

Kim McCarthy

Okay. It is June 20, 2001. This is an interview with Kim McCarthy, Ph.D. and Professor of Psychology and Creativity Studies in the Department of Liberal Education.

And if we could just start with the date that you came here—that you came and what the circumstances that brought you to Columbia?

I was a doctoral student at the University of Oregon. And I had actually decided to stay in Oregon and pursue research. My doctorate officially was in Research and Measurement in Educational Psychology. And I saw an add—I of course got a subscription to “The Chronicle of Higher Ed.” looking through all the jobs saying, “Am I going to get a job?” And I saw this one that said, “Looking for Psychology Generalist with a commitment to the arts and experience in women’s studies.” And I said, “if I don’t apply for this job I can never complain about anything ever again in my life because I have—I have a Bachelors and a Masters in Music Composition.” My primary area is in—my doctrine, like I said was research and measurement and my secondary area was women’s studies. So this is probably the only job where I would be in the top one percent of the candidates who were qualified to apply.

So I applied and I figured well it will be good interview experience, but I didn’t think I would get it. And so I came here and I got the job and that was in 1989. I started in the fall of ’89. I hadn’t finished—I had planned on finishing my dissertation, but the day that I moved to Chicago my disser-

tation committee, one member added another analysis so I had half of my dissertation to finish when I got here at Columbia. I taught three classes I’ve never taught before and I worked my butt off.

Then when I got here I found out that there were some other reasons why I was hired than—than either my skill and fascinating intellect and abilities. Was it that there were politics inside the department and there were a battle between—it was—you might say it was split 50/50. And there—actually there were two things, there was a lawsuit going on with a predecessor. I don’t know if she was a psychologist or what, but who had not finished her dissertation and was suing the school. I guess saying that they should have retained her and they fired her.

And the other thing, was that some of the faculty were trying to get rid of another professor who was here. And they were—the gossip was that they were going to use me to oust this person. And I heard that during the interviews and I asked everybody about it because I wanted to make sure that that wasn’t the case especially being a feminist I wasn’t—I was not going to be used to replace some other woman over some other gender stuff, you know so. And I was assured by everybody and by her and I asked her about it. I asked people about it point blank. And we were in complete different areas so I thought, well this will be okay.

So I came here to Columbia and why did I want to come? I—my fear was when I got my—when I got my doctorate, that I would be teaching in some little dinky town.

And I’m not—I don’t like small towns. So I know a lot of people who like small towns, but I’m not one of them. I don’t want to be picked up by any UFO’s so I figured, let’s live in a large town. So I thought, Chicago oh lots of art, lots of culture. And I’d lived in Eugene, which is spectacularly beautiful.

Pacific Northwest is just unbelievably gorgeous. And I’d lived there for 8 years, but it was really kind of monotone and homogenous. I mean you had a lot of hippies and you had a lot of green and then you had a lot of rednecks. So there wasn’t much diversity there. So I was ready to leave and it was by a large body of water. I grew up in California by the ocean so I really liked that. So I was really excited. And I also wanted to—I also wanted to work with nontraditional students. That was my—my dissertation was in creativity and that was my mission. Since I—I can’t even find the roots of when I had



that as a mission to work in the helping professions. So I was very excited to come here. It just seemed like the perfect place you know. Some of my friends said, "Well why are you going there? You know, nobody's ever heard of it. You know, I mean you might as well work at Eugene College." And I didn't care. I didn't care.

Did you do any kind of research or looking Columbia up or trying to find out about it or did you—?

I didn't even know to do any of that, see because I didn't know—I didn't know that people got catalogs and then read up about the place they were going to interview at. So it's—I mean all of this just happened to be a perfect match. I mean it was—because I had no idea, I'd only been on one other interview. And I mean now you know, if I had to do it now I would know all kinds of things to do and all kinds of things to ask. Like I would have asked for release time to finish my dissertation. I would have said, "No I'm not going to teach three brand new courses." But I just was naive—I didn't know. So that's how I got Columbia.

And how much—you said you taught three new classes. Were those classes, were the titles given to you or were you able to—?

No. They gave them to me. They assigned them to me. I taught an Intro to Psych Course, an Art, Technology and Science course and Women In Art, Literature and Music course. I've done a lot of interdisciplinary work.

Okay. We'll come back to that and I want to come back to the courses then that you've developed. Which those obviously

didn't fit in that category, but maybe you talked about your personal mission of waiting to work with nontraditional students, which is—
Right because I was one of them.

Maybe speak to that for a moment.
Okay.

You know how you identified that and then talk about the mission of the college as you see it or you have come to see it. And you know has your personal mission evolved or changed or has stayed the same?

Yeah I guess I didn't even know what a mission of a college was. I mean that's really naive, but I just didn't pay a lot of attention to that kind of stuff. So Les, in my many phone calls with him that were very, very long he must have told me what the mission was and so that—that really was enticing for me. The arts and the culture and plus just those three areas, because I had expertise in those three areas. And when I was growing up I was you know, the regular white kid, you know doing the good grades, you know doing the Blue Bird, Campfire Girls you know, all the go out and help people kind of things you know.

And I got bussed when I was in about fifth grade—we got bussed to another side of town. And so while we had had black kids coming to our school, this was the first time that we—anybody from our school had been bussed. So I got to see another part of the town, another type of house. I also—I had realized this way before. This wasn't like a big light bulb experience because I'd seen this kind of stuff before, when I was little. My mom was a psychiatric nurse, so I

went out to Camareo State Hospital with her and this was before they had behavior mod and people were just dressed up in white and walking around drugged. So that really had an impact on me.

I'm surprised I remember that you know, but and then going through locked wards and the big doors banging. And I had a great aunt who was deaf and my grandmother talked for the deaf. So I'd learned sign language, you know. Helen Keller movie was a big—had a really big impact on me in my career because I should make a note of that, because that tells—that's guided me a lot.

When I was—so I was the regular kid you know the regular middle—upper-middle class kid. My father was a lawyer, so I thought we were rich. Since then, I now realize we weren't rich, but at that time I thought we were. We were a lot better off than a lot of them—a lot of my friends that was for sure—a lot better off. And I could not go to their house. My mother would not let me go to their house, but they could come to my house. And their reactions, when they saw my house, were unbelievable. They just couldn't get over it.

Are these your friends in your neighborhood or are these friends from school (inaudible)?

From other—from—kids that had been integrated into my school and then I had them come over to play after school. And then I—when it came turn for my—to go over to their house to play my mother wouldn't let me go. So I snuck out and went anyway. And there was a part of town called Colonia and you weren't supposed to go there. And they were—so they were from parts

of town that were known to be the bad parts, you know. So I went over to part of them. I didn't go all the way in them, but I went in there anyway and looked around you know. And I just got—I just got a feeling that things were not fair in the world, you know things were not fair. So I nevertheless still had you know a nice—I had a nice childhood, you know. There was weird things that happened, but I mean overall I think I had it a lot nicer than my sisters did. I know I did.

My mom died when I was in the thir—and when I was thirteen and in seventh grade. And she had an aneurysm and was in another state. So when they brought her back, it was kind of like a twilight zone thing because I hadn't seen her for a week and then boom, she's in the hospital and then boom she'd dead and now we're having a funeral. So my life changed completely and totally after that—everything changed. And even now, when I think of that year that—that is the worst memory I have even now and I'm 46. That's still the worst memory I have. If I dwell on it, I can get really bad anxiety. And I can't remember a whole lot of the details, but that was the worst feeling year and then it—it continued to be bad. My dad has been married seven times, so you can see that I've had—I've had a lot of experiences.

Six since your mother—all after your mother's death?

Yeah, yeah he got married once—I think it was a year after my mom died and had it annulled within a month. And then a year later he got married. That was for three years. Anyway that's a long—that's a different story, but my grades—before then I'd been on a cheerleader. I'd been on all these clubs you know like they have in junior

high and high school right and all this stuff and was a part of the in group, you know. And then my grades dropped. For some reason I thought that I could—that I had to change friends now. I had to go and play with the—the friends who had divorced families. And my—you know what? My mother wouldn't let me play with people with kids who had divorced—who were from divorced families. And I couldn't play with kids who lived in apartments. Isn't that weird? Well that you know, this was the early sixties—yeah the early sixties. And so I some how thought, that I had to hang out with this tougher crowd and that's exactly what I did.

Did you—and you started to see yourself as part of the group that your mother before wouldn't let you be a part of because you're not—you didn't have her?

Because now, now—now we were—now she was dead, so basically it was like a divorce. So we were the damaged family, so we had to go with the damaged kids. And I don't know how I got that, it's just—it's really weird how I got that. And then, so I had—was trying drugs when my mom was alive. One of the girl's father was a doctor and she got a bunch of stuff, you know. So we'd take at school and this was in the seventh grade. And then after that, it was just a free for all. My dad was gone a lot and my grades dropped. I was taking drugs.

I remember, I guess this isn't funny, but I can remember buying—buying, they called them reds and they came in three—three's—three little pills and they were wrapped up in foil. And we would buy those the first period—my friend Carolyn. And they would—we

called it hitting us, in that first period. And I can remember that it was algebra and I got a D minus and the teacher wrote that, that was a gift. Well no wonder, because I was always fucked up in his class, you know. And I tipped over the desk a couple of times and all kinds of stuff. So I would just be out of it for the rest of the day.

And we used to sneak out and you know, go sneak out after dark or after our parents—either my dad was gone—either I was babysitting—I babysat a lot—or my father would get a babysitter, so I could go out. And then I would just go out and do whatever I wanted and he was out doing his own thing. So we would go to these parties and just get hammered and take all kinds—if anybody gave me a pill, I would take it—any kind of pill. And I think—I think now, my God what was I thinking? But nobody asked me in high school, “Why did my grades drop?”

Your dad even.

My dad did, yeah I got in trouble from the school. They—well, to tell you about old fashioned. I had an English teacher and I was belligerent—I was tough and I wasn't going to let anybody boss me around or tell me what to do and he was—I thought he was going over the line. And so then he chased me around the room and at that time we—they didn't have panty hose and so I wore a girdle that had lace down at the bottom—God how funny—and wearing hose and that was such a big deal. But he chased me around the room, threw me up on this sink thing, lifted up my dress and spanked me. So I ran out of the room and went up—I don't—I can't remember where I went, but anyway the—the principle called

up my dad. And I went home and my dad said, that they had said, that I was belligerent, rebellious, arrogant, aggressive, all these words that I didn't know what they meant. And I thought what the hell? Irresponsible, you know all these really multi-syllable words and I was trying to tell him what had happened, you know, this pervert lifted up my dress. And so I can identify with them because nobody ever asked, not one time. So I think the schools are—hopefully the schools are more sensitive. A lot of them are now to—if there's a big change.

When—then when, and I think this is important. When did things start to settle down and when did you develop your own sense of—of ambition or direction that ultimately I mean at least educationally led to you, you know pursuing an advanced degree? I mean were there—

Well, I always knew I was going to go to college. That was expected. See because I came—I was growing up with the advantaged kids. We weren't in a private school, but we all thought we were the cream of the crop, you know we were in the best class—blah, blah, blah. And so I thought I was going to have a life like Gidget on TV you know or that kind of thing, you know.

Where college was social life.

Yes, yes. But also that I was going—see my mother was a nurse though, so she was working. So I had—I had a model. My father was a lawyer and so I was aware that we had things. And my grandparents weren't that rich so I had—and my mother's family was—was not rich they were farmers and some of my cousins were very poor, I mean compared what—how we lived. So

I'd seen that, but my life was really chaotic after that. I imagine, if my mother had lived I'd probably would have gone the sorority route you know, and gotten married, had the three kids, have the big fancy house; you know that whole thing. And then maybe, by now I'd be divorced and then wondering you know, I've got to go to college now you know, why didn't I do that before or—maybe the feminist movement would have gotten me beforehand? But I guess that—that's what was in the movies, so that's what I thought I was going to do.

Actually when my father married the second time it was—my father has a real knack for picking out—well I should change this now. Because I just got off the phone with him now and I am sure that he is nuts, but he had a real knack for picking out women, who were—had a lot of problems. And so the second one that he had, had a lot of problems. She would give us the silent treatment a lot of times. And I mean for days she wouldn't talk to anybody. And I realized that something was really wrong and I started reading all these psychology books because I could tell that she was not normal. And also because she had three kids, my father had three kids so there were six kids. I was the oldest, so I babysat a lot.

And I remember one time, there was a big feud between my youngest sister and her oldest daughter. And I'd been babysitting and her oldest daughter had been giving me a big hassle so I told on her, right. She took a hairbrush and beat the shit out of her, till finally I was yelling at my dad. I said, "Stop her! Stop her! Stop her!" You know so my dad finally got on her and

stopped her and I thought, I'll never, ever tell on these kids again. So I started reading all these psychology books. And the one that I thought really helped, was this one on transactional analysis you know, but it—it worked you know. Because I could see that she was—she'd had—she'd had an abusive relationship growing up.

And then they got divorced—no, I moved out and got a job because I had said after my mother died, "When I get a car and I graduate from high school I'm out of here." So I was that smart, that I didn't quit high school you know, which I had—the gang that I ran around with—a lot of them did. And I'd been in juvenile hall and stuff like that so I could have gone that route you know, but for some reason I knew to finish high school. And then I moved out and I—well my father played the piano and he plays it really, really well. And he can hear anything on the radio, and immediately play it and he plays in a jazz style. And one of my favorite memories, is laying under the table with the dog—under the piano with the dog, under the sounding board because we had a baby grand piano and just laying there and it was just—so I grew up really loving music too.

So I went to junior college for awhile, studied there—both things. I was always torn between music and psychology—music and psychology. And I felt really guilty to pursue the arts, thought it was really selfish. So I went through that whole thing you know, right. And then how did I leave that college? I looked up music therapy and I went to University of the Pacific. And when I—you had to audition; it was a conservatory, you

had to audition. And so when I auditioned, I had played this twentieth century piece by Schoenberg and it was my favorite thing—I Bach—Beethoven, forget—I didn't really care about them, but which is not good when you're going to go—when you in a conservatory. But they had—my teacher had said, “Well why don't you also major in piano performance?” And that did a really, really—that did a lot for my self esteem because my other music teacher had said it was too late, forget it, you're never going to get anywhere you started too late.

And so I went into the music—you got a bachelors with music and you took the music therapy courses and then you would take an internship. So I was also taking, Theory and Harmony. That's how they taught it then. And my teacher in Theory said to me, why don't I become a major in music composition? So I said, “Sure, I would love it.” You know, that's what I really love to do is make up stuff. So I did that. I was a double major all the way, until the very last semester of my senior year and then I dropped out of the last course you needed for music therapy. It was a behavioral program and I didn't realize that there were other views of psychology besides behaviorism. And I thought music therapy was behaviorism and I knew I didn't want to do that. So I dropped out of that and then my plan was, I was going to go and get a job as a social worker.

So I must have—must thank my father's second wife, who he is now married to for the second time. But he says that he's going to write a play, “Number Three Second Time Around”. But so, I think that with my mom and my grandmother and these different wives and realizing

that my dad had problems and just all the things that I went through to survive. Because I was sure we were going to be abandoned any day and I just lived that whole way, all the way, till my last sister was eighteen.

I had been—I got out of school and I had—but my plan was, was I was going to be a social worker. Get an MSW and then I was going to go back and study to get my masters in music, because I really wanted it just for myself. I really, really wanted it. And I went up for an audition at University of Oregon, for a scholarship and I met Morton Feldman, who later on tried to pick me up. But anyway, he was one person I had studied and he was really—he's really well known and famous. So I was just excited beyond belief and I got a scholarship, so that I went there instead of going to University of San Diego for social work.

So then I got my masters there in Composition and then I realized that I didn't think I had the—the stamina to be a therapist. I didn't think that I could separate myself—I just don't think I have the—I might be able to do it now, but then I really couldn't have done it. I just had had so much crap happen in my own life I don't think I could have gotten a grip on it in order to be a therapist at that age. So I looked into music business, realized that wasn't going to cut it. And I had been taking psychology courses again because I liked them. And the music school is on a hill and then just literally you know, maybe fifty yards was the Counseling and Ed. Psyche building. And again, there was another teacher there that I really liked and I had been an assistant—research assistant at the Center for

the Study of Women in Society, which has something like a \$3 billion endowment, or something they have.

So I was around—through my masters program—I was around a lot of women, who were very active and successful in the fields that they wanted to be in and so it was really encouraging. But even then I can remember thinking, I was asking one of them for advice and I said, “Well you know I'm thinking about getting a second degree in social work. You know, what do you think?” She says, “Well why bother with that? Why not just get a Ph.D.?” And I'd never thought of myself as getting a Ph.D. And it's like a photographic memory, looking through those windows that had those little wires in them you know? And then just staring out the window and thinking, well what the hell, I don't have a boyfriend, I might as well get a Ph.D.

And that's what I thought so—and this guy just thought I was great. And this whole Ed. Psyche program, the—all the teachers there just thought I was so—I don't know why they thought. I didn't deserve it, but they thought because I came from music that I was just so neat and they all took me under their wing. And it was so different from music, which was so competitive and so cut throat. And so when I was in there, I could have gone into to doing research in gender differences. And it was on my dissertation then—point when I made my dissertation, that I had also hooked up with some faculty who were doing work in creativity. So I had—I'd been lucky to have a lot of mentors. I've been really lucky with that. So I studied with about six different people that were all a group. I mean we met outside

of class and I did really well in all those creativity things you know. And so I did my dissertation on that and didn't know what I was going to do. Thought I was going to do research, so. Did that answer your question?

Yeah. I—a couple things that I just want to go back to that struck me when one individual told you, you were too late to start a career in music—you had started too late. And then the other person comes along and says, why don't you, you know go into performance (inaudible). And I think of Columbia when I think of that kind of message or the contrast where society is telling a lot of students, you need you know to have your portfolio. You need to have all this stuff before you're seventeen or eighteen. I mean people suggested all these things, that I was either told or I assumed were—were out of my reach—out of my reach.

And I think that's true for a lot of Columbia students outside of Columbia. Exactly.

And then they come here. Yes. Because traditional education didn't work. I mean my grades all through high school were D's. I mean in the last two years and then we moved and then they put me—they took me out of college prep classes and put me in the dumb-dumb classes. So I literally did nothing. I did—had no homework, got all A's. So it was fine with me you know, because I just sat and talked and did stuff. And then I went to junior college and got—smoked pot all day and went to class. And I was more for social life so I got a bunch of W's you know and got good grades in music

classes, but nothing else. The psychology or the sociology classes I took I got A's in, but everything else was just you know skimming by. And then—then when I went down to—then when I was in a conservatory, I was in the school full-time then it was—with a structured program, it was a whole different matter.

Maybe now it's a good time to talk about then your, if you have a philosophy of education or your own personal mission beyond the—the—your desire to work with nontraditional students that you've had all along. How has your educational experience—what has it taught you and how does that influence you as a teacher here at Columbia?

Well having grown up and see how—and again, I—I cannot find the beginning of this. So it was when I was really little, but realizing that people—that life wasn't fair and people didn't—didn't deserve it. They had bad things happen to them and they didn't deserve it. And then when I started to study the arts I looked at again, musicians and I was struck by how some of them could still make these fantastic beautiful things, even though they had such bad things happen to them in their lives. And that was the—that was the start of it as I thought it, must be creativity. So I kind of moved from the arts after focusing in on creativity. That's what kept them alive. And then also—

And then when my mother had died my life became so uncertain, that uncertainty is the focus of my career now. That uncertainty, is a part of life and you have two ways to respond to it. You know and I got this from (*inaudible*) and I just

loved this one book. And he says you can you know, either fall back in apathy or you can try to work with it. So I think that creativity is the answer and so that's what all my research is focused on. I think that creativity shows the value of uncertainty and is a proactive positive way of dealing with things that happen that are really hard, that hurt a lot.

Can you expand a bit on that relationship between tragedy or hardship or I would imagine suffering and creativity? I mean is one necessary for the other or does—does that—

My students ask me that all the time. “Do you have to suffer in order to be creative?” And I think—

Or have bad things happened to you or—

I think no, no because I think that I just happen to notice it because of the extremes. There was a lot of people who had just wonderful lives you know, patrons and all kinds of stuff and just lived this glorious life you know. But of course, it was the ones that had lives that were really hard—I guess it's probably because I could relate more to them because I—my life was—I found it really hard. And I thought, well that must be where they get their strengths.

Once they find—if they find it or someone introduces to them—the creativity?

Or they just—creativity is just—well there's—there's one theory that says—there's a lot of different theories on creativity and I don't believe in any—just any one. I think they're all really valuable to use because they can explain different aspects. It's like you've got this microphone here and you can look

at it from all these different places around the you know, a circumference of it and that's the kind of research that I try to do. And I figure as we get—I really believe in quantum physics in that, that might lead us to some way to understanding indeterminacy and uncertainty and how to do research to get a better picture of how creativity works. I think that uncertainty is always going to be there, like Heisenberg says. And I don't think that you have to have suffering, but again it's how—it's how—see creativity is like a whole philosophical—it's like life is a journey, it's not a destination. So can you get through life without ever feeling pain? And I think no. I think that even happy things can have a bitter edge to it.

And so this is how I'm trying to teach myself. I don't like to think of the idea that there's pure evil. I find it more comforting to think of the idea that it's people who have—it's evil comes from bad behavior of people. And people lose touch with who they are and then when that happens then they can go haywire and do all kinds of crazy things. Like the Jeffrey Dahmer kind of stuff, or that they have some genetic it introduces some toxin you know, or were raised really bad and that they are insane.

So and also because when I was in the—when I was a junior in high school I became a Holy Roller. And I carried around a bible with me and I prayed in classes. And I remember when I got—I had gotten saved and I came home and I told my dad. I said, "Dad I've seen the devil. I'm a new person now." And he was married to wife number three who he's married to

now. And I was seventeen, I think, and I said, "I've seen the Devil. I'm going to be different now you know. I'm going to—I'm going to be a good person now Dad I promise." And he was in like a lazy boy recliner you know, when they have those things. And he had his feet up and he flipped that thing up and came flying up and he goes, "God dammit you're on those drugs. When I moved all the way out of LA and you found that Goddamn LSD already, aren't you? I'm taking you right down to the jail." "No dad, no dad really. I—I just found Jesus dad." "No you didn't. I swear to God I don't how you did it so fast!" So but anyway so that lasted about a year and then I went back to smoking pot every day and the partying. But I forgot what I was talking about.

Well do you—then another issue that is very current is that our educational systems drum creativity out of children and youth and—

I know because here's—here's why else I'm interested in creativity. I like it because it's fun. It's a—it's a—everybody likes to talk about creativity—almost everybody I've ever met. It's a positive way to do it and I figure if I—I can't come up with a solution for a lot of these problems then these kids can't. And I see a very fine line between therapy and education. Therapy, is a one on one. Education, you have a lot of people. And so if I can give hope to some—some students like the hope that I've gotten. Like I said, I've been very lucky to have mentors. And just to—just to plant the seen in them that they can do a lot of things. The other—the other thing is how I really got this was when I was doing a practicum in music therapy and I was placed in the juvenile hall and we were work-

ing with girls in the girls' lock up ward. And we were learning how to do group therapy and we each had little groups and I had the group with the tough girls, which I thought oh how interesting.

How appropriate.

I know—really. And so they were the ones that dictated what everybody else—I mean there must have been thirty, but they were the ones who monitored what everybody else was going to say. And I can't remember anything what happened, but I was comfortable with them. So I guess it was a good match. And then we did one where—we had one exercise where we had to lead the entire group in one big exercise. So I had them, it really wasn't music therapy, but anyway I put on some music and I had them draw what they thought they'd be doing tomorrow. And then I put on a different song and had them draw what they thought they'd be doing a year from now. And then, I did it again and I had them draw what they thought they'd be doing ten years from now.

And so we'd been there for, I think a couple of months and nobody had said to me—again because I was wanting to get into the mental health counseling issues. Nobody had talked about anything of substance and I felt like this was why I got out of it, because I felt like I'm not—either I'm going to teach music, or I'm going to do therapy. I'm not going to go in there and do happy time stuff you know. So and that's what I felt the others were doing.

But anyway this—we went around in a circle and this one girl said, that this—that her picture was of her sitting at a bar drunk and she

was going to be an alcoholic. And it was the first time anybody said anything that was connected to them and it was just silence in the room. And so I started to respond to her and my teacher was worried about—didn't trust me so she got in and changed it—changed the topic. So then we got back onto happy talk—"let's go do something else." And but that—that made a big impact on me—that made a really big impact on me because I—I could relate with—I could see myself as that—as them. And I thought, God if somebody would just tell them no, it doesn't have to be like that. You know it may seem like it and it may seem like it's hopeless, but it's not.

And I've had mentors—just people come right out of the blue. I don't know how I've gotten them. Sometimes I—this is what I tell the students now. Go out—if you like somebody and you like their work and stuff go up and ask them if they'll be your mentor? I've cold called people out of the phone book. And not everybody's going to be nice and not everybody's going to be you know, good at it, but I said it worked for me. So and it can be really helpful and really help you build your confidence. And I said and you just think of it as that you get to work in the field that you love. And—and the higher up you go it isn't necessarily successful or money, it's that you get access to the tools so that you can really use your imagination in the way that you want to. And so the better equipment you get the better environment you can get in with people who have the same interests then, that just stimulates your creativity.

So if you—you know, if you—you look—if you look for what you love then it might work out. It worked

out for me. I got a job that I liked and thank God I didn't end up working in some little dinky town teaching classes of 400 of Intro to Psyche for \$17,000 a year, which was my fear. So it turned out great for me and I tell them that I had no idea where I was going—how was I going to fit in because I wasn't going to fit in, in traditional psyche programs. If I had gone to them I wouldn't have been able to do a lot of this work. I might be now if I'd been teaching you know, done the standard stuff until now, then I could go off and do my own thing. But Columbia had a lot of—and I could teach in the Humanities so I didn't have to give up music completely. I taught a twentieth century music.

So let's talk a little bit about some of the—your favorite or what your—the innovations that you've brought to your teaching and to the course offerings here. What have been kind of the things that you've authored?

The—definitely the courses that have creativity in the title at a school like this, it's a natural. Everybody wants to take it; it's a perfect fit. So of course it's a sell out. It's as if you were going to teach—if you were going to go to a special phys. ed. school and teach history of sports. It would be an automatic sell, you know? So that was the first course that I made and I was told to wait until I could make that. There was a lot of politics in the department. There was a lot of fighting—two camps. And so I was torn in the middle wanting—you know, being hit to rat—rat on this group, being hit to rat on this group. You know and here I didn't have my—I hadn't passed my, they called it probationary period then.

So I didn't know what the hell to do and I was just dying because these were big strong people and they were just unrelentless. And the chair was also doing that to me too, so I got nastier as time went on.

And just—I started to do—I came here wanting to do—set up a—my career goals were to develop some kind of program that would integrate the arts with the helping professions. Not just psychology, but all—any of the sociological organizational grass root stuff, educational—just any—anything that they might come up to think up with, but that the arts were a really good medium to work through. One, because as Waslow says it, "Creativity is valuable because it makes us better people because we are the product." It's the process that gives us the insight into ourselves and makes us more honest, better able to solve problems. It just—there's a lot of things, but just to save time it just makes us better people. And then we're also more efficient that way at helping improve inequity in society.

So I wanted to set up programs and develop a program that would do this and it—and I wanted to model it after how I'd been taught with a lot of practicums. You know, like we called them practicums in psychology. They were field placements. And I did it as an undergraduate, so I don't see why they can't do it here. So I had the same thing you know, and I had a chair who should have been born in the 1800's. So talking about that was just completely useless. And he was always on my back—he was nasty. He's—I won't say any of the other stuff, but anyway he was just nasty.

So I had started and at that time we also had coordinators. We had three coordinators and they also had a lot of power in the department. And humanities, I was free in, social sciences, I was not. And it took awhile before I could introduce a Psychology of Creativity class, but finally I was able to do it. And it went over really well and then I—then I introduced I think it was—I think the sequence was Creative People, Creative Products. And then the next course I introduced was I collaborated with Brian Shaw from Theater and we were going to do field—field placements again. And it was called, Arts in Community Development. And again, it was looking at how you use the arts in the grass roots level and just with regular ground zero and then students would be placed in these different places. And it was a really hard course because to do field work is it really takes a lot of work. It's just—even with the two of us it was just a ton of work.

And then I—we kind of—Brian's wife got pregnant with twins, so we didn't teach it then for one semester. Because he had to—you know they had to struggle with that—twins is a lot. And so then I had also—let's see—then I went down to, I forget the exact sequence of this, but I went down to—well actually Suzanne Cohen Lange had a—of Interdisciplinary Arts had a guest teacher. Guest artist teacher name John Malpede who was the Director of the Los Angeles LAPD—Los Angeles Poverty Department and it was a theater company based in Skid Row Los Angeles.

And so he taught us their creative process and I was really fascinated with it. It thought it was—had a lot of hope for them. If you have a room full of people, like just around this table, if you have a group of people is it possible for everybody to—and you're doing something—is it possible for everybody to get their needs met? Or does it always boil down to that there's two people that get that—what they want and everybody else ends up giving—right? And then as long as that shifts around that's okay, but often times it doesn't shift around. So I saw in his process, a way that that might be possible. That everybody could get something meaningful out of it. It really is a unique process. Well I think he's just a real genius for having done this. And also, in Skid Row you had the really transient population so you don't memorize scripts and stuff like that.

So he ran a three week workshop and so I had talked to him about doing some research down there—going down there and doing this. And he said, "Okay fine." So I went down there and I did research. I had a equal group of residents from Skid Row and then I had the people who were in this workshop, who all had permanent residences some place else. And then I looked at their—you know I did a—I looked at affect, I looked at—I did interviews with them. I did—I looked at the—to see if I tested hypomania. There's a relationship between bipolar and creativity and just a bunch of other things you know, their (*inaudible*) of control—that kind of stuff. And then that also, again there I was you know with thinking I could be down here. I could be down there; it's not that far. And I remember one night staying in—in—the—my room.

We lived in an SRO and it was scary down there. And there—there had been—it was—the SRO—there weren't many women down there, it's mostly men, single room occupancy. And Skid Row's about a mile radius and now Los Angeles Police don't—do not care what happens as long as it stays in Skid Row. So everything and anything goes on all the time. The police drive through; they have the helicopters with the big lights—doesn't make any difference at all. People smoking crack, doing all kinds of shit. Well there'd been a fight in the SRO with two—with two men and they have guards all over the place inside the SRO's. So they immediately make everybody go to their room and then they do this and then the police are there and then they pick this guy up and they take him—take him away.

And so I had run back to my room when I saw that this was happening. And I remember sitting back there thinking, well I have an American Express card and the jewelry district's two blocks away and then there's a hotel across the street from the library. You know, I could probably run out the back door and make it to the hotel. And wondering you know, should I leave now or should I wait? Should I leave now or should I wait? And we had bars on our windows and then there was like a parking lot and then there was a gate here. So that—that—you—nobody could enter the parking lot and then there was a street. And there was always people out there all the time—always crack,—

Pipes—yeah.

Lighters flicking so it looked like fireflies. It was really pretty you know, but it was weird you know,

so many people are out there. Little shaker lady was out there. She had a milk jug full of coins and was just always shaking it. She was a midget—a small person and I don't know what, but she was always doped up, always—. So this was part of my research to look into uncertainty and how do people deal with it and how do—that this theater company was doing some—was doing some good because some people got control over their lives. Not everybody and it was a tough group you know. I don't know if I could stay down there and work all the time, but I'd also had health problems.

So I came back from that, we started this field placement thing. I was really inspired by that. And I then got another small grant to work with a group in Uptown called Scrap Metal Soul. And this was—Uptown is the most diverse neighborhood in the United States. I don't know if you knew that or not, but it is.

I didn't know it was in the United States. I know it was in the city and—

And it's in the United States.

Wow.

I did all this urban studies and research and because of the immigrants and all that stuff. So this theater group does use scripts, but they take it—they do oral history. They take people's stories and then they meld them together and they make plays out of it with—with sets and lights—they're much more structured. It's a family oriented thing so you have kids, you have—you know from babies to 88 year olds. So I did one small research project with them.

And then I got a small grant from them to do a larger research project and with Ron Boyd who was also going to make a video and then we were going to make together an educational video that the students could use too. I mean I had a great plan, that the students could use then to go out and do workshops on community development in high schools. And that they could use part of the video and then we would continue this line of work through building those classes. When I did this research with Uptown I had—I had a group of students, I think there was ten. There was ten one semester and eight in another semester and we did a participatory collaborative research and they—they worked right along with me you know.

I mean so everything was just open and they did research and unfortunately that same fall I got a—I developed an autoimmune disorder, so I was really sick. So I—I got through that year. I don't know how, but I had mono and I started menopause and then I had this autoimmune disorder so I was just—got really sick. And here it was my first chance to do something really great and somebody had given me some money. You know I thought this—this was—I was going to take off from here and I was just—everything was going to happen. And the student--

What—do you know what year this was?

This was in 1997. And I worked with the students for the whole year and we did collect all the data. I took them to a conference the fall of '97, an Eco Community Conference, that is of all the community psychology programs

and some other programs in the Chicago area. There were some—Kansas State came, Michigan—schools from—colleges from Michigan and from Wisconsin and from Ohio and all the ones from here. And grad students ran it, but there was a lot of faculty there. And they all gave reports of their research so I took a group of students there the fall of '97 so they could see what it was like. And they were really interested in—because I had gone a year before. I can't remember if I—I did give a presentation.

I gave presentation on what I wanted to do in this research and I got a really great reception. And they were really interested because it was a proactive way to address community issues and problems.

And they were—a lot of them, like the current—what the undergraduates were doing then, they were going around to a Latino community and talking with the business owners to make their stores wheelchair accessible. And they were getting a lot of resistance so they told stories about how that, oh no then the drug dealers are going to want to come inside and they're going to set up shop here you know. Because they've been shot, so now they run things from their wheelchair, blah, blah, blah, but just all kinds of stories. And then the graduate students were talking about riding around in that bus that goes around and I'd forgotten that. They work with the homeless—the name is gone.

Knights of Min—not the ministry, but Street Ministry or something.

Yes, yes, yes, and then another one with the AIDS and stuff so. In '98 then I took eight students, one part time faculty and three community people and we all went there from

this Scrap Metal Soul and theater group in Uptown and we went there, and we gave presentations on this research project. So I thought that was just really fantastic. And then for this group—for the Eco Community Conferences to talk about community, but yet nobody had ever brought any community people. That's what's—I just thought that was really great that we had done this. And then—

Okay. So and so this—was this kind of the pinnacle of this project? When you brought—so you had—

When I took them to this—this and here I was working. By this time I had just learned to go around the Chair and I just worked with the administration because it was just—it was futile. And by then I had been getting a lot of—let's see I started this interdisciplinary form on creativity where you'd have four faculty from different departments discuss some issue on creativity and that went over really well. I did a lot of things with students and a lot of like women in the arts celebration things. And I had been praised in public by the president, the vice president, the academic dean for my work in community outreach.

So I felt like I was really you know, making my own career here. And then—and then I was just sick. That—this autoimmune disorder it just really took the wind out of me. And since then we've changed—we have a new dean—a new chair, who's really wonderful, who I really like. And the school is doing a restructuring, I'm sure a lot of people are talking about that. So

its—its really gone through some changes and some of them are really good. The—the negative side for me is that the people who knew me and knew my work are—have either left, or they're no longer in the positions and I'm no longer in a position to keep up with that kind of a work. So that's—that's where I am right now, with trying to figure out where am I going to fit. And also the chair has an interest in cultural studies and so that's where the department are. We have new faculty. A lot of them are really interested in this, so all the energy is focused on that. It's just too much to work on more than one major.

So right now I'm kind of just sitting on hold to see what—what's going to happen. My health got really bad last of October and I guess with autoimmune disorders you can go through active periods and remission periods. And I think what I must have had, was an active period. I think now I'm going back into remission, but now it—and it's so ironic about having to deal with uncertainty, because you can't predict when these things are going to happen. So I have to figure out now, how can I be responsible within this—within my—my health and how can I do the things that I want to do, which requires support from the college and from the department. And maybe that will happen in the future, but now our chair is leaving to become dean. So again, things are up in the air. So this isn't—career wise, this isn't the best time in my life. Because all the things I plan to do, I mean I was going really great you know and now it's kind of like that plug is pulled out of the drain and I have to figure out what to do.

Would—a couple of things because we are coming down and I want to make sure that we get to this, the future—in your future. You know what—what has kept you and keeps you at Columbia? I mean, do you envision staying here and—and revamping or redefining what you're going to do or reintroducing it? It sounds like that's a bit of it, that you might have to reintroduce it to the new powers that be.

Well I can't—I can't do field work anymore. I don't know, maybe I'll change my mind in the future, but after this last fall, I'm afraid to get involved in that. Because I'm afraid that I would have to pull out and I don't want—I don't want to be irresponsible about anything. But we have—we have another new faculty in—person in here who has the same interests—wants to do the same kind of things. So maybe between the two of us—we've talked about doing a minor. There's a possibility we might be able to have this type of work as a—

