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Interview with Margaret Sullivan, 2001

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M a r g a r e t S u l l i v a n

Okay, today is June 6, 2001. This is an interview with Margaret Sullivan, Chair of the Marketing Communications Department here at Columbia College.

And if we could start—if you could tell us when did you come to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you here?

Well I came to the part-time faculty in 1978, and my first visit to the school was as a guest speaker in a copy writing course. At that time, there was no Marketing Communication Department. There wasn't even its predecessor, the Advertising Department yet. There was a tiny handful of classes in the Journalism Department chaired by Daryl Feldmeier, who was a considerable leader in my mind. And I was a night reference librarian, trying to put my portfolio together in advertising as a writer. And I had a client who invited me to come to the class and talk about you know, a young person's experience with freelancing and that was successful. And then the next class he was called out of town and asked me to take it over as a guest speaker, because it went well with my first. And I got evaluated by somebody in the department, who thought I was the regular teacher and I got really good evaluations. So the next fall they offered me a class and I was out of my mind, I was so excited. So it was a nice time. It was an accident I guess—

Had you considered teaching before? I mean was it literally something that—

It was in my blood, but I had thought I would, you know, have a career in advertising for 20 years

and then maybe—you know, I didn't think it was going to happen so fast.

So that was in '78. So you started teaching here in '79?

No, '78 was when I started.

And did you start in the Journalism Department?

Uh-hmm.

Okay. Could you maybe explain that evolution of your course work—leaving journalism into advertising into the marketing communications and how that evolved?

Well you know what? It's like—it's like everything at Columbia at that time—more now—I mean, more then than ever, it was about the people and there was no chair and we were so small. And if you look at other colleges and the way they teach advertising and public relations it's all—there's either a journalism school model, or a business school model. And we came out of kind of a Journalism school model, but as soon as—during the time I was teaching, I remember Mike Alexandroff was courting John Tarini, who was the first chair in the department.

And was that advertising?
Uh-hmm.

Okay.

And when John came to the college—that's T-a-r-i-n-i—

Okay.

I was the first person he hired as a full timer and there were just the two of us in the department, that he called the Advertising

Department. And he had come from the world of market research. He was a Clinical Psychologist who had done research at Lee King and Partners Advertising. He had a big background. He was a very charismatic guy—very ambitious. And he founded the Advertising Department and we were still kind of always paired. We shared a secretary/receptionist. We shared offices together. My first office—I can't remember who I shared it with, but was journalism faculty member. And Daryl and John would go to lunch all the time and there was—we were kind of a unit. And Daryl's health fell apart and when John was on his own, he more or less decided to distribute the curriculum in three areas—marketing, advertising and public relations. And then we became the Marketing Communication Department. And I want to say that happened in, something like, '88—1987-88. But while we were the Advertising Department it was very intimate; I



was the only full-time faculty member for years. And he brought others; Mort Kaplan came to be the Head of Public Relations. He's someone you might want to interview—Mort Kaplan. He's got a lot of college history in his head. He's been here a very long time.

I always forward these to Louis to see you know—

Yeah I think they would be. He—I think Louis would agree. And then we were—then Dr. Tarini was—how to say this? It more became the reality, that the individual program has created those programs and moved them into development. Mine was Advertising. Mort's was Public Relations and John hired an old colleague of his, Phil Kaplan to be a Program Dead for Marketing. Then we had this major with three concentrations, and frankly that was a model for the school. I know the Film Department had concentrations either then or shortly thereafter, but that was kind of a model for the school.

Can you describe, if your concentration or area that you focused on was advertising, what you brought to it? If you know, this was really something that you've been you know, since the beginning part of the ground level so it's maturation.

Yeah well I—yeah I proposed every course in the curriculum for the first 15 years.

You know what—what were your priorities? What were your goals? And then maybe if they've changed or how have they changed in you know the 20 plus years here? That is a big question.

That is a really big question. At the time, I came to the college and at

the time I was trying to break into that business, it was spontaneous. There were a lot of underdog types. I felt—and this is probably the most important thing I can say, because I think these questions are so good and they really help my frame my thinking. I think that the Columbia mission and the mission of advertising were very similar. That advertising—and this is the most important thing I have to say—to me, represented democratized access to an artist life. That there's no way I could imagine, in the context of—you know, you've got to think of the seventies back drop. Feminism was fresh. The struggles of women in the work place were poignant. Graduating from school at a time like that, was demoralizing for people my age. We would hope to get hired as receptionists and move up and there was one business where you could do that, it was the advertising business. If there was any hope and chance of promotion, of being understood and appreciated for having the best idea.

And I liked academic life; I became a librarian in a college because I was torn about the academic life versus business life. And an academic life, the way I understood it outside of Columbia, that it was a grind, it was political, it was confining. And I thought that what advertising had going for it, was that you could walk out of high school and get a job if you were smart and if you were articulate and if you were clever. And it was a good business for a painter. It was a good business for a poet. It was a good business for a writer and there weren't any in the seventies. There just plain weren't any. And standards were shifting, so

that graduate education was imperative if you wanted to do anything and you know advertising wasn't like that yet. It is now, but it wasn't like that then.

It was a real ambigü—like ambigüous in a good way. A morpious kind of world, where you get—you got rewarded for having a lot of political reference points. You got rewarded for caring about the broader politic and economy and you could live an artist's life and make a living. And I thought that Columbia was really part of that story, in helping artists make a living. So it was such a natural coming together. My career got off to a brilliant start because of my interest in those two worlds and they had a lot in common. And my department at the time was very free flowing and exciting. And every semester, we had new courses and new ways of getting along. It was a very—it got off to a great start. I feel really lucky about how all that happened because all my friends—peers were struggling incredibly just to catch a break and delaying their careers by years and years before they could break into their fields. And I—that didn't happen to me. The rest of my life has been really rotten, but this part was just so effortless. And it made so much sense and I felt so at home right away and understood.

Did you know about Columbia before you were invited to be a guest lecturer?

That's a good question.

And how did you learn about it? And what—what were you impressions?

My first impression of Columbia and it was a strong one, was about when I moved to Midwest, I was

15 years old. And I had come from a high school in South Philadelphia and to New Trier, which was wow—what a transition and you really—if you didn’t know those people in kindergarten then forget it, you know. So I had kind of an isolated other—like I was already a little weird anyway, but to go into a new high school gave me a sense of other. And I was just trying to get acclimated to the local press. I had just moved here and there was an event at Columbia, a discussion. And a speaker—and I—I actually don’t remember who it was now, somebody who had been at the Democratic Convention, which I really wanted to hear about. And came down on the El by myself for the first time—the first time I’d taken public transportation in Chicago to go to this lecture. And I—we were all in the 600 Building and I was just thrilled. I thought it was the most exciting time.

Was this as a high school student?

I was a high school kid. And I came to a lecture here once; I told my parents I wanted to go here. And there was no way they were going to support it, I was going to go to a Catholic college, or not at all. So, but I—I just—I immediately felt at home.

And you had—had you identified at that stage the artistic or creative side or desires?

Oh sure.

And you saw that here as well?

Oh absolutely. And mainly I saw it as a political center even. Yeah I—I love the combination of powers. I don’t see it that way anymore, sadly, but I did see it that way then. And I liked Chicago because Columbia was here. I did not want to come to the Midwest. I really

didn’t want to live here. I didn’t like the weather. I didn’t like the— the skyline. I didn’t like—I didn’t think you could go anywhere from here, you know. You can’t take a drive and see any mountains and that just drove me nuts. I thought I was going to be miserable and I thought I could—well I could like this place. I remember thinking, after being here.

Two questions and I’m just curious about. At New Treer did you—did they have the alternative high school at that stage? And did you participate in that or the—the centers?

No. They had—they had the experiment in free form education, which I understand led up to (*inaudible*).

And where did you end up going to College?

Loyola University, but I came to Columbia (*inaudible*).

So you maintain an interest in or a familiarity with this school.

I didn’t know anyone here. It’s funny, I didn’t know a soul. And when I got invited to be a guest by somebody I freelanced for, I was out of my mind. Oh I know Columbia—you know, I was really excited. But I didn’t have a connect—it was a total coincidence that this guy he said, “Will I teach a class?”

Can you—and you know, you gave a great definition of—of the mission and—and the common mission that you felt advertising or marketing communications had with the college. Could you just expand on that a bit about you know the mission of the school

in—in your mind? What it has been and has it changed?

I thought—I think the mission of the school and was coincident with advertising is that we attract students with nontraditional excellence. If we had admission standards they’d probably be set low and we would get mediocre students. But the total lapses of admission standards I believe, has drawn us a group of people who have excellence that either is not traditional, or doesn’t get understood by the people around them for any number of reasons. The same way most artists have difficulty being understood or translating their talents into a traditional school system. And I think the advertising business is really like that. The people I know who are— well, here’s a typical problem in my department, and I think this will explain this more clearly.

The very best, and I mean the super stars that we can get to come and teach here, inevitably don’t have degrees. And they get real embarrassed right when we’re going to hire them, “Well we don’t have a degree—I don’t have a degree.” I hear this all the time from people, who are—had nothing for an education, became fabulously wealthy, are brilliant, hilarious, caring. But it’s a nontraditional business and you know I felt that there’s some common pathway about rewarding creativity, style and part originality. I felt that we had that in common in advertising in Columbia. We have that in common and advertising draws some of the sharpest people. Also, some of the least prepared people obviously and some of the worst obviously, but it also draws that sharp culturally representative type,

you know. Somebody who really gets it, but has that other—that sort of outsiders viewpoint. I mean that's what—that's why people look to commercial art—to commercials for the state of the art and what's going on in films, what's going on in television. Commercials are—are more contemporary than TV shows.

I love that nontraditional excellence—recognizing nontraditional excellence in the students or the potential students. Have the students changed in the years that you have been here and how?

Well there are two ways I want to talk about that. One is generally. When I started teaching, I was the youngest one in the class and that was true for—for years. We attracted older students. We offered far more night classes than day classes. And I loved those people, they—they were raw and they had guts. You know they—they were trying to improve their lives and they saw even one course as a way to do it. Now—and I think this is generational and I think it's sociological and I think it has to do with what Gordon Alcott, the personality psychologist in the twenties, suggested that adolescence was going to expand in our culture. And you know, when—when my parents were teenagers, it's because they were teenagers or they were sixteen and they were goofy for a year and then they bought houses and joined the army, you know. And they looked like they were forty, when they graduated from high school.

And now not only does adolescence start earlier, when—because eight year old girls look like, I don't

think—they look very mature to me. And adolescence extends itself further, so now by the time—I mean you want to define adulthood as being the point at which you're self sufficient, self supporting, independent, you've identified your life goals, you're capable of a permanent relationship, you're capable of becoming a parent. You're talking about somebody who's in their thirties. And so I think that I know its—its too generalized to really talk about in the Columbia experience, but I've seen it happen over 22 years. I've seen that world completely change because the kids I knew in the seventies wanted something—lived their lives in a very embodied way. Just the way they sat in the chairs was different. Had a much stronger sense of interaction with me, called me Margaret. Nobody would do that now ever. No one's called me Margaret. And it could be the gray hair, but I also think it's the culture.

They want to call you—

Professor Sullivan you know, which I don't insist on, but it's the way they are. They're still psychologically adolescents, when they come here. And they come here with an understanding, that they're going to be here for four years and have an experience. You know whereas in the seventies—I mean, in the very beginning I met students who came here because they thought that in 15 weeks, they could put together a book and get a job. And they were right and they did and they could and that's the way the program was. And so the sociology of having to extend that and give people ready-made lives and I'm all over what we do for students now. But it also hits at getting them ready made lives and that identity

that goes with that, but didn't used to be the case. So in a general sense there's a, there are two completely different worlds now. And in a more careful scrutiny I'm always saying this, I see little cuts of folks come through. And it shifts every three or four years as if there's a sense of a class like a freshman, a senior kind of hunk of people who share some aspects. And I've taken notes on it over the years, just because I'm interested. And I remember when all the 708's came here and I remember when—

And that's referring to the prefix of suburban phone—okay.

And I—I remember you couldn't park, because all those kids had cars. Well they never had cars in the seventies and early eighties. And then they all had cars. Now they all have SUV's and the—I—so that—and that's been—been more gradual. And I don't mean to suggest that there's an escalating sense of wealth. I mean to say, that there are points of which they're different—there a group. And it all inevitably refers to the broader culture—inevitably I can explain it. When the—when the PC culture was really blanketing everything, I saw the students change and get nervous to talk about things that you wanted to talk about. And there was an inhibition and a prohibition, that was palpable in the classroom. And I remember when it happened; I remember what it felt like. It was kind of lonely. A lot of the fun went away you know. It got quiet and so my original impression of Columbia as a political art spot, has unfortunately is disintegrated almost entirely, but I think that's going to change for the better.

Okay. Let's come back—make sure we come back to that.
Okay.

I want to make sure we talk about or I ask you about your position as Head of the College Council and when that—when that came about and what was going on with the College Council at that time and—and your take on that.

Well that's important. I've been Chair of the College Council, for two years. Let me say, that I wasn't thrilled about the way it got structured to begin with. And now I find myself in the spot of wanting to save it, which is ironic. Because I had thought of it as something that John Duff wanted to bring to the colleges, as an accomplishment of his own and I felt that it came from a perspective that wasn't relevant to our culture then. I would have preferred the faculty said it. So I didn't sit on the Council the first year. And my participation was—well it wasn't begrudged, it was just—it wasn't my cup of tea. And so I insidiously became infused, because it's our government's structure and we need to participate in it. I watched it fall apart this year in the absence of leadership and that started to happen last year.

I have also—I also think that having brought tenure to the college manipulated governance, in ways that people haven't really taken stock of yet. I feel that people might sit on the Council because it's the stroke in their tenure file. I'm afraid that I felt that way a lot. That it's not seen as an opportunity to participate vigorously in college and the future of the college. And I believe that the structure of the

Council and the way things came to and especially last year, where proposals were shoved in people's faces a day before they had to be voted on. By laws were broken all the time. People became demoralized around them, if not beforehand, and felt that that was a rubber stamp exercise.

Kim McCarthy and I did a survey of the membership in January, to discover their feelings about it and that really emerged. We're just sitting here to the listen to people who already decided what they're going to do; they have no interest in input. And I also think the organization of it never really clicked the way it should have. If it was going to be a body where faculty, administration, staff, and the students really worked together, that didn't happen yet. And maybe it will, but I sense that everyone—and I learned this is in the survey—that many people feel isolated as they sit there. The students, for example, the couple who sit, don't seem to represent the student body at Columbia College to me at all. They're talking personally—I don't think we've been properly oriented into own system of government—governance and I don't think we've owned it. I'm often encouraged to just go ahead and cancel meetings that don't have a sufficient agenda. Whereas I feel that, that's when you have a meeting. That's when you really want to talk. And I—I worry about what's going to happen next.

Can you—not compare, but maybe contrast—what's the role of faculty organization at Columbia College? And as an office—I mean—

Well I think it got diminished in the structure of the council, but I—again I think that's a group that could make a big comeback. I think faculty matters ought to be decided by faculty. Most of the business of the Council is about—is academic. And I think our new president, while he hasn't come off as clearly, I think he probably thinks that way too. My sense, is that he'd like to see a staff organization, a faculty organization and a body of administrators, who would recommend discretely. They'd get together and create their own recommendations instead of watering everything down the way we do. And then there could be an over group that would hear all, but from their points of view. And I don't think that happens in the council, the way it's set up. Although I plan to dedicate the summer to study other models coming up. As I exit the chair, I'd like to be able to leave a recommendation for the future. Because that chairing that meant—the council meant a lot to me. I learned a lot about dynamics—how important they are.

Can you just expand a little bit though on that, you know you start out being very skeptical about—and now you're trying to save it. You mean save it and maybe restructure it to save it to serve other—

Uh-hmm, uh-hmm to not just give up on it and let restructuring absorb it. I don't think that's a very good idea at all. I think that would be terrible. So now I find myself wanting to protect it.

Because in the restructuring what those voices, even though they're being watered down, the faculty's and the administration's voice or staff would be lost?

I worry about that.

Okay. We might come back to that when we talk about the future or where Columbia's at in the future.

Okay.

I also want to ask you about the summer camp program and the origins and again, the goals of that.

Oh good. That's a good Columbia story too because I had the idea in, I want to say the middle of '93, around March. I had an idea—maybe January—that we should have a camp. And I meant let's get a group together, form a committee, discuss it—study it for a year or two, make a plan and open a camp maybe in '95—'96. Well no, you know I brought the idea to Bert, the typical Columbia way at the time. Well let's do it—let's start the program this summer. You know, you—you start it this summer. And that's how it happened, it happened that fast. It was ridiculous. I mean it was absolutely ridiculous. I had no staff. I had no resources. I didn't know whether or not I had a budget—I found out later. I had never supervised a children's program before. I never created curriculum for a children's program. We had one lunch where Sheldon and Suzanne Cohan—maybe Al Parker, I think he was there—helped me figure out how I was going to structure it, but then I was on my own. And there was a receptionist in Bert's office, who was being replaced. She was a temp worker and they were trying to find a real job for her. So I got her for the summer and we became

best friends in this thing. Just thrown into the belly of the beast, no idea whether or not we were going to even open our doors. No sense of how to train people.

What was the idea?

The idea was to create—I was reading stories in—in the press that the most vulnerable age group for crime and victimization was that after school, or grades 4-8. You know, before they can really get engaged in external projects and really live independent lives. That, that group of kids, too old for baby-sitting and too young to be left alone were in a lot of trouble. And I thought—and I should say the truth, I had a kid that age and I was worried about him. And I could have stayed home all summer with him, but I would have rather been engaged in something else with him. And I would have rather seen him in a program that made sense to me. All the other camps were, if he didn't want to play soccer and your parents weren't real rich you know, there's nothing you can do.

So I wanted to create a project that was for working parents, who had kids who were too young to be left alone and too old to sit with a babysitter all day. And—and then the eco—the economics of that are crippling for a lot of families. And I kind of thought that the South Loop neighborhood might pop and that we might get some people living down there eventually and that there'd be an audience for this project, you know.

And what would be the focus of the—or what was the focus of the camp? What is the focus of the camp?

They—there are three. We do a visual arts project, a media arts project and performing arts project.

And it's a beginners program. It's not about being the best belly dancer in your school and then coming to a camp to do it all summer. It's—its kind of a free for all in that sense and it's meant to be introductory for everyone. The most important thing I want to say about it, and I don't mean to talk out of sequence, but we run it so that 70 percent of the kids pay, 30 percent don't. So that I can send a letter to our teachers in the Chicago Public Schools and tell them, "I have a seed for somebody, you think might need it?" And parents tell me again and again their kids in private schools, although they claim to be culturally diverse, camp is where they experience cultural diversity in their lives. And I feel really proud about that.

But we have—we take over that gallery at 11th Street and have our own exhibit. And we do a documentary in the media studies and we do a musical in performing arts. The kids go to three classes a day, which is a model that took me about two years to figure out. In the first year, I had them choose a major. So you—so you majored in visual or media or performing, but the media kids were always jealous of the visual arts kids. They wanted to be painting a canvas and then the kids who were painting wanted to be in the musical. And then I thought, "well what—how would they know, they're eight. You know, why should they know?"

And that's when we started this rotation of three classes. I only hire Columbia people. So this time our media teacher, is an MFA candidate in film. And our visual arts teacher is a former camper, former Councilor and you know, has studied in the college. And the

assistant director, which is a very elaborate—I mean this program is going to be 10 years old next year. It's really grown. We used to have to advertise. We haven't advertised in years and it fills. It's gone from 35 kids to 90, but two times so really 180 because we do two sections. What else can I tell you about—

All right. So summer camp program—

What I liked about it and I think what the connection to the college that you're probably looking for, is that a faculty member could come in and just start a business in here. I mean you've got to love that about this school, if nothing else. You got to love the support for ingenuity. I mean, I wasn't big on having to do it by myself and I wasn't big on starting it like it was an emergency. I would have liked a little bit of foresight, but on the other side what's been really magical about it is that we did just dive in and it did just work and I did figure it out on my feet and I got the right people. You know when you have a psychologist come in and talk about developmentology and we have you know a CPR trainer. We get the expertise that we really needed to make it a camp and make it safe and wholesome.

And it's just such—I hope you visit, it during the summer. It's going to open on Monday. It's just a nation—it's become a nation. And it's a connection of college, to community, that I know we would have never had. You know Maura Taps daughters come to my camp and—and trustees. I mean this was the way I learned how to function in the college. Because as a faculty member, I never filled out a check request. I didn't know how to get

pens. I didn't know how to get a permit to go across the street and use the park. I had no idea how students got hired. I had no idea just how to get a phone line put in. And it really was a sort of a—it was just what I needed at that point in my development in the school; was something where I had to learn everything from the beginning. And I don't know how other faculty—know who all the people on the fifth floor are. I mean, I knew all the people in purchasing because I had to have pagers for emergencies. And I'd know people in accounting because we had to order tee shirts. And I'd know people—that's how I got to know the school, was having that project because it was a microcosm of the place, if you think about it.

Now it's almost 10 years old and you said you know, then we could do this. Do you think—has anything changed or that would prevent you from walking in tomorrow, say the summer camp never existed and saying, I've got this idea?

No.

So you think that's still a possibility—that entrepreneurship?

No.

Or it couldn't be done today?

I don't think it could be done today the way—no.

Could you explain why or do you feel like talking about some of those? Because that is you know, what we—I'm hearing—

I don't think it's a terrible thing for me to be saying about this school, that that couldn't happen. And I think there are a lot of reasons, just logistic. Our size alone made it possible for me to do that by myself. And that would be—I can't

imagine the logistics of having one person do that anymore. And I think we've become, in the PC culture we've become afraid of litigation and we become afraid of—all those kids have fallen down in my camp, I supposed they could have sued us. One of our Councilors got seriously hurt falling from a ladder putting up a show. I supposed she could have sued us, but now she didn't. Of course, nobody would do that in that environment it's whole—it's nice and happy. But I think we've become so—not just us, the culture in generally, us in particular, have become nervous to take risks like that. Now that camp is a risk. We could have looked horrible. If you want to talk about the bad press we could have gotten. I mean that could have been a blood bath. Nobody would go there. I mean, it's too scary. So I'm glad those developments happened when they happened.

And you mentioned Bert Gall. Is there one person that exists now that could say, yeah go ahead and do it or no? I mean, is there—is there a bureaucracy that—

No. No that would be—again, it's—it's our structure and our size that would discourage that kind of risk taking. Now I'm—and I—I am not making a judgment about whether that's good or bad, it's just a fact. And Bert's attention to things like that, is unprecedented. The amount of time he was willing to spend on that is not to be replaced. You don't get that kind of mentoring. You don't get that kind of support in today's world. People—it's a work load issue. People just take on too much. I

immersed myself in that thing for summer, after summer, after summer and it was in my head all year-long, until we got a formula that—I mean it's got a life of it's own at this point. And it's effectively running itself because there's enough continuity. And now I've got a population of Councilors who went to the camp.

I went to the library a couple months ago and there was a young woman behind the counter, who was a student. And I knew I knew her, but I couldn't figure out how and I couldn't figure out why I knew what she looked like when she was like, 9. And I realized that she had—it was what I wanted was for people to get drawn to this community, who wouldn't otherwise get drawn to it and want to come in it. She went to the High School Institute and then she came to the college and now she was working in the library. Of course I felt real old, but I also thought that that was what I had in mind. Was to build a community that way, from childhood to—to college life. Now I can't remember—but the kind of immersion it took to start it. I couldn't get that kind of time with anyone on the administration, right now. I couldn't get a half hour weekly appointment. I'm not complaining it's—I'm not making a judgment about it, it's a reality of our size. But Bert would work on this five and six hours at a crack. He'd help me with every—

You met—when you say a half hour weekly appointments, that was Bert and that was and until the thing got off the ground. Is that who you met with then? He gave it a lot of time. And he gave it—and he thought of things I

would have never thought of and spared me a lot of what would have been really difficult situations. And had the—and there were all kinds of little—you know, when we're—when you're small and there's not a lot of structure—I learned this when I went to a camp conference of people who direct camps. And I realized, I'm never going to go to one of those again. There are all these workshops on how to handle problems I would never have. Their biggest problems about insurance and paying lawyers. Well you know, Bert would find a way to get the college lawyer to—you know, I'm going to meet with them anyway and I'll just them to get you a parents' authorization form. That's something that should have cost thirty or forty thousand bucks and it just got skated in. You know so bang there's like the—the problem that stops all these camps from even getting to step one, we just took care of because that was that kind of community at the time. It was intimate and people just wanted to see a camp happen. People just think it was good and—and help out.

And I remember the second day we—after we opened, it was pouring rain. It was like now outside. It was just mortifying, and I had all these kids, and I was a nervous wreck and really scared. I was just shocked that even the—any of the staff showed up. I was so scared that it was going to be a blood bath. And we're supposed to play outside for lunch and it was raining and I kind of had some ideas, but I didn't know how it was going to happen. And Keith DeWeese, worked in the library at the time. I didn't know him. I'd never met him, but he knew a camp was starting and he noticed it was raining and he got “The Hobbit” out of the

library and walked in the rain down to 11th Street and introduced himself and said, “I understand you're running this project. I thought you might need a movie because it's raining.” And so God, that happened all the time.

That's a great story.

That happened constantly—things like that. And people just diving in to help for—about anything, for any reason. And sending me you know, paper overstock they have and it kind of had that—that kind of little one-room schoolhouse feeling actually. It was so charming, but that was a function a culture that's shifted considerably.

And yet the camp remains. And you said you know it's going stay. What—could you just spend a couple minutes maybe on the kids or maybe a favorite story or something—a difference it's made or—?

The camp is really still—it—it maintains its identity. It's funny, I bet you could find a lot of examples of people and departments and structures, that have stayed the same despite all the changes around them. I bet you could find a lot of examples of that. I think my department is like that, by the way. I think we're the same. We're just as cranked and excited and open as ever. So maybe I'm wrong about saying that that couldn't happen now. Maybe that's not true. I see what the problems would be and maybe I've just been here too long and maybe I've been in the chair's job too long. So that I—I tend to just ease the problems right away. I mean maybe that's not the most valid thing I said so far.

A story about camp? I know that the—well last summer when we were going to have our first musical in performing arts. I got complaints from the parents, that there's no way their kids were going to participate in that, they were too shy and we'd better think of an alternative curricular option for them. And there's—and then four weeks later we go to the performance and the parents were dancing their way out of the theater. And moms were coming up to me and saying, "I never saw my kid dance. He's like twelve and there's no way he was ever going to dance." So there's sort of this anything goes. That's why I haven't tried to turn it into an interlock in, or a—it'd be a great place for a junior jazz ensemble. I don't want kids who have any prior experience, or if they do I want them to just start all over again. The excitement of it is that you'd never do it except that everybody else is trying it together. And that's so sweet. You know, we start in the morning with singing warm-ups. And I—I'd get lectures from the parents on the first day, "My kid will not be singing. Don't—he's too shy, we don't do that. He was never—his teacher can't get him to do that." And then I just say, "Okay well okay." You know and I know it's not—I know camp is different.

There's a—it's—well we're always calling it Camp Nation. Our tee-shirts said Camp Nation for a while because there's—you're in a different world. And I think that's one of the things about Columbia that people fall in love with. I'm sure it's true in a lot of schools and institutions, but there's that—that feeling of being outside of everything and in your own little system that you created.

So that feeling or sometimes in a classroom, which is so common when there's a kind of almost structure or pecking order or a pyramid. You know and the person that's the most outgoing, or that has the most experience, or that—that really doesn't happen.

They really mix it up.

They—yeah and so that every—I mean the student, as a whole, identify with the whole. Not the—

Uh-hmm and you think—you'll get these notes from parents who'll say, "Group with my child with his best friend from this school." And we'll do it because they ask us to, but inevitably they don't wind up hanging out. I mean, they wind up hanging out with people they never expect to. I mean my younger son went to camp last year and I just loved his—he has a summer birthday. I loved his birthday party. There were kids you'd never see from his school. It was so interesting. They came from so many—they were so far flung, you know. Kids don't get a chance to interact outside of their little worlds. You know they're carpooled to the school, to the lessons and they don't get that sense of a you know, a friend in Hyde Park and a friend in Rogers Park. They don't get to do that. So I think that's a nice thing.

My daughter's two I hope she can go when she's eight finally.

Oh you got—you're going to have to hurry her up. Maybe she's precocious and she can go at seven or something.

I want to make sure I ask you about your position as Chair. How long have you been Chair? And are you still teaching and what

have been the adjustments or struggles you've had as Chair?

You've already mentioned a couple or maybe how it's changed your perspective a little bit. If you could elaborate on that a bit.

My chair struggles are probably out of a casebook, or a generic article in a woman's magazine about gender problems.

Okay. Please speak to that.

My chair problems are totally genderized—all of them. And I don't genderize things as a nature, but there's no way that John Tarini had to take the kind of treatment, that I've taken. I'm not complaining, but—I wonder if I want to tell this. I think it's okay to tell this. The other day—and to give an overview, I've been a chair for four years. My chairperson retired. He sort of fizzled away. The end of his career was disappointing to most people and I don't think I'm giving away a big secret by saying that he wasn't around much. And all the sunshine boys were making their exit and he promoted a candidate for chair, who he thought would be great. And I didn't she understood us and I was afraid of the kind of changes that were going to happen, if we had someone who hadn't walked the long road, I guess.

So I applied for the job, with no expectation ever that I'd be taken seriously as a candidate. And I did it more as a vote of confidence, with just to have one of us from the faculty. I tried to talk Mort into doing it. I would have loved to have worked for him, but nobody would bite. Mort said he wanted to retire and, but you know when I got the job he didn't and his department really changed a lot. And the more I went through the interviews, the more I saw that, that of course I

was—of course I should be doing this for a while anyway. And I remember going through the search and the speeches I made really meant something to me. I believed in it. Other chairs—that year five women Chairs were appointed—five I can think of, there could be more. Jane Ganet-Segal, [Riverdance] ? Suzanne Cohan-Lange, Lynn Pena, Rebecca Courington, Garnet Kilberg-Cohan and me—there were six. Maybe Lynn came a year later. But there were five women chairs and it was a public press initiative, of getting more women into the chairperson's body.

I was the only one who had to succeed before a search committee. Everyone else was appointed and that made me pretty angry, at the time. I thought, well why do I have to jump through the fiery hoops? And in retrospect, I'm not the least bit sorry. I earned that job and ten people had to choose me and I feel really good about that. Because at the time you know, the culture was so personal. People might have said, "Well Caroline just liked her." "Well Bert just liked her." And I'm glad that nobody can say that. They got one vote you know. And I think they were dazzled by the other candidates too. So it made me feel grounded and I went in with a feeling of having been chosen and respected and that was great. And our—our department was like you know how you let things go in your house and it looks like nobody's lived there for a while and then everything needs to get made better. And right now I'm just—I can't believe how much fun it is down there. I mean it's just really fun.

So the gender issues are with you and the outside, not within your department?

Yes. Yeah and I need to make that really clear. Certainly not within my department because I can't imagine a better group of people to work with, but I feel it in the Chairperson's Council.

Have you spoken to the other female Chairs? Has this come up with them too?

And we—I think we've come a long way in that we've—yes we talk about it openly. And I see it all the time. I see the kind of bullying that goes on. "Well you don't know what you're talking about." You know when I came into the job you'd think I'd be assigned a mentor or something, wouldn't you? Wouldn't you think that someone would show me the way? And frankly it took us a while to just pull ourselves together—the female chairs. By the time we did, I had figured out most of the things I would have needed help with, but those guys could just get stuff. You know I didn't understand—nobody showed me how to do a budget meeting. And I don't mean that I needed on the job training. I went into the job with some expectations prepared to do it, but there were tricks and there were things that I would share with anybody who came in new right—and without even blinking. "Well don't do it—God don't go through that because it's really—from here to there it's not this way like it looks."

So many little—I wish I could give you a perfect example and I'm struggling for one, but just knowing who to call if somebody does graffiti in your bathroom. You know, you could spend a day trying to figure that out. Just those little things, they would have meant so

much and they were withheld. They were begrudge—I was begrudged them. And in the part-time faculty I see it. I see it with the students. Although, now I've developed a reputation, I think of maybe you don't try to screw around with me, but I sense that students will try to manipulate me in ways they never tried to manipulate John.

The story I was about to tell you is that a faculty member came into—it was when I was getting my picture taken for this activity. And a faculty member came in my office—a part time faculty member and said, "When are you going to give me an answer about my teaching schedule?" Like across the room there was a student sitting here, there was the student taking a photograph for this project. My camp assistant was in the other corner of the room. So across all those people when, for all he knew we were in a dense meeting, just yelled at me like I was an errand girl. And that, you got to say, he would have never yelled at John Tirani—wouldn't do that. And you know, my own department colleagues pointed out to me more than ever full time faculty members are constantly saying you know, do you think that maybe it's because you know,—

And I'm making the assumption this was a male part timer?

"Uh-hmm" he bellowed at me and that I'd better get on it. It's true he had been there since I was a full time faculty member, but that should have anything to do with it. You walk into a meeting someone's conducting. I get a lot of that. People barge in and start talking over whoever's sitting there. That

would never—that would never have happened—you wouldn't dare walk in on—on—I don't mean to compare myself to John, but a man at that desk. Wow did they get treated differently.

I think it's important that it comes up because it's been very interesting at issues of gender by—within the oral history project—by both men and women. And I would say even actually men have brought it up more that it's a concern of theirs. And I think—
Really?

Yeah and I think—
There wasn't a woman on the stage at the inauguration—there was a panel of folks and there wasn't a woman on the stage.

Yeah and I think that one of the commonality in bringing it up is that it shouldn't be that way here. All right, the rest of the world you know,—
Of all places—

Why—yeah so that's very interesting.
But I do want to say, and this is really important. That I think it's changed for the better enormously just over the last several years. I mean I remember a lot of comments. I remember a lot of behavior. I remember behavior at the faculty retreat. My first couple of times I was shocked and that stuff would never happen now.

You mean like locker room stuff? Or—okay.
Uh-hmm, uh-hmm just gross. You know that how conspicuous you feel when men are talking gross in front of you and you're just supposed to listen. I was in that spot all the time—all the time in

the beginning. And that would never happen. I think the large part, everyone's who's come new to the college seems to have respect for others.

We're coming now to the last few minutes. So I do want to—you to address briefly these questions. Your major concerns for Columbia's you know, present and future and you know or challenges and maybe your—the things that make you feel good about—you know, why do you stay here? So you know work it concerns and things that you find (inaudible)?

Why I stay here is that I still have a voice. I still—I really believe in the college and the students here. I think that the students are going to come and go. The administration's going to come and go. The faculty and I think of myself as a faculty member first, a chair second. The faculty abide, we carry the story and there's no way I would give that up. There's no way I'd walk away from that. We're the center and it may not seem that way from time to time. And we need to take more responsibility for that, but we're the—we're the life force here. Others are visitors—everyone on the administration isn't a visitor as far as I'm concerned. I don't care what they did for the school they are visiting. The students are visiting. And the relationships endure, but we're the you know, we're the abiding presence, we're the personality. You know so that—I mean that's what I most believe in. And I guess I worry about maintaining that tradition in the face of so much growth.

So dealing with the growth?

Uh-hmm it—that it may obscure or spread too thinly our—our tradition, which is really strong and valuable. I don't wish it were like it used to be. I really don't. I had a lot of problems then that I wouldn't tolerate right now, you know.

Like?

A pack of elderly male chairmen talking about somebody's ass at a department meeting. I wouldn't tole—I wouldn't tolerate it. I guess no one would. I think the times have really changed. It's not just the school. But I think that there was a cowboy feeling here that was really encouraged in the beginning. And it went with the sense of frontier and the sense of conquering something—it all went together.

But it's interesting because the involvement and certainly Mike Alexandroff's own personality and own commitment you know that and the commitment to civil rights and the—just the progressive attitude. That I think people are surprised to hear, although this happened in the larger culture as well, that the women were marginalized in the Civil Rights Movement and the counter culture and that's where the Women's Movement came out of.
That's interesting. That's really true here that we really are sort of an example of that in a smaller world. And that you know, I always think when you hear these stories about the fundamentalist Christian minister who abused the daughter. And you think, well what's—here's somebody touting Christian principles who's willing to hurt somebody else? And you always go, "God how does that add up?" And then of course I think that, that happens. You know, it's like the

electric company telling you to be prudent about electricity. They're about to destroy the whole world. It's their fault. You know, though they're going to make it like it's your fault and then we're just all kind of okay, it seems to make sense. That's one of the ironies of life, but it was like that. I just think of you know, the old hippies and how terribly they treated women—awful. I'm so glad I missed that thing. I wanted to participate and my parents wouldn't let me. But just awful and women were marginalized terribly and just in a context of liberation. We do have that problem here or we did and I'm glad that's changed. That's one thing I really don't miss about the old Columbia. And when I say preserve the tradition that's not the part I mean. I mean the idea that you can make it all, you know. But you're a good interviewer.

Oh thank you. I'll stop there so you won't have me—
Well I feel like I—