Women, Education and Leadership at Rutgers
2015
Interviewee: Linda Stamato (LS)
Interviewer: June Cross (JC)

LS: Actually in graduate school I was getting a degree in labor studies and began to see the real value of people who are gonna be working side by side in an enterprise going forward. If they're on strike, if they're at war, you know, how do they make that work?

And usually productivity levels go way down after strikes. People have to come back to terms with the people who were dissing them and all that kind of business. So, the more you can seek labor peace, you know the better off. So, what forums would make that more likely?

And during the Second World War, there was an effort in this country to prevent strikes because obviously the steel industry and whatever didn't like strikes. So, they created in 23 states, state boards of mediation, and these boards resolved all kinds of disputes before they led to strikes. And consequently, we began to see the real value of having mediators involved in these discussions because they can see some things the parties can't. You can usually test out an idea with the third party when the other one is not there.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: 'Cause as soon as you test it out in front of the other guy you've given it, you know, [laughter] so ...

JC Right.

LS: So, there's a lot of these little things that make it possible for people- And most people wanna work things out anyway. They don't like strife. They don't like war. They don't like, you know.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: So, if you give them a forum, that allows them to do it.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: And it was clear that the labor stuff had a lot more of a message than I think we were beginning to see. So ...

JC Hmm.

LS: I took ... I was getting a, I guess, a master's degree in labor studies and then there was a course in public engagement and siting airports and things like that that cause all kinds of angst in communities, and they were beginning to use mediation. I thought, "Well, this is kind of fascinating." So, I concentrated on that, began doing it, actually doing some of the mediation and then got involved with the Ford Foundation 'cause my colleague, who you just met, he was the program officer in charge of government and law.

JC Uh-huh.
LS: And he had been appointed to the Board of Governors by the governor, and I had been elected by the trustees so we ... so we had common ground in this dispute resolution stuff so we decided to work together.

And, after Frank Thomas came into the Ford Foundation, he basically wanted to end the public interest law investment. He wanted to change a lot of things. So Sandy left. We formed a small center at NYU, considered Columbia for a while ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... and then Rutgers made an offer so we came to Rutgers and that's ... We've been working on this for 30 years.

The thing about Douglass and the reason why ... Actually, a number of my friends from high school also came to Douglass which is sort of interesting so we're able to, compare and contrast our experiences over time. To have gone to a public high school, fairly diverse and, you know, I've ran for various offices. They always kept encouraging me to run for secretary. I didn't want to. And if I run for president, then I lost, you know, this sort of thing.

So, going to Douglass, although I don't think any of us thought we're heading to a woman's college, we just knew Douglass was New Jersey and Douglass was well-known and it was very competitive and why not? So when we got here, and began the experience of being totally our own selves so to speak. And for some strange reason, I never quite figured out why, but I was nominated to run for president of the freshman class. Well, nobody knew anybody then. So, how that happened, I have a feeling there was an upper classman who must have gone to Nutley High School where I went, and so that happened.

And I remember thinking, "Okay. I wanted to run for ... And here I am." And, there was a sense that everything was possible. Every course that was offered was for us. It wasn't for them but for all of us. And we thrived. I mean it was an environment that really encouraged learning and aspiration and ambition. And it's sometimes subtle ways and it sometimes very manifest ways. For Example, Dean Bunting was frequently talking about "Don't just settle for a house in the oranges. There's a notion that somehow when you go to college, you get a domestic kind of degree and then you settle in and have children. No, no. That's ... This is not for you. You're at Douglass now."

It got to a point where we would compare our SAT scores with the people going to Princeton and found ourselves higher and therefore, you know, very, very elegant, all that. So, over time, it became "This is the place we want to be." I think we were discouraged that the dean left, but then she went to Radcliffe so that was okay. And Dean Adams was a remarkable one.

And fortunately for me, actually many years hence, I was on something called the Commission on Higher Education for the Middle States Association that did accrediting.

And I ... And Ruth chaired the committee looking at Radcliffe College and I was a member of the committee. So, to be working alongside my former dean, this was really privileged. And, she was an exceptional person to, to work with. I never thought that would be ever be that.

But there's, there was always those kinds of experiences. So, when I was acting dean and was speaking to "the assembled" at the chapel. I remember saying, and I said it out loud, "There is no way
that I ever thought when I was sitting down there who you are that I’d be up here." It was once of those, I don't know, wonderful moments, passed quickly because there were challenges and all that kind of thing, but lovely. So, yeah, Douglass made a big difference for those of us who graduated from high school in that period of time.

LS: And, I know Roberta Siegel and others have done studies about that cohort and their mothers and then their daughters. And I think it's a very, very rich, subtext to take a look at. I can't clone myself so I don't know what I would have been otherwise, but, you know.

There was a sense that there was something afoot, you know, in the land. It wasn't just what was happening to us at Douglass. And also we were very politically engaged. I went on a hunger strike, the French wouldn't get out of Algeria, [laughter] you know. I mean I remember all of these things that, that we were really motivated by. I mean outraged by.

And then when it became our thing, a woman's thing, and for them the conversations you'd have across generations, how disparate they were, how difficult they were, and yet you felt, felt a gnawing of injustice and, you know. But we didn't feel that we were experiencing them. I didn't think there was any antagonism towards Rutgers. We just thought "Just stay over there [laughter]. We're okay over here."

You know, I think it was a good partnership. I, I think they ... Because when I was at Douglass, Rutgers was all male so there was a kind of a brother-sister relationship.

JC I see.

LS: I think in most cases, the you know, fraternity life and so forth, I didn't participate in much of that. And but there was so much else beyond it. there were very few men in the classes. Occasionally, there would be, but, we kinda kept our distance. And ...

I think there was a subset of people who had that but there was another subset that was looking for a Phi Beta Kappa. So ... And it seemed as if it was an either or. And I think that became more confirmed with Betty Friedan's book, the sense that you had to make that choice and you couldn't have it both ways.

I don't know that I actually thought about it precisely in that way but I was married before my senior year and, I was going to graduate school [laughter]. I don't think I thought either way about it. What was interesting is I had, I make this point because I, I find it still offensive. I had ... With all the other political science majors, and there were quite a few of us, we applied to the same institutions. I had the best grades. I was in the ... I graduated with honors and whatnot.

I didn't get in to Columbia and I didn't get in and my faculty advisers could not understand how that could be. I was the more qualified of everyone that we knew of, married. And that was assumed to be if you were married, you weren't going to be in for the long run and they didn't wanna give you a place. So that's fascinating, you know, that kind of discrimination that I guess, nobody thought twice about.

But so you're battling the cultural notions that you're supposed to be home now that you're married and you're taken care of ...
... and your own aspirations, and then the institutions reject you. So, I mean I did a number of things and I, I went to Seton Hall University that accepted and I did Chinese Studies and then I switched to American Studies and then I went to NYU and I did American Studies there and then I came back to Rutgers and I did labor studies so I am accumulating degrees. It's almost as if I was trying to put off being serious about anything but ...

JC Were you?

LS: No. I just loved learning so that was one thing. And I was also having kids so, you know, you have two kids 13 months apart and then another one seven years later. It does keep you occupied. But I was working around [laughter] get- getting it all so-, sort of in place. So, most of it worked except the marriage which fell apart mostly because I think, although I used to say to my husband, we're married for 20 years. A lot of people a century ago didn't make it that long. They died before they were married for 20 years. So ...

So, [coughing] ... So the marriage fell apart and I think a lot of it because of the strains and stresses of that period of time. I remember my husband telling me he was reading Marilyn French, and I, I absolutely couldn't get over it. It was his effort to try to find out what was going on ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... in the world and then in our little world. And I have to say regretfully in many respects that he was, he was too far behind each time I was taking another step. It sounds kind of selfish. I don't mean it that way. It's just that you're part of that environment. I know who I am and what I wanted to be. I used to carry around my father's engineering books in high school I think because somehow or another, I wanted to identify with something that ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... that was different than other people. I don't know. I don't ... I still can't understand why I was doing that. But it's just my guess. So, I think I've always had a kind of compulsiveness. I've mentioned earlier about the fact that I write these columns for the Ledger.

It's because when you feel strongly about something, either because you want to do it or because you think it needs to be done or to be said, you do it. So that kind of sort of some kind of spirit behind my involvements I guess ...

There's a couple of reasons why when I graduated, I remember thinking, well, I have to find something that's similar to the student center where you hang out and talk about politics and everything else. What would that be? and I found the League of Women Voters, a very similar group of people, a lot of women who were feeling strongly about things and acting accordingly.

So, one of the first things I got involved with, I became education chairman for the state board of the league, and there was a bond issue coming. 1964, '65 it was passed. And I became very actively engaged in that and Douglass was part of that struggle to get that bond issue passed. So while working with the Douglass people, I met the head of the alumni association, Adelaide Zagoren, and she nominated me to be a member of the board of trustees. Douglass at that time had a couple of slots, two I believe, on the board of trustees. That's, that's changed now. But she nominated me.
A good example of someone deciding you're someone who might be an up and comer, might be good for the college, and promoting me as it were. And there been often instances as of the other way so I really appreciated that and, I began to be more involved in that way, kind of college but League back to higher education and then involved obviously with the board of trustees ...

JC  Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  ... and then later to the Board of Governors

The trustees go back to the founding of the original Rutgers College, 1766, and when Rutgers became a public university, it was a land grant in 1860s but became the public university in 1956. So, we're very young as a university. And so, the statute was written to retain the trustees because of the land and the endowment and a variety of other things. The trustees were not gonna hand that over to the state. But they did agree to a governing board which would be half appointed by the governor and then the other half appointed- elected by the trustees. So, that's the way it's been since then until recent days.

The trustees only really can have a role at all in the appointment of the president. And they control the land and some of the endowment, and some of their members are overseers of the foundation. trustees serve on a lot of the same committees that the board of governors are on. So, they kind work side by side, everybody to the greater good of Rutgers, you know [laughter].

Well, one of the differences was is I was a trustee at the time and I had to keep it quiet because there was much acrimony between the very left-leanig people, some of them students at the labor school and I was a more mature student at that time and... but I also knew what was going on [laughter]. So, that made it kinda interesting. I sort of sometimes felt like a, I don't know, not a scab but, you know, that I was placed in a place [laughter] ...

JC  By the door so to speak [laughter].

LS:  Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, but I loved it. I loved it. I felt transformed by the, the learning. I didn't know. I have read about the early labor wars and it, it was nothing that I had learned in high school and basically nothing I had learned in college really except in American history but only touched on it. But this was intensive. What's the ... What was happening with the working people in this country?

And I became seized by, by it, by the injustice, the unfairness, the debts, the, you know, and a number of the people affiliated with the college who had given money in the buildings were also a part of that people, group I didn't wanna be part of. So, it got very complicated. But what happened was I, I got an internship at Johnson & Johnson, spent some time there while negotiating labor agreements so I got some real hands-on work.

I then graduated, went to the state board of mediation that I had mentioned earlier and did some work for them and kind of moved around doing various consulting jobs really, until I landed the Ford Foundation position and from there ...

JC  And what year was that?

LS:  ... went to NYU.
Yes, yes. And, a lot of the Rutgers trustees were fit to be tied over the fact that they were forced to go coed and Douglass could stay single sex. I mean that just ... If, if it had been equivalent all along, they were comfortable with that. But the notion that that should change, and Douglass would not be similarly penalized ...

JC How did that ... How did that happen?

LS: You know it's, it's pretty interesting. I think the case was still made that there was a special reason why Douglass should remain female but it was also the case that there was such demand for Rutgers that they had to satisfy the demand. And you couldn't expand Douglass. At least that's what was thought, and it was time for Rutgers to join the rest of the world. And I think it was beginning to be the situation where federal law and some constitutional challenges were also suggesting, you know, you're not on solid ground getting federal money and maintaining a separate institution.

So, Douglass was able to maintain its separateness I think in two ways. One, by being part of the umbrella of the university, and secondly, by basically claiming a still certain status that it was needing to make up for past deprivations, to put it that way. And it's, it's been challenged a couple of times constitutionally. Every once in a while, a guy applies to Douglass and just can't get in, you know. Got better SAT scores or whatever and I don't know whether they're being put up by right wing founda- or whatever. but so far, we have managed either to settle those cases or they just want it brought ...

... further forward. and now I think we're at a similar juncture where we no longer have a faculty where our status as a college is, is ... Well, it needs to be better defined so it's a residential college but it still has significant intellectual, social, cultural, academic components, but how we project ourselves to the world, I think, is, is a challenge.

And I think the strategic planning process has been attempting to address some of that. I think the question really is: if you are defending the notion or projecting the notion that women should be educated separately, what is it that you're doing for them in that setting that's different than they'd have somewhere else.

I think a lot of it has to do with what the young women are doing in high school. So, what kind of transition are they gonna have here? So you find a number of, of young women who are fairly immature and naive or recent immigrants and they thrive in a place like Douglass. Whether they would thrive similarly at Rutgers, I don't know. I'd really like to see those kinds of situations looked at pretty carefully.

I do remember, going just back for a minute, that when the first reorganization was taking place in the late '70s or early '80s, and I was on the Board of Governors and I voted against, much to the chagrin of the president and everyone else.

JC Is this when the faculty...

LS: Yes. When the faculty was taken away and consolidated. It was a strange period because faculty from Douglass and Rutgers would be on the same plane going out to recruit the same person, you know, and we're part of the same institution. So there were these nutty things. But the fact is the thought was that the faculty is separate, were not as strong as they would be together. And most ... A lot of the faculty felt that was the case. Most of the Douglass faculty thought they should stay at Douglass. They think they had a special mission there and worried about what would happen.
And I remember specifically saying to my colleagues on the Board of Governors, "Here's what I'm worried about. Douglass has more chemistry majors than any institution of higher education in the United States and why they did not know they were gonna major in chemistry when they came to Douglass, we've checked that out. So, what is happening here that's leading them in that direction? And why do I pick chemistry? Simply because it, it stood out. So they can't major in physics because we don't have a physics department, and that's not good. So, when we become one full faculty, they can have any discipline in any program- in anything they want, but I'm worried about those chemists."

JC  
Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  
And sure enough, after the consolidation, slowly that was no longer the case.

JC  
Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  
I don't know what or why. Again, it could be explained many number of things. But several of my colleagues and then subsequent years went on, one who wound up to be my own physician went from Douglass chemistry major to Harvard, and she was a physician, and came back to be a physician at Rutgers, [laughter] you know.

JC  
Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  
So, those were the things I thought we were gonna lose. And I wasn't sure precisely why we had those strengths. It had to do with the faculty recruiting the students, supporting them, believing in them, saying, you know, you can achieve all these great things. Why couldn't that be in a consolidated faculty?

LS:  
The deans ...

JC  
So Mary Hartman was the dean then, right?

LS:  
Yes.

JC  
And...

LS:  
She supported the consolidation. I did not. I've told Mary many times, "We've been on the opposite sides of all these que- all these issues. You won and I was right." [laughter] But, you know, it's a ... She was in favor of getting rid of the State Department of Higher Education, too, when the governor in their wisdom decided to get rid of it. I was serving on it. I didn't think it was a very good idea. I said, "Mary, you won again. You're wrong." [laughter] I love her [laughter].

So, so initially, there was such, such resistance to the consolidation of the colleges over decades and there had been one study after another recommending ... There was something called the federated plan. They were gonna be federated colleges. There was gonna be this, there was gonna be that. Finally, Ed Bloustein, he came in '71. And it was just as we're turn- getting into the '80s, '79-'80. He said, "Enough already. This has got to change. We're gonna consolidate the faculties." It was that vote that I voted against.

It was the subsequent so-called TUE, Transformation of Undergraduate Education, that I was a support of. And this was after I had been dean and I saw what was happening in a college with no
faculty with the faculty fellows basically more a bond and with declining interest in students in enrolling. The profile of the students was shifting considerably. We wound up with almost a separate and unequal situation. It needed to be addressed and I think effectively, students were being hurt in the following ways.

We were saying at Douglass for example, you can only major in certain things here. Well, that was depriving women at Douglass for majoring in things over there. Why was that a strength? There was even an effort subsequently to require- to try to make a difference. Why do we exist separately? So, Douglass, you could major in whatever majors here but you are required to have a minor in women's studies. I said, "That's absurd. If you want a major in chemistry and minor in physics, you can't?" You have to ... You can't be forcing people's choices to make ... to explain why you exist. We have to get the benefits of the big and preserve the assets of the small. That's, that's our challenge."

And, I think it was important to stop the fakery of, of college because it really wasn't. And I think, we were hurting students. They were ... For example, there were four or five different honor codes. If you have kids from all the colleges in the same lab and they were cheating, one might be expelled and other might have a hand slapped and another something else. There were so many disparate things because the colleges were retaining all of their separate rules and regulations and expectations, but denying students a fair deal basically, access to all the coursework, access to all the faculty, so it wasn't working. The idea of this consolidated faculties saving the colleges, they weren't being saved. It was hurting students.

JC: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: I saw that when I was dean and I, and I could see it clearly. So that's why I was willing to join the, the president's task force. This was President McCormick, now he asked us to take a look at what was happening, and it was scary and not good for students. I always felt that if you keep the student in mind, you can make the best decisions. It's when you think about everybody's turf and this, dah, dah, dah, you get kind of messed up. But let's think about what they need. Now, the alumnae of course were opposed. I thought they should be engaged in making a better outcome. I think that now but I'm ... I've not been persuasive [laughter].

The reason for women's colleges, the reason for black colleges was because people were being denied access to quality education. So they came into being because people saw that that wasn't a good thing. But when you, when you're created in reaction to something, I think that's one set of challenges. Now, when everybody ostensibly has access to everything, how do you maintain your separateness? How do you maintain the, the, the reason for being?

I think that is really tough and I think a lot of us seem to feel in our gut that there's good reason to do it and there's not enough evidence 'cause when we look at the evidence, it's always the experience of women graduating from women's colleges when they couldn't go to Harvard and they couldn't go to Princeton, and they couldn't go. So ... But, you know, I mean I think Cheryl Wall, who you may meet, her daughter chose to go to Spellman. And I remember Sheryl saying, "You know, I was really surprised at that."

And you might wanna talk to her about that because she would have thought in this day and age her daughter would aspire to another kind of institution. No. She wanted to go where she wanted to experience something she didn't think she'd experience somewhere else. So, that's sort of an interesting thing. Now, I don't know how much may be happening at Douglass now where women are
saying, "You know what? We do have all these choices. We think we wanna go there. What makes the there there to them? What are they seeing?"

So with Douglass, I'd say, well, you know, you can see you've got a certain set of internships, you have the Institute for Women's Leadership that gives you special privileges. Women at Rutgers have those, too.

Yeah. I think ... I think the reason for being for women's colleges now is in the stages of full development. I think if you look at Wellesley, for example, there's an effort to have a strong presence component for professionalism. Come to Wellesley not only 'cause you're gonna get a broad deep profound quality liberal arts education but we are going to prepare you for the work life in ways that you're not gonna get it in an co-educational institution.

Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but that's the pitch. I think it's generally that idea that the notion that you're getting everything and a value added. So, the value added is getting to know and love and live with women to learn together in special housing whether around a language or a culture or a global orientation and it's about, special programs, internships, connecting with alums, being part of a network that will stand you in good stead from this day forth, you know, this kind of thing. But I think really it's still to be described and identified well.

I think it's a real challenge as the colleges, keep getting reduced in number, you know. Those that we're hanging on are hanging on with- in wonderful past which I think justifies a future for them, but I think they need to better identify what they are, who they are and what they offer.

LS: It's excellent. But you know what? I tried to do that when I was acting dean and got resisted at every level. "No. Everything has to be on our campus." And the interesting thing was this is what was happening with protect the college, protect the college, preserve what we have and don't let anybody off. Get the money on ... Put on money into the science building on the Douglass campus.

I remember saying to Dick McCormick. "Why are you celebrating all that money for the science facility on the Douglass campus? It's not equal to the science facilities on the Bush Campus. Why shouldn't Douglass women take advantage of those labs, work with those faculty over there? I don't understand that." He said, "Well, no. You have to have something over there for themselves." I said, "There's no such thing as a feminist chemistry." There's not ...

I mean let's understand what we're talking about here. You don't need to have your own if it's second class. You want a first class access and we have to figure out how to do that and preserve Douglass. So, I, I think one of the, the challenges is doing ... How, how do we preserve the Douglass presence and get involvement in the sciences that typically still don't interest women or appear to interest women, computer science, engineering. Create a space for them in the engineering school with special interest and support and whatnot and encouragement.

Why don't we create our space there instead of trying to create them here? So, that's what Jackie Litts been manage- managed to do. And Tom Farris who's dean of the engineering school is a hundred percent behind it. There's a real thrust to diversify the engineering school and that's one sure way of doing it. So we are an asset and we're beginning to be seen more as an asset in a lot of ways that typically before was, "Oh, they always want their way over there, doing their thing," you know, this kind of thing. But a lot of the, the innovations at Douglass have been adopted at Rutgers.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].
LS: And, and schools have been taken over. Mason Gross School of the Arts had its genesis at Douglass. And Roy Lichtenstein and the famous Art and Joan Snyder who was in my class. Douglass have much to give to the university and still does. And so I think as long as it remains that asset and delivers on a future and ex- and, and attracts young women to its place, it, it will thrive.

I don’t know about other women’s colleges. It's gonna be touch and go for many of them. We saw Sweet Briar go under and then come back. I’ve seen Mills over and back. You talk to people who've been at various other institutions and, you know, they feel strongly that their Mount Holyoke is gonna survive and ... But you notice some number of the women's colleges are having graduate programs for men and they're doing various things to try to bring money in to survive. A lot of the original ones have huge endowments. That's helps. But I think it's a really, challenging time. And that's probably not strong enough a word. Who are? What are we ... What are we about now?

JC It like an identity crisis almost.

LS: Yeah, it is.

JC Yeah.

LS: It is. And I think there is a sense that we know there is a reason to con- continue. That's why it's not just, "Oh, well, we have an alumni association we have to keep feeding." No. It's not that. We believe in what we had and we wanna share it. I mean I was struck by the percentage. In the early days of Douglass, the number graduates, 50 some odd percent we're giving to the alumni association. That's very high. So, that small cohort of women knew they had gotten something special and they were gonna help the next generation. That continues. And I think there's a treasure, a precious jewel [laughter] in that colleges and we need to get it right.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: And I think a lot of people are working hard to do that so ...

I look at it ... I, I feel that language is just not up to the task, but I've just been exchanging, messages with a friend of mine who just died two days ago who was my classmate at Douglass. She went to work for the national security administration. She, married a priest. She has three daughters and I have three daughters also, and we have been friends for the duration. And when I think about it, my classmates, there are 12 of us, now down to 10, we get together every year several times a year. We have been there for one another, for all the crisis and challenges and wonders and joys of our lives.

My daughters who went to co-educational institutions have none of that. So that level, that kind of connection which we establish there. Again, we can't clone ourselves. How we would have been at Rutgers, I don’t know. But that's very special. The regard for learning when we come back for reunion, where’s the intellectual content? Where’s the ... We're at the faculty. We're ... This continued. All of these women went on to get graduate degrees or to do other things that built on the learning and their education at Douglass and their expectation of themselves.

So, there was a sense of what was expected of you and you had to deliver, the connection you have with one another and the belief that it was because of everything at that place, that special place, the women who came, the faculty who were there, the staff, the deans, the people who supported you
that, that was your life and that made all the difference in what came later. I don't know, how-
whether that's a universal experience. I doubt that it is.

JC You said there were 12 in your class? [Inaudible 00:44:02]

LS: No, no. This 12. This cohort.

JC Your friends. Your group of friends.

LS: Yes, yes. There must have been a hundred and some odd.

JC Yeah. I was gonna say I thought it was a larger ...

LS: Yeah. But reunion classes tend to be pretty big when they come back.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: With the, with the Fisher, with the, with the alumni association now, it's very difficult. because their
people are torn between the college and the alumni association when they should be all on the same
page.

The alumni have been very, very good at raising money. There's no question about it. They formed
their own 501(c)(3) right from the get-go. I'm sure they had no idea how important that would be
going on. the law school did the same thing. but I think, I think it has become too controlling an
organization.

When I became dean, I ... And granted I was acting and I was only gonna be there for a year, I said,
"This is it." You know I, I was thrilled ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... but it was limited. I had my other life. The first person I thought would be thrilled would be the
head of the alumni association, the first Douglass graduate to be dean even though acting. I used to
say acting but serious [laughter]. she said, well ... What was her phrase? "Well, we know you're a shill
for the president."

That was the greeting. So, I was absolutely ... I was like being kicked in the stomach. What? What? I
mean I couldn't understand it. The notion that somehow or another the president and the board of
trustees or whoever was putting me into a spot to deliver something that I had no idea of was just
nonsense. So, it was a fraught relationship.

I went to my first alumni board meeting to talk about what I wanted to do for the college with their
support, and they told me the level of money they were giving my predecessor and they were cutting
it by 15,000 for me.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: So, she got 50, you get 35 [laughter]. Why? I rattled off what I wanted, why I thought it was important
to do and they restored the money. But it was always this, this give and take. I think they had a staff
of 26 and I had a staff of three, you know.
So, there was a sense that all the resources were going to the alumni association and they were niggardly giving them back to the college. So, if I said, we need something for the global village, they would deliberate and let you know. So, they were raising the money but they were controlling [crosstalk 00:46:44] the disbursement of it, and that was the problem.

JC  So it becomes like a shadow.

LS:  Yeah, yeah. And I mean I think basically, they really mean well and cared about what they were doing but their control was such that they didn't trust the deans, they didn't trust Rutgers. They thought every good thing from Douglass that became Rutgers was taken away from them rather than celebrate it. So, it was a mentality that's very hard to, to overcome. And I tried.

You know when I keep talking about Douglass as the jewel and the asset, you know, I see it that way and I think a number of people in the Rutgers' side do. I think they also see that it's contentious and difficult and I think a lot of that is driven by the alumni association. But I remember my first couple of weeks as dean, when I would call the, the, dean of the executive dean of FAS, Faculty of Arts and Sciences and say I need money for X, Y, and Z, she'd say, "Get it from the alumni association."

And when I'd say to the alumni association, I need money this for this, they'd say, "Get it from Rutgers." So that, you were constantly trying to navigate between those two worlds. Rutgers or the FAS was suffering for money and they'd saw what the endowment was at Douglass and say, "Why aren't you getting the money from there? Why should we take it away from Livingston that has none?"

JC  Right.

LS:  So these were difficult conversations to have. And, I think people over time develop these antipathies and some of them are well-grounded, some of them are, are not. But I think fundamentally, if you pressed anybody in old Queen's about the value of Douglass and its progeny, IWL, IRW, the Center for women and Politics, all ... They are constantly thrilled to be able to brag about it and I think believe in it. So ... But there's also the, the other ...

LS:  Yeah. So, so ... That's right. I ... So I was not directly involved.

JC  Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  But I know Mary had ... Mary launched the institute, to galvanize what she thought were elements of leadership to develop the potential. She ran into some early difficulties with Barbara Shailor who thought that IWL should be for Douglass not for ...

NC  Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS:  ... Rutgers Women.

JC  Okay.

LS:  So, so, you know, you, you re- You begin to see again this replay of "Well, this should just be for us." Well, and Mary was beginning to raise money for IWL from the same sources that gave to the alumnae. So, Mary has a good relationship with the alumnae and she's kept that up for years. But I
think there was always a bit of tension. You're raising something and this is a good thing and we like to support it and we'll give you some money for it, but, this should just be for Douglass women.

JC Right.

LS: That's not tenable. I mean I think it's like economic protectionism, you know. Begin ... When, when ... As soon as you begin to say, you know, we're gonna close this off, I think that's when you lose promise and you lose potential even though they're downsides. If it was all Douglass, it would have been great strength for Douglass but it would have not been good for all the women over at Rutgers and I have to care about them, too [laughter] you know.

There was an acting dean, Paula Brownlee. This is pretty interesting. This is ... These are the ways in which women help women I think. I was on the trustees ... Where was I governor? I guess like ... Well, whatever. But I was on the Educational Planning and Policy Committee which was a big, big important, Board of Governors committee. And, Douglass dean was leaving, Jewel Cobb I believe. And then replaced by Paula Brownlee, acting position. And Ed Bloustein got the bright idea that the university could take over the house because Paula Brownlee didn't wanna live in it. And maybe future deans wouldn't wanna live in it so we can repurpose that house somewhat.

I got ... Living in the house is a condition of employment for the dean [laughter]. So that preserved that house. Now, I think it's central to ... And I didn't even know that yet because I hadn't lived in the house yet. But it's central to the campus. It's the only dean that s a house, you know. the president has a house but the dean's house is right in the campus.

JC It was always ... It was always so central ...

LS: Yeah.

JC ... to the social life of the school.

LS: That's right. And depending on the dean, you know, how, how she used it. But I had concerts in the house. I had lectures for kids and student. We had student presentations about their, about their research projects. We use the house for every reason even more than the student center in a way. So, but I didn't even know and appreciate that fully. The notion that the, the, the building was gonna be taken away, and become Rutgers, that was not gonna happen.

So, so I think, you know, being in critical places to run interference for things that are essential are very important. and sometimes you didn't even know how important. I sort of thought sometimes it was a thorn in the side of the [laughter] president. But, you know, I mean those things do happen. I ... He's one of the best presidents Rutgers has ever had. and ...

JC Bloustein, you're talking about.

LS: Bloustein, yeah. Outstanding leader. but ... And you know, we had our differences from time to time.

When you have taken in the view of the world about your sex, your gender or your color and you begin to see yourself as others see you, then you act in a discriminatory fashion toward your own. So sometimes it's called ... I don't know. I, I think I've seen all kinds of different expressions for that.

Yes. In a way.
Yeah.

I mean I remember listening to some people talking about how they chose their professional ... They're doctors and so forth. Oh, I wouldn't go here, you know. And these were people who are women who were not going to women What? Well, because they have been so conditioned to think this is not something women can do so that they weren't gonna go to that profession. I don't think they were doing that mental analysis. But I, I know at one point at Douglass, one of the things I had to wind up talking to my staff over and over again, you are thwarting the people below you or above you because you don't want them to look good.

You ... The notion that you won't do your work because somebody above you is gonna look good, where does this come from? And I, I found it astonishing.

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

And I found myself at odds with a lot of ... There was one staff member that I, I frankly couldn't understand what the antipathy was particularly since I wasn't staying. And, there had been an issue of The Caelian which was the campus newspaper and the young women, it was breast awareness month, and so they had the cover of the Caelian about 12 women just naked from their neck down, to the waist. Breasts, no faces, you know. Breast awareness. She confiscated the entire issue and when I found out, I had it put back immediately.

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

And the students got wind that it had been taken away. They wanted to know who took it away with a bang, you know. They wanted to make a big thing about it. But I was mortified. I thought, "What are you doing?" And she was annoyed with me. [laughter] I said, "Are you kidding me?"

It wasn't appropriate [laughter].

First of all, I thought it was a great issue, but be that as it may, and, and, I kinda run up. I get some interesting challenges for example. I ... There ... Some issues of The Caelian would have this really outrageous views of naked wom- or partially clad women and I bring the students in, I'd say, "You know, what do you think you're accomplishing with that? Well, we're free, we can put anything we wanted there so you can. Where do you get those pictures from? From the internet. So some poor woman out in California is selling herself for cheap so you can put her in your Caelian." They weren't thinking that way.

And it was the beginning of this, you know, hooking up culture and I want to have a serious meetings talking with them about who they are, how they wanna use themselves and their bodies and how to believe in it, you know. Think seriously what's going on here. And I got thwarted by a group of people who said, you know, that's basically none of your business. This is all about other things we should be doing here. And I found that odd. Then I was thwarted by I wanted to have a mediation program on the campus. I thought, "Here, this is a way in which you show how you can be powerful by helping rather than by asserting decision making.

And I was told we have no problems. We have no conflicts. there's no need to have mediation. When I found a student had been living in her car for six weeks because she had, she had a conflict with her
roommate, I made the point [laughter] obviously. And this was the ... This was the way I used to think anyway that if Douglass had a mediation center and the young women here were trained to mediate on campus conflicts, this would be an asset to the university. Anybody anywhere in the university students who had conflicts, roommate conflicts, other kinds of thing can be mediated by these young women.

Here would be a great asset, skill building and ... Well, it didn't come to pass because everybody could think of all the reasons why it was hard to put together including no money from the alumni to put it together.

So, you know, it, it was an interesting year. It started with the planes hitting the World Trade Center.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: And, there ... Parents were coming and taking their young women back from college because they thought that's what they should do, you know, everybody was kind of unsure what to do. Well, for me, it was bonding with the students. One of the students, her mother was a stewardess on the plane that went down in Washington. We had another student who with her dog went and help cleaned up.

There were students who didn't know where their parents were. I opened the house for people to stay. There were all those campus gatherings, you know. You tried to come together as a community, and, it was, it was the launching of, that year, Shaping a Life Program. We made it about, you know, survival and who we are as a community and what we wanna be for one another. I, I think it was horrific of course, but for, for the campus, it was something totally unanticipated to be sure, but it had an effect that brought people even closer together.

So, in the dining halls, you could see everyone instead of talking about their petty nonsense, you know ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... talking about what's going on in the world, who we are, people. And, you know, it's funny because I remember specifically thinking about the Douglass experience when I went back to Morristown where I lived and just happened to have dinner that week with a colleague of mine, in an Arab, Pamir Restaurant ran by Afghanistan residents and so the flags on the outside and they were so afraid that people weren't going to come to the restaurant. And I didn't even put two and two together.

And I went in to have dinner and the mayor was there and the police chief and all kinds of residents had come to eat in the restaurant that night just to be supportive of local people who they felt might be retaliated against. There was a same kind of spirit and openness and generosity on the campus as well to anybody who was wearing a hijab, for anybody who looked like they might be different, who might be subject to any kind of hassle. And it was, you know, the really good heart of Douglass, I thought. Because I thought they wouldn't be a college without a faculty. And faculty made the decisions. Faculty were the lifeblood of the college. Without a faculty, how can you be a college? I ... To me, it was just that simple. I didn't ... I didn't trust. I didn't ... I couldn't, I couldn't visualize how the departments were gonna function with the colleges or when they were consolidated. I thought they would be consumed with how they all got along with one another. I think it mattered if you were physically located in a place. So, you know, you could walk over to American Studies.
Now, I don't know this for sure, but my guess is because American Studies has its home base, Douglass, you probably have a lot of Douglass students who are majors in American studies. I think there's a tendency to want to be part of what's close to you which is also why the residential housing is so great because you can be language and culture and all of that. But on the other hand, when you have to go to the Bush Campus for all your science and all that, I mean I think that that affects where-how you major. So that's why great to have the space in engineering, great to have all of that because it, it tries to cross that bridge.

But yes, I was not sure that it was gonna work well for Douglass and I thought because I gave the example about the chemists. I thought that that would be the death knell, you know, for women in science at Douglass and I might have over exaggerated but I was not comfortable with the plans going forward. The, the president was pretty sure about what he was ending but I don't think he was that clear about what we were creating. And it took quite a while to get the act together. And I think in the meanwhile Douglass was set back.

Mary Hartman was the dean then and she did support the consolidation. I think she expected more resources to be coming to Douglass. She tried to create a fellow's program basically keeping faculty attached to the college. And initially, that could work because they had been at Douglass and had been hired at Douglass. But once that cohort left, the rest are hired by their department. They had no affiliations with the colleges. You have to create that connection.

So women's and gender studies, it's located on the Douglass campus there's a- for good reason, and there's a great connection with the young women there and that's appropriate. the religion department used to be there. I don't know whether it still is. I'm not sure where all the departments are. But, I think I was concerned about all of that.
keep the benefits that they had only to their own. It was, it was fomenting all kinds of separateness that was not good, I think, for students who were trying to reach out and grow and become, take advantage of all of the university had to offer. Why come here if you can only be over here? You wanna major in journalism? Oh, you got to leave here and go over to sky. It made no sense.

We are one university but they're ... And Camden and Newark do not wanna let go of the Rutgers name, but for all intents and purposes, they are of a size, at least Newark is of a size and a comprehensiveness. They could very well stand on their own. There were times in the past where the Newark campus of Rutgers thought seriously about becoming part of an all-Newark higher education establishment. It was called the Council of the Higher Education in Newark. That would have been brilliant for Newark and for Essex County and I'm sorry that didn't happen. Because separate institutions competing with one another, that's just not great.

But now, the chancellors on both campuses, chomping at the bit as it were, always thinking New Brunswick is keeping the money. Frankly, when I was on the Board of Governors, we're constantly asking for an assessment of how resources were distributed. We were persuaded that Newark and Compton were benefiting much more than their numbers justified and that was justified anyway. But the fact that they were being deprived didn't seem [laughter] fair but they thought so. And this is the flagship. You can't get away from that. It's the heart of where the college was in 1766. Old Queen's, College Avenue, you know, has its own history and culture. I think you can't get away from that. But Newark and Camden are seen as real stars in the constellation.

JC Right.

LS: So, where they'll be in the next 10, 15 years, I don't know. They've tried to consolidate their law schools- I don't think successfully. They're co-deans.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: How does that work?

Yes. [laughter] That's, that's great question. The ... [laughter] When I talked about the opening of ... crossing the threshold of opportunity coming to this women's college that was true intellectually, and to a certain extent socially except that you had to be in your dorm, by 10 o'clock at night, and don't try sneaking in. You had to ... Well, no drinking, no smoking. Well, no. That's right. You could smoke but not in the dorm, not in our little dorms on the Corwin Campus.

At that time, we were still hawking cigarettes on campus for a few extra bucks [laughter], you know, that kind of thing. Oh, when I think of those days, my gosh. Now, we're doing with Coca Cola and Pepsi. anyway, the chapel was required. you, had to ... Oh, yes. And, and as a first year student, you could not wear red.

I'll tell you a quick story. I was on a blind date, well, half blind. I had met the guy on a mixer at the Douglass campus. He was at Princeton. And the deal was at Princeton, they have had like rooms where three or four guys had different rooms and a little kitchen type thing. And so if you went to stay, you know. You had your room and all of that stuff. So, I go down there, and I go to the room and it's a single. Oh, god. And on the wall was a moose hanging [laughter].

JC Oh, no.
LS: And from this moo-moose was a little sign that said, "You think you're horny." I thought, "Oh, all right. I'm out ... I'm out of here." So, but how do I, how do I get out? How do I escape? This by the way, I'm all dressed for the dance that night in my red dress. So, I gotta get back to the campus. And how do I get on the campus? I'm wearing a red. You can't wear red. If anybody sees me with red, this is gonna be bad. Well ...

JC: What will happen if you wear red?

LS: Well, you get penalties and embara- you know, whatever else. But, you know, it was verboten so, you know, you didn't do it. And I guess I was intimidated, but I think I was pretty good to get out of that place but I have no way to get back. The buses weren't running anymore. So, a guy at the gas station offered to drive me back to campus. Can you believe it? In those days, I guess that was fine. And he did and he lent me his jacket so I could cover up my red dress. Now I remember that.

And so we lived in this environment of things where you had to be sure you didn't make some mistake. And why we ... There was an Honor Board and in fact, I served on the Honor Board. And here's a good example. Oh, this is, this is a great example. It came to pass that a student was penalized. she was coming before the Honor Board and I forget whether she was gonna be expelled or she was gonna be suspended because the ... She had spent the night with a Rutgers guy. So, the issue was: Is she out of the room without permission? So, I remember as the Honor Board, I said, "What happened to the Rutgers guy?" "Oh, no. They don't have similar rules over there. This only applies to Douglass."

And ... Well, that struck me as grossly unfair. So, I refused to [laughter] convict [laughter] and the dean of students was livid with me. So she ... We had a contentious discussion and she said, "You know, we have a rule here. You are not allowed to bring discredit on the name of the college. You see it's written right here. It's number 10 or whatever it was." I said, "Bring discredit on the name of the college? So, if I steal a towel from, you know, a hotel, am I bringing discredit in the name of the college?" She said, "It doesn't go that far." But supposing, supposing the reputation of Douglass gets around that young women go spend the night with Rutgers people, I said, "Well, that might attract them to come for all I know." That didn't sit well.

JC: I'm sure.

LS: So, so but yes there were a lot of constraints. And you have- had to wear a skirt to dinner. So, in the old Cooper Dining Hall, you would see, it's no longer standing, this rack of, of hooks with all these grotesque long ugly skirts. We all leave them there. We'd go in there, put the skirt on [laughter] and then go into dinner, come out, take it off and go back in our jeans. So ... And we had prayer at dinner. Somebody rang a bell and you say a set of prayer.

JC: Christian prayers.

LS: Yeah. I guess, you know. I think they were silent. But I, I ... But, but I don't recall that.

And the food [sighs] was not good. And if you didn't like the main dish, you had- you could have cheese. And it was three pieces of American cheese on a plate. I ate more pieces of cheese which I ... And I think at one particular... I think that's why I got so sick and went into the infirmary and they wouldn't let me out because ... But I had to be at a demonstration I thought. So, I ... Then I refused to eat altogether so I was on a hunger strike until my father showed up.
When he crossed the threshold, I went "Ugh, I'm in trouble." But as I said, the, the French wouldn't get out of Algeria and I had to get out of that infirmary [laughter].

JC [laughter] How diverse was your class?


JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: I mean my godchild, Joy Smythe McCauley Solner came from Sierra Leone and, she ... She's just great. so I always think of Joy because she was one of our crowd. there were ... There were young women from Catholic schools so there was sort of a kind of a cohort. There was a reasonable number of ... Well, you probably have heard of the stories about anti-Semitism at Douglass but basically it was rampant in higher education generally speaking. But there were people of every faith, religion, ethnicity, the sense of being a real cultural mix.

And as I said, you know, at my high school it was very diverse so I was used to that. I always had friends who were black, Jewish, French, whatever. I mean it just was who we were. same community I live in now, Morristown, I mean I don't think I wanna live in any other place. And that was the way Douglass was. I think it probably now is diverse as it now is. I think there are more Asian students now and more Middle Eastern students I believe, but I don't really know. I just I think more higher education is more diverse generally speaking than those days. But we probably compared to other colleges at that time probably remarkably so.

LS: Sacred ... The path that goes from the street, George Street where the Douglass sign is, Douglass College ...

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: ... going up to college hall. That's called sacred path. And as a first year student, you're not allowed to walk on that path. So, you know, the big thing is you, when you become a sophomore, you can walk on the path. "Cause otherwise, you had to go around.

JC Right.

LS: I think most of us just walked alongside of it, you know, on the grass because well, what the hell? [laughter] but yeah, there were a lot of things like that. Traditions. And they still ... They still have them in one way, shape or form.

JC Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LS: Not exactly the, the heart of the activity, I don't think, any longer but, but they still resonate for those of us who were there then [laughter].


LS: I'll just say one, one more thing.

JC Sure.
LS: And that is that in all the talks I had with alums during the, the last reorganization, I tried to make the point that Douglass has changed. And you know that expression, "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"? Each generation profited, benefited from it and it was different for each of us. And what we're trying to preserve is often the thing that we had but the next one, was something different and the one before that was something else. And it was good for them then and there.

The statistic nationally is that 80 some odd percent of students love the choice they made for college because they make it work and that's as simple as that because they're so crazy, the reasons people choose where they go. But most of us didn't know that we're making an affirmative decision to go to a woman's college and go to Douglass. And I think that's only really in recent decades that that's been the case. We came because we couldn't go elsewhere. But we profited from it.

But the sense of the Douglass experience, the Douglass difference or what I call the Douglass advantage is that it changed enough to accommodate the people who are coming at that period and made it work for them and they made it work for themselves. So, the reason that way continued to thrive is because it has an adaptability even though I can't describe precisely what it is. It's an animus and it's a spirit and it's an involvement and it's an engagement that, that makes a difference in people's lives. And maybe they go there because they're gonna do that anyway [laughter].