had taken sewing in home economics, so I thought I was qualified. The foreman had me sew a straight seam joining together two fabric pieces and then told me to report the following morning at 7:30. I would be trained as a cuffer, the person who sews cuffs onto coat sleeves. Sunset Sportswear produced ski parkas for mid-market stores, such as J.C. Penney and Sears.

My job was not difficult. I did have to stay focused because there was continual pressure to go faster and faster. This could easily result in running a needle into your finger, something that I did once. Every job was assigned a piece rate: the number of pieces that a person needed to sew every week to remain employed. On an average day, I attached roughly 900 cuffs onto sleeves. The base pay was \$1.64 an hour and one could earn more by exceeding the piece rate. The problem, however, was that exceeding the rate resulted in management increasing the piece rate. It was ostensibly a union shop, but the United Garment Workers of America (UGWA) was a scab union that did nothing for the workers, aside from taking our dues.

Management assigned jobs based on the worker's race and sex. The small number of men—all white—were cutters, who earned a much higher wage and were not subject to piece rate. The men cut rolls of fabric into the different parts of a coat: back, right, and left fronts; sleeves; and pockets. Japanese women, married to GIs stationed at Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base, were given the skilled sewing jobs. It was assumed that Asian women had especially nimble fingers. Hana was the only Japanese woman fluent in English.

The Black women were bundle girls. "Lift that barge and tote that bail," one quipped. They moved the crates full of coat parts across the floor. Ruby was the only Black machine operator. She had learned the trade, working in the South,

and had one of the most skilled jobs, setting pockets. The rest of the machine operators were white women like me.

In the morning, we queued up at the time clock to punch in and make sure that we were at our assigned positions before the 7:30 whistle. Failing that resulted in being docked for a quarter of an hour; three late arrivals led to termination. Aside from a half-hour lunch break, machine operators could not leave their machines at any point during the day. The bundle girls were responsible for keeping us supplied with the pieces to be sewn and thread, if we needed them.

But none of us—machine operators and bundle girls—could go to the bathroom at any time, other than lunch. This made it especially difficult when menstruating. We used to spend part of every lunchtime lined up waiting to use one of the few bathroom stalls. Imagine eating your sandwich while standing in line, waiting to pee. It was the one factor that united all the women, white, Black, and Asian.

We took the bathroom issue to the UGWA business agent, who brushed our complaints aside, saying it wasn't a big deal. But it was a big deal to us. Ruby began telling us about the Blue Ridge strike that she had been part of in Georgia.⁵ She suggested that denying us the right to go to the bathroom violated our human rights. It was not hard to gain support for action. Hana talked with the Japanese. We didn't trust the male cutters, but the women were united.

What action could we take without jeopardizing our jobs? I don't remember who came up with the plan. What we did was quite simple: every morning at 11:00—a half hour prior to lunch—everyone would leave their workstations and get in line to go to the bathroom. On the assigned day, every woman stood up as one and went to the bathroom. The foreman began to scream at us, threatening to “fire our asses.”

We stood firmly and repeated the action every morning. The company labeled us as “communists” and sent Pinkerton detectives after us. The wildcat action was reported in the local newspaper. After about two weeks, the company capitulated. We were on top of the world. Yeah, good guys win. Within six months, Sunset Sportswear closed the Tacoma plant and moved operations to an Indian reservation.

At this point, I moved to Seattle, where I landed a “respectable” job that made my parents happy. Although I was never a great typist, I managed to do more than 40 words a minute without errors and was hired by Prudential Insurance as

5. On August 10, 1967, more than 450 garment workers, most of whom were Black, staged a walkout of the Levi Strauss plant in Blue Ridge, Georgia, after the company started laying off workers in violation of the seniority clauses in the contract signed with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The strike lasted nearly a year and triggered a nationwide boycott of Levi Strauss jeans. See Anonymous. (1967). Lonely struggle in Appalachia: Women fight to save union. *The Movement*, 3(5), 9-10. Civil Rights Movement Archive. <https://crmvet.org/docs/mvmt/6705mvmt.pdf>.

a medical claims processor. I loved being downtown and able to go to the waterfront, Pike Place Market, and the original Starbucks.

The job was boring. Depending upon the policyholder's coverage, we could approve a set amount for doctor visits and hospitalization. We did not punch a time clock, but there was a rate that we had to meet. There were women, ranging in age from early 20s through mid-60s, in the department. Several of the young women had college degrees, but there was no upward mobility. The manager was male. The thought that I might end up working there for the rest of my life was terrifying, even though it paid better than my previous jobs, around \$100 per week.

I began checking the help wanted ads in the *Seattle Times*. The good paying jobs were listed under the heading "Help Wanted Male," while those under "Help Wanted Female" paid very little. Among the best paying jobs were machinists. Their pay was two to three times more than my salary. My grandfather had been a machinist for the Great Northern Railroad, so I knew that the trade involved high-speed cutting metal parts, but I did not know much more.

As a female, no employer would consider hiring me if I was untrained, so I enrolled in the machine shop program at Renton Vocational Technical Institute (RVTI). I could afford to quit work because I had married a man with a good paying job. When I met Rick, he was a single parent, raising two young sons. I immediately fell in love with those boys.

RVTI only had programs for traditionally male jobs, which meant there were no women's bathrooms. When I suggested that I post a sign, saying WOMEN on the door when I needed to use the bathroom, the shop teacher said that I could walk the two blocks to a gas station and use their restroom. This was in Washington state where it rains nine months each year.

Once while I was on my bathroom trek, someone damaged a part that I had been working on for several days. Another time, a male student pulled a knife on me. He was carrying boxes, so I opened the door to the classroom for him. He became irate, accused me of being a feminist, and pulled out a knife. What was funny is that I didn't think of myself as a feminist.

It may well have become ugly except that my friend Jerry Sanborn intervened. Jerry grew up in the Oakland housing projects and had been in Hell's Angels. He was 6 feet, 6 inches tall and probably weighed 280 pounds with tattoos on his arms. Jerry had never mastered basic math, so he had needed my help to learn shop math. Jerry physically hauled the man outside and started beating him. "You ever mess with her again, and I will smash your head into the concrete out here." Jerry and I remained friends until his death twenty years ago.

This was in 1974, a significant year for another reason. My mother died. Her headaches were debilitating for years, but the doctors continued to tell her that she exaggerated the pain. Then Mom went blind and doctors discovered she had eight intracranial aneurysms, two of which pressed on her optical nerve causing blindness.

My father tried every possible option to get her medical care, including flying with her to the Mayo Clinic in Minneapolis. Finally, doctors did an experimental surgery, cutting into my mother's neck and closing off the two veins with aneurysms that pressed on the optical nerves. Mom regained her eyesight, but she suffered a series of strokes. She was in St. Joe's Hospital, recovering from one when my father's medical insurance ran out. The hospital discharged my mother, causing another stroke. Another hospital agreed to take her, but we had to sell the house to pay for her care. Mom never regained consciousness.

When I finished the RVTI program, there were a lot of job openings. Guys were snapped up midway through the program. I was by far the best student. More than 70 companies offered apprenticeships, and I contacted every one of them. The only job offer I received was for janitorial work at minimum wage.

I asked the shop teacher for help. He responded, "You ever make any waves and I guarantee you will never get a job. Just shut up and quit complaining." Before leaving RVTI, I stopped by the office to say hello to the secretary, who had been very supportive. "Do you really want a job?" she asked. When I said, "Yes, I do want a job," she told me to wait while she made a phone call. Her husband was the superintendent at the Kenworth Truck factory, and thanks to her personal intervention I interviewed with him the following morning.

When I entered his office, the plant superintendent reached out to shake hands. Three of his fingers were chopped off. I tried not to react visibly, but he just looked me straight in the eye and said, "If you're in this trade, you will not get out with your fingers. That's the way it is." He had worked his way up from the shop floor.

The machine shop foreman, Axel Johnson, did not want me. Before my first shift, he held a meeting where the men discussed how to drive me out. No one was to speak with me, nor show me how to do anything. I was to be ostracized. Axel also started up something like a football pool, where the men put money into a pot and marked the hour when they thought I would walk out. Most picked early times. I did not know any of this until much later.

My first day at Kenworth was like something out of a bad movie. The superintendent escorted me to the machine shop near the back of the factory building. As we moved through the plant, workers put down their tools. The line stopped. Production ceased. I could not have drawn more attention if I had been a purple-headed alien. It was totally disconcerting. I was dressed appropriately: Osh Kosh bib overalls, short-sleeved t-shirt, and Red Wing steel-toed boots, lugging a brown Kennedy toolbox.

Being ostracized is not just unpleasant; in a machine shop, it is dangerous. There are many ways a person can be injured or killed. If parts are not properly clamped down or you try to take too deep a cut, things can jam up with chunks of metal flying. Things can go wrong, even if the worker does everything right. The tool can hit a sand pocket in a casting and boom: collision.

Castings, which appear perfectly normal, might have sand pockets. An experienced machinist knew to lower the speed and depth of a cut to adjust for that

possibility. Machinists must calculate the math and adjust for the quality castings or the type of metal. They also need to know whether the company had purchased cheap tools, the kind that tend to shatter. Machines vary from each other. Not all lathes run the same. Nor do milling machines. Trade school is a good introduction, but it cannot prepare one for the actual dangers of the workplace.

What saved me during those early days was a Black man. He worked a swing shift but began to come in during the day shift to help me. I would not have survived the first month without Leonard Bourgeois. When I asked him why he chose to help me, Leonard said that he remembered how the men had ostracized him when he was hired. A key difference was that he had already been fully trained, having learned the trade in the state penitentiary.

From the beginning, I gained support from Black men, most of whom were janitors. The next group to accept me were the handful of Latino men, followed by older white men. The last group to decide I was acceptable were the young white guys. My ability to do the work—put the parts on the floor—threatened them. It couldn't be a real man's job if a woman could do it.

I spent four years as an apprentice, spending most of that time under Axel Johnson. What made it tolerable was that I spent six months in the tool and die shop and another six months in maintenance with foremen who liked me. Both asked for me to be transferred to their shops when I made journeyman, but Axel refused to let me go. I don't know why. Tool and die men design and make prototypes. It is highly skilled work. Maintenance machinists fix broken equipment and machine new parts if needed. Both jobs are much more interesting than production work. Perhaps Axel recognized that I was very good at putting the parts on the floor.

There were two paths that I could take to survive. One was to kiss up to management, be their girl, and hope to move into management. The alternative path, which I followed, was to embrace the union and try to become one of the guys. Local 79 of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) represented all the machinists in the Seattle area, aside from those employed at Boeing.⁶ There were a handful of women members working in less skilled jobs, but they didn't attend union meetings. It was just me and the guys, which meant that I stood out.

Even before I finished my apprenticeship, I was appointed to the union's legislative committee. I learned a huge amount from the legislative committee chair. Mike Rubicz was very adept at framing issues in ways that made sense to the average member. He was in his mid-30s, working in one of the small job shops. The major firms wouldn't hire him because he was reputed to be a Communist. He had this thing about the Soviet Union. Mike also opposed the Equal Rights Amendment because he thought it divided the working class. We became friends but argued.

6. In the very early Boeing years, the workers were part of Local 79, but eventually the aerospace workforce got so large that the IAM established Local 751 for them. It also was a way to address government fears of Communist infiltration into an industry directly tied to defense.

When I made journeyman, the men in the machine shop asked me to represent them on the shop committee. I was shocked that they wanted me. Management was even more shocked, not just to have me in that position, but by my way of carrying out the job. In the past, the shop committee members and chief steward tended to be deferential in meetings with management. The bosses would set the agenda and declare what was possible, and the union men would bargain around the edges. That wasn't my style. I'd walk into the office and say, "Okay, this is what we need to discuss, point two, three ... and these are what we are willing to accept." I believed in seizing the upper hand. Management didn't know how to handle it. I was very successful, and that encouraged the men to ask me to run for the chief steward position.

Past practice had been that the chief steward be from the machine shop. To keep me from being elected shop steward, Axel transferred me to the maintenance shop. The men responded by starting a petition demanding that both the company and union leaders accept me as the chief steward. Almost all the men signed the petition, which ironically was started by one of the young guys, who had been quite hostile to me when we both were apprentices. That is how I succeeded in escaping from under Axel's thumb and ended up as the chief union steward.

It turned out that maintenance was an ideal job for the chief steward because you must move around the entire plant to do the work. Much of the job entails preventative maintenance, which requires regularly inspecting equipment and discussing performance with operators. This was a good period for me. I liked the work and had the respect of my co-workers, as well as from the more activist Local 79 members.

One of my priorities was safety. Some safety issues, like ensuring safety bars on punch presses, were easy. But others were more challenging. This was before right-to-know laws, which allowed workers to learn the names of the chemicals used in the workplace. The machines sprayed a green coolant on the parts being cut. It got all over our bodies, and we breathed the spray in throughout the day. We were told to clean our hands with the coolant before eating lunch. I hadn't paid attention to the coolant until there was an article in the national union newspaper's column *Help for the Walking Wounded*, which described health problems caused by exposure to trichlorethylene, a chemical commonly used as a coolant. It caused liver damage, kidney failure, infertility, and nerve problems.

I did some sleuthing and discovered our coolant was trichloroethylene. Neither OSHA nor the EPA had banned it, so I raised it as a contract issue. I also was elected to the King County Labor Council, where I pushed through requirements that the companies building the Kingdome open up opportunities for women and minorities to be employed on the project.

The union's old guard was not happy with the growing activism. It reminded them of the years when Local 79 had been a hotbed of radicalism, even leading the Seattle General Strike of 1919.⁷ In the McCarthy period, the leaders of Local

7. Shipyard workers belonging to Local 79 were bargaining for a new contract, when

79 were sent to jail, charged with belonging to the CPUSA. The International put the Local into receivership and appointed new leaders. Rank and file union men, suspected of being CPUSA members, were fired from their jobs and in some cases sent to prison, while the new union leaders did nothing.⁸

The same business agents and officials still controlled the union in the 1970s. I often heard members describe the union leaders as “goons” who worked hand in glove with management to stamp out threats to their joint control of the sector. There had been one attempt to replace the leaders, back in the 1960s, but those men had lost their jobs and had been blacklisted.

A movement for change took off, spreading from factory to factory. Many thought the new International Association of Machinists president, William Winpisinger,⁹ would support us. He wanted more labor militancy. We put together a slate of candidates to run in the upcoming union election. The slate included active members from a cross section of big plants. For the first time a Black man and woman (i.e., me) were nominated for office. I was chosen to run for sergeant at arms, the person assigned to maintain order in meetings and if necessary, physically restrain people. This was a job usually given to a big guy.

The period leading up to the election was both exhilarating and terrifying. On the one hand, there was tremendous excitement among machinists. It was palpable. We were not allowed access to the plants, even though the old guard held meetings on company time. It didn't matter; we held impromptu meetings outside the plants. We also did things like scaling fences in the night to break in and meet with workers on swing and graveyard shifts.

One night someone shot at me when I was returning home. I think the goal was to scare me, not kill me. Another man had the brake lines on his car cut. He was able to turn into a ditch safely. The FBI began investigating whether we were Communists. The scariest thing was an anonymous complaint, alleging that I abused my stepsons. The Children's Protective Society investigator spoke with neighbors and the boys. She didn't find any evidence of abuse, so the accusation was labeled “unsubstantiated” and placed in a permanent file to be re-examined if there were subsequent complaints. These things put enormous stress on the marriage.

I will never forget the union hall on election night when the ballots were counted, and we learned the entire slate had won. Yeah, the good guys won.

management locked them out. Within a day, 65,000 workers from across the city had walked off their jobs and the National Guard was called in to patrol the city with tanks. See <https://specialcollections.ds.lib.uw.edu/SeattleGeneralStrike/strike-timeline/>.

8. The purges of suspected Communists lasted into the 1960s. In 1963, a machinist at Todd Shipyards named Eugene Robel was fired from his job and charged with the crime of being a member of the CPUSA. Robel argued that he had First Amendment rights to free speech and association, which the McCarran Act violated by criminalizing simply being a Party member. The Supreme Court agreed in *United States v. Robel* 1967.

9. Winpisinger, who was elected President of the IAM in 1977, had a history of militance when organizing automotive and railroad machinists.

Then an amazing thing happened. Three days later, boxes of “lost” absentee ballots turned up. Almost all those votes were for the incumbents, who were then declared the winners.

Things went from bad to worse. Men got fired for bogus reasons, and the business agents refused to contest their firings. I was not fired, but I almost got killed. I got a call to repair the hot rails that power the assembly line. Whenever there is work involving electricity, the power must be shut off and locked so no one can accidentally turn it on. The power box was in the machine shop, and the lock and key were stored in the machine shop foreman’s office.

I retrieved the lock and key from the office and then shut the power off and locked it into the off position before returning the key to the office. I went back and started to climb up to begin working on the hot rail. But before I did anything, one of the men from maintenance arrived and told me there was a call for me on the phone in the maintenance office. I assumed it was a call about a union matter so climbed back down.

An apprentice, Dan, working with me, asked if he could go up and see if the problem was something he could fix. I said, “Sure, go ahead,” and went to take the call. The power had been turned back on, and Dan got hit with 220 volts. What saved his life was that his elbow, as well as his hand, had touched the rail. The voltage went into his hand and then out his elbow instead of continuing to his heart. The safety man described it as an inadvertent accident.

Shortly after this, the maintenance foreman told me that I needed to leave before something “really bad” happened to me. This was a frightening time. Two labor activists in the city had died in suspicious circumstances. One man was shot, and the second suffered a workplace accident. Things were tense at home, as well. The marriage ended, and I left the job.

We filed unfair labor practices against Local 79 and the IAM. The investigation took two years. In the end, the election was re-run with government oversight. Unfortunately, none of the original slate could run because union bylaws required candidates for office to be working members and none of us were still employed in union shops.

Fortunately, another group of activists ran and won. Yeah, good guys won. Six months later, the International put Local 79 into receivership and then merged it into Local 751, which handled Boeing workers. No one from our group was able to continue working as a machinist in the Seattle area.¹⁰

After leaving Kenworth, I held down a part-time job as a Metro bus driver, working 3-4 hours a day, and I finally started at the University of Washington. I majored in political science because I wanted to understand power—more specifically, how to get it. I did well in my classes and, for the first time, had teachers who thought I was smart and capable.

10. Mike Rubicz moved to Youngstown, Ohio, where he became the president of Steelworkers Local 1375.

One semester I took two classes from an older professor, who had a reputation for being cranky. I picked the classes not because I particularly wanted those classes but because they fit my work schedule. After midterms, Professor Alex Gottfried asked me to meet with him during office hours. I was terrified, afraid that I had failed both exams. Instead, he said my exams were the best he could remember ever getting and he wanted to know about my background. After sharing stories of life in the factory, Professor Gottfried suggested I put them in a book. I laughed and said, “Nobody gives a damn about people like me.”

But a seed was planted. Three days later, midway through my bus route, I decided this was something I could do. It was way too painful to write about my experiences, but I could collect the stories of other women working in traditionally male, blue-collar jobs. I bought a tape recorder and began recording the life stories of tradeswomen in the Seattle area.

It was not easy deciding to go to graduate school. I had fallen in love with research, and MIT gave me an incredible package: full tuition plus a living stipend. But going East would take me completely out of my comfort zone. My father talked with family members about how they could support me after I flunked out—because that was almost certainly going to happen. Metro offered me a full-time driving position. That would have been a safe career path, keeping me in my community. In the end, I thought about what my mother would have advised, and I headed off to MIT in fall 1982.

People rarely think of MIT as a place to study political science, but it has a very highly ranked program. Our incoming class had 32 students, a mix of MA and PhD students. Only four of us were funded: two white men, a Black woman, and me. We were told that all funding decisions would be revisited at the end of our first year, which set up a hyper-competitive environment. There was an immediate assumption that Melanie Hines and I got funded for affirmative action reasons while Bill Stanley and John Coleman deserved their fellowships.¹¹

At MIT I learned not to stress about whether I was the best or the smartest person. Everyone was very smart. If you do the very best that you can in the time given, you are good. Writing papers and doing research is just another version of putting the parts on the floor.

My advisor, Professor Walter Dean Burnham, was extraordinarily supportive. Early on, he told me that I was a Gramscian organic intellectual of the working class. Of course, that comment led me to read Gramsci. I also owe a debt to Professors Suzanne Berger and Deborah Stone, who showed me how to navigate being female in a heavily male department.

11. Bill Stanley is a comparative politics professor at the University of New Mexico, and John Coleman is the dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Minnesota. Melanie got married in our third year and died along with her husband and baby in suspicious circumstances while writing a dissertation.

At the end of the first year, Professor Deborah Stone invited my class to her home for a waffle breakfast. She had just finished writing a waffle cookbook and wanted to celebrate. After listening to her share publishing stories, I started asking questions. Finally, Stone stopped me and asked what was behind my questions. That provided an opening for me to mention I had a book manuscript. Stone asked me to share it with her. She read the manuscript and then sent it to the editor at Temple University Press. And that is how my first book, *Alone in a Crowd: Women in the Trades Tell Their Stories*, came to be published in 1985.¹²

I wanted to write a dissertation analyzing the role of the state in squelching labor activism, with Local 79 as a case study. My committee said that if I wanted a job, I needed to “write about national institutions and be quantitative.” I followed their advice and was hired for a tenure-track job at Yale. The research became my second book: *Congress, the President, and Policymaking: An Historical Analysis*. I think of its publication as getting academic journeyman status.

Being at Yale gave me an opportunity to meet some of the most impressive political scientists in the country. The interesting thing about these men—yes, all men—is that they were very nice. I left Yale and moved to Claremont Graduate University in 1991. Giving up Yale was hard, but my new husband had a position in California.

I am a good teacher, but research is what I love. What I like the most about teaching is the hands-on work that occurs when I collaborate with graduate students on research projects. Over the past three decades, I’ve co-authored with more than 40 graduate students.

I still think of publishing as putting parts on the floor. As of today, the number of parts on the floor is six books and more than 60 other academic publications. Aside from some early mainstream research needed to get tenure,¹³ I’ve spent most of my career doing research on the ways that traditionally marginalized groups can gain a voice and power. My first post-tenure book, *Is the Fetus a Person? A Comparison of Policies Across the Fifty States*, is an analysis of case and statutory law in the 50 states that could legally define the fetus as a person—abortion, fetal battery, and prenatal drug exposure.¹⁴ I found that hostility to women’s rights, not pro-life attitudes, explains opposition to abortion. I’ve done research on the determinants of support for female candidates, as well as threats against women elected officials. I’ve worked with a former colleague, Chris Krewson, on a series of projects examining the impact of gender on evaluations of the Supreme Court and how that impact intersects with partisanship and religion.

12. In 2018, the book was reissued in a digitalized format as part of a National Endowment for the Humanities effort to make significant out-of-print books available for free online.

13. Prior to coming up for tenure at CGU, a senior colleague told me that he wasn’t going to count “any of that stuff I wrote about women, minorities” in evaluating me for tenure.

14. The book was written up in more than 200 newspapers and in 2001 was awarded the Victoria Schuck Prize by the American Political Science Association.

For more than a decade, the primary focus of my research—indeed my passion—has been voting rights issues affecting Native Americans. To be honest, I had never given the issue a moment's thought before a Native student, Deron Marquez, in 2010 asked why I wasn't helping his people gain access to the ballot box. I discovered this was a complex issue, involving electoral law, treaty rights, historical abuses, and contemporary racism. It took me five years to publish a single article—not very quick for putting that part on the floor. But I've picked up speed, publishing another 15 articles and a book, *Voting in Indian Country: The View from the Trenches*.

This research has figured prominently in voting rights litigation and has led me to become involved in voting rights cases, starting with serving as an expert witness in *Wandering Medicine v. McCulloch* (2014). I also was an expert witness in *Yazzie v. Hobbs* (2020) and did research that was used in three other cases: *Poor Bear v. Jackson County* (2015), *Sanchez v. Cegavske* (2016), and *Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation v. County of Elko* (2022). This work brings together both my old union activist tendencies and academic side. I've just returned from doing survey research on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation and can't imagine quitting.

Chapter 8. Wayfinding Across the Academic Landscape: Braided Careers

H. Lewis Ulman
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

H. Lewis Ulman experienced several distinct journeys in and out of universities. His paths included time in rural Canada before returning to Pennsylvania and completing a PhD in English that met his developing interests and needs. That led him to distinctive work in digital humanities and composition, especially in creating texts and textual editing. He continues his current journey, even in retirement, with environmental work and environmental humanities.

A path is a prior interpretation of the best way to traverse a landscape, and to follow a route is to accept an interpretation.

- *Rebecca Solnit, Wanderlust: A History of Walking, 2000*

It's call wayfinding, Princess. It's not just sails and knots, it's seeing where you're going in your mind. Knowing where you are, by knowing where you've been.

- *Jared Bush, Moana, 2016*

When I retired at age 62, my department held a reception. In conversations over refreshments after the formal sendoff, several colleagues commiserated with me over the circumstances that might have led me to retire when I did—a change in the pension rules that would mean if I worked another two years I would actually end up with a slightly smaller pension (true) and the lack of any program allowing a faculty or staff member to taper their workload (and compensation) as they approached retirement (also true). Others simply wished me well, assuming that I was looking forward to a change in the landscape of life (again, true).

Along with a thoughtful gift, my colleagues gave me a “memory box” containing cards, letters, photos, and videos on thumb drives wishing me well and reflecting on our work together over the years. That was for the most part. One card from a good friend contained a hint of perplexity: “Have a wonderful retirement, although I think it is oddly early.”

What stands out to me ten years later about these undercurrents of concern and perplexity is the presence of a linear, normative model of academic careers bound to milestones associated with hiring, tenure, and promotion, a continuous progression along a well-marked path with a clear destination. From that perspective, my academic career looks like a river coursing down a single channel: I was retiring as a tenured associate professor after 28 years on the faculty and, prior to

that, six years earning my keep and learning my trade as a graduate teaching associate responsible for my own classes while pursuing my master's and doctorate degrees. That was followed by another year as a full-time postdoc instructor and research assistant. But an overview of that sort simply connects generic organizational stages of careers in higher education, charts progress along a prescribed course with no personal, historical, or social context.

Moreover, writing about a life in—or passing through—academia involves making some assumptions about what constitutes being “in” academia and “out” of it. We usually define being “in” academia as preparing for and working in a faculty position primarily responsible for teaching, research, and service at a post-secondary college or university. Of course, that definition leaves out, or doesn't neatly fit, a great deal of what constitutes academic work in colleges and universities. That includes part-time teaching and research as well as academic support positions, not to mention all the non-academic labor that keeps universities running. Working in “administration” introduces a liminal space fraught with ambiguity. But more on that later.

My own story of academic life feels less like following institutional tracks (though it certainly involved those tracks) than like wayfinding in, out, and across complex academic and personal landscapes, circling back, starting over, frequently redefining goals and destinations while navigating the complex channels of a braided stream shaped by individual experiences and circumstances.



Figure 8.1. Braided Glacial Outflow. Akshayuk Pass, Baffin Island, 1977 (Pat Claeys)

From the start, my career in higher education proceeded in fits and starts. After gaining early acceptance to Brown University, I enrolled instead at Ohio Wesleyan University, following my high school girlfriend, after taking the opportunity to spend the summer before my freshman year studying German at the University of Salzburg, Austria. I did well at Ohio Wesleyan, but a disagreement with the college at the end of my sophomore year about tuition and early graduation led me to transfer to a small college in my hometown. After finishing my bachelor's degree in December of my senior year with a major in English and the idea that I would like to pursue an MFA in poetry, I took a job as an "orderly" at a local hospital to bide my time while applying to grad schools for the fall.

A nurse-administrator who had been a mentor at work offered me an opportunity to train as a dialysis technician with a path to an administrative role in the program. I cringe as I recall how I declined the offer: "Medicine helps people stay alive," I said, "but literature and the arts give them reasons to live." I see now that I was conflating career choices with broad outlooks on life, but the young need a star to steer by as well as a rudder, so in the fall I stuck to my plan and began an MFA program in poetry at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

I had been awarded a graduate assistantship, but despite repeated inquiries on my part, no one ever asked me to do anything other than write poetry. This sounds ideal, but I would have benefitted from more structure. Tellingly, I wasn't writing poetry beyond assignments dutifully completed for my writing workshop.

Instead, I spent a great deal of time hiking and rock climbing with the outing club. I took a leave of absence before the end of my first semester, returned to my hometown, and took a job at a startup outdoor equipment store. This involved a great deal of teamwork under pressure to make the new endeavor succeed. I fondly remember driving a truck through the hills of Pennsylvania looking for old, preferably falling-down barns to buy from farmers grateful to get the mess off their property. We used the weathered boards to line the walls of the store.

While visiting my father in the winter of 1974, I read an article about the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). It offered expedition-style courses in every aspect of wilderness travel, from sea kayaking and winter ski touring to leave-no-trace camping and wilderness first aid. I decided to quit my job in the spring and enroll in both a summer semester in Alaska and a fall semester in the Rockies, spending nearly all of the next eight months out in the field.

When the eight months with NOLS ended, I returned to Greensboro. This time I pursued a master's degree in English, and I began an independent study in translating poetry from German to English. That didn't take. Again, I dropped out before the end of the spring semester, returned to work at the outdoor equipment company in my hometown, and helped them start an outdoor education school. I was once again in the outdoor education and wilderness travel channel of my braided career.

During the summer of 1977, the woman I'd fallen in love with at NOLS, Pat, and I joined my brother Jim and his son on an expedition to the brand new

Auyuituq National Park on Baffin Island. We flew there in Jim's single-engine, four-seater Cessna 172, with the goal of hiking up Akshayuk Pass to the point where the Arctic Circle crossed the Cumberland Peninsula (see Figure 8.1).

Several months after that trip, I quit my job and joined Pat in northern Manitoba, where she was teaching elementary school, 500 miles north of the U.S. border. I spent the next few months or so hiking and canoeing the backcountry of northern Manitoba while Pat completed the year teaching elementary school for the Frontier School Division, and we pondered our next step. I had begun to feel less enthusiastic about the recreational side of outdoor education, drawn again to what the humanities had to contribute to environmental issues.

Eventually, we concluded that opportunities for both of us to live and work in the same place were more likely in the United States. After marrying in the spring of 1978, Pat became a permanent U.S. resident, and we moved to State College, Pennsylvania, where Pat enrolled in a BA program in education at Penn State (to re-certify to teach in the United States), and I—again—began a master's degree in English.

The master's program did not offer much opportunity for specialization beyond choosing a thesis topic. Because it also offered financial support through teaching assistantships, the program provided a deep dive into the field of composition studies. I wrote my thesis on American nonfiction nature writing (working with a scholar of British Romanticism because ecocriticism was not a "field" yet), but I was interested and engaged in the composition program. The sense of teamwork among the faculty and graduate teaching assistants drew me into that community, and the composition program's theoretical and pedagogical focus on the processes of writing provided a framework that helped me imagine university teaching as a profession.

Both environmental humanities and composition had roots in the soil of English studies and were poised for rapid growth in the 1980s. Another influence that profoundly shaped my career and the field entered my graduate training like a sleeper agent. At some point in 1978, John B. Smith, at the time an associate professor in the department of English at Penn State, who had worked for the previous seven years as a research consultant in the Penn State Computation Center and had worked closely with the World Shakespeare Bibliography, offered a non-credit workshop, open to graduate students and faculty.

Smith's course focused on using the university's mainframe computer for word processing and managing bibliographic data. For the word processing component of the workshop, we learned Waterloo SCRIPT using remote terminals to access a mainframe computer on campus. At the time, the terminals could edit only one line of text at a time, and we had to pick up printouts from the computer center on the other side of the campus.

As I recall, about a dozen graduate students and faculty attended the workshop on the first day, and in short order all the faculty dropped out. Soon they were followed by all but a handful of graduate students. I stayed.

The computers were slow and the interface arcane, but you never had to retype an entire essay to edit your prose! I was hooked—an appropriate metaphor for something that drops into your life seemingly out of nowhere and, once you bite, draws you toward the unknown. With an irony that I didn't appreciate at the time, I wrote my master's thesis on American nonfiction nature writing entirely on a mainframe computer.

While I completed the final academic term of my master's program, Pat was called home to Manitoba for her father's funeral. Before she returned to Pennsylvania, she received a letter from her sister in Ottawa containing an ad for a teaching job in Povungnituk (now Puvirnituk), Quebec, an Inuit village of 900 in the eastern arctic, 500 miles north of tree line.

We decided that it would be a great opportunity for Pat to continue her teaching career in Indigenous communities; she had previously taught for two years at a First Nation school in Manitoba. For us to return to the arctic, she arranged to interview with the principal at the Toronto airport on her way home from Manitoba. She got the job, and while there was no prospect of me finding employment in Puvirnituk, I was determined to join her as soon as I submitted my master's thesis in mid-October 1980.

I was happy to take a break from academic work and support Pat's unique job opportunity. Life in Puvirnituk provided many opportunities to learn about Inuit culture and the arctic environment. We rode along on snowmobiles with Inuit hunting and fishing parties; met regularly with Inuit elders charged with introducing the anglophone and francophone teaching staff to their culture; and took Inuit language classes with a teacher who spoke no English during the class (to approximate the experience of the Inuit children, whose classes were held in English or French from the fourth grade on).

Outside of these formal interactions, I was able to use my amateur radio license (another interest flowing in the same channel as computing) to set up phone "patches" that allowed residents to talk with family members in the "south" (Montreal, Ottawa, etc.) for school or medical care. (The village had satellite phone service, but it was expensive.)

The most unexpected turn of events presented me with another path in my academic life. When a seventh-grade teacher unexpectedly adopted a child, she took a ten-week leave of absence, which left the school in need of filling a gap in the staff. While Canadian law at the time stipulated that the school should first seek Canadian applicants, it was difficult to find someone on short notice who would move to the eastern arctic for a ten-week position. To make matters more complicated, the village had nowhere to house a new teacher (housing was provided to the teaching staff).

I must have been the only unemployed person in town with teaching experience and a graduate degree. I was certainly the only potential candidate who already had a place to live in the village. The principal and school board approached me about taking on a seventh-grade class (all subjects except Inuit culture and physical education) as a substitute teacher, and I accepted.

It was a fascinating and humbling experience, unlike anything I experienced teaching first-year composition at Penn State. Teachers did not assign grades. Instead, we visited with parents and children in their homes to discuss the children's learning. I had to put extra effort into learning a bit of Inuktitut because, while my classroom instruction was conducted in English, the children spoke casually with one another in Inuktitut and appreciated teachers speaking informally with them in their native language, even if haltingly. And maintaining a modicum of classroom decorum was a problem entirely new to me, especially given the students' age.

At the end of my teaching stint, it was clear that there was no continuing teaching slot that I could apply to for the following year, and even if there were, it was unlikely that I would be selected in an open search that included Canadian citizens. While Pat would have liked to return to Puvirnituk, it was clear to both of us that we didn't want to live separately, especially given the remoteness of Puvirnituk. To find the best opportunity for both of us to pursue work in the same location, we returned to the United States.

I came away from our year in the arctic ready to return to Penn State to pursue my PhD in English and, hopefully, a faculty career in higher education. Pat hoped to continue teaching. So, I spent the next four years completing my PhD, and a year after that splitting my time between a post-doc instructorship and a research assistantship. Pat worked in early-childhood education, and we started a family mid-way through my PhD program at Penn State.

When it came time to focus on an area for my dissertation, I had to stray off the beaten path. In the early eighties, Penn State's graduate program was still built on a "broad coverage" model. We all began our coursework with an introductory course on bibliography and textual editing, and at the PhD level we prepared for and took comprehensive exams in five areas. I chose Old and Middle English literature, nineteenth century English literature, nineteenth century American literature, twentieth century American literature, and rhetoric and composition (the new kid on the graduate curriculum).

However, when it came time to focus my work toward writing a dissertation, I had to find a new channel. I had gravitated toward the history of rhetorical theory, only to discover that much of the coursework in that area was taught at the time in the department of speech communication, and when I settled on a dissertation focused on language theory in the work of 18th-century British rhetorician George Campbell, it turned out that the faculty member whose background best fit the project was also in speech communication. No one knew if a student was permitted to write a dissertation directed by an advisor outside one's own department. It turned out that there was no rule against it. With a committee comprised of faculty from both speech communication and English, I became the first PhD graduate from what would become a leading program in the field of rhetoric and composition.

Before submitting my dissertation, however, I got a short lesson in the territoriality of academe. I applied for a faculty position that, in retrospect, I realize

was not a good fit for, a fact that the search committee made abundantly clear. So I spent the following year at Penn State on a split appointment, 50 percent as an instructor and 50 percent as a research assistant to Professor Robert N. Hudspeth, who was working on his multivolume edition of the letters of Margaret Fuller.

Like my time spent in outdoor education before returning to academe and the appearance of John Smith and word-processing during the first year of my master's degree program, my work with Bob Hudspeth on the Fuller letters altered the landscape of my career in ways I did not plan or realize at the time. Deep dives into the library to research footnotes and research trips to archives to check transcriptions of primary materials caught my imagination and fit my habits of mind.

The following year, I accepted a tenure-track faculty position at The Ohio State University, which was developing its graduate program in rhetoric and composition. At the interview stage, a senior faculty member on the search committee whose research and teaching focused on Renaissance literature asked me whether I was focused on rhetoric or composition—not an unreasonable question from someone outside the field trying to help his department build and balance its faculty, but another reminder that junior faculty at a research university not only enter a fairly well-defined tenure track toward promotion but also fill a particular niche. The consequences of veering off the tenure track are spelled out in official promotion and tenure documents, but the consequences of wandering out of your area are largely left for new appointees to discover.

Of course, I had no clear intention at that point of wandering out of bounds: nearly all my conference presentations and publications while on the tenure track focused squarely on 18th-century rhetorical theory. But looking back, there were signs that I might go astray.

First, building on my experience working on the Margaret Fuller letters, I put a great deal of effort into a textual edition of the records of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society, an 18th-century Scottish scholarly society to which my dissertation subject, George Campbell, along with other luminaries of the time, belonged. I included the published volume in my fourth-year review packet, and during my meeting with the department chair, he was careful to remind me that it was “not your tenure book.”

Fair enough. The edition was more a reference volume than a critical edition of a literary or historical work of interest, and, in any case, the days of earning tenure for edited volumes of any sort had largely faded into the past. Still, it was clearly a warning to get back on course with single-authored publishing of books and articles, and on schedule. I waited until I was tenured to publish a textual edition of one of the Philosophical Society members' presentations on language.

Little did my chair know about a publication I never put on my CV or mentioned in an annual review. I had purchased a TRS-80 Model 100 “laptop” back at Penn State, so I could log into the mainframe from home. At some point, I realized I could program in BASIC on it. I had no need to do so, but out of sheer curiosity born out of my work on the mainframe for word processing at Penn

State, I wrote a simple program for price comparisons quoted in different measures (e.g., pounds and ounces), and I published the code along with a description in *PCM* magazine, a trade publication for portable computing enthusiasts—and they actually paid me a small sum for the article!

Fast forward, and I did publish my book on debates about language in 18th-century British rhetorical theory, and I earned tenure and promotion. Once promoted to associate professor, my university and national service commitments increased, including a growing number of committees and program directorships focused on the expanding role of instructional and research computing in the humanities.

I began a series of collaborations and took on service roles that kept me shifting channels in the braided stream of mid-career, finding, along the way, that diverse streams had flowed together. Working with colleagues in other areas, I coordinated a colloquium on “English Studies in the Late Age of Print” with a colleague in Renaissance studies; organized a works-in-progress symposium on “The Greening of English Studies” with a college administrator; secured a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-up Grant for a project on “Reliable Witnesses: Integrating Multimedia, Distributed Electronic Textual Editions into Library Collections and Preservation Efforts,” collaborating with a university librarian; and, in collaboration with a colleague from the geography department, developed an interdisciplinary course on environmental citizenship.

I served as chair of the Modern Language Association’s committee on computers and emerging technology, and when the volunteer bibliographer for the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) stepped down, I developed and ran an online bibliography that allowed members to submit and consult entries via the web.

In the midst of these projects, the wind at my back changed direction dramatically and I had to reassess the course of my career. In the early 2000s, it was becoming clear that computer systems were a necessary support for teaching and research across higher education, but there was no direct faculty oversight of those systems in our college of humanities. Probably because I had spent four years in the late 1990s as director of the English department’s computers in composition and literature program and two years as chair of a faculty oversight committee that advised the college about its information systems, the dean of the college asked me to fill the new position of Assistant Dean for Research and Instructional Computing.

I quickly became immersed in developing, managing, and defending budgets; hiring, supervising, and advocating for technical and instructional support staff; consulting with faculty and departments across the college to make sure we were meeting their needs; writing grants large and small; and representing the college’s interests to the university on matters that ranged from building projects to computer security. And I continued to teach and conduct research, though at a much-reduced rate.

The job strained my sense of professional identity in ways I hadn't anticipated. Perhaps because the position and title were so new and focused on computing in a college of humanities, the university couldn't seem to figure out whether I was staff or faculty: my email inbox made this abundantly clear.

Part of the confusion no doubt stemmed from a decision the dean had made about the position, which he established as Assistant Dean for Research and Instructional Computing. There were only two other faculty positions in the college office—the Dean and the Associate Dean for Faculty, who administered the college's promotion and tenure program. Both of those positions were traditionally filled by full professors. The college staff also consisted of several other assistant deans, positions traditionally not filled by faculty. Occasionally, this blurred identity came into sharp focus.

One day, when the dean who hired me was consulting with someone from the university about reallocating space, he stopped by my admittedly spacious office and said to the consultant, "I don't know why we put an associate professor in this office." Now, I had been moved nearly every year as we played our annual game of musical offices, and the dean had recently put me in the space in question that day in order to make it easier for me to consult with others in the college office, but when faced with someone from an office to whom he reported (at least in matters of space allocation), he suddenly became self-conscious about matters of rank.

A few years later, I decided I wanted to return full-time to my faculty position in the department of English, partly because I was eager to spend more time in the classroom and the library, and partly because I had decided that my administrative position was no longer necessary—the people I oversaw had matured in the job and were working seamlessly with faculty, and much of the administrative oversight I had been doing was absorbed by a merger of our college into a federation of colleges.

When I reached this decision, the dean at the time (the third since I joined the college administration) was surprised, remarking, "I thought you would go off somewhere and become CIO" (administrators seem to always be going off somewhere new). I realized that I had indeed wandered beyond my comfort zone, and I felt the need to seek new channels in the braided stream.

For the next seven years, I resumed a full schedule of teaching in three areas: digital media composition, electronic textual editing, and environmental citizenship (an interdisciplinary course I developed with colleagues in geography). I also continued work on a project I had developed with a colleague during my tenure as Assistant Dean, the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (thedaln.org). I participated regularly in the work of Literacy@OSU, an interdisciplinary working group focused on literacy studies.

These efforts were different channels in the braided stream of my career and navigating them kept me very engaged. But I was not working on a "second book." Once, after a teaching observation of a graduate textual editing class, a colleague urged me to "get promoted, it's great on the other side." In short, focus

on writing a book—to get to the other side. However, I already had another “other side” in my sights.

By 2014, Pat and I had been volunteering for our local metro park system and a nonprofit land trust for well over a decade. My volunteer work increasingly focused on photography and videography in support of environmental programming and land acquisition projects. In addition, I was beginning to realize that the six electronic textual editing projects I had worked on with my students in a series of undergraduate and graduate courses from 2003 to 2014 were not going to reach their intended goals if I continued teaching new projects year after year.

The projects, undertaken in collaboration with the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Ohio State, which held the journals and collections of letters that we were editing, involved not only the scholarly work of textual editing but also consideration of models and current options for peer review, publication, and preservation of electronic textual editions, goals we couldn’t see to completion during an academic term.

Pat and I decided it was time to retire; to camp, hike, and travel in the spirit we did when we met, while we still had the ability to do so; to deepen our commitment to volunteering, especially for environmental projects; and for me to see a complex project—the electronic textual editions—to its conclusion. Ten years later, we have together undertaken several months-long camping trips throughout North America, created photos and videos in support of land-preservation projects, and worked to transform our small suburban lot into part of what Douglas Tallamy calls the Homegrown National Park—a loose network devoted to converting lawn to habitat for native plants and wildlife.

I serve on the board of a nonprofit land preservation preserve system, and Pat helps coordinate a biannual series of Women’s Walk in the Woods events for the same nonprofit. Pat also serves on the leadership team of a research garden at OSU’s Waterman Farm. And I finished revising those electronic textual editions and seeing them through peer review, publication, and preservation in a university’s online archive, fulfilling a promise I had made to myself and my students.

I never expected my academic career to turn out the way it did. Of course, I don’t remember extended career trajectories being a source of much speculation among my cohort of PhD students in the early 1980s. Beyond the drama (or what often felt like a lottery) of securing an academic position in one’s chosen field, careers in higher education seemed broadly scripted—longitudinally, for those seeking and fortunate enough to secure tenure-track positions, as a linear progression from assistant to associate and then full professor; and day-to-day, as a mix of teaching, research, and service. The reality has been much more complex, challenging, and interesting. Our colleagues’ unique routes into, through, out of, and beyond academia—whether in deep, straight courses or braided, meandering channels—tell us something valuable about the landscape of higher education and the diversity of human experience.

Section 4. 1990s Cohort

Chapter 9. Grounded in Community: Four Decades of an Academic Journey

Yolanda Chávez Leyva
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

With others, Yolanda Chávez Leyva paved and followed several paths from her Texas Mexican American origins. Those paths took her across Texas and New Mexico, in different fields of study and work, and ultimately into a new landscape entirely, as a pioneer in Mexican and lesbian community studies, where she engaged in teaching, research and publication, oral histories, community advancement, and museum development. She also raised a family, and her children are now following her paths—and charting their own.

I walked up to Miss Montes' desk at the front of the classroom in 1968. "Can I show you some Egyptian hieroglyphs that I've learned?" I was excited to share them with her, and I felt safe with her. She was the first Mexican American teacher I ever knew—Miss Montes, my sixth grade teacher. She was kind with what must have seemed strange to her: my love of Egypt. She allowed me to write some glyphs on the blackboard and tell the class about them. By sixth grade, I had several inspiring and dedicated teachers, but Miss Montes was different. Seeing her at the front of the class made me feel at home. It was the first time I felt like I truly belonged in school.

By the time I finished Miss Montes' elementary school class, I exceeded the educational level of both my parents. My mother Esther Chávez dropped out of elementary school in sixth grade after the death of her mother in 1927. She was needed at home to help take care of her young siblings. My father Geronimo Leyva dropped out of elementary school in third grade around 1919 to work after his father abandoned the family. My father taught himself to read as an adult.

For the brief time they were in El Paso's public schools, my parents attended what were then called "Mexican schools," the schools south of the tracks where Mexican-origin students made up the vast majority of the student body. Those schools focused on Americanizing Mexican and Mexican American children and turning them into "good" low-paid workers. They were under-resourced and overcrowded. My parents knew nothing of high school or college. The first high school in El Paso's south side didn't open until 1927. They valued my education, but their vision was for me to graduate from high school. Accomplishing that would far exceed the opportunities they had.

When the El Paso school board brought educational consultant Paul Horn to El Paso in the 1920s, he said that there were two separate school systems, one north of the tracks and one south of the tracks. Forty years after he wrote his

report, I lived with the vestiges of both school systems. While my older cousins attended school in the Southside, suffering from the humiliation of the district's long-time "no Spanish" policy, I went to a school north of the tracks in a neighborhood that was slowly changing from white to Mexican American.

In Southside schools, students found speaking Spanish on school grounds were punished by teachers, coaches, and principals—paddled, hit, given "Spanish detention," put under the teacher's desk, and more. In the "American" schools, to the contrary, students were required to take Spanish classes with the justification that they would eventually be the employers of Mexicans and needed to be able to communicate with them.

As I prepared to enter first grade, my parents told me I could no longer speak Spanish because they didn't want me to be punished. In school, I took Spanish classes while at the same time losing Spanish, my first language. This was a linguistic trauma that has stayed with me and that hurt many children in my generation and earlier.

I begin the story of my academic life in the context of my border community. A segregated school system with policies that isolated Spanish-speaking students for generations as well as community efforts to create a more equitable society shaped my world view. I cannot separate my individual story from that of my parents, my community, and our history as Mexican-origin people on the border.

In high school and college, I could never have imagined that I would become a professor of history. I never liked history. My high school history teachers were either detached coaches who were forced to teach history or burned-out teachers who had lost their patience and enthusiasm for teaching. I have no memory of my undergraduate university history professors. History held little meaning for me. I was not a part of it as it was presented.

I excelled in high school, joining many academically focused organizations and working on the school newspaper. I enjoyed my classes although I never felt totally comfortable. Because I was a fast typist and stenographer, even competing at the state level in both, my high school teachers encouraged me to pursue a career in court reporting. They called my parents to tell them this was *the* career for me. It would require my attending court reporter training but not college. My parents were thrilled. College? There was little mention from teachers or counselors that I should attend college as I went through high school, even when I graduated in the top 1 percent.

My high school experienced a tremendous demographic change in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. It transformed from one of the "American schools," schools that were predominantly white to a Chicano high school. A few years before I entered high school, my English teacher, Elroy Bode, wrote "Requiem for a WASP School," in which he discussed the racism inherent in the school system and called for respect for the growing Mexican American student body. His advocacy showed up in the classroom when he assigned Mexican American authors

and encouraged us to write. His consciousness of the changes and the racism in the school system was rare.

My K-12 years were shaped by the long history of exclusion of Mexican American students in the El Paso school district, as well as the lingering legacy of the Ku Klux Klan, which controlled the school system in the early 1920s. My elementary school was renamed Grandview Elementary to Rusk Elementary after Thomas Jefferson Rusk, Secretary of War under the Republic of Texas. Free to do what they wanted while they controlled the school board in the early 1920s, the KKK went on to name other schools after the “heroes” of the Texas Revolution. Ironically, one of those KKK-named schools became an iconic Chicano high school, *la Bowie*.

In 1970, a group of Mexican American parents and their children filed a lawsuit against the El Paso Independent School District. They argued that the school maintained an unconstitutional, dual school system for white students and Mexican-origin students; that monolingual Spanish-speaking students were disproportionately assigned to special education classes; that school teachers were segregated with white teachers sent to white schools and Mexican American teachers sent to Mexican American schools; that Mexican American schools offered an inferior curriculum and had fewer resources than white schools; and more.

In 1976, the court ruled for the parents. It ordered a number of remedies, ranging from increasing the number of air-conditioned classrooms in Mexican American schools to hiring additional qualified bilingual staff.

In my senior year of high school, the school unexpectedly offered a Chicano literature course taught by a teacher who did not have the requisite training. I was excited to have a Chicano-centered class. Over the course of the semester, however, our teacher began to make disparaging remarks: Mexicans are fatalistic. Mexicans have no ambition. She repeated tropes long used to bolster white supremacy and ingrain a feeling of inferiority in Mexican American students. Looking back, I believe the course was the school’s effort to counter the charges of discrimination in the Alvarado case. For students, it achieved the opposite, demonstrating that the schools saw us as inferior.

I did attend college immediately after high school. To my surprise, I was encouraged by my cousin’s girlfriend Billy Jo. I remember the day in their apartment during my senior year in high school when she asked, “Are you going to college when you graduate?” I didn’t know what to answer. I had no plans. I had no guidance. “You should go to UTEP,” she continued. So, I applied and spent my first year at my hometown university, the University of Texas at El Paso, as an undeclared major.

In my second year, I transferred to the University of Texas at Austin—not because of the school’s distinctiveness but because I wanted to get out of El Paso and Austin was then a cool, hippie town still. I had no clue what to study. In high school, I dreamed of being a journalist, but I didn’t know whom to talk to about such a career.

At 19, I declared business my major. As a first-generation student with no knowledge of college or where to go for counsel and advice, majoring in business seemed like a stable future. I did not find the inspiration for what would become my future career as a scholar and academic in my accounting or management classes; rather, my Chicano studies courses led to my discovery of both my past and my future.

Sitting in a 500-student political science class taught by a Chicano professor, I first learned that my family stories were part of history. There are histories that live within families, passed from generation to generation, years before scholars begin to recognize them as History with a capital H.

Growing up on the border with immigrant parents who came to the United States during the Mexican Revolution, my childhood was filled with stories about crossing the international bridge from Mexico to the United States, growing up in the Southside barrios, surviving the Great Depression, the repatriation of family members, and the experiences of living far from the border during World War II.

As a child, I learned to listen intently to these stories, which fascinated me. I didn't understand that they were part of the broader history of the United States, much less the binational history of the United States and Mexico. Nothing in my K-12 education prepared me to understand the place of Mexican Americans in the history of our country. That day in poli sci, the professor talked about the massive repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans that followed the 1931 deportation campaign during Herbert Hoover's administration. I wanted to run out of the classroom and call my parents. "We are part of history," I wanted to yell.

My Chicano studies courses shaped me as a scholar and educator. As a historian devoted to working for and in the community, I learned that much of my work occurs outside the classroom. That includes taking my students into the community, a lesson I learned from one of my professors in Chicano studies early on, Ines Hernández Ávila, then a doctoral student at UT Austin.

During the spring 1978 semester, Professor Hernández Ávila took us to East Austin, a working-class community that included Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. Drag boat races held yearly on Lake Travis left the neighborhood filled with discarded beer cans and other trash, and terrible noise pollution. Attendees urinated on people's yards, and traffic and parking made the streets undrivable, disrupting life for the people who lived there.

The East Town Lake Citizens Neighborhood Association and the Brown Berets organized protests against the drag races. Our class attended meetings, and, in the summer, we attended the protest. I carried a sign that said, "Keep the trash out of East Austin." In 1978, the police brutally beat one of the organizers, Paul Hernandez. One police officer was suspended for excessive force, and the City Council ended the drag races.

I was involved in the Chicano Movement centered on campus. This included working in the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) and with a group of student allies with the Texas Farmworkers Union. Leaving campus to work in

the community was transformational for me as a student and for my future career as an educator.

In 1977-1978, I took a two-semester class with Professor Hernández Ávila in Chicana literature. The capstone project in the class was to conduct two oral histories. It was my first exposure to the idea of recording and preserving spoken histories. After much begging and coaxing, my parents agreed to be interviewed.

That experience taught me the importance of preserving the histories of everyday people. The oral histories were deposited at the Benson Latin American Collection, one of the most important Latin American libraries in the Americas. In the spring of 1978, we organized a daylong event at Juárez Lincoln University, an alternative institution of higher education that emerged out of the Chicano Movement, just west of the freeway next to East Austin. I gave a short workshop on oral history, not knowing at age 22 that one day I would be director of the Institute of Oral History at UTEP.

In 1980, I entered the MA in economics program. I discovered that this was not a good choice, and I dropped out. In the meantime, having run out of funding, I looked for and got a job with Travis County Emergency Assistance as a receptionist. I felt at home in the office. Our clients were working-class people, mostly women, from Austin's eastside and southside, the Black and Brown parts of the city.

I was promoted to case worker and eventually to supervisor, and then researcher. I spent years listening to the stories of our clients who came to us for financial help with housing, food, and utilities. It was here that I further developed my skills as a deep listener, learning to not just hear but to listen without judgment. This skill became fundamental to my work as an oral historian.

I oversaw the indigent burial program associated with the "paupers' cemetery." I couldn't believe the inhumane system in which I was embedded. A rule of the indigent burial program was that the families could not purchase a headstone, even for the future. The cemetery in East Austin reflected the creativity of working-class families. It was filled with homemade headstones and artificial flowers. Some graves had only a small paper marker with the name of the deceased and date of death. Often they designated homeless people with no one to look after them. The inhumanity of the system and the creativity of the families wanting to honor their loved ones were in stark contrast.

In the evenings, I read about radical social work and analyzed the ways in which my day-to-day work upheld the capitalist system. I thought about returning to school to study social work, but I was too busy seeing clients. I was emotionally and physically drained from listening to their traumas, which I could do little to alleviate. I was frustrated by the system that kept them poor and struggling generation after generation.

At age 30, I decided to move back to my hometown to help my elderly parents. I also decided to return to school. I wanted to study the U.S.-Mexico border

to learn more about my people's history in Mexico and in the United States. I entered the MA in history program at UTEP where I studied both colonial Mexican history and 20th century Mexican American history. I focused especially on the Great Depression, a time that my parents had often talked about. Various branches of my family repatriated, often with devastating consequences, including the death of my teenaged great aunt.

For me, the repatriation of my grandparents in 1931 meant I was born in Ciudad Juárez. We were a classic transnational family. My grandparents married in Juárez, lived in El Paso, had their first children there, and then following their return to Mexico, had more children in Juárez. It was precisely these complex histories of crossing back and forth between the two countries that drew me to studying border history.

After earning my MA, I taught Mexican American history for a semester at UTEP. The demographics then were very different from the current demographics. Now, 84 percent of the student body is Latinx (mostly Mexican American) and more than half are first-generation students. In 1990, there were many fewer Mexican-origin students.

About midway through my first semester teaching at the university level, two young Mexican American women from my class came to see me. They told me that some of the white male students were telling their classmates that they were "going to get" me for what I was teaching. The young women were visibly shaken, teary-eyed. I assured them that nothing would happen, but I feared that something would. Fortunately, it was all talk, but in class the hostility from the white male students was palpable.

I entered the doctoral program in history at the University of Arizona in the fall of 1990. I was nervous and excited. I looked forward to continuing the work I began in the MA program at UTEP. About a third of the way through the first semester, one of my professors asked to speak to me after class. He was a well-known scholar of ethnic history. "There is no such thing as Mexican American history. You should just drop out now." It was a message he directed to me numerous times. Each time my chest tightened, and I couldn't catch my breath. It is a moment frozen in time. I don't remember my response, but it began a painful period in my life. How could we not have a history?

I became a detached doctoral student, more interested in community organizing than socializing with my cohort. I eventually graduated in 1999, two years after accepting a tenure-track position at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). I was the first Mexican American woman to earn a PhD in history at the U of A. People asked if I was proud of that but in reality, I was angry and sad that 105 years after its founding, I was the first.

At UTSA, I found students who were hungry to learn Mexican American history, and I found Chicana and Chicano colleagues who organized to support each other across disciplines. Nevertheless, in my third-year review, elder historian colleagues told me to stop working with the community because it was not

scholarly. I knew immediately that I needed to find a different place, despite my love for my students and other colleagues. The opportunity to return home came when a tenure-track position opened in UTEP's department of history.

In 2001, I began a tenure-track position at UTEP where I had started as a first-year student in 1974. The position was for a public/oral historian who could work with the community and was a borderlands scholar. The department's PhD in borderlands history was just two years old.

It was a perfect position for me. "Study the border on the border" was the program's motto. I began to teach courses on Mexican American history, U.S.-Mexico border history, and public history. I trained myself as a public historian along the way, drawing on my experience working as a historian within communities. My experiences engaging the public with history did not come from formal academic training. Rather, I learned through my social justice work.

Beginning in my PhD program in the 1990s, my passion was to share history with the communities I was working with, especially Mexican American and LGBTQ communities. When I lived in San Antonio, I worked with the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, a grassroots, community-based arts and cultural organization, dedicated to social justice. Their vision inspired me. Their recognition that our lives were intersectional helped move me to action. They understood that knowing our history, recovering our historias, was critical to our movement for social justice. I authored articles for their newsletter, *La Voz de Esperanza*, an opportunity that allowed me to write for a public audience.

In the late-1990s, while still at UTSA, I began to write for the Progressive Media Project (PMP), an initiative of the *Progressive*, which had been founded in 1909 by Senator Robert M. La Follette Sr. of Wisconsin to investigate and fight corporate and political corruption. Through the PMP, I wrote about border issues and Mexican American/ Latinx issues. It was an opportunity to use my training as a historian to put today into context. I wrote about the militarization of the border, the border fence, immigration, and the growing vigilantism against migrants.

It was the first time I received threatening emails aimed at silencing me. One man, on the distant fringe of right-wing politics, wrote that his dream was to shoot every migrant trying to cross the border. Others told me to go back to where I came from.

This was not the last time I received such a violent response to my words, however. On August 3, 2019, a 21-year-old white supremacist came to El Paso with the intention of killing Mexicans. He killed 23 and injured 22. His manifesto addressed the "Hispanic invasion" of the United States and the "cultural replacement" that was occurring.

The community was traumatized. In many ways, we still are. A couple weeks after the massacre, one of my colleagues organized a symposium for UTEP students, faculty, and staff. She invited me to participate, and I spoke about white supremacy. I said directly that Trump was a white supremacist. The backlash was immediate. Students for Trump, a group in Phoenix, called for me to be fired. My

social media and credit cards were hacked, a situation that lasted months. These are common forms of harassment by the extreme right wing.

What created my greatest fear, however, was one post on social media. A frequent contributor to conservative websites wrote this about me: “Not too long ago (she Wouldn’t of had that job in the 1st place) That would have earned her a trip to the nearest Tree.” (Typos and grammatical errors are in the original post.)

I reported this to my university. I received no response from some administrators, a lukewarm response from others, and a strange suggestion from one to take customer service training. Only my students and one colleague, the director of African American studies, gave me the emotional and moral support I so desperately needed. I spent months looking over my shoulder, wondering if one of the anonymous critics was nearby.

Throughout my tenure at UTEP, I continue to invite my students to work outside the classroom, partnering and accompanying community members. In 2006, the City of El Paso announced a new “Downtown Revitalization Plan,” which was greeted with great enthusiasm. Hidden within the plan, created by the city and a group of wealthy and influential businesspeople, was the demolition of 300 acres of the Segundo Barrio, one of the most historic Mexican immigrant neighborhoods in the United States and the place where my maternal family lived when they arrived in the United States.

It was also the center of my research on Mexican American children. A group—including historians, students, activists, and attorneys—founded Paso del Sur, a grassroots group that worked with Segundo Barrio residents to fight the demolition. History was an important part of this struggle.

As we worked in the barrio, residents asked us two important questions: “Why do you care about our barrio if you don’t live here?” Some of us told them that our families had started there and that, as historians, we knew the value of the barrio.

The second question was “What is so important about our barrio?” It was clear that part of our work was to share the history of the barrio with its residents and with the people of El Paso. My students, from undergraduates to doctoral students, quickly put together a chapbook, *El Segundo Barrio: Una historia viviente*, which we distributed to schools, libraries, and residents. Paso del Sur created a historical project, Museo Urbano, placing historic photographs on barrio buildings, so people could see the history. We also worked with Sacred Heart Catholic Church, long the heart of the barrio, and muralist Francisco Delgado to create a mural that told the history of the Segundo. Ultimately, the demolition did not occur, the plan thwarted by the 2008 recession.

My/our dedication to the history of the barrios continued, and, in 2011, David Romo and I opened Museo Urbano, funded by a small grant from the Texas Historical Commission. We rented two small apartments in a historic tenement building that was the first U.S. customs house in El Paso, the Mexican Preparatory School, a boarding house for African American women, a Chinese laundry, and the home to Teresita Urrea, a revolutionary curandera who

was exiled from Mexico in 1898, and Henry Flipper, the first African American graduate of West Point.

The museum featured the history of the Segundo and Teresita Urrea. Cultural workers volunteered to perform there. We commissioned a mural by David Flores of Colectivo Rezizte in Juárez that featured Edmundo Tostado, aka Don Tosti, the first Latino composer to sell a million albums for his 1940s song, “Pachuco Boogie.”

Young men in the barrio asked if they could add their artwork to the tenement courtyard and soon the rock walls were filled with small murals depicting a variety of themes. One mural showed the United Farmworkers Union flag—red, white, and black with an eagle in the middle. One Sunday morning as I swept the courtyard (we did everything ourselves since we had no staff), an older woman walking home from church asked if she could come in to see that mural. As we stood there together, she told me that she had been a member of a farmworkers union in California in the 1950s, and from her wallet she pulled a 60-year-old union member card. History lives everywhere.

Ten years after the plan initially was announced, the City of El Paso declared its intention to demolish El Paso’s oldest neighborhood, Barrio Duranguito, to make way for a multi-purpose entertainment center: in reality, a commercial sports arena.

Again, history and historians played a crucial role in saving the barrio. My interest was the residents, mostly older women on limited incomes who had lived in the neighborhood for decades. They had a tightly knit community. They watched out for each other. They rented apartments in historic buildings that reflected the early history of El Paso, including the “pioneers” of the city, immigrants from all over the globe, the Mexican Revolution, and more.

The buildings, long neglected by the landlords, were falling apart. The residents asked us to help them save their community and to force their landlords to repair the buildings to code. In addition to organizing protests, petitions, and visits to City Council, we studied the history of the barrio.

Just as we employed history to argue for the significance of this barrio, the Council used inaccurate history to argue that it was an insignificant place and, in turn, its destruction would be of no consequence. While the residents were displaced, the buildings remain, and no arena was built. A non-profit, Project Regeneración, is working to rebuild the barrio, including providing affordable housing for those residents who want to return.

In 2015, I became the director of the Institute of Oral History (IOH), founded in 1972 and the foremost depository of border-related interviews in the United States. The seeds planted in 1978 came to fruition 37 years later. At the IOH, we conduct interviews with former Braceros, asylum-seekers, former Chicano activists, and residents in southside barrios. I became lead historian for the only Bracero history museum in the United States and consulted with the Smithsonian on their first Latinx history exhibit. My hope to bring border history out of the classroom and into the community remains at the heart of my scholarly work.

Working with my students in service to the community has been immensely rewarding. In 2019, the El Paso Independent School District decided to close three schools in South Central El Paso, some of them original “Mexican schools.” The students in these schools came from the surrounding Mexican American, immigrant, working-class neighborhoods. In response, Familias Unidas por la Educación, a grassroots organization formed by parents, filed a lawsuit in 2020 against EPISD in the U.S. District Court, Western District of Texas, arguing that this decision violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment of the Constitution as well as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act by discriminating against Mexican American students on the basis of race.

Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid, who represented Familias Unidas, approached me about writing an expert report on the history of Mexican American education in El Paso. I invited my student Angelina Martinez, now with her PhD, to collaborate. Together, we had expertise in this history from the 1880s to the present. We prepared a lengthy report that showed an ongoing pattern of discrimination against Mexican American students in local schools.

When EPISD asked the court for a summary judgment, arguing that Familias Unidas did not have evidence of discrimination, the judge ruled that our report provided ample evidence of a long history of discriminatory behavior against Mexican-origin students. I came full circle: from being a student in this school district to documenting the discriminatory history of the schools to supporting contemporary parents in their fight for the rights of their children.

In August 2024, my daughter Malinalli Leyva defended her dissertation, exactly twenty-five years after I defended mine, becoming the second PhD-holder in our family. Over the last two decades, I have often reflected on my earning a PhD and becoming a full professor. Only 1 percent of Latinas have a doctoral degree. This statistic is both surprising and unsurprising.

The history and contemporary situation of Latine people and, as in my case, Mexican-origin people around education is dismal. Inequitable resources, discrimination, inadequate schools, and even policies that push students out of school continue to be endemic.

My story of becoming one of the 1 percent of full professors who are Latina is not a story of exceptionalism. In many ways, my story is the story of the generations before me and also that of my current students. We continue to be shaped by schools that limit our vision of our futures. And there are educators who see potential in all students just as I see brilliance around me everywhere. Creating an academic experience where students feel nurtured, where they and their communities are recognized, has been at the heart of my work.

Chapter 10. Repertoires of My Life

Michael L. Wilson
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

Michael Wilson's journey from Chicago youth to university academic career in Dallas, Texas, had many stop and starts. From a challenging childhood and adolescence, he left secondary school without completing his degree. With time and shifting knowledge combined with opportunities, he explored several then "early" and experimental liberal arts colleges. Finding an institution and instructor/advisors to support him at Cornell University, he completed his undergraduate studies and his PhD in modern European cultural history. Following a sessional appointment teaching at Princeton, his career developed as a teacher and program leader at the University of Texas at Dallas in the field of historical gender studies.

Like many of us, I have a repertoire of stories about my life. In these set pieces, I usually cast myself as a clueless outsider, stumbling through situations I don't understand, oblivious to context and subtext. What might be entertaining at a dinner party, though, will not suffice for what Pierre Nora called the "impossible genre" of ego-history. That leaves me with the question of how best to record the tale of how I ended up where I seem to be. I am nearing the end of my professional life, but it's not over yet, which makes the task a bit daunting.

Some friends have suggested that I'm just a banal example of post-War social mobility. My paternal grandparents were tenant farmers in Tennessee who moved to Chicago to work in factories. My father joined them after his two years of naval service and held white-collar jobs the rest of his working life. I acquired a doctorate and work at a research university.

There is a grain of truth in this familiar narrative of the American Dream fulfilled. But it ignores how the opportunities for social and economic advancement were not afforded to my father's five siblings or to my sister and brother. I can claim no special merit: my family contains people who are smarter than I am, more ambitious, and more hard-working. Other factors must have been in play, contingency prominent among them.

I was a shy and bookish child, eager for the approval of authority figures. School seemed made for me, and I have loved it from the day in 1961 that I started kindergarten. My parents, more than I appreciated at the time, tried to support my seemingly eccentric interests. They scrimped so that I could take piano lessons, and they dropped me off regularly at the local branch of the library. Our family vacations often included historic sites and local museums, and my parents later allowed my participation in community theater. I attended a neighborhood public grammar school from kindergarten through the eighth grade, mostly with

the same group of classmates. The neighborhood was predominantly Polish, and many of friends' parents spoke little or broken English.

My friends and I were educated surprisingly well, in retrospect, by women who would in later decades have taken up jobs with greater social recognition and monetary rewards. The Chicago public school system could then afford to supplement the main curriculum with only music and art classes.

I was particularly encouraged by Ginger Walsh, an energetic and imaginative teacher who somehow managed to hold onto my cohort for both fourth and fifth grades. Miss Walsh, as she was called, had what was acknowledged to be the liveliest and thus the noisiest classroom in the building. She took great satisfaction in finding pleasurable ways to move us through the required materials and prepare us for the standardized tests on the horizon. I was, I must admit, a teacher's pet, and Miss Walsh's approval gave me considerable pleasure and more confidence. By eighth grade, when we all had to fill out a form listing our ambitions for future work, most of my male classmates wrote "tool and die make," and I wanted to be an architect.

My teachers encouraged me to apply to Lane Technical High School, which enrolled students from across Chicago and had the system's highest admissions expectations. Lane Tech had, in the wake of Sputnik, been designated the city's science and math high school. The program that interested me most, architecture, was considered one of the most rigorous because of all the required math classes. I don't recall ever wondering about being selected to attend Lane. My anxieties, as someone just barely entering puberty, were entirely focused on the required swimming class, which I had heard was conducted in the nude. (It was.)

Lane Tech turned out to be a nightmare. The school was huge, with 4,000 students. In 1970 the entire student body was male. Later in the academic year, when the Board of Education decided to make Lane a co-ed school, about 1,500 students walked out in protest, led by my physical education teacher. They assembled downtown at the Board of Education building, condemning an unacceptable "lowering of standards."

As all this would suggest, Lane was a cesspit of toxic masculinity. I was small, soft, and (in the judgment of my classmates) effeminate: a natural target for bullying. I had few friends and took to hiding in the library during lunch and free periods.

My academic courses were not particularly challenging, which left me more time to read my way randomly through the stacks. I had constant conflicts, though, with my drafting teachers, who found my devotion to the aesthetics of Frank Lloyd Wright to be not merely retrograde but perverse.

Woodshop was also a challenge. I was afraid of all the power tools and was markedly maladroit. I think that the only project I finished successfully was a sanding block. The advent of a small number of female classmates in my sophomore year diverted some of the bullies' attention away from me, but I sank deeper and deeper into depression. Neither I nor my parents could recognize, much less address, what my steady disengagement from the world signified.

The opportunity for real change came from an unexpected quarter. My sophomore American literature instructor, Mrs. Matthews, seemed to me the epitome of teacher burn-out. Each day she lectured to us from a set of yellowed notes. We dutifully took notes on her lectures, which were then collected, followed by a quiz on the material.

I quickly realized that I need not do the required reading, which left me much more time to read what I wanted. The only difficulty came with Thoreau's *Walden*, which I had encountered on my own, and felt rather differently about than did Mrs. Matthews. I did very badly on that day's quiz, and she called me out into the hall. When she asked me what had happened, I could only say that I saw different things in the book than she did.

About a week later, Mrs. Matthews called me into the hall again and asked whether I had ever considered taking honors courses. I had no idea what she was talking about, but I took the information she gave me and said I'd think about it. I barely gave the prospect any thought since it seemed to me that honors classes would require much more work from me for the same result. I declined her suggestion, as politely as I could.

The next week, Mrs. Matthews and I had another chat. She asked whether I had considered private school. "We're not Catholic," I replied. She informed me that there were private schools that were not religiously affiliated, and she named three she thought would be of interest: the University of Chicago Laboratory School, the Latin School, and the Francis W. Parker School.

I dutifully went to the library to research and sent off for each school's information packet. I quickly determined that the commute across Chicago to the Lab School would take far too much time. The curriculum at the Latin School seemed very staid to me. Parker, founded by a colleague of John Dewey, was immediately appealing. The school was explicitly student-centered and seemed to offer a varied and flexible set of courses. I decided, based entirely on the promotional materials, that Parker was the right place for me.

I was oddly confident that my enthusiasm for the school meant that my application inevitably would be accepted. I had no doubts and no Plan B.

The problem was how to approach my parents with this new prospect. The admissions process required that they meet with the headmaster at the same time I underwent an admissions interview. Even more daunting, to be considered for financial aid, my parents would have to share their tax records. My father was vehemently opposed to anyone knowing about his finances. I can't recall how I managed to get my parents to agree to writing a check for the application fee or to scheduling our admissions meetings. I suspect it was a relentless campaign of petulance and outright begging. Tears may have been involved.

I remember very little of my interview but the encounter with the headmaster was transformative for my parents. They informed me, with a hint of surprise, that the school was actually very interested in my application; the headmaster convinced my parents that the education Parker offered would be a good fit for

me and would lead to a good future. My father reluctantly handed over the necessary financial records, and the rest of the process seemed to happen very quickly. I was soon able to inform Mrs. Matthews that I would be transferring to Parker, though I doubt that I thanked her as much as I should have for her attention and encouragement.

I often describe my time at Parker as akin to the moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when the film shifts from black and white into color. I entered a world I could never have imagined. The school was located in a part of Chicago I had never seen before my interview, and many of my classmates lived in the most exclusive areas of the city.

Indeed, my peers were so much more sophisticated than I was. They had been places I had only read about, and they knew about things far outside my experience. It was more important to me, though, that I finally discovered peers who cared about books, music, films, and art. My interests had always made me feel like an outsider but now I felt less so. I was still painfully shy and socially awkward, but I gradually made friends, and my depression lessened.

My academic skills were weaker than those of my peers, and I had to work much harder at my classes than I ever had before. Two English teachers took a special interest in me and helped me understand what was expected in my written work. One was Frances Paden, who had recently finished a dissertation on W. H. Auden and nurtured my interest in creative writing. The other was Marie Kirchner Stone, a legend at Parker for her exacting standards and devotion to literature.

My history instructor, William Ray, wrote in a trimester evaluation that I had the makings of a good historian if I would apply myself, a prospect I found appalling then. I also spent a good deal of time in the art studios under the tutelage of Roger Gleason and James Mesplay, both very accomplished practitioners. My interest in architecture transmuted into enthusiasm for all the arts, and I dabbled in everything I could. Too excited by exploring so many new experiences, I simply couldn't decide on a focus.

Since my early teens, my parents and I had shared the expectation that I would be the first in our immediate family to attend college. We knew that the University of Illinois had two campuses, and I assumed I would end up at one of them.

Parker, though, had a required no-credit course on the college admissions process and through it I discovered what were in the 1970s called "experimental" colleges. These were institutions that gave students great discretion in what and how they learned; some had minimal distribution requirements and many used evaluations in place of grades.

At the time, many such colleges could be found scattered around the country, and I sensed that attending one of them would be the best way to continue what I liked best about my Parker education. While my classmates applied to Yale and the University of Michigan, I applied to Bennington, Bard, and New College in Florida. I was accepted at the latter and was awarded a financial aid package that would make it possible.

New College and its relationship to Florida's current governor have been in the media quite a bit in recent years, but in the fall of 1974, it was still a private institution and far less newsworthy. During my first trimester at New College, I enjoyed and did well in my classes—I discovered the discipline of art history, for instance—but I struggled to make friends. In the second trimester, I did poorly on both fronts.

I decided that a geographic cure was required, and I applied to Oberlin as a transfer student, a decision that seemed prescient when New College announced that it was closing its doors. About this time, my parents reminded me that upon my nineteenth birthday they would no longer be supporting me financially.

This was only fair, since my sister was getting married and my brother needed supplementary education to help with his learning disabilities. I had managed to repress these realities, though, and was quite sullen with my parents for some time. I informed Oberlin that I needed to defer admission, and I moved back to Chicago.

In the summer of 1975, I moved in with my great-uncle and found work as a bank teller at a local savings and loan. Everything I did felt like a regression, but I told myself it was only for a year. I could now declare myself financially independent of my parents and in less than a year I would simply move to Ohio for college. I tried taking two courses in Northwestern's evening division, but the trip to its downtown campus on public transportation after a day at work was too daunting. I barely passed both classes.

When people inquired what I'd do if Oberlin didn't work out, I glibly replied, "I can always move to Boston." Of course, had I done the slightest bit of investigation, I would have known that establishing independence for the purpose of financial aid requires years, not months, and I would have been better prepared for Oberlin's decisions.

So, in September of 1976 I packed my meagre belongings, and I moved to Boston. The next five years in Boston were crucial to my development as an adult. I lived in a series of communal households, of which there were a surplus in the mid-1970s. I had a string of jobs that were only meant to support me. I worked in a factory and a bookstore, as a temp and a bank teller again, and finally in the business side of publishing.

These jobs taught me something, but at the time the main lesson seemed to me that I did not want to do any of them for very long. I continued to read a great deal, sketch and paint intermittently, and write reams of maudlin poetry. Through friends, I made connections that allowed me to publish some book reviews in local alternative papers. I also took a few classes through Harvard's Extension School. I was more successful at attending and completing these courses, and that prodded me to think again about becoming a full-time student.

Even more than at 18, I knew I wanted to pursue a flexible and self-directed curriculum. I also wanted to stay in proximity to my community in Boston. However, by 1980, many of the experimental colleges, particularly those in New England, had closed.

I concentrated my efforts on Hampshire College in Amherst and, when I visited campus for my interview, the welcome I received felt much like the one I had enjoyed at Parker. I was admitted and awarded sufficient financial aid so I could manage—if I didn't think about the student loans. One very attractive aspect of Hampshire's self-paced degree was that, if I were disciplined, I could graduate in only three years.

I arrived in Amherst without a clear academic plan. My interests spanned the arts, humanities, and social sciences, and my coursework only expanded the possibilities. My time in the work force had helped me develop greater discipline and time-management skills, so I navigated the freedoms of Hampshire's curriculum much more successfully than I had at New College. I felt strongly that I had to take full advantage of my three years of full-time education, and I sometimes over-compensated. In my second semester, a twenty-page paper on the application of video technology to modern dance quickly turned into a seventy-page behemoth. My sense of urgency contrasted with the more relaxed attitudes of many of the younger students. I discovered that the faculty responded to my enthusiasm and willingness to work hard; I developed tutorial relationships that shaped me in important ways.

The most important of these happened by chance. As a work-study student, I was placed in the financial aid office, but they didn't need me for the full twenty hours I was allotted. I then received a supplemental assignment to assist Mary Russo, a professor of comparative literature who had received NEH funding for the Humanities Forum, a public program to introduce the campus to new directions in the humanities.

Working closely with Dr. Russo, I was quickly immersed in critical theory, feminist and gender studies, and post-structuralism, all of which energized me, even if my grasp of them was at first rudimentary.

In addition to the informal education I received from Dr. Russo, I enrolled in a seminar she co-taught with Nancy Fitch, a historian of France and Europe. That class, *Europe in 1900: Issues in History and Theory*, was my reintroduction to the study of the past. Whether because I was now mature enough to understand the value of history or because the instructors' approach to historical knowledge was more congenial to me, this course was another formative experience.

Indeed, I often think that my academic career has been largely rooted in the materials and methods I encountered that semester. An oral presentation I gave in class on the Paris International Exposition of 1900 became, after many revisions, my first academic publication. The initial courses I taught independently were also grounded in this period and used many of the texts I first read with Drs. Fitch and Russo.

In the fall of my final year at Hampshire, I started working under their supervision on my senior thesis, an analysis of representations of the past in the Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the Lowell Massachusetts Historical Park. Infatuated with my idealized vision of the life of an academic and encouraged

by my instructors, I considered continuing my education in graduate school. I was confronted once again with the problem of how to focus my shifting range of interests, as is demonstrated by the variety of programs to which I applied: departments of history, comparative literature, communications, film studies, and performance studies.

Several programs did not offer me admission and few of them could provide the financial support I would need. Ultimately, I decided that I would have the broadest set of intellectual opportunities and the strongest funding if I attended Cornell University to work with Dominick LaCapra, the eminent modern European intellectual historian.

Graduate school, though, was a shock at first. My sizable cohort was filled with people who possessed much deeper training in history and historical methods than I had. Many of them had been aiming for a doctoral program since at least their early adolescence. The atmosphere was more competitive than I was used to—one of my male colleagues repeatedly referred to me as an “empty-headed semiotician”—and my relationships with faculty were more distant.

I felt unworthy of the two-year fellowship I had been awarded, and I was, to my surprise, also unnerved by not having a job for the first time in 14 years. Every day for those first two years I would wake up and ask myself if I was really doing the best thing.

What actually decided matters for me was starting to work as a teaching assistant in my third year. I still feel guilty that I was set loose on undergraduates knowing as little as I did about the subject matter and about pedagogy. Gradually, though, my footing became firmer, and I grew more confident about my ability to perform my duties. I had, though, over these two years acquired a much more vexed relationship to writing itself and frequently found myself blocked when it came to my own assignments. At one point, I think I had accumulated more grades of “incomplete” than anyone else in the program.

My graduate education, though, accomplished exactly what it was supposed to do. I learned a great deal from my distinguished instructors as well as from my peers. I came eventually to understand the norms of the historical discipline and the conventions of academic labor. When it came time, I travelled to Paris to undertake research for my doctoral dissertation. The manuscript itself emerged very slowly but, under pressure from the constricted job market, I did complete and successfully defend it.

Starting with Cornell, the story of my career follows something close to a standard narrative. In 1992, after working for a year as an instructor in New Jersey, I was hired onto the tenure track in an interdisciplinary school of arts & humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas.

For more than 30 years at UT-Dallas, I have enjoyed great freedom to teach and research as I have pleased, supported by extraordinarily interesting and generous colleagues. I still learn from them and from my students each semester. This, too, sounds like a conventional sentiment, but my desire to understand the

world and its past have never failed me. As best as I can, I try to live up to the examples set by the many, many teachers along the way who saw in me things I could not recognize in myself. Within the many constraints of our culture, they are the ones who ultimately shaped me. I could not feel any less *self*-fashioned.

Section 5. 2000s and 2010s Cohort

Chapter 11. Pictures from an Institution

Jefferson Pooley
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

A Harvard and Columbia graduate, Jefferson Pooley departed from his advisors' expectations and taught successfully at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. He also developed a research and publishing career with special achievement in launching new digital publishing sites in communication studies. After two decades, he is launching a new path, combining teaching at the University of Pennsylvania with developing publications and archival sites.

The year 2024 was the right year to take stock of a career that, rather suddenly, had taken a sharp turn. That spring I left my full professor position at Muhlenberg College after 20 years. I had spent my entire teaching career at Muhlenberg, a small liberal arts institution in Allentown, PA, since joining the faculty as an ABD (all-but-dissertation) graduate student in 2003. In the two-decade interval on Muhlenberg's faculty, I had balanced the college's steep teaching demands with an evolving research program. A media scholar by training, my course portfolio reflected the topical breadth demanded by undergraduate teaching: Media & Society, Popular Communication, and the like.

My main scholarly preoccupation was always a partial mismatch; from the dissertation onward, my work centered on the history of communication research, and the would-be discipline's memory of itself. By 2010 my interests broadened to the history of social science. Neither of these were fit topics for an undergrad media & communication major. My work life had become bifurcated, divided between Muhlenberg and the invisible colleges that claimed my research attention. Most of my campus colleagues directed their energies to the brick-and-mortar college. They were, in Alvin Gouldner's (1957) terms, "locals"—and I had become a "cosmopolitan."

Then I added a third track when I founded a small open-access press in 2018. I remained a committed teacher and a scholar, and now I was an editor and publisher, too. Since the mid-2010s I had taken to writing about scholarly communication in what felt to me like an extension of my other interests. The press was my attempt to learn about the academic publishing ecosystem from the inside.

Despite negotiating a reduced teaching load and attendant pay cut, I found the triple burden—the juggling act—to exceed my capacities. Coming off a department chair stint in 2019, I started to think seriously about leaving my teaching post. The pandemic, meanwhile, accelerated financial pressures on non-elite liberal arts colleges like Muhlenberg. A new normal of austerity, contraction, and sapped morale made the campus increasingly unpleasant.

So in spring 2024 I left the only academic job I've ever held, after a year's experimental leave. I had lined up paid work: archival projects at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication and a part-time fellowship gig at Knowledge Futures, a nonprofit developer of scholarly publishing software. The idea was for those roles to subsidize my research and editorial commitments, with the prospect of additional income from the press.

As it happened, I couldn't quite make up my already-reduced Muhlenberg salary, although I earned enough to get by—together with my wife's income as a professor at nearby Lehigh University. In part to retain an academic title, I reached out to the Annenberg School with an offer to teach as an adjunct. Here I am, in the classroom again, teaching still-broad courses to undergraduates. The proportions have changed, but I find myself working, again, on three tracks, as a 48-year-old para-academic.

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I grew up in Silicon Valley, or slightly above it, in a hilly, faux-pastoral town separated from Palo Alto by the Stanford campus and the university's open-space preserves. I had strangely deep Palo Alto roots on my mother's side: Her grandparents owned a 17-acre chicken farm in the city, sold off and developed long before I was born. My mother was raised instead in Marin County, north of San Francisco. Her father, a radiologist and closeted gay man, divorced her mother, a severe manic-depressive, when my mother was in her teens. She met my father in Paris, while the two were studying abroad as college juniors—in the 1968-1969 academic year, as it happened. He was from Wilmington, Delaware, the fourth of four boys in what was an intellectual household of sorts.

His father had a high school education and worked in an electric plant. But this grandfather was an autodidact and avid reader, and his four sons were good students. One became a professor of Chinese history, another was an English teacher, and the third a self-styled inventor.

My father went to law school at Columbia, living with my mother on food stamps near campus. A summer stint at a Palo Alto law firm led to a post-graduation job; this was the early 1970s, when the region won its Silicon Valley moniker. He specialized in trade secrets and made a successful career representing litigious tech firms. Teaching part-time at Berkeley's Boalt Hall, he authored treatises on trade secrets law and later took up a post as deputy director of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in Geneva. He was, as an extension of this work, something of an IP maximalist—demanding, for example, that my brother and I purchase video games that we had copied from friends. My own involvement in copyleft and open-access worlds has, I now recognize, a Freudian character.

My mother worked as a travel agent and raised my brother and me as a single parent after she and my father divorced in my early childhood—though we divided time between the two households. I was a serious student and voracious

reader. Soon I was taking a cross-country road trip to study at Harvard, where I became interested in the social impact of the mass media.

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It turns out I was lucky that Harvard had no communication or media studies program. At the time, the study of media was divided between researchers in the organized field—an aspirational discipline often called “communication”—and scholars from everywhere else. The departments and schools of communication that housed the first group were, then as now, shunned by most elite universities, including Harvard.¹

The field was established, instead, at big Midwestern land-grant universities after World War II, often by burrowing from within existing journalism schools and speech departments (Chaffee & Rogers, 1997). These units suffered because they flourished, their lecture halls filled with future ad men and broadcasters, who—on the plus side—bankrolled each school’s PhD programs and research-faculty hires.

The same undergrads, though, sapped the discipline’s legitimacy, hellbent as they were to get on the other side of the glass. Often relegated to the university’s professional-school margins, self-identified communication scholars had jobs but no respect (Pooley, 2011). Theirs was a Faustian pact, the field’s vocational riches traded for prestige and coherence. UK sociologist of media Jeremy Tunstall (1983) captured this point 40 years ago: “The fact that a single individual can teach courses in, say, magazine editing and research techniques in social psychology is a tribute to human adaptability, not to a well-conceived academic discipline” (p. 92).

So the discipline-bound scholars toiled away in well-heeled obscurity and—to some extent—self-reinforced mediocrity. The *other* media scholars were sprinkled throughout the mainline departments at the university’s reputational core. This was the media and communication studies that I encountered at Harvard, through a patchwork of courses in English, comparative literature, and political science. I liked the self-stitched approach enough that I aimed for something similarly undisciplined when I searched for graduate programs a few years later. And this issue—the loose fit between the organized discipline and the intellectual field—would become my main scholarly preoccupation.

I majored in Harvard’s social studies, a cross-departmental program modeled after Oxford’s philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE) degree, which combined heavy doses of social theory with a license to graze across six or seven social science and humanities disciplines. I was, at the same time, a member of a tiny

1. The exceptions—departments or schools at Stanford, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania—each have interesting histories that explain their rule-proving exception status.

community of campus radicals. While writing for, and helping to edit, Harvard's left-wing monthly *Perspective*, I became disillusioned by my fellow students' apathy. I began to steer my courses to those English and sociology offerings centered on the mass media, having convinced myself that television and advertising explained the campus-wide indifference to politics. My senior thesis (Pooley, 1998) took up the issue from a different angle, criticizing the then-voguish "public journalism" movement for its willful embrace of a useful fiction—that of a flourishing public sphere.

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After graduation I moved to New York City with no job and no debt. My fiancé, a Wellesley student with whom I recently celebrated a 25th wedding anniversary, was jobless and debtless too. Back in Boston, I had an interview with the legal-media mini-mogul Steven Brill, for an editorial assistant post at his soon-to-launch magazine *Brill's Content*. He and Michael Kramer, his editor, confronted me about a misspelling in my resume; my panicked retort was to point to two typos in their *Harvard Crimson* ad. They apparently liked the pushback and offered me the job a few weeks later.

My run as a journalist was brief, though the magazine—*Brill's Content* focused on the media—served as a popular proxy for media scholarship. I was promoted to staff writer, then columnist, though my column—aptly titled "Media Studies" and centered on recent media scholarship—was short-lived. The truth is that I was poorly equipped, dispositionally, for journalism. The role had me calling up seasoned *New York Times* reporters to question their stories; they did not hide their disdain. You can't do without intestinal fortitude in adversarial journalism—especially if your subjects are adversarial journalists themselves. So I decided, early in my *Brill's* tenure, to apply to graduate school.

My search was for a doctoral program in media and communication, with the aim to find one that would mimic the department-less freedom of Harvard's social studies major. Columbia's brand-new, cross-disciplinary PhD in communications was, in that key respect, a match. Housed in the Journalism School and governed by a university-wide committee, the program had few dedicated courses and a skeleton staff. The idea, instead, was to sample from Columbia's media-related offerings across the arts and sciences departments and professional schools. I took that program's flexibility—really a form of benign neglect—as license to roam further still, via New York City's inter-university doctoral consortium. In the end, over half my coursework was completed at NYU and the New School; I sought out scholars whose work I admired, including Steven Lukes, Todd Gitlin, Richard Sennett, and Craig Calhoun—all in NYU's sociology department—and philosopher Charles Taylor, then spending an annual, condensed fall term at the New School. It was, in effect, social studies all over again.

I arrived at Columbia determined to work on media and the problem of consent. It was the question that had motivated my leftist activism as an undergraduate: Why do people consent to their own exploitation? That's the framing used by a loose lineage of so-called Western Marxists who, in effect, blamed culture and the mass media—by distracting, drugging, or diverting the masses' attention.

I was enamored with these figures, devouring books by Perry Anderson (1976) and Martin Jay (1984), among others. I arranged for an independent study with Gitlin, who had—in his post-New Left, late-1970s work (Gitlin, 1978, 1980)—explained the U.S. system's containment of protest through a Gramscian lens. Gitlin, I soon learned, had long since drifted to the center-left and stated, flatly, that these questions held no interest; the *mensch* that he was, he agreed to re-read this material with me anyway. My master's thesis (Pooley, 2001) was a half-baked attempt to revive this tradition for critical media studies. Its first sentence—"It cannot be stated too bluntly: Everything hinges on the rescue of false consciousness, that dangerous and indispensable idea" (p. 1)—gives a sense of its earnest portentousness.

The topic brought me, circuitously, to the work I'm still doing now, on the history of media research within the history of the social sciences. I pitched a dissertation on the history of leftist media and cultural analysis, with the stated aim to recover a theory of "communicated quiescence" shorn of the Marxist tradition's epistemological hubris.

As I began to read in the historiography of U.S. communication research, I was struck by its thin, justificatory character. One strand of the literature provided, unblushingly, an origin myth for the aspirant discipline, complete with a quartet of founding fathers. Other part-time historians—most of them still active in what was, after all, a young field—drafted usable pasts to supply a legitimate lineage for their favored approach. Another common tack was to deploy history to assign contemporary disputants to a discredited past.

The most pervasive strategy, I found, was to draw a sharp, unflattering contrast to a body of predecessor-scholarship—not just in literature-review summaries, but also in core articles and book-length historiography. As a result—or so I thought then—the field's remembered past was strikingly airbrushed and whiggish, even relative to the history of mainline social sciences. I had a theory that the field's youthful insecurity raised the legitimation stakes. Senior figures in the field, I concluded, had used history to buttress a discipline with bricks but no mortar.²

So I changed course. I swapped the leftist project for a history of the field's memory. I selected what was among the field's most durable narratives: the claim that rigorous social science during and after World War II had supplanted a naive and impressionistic interwar belief in media potency. Sophisticated studies

2. One uncomfortable irony was that a majority of my committee members were themselves field-historians in this mold: my advisor, Columbia journalism scholar James W. Carey; Gitlin; and Elihu Katz.

conducted at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research, the story went, had shown that the effects of mass media tend to be weaker than previously held. This powerful-to-limited-effects storyline was adopted by the newly organized discipline of communication, busy lodging itself in U.S. journalism schools in the 1950s and 1960s. My dissertation (Pooley, 2006a) traced the formation and uptake of that two-stage plot, showing how shorthands for naive faith in media potency—analogized to “magic bullets” and “hypodermic needles”—remain textbook staples (see also Pooley, 2006b).

The fact is, however, I was already three years into a full-time teaching post by the time I defended the dissertation in 2006. I had, in a way, stumbled into the job at Muhlenberg College. Slated to give an informal talk to a class session, invited by Muhlenberg's Sue Curry Jansen after a serendipitous email exchange, I saw a job ad for the college's communication department on a listserv. Throughout graduate school I had harbored an under-informed, and fully romantic, aspiration to teach at a liberal arts college. At the same time, as a budding historian of the field, I knew that most good liberal arts colleges had no program—on the grounds of communication's grubby vocationalism. So when the Muhlenberg ad appeared, I wrote to Jansen to withdraw from the class talk, opting to apply instead. (In the end, and fittingly, the session was restored, in the form of a teaching demonstration.)

The job market in media and communication research was relatively healthy—and remains so today, mainly because of all those PR and advertising students, who underwrite the enterprise. It's a lumpy market, however, divided into three principal buckets: practitioners (journalists and film-makers, for example), social scientists, and humanities scholars—the latter typically products of film studies or English programs. The practitioners and social-science-inclined communication PhDs have it better, while the film scholars face prospects akin to those in the main humanities fields. I presented as a social scientist, one of the reasons I was able to secure an ABD post.

I would go on to spend two decades at Muhlenberg. In many ways, the school matched my image of a liberal arts college: a manicured residential campus, small classes (sometimes held on the grass), and colleague-friendships across the divisional spread. I did struggle to carve out time for scholarship, as reflected in the delayed dissertation. I spent a summer in State College, leaving my pregnant wife in Allentown for an isolated apartment close to a good library, writing furiously against Muhlenberg's too-tolerant three-year ABD allowance. I finished in time and proceeded to win—with sometimes-absurd tricks—time for research and writing. Steep service demands, the 3-3 teaching load, and norms (good ones) to spend lots of time with students beyond class made it an ongoing challenge, especially for a tortured writer like me.

The teaching was the main reward. Like many liberal arts faculty, my coursework was pitched broad and shallow, with no obvious link to my research agenda. This worked well for me, with course offerings like *Media & Society*, *Popular*

Communication, and (my favorite) Social Media & the Self. Many of the students were excellent, most of the rest seemed to care, and all of them had signed on for the discussion-based format and close faculty contact.

I was lucky to join Muhlenberg with an exceptional cohort of new hires, who remain my closest friends at the school: a neuroscientist, sociologist, dancer, and political scientist. One of the pleasures of a small residential campus is that faculty socializing, reading groups, and even collaborations are easy to find or initiate. My department (of communication, soon renamed to media & communication) was warm and supportive, anchored by the quietly remarkable Jansen—whose friendship and collaboration I treasure to this day.

I sometimes wondered if my position at a non-elite, “teaching” college imposed a credibility penalty. Perhaps, but I never saw any real evidence, and here again I suspect that the field’s loose and undisciplined character played its part. There’s never been a recognized hierarchy of departments nor journals in communication research, and since many elite institutions have long shunned the field, the spillover effects of university prestige were not widely felt.

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In 2009 I was invited to join a paper with a historian of social science, Mark Solovey, to present at a Duke symposium on the fraught relationship between economics and the other social sciences (Pooley & Solovey, 2010). The event introduced me to an inchoate community of scholars—some trained in social science disciplines, others intellectual historians, still others historians of science—working on the history of the social sciences. The symposium led to an invitation to join a grant-funded project directed by Philippe Fontaine, a French historian of economics. That project, spanning five years, involved working with a handful of others on the postwar history of the social sciences at five U.S. universities—funded, improbably, by the French government.

In 2013, as the project wound down, Fontaine approached me and another historian, Jamie Cohen-Cole, about launching a small scholarly association to focus on the history of the postwar social sciences. We established the Society for the History of Recent Social Science (HISRESS), which has sponsored annual conferences ever since. Those meetings, and other events and commissioned papers, brought me further into this polyglot quasi-community. My writing continued to focus on the history of communication research, but now within the backdrop of the other social sciences. Fontaine and I organized a series of workshops with the aim to produce an edited collection on the various social sciences’ entanglements with U.S. social problems in the postwar (Fontaine & Pooley, 2021).

More recently, Fontaine, Cohen-Cole, and I launched a new journal, *History of Social Science*, to provide a publishing outlet for the motley group of historians working on these topics. My scholarly agenda has been re-framed as a result of these encounters with the wider social science aperture. Among other things,

I have studied the history of the so-called “behavioral sciences” movement in the 1950s U.S. academy, with special interest in the complex entanglements with funders and the national security state (e.g., Pooley, 2016a).

My interests extended, meanwhile, in a related but largely a-historical direction. In the mid-2010s I started to write public-facing essays on the scholarly publishing ecosystem (e.g., Pooley, 2015, 2016b). I was alarmed about the big-five corporate publishers’ cynical embrace of the open access movement. The likes of Elsevier and Springer had latched onto a funding mechanism, the article processing charge (APC), that only grant-rich scientists and academics at a handful of wealthy universities could afford. This struck me as the old tolled system seen through a camera obscura, with author exclusions traded for barriers to readers. The open access movement had been hijacked.

In the balance of the decade, I came to feel that my standing, and also my knowledge, was limited by a lack of experience in the publishing trenches. In 2018 I founded a small book publisher, *mediastudies.press*, predicated on the idea that scholarly publishing should charge neither authors nor readers (Pooley, 2024). It was, in the bizarre nomenclature of this industry, a “diamond” open access press—one inspired by the example of other scholar-led presses that had, around the same time, banded together in a mutual-aid group. I continued to blog and write essays about what I had come to see as the “APC scourge,” but now as a publisher, with skin in the game. Running a small press was a month-by-month education in the mechanics of 21st-century publishing—an exhilarating and demanding regimen. We started publishing in 2020, the same year I co-founded the *History of Media Studies* journal under the press’ auspices.

Here I was, in the midst of the pandemic, wearing too many hats. It all made sense to me: I was, I told myself, a sociologist of academic knowledge, and also a (part-time) media scholar. And a college teacher.

Year-by-year, Muhlenberg’s financial position weakened, until it cratered: enormous deficits, steep enrollment declines, and a drastic fall-off in “net tuition”—the amount an average student pays after competitive discounting. Most other liberal arts colleges in the Northeast and Midwest, except the most prestigious and well-endowed, are quietly suffering in the same way (with regular closures just the iceberg’s tip).

Each non-elite liberal arts college is, in effect, the enemy of all the others, in what amounts to a mutual suicide pact: desperate tuition discounting to win deposits among the fast-shrinking pool of prospective students, whose (often well-off) parents have learned to play for the best deal. Savage cuts and shameless revenue gambits lead, stepwise, to a degraded academic experience, which makes the place less appealing to the remaining prospects who are—thanks to the new admissions laxity—less qualified in turn.

I was already a strange duck at Muhlenberg. A handful of my colleagues were active scholars, against all odds. But most, by choice and by adjustment, were preoccupied with the mounting labors that the institution—now hollowed

out—demanded. Here I was, trying to juggle the teaching, the press, the journal editing, and hastily made writing commitments. It was not sustainable, as my long-suffering wife would attest.

So I left my tenured, full professor post at Muhlenberg this year. There was no plum Research 1 position waiting for me. What I have done, instead, is to mix paid work at Penn's Annenberg—an oral history project and related consulting—with the part-time position at Knowledge Futures, the platform that hosts my press. And I have picked up adjunct teaching at Annenberg, with more to come. So I am of the academy, if not exactly in it.

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Chapter 12. Prisons and Pathways to Rhetoric and Composition

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With many professors across time, Patrick Berry completed undergraduate studies later than the presumed norm. He then held several positions in advertising, marketing, and journalism before deciding to begin doctoral studies in English and writing studies. His family's experiences with imprisonment led him to begin a pioneering career in studying, advancing, and developing prison literacy programs.

This chapter explores my pathway to the academy with particular attention to issues of compartmentalization and the critical role that personal narrative plays in contributing to the understanding of individual journeys to the academy and, in my case, the field of rhetoric and composition. In sharing these reflections, I aim to make visible pathways that are often omitted in discussions about the construction of an academic life. Before offering my own narrative, I reflect on a few narrative works in rhetoric and composition that provide valuable historical insights. My own journey involved twists and turns that are organized here around two themes: prisons and pathways.

Narrating Our Lives in Rhetoric and Composition

In Duane H. Roen, Stuart C. Brown, and Theresa Enos' (1999) edited collection *Living Rhetoric and Composition: Stories of the Discipline*, prominent scholars reflect on their pathways to the academy and specifically the field of rhetoric and composition. Many arrived as the field was first emerging, when graduate programs like those of today did not exist. Some senior scholars came from literature, education, and other fields, and as Andrea Lunsford (1999) points out, several told stories of "the GI Bill, 1960s activism, and programs like open admissions," which had afforded them access to the field (p. xi).

Others brought up commitments to working with what was then called basic writing as well as "the struggles for disciplinary recognition and legitimacy and the (very) troubled marriage of literature and composition," concerns that reverberated for years, leading to a growing number of independent writing programs (Lunsford, 1999, p. xi). Aspects of these stories will likely be familiar to senior scholars in the field, while others may find them new.

Mike Rose's (1989) *Lives on the Boundary* was especially valuable to me as a literary researcher and educator who was a new scholar in the field. I was drawn to this

genre of writing and appreciated many of the narratives that followed in succeeding years. If there were a canon for composition, Rose's text, which is both a literacy narrative and a story of building a life in the academy, would be, as Mark Wiley (1993) argues, "a unanimous choice." Perhaps all accounts of navigating the academy are literacy narratives to some extent. Such stories highlight the continuities and contradictions experienced by those who build a life in rhetoric and composition. As Kathleen Welch (2003) noted, such stories are also invaluable for tracing generations in our field and the lineages resulting from various forms of mentorship.

Reflecting on the experiences of "first-generation scholars" in rhetoric and composition, Welch (2003) discussed anticipating future stories from the field's luminary figures, saying, "I hope that Horner, Lauer, and Lloyd-Jones will write longer autobiographical accounts of the earlier days of composition-rhetoric." Narratives like these have allowed Welch to trace the tensions between the terms "composition" and "rhetoric" as well as training in the field extended across generations.

However, such explorations can also highlight omissions. For example, in her foreword to *Living Rhetoric and Composition*, Andrea Lunsford (1999), while praising the book, highlighted the absence of scholars of color. Such a lack would be unimaginable if such a collection were published today. Of course, there were fewer scholars of color in the field then, but this omission demonstrates how the field was then read in less capacious ways (see, for example, Kynard, 2013; McComiskey, 2016).

As demonstrated by these narratives, stories frame our histories—stories we remember, those we forget, and those we have never heard. They also are valuable in tracing the pathways of a broad range of scholars. The Writing Studies Tree (n.d.) continues this work through a crowdsourced online database of academic genealogies within the field.

In this chapter, I focus on issues of compartmentalization because I see that as a potential obstacle to understanding our histories. My own pathway to the academy was marked strongly by compartmentalization; as an undergraduate, I never envisioned myself as part of the university; instead, I operated under the assumption that it was *not* a place where people like me could find a home.

Later, I read collections like C. L. Barney Dews and Caroline Leste Laws' (1995) edited collection *This Fine Place so Far From Home: Voices of Academics from the Working Class*, which emphasizes how the academy leaves many people believing that they don't belong and that it is a place where "blue-collar work is invisible." Though I neither was blue-collar nor identified with the label "working class" (for various reasons, few people in my immediate family worked), I still found myself drawn to such stories as I heard others speaking about the difficulty finding and navigating a life in the academy.

Prisons

I begin by focusing on prisons because I had kept the role that prison had played in my life hidden until it became part of my scholarly identity. Not until my

mid-thirties, in graduate school, did I begin to write and talk about my father's incarceration. The reason I took so long was shame, though this was not limited to within the academy; I had compartmentalized my father's history, rarely letting others in on that part of my life.

It was only while teaching in prison—listening to incarcerated men at a medium-high-security prison talk about their estrangement from their children and families—that I began to feel compelled to share my story, which I discovered was not only therapeutic for me but also valuable to others. At national conferences, after I gave a talk and mentioned my father, I was often approached by a faculty member or graduate student who told me about their own experience with incarceration, often involving an incarcerated family member. It showed me how the act of narrating my experiences could open a space for others to talk about the impact of mass incarceration on individuals and their families.

In my family, no one went to college and most people did not complete high school. It was an environment, at least on my father's side of the family, in which going to prison was much more a possibility than going to college. My father, his brothers, and some of their children moved in and out of prison, their lives ruled by alcohol and drug addiction. I did not see my father often, as my parents divorced when I was very young and my father was often incarcerated.

According to Brian Elderbroom and his colleagues (2018), one in two adults in the United States has a family member who has been incarcerated: "Despite limited recent declines in the jail and prison population, an unprecedented number of people continue to be impacted by incarceration and the collateral consequences of that experience, which can last a lifetime" (p. 10). Given this, it's perhaps not surprising that I met others in the academy who were impacted by incarceration but for many years did not talk in academic spaces about this aspect of their lives. People's reasons for not discussing a connection to mass incarceration are numerous, but for many, embarrassment and shame play a role.

While I was an undergraduate (see Berry, 2018), my father was released from prison. Without a home and struggling with alcohol addiction, he panhandled on the Lower East Side of New York. From time to time, I would see him and then drive to the university—the two scenarios were worlds apart. Once I took pictures of my father and other men without homes as part of a photojournalism assignment; as we viewed the photographs in class, I never told anyone that the man standing in front of the liquor store with a smile on his face was my father. He passed away from complications related to cirrhosis while I was still an undergraduate, but for me at the time, this history was hidden—or, as I am using the term here, compartmentalized.

One exception to the compartmentalization of my life was Dr. Joan Digby, an English professor and director of the honors program at my school. We had built a strong relationship, and I felt I could share this hidden part of my life with her;

she was consistently supportive. At times, I would cat-sit for her in Oyster Bay, New York, when she and her husband traveled, and I was mesmerized by their walls of books and the life they had built, which appeared satisfying and very different from mine at the time. Joan remains one of the most important mentors in my life today, more than thirty years later. Nevertheless, many years passed before I felt comfortable talking to others about my father and prison, let alone writing about it in my scholarship.

When I was a graduate student, in 2004, prison education programs were declining; a ban on Pell Grants was then in effect that did not end until 2023 (Weisman, 2023). The lack of financial support for such programs meant that fewer of them existed. Still, I volunteered to work with the Education Justice Project, a dynamic program housed at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, that provided upper-level courses to incarcerated students who had earned the equivalent of an associate's degree.

I was drawn to this work because of my interest in literacy, broadly conceived; I wanted to better understand what literacy could do in this context. I was also interested in the pathways that did and did not exist for this population. Could the students in this program enroll at the university after they were released? There were no guarantees. Increasingly states have worked to "ban the box," an initiative committed to removing criminal history questions from admissions (Allen, 2023).

Yet barriers continue to exist well beyond the university. Making such obstacles visible remains important work and is something I continue to advance through Project Mend (n.d.), a program that provides humanities and publishing experience to people affected by the criminal legal system. Supported through various grants, the initiative invites a group of these individuals to learn through the production of an annual publication, *Mend*. I do this work in addition to my responsibilities as an associate professor, which bears mentioning because such "community" work is too often pushed aside in conversations about life in the academy and becomes compartmentalized and dismissed when it comes to discussions of promotion and tenure.

We cannot entirely escape compartmentalization in our lives; however, boundaries between the personal and the professional and between the university and the community need to be constantly examined. Some community experiences may be celebrated in some contexts and dismissed as separate from the scholarly work of the university in other cases, and personal narratives are sometimes dismissed as gratuitous or indulgent. Nevertheless, personal narrative holds value. As Jerome Bruner (1994) has written, "[A] life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold ... " (p. 708). Such narratives can also help us understand historically and personally how people experience the academy in various times and places. For those impacted by incarceration, the process of reflecting on such experiences can be liberating.

Pathways

It took time for me to find my way to doctoral study. When I was 38, I was working in magazine publishing at Hearst Communications in New York City. Having spent 14 years moving through various positions, most of which I enjoyed, I was now overseeing the production at one of the company's flagship publications, *Good Housekeeping*. Married and with a four-year-old daughter, I was living in Brooklyn, NY. I wanted to make a change, which involved navigating compartmentalized aspects of my life, my father's world being just one. My path to graduate school included the bringing together of disparate worlds and a few less-than-perfect decisions.

I had applied for and was accepted to a master's program in literature at New York University but ultimately declined to attend because of the cost. I instead enrolled in a master's program in English at Brooklyn College while working at Hearst. Throughout much of the 1990s, I began a long slog of taking classes at night, often selected based on the times they were offered rather than for their focus. While some were wonderful, others were less engaging.

In 1998, I found myself teaching at two schools. I took on a teaching gig in New York University's publishing program. A supervisor at Hearst had been invited to teach a few classes on manufacturing and asked me to join him. We wore suits and ties, prepared PowerPoint presentations, and shared with students various publishing artifacts that illustrated offset and rotogravure printing. I liked teaching—preparing materials and engaging with students.

However, teaching a writing class at Brooklyn College revealed to me that there was a distinct academic field that studied writing that I thought I might call home. One of my earliest assignments was to teach a class for students who had failed the school's writing assessment test. The era of open admissions had ended, and my job was to prepare students to take a 50-minute writing test at the end of the semester—they would need to transfer to a community college if they failed.

I wondered why the college had assigned me to teach this course, as I had limited experience with teaching and no experience with teaching writing, and the stakes seemed so high. I remember telling my advisor about my teaching assignment: "No one wants to teach that course," he said. Some faculty in literature saw it as beneath them to teach a remedial course, but that was not at all how I saw it.

My class was composed of students of color, most from the West Indies, who appeared to be older than I was. They were intelligent, and many were frustrated that their academic careers were in jeopardy, and they had to pay for this no-credit remedial course. I cannot say that I followed all the best practices in my field, which I did not even know at the time, but I worked closely with the students, teaching to the test—and to my surprise, they all passed. My teaching mentor noted that this rarely happened, let alone in a class with a new instructor.

I was delighted by this result but also troubled by the way writing was taught and evaluated. The course had a gatekeeping function, and I wanted to learn more

about the relevant history, which led me to apply to graduate school in rhetoric and composition. That was when I first read Rose's (1989) *Lives on the Boundary*. I was captivated by the long journey Rose had taken and the roles that literacy and mentors played. Despite Rose's sharp critique of the educational system, his narrative never loses its connection to a sense of possibility. I was interested in what writing afforded those coming from marginalized spaces.

Eventually I wrote a thesis on socialism in Bernard Shaw's plays, working with Karl Beckson, a Victorianist and an Oscar Wilde scholar. Beckson was demanding, blunt, and sarcastic, but ultimately he endeared himself to me. I trusted him and was delighted when he offered me praise because I knew it was authentic. Following a production of one of Shaw's plays, I met Richard Nickson, editor of the journal *The Independent Shavian*, for which I became a volunteer editor, working on all aspects of the publication including design and layout. In another example of compartmentalization in my life, I fit this in around my work at Hearst and continued it during the first few years of my doctoral program.

Balancing a full-time job that involved working several late nights each month, taking courses at night, editing the *Independent Shavian*, and at some points teaching courses at Brooklyn College and New York University at night or on weekends, I was stretched thin. It was hectic, and yet I was driven to get somewhere through my efforts, even if I still needed to figure out exactly what and where that place was.

My graduate school application process started with two years of failure; I needed help to understand how to apply effectively, and though my MA grades were all right, they were not the highest. After talking to the graduate director at the CUNY Graduate Center, I decided to take two courses as a nonmatriculated student, fortunately with leading scholars in the field: Ira Shor and Sondra Perl. They encouraged me to apply widely to graduate schools, which would mean potentially leaving New York State. Shor read my statement, helping me see that I did not understand the personal statement genre; I also found myself studying for the GRE general test and the literature test, which schools often required even though I no longer planned to study literature.

From the 14 schools to which I applied, I received several acceptances and many rejections. One university in Florida wanted me to continue studying Shaw and offered me an extraordinary multiyear fellowship with no teaching requirement, but I declined because my focus was now on rhetoric and composition. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign also accepted me. I remember flying to Illinois with my wife and daughter and finding everyone there kind and supportive. I wondered whether that would continue once I was enrolled, but it did. The program provided me with a model of mentoring and support that I strive to emulate as a professor.

Money was an ongoing issue. My wife and I left our well-paying jobs and began a new life with me receiving a stipend of \$19,000 a year and my wife searching for a job. My mother was living in Brooklyn and was to some extent financially

dependent on me, and within a few years she developed dementia, and I needed to help her move to a senior living home and then to an assisted living facility in Illinois. Also, I was the victim of a hit-and-run accident that led to memory loss and a lengthy hospital stay.

Despite these challenges, I always thought I had made the right decision. Working with extraordinary faculty members in Illinois—many of whom remain dear friends today—and taking graduate classes felt, despite the financial struggle, like a gift.

Conclusion

My work always centered on literacy: *What can literacy do to help individuals build a better life?* In many ways, my life has benefited from literacy. That said, I now feel that much of the real value came from mentors who helped me find pathways to a better life—in my case, an academic life—and who helped me see how I could blur boundaries and reduce the compartmentalization in my life.

Most of us like to think about how we are different, how our graduate student and faculty pathways are unique. And, of course, to some extent they are. Yet there are shared experiences, too, that make it easy to label someone as a “typical” faculty or graduate student. I think compartmentalization can lead to this surface-level reading of lives in the academy. I often find myself thinking about the compartments I create through how I read myself and others.

Some readers may argue that some compartmentalization is necessary; I agree, and yet the richness of an academic life is much more complicated than it is typically portrayed as being. I am not arguing for eliminating all compartmentalization. Instead, we need to recognize that we have choices and that movement through the academy requires that we make decisions about how we incorporate our individual lives into our work. Doing so can benefit the individual and dispel the myths that inform movement through the academy.

I recall a conversation I had with a new graduate student who told me he thought he might be the oldest student in his cohort. He told me about many of his past jobs, including one in construction, and I was reminded of how I had felt when I started graduate school as an older student and my own brief stint as a construction worker and shared these thoughts with him. Such sharing is valuable in helping reveal the richness of individuals’ experiences and how our travels across time and place matter. Paying attention on this level can lead to a more inclusive and less compartmentalized academy.

When I talk to graduate students now, I listen carefully to their concerns. I admire their persistence in wanting to make the field to more democratic and inclusive and appreciate how their pathways are distinct in terms of both the historical moment and their own histories. In *Living Rhetoric and Composition*, renowned scholar Edward P. J. Corbett (1998) reflects on one of his articles in *College Composition and Communication*, in which he discusses “how much better

trained the younger teachers are today” (p. 5). Corbett’s observation underscores how professionalization has changed over time. Despite his having received much acclaim as well as the field’s exemplar award, Corbett writes that he felt like a fraud when he compared his education in the field with the rich training future generations would receive.

In moving through the academy, we can recognize the shifts undergone and the pathways taken and debunk the myths—literacy myths (Graff, 1979), yes, but also the myths that shape our narratives about graduate school enculturation and life in the academy. I still have compartmentalization in my life, as we all do, and yet I believe it is important to consider where it comes from and how it might be shaped by dominant narratives of individuals moving through the world.

We need to resist giving in to the fears that lead many of us to hide aspects of our lives that do not fit neatly into the tropes about what it means to enter the academy and our field. Resisting this fear is especially important for the many of us who have pursued the academic life from places and situations that may at least initially appear atypical. By making our histories visible, we gain the potential for a greater awareness of the value of diverse pathways to the same destination.

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Chapter 13. Community College Work

Shawn Casey

COLUMBUS STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Following undergraduate studies at the original progressive liberal arts Antioch College and then a Master of Arts in humanities at the University of Chicago, Shawn Casey completed his PhD at The Ohio State University in English and composition studies with a focus on late 18th-century English literacy. On finding a community college teaching position, he quickly surprised himself and became a successful and devoted full professor and advocate for community college work.

When I started graduate school in 2004, I had some experience in higher education, first during a brief stint as a graduate student at the University of Chicago and then in the instructional design department at Franklin University in Columbus, Ohio. I understood that pursuing a graduate degree in English was not a practical plan for a career path; however, I rationalized that the opportunity to pursue a doctorate and write a dissertation was a privilege I couldn't pass up.

So, I embarked on this journey without any particular hope that it would result in gainful employment or a meaningful academic life. My current role as a faculty member at Columbus State Community College was not a destination I had in mind. Instead, I idealistically worked to balance my academic interests and curiosities against potential work and funding in graduate programs while trying to ignore the generally pessimistic narratives about the market for faculty positions in universities and four-year schools.

My experience as a community college teacher contradicts both the dominant narrative of a dismal academic job market and the general perception that community college working conditions are less desirable than faculty work in four-year colleges and universities. I had to discover this for myself, as community college teaching was not addressed in my graduate training even though I was enrolled in a rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies doctoral program.

An important part of my journey to community college teaching involves reflecting on my own life path and career expectations. These often exceeded the simple image of the linear career track from research to publication to tenure that preoccupied me and my peers in graduate school. I don't think I'm alone in missing the discussions of meaningful work, considerations of community and place, and open sharing of working conditions—including the benefits of a faculty union—my graduate training overlooked.

I served for several years on the Modern Language Association community college forum on higher education professions. In this role, I worked to promote community college work in our field's most conservative and entrenched

professional organization. In January 2023, I presented on a panel discussion of the community college job search at the MLA annual convention in San Francisco. I titled my presentation “The Community College Ethos.”

I tried to articulate what made community college work so satisfying and what characteristics we are looking for in future community college faculty. I continue to take what professional opportunities I can to help future faculty reflect on both their future working conditions and their purposes for pursuing an academic career. I am especially interested in promoting the idea that community college work should be considered a valuable and even desirable career path. One obvious place to add this emphasis is in graduate training. Doing so, however, will require a shift in the dominant narratives of the academic career path.

I began working at Columbus State in 2010, and since then I have served on hiring committees in my English department and across several academic divisions. Columbus State is a large and diverse college, enrolling over 40,000 students. Columbus is Ohio’s largest and most rapidly growing urban area. We’ve hired several times and expanded the ranks of our full-time faculty.

Like most two-year schools, we rely on contingent and annually contracted faculty to teach most of our first- and second-year English composition courses. Regardless, my experience during the decade and a half since I began working at Columbus State contradicts the dominant academic career narrative. The headlines in this narrative include retreat from tenure, full-time faculty reduction, department and college closings, and a generally dismal outlook on the job market and working conditions in higher education.

In my experience, most of our faculty candidates don’t have a full picture of community college work and teaching. This includes reflection on the role and purpose of academic training and academic work in the course of a life path. Instead, most candidates, and this was true for me, bring a sense of their academic discipline, an assortment of narrative frames from undergraduate experience and graduate training, and a sense of purpose and even joy in teaching that is sometimes difficult to articulate amidst the requirements to highlight authority and technique in a teaching philosophy.

To help address the gap in understanding that we sometimes see in community college job applicants, faculty mentors frequently emphasize the importance of understanding the community college teaching environment in the annual community college jobs panels at the MLA. This includes understanding the diverse structures and histories of two-year institutions—which often vary from state to state—as well as the diversity of the student body, which typically more greatly reflects the community in which the college is embedded than the local four-year college or university.

In my MLA presentation, I chose to focus on the concept of ethos to help candidates think about how the guiding values and purposes of a community college and the experience of community college faculty members might define a sunnier, even gratifying, experience of a career in higher education. This is one

of the most important points I wanted to share with potential candidates: The community college work environment and the attitudes among community college faculty sometimes offer a brighter alternative to the gloomy outlook on an academic career that we encounter on the job market.

I realize now I was mainly advising my younger self in this presentation. I wish I had known enough to check out the popular community college job talk sessions during the MLA conventions I had attended as a graduate student. However, the truth is that community college work was not promoted or talked about as a career path in my graduate program.

In graduate school, the diversity of academic workplaces and roles was overlooked in favor of scholarship, research, and publishing. I loved this aspect of graduate study, but in my situation, training within my discipline did not prepare me to anticipate and build a life in academia. Teaching was something we trained for, something we studied, but not necessarily the key focus of an academic life.

Instead, even from my perspective as a graduate student in rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies at The Ohio State University, teaching appeared to be a task that helped pay the bills for the more lauded activities of research and scholarship. This is contradictory, given my field's focus on pedagogy and the teaching of writing. I see now that part of the reason I chose rhetoric, composition, and literacy studies as a field is because I knew classroom teaching was a focus for me. But even there, the community college, an obvious choice, wasn't an institutional context we spent any significant time exploring. The problem here doesn't lie with my field but with the dominant narratives of academic life in the university as a whole.

The university's structure exploits graduate and contingent teaching assistants to subsidize the work of the full-time faculty and the graduate program. Teaching, as this structure implies, and promotion requirements reinforce, is the least important task for a serious academic. If I were to follow the university's model of the academic career path, then it seemed that I should aspire to reduce my teaching load, transfer the essential teaching tasks to the least supported instructors, and get on with the business of preparing an academic monograph attractive enough for a university press to publish to move me along toward job security. Even the idea of "choosing" a career path seemed out of reach to me in an environment where conforming to the narrow and obtuse expectations of the dominant academic narrative and its dismal job market appeared to be my most important task.

I hope that the experience of graduate students today has changed. I've had the opportunity to mentor and recruit faculty from my former graduate program. They seem to appreciate the opportunity to pursue an "alternative" career path, though I know that for most English graduate students, the opportunity to pursue a career in any form is welcome. I also think it's been easier for the Columbus State English department to see the value of PhD graduates on the faculty since I applied for my position.

Whereas some department members viewed my hiring with suspicion, most now seem to understand that good teachers and colleagues can emerge from doctoral programs. These developments suggest that university and community college career paths may be better connected now. I hope our image of the people who hold and promote academic careers continues to broaden alongside our expanded sense of the careers available in academia.

A more diverse faculty with a broader range of experiences is needed to help promote student success in two-year (and, in fact, all post-secondary) schools. We won't have this kind of faculty if colleges and universities don't expand their thinking and their teaching about who follows an academic career path, into what kind of institution, and how and why they choose the institutions and roles they take on.

I was woefully ignorant of the community college world when I first applied for my faculty position. I only knew that I was out of graduate student funding at Ohio State and that my contingency plan to finish writing my dissertation while working for the university writing center was cut short because of budgeting changes that followed the 2008 recession. While my decision to apply to Columbus State was economic, I soon found that the institution offered a collegial work environment and gratifying opportunities to teach and serve in a community where I had lived for more than a decade. I wish I had considered community college teaching a valued and valid life path earlier in my academic career. And I wish I had been a little clearer about the collegiality, stability, and purpose I expected from my job because this is what I found at my community college.

My first experience with Columbus State's working conditions and how they differed from what I expected from the academic job market began when I contacted a faculty member in the English department during my application. We met for coffee and discussed the school, the work, and the value of the faculty union.

This was the first time in more than six years of graduate study and advising that anyone had suggested that working within a faculty union could add real value to my experience as an academic. I was under the impression that any job prospects, both on the market and in my future work toward tenure, involved a precarious mix of scholarly success, social networking, likability, student and mentor evaluations and recommendations, and being "our kind of person" (a droll phrase shared with me by one committee member).

In short, my impression of academic work confirmed an overwhelmingly affective atmosphere of dependency in which there were "no guarantees that the life one intends can or will be built," as one of my former teachers put it (Berlant, 2011, p. 192). Yet here, at a coffee shop where I regularly brought homework and grading, was a community college faculty member explaining how unionization stood against the labor model that I had been led to believe was my only choice in pursuing an academic career path.

To be clear, the benefits of Columbus State Education Association union membership, beyond collective bargaining, include a contract that anyone can

view that explains both hiring and compensation formulas for all faculty, transparent performance and advancement expectations for both the faculty member and evaluating peers and department supervisors, union protections against retaliation for unfair or uneven application of performance expectations, and protection from additional work expectations without adequate compensation. In addition, working within a union offered a form of solidarity between full-time and contingent faculty and the interests of students and the institution against the volatile forces of capitalism on the one hand and government corruption on the other. My first significant conversation with a community college faculty member presented a very new way of thinking about my academic career path.

I continue to be impressed by how gratifying and essential union membership has been to me. But Columbus State has its challenges. As one union president explained early in my career, our union is comparatively young. Columbus State and the entire community college system are relatively young. Founded in 1963 to address career and technical training needs, Columbus State has grown exponentially alongside the explosion in demand for credentialing and certification in the workplace.

In the last two decades, the union and the college have grown together. The union is instrumental in helping the faculty and the college uphold academic standards. The college and our students benefit from a unified faculty addressing changing delivery modes, the expansion of dual credit, a pandemic, a volatile legislative environment, and many other challenges. The union, and a collaborative approach to academic labor in general, helped to advance the critical goals and ideals that I first encountered in academic study. This is one of the reasons why I think better connections are needed between academic working conditions and graduate school training.

The relative newness of the community college model helps us adapt to many of the challenges of the 21st century that have proved fatal for so many traditional four-year schools and even universities. However, the newness of the institution can also be detrimental. One dean shared with me during my interview his perception that many faculty at the college hadn't worked at other institutions and, therefore, didn't have much perspective on the wider world of higher education themselves. This might explain the uneven hiring criteria that I think still characterize the community college job search.

For example, I was hired at the dean's suggestion specifically because I was on my way to completing a doctorate. To his mind, more PhDs on the faculty meant more prestige. But members of my department looked at the PhD with suspicion. Rightly so: my university experience had not prepared me for community college work.

My graduate work itself was evidence of the continued expansion of degree expectations across the job market. It meant something significant; that is, I wouldn't, and I didn't, understand the community college ethos. The industry and the market have changed in the fifteen years since I began at Columbus State.

We still do not require the doctorate, but candidates holding a PhD are given even consideration, and many, but certainly not all, of our new hires include some combination of an advanced degree and experience teaching in higher education beyond the community college.

In the first decades of the 21st century, it seems that community colleges and doctoral candidates are beginning to find each other more often. I know this development is driven by the dwindling prospects for a “traditional” academic career path in the university system. When I speak to community college faculty applicants, I try to emphasize the shift in mindset required to see community college work as a value in itself and not just one of many desperate alternatives possible at the end of a graduate career.

This is the perspective I wish I had developed sooner as part of my graduate studies. Instead, in graduate school I read Ohio State English professor Frank Donoghue’s (2008) *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. It has joined the chorus describing the discouraging outlook on the university job market among graduate students and professors. I note now that the index includes several references to Columbia University but none to Columbus State, even though Columbus State offers a local example of the kind of professorial role that might serve as an alternative to the shrinking university professoriate becoming the looming wage earners of the corporate university.

Articles and monographs on the collapse of American universities in general and the humanities in particular were and are ubiquitous. I suppose they are prescient—in part but only in part—as college and university closures and department consolidations are more common after our most recent pandemic. But by the time I reached Ohio State, I at least knew enough about the history of education to look at the sky is falling narrative with a critical eye.

I liked Donoghue’s book and his class enough to remember some of his statistics on publishing and tenure. For example, he shares the anecdote that academic presses could only rely on selling about 200 copies of any monograph to university libraries, their biggest market. This was in 2008. The more widely cited statistic that Donoghue (2008) shares is one collected by Deborah Rohde, stating that “ninety-eight percent of all publications (articles and monographs) in the arts and humanities are never cited” (p. 48).

I remembered these figures when I evaluated my own prospects as a community college teacher. I realized fairly quickly that teaching an average of 75 students a semester—a horrifying number to colleagues unrealistically expecting to teach one or two graduate-style seminars a year—gave me a far larger audience than any monograph or article publication would. The bonus was that I might even enjoy that work and see it connected to a life path less precarious than the bleak picture painted by Donoghue (2008) and other academic storm crows.

To position myself better as a teacher in the face of what seemed insurmountable odds, I pursued a Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship through Ohio State. The fellowship offered graduate students across the college an opportunity to

teach and train with a partner institution. I was placed at nearby Denison University. I worked alongside a faculty member at Denison in the education department where I was hired as an adjunct the following year.

Denison was indeed that “college on a hill” in the most classic and expensive residential liberal arts school tradition. However, I quickly realized that despite the resources of the college I was not the right fit for their population. I appreciate that fellowship program for this experience because it was perhaps the first time I had thought about job satisfaction, not just landing a job, in my path to an academic career. My challenges at Denison were, most simply, a matter of class, caste, preparation, and social and economic background. I shared little with the students I was teaching.

The colleagues I found there were quick to emphasize the quality of the facilities but little else. In contrast, at the same time, I interviewed at Columbus State, where department members were quick to praise the students, share their joy in teaching, and appreciate the collegiality and protections of the faculty union. I know Denison still finds excellent faculty and students, but I do wish Ohio State’s future faculty program would consider at least offering graduate students the opportunity to experience a community college environment as one option for those of us who might find a better fit at a two-year school.

One event that helped me reimagine my life as a teacher rather than a researcher occurred during a graduate student meeting with a visiting scholar at Ohio State. This person was a faculty member at a smaller university nearby. It was rare to have a guest speaker from within the state. Further, the speaker shared that she carried a four/four workload. In my imagined memory of this conversation, I hear the collective gasp among my fellow graduate students.

My impression of workload in academic life involved efforts by full-time faculty to reduce teaching commitments to carve out time for the real work of scholarship. As a follow-up, this guest assured us that it was possible to teach full-time and have an academic career. I think this was the first time I had heard a faculty member admit that teaching wasn’t a burden to be avoided but a job to be embraced.

When I look back on this moment, I also see an explicit acknowledgment that academic work is labor. I remember Lauren Berlant explaining to us at Chicago that academics don’t want to admit they are laborers. This is a major problem for academic organization and solidarity. At that moment, I felt solidarity with another teacher. This made it possible for me to imagine my work within the context of both a classroom and a union and outside the equally demanding labor of scholarship and publishing.

This shift in identity from scholar to teacher, viewed in a positive light as one possible unfolding of an academic life, is part of the community college ethos I try to share with prospective two-year faculty. This shift in identity also helps me connect with the many excellent high school teachers I’ve worked with in Columbus State’s successful dual credit program. In my role supporting our high

school teachers delivering college courses, my background in university teaching and rhetoric, composition, and literacy scholarship helps provide an institutional bridge between high school and higher education. In graduate school at least, it would have been useful to me to understand earlier that the size of a teaching load does not diminish the value of the role.

I understand that workload makes the faculty role significantly different than the one modeled in our university graduate programs, but I think it is worth considering that the contrast in these roles does not represent a failure or deficit, rather a difference. A change in attitude and perception toward faculty roles as matters of difference rather than hierarchy or merit could help make university training for college teachers more effective. It might help community colleges recruit more faculty who have trained to teach in our environments and reduce our reliance on university aspirants who see community college work as a fall-back career.

I'm not sure if the elision of teaching labor and the failure to connect teaching styles and standards across institutions is a feature or a fallacy of academic training in the university. Or both? Ignoring the significance of developing myself as a teacher during graduate school may very well have been willful on my part. I've stated that my graduate education didn't prepare me for community college teaching, but that's not entirely true.

My first experience in graduate school was at the University of Chicago in the master of arts in the humanities program (MAPH). I was enrolled in the Little Red Schoolhouse writing program, where I learned some writing pedagogy. I also completed an elective course on community college teaching. I remember that we took a field trip to a community college in a far north Chicago suburb where a University of Chicago graduate was the college's president. I remember sitting in on a first-year college composition course with a classmate and not taking it in very well.

Thanks to my very small and very liberal undergraduate college, I had never been in a composition course. I might as well have been on another planet. I measured myself mostly in terms of scholarship and study. At Chicago, I certainly wasn't prepared to see myself as the kind of authority known as a teacher. At the end of the community college teaching course, several of us were invited to apply for positions at the suburban community college. I don't know if anyone took up the offer. Putting myself on a career track as a teacher in an environment that was absolutely new to me while I still felt I had so much scholarly knowledge to master was not something I could imagine for myself. I missed an important opportunity to start a new life in academia that semester, which would have led to a different essay.

Instead, after leaving Chicago, I moved to Columbus, Ohio, for personal reasons. I had a boyfriend, a family of choice, and no other roots to help guide me on my path. In Columbus, I found myself in one arm of the academic doomsday spiral that Donoghue (2008) wrote about, the for-profit corporate university. Before

enrolling in a doctoral program at Ohio State, I worked briefly as an instructional designer charged with taking courses online at Franklin University, a local business school. This was during a period of fierce competition with the now much-diminished University of Phoenix.

To Franklin's credit, this 100-year-old trade school that started in the basement of the downtown YMCA, which was now my neighborhood gym, transitioned to the digital age more quickly than any other school in Columbus. Unfortunately, as part of this transition, Franklin replaced most of its faculty with instructional technologists and course managers charged with delivering a curriculum as widely as possible and with the least labor cost.

I had my first real taste of classroom teaching as an adjunct instructor at Franklin. I also learned that, even at a school determined to eliminate or at least transform the role of full-time faculty, faculty status was the only way I would achieve what I perceived to be the autonomy and fulfillment I found in the classroom.

My decision to enroll in the rhetoric, composition, and literacy program at Ohio State reflected my growing understanding that academia was, in fact, an industry filled with laborers and some very uneven labor conditions. Compositionists found jobs more readily than those who specialized in literary analysis, but they earned less respect in the university than their peers in literary study.

I enrolled determined to focus on what seemed most ubiquitous in higher education and most significant in understanding how our culture worked: the teaching of writing. It wasn't until the end of my career as a graduate student that I heard the term generalist. Otherwise, I might have understood sooner that introducing students to critical reading and writing skills through both composition and literature courses could become how I would shape my purpose and work in higher education. I also might have understood sooner that two-year college teaching would be the place where I could teach both composition and literature as part of a broader approach to thinking critically about literacy.

I began my graduate study in rhetoric and composition, rationalizing that teaching college writing was both a secure career path and somehow also closest to the work of the educator and teacher I wanted to be. Then I discovered literacy studies. In literacy studies, I found a critical perspective on the cultural technologies and institutions of higher education that fit my growing awareness and critique of my material conditions in that field.

Literacy studies also promised engagement with the work of teaching and learning. The young graduate student interested in critical and cultural analysis was attracted to the idea that literacy and its rhetorical deployment might be effective intervention points for purposeful cultural change through advanced education and training.

Thanks to *The Literacy Myth*, my understanding was soon reversed. I began to see how ideas about reading and writing developed and changed in response to the material arrangements of social hierarchies. Far from diminishing my interest

in teaching reading and writing, this critical perspective on the history and role of literacy in our society opened new possibilities for working with students. I began to focus on critical literacy skills that pointed beyond the expectations of the English classroom to wider cultural critique and a wider appreciation of students' personal and community experiences of literacy. Here, my graduate training began to dovetail with my future perspective on community college teaching and curriculum work.

At Ohio State, I had the opportunity to reflect on my own relationship to ideas about literacy and higher education in a graduate class exploring literacy narratives in a digital format. My literacy narrative took the form of an audio file: that was the digital part. In the narrative, I shared how growing up in a small town in Indiana, I found myself regularly compared to my English-teacher grandfather.

Everyone in my parents' generation had taken his courses. Any bookish traits on my part and any physical resemblance, of which there were many, brought a comparison with my grandfather. I now saw how those childhood memories and my family's legacy of academic achievement continued to shape me. My grandmother was the town librarian. I watched my father work his way through law school as I struggled to adapt to kindergarten.

Together, they led me to pursue one of the only narratives, or myths, I could imagine for myself: scholarship and teaching. This assignment offered a rare moment of reflection on the connections between my life path and my academic career path. I will always appreciate this invitation to bring some of my own experience and identity into the classroom. I know now that helping students see their experience and identity as resources in the classroom is a key component of literacy pedagogy. But in graduate school, I was too busy attempting to conform to the university image of the scholar and researcher to bring these elements into my own work.

There's another side to this story. While I knew from my study of the history of literacy and education that people with backgrounds like mine were more expected and, therefore, more likely to pursue academic careers, I didn't quite understand at that time that most of those people's careers would be built, promoted, and advanced within a heteronormative matrix that resisted the inclusion of my experience as a gay man.

I also didn't quite understand what it meant that on my mother's side of the family, I would be the first to pursue a college degree. Beneath the superficial narrative of the pursuit of an advanced degree lurked complicated, and personal, social factors that I had been largely free to ignore while living my best gay life in Columbus.

These factors meant that while I always looked like a bookish scholar, I never really had the kind of cache, savvy, native intelligence, or instinct to understand what it meant to be a professional academic. And I was queer at a time when narratives of pride and legitimacy were poised in complex and contradictory relation to experiences of erasure, othering, and outright discrimination and stigma.

While I didn't know what I didn't know about teaching careers in community colleges, I was also ignorant of the ways that emerging into and striving for social acceptance as a gay man had shaped the life I was able to imagine for myself. I see now that I was pursuing a narrative of achievement in academia that fit partly because it allowed me to imagine a future that was measured by the clear expectations of the classroom and career path rather than the nebulous expectations of conforming, or failing to conform, to the social institutions available to my straight peers.

I now wonder if those family friends who remarked on my bookishness and aligned me with their image of my grandfather weren't also placing a young gay kid within a narrative that would make sense for me, my family, and everyone's comfort level and experience with queerness. I certainly didn't fit my father's mold of the high school quarterback and track star.

I now see that stories about literacy and the academic life had a shape and trajectory that could carry me into adulthood at a time when other narratives of queerness could not. This difference in my literacy narrative is much more critical than I realized when I was working to build my academic career.

After securing tenure at Columbus State and while grieving the early death of my father, in therapy, I learned that gay men of my generation and earlier were often overly identified with their careers. My therapist, Shawn King, had done research in this area, and his explanation seemed reasonable: without a family role, in the absence of legalized marriage and parenthood, often denied access to protections from home community institutions like religion, work, and property ownership, gay men overidentified with the institutions that were available to them, the most important being their careers (King & Orel, 2012).

This was a difficult distinction to discern during graduate school. I'm glad I found a safe space in my career to pause and reflect on how my life options had been determined or denied by my experience in a minority group. This perspective shapes how I approach my community college work. On the one hand, I carry privileged insider access to higher education and have been welcomed warmly within academic spaces. On the other, I grew up in a culture that subtly denied not just my equality but my very right to exist within its dominant narratives. Reflecting on my academic career path within this context, I can't help but wonder what opportunities for self-fulfillment I have missed. I also can't help but notice how this has strengthened my affective attachment to community colleges committed to reducing the harm caused by discriminatory practices in our society.

My joy at "discovering" union protection against discrimination on any basis and the collegial nature of a community college nestled in the heart of the most prominent queer community in Ohio makes sense to me now. But I am also very aware of the cost, in terms of mobility and career options, of growing up without an image of myself as fully integrated into a community through other social institutions. It feels surreal to be raising these concerns after the strides in equality that took place in the first decades of the 20th century.

Even though I know the protections enjoyed by queer people are still at risk in our current environment, I feel the pressure to exclude these factors when discussing career trajectory, perhaps because mentioning them feels impolite or ungrateful. I think it is worth noting, however, that our work to recruit a more diverse faculty means acknowledging the ways that the false narratives of individual meritocracy in higher education make it more difficult for us to integrate the strengths, resources, and motivations drawn from diverse personal experiences into our institutions.

In a workshop sponsored by our department's antiracist pedagogy group, compositionist Asao Inoue spoke to our college about the subtle habits of white language that lead to supremacist thinking in higher education. Inoue drew on Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change* to explain that assuming that all students have the same access to dignity and achievement that we imagine for ourselves is just one of the ways that we hide, and therefore uphold, the structures of a society that limit access to certain spaces and certain experiences.

Inoue also points out that keeping the burdens of discrimination and representation as theoretical concepts for inquiry and denying personal narratives of injury only reinforces the supremacist trope that achievement is the result of individual effort while discrimination is something that happens to an anonymous group. Inoue asked us to acknowledge that the discomfort of speaking to these issues is an important step in dismantling the expectations of the white supremacy culture that pervades our institutions (Inoue, 2021).

Reflecting on Inoue's comments, I now see how in my own efforts to conform to an ideal academic career path I have paid into models of hyper individualism, rational self-control, contractual and transactional relationships, and standards where discomfort, either my own or my teachers' or my students', was to be avoided. These are cultural standards that contributed to my own inability to explore meaningful work for myself until I stumbled upon it in a community and student-oriented institution. Interrogating these standards both for the lived experiences of individual students and in the histories of our institutions is one way to start broadening our perspective on how and why we undertake an academic career path. So, I include the challenges of teaching within and against a supremacist culture when I describe the community college ethos and the values and experiences that drew me to this work.

It wasn't until I had worked at Columbus State for several semesters that I began to understand that I did, in fact, "fit" within this new kind of institution. The community aspect of the community college shouldn't be underestimated. I knew several people in town who had taken classes at the school. And the college actively embraced its place in Central Ohio. We were not pursuing the best out-of-state students; we were actively working to bring attention to as many students in and around Columbus as we could reach.

In the years since I began at Columbus State, the college continues to commit to meeting students where they are. We were early to offer students chosen name options in our enrollment systems. We are committed to reshaping our faculty and staff hiring practices to reflect student communities and demographics. When state dual enrollment policies reinforced disparities in our local public schools, we doubled down on increasing access for high school students in our most underserved communities. Housing support and food and clothing banks are some of the other strategies the college has brought forward to both acknowledge and support the challenges our students face.

While our efforts to provide “wraparound” services may seem inadequate next to these material barriers to learning, I am proud to say that we no longer promote a narrative where we expect students to educate and perform their way out of the stark inequalities that exist in Columbus. This institution, in short, reflects and acknowledges my own experience as a community member, and it is therefore important to me to promote community college work and the community college mission as a possibility for pursuing meaningful work in an academic life.

In looking to the future of graduate training, I think it’s important to incorporate this option and to also allow future faculty to reflect on their life paths as a whole rather than just as a career path within academia. This requires first resisting the monolithic image of an academic career that is sometimes promoted based on the lived experiences of a limited number of faculty at specific universities and in specific departments. Part of this resistance is acknowledging conditions of labor and culture at different institutions. But an equally important component is an honest reflection on the variety and diversity of life paths that subvert the expectations of who will pursue an academic career. Finally, we need to acknowledge how any number of academic career paths can contribute to building a life that feeds and supports the expansion of the values and purposes that lead so many of us to academia in the first place.

These are some of the components of community college work that deserve a place on the university research and teaching agenda. When I speak to the Modern Language Association again in January 2025, I will share how this work has helped our literature faculty develop free and accessible digital anthologies that make our course costs easier to manage. I will focus on the collaborative and collegial nature of these projects. I will emphasize how we organized the distribution of labor and opportunity to make participation accessible to faculty with varying levels of availability.

An important component will be a description of how our students’ needs and identities help shape our approach to creating materials for our classes. This will be a small presentation on a very small and local contribution made by faculty at Columbus State. But I hope that I’ll share an image and a narrative of community college work that seems valuable and accessible. This is the image I needed as I pursued my academic career path, and I’m happy to think that I might be able to share it now with others.

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Chapter 14. Notebooks of an Adjunct Professor

Zoë Brigley Thompson
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Welsh-born, PhD in literature, feminist poet, and essayist, Zoe Brigley Thompson crossed the Atlantic with her now former husband, a mathematician. She found sessional employment at his tenure-track and tenured universities. Following divorce, she is raising two sons while teaching across English and writing for the sciences at The Ohio State University. A well-published poet across Anglo-America, she is now working on a study of American Westerns across media and genre.

In her 1961 introduction to *The Golden Notebook*, Doris Lessing (1961) recommends that before beginning their education every young person should be told, “You are in the process of being indoctrinated” (p. xxi). This controversial comment from the Nobel-Prize-winning novelist encourages Philip W. Bennett (1995) to wonder if Lessing refers to a more personal “pain of growing up” in the Western education system, or, thinking in a broader context of the philosophy of education, whether her comment reflects on how that system “works to make students fit ... to be good producers and consumers” (p. 75).

Lessing (1961) expands on her provoking comment, however, by adding that those who teach and work within academia often have had to adapt themselves to a particular hierarchical system and that sometimes they end up supporting the system’s elitist requirements:

Those of you who are more robust and individual than others, will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your own judgement. Those that stay must remember always and all the time, that they are being moulded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this society. (p. xxi)

This statement praising self-education and warning of the dangers of having to fit into the university system is thought-provoking for an adjunct professor, whose role is often half in and half out of academia. My own career is characterized by work as a poet, an editor in the publishing industry, a freelance writer as well as a contingent instructor of classes in English literature, creative writing, and sexuality studies.

In this essay, I consider how adjunct faculty become adjuncts, our challenges, and the joys and felicities in the role. With reference to my own story, I organize the essay in a series of notebooks. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing (1961)

intersperses a realistic narrative of women in the 1960s (titled *Free Women*) with notebooks gathered by the novel's protagonist, Anna Wulf. The black notebook tells of her life in South Africa before arriving in London, the red explores Lessing's/Wulf's engagement with politics, the yellow is a story within a story about a failing romantic relationship, while blue tends toward dreams and imaginings. The golden notebook is the receptacle that brings these many elements together.

The text is an experiment in autofiction. Lessing herself recently was claimed as a practitioner of autofiction, especially in her tendency toward "shaping and arranging material" in fragmentary and elusive forms which evade simple autobiographical narratives (Menn & Schuh, 2022, p. 111). Effe and Lawlor (2022) explain that autofiction simply does not have "something to do with the self and fiction" but includes strategies such as "a combination of real and invented elements; onomastic correspondence between author and character or narrator; and stylistic and linguistic experimentation" (p. 1).

These strategies may be put to good use by the adjunct professor, who (as I will outline) in writing about the situation of adjuncts might be met with hostility or even jeopardize their own job, since adjuncts are often hired at the pleasure of the chair of their department without oversight or scrutiny.

This account of adjunct experience in the university is divided into notebooks: the black notebook describes obstacles to an academic career, the yellow considers the part that personal relationships play, the red comments on departmental politics, and the blue addresses the joy and felicities found in teaching and imagining as part of an adjunct teaching role. This essay is itself my golden notebook woven together by the story of an academic named Sophie, whose life in the university both converges with and differs from my own experience. In bringing these threads together, I adopt what Menn and Schuh (2022) define as "[Lessing's] autofictional way of experimenting with conventions of autobiographical and textual unity" (p. 113).

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"It's not so easy to succeed when you don't have a desk or a table to write at." Sophie's mother, Ruth, talks about her friend from school, Aled. Many of Sophie's friends do not have a table or desk to sit at when they have to do their homework. Aled tells her that he balances his books on his knee while sitting up in bed. Sophie feels a little guilty that she does have a desk to write at. Ruth made sure of that, and sometimes in the evening, they sit and read whatever Shakespeare play Ruth is teaching to her class at school, though Ruth always takes the best parts. At the age of 15, Sophie loves the work she brings home from school. She eats it up hungrily, every subject she studies, but especially literature and drama.

Sophie has not yet read Raymond Williams' (1983) theorizing of working-class culture and the power of a community, but she will, and when she does, she will recognize those long afternoons in the hazy parlor of her grandmother's house,

watching a Western, a black and white detective picture, or even French New Wave, her grandfather having educated himself through the movies.

It's part of the family history. Every week, whatever film passed through the town halls and churches converted to cinemas, the whole family was there to watch. First was the great-great grandmother, an exquisite Welsh seamstress; then the great grandparents—one an Irish immigrant and the other from rural Wales, both families came to work in the mines. Sophie's grandmother ran the candy stall at the local market and her grandfather was a miner who survived World War Two despite being a rear gunner in the AirForce. Sophie's mother, Ruth, would go on to be a teacher and writer and raise Sophie as a single mother. For all of them, books, movies, poetry—it was all a shared pleasure and a window on the world and a way to learn and better themselves.

Through one movie, Sophie's grandfather tells her what he hopes her future will be. One afternoon, they watch *Woman of the Year* (1942), starring Kathryn Hepburn and Spencer Tracey. Hepburn's Tess Harding is difficult, career-minded, driven, resilient, untamable but also loveable and comic. At the end of the movie, Tess is civilized, but Sophie's grandfather tells her that this is the kind of woman he hopes she will be—not Tess at the end, but Tess in her prime.

Sophie is not sure how she might become Tess Harding, but she senses that work and school are key, and schoolwork is an escape from the boys who follow her home from school, shouting lewd comments, or the older boy who often tries to kiss her. She doesn't tell her mother about the gang of boys who grabbed her on her way home one night from a friend's house. She is not sure if she is protecting herself or her mother, or perhaps their close-knit family unit: mother *and* daughter.

She doesn't know this at that time, but violence will continue to impinge on the edges of her education and career. At college, she works as a journal intern for a renowned professor and editor, who sometimes comments on her "summery dresses" and at other times bullies her to tears. From a fellow student, she receives disturbing emails threatening to harm her for being cold and distant. She starts a relationship with one of her housemates, with whom she will go on a vacation which ends with him punching her on the street in Istanbul. The university moves her into new accommodations, but she still has to see that ex-boyfriend in classes.

For all this, she will blame herself, and she will go on thinking that there is something wrong or unlucky about her. Yet, at every academic hurdle, she succeeds. Through her BA, her MA, and into a PhD program, all funded and completed, but at every turn, she suffers from self-doubt. Each step seems mammoth; at every achievement, she wonders if she really deserved it. Can a woman treated so often like no more than a body also be a creature of the mind? Are those thoughts worth hearing?

Later, she co-authors a book on violence against women with her best friend from graduate school, Niamh, and they are interviewed by *The Times* about the reasoning behind the book. "We need to highlight that our area of study is not personal," Niamh says. "We'll be criticized if they think we're only writing about it

because it happened to us.” Sophie agrees, and they write defensively, “To assume that the researcher of rape has suffered some sexual trauma is also a way of explaining away the importance of the research, as if it was only the result of some personal grievance or ongoing post-traumatic damage” (Gunne & Brigley Thompson, 2009, p. 40). The interview is titled “Why not choose a happier subject?”

The Black Notebook

How and why do adjuncts become adjuncts? In a recent editorial for the *Los Angeles Times* (Times Editorial Board, 2024), the editorial board argued that contingent faculty are overused and underpaid, and that this has negative consequences for the standard of education generally. The article notes that contingent faculty in the state of California take home less salary than public school teachers with fewer benefits and less job security, and they are often viewed as a cost-saving measure by institutions. The American Association of University Professors (2024) reports that 70 percent of instruction at universities is conducted by adjunct professors. Berry and Worthen (2021) describe this phenomenon as a result of the “higher ed industry” which “like the real estate industry, and its sibling, the finance industry, has found a way to suck down the wealth accumulated by the previous generation, during the 1950s and 1960s, the years post-World War II when inequality for a while actually levelled off” (p. 3).

Who *are* adjuncts now? To begin, they are overwhelmingly women; as Margaret W. Sallee (2023) puts it, disinvestment in the university, “shifting the onus to support faculty from the institution to the individual” (p. 179), has had the most impact on women, who often take adjunct positions in order to solve the two-body problem where their partner is also an academic and they are seeking jobs together.

There is also the issue of institutional racism. For example, studies by Johnson *et al.* (2024) and Sakata *et al.* (2023) document the trauma of everyday racism experienced by Black faculty and students, including the feeling of walking a tightrope, the assumption of them being “exceptional,” unconscious bias, and the pressure to represent a community. Disproportionate exposure to violence in young Black people’s lives also has an impact on future careers (Sheats *et al.*, 2018). Victoria Collins (2022), writing about her decision to strike from her adjunct position, highlights an American Federation of Teachers (2024) report which describes how “[m]ore than half of Black educators (56 percent) took out student loans—with an average initial amount of \$68,300—compared to 44 percent of white educators, who borrowed \$54,300 on average.” Financial necessity pressures such academics to take on contingent work.

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Sophie and Will are running late, and that always makes her nervous, especially when they are meeting new people, and especially physics professors. Sophie is supporting her husband, Will, who has been giving a paper at a prestigious

Chicago university. At tonight's dinner with a colleague, he is keen to make a good impression, and so they rush along the sidewalk, hoping they make it in time. Both of them are fresh out of graduate school, and Sophie is working the equivalent of a tenure-track job in a small university in the England, while Will has a postdoc in the United States. Will has taken her on a work trip to Chicago, where he is trying to find new collaborators for a paper he is writing. Will has already told her that the professor they are meeting seems a little distant, but tonight they will have a double date with him and his wife.

"His name is Joe," Will tells her. The wife, Heather, works in the same department. "I know it'll go well with you along with me," he adds. "You're my secret weapon." She hates it when he says that. Like the whole of the meeting rides on her, but she says nothing.

In fact, when they reach the restaurant, they are soon seated in a booth, and the other couple is late. When they arrive, they apologize, smile, shake hands. Their smiles are warm, and so the night begins. They talk about Evanston, farmer's markets, local bands, foodie restaurants.

"So what are you doing at the moment, Sophie? Are you working at the university as well?" asks Joe.

"I still have a job back in the UK," she says.

"Well, that must be awkward, with you two just married," says Joe.

"It is," says Sophie, and she thinks how it is harder than he can imagine. Just after they were married and just when Will was leaving for a postdoctoral position in New York state, Sophie had a late-term miscarriage, and now she is wondering if a family will ever be possible for her and Will. "I thought about becoming an adjunct, but Will tells me that adjuncts are treated really badly in the United States, so I wasn't sure if I should take that on."

This leads to a marked change. The couple isn't smiling anymore, and it strikes Sophie suddenly from the way Heather turns slightly, the way her face slumps, that Heather must be an adjunct.

"I'm so sorry," Sophie says. But Heather is getting up from her seat, and turning her anger not on Sophie or Will, but on Joe. Heather stands there for a long while staring at Joe before walking away. When she leaves, there is no smile that can mask Joe's annoyance, and he in turn glares at Sophie.

Later, Sophie apologizes for embarrassing Will. She begins to understand that in the United States, being an adjunct is far more controversial than she realized. Sophie continues to wonder about them both and how they came to be: Joe "the Professor" and Heather "the adjunct." Years later, she hears that they divorced, and she is not surprised.

The Yellow Notebook

The two-body problem is well known in academia, and while double tenure-track positions are the holy grail, it is often (although not always) women who are

offered contingent faculty positions (Wolf-Wendel *et al.*, 2003; Jacobs & Winslow, 2005; Sallee, 2023). In a report for *Inside Higher Ed*, Fulk (2019) recounts a story from her own experience of being an adjunct professor, telling how a full professor informed her husband that “long-term employment as an adjunct is the logical consequence of [a] decision to marry a fellow academic and not have a commuter marriage.” Fulk (2019) concludes, “I should, it seems, have followed my head rather than my heart if I truly desired an academic career of my own.”

Recent studies show that many women find it particularly hard to manage their roles as academics in complicated relationships to those as partners, and as mothers. In interviews with more than 31 academics and five academic partners, Margaret W. Sallee (2023) found that women in opposite-sex couples found commuter positions incompatible with their responsibilities within their families, and factors like these “drive some to leave the academy, or adopt accommodation strategies, such as pursuing adjunct positions” (p. 179).

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When Sophie tells her friend Niamh that she is leaving her position in the United Kingdom to become an adjunct in Pennsylvania and be with her husband, she is surprised that Niamh is angry. “You shouldn’t be giving up a position like that,” she says. “Why does he have to be in the US? Can’t he come to you?”

“I can’t ask him to do that when he has the position at the better university,” Sophie replies. “Besides he thinks that he might be able to get us a dual hire. And more than that I want to have a family. I already had three miscarriages. We need to be in the same place, or it might never happen for us. My body can’t take this constant back and forth.”

“Yes, I get it,” says Niamh. “But you are giving up so much.”

Sophie can’t see what Niamh is saying at that time, but she will later. Now, she is thinking about a family and how much she wants to be a mother. She is feeling afraid that she might never be a parent, and she is wondering what life might look like without children. She understands that sometimes women do not want to have children, but she has always wanted motherhood, and she is hoping that the calm and rest of being in one place will be what she needs to see a pregnancy through to full term.

She does get what she wants. She becomes a mother, after a pregnancy full of warnings and worry. She remembers that time as one of the happiest times of her life, the togetherness of mother and baby, the joy of caring for him, and watching him grow, which she had been afraid she might never experience. She finds it hard to write or fit in her research, but she has other things to think about.

Later though, she remembers what Niamh told her. She remembers when Will tells her that he doesn’t feel he can negotiate for two tenure-track positions, that the job means too much to him to risk it. She thinks back to the stellar position at Oxbridge that a colleague told her to apply for right after graduate school,

but how they agreed finally that Cambridge was too far away from Will who had a year of graduate school remaining. Then Will moved to the United States, and she had to follow him. She remembers Niamh's words when she starts teaching as an adjunct, based in an office without windows in the basement of the building while the tenure-track offices are on the top floor.

Sophie later meets with her department chair to try to negotiate an improvement in her position, perhaps even a move to the tenure track. "Well, Sophie," he says. "I have to tell you that some of the other women in the department resent you being here. They think a woman should earn her position rather than being a spousal hire. What would they think if I suggested you for the tenure track?"

"I never thought of that," says Sophie, thrown by the unexpected comment.

"I think you'll just have to stay where you are for now because you haven't really earned a tenure-track position, coming here with your husband, and you should have negotiated before you came here."

There is little that Sophie can say to this.

The Red Notebook

In her detailed account of bias against adjunct faculty, Fulk (2019) comments that "every faculty member, both adjunct and tenured ... agreed immediately that bias against adjuncts is endemic on academic campuses." She explains that this extends to tenured and tenure-track faculty who "have a tendency to regard adjuncts as deficient in some aspect of ability, ambition or work ethic" or that there is "some weakness or error on their part." These tenured faculty find it easier to blame the adjunct for not publishing more or for not managing the job market, than to face the reality that "colleges and universities are offering fewer and fewer tenure-track lines, and more and more eminently qualified graduate students are left to attempt to survive in the adjunct positions that are the only ones available" (Fulk 2019). One example is a tenured professor who told a contingent faculty member that adjuncts are "scabs" and "complicit in [their] own exploitation."

Such attitudes show a lack of awareness and understanding of the lived experience of adjuncts. Take, for example, adjunct professor at Mercy College (New York), Victoria Collins, who writes about her decision to strike in a 2022 article. She points to the high numbers of people in the global majority working in contingent positions, suggesting, "My story is not unique — it mirrors the lived conditions of Black and brown folks in academia across the country." For Collins (2022), the decision about whether to continue teaching is difficult, even though she loves working with students and knows that Black instructors encourage higher enrollments of Black students. She notes, "As a queer, Black person from the South, who is relatively cash-poor, I had to think about survival and how I was going to pay New York City rent — among the highest in the country — and afford to eat."

Adjunct faculty who protest the conditions of contingent positions are often viewed as “complainers” (Fulk, 2019). Similarly, Berry and Worthen (2021) describe the case study of an adjunct professor, John Hess, who went on to be a successful organizer, working within the California State University system. When Hess describes his first call to organize, Berry and Worthen (2021) note his hesitancy: “People who work as contingents at universities will recognize the ... sense of risk” (p. 11). They describe Hess’ dilemma as he “figures out that he is being asked to come to a meeting where other people may vote on a proposal to eliminate some of his potential rights,” but “showing up at that meeting to vote against that proposal could mark him as a problem and could cost him his job” (Berry and Worthen, 2021, p.11).

Such stories are reminiscent of Sara Ahmed’s (2021) theorizing of the complaint, when she describes how seeking redress can often be posed as “*just* complaining, *always* complaining” (p. 1). Ahmed resigned from her university professorship precisely because of the problems she sees in universities. Interviewed by the *Paris Review*, she explains her view of contingent staff as producing cutting-edge work and working powerfully and politically through conflict with power structures of higher education.

I don’t know that universities can be places where you can go to have breathing space, given the kinds of pressures academics are under, and given the extent to which these institutions rely on precarious staff. All that makes it much, much harder to fight for alternatives. At the same time, the most inventive academic work comes from those who occupy precarious positions. A lot of the really important work—in Black studies, in gender studies, in women’s studies—comes out of a battle with institutions for something. (Ahmed qtd. in Binham, 2022)

Ahmed rejects the idea of the university as a refuge. Her work on the complaint is particularly relevant in the context of contingent faculty seeking better working conditions. Ahmed (2021) writes about “‘the nonperformativity’ of institutional speech acts, policies, procedures, and commitments” (p. 28). While universities may make gestures toward better working conditions for adjunct professors, these are sometimes empty promises when it comes to economics and actions.

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After Sophie has worked as an adjunct for about a year, she is permitted to borrow the top-floor office of a professor who is on sabbatical. One of the other professors stops her in the hall, and they talk about books, the department, and their children. He leaves her with a smile and the promise that they must get their kids together for a playdate. A few weeks later, she greets him in the corridor, and he walks past her as if she were a ghost. She presumes that he must not have realized she was an adjunct, but now he knows.

Another day, she is invited to speak on a panel at the university library. On the panel with her is a professor from her department who she has never met. They make conversation and the professor asks her if she is on the tenure-track. When Sophie explains that she is an adjunct, the professor looks appalled. The conversation dries up quickly.

Since Sophie began as an adjunct, she has been attending meetings with the chair of department and other adjunct faculty to discuss the possibility of adjuncts having a vote at departmental meetings. It is the day of the departmental meeting, and the chair of department sends her an email. The adjunct representative is ill. Could Sophie fill in to present the case for adjunct faculty?

Sophie is unsure if she wants this job, but she also wants to please the chair, since the renewal of her contract is entirely their decision. She decides to go ahead.

At the meeting, she presents the case of the adjunct faculty, explaining why it would be inclusive and supportive to allow adjuncts a voice in departmental matters. When the presentation is over, the faculty begin a discussion. Many of the tenured professors are angry. Allowing adjuncts more of a say might undermine the tenure track and put their own jobs and the system in jeopardy. The comments are savage. All of the administrative staff and most of the adjunct faculty walk out in protest.

Sophie stays and when the discussion returns to her, she notes that most adjunct faculty did not choose to take these roles but did so out of necessity. Sophie doesn't realize that this comment is controversial or that somehow all the anger and bitterness about the erosion of the tenure track has suddenly turned against her. In the weeks that follow, even more people snub her in the corridor until she really is a ghost in her own department. The adjunct faculty are allowed to vote, but few of them attend departmental meetings because they feel unwelcome. Few take up their new right to vote.

The Blue Notebook

If Ahmed's (2021) theorizing about the complaint applies to adjuncts, she also outlines how students are framed as killjoys when they complain. Ahmed (2021) also observes that the tendency to blame the complainant is often part of students' experience when they are forced to take on institutional hurdles. This could be a point of solidarity between students and adjuncts. It is intriguing that students are reported to be the least biased and prejudiced group regarding contingent faculty within the university (Fulk, 2019).

E.P. Bettinger and B.T. Long (2010) find that "taking a class from an adjunct often increases the number of subsequent courses that a student takes in a given subject and may also increase the likelihood that the student majors in the subject" (p. 611). Contingent faculty have huge job satisfaction from their teaching and the mentoring of students. Angela Thomas, an adjunct at Georgetown University

Medical Center, describes seeking to inspire students from backgrounds with economic stress:

Many of my students have sought me out for mentorship, especially if they come from a marginalized group. They feel inspired by my story, which I usually share on day one or two of my class. Learning that I was a teen mom from Detroit turned healthcare executive and professor helps them have hope for reaching their career goals despite the odds. (Thomas qtd. in Cha et al., 2023)

Similarly, Crystal Lockett-Thomas, an adjunct at Collin College, describes providing “a culturally sensitive lens for students, letting them know there are other people like them who are successful” and providing “personal experiences of overcoming challenges” (qtd. Cha *et al.*, 2023). McLeskey and Obernesser (2024) argue that this kind of unpaid emotional labor is very often taken on by graduate and contingent instructors at their own expense and out of a desire to support students.

As the instructors most students encounter, certainly at the undergraduate level, adjunct professors are extremely important. The problem, however, is that many experience burnout due to unreasonable work expectations, tight deadlines, and lack of resources (Whitmore, 2023). Zhu (2021) emphasizes that positive student experiences in classes are not so much decided by whether they are taught by tenure-track or adjunct faculty, but by the working conditions of adjunct faculty, including factors such as “pecuniary and non-pecuniary compensation, involvement in institutional governance, propensity to seek outside employment, priority in course choice and scheduling, and access to teaching resources” (p. 12).

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One of Sophie’s students, Jake, wants to interview her about her research and teaching for a general education assignment. They meet on Zoom. He asks her about her field of study, and she explains that she works in creative writing and literary studies, especially narrative studies. He asks how easy or hard her students find her courses.

Sophie responds: “It’s a useful thing for students to have a strong grasp of because when we’re consuming different kinds of media, narratives are being constructed even in social media posts or advertisements. In our course, we talk about the body, how different ideas about bodies are communicated to us through books or social media or representations on TV or the magazines we read, and how those influence the narratives we create about ourselves. Do we create a narrative which is saying, *Oh, I’m insufficient* or *There’s something wrong about my body*, or *something wrong with me*? I don’t want that kind of toxicity for my students.

"We're aware that at the moment, it's election season. All kinds of narratives have been aimed at us to get us to vote a certain way. Students who have an awareness of language in all its different forms—they can recognize how that seeks to change the way we think, and that's good no matter your political affiliations.

"I often find that students are very good at analyzing the visual stuff because many of you have grown up to be quite sophisticated readers of film or representations in computer games, the kinds of media that young people embrace a lot. But sometimes, we feel the effects of a text and we're not absolutely aware of how that happened. I love getting students to analyze texts, like your film review, for example."

Jake: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "Looking at a particular scene makes you think beyond generalities about how even a one-minute scene in a film is doing so much work to influence what you feel and think. There might be emotive music playing, and perhaps you didn't even register that consciously except somewhere in your brain, you felt, *Oh, this is emotional*. To break it down and look at it carefully—that can be powerful for students."

Jake: "Oh, I feel that. I don't think I paid attention to this when I was younger, but I notice it now. It's amazing to notice all the multimodal techniques being used. But what big problems does your research and teaching explore?"

Sophie: "I'm particularly interested in looking at representations of violence, and what those scenes or those narratives are doing, what kinds of messages they're sending, and how it helps us to think about real violence in our society. So take for example the outcry around *Game of Thrones* and the scene where Sansa experiences sexual violence—there was huge outcry around that moment. Political movements of the time like #MeToo were responding to the writers of *Game of Thrones* in real time, and the controversy changed the way in which shows are made. *House of the Dragon*, the prequel of *Game of Thrones*, is far more careful in its representation of women and violence against them, and I find it very fruitful to study moments where narratives about violence in culture and fiction intersect."

Jake: "How does this link up with our course?"

Sophie: "Well, there are many ethical questions we can ask. There's a lot to think about regarding how bodies are represented. And that might include violence against bodies, whether that's physical violence or if we're thinking about the violent impact of certain toxic ideals on people's mental health. I'm also thinking about diverse perspectives. When we were looking at the Instagram accounts of writers and creators related to the body, I was quite careful to try and include all kinds of unexpected viewpoints. So we looked at the artist, Esther Calixte-Bea, and her artworks and arguments about being a body hair activist. I want my students to encounter unconventional points of view and attitudes, to be able to decipher the making of meaning and representations, and to have space to work out what they think for themselves. That is a real joy to me, and it is one of the reasons I love my work."

The Golden Notebook

The fragments I assemble here are held together in this article by the golden notebook, which connects the strands. What might we amass from these pieces? From the black notebook, we learn about lived experiences such as misogyny and racism within the educational system and environment which offer obstacles for an academic career. The yellow notebook describes the untenable position (often of women) in dealing with the two-body problem. The red notebook outlines departmental politics and prejudice against nontenured faculty, as well as the refusal to face the reality of a shrinking academic pool of tenure-track jobs. The blue notebook describes how despite experiencing difficult work conditions, precarity, bias, and contempt, adjunct professors love their work as teachers, and they give up their spare time without pay to mentor and guide their students. Finally, there is Sophie's story, as she travels a long way from her working-class-family origin in Wales to becoming a successful teacher, writer, and editor.

Being an adjunct is certainly difficult. But I also emphasize that among colleagues I have met in my career, many have been sympathetic, ready to help, and desirous to change the system, including many department chairs who improve conditions for adjuncts in universities where I have worked. I am grateful for the support I have received.

In writing this account, I tried to outline an honest, realistic portrait of adjunct life. Despite the problems faced, including now being a divorced, single mother relying on precarious work, I maintain my optimism, I love my teaching, and I enjoy working with students. I want to extend my thanks to all those who have and continue to encourage me.

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Elizabeth S. Cohen is Professor Emerita of History at York University in Toronto, Canada, where she taught in various statuses since the 1970s. She holds BA and MA degrees from Harvard University and a PhD in history from the University of Toronto. Using archival records from the criminal courts of 16th- and 17th-century Rome, her scholarship explores themes of non-elite women's agency in street life, lawsuits, and various kinds of work, including domestic service, prostitution, artisanal production, and the making of art. With co-author Thomas Cohen, she published *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome. Trials Before the Papal Magistrates* (1993, University of Toronto Press) and *Daily Life in Renaissance Italy* (2001, Greenwood; 2019, Bloomsbury). With Marlee J. Couling, she co-edited the recent essay collection, *Non-Elite Women's Networks Across the Early Modern World* (2023, Amsterdam University Press).

Thomas V. Cohen is Professor Emeritus at York University in Toronto, Canada, where he taught from 1969 to 2019. He holds a BA from the University of Michigan and a PhD from Harvard. He uses the records of a criminal court in Rome to write about the Renaissance city's everyday life. Addition to co-authored publications with Elizabeth Cohen, he wrote *Love and Death in Renaissance Italy* (2004, University of Chicago Press) and *Roman Tales* (2019, Routledge) and edited and translated the works of other scholars. He is currently co-editing a *Handbook of Microhistory* with essays by scholars from around the world. A perennial civic activist, he has sat on the board of Toronto's zoo and now campaigns for good urban planning.

Johanna Drucker is Distinguished Professor and Breslauer Professor in the Department of Information Studies Emerita at UCLA. She is internationally known for her work in the history of graphic design, typography, experimental poetry, fine art, and digital humanities. Her artist's books are widely represented in museum and library collections and were the subject of a travelling retrospective, "Druckworks: 40 years of books and projects," in 2012-2014. Recent work includes *Visualization and Interpretation* (2020, MIT Press), *Iliazd: Meta-Biography of a Modernist* (2020, Johns Hopkins University Press), and *Digital Humanities 101: An introduction to Digital Methods* (2021, Routledge). Her most recent publication, *Inventing the Alphabet* (2022, University of Chicago Press), documents the intellectual history of knowledge about the invention and spread of the alphabet.

Michael Frisch, University at Buffalo, SUNY, emeritus, and Randforce Associates/Talking Pictures, LLC, works on oral/public history projects with community organizations, museums, and filmmakers. He turned a long academic career into consulting and software development to help organizations and communities create meaningful access to their stories, photos, and oral histories, sharing these in dramatic new ways with the communities that matter to them. His books include *A Shared Authority* (1990, State University of New York Press) and *Portraits in Steel* (1993, Cornell University Press), with photographer Milton Rogovin. He served as editor of the *Oral History Review* (1986-1996), and he was president of the American Studies Association (2000-2001) and the Oral History Association (2009-2010). His work in new oral history multimedia technology has been featured in master classes and conference keynotes in Australia, China, Brazil, India, and Europe.

Harvey J. Graff is Professor Emeritus of English and History, inaugural Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies, and Academy Professor at The Ohio State University. A comparative social historian, humanities, and social science scholar, he is an international authority on comparative social and cultural history, literacy, children and youth, urban studies, interdisciplinarity, and education at all levels. He writes about a variety of contemporary and historical topics for *Times Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Against the Current*, *Columbus Free Press*, newspapers, and academic journals. He has published *Searching for Literacy* (2022, Palgrave Macmillan) and *My Life With Literacy: The Continuing*

Education of a Historian (2024, WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado), and *Reconstructing the “Uni-versity”: From the Ashes of the “Multi- and Mega-versity” to the Futures of Higher Education* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2025). President of the Social Science History Association for its 25th anniversary, he received an Honorary Doctor of Philosophy from Linköping University, Sweden, for his “contributions to knowledge,” and is a member of the American Antiquarian Society and Phi Beta Kappa.

Carolyn D. Herrington is Professor of Educational Policy and Director of the Educational Policy Center at Florida State University. Her teaching and research focus on the politics and policies of educational reform with a particular emphasis on the role of the state with respect to accountability, school finance, school choice, and comprehensive children’s services. Author of more than 50 articles, chapters, and policy reports, her work has appeared in *Educational Policy*, *Educational Finance and Policy*, *Peabody Journal of Education*, *American Journal of Education*, *Journal of Education Finance*, *International Journal of Education Reform*, and *Educational Administration Quarterly*. She served as dean of the College of Education at the University of Missouri, associate dean of the FSU College of Education, and chair of the FSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Yolanda Chávez Leyva is a Chicana/fronteriza historian and writer who was born and raised on the border. She is of Rarámuri descent and honors her grandmother Canuta Ruacho. She is the director of the Institute of History and a professor in the department of history at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has spent her life listening to and now documenting the lives of people who live on la frontera. Leyva specializes in border history, public history, and Chicana history. She is co-founder of Museo Urbano, a museum of the streets that highlights frontier history by taking it where people are—from museums to the actual streets of El Paso. She is the recipient of the National Council on Public History’s Best Public History Project Award and the American Historical Association’s Herbert Feis Award, which recognizes distinguished contributions to public history.

Paul H. Mattingly is retired Professor of History, New York University. He attended St. Anselm’s Priory, now Abbey School, and then Georgetown University (Honors), followed by the University of Wisconsin where he earned his MA and PhD. He then had a career of 40 years teaching public history and American social history at New York University. In addition to chairing the department of cultural foundation, he directed the program in public history from 1981–2006. Among other books, he published *Suburban Landscapes* (2001, John Hopkins University Press), *American Academic Cultures* (2017, University of Chicago Press), and *An American Art Colony* (2019, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press). He was born in 1941 in Washington, DC and completed a genealogy of his family contextualized with colonial Maryland and Washington, DC as sites. His historical work is distinctly interdisciplinary, ranging far beyond existing disciplinary categories. His autobiography, *Until Now*, and travel books—*Tolle et Lege* Publishers—will be published at a future date.

Jefferson Pooley is a lecturer at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, and directs mediastudies.press, a nonprofit open access publisher in communication and media studies. He writes frequently on open access and related issues in scholarly communications. He is co-founder and co-lead of MediArXiv, the open archive for the media studies field, and co-edits a pair of journals, *History of Social Science* and *History of Media Studies*. His research interests center on the history of media research within the context of the social sciences, with a special focus on the early Cold War behavioral sciences.

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Michael L. Wilson is Associate Professor of History and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas, where he has taught since 1992. He is an historian of modern Europe and holds degrees from Hampshire College and Cornell University. He has published on Henry James, the World's Fair of 1900, Parisian bohemia, and modern French masculinity.

Changing Paths of Academic Lives

“Academic paths,” or the variety of careers that constitute in full or in part higher education, are for understandable reasons commonly misunderstood. Most often, this misunderstanding is rooted in conceptions of careers into and out of different kinds of teaching positions. Those conceptions are shaped, in part, by the disappearance of tenure-track and full-time professorships and the related increase in contingent and sessional appointments, by time-limited perspectives based on experiences in a single discipline or sub-discipline, and by challenges faced by women and two-career households. *Changing Paths of Academic Lives* offers, through a series of personal accounts of those who developed alternative or non-traditional academic careers over the past six decades, a compelling and historically-based perspective on what it means to pursue an academic career.

Harvey J. Graff is Professor Emeritus of English and History, inaugural Ohio Eminent Scholar in Literacy Studies, and Academy Professor at The Ohio State University. A comparative social historian, humanities, and social science scholar, he is an international authority on comparative social and cultural history, literacy, children and youth, urban studies, interdisciplinarity, and education at all levels. He writes about a variety of contemporary and historical topics for *Times Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Against the Current*, *Columbus Free Press*, newspapers, and academic journals. He has published many books, most recently *Searching for Literacy* (2022, Palgrave Macmillan), *My Life With Literacy: The Continuing Education of a Historian* (2024, The WAC Clearinghouse and University Press of Colorado), and *Reconstructing the “Uni-versity”: From the Ashes of the “Mega- and Multi-versity” to the Futures of Higher Education* (2025, Bloomsbury Academic).

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