



CUNY Digital History Archive
Transcript of interview with Tucker Pamela Farley
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Andrea: It is Sunday May 15, 2016. I am Andrea Ades Vásquez and I'm with Yana Calou, and we are interviewing Tucker Farley for the CUNY Digital History Archive. We're in Manhattan. As the first question why don't we start with if you would like to say a little bit about your early life, where you were born or anything about your time before finding Brooklyn College?

Tucker: I was born in Massachusetts, and I went to Oberlin College, which was a perfect place for me because I had decided that I didn't want to turn into a fluffy, frilly person without a thought in my head. So that was good. I spent a little time in Europe, and then I came back and worked in southeast Ohio, in Appalachia as a schoolteacher in a public school with the first to twelfth grades in the same building. Great education for me because we didn't have books, we didn't have chalk, we didn't have heat, we didn't have anything. So I got lots of good lessons on how to make it up as you go along [laughter]. I taught all the grades of high school, English and a few other things at the same time. So they really taught me a lot- those students and I love them a lot.

I know that during the same period of time there was a wonderful essay, "The Laying On of Culture," [laughter] but I think I lived it.

Andrea: And what years were you there?

Tucker: That was '61 to '63, round there. And I did teach briefly at Saints Field High School also.

Andrea: Where's that?

Tucker: It's in the same area, southeast Ohio. Then I decided that I would get a graduate degree because I wasn't having a very good success in working for the black students in my classes who were discriminated against in my opinion. The girls for example were not allowed into the home economics

class because the home economics teacher told them, said that they couldn't pass the test. So I decided if I can't change the whole school system by myself maybe what I can do is write textbooks with my students in them. So I decided to go back to graduate school. And I ended up- I had to pay for a divorce to do this- and I ended up working in the Institute for Industrial and Labor Relations at Penn State University.

They were running two schools at the time to determine whether all the lazy workers in McKeesport and other Pennsylvania towns who were on welfare would be better returned to being paid laborers if they got a traditional diploma from high school, or whether they got vocational education. So one school was vocational education, one school was traditional high school. And I didn't last long in that job because I said that these workers would get better jobs if they had jobs available to them. It was the beginning of deindustrialization and factories were moving to cheaper labor. So that was an introduction to me that put me on the side of the workers I should say.

I did go to graduate school. I was very active in the anti-war movement. I was one of the elected leaders when the National Guard came to the Penn State campus with armed ammunition before Kent State and Jackson State. It was a dangerous situation, and the university ended up hiring Theodore Kheel who was a big labor management negotiator between the unions and corporations to negotiate between the protestors and the university. And I was one of four people elected to represent the demonstrators. So that was another introduction to me to the way that labor and management were working in those days.

We organized- I helped organize one of the first graduate student unions there at Penn State. And when I graduated, I graduated at a time that the job market had fallen through for academics, and I came to the Modern Language Association at the end of the '60s and there were maybe four to six jobs available for thousands of people. So I organized the job seekers caucus and worked with other radicals who were organizing the MLA at the time and we briefly took over the Modern Language Association, elected our own people. And I ended up being head of the job market commission in the Modern Language Association, and put on a big forum on the job market and invited a radical economist called Bill Tabb to help us discuss the issues and see them in a broader context than what they were looking at. So I kind of made a name for myself in the MLA and got lots of opportunities to get jobs, so I would take them and say, "Oh I'm sorry I can't take this job, but I have a good friend who would be good for you."

And I went to CUNY because of open admissions. I really wanted to work, it was one of two systems on in California and one in New York that had open admissions, and that was what I wanted to do.

Andrea: And which year was that?

Tucker: I came in 1970.

Andrea: Right at the start.

Tucker: I formed the New York Women's Labor Project right around that time. And a group of us who had been active in the New University Conference, which is the successor to SDS at that time, we developed a course a women's studies course for working women, and taught it.

Andrea: Which was before you were at Brooklyn, or when you moved there?

Tucker: Just before that time I think I developed it.

Andrea: But it wasn't at the school?

Tucker: No it had nothing to do with the school. In fact a lot of my activism wasn't at first at the school. We taught in union halls around the tri state area. And that work ended up as being the basis for the women's studies program at Cornell, ILR with Bobby Wertheimer. They developed a trade union women's studies program.

But I did start teaching women's studies courses at Brooklyn in 1970.

Andrea: Tell me about the way you said you came to CUNY about open admissions. What did you hear about it, why? What attracted you?

Tucker: What attracted me, I thought it was the right way to run the university. Especially a university that was a city university. And I had been teaching students who didn't have enough food to eat during the day for some time. I thought that they should get the best teachers that they could have, and I thought I was a good teacher and actually go there.

Andrea: Because open admissions began pretty abruptly, it was supposed to take five years to come into being, but because of the demand it actually happened much quicker than we thought. So there was a lot of hiring happening all at once, and of course the student body grew so quickly like in a year. I'd love to hear about what your impressions are?

Tucker: When I first came I was horrified by some of my colleagues who were talking about having to teach the ineducables. And it just floored me and really motivated me to begin to concentrate ... I left my work in the unions really I left to for CLUW, the Coalition or Labor Union Women, but mostly I began to concentrate on developing programs for CUNY people and for community people. I began teaching in kitchens, and school libraries, and places like that to help women from the community who might possibly want to come back to school to have a little contact with the school. And started the Women's Center there too in order to give them a support in the school. And to have a place that was more radical and offer more radical or offer more radical programs than perhaps the Women's Studies program- which I had been

working on too- could do since that one had to pass faculty council and all of that and be very respectable. And the Women's Center would have more freedom.

Andrea: When you first arrived on campus in this moment of open admissions was there also an active anti-war movement?

Tucker: Yes there was an active anti-war movement. I got there and I said, "Where are the anti-war activists?" And Hoby Spalding thought I was an agent [*laughter*].

[00:10:34]

Andrea: And who did you run into, what did you find in that area? Renate had mentioned there were demonstrations, you mentioned the anti-war activity.

Tucker: She was already involved in that, she was on campus.

Andrea: She was there before you?

Tucker: Yes she was on campus before me. And she was active and there were students who were active. And the students introduced themselves to me immediately, we became good friends and we worked together. The students that I worked together with a lot were Hope Singer, Debbie Cherry, Rosella Mosarino, those three particularly. And then after we started getting courses towards a program Carol Lafason, and Davida Mayan.

Andrea: Have you stayed in touch with them? You remember their names so well.

Tucker: I do remember their names. I'm losing my memory so I may forget them, but I don't think I will. They were wonderful. I mean, the students...It was a time when you could really be buddies with the students. When I first started meetings for the Women's Studies program we had students, faculty, and staff all together. No hierarchy. And it was very exciting those early days.

Andrea: That's interesting that you mentioned staff as well, because usually we hear faculty and students. Who were the staff members, what was their role?

Tucker: Anybody who wanted to come could come. And once we first started teaching as a program ... I'll tell you the story of how we got this, but we got an office and a staff person who was very active with us and I included her on everything, Pat Corsia. She had worked on Wall Street as a secretary before she came to Brooklyn College, and she had had her heels racked with a ruler for wearing sling back pumps. She was very happy to enroll into a more congenial atmosphere in the women's studies office. But I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself.

Andrea: Yes because we want all the details. It sounds like an amazing moment there all this activity?

Tucker: It was wonderful, I started teaching women studies, I was hired to teach women's studies. I sold myself to the college as somebody who wanted to teach women's studies. And the students had apparently been active in saying they wanted women's studies, and so I was hired to teach women's studies and I started doing that.

In fact the first course that I offered in women's studies, they didn't bother to put limits on it or check the registration. And if the first hour it got to be over 100 people. So it was definitely wanted. And people in those early courses would bring their mothers, and their sisters. It was an amazing time because of course there were no materials and my experience in making it up as I went along was very useful in not having books and texts. So we did some very good work in inventing what we needed to do.

Andrea: What was the reaction of the administration at this moment, they had a lot on their hands right?

Tucker: The administration they didn't react so much but the English department was amazed. And first they wanted to close it immediately, but then they realized they would get good FTEs from having that many students with an English teacher.

When I came I was not given an office. I was not given a desk. I was not given a chair. I was not given a telephone. I was wandering the halls as a fulltime faculty member.

Andrea: And so you were brought in to teach before the center, or the women's organization, or any of those, all that?

Tucker: Oh you know I had to do that. That was later.

Andrea: Right, so when you first came in there's all this activity, anti-war stuff-

Tucker: -Mostly anti-war stuff...

Andrea: -And obviously you're really attracted to open admissions and people very much attracted to women's studies at this time clearly? It was early '70s.

[00:14:57]

Tucker: Well I was teaching those courses with our program at the beginning. I taught them both in the School of Humanities. We had five schools during that period of time. Tom Birkenhead, who was the Dean of the School of Social Science, hired me to teach in the School of Social Science, and so I taught women's studies courses in the School of Social Science as well as in the School of Humanities.

That was very good because it gave me a grounding to begin organizing and agitating for a more programmatic approach and for other people to be

included in both schools. So I co-taught at one point with Freddie Wachsberger from Art, for example, and with Renate Bridenthal from History. And eventually over a period from maybe '72, '73, we got committees going in both schools and I was appointed to be the head of the committee.

So there was a committee in each school and then I was the head of the two committees- a Women's Studies program that would include the two schools. And so the people from social science worked on a social science introductory course. And the people from humanities worked on an introductory course in humanities. And then we brought it together for advance course for majors that would combine the two, and left room in the middle on the middle layer for courses from the different department to contribute to women's studies development. So people could major, get a co-major at that time in women's studies. By 1974 it was approved in Albany.

Andrea: And what was the student body like then?

Tucker: The student body as I knew it was very mixed. There was the open admissions people who were wonderful. Many of them were given mediation at that time. But I found them very bright, and alert, and attuned to the realities of life in ways that some of the other students weren't. So I liked that very much.

Andrea: And they were all interested in your classes?

Tucker: Well I wouldn't say they were all interested in my classes.

Andrea: And was it mostly women who came to the classes?

Tucker: Who came to the women's studies classes? Because I taught regular classes too. Yeah it was mostly women and their mothers and sisters.

Andrea: How do you mean?

Tucker: Well people got so excited they brought their families to take the class, too. It was great. *[laughter]*

Andrea: *[laughter]* That's great- They saw it was a real opportunity? That's interesting.

Tucker: Yeah it was, it was wonderful.

Andrea: And so you didn't feel a lot of resistance from the administration, you had this pretty diverse group of students attracted to the classes and obviously women's studies. Tell us about how the structure started forming, the first meetings about forming the women's organization I think came first and then?

Tucker: There was already a Brooklyn College organization which was primarily students. The women's studies group developed its own programmatic task and orientation, and it was open to anybody who wanted to come, any faculty

member, any staff member, any student. And so we had big meetings, and people took on tasks. Is that what you're asking?

Andrea: Yeah and I remember when Renate was telling us about the first meeting you didn't know how many people were going to show up and it turned out to be a really big group like 100 people or something. And she described it the same way you did, and people had all these different interests, and people took it in many directions.

And yes we have heard that you were really so wonderful with students. So I was interested in your connection to students and how that worked. And also what directions you took, you sort of took charge. And I know the women's center was very much something you -

Tucker: That came later. At first we did the women's studies program.

Andrea: Tell us what happened after those first meetings that you just described?

Tucker: Well they narrowed down to task groups and I remember working with students as I developed curriculum that I thought would be appropriate to put before faculty council and the curriculum planning committee. I got myself an office by that time, we would sit there together and open books, I would bring in the books that I thought would be the most appropriate because they would have women writers in them. When I started teaching in the English department at Brooklyn College there was one woman in the curriculum in American Literature.

Yana: Virginia Woolf?

Tucker: No she wasn't in American Literature. But the one woman in British literature was Jane Austin, and the one in English was Emily Dickinson, so we had two women. My friend Paul Lauter in MLA was working on developing a Heath anthology which would include a lot of women, a lot of people of color, and working class writers. And so I would bring in a variety of writers that I thought should be included.

And then the other task as I saw it, I remember working with the students to tell them how I was thinking, what did they think about that, they loved it. I thought that the way that the earlier textbooks had divided things into periods was problematic. For example in English they would have people like Dryser in American literature be the person who was writing the new naturalist kind of literature. But before that there were all these wonderful women writers who weren't even in the books. So I would bring my other books along and say, "Here, look see these other women, look at that dates. We should include." "Yes we should include, oh let me read that!"

So we had a kind of collaboration that I thought was wonderful because I felt they were interested in what I was doing, and I was interested in how they

were feeling. To me we worked together and it was very important to include the students.

Andrea: And did they make it neatly through curriculum committees? I mean they have to go through a series of approvals when you design classes to introduce new material?

Tucker: We did. The biggest problem came a little bit later when they wanted me to teach a lesbianism course that I had already been teaching at Barnard, that students at Barnard had hired me to teach a lesbianism course. But we already had the program by that time.

Andrea: So take us back to the beginning of the center and the program?

Tucker: First we did this program and we didn't have really time that was adequate and that sort of thing. So in the summer when a lot of people come to the school and take summer school courses, we didn't have faculty who were hired to be there. So we hired two students, we engaged two students to be the summer coordinators. That's where Carol Lafason, and Davida Mayan came in, and they worked with Pat Lafason the staff person in the office, and they were our coordinators in summer as students. I just loved that, I thought that was very consistent with the kind of education that we were fostering, encouraging, and developing at that time.

Yana: Tucker, do you know if you would maybe have any letters from students thanking you, that maybe you would share and we could get permission from them to share? Or any kinds of anything like this. I saw in the archive there were some letters from students looking for recommendations for graduate school and thanking a lot of the program faculty for opening this field up in this line of enquiry.

Tucker: I think that was a little later, that was a little later. And there should be somewhere in the files if they weren't disappeared like other files which seemed to have gone. I had to fight for my job during this period as an untenured faculty member, but that was after I had founded the women's center. It's a great story that fight. And founding the women's center is a great story. And the women's studies program is a great story, they go one, two, three like that.

If you tell me you want to talk about this now I'm happy to do it. But chronologically they're like that.

Andrea: In order, this is great, it's really interesting. I mean are we up to the women's center?

Tucker: No we aren't. the women's studies program, I brought in a woman from the department who it turned out didn't share the kind of broad based pedagogical experimentation that I'd been describing to you, and thought it was dangerous

and inappropriate. And who went to the administration and worked to not have the people who have been involved in the real pedagogical feminist approach to the program meet with the provost at the time to instate a women's studies program committee to run the program. And it was originally

...

At that point two people were appointed, one person was appointed by this other person to run a program who had never really been involved in the founding of the program.

Andrea: Who was the provost at the time?

Tucker: Marilyn Gittell. But she hadn't been active with us in doing the work. So when it was proposed by the senior faculty member who literally raised the hand of another person and said, "This is the person who should be the coordinator," and held this woman's hand up, she was appointed the first coordinator. I don't know how much Renate has told you about this already, so stop me if I'm just repeating. And I was excluded as the as the radical.

The first women's studies committee, for several weeks I think Renate would know she was included. And apparently from what I heard, I wasn't there, they mainly talked about what the logo should be. And the women who had been involved in developing the women's studies program were dissatisfied and went back to Marilyn Gittell and said, "This is not going to work, we can't do this. This is not a proper coordinator for us." I wasn't there so I don't know exactly what they said but this is what I understand. And they said, "We need Tucker back," and the other woman stopped being the coordinator at that point and I came on.

Andrea: Who was that person?

Tucker: She was the one from the French department, Mary Ryan was her name.

Andrea: Okay I'm sure it's in the files. I see this is all the nitty gritty of the really -

Tucker: I don't know how much nitty gritty you want but anyway the questions that you asked about the original founding did include a problem with the administration. The administration unknowingly did it but then corrected it. So where does that leave us?

Andrea: The very beginning, so you had coordinators?

Tucker: Once that wasn't the case anymore and we were back to the group of people who were working on the program and had been working on the program, we said we need co-coordinators. So from then on we had co-coordinators and that was good.

Andrea: And what were the main concerns? What were the original, early concerns that you wanted to deal with the other women?

Tucker: With the other women who were faculty? I wanted and I think that the majority of us wanted to make sure that the kind of broad based inclusiveness that we had started with would be part of what we expected from all the courses. So that people who were offering a course in psychology, or a course in sociology, or whatever from the other departments, from French from anything, would apply to the program with a course description. And that we would check it to see is this an inclusive program, or is an all-white, upper class kind of literature or psychology, or whatever it was. Are we really interrogating the scholarship here? Because that was part of the plan as those of us who worked on it understood it.

[00:30:10]

And we didn't want just one person lecturing from the front of the room and everybody else sitting in the room just taking notes. We wanted to have the students discussing, and participating. We wanted that kind of openness in the classroom so that they would be a feminist pedagogy.

Andrea: And were they team taught classes?

Tucker: Occasionally if we got the money for it, they were. I remember I taught with both Freddie and Renate.

Yana: Do you remember what the first class that you said you were teaching even before the program, the one that the 100 people was called? What were some of the topics?

Tucker: Oh it's 100 in the first hour. Topics I may have records in my files, I'm inviting you to come down and look at these files. Or they may be in those three boxes. Somehow they are somehow unprocessed in the Brooklyn College library. I saved all my women's studies curricula so you should be able to find that out.

Yana: So you were teaching some clearly a labor component, clearly women in American literature.

Tucker: I don't think it was restricted to American literature actually. I think in that very first course I even brought in sex manuals and said, "Let's look and see what they're telling people here," they were very revealing. So I brought in all kinds of materials. And the students would bring in materials.

Andrea: And did students come to you personal, did they open up to you outside of class because of the things that you were teaching in class?

Tucker: They did, but they also did in class. They did in class. And we did journaling in class. And I carried that over when I started teaching in kitchens and libraries because I wanted to develop a program for returning women. We did

a lot of journaling in those classes, so if I can segway into Project Second Start -

Yana: This the Impact the Project Impact?

Tucker: I think it was renamed yeah. It started out as project Second Start, and then it was Project Chance. In the New York Women Labor Project I was working with a woman named Susanne Paul who came in and she became one of our teachers. And she ended up teaching Empire. And she and another woman Dolly Robinson, got a grant to do a study of women who returned. Older women as they called them in those days- who returned to school.

And as we had suspected the biggest proportion of students in those days in the early '70s for CUNY in Brooklyn at least, we didn't do all the schools. But at Brooklyn College the biggest population was returning women. And so we made a case, they didn't, they did the study. But it seemed to me that a good case could be made that the university and the college should take account of the returning women population and accommodate these students institutionally. So that was part of my impetus for starting Project Chance. And I went down to -

Andrea: So was that an offshoot of the women's studies program Project Chance? Or was it something completely different?

Tucker: Well I have to give you a little background here. Another project that was happening was Lilia Melani from the English department was suing CUNY, and one of the people that joined that suit was Renate. So Renate and Lilia were more involved with the suit. I was involved with starting women's studies and I was really the only faculty member that started the women's center in the beginning.

So there were two parts to the starting of the women's center that were helpful in institutionalizing it. One was actually getting a space and hiring some people at the college, and that's a story. And the other was making sure that there was a long-term project at the university which would link the women's, in my view, should link the women's studies program and the women's center, and that was Project Chance.

Yana: And created funding for?

Tucker: Yes. So coterminous both things ... Renate went off to write because she was part of the suit, she wanted a better job description, she wanted to get away from being a lecturer and become a faculty member.

Andrea: I was just going to say wanted tenure.

Tucker: I remember we were sitting on my bed in Brooklyn one time and I'm telling her about this idea of getting a women's center going. And she said well you'll

have to do that on your own. I was so crushed, my dear sister leaving me. She said, "Yes I'm going to go off and write," which she did. Which was very good, that's what faculty members are supposed to do. I was still crushed. [laughter]

I did two things, one was go back to the plan of inviting everybody faculty, staff, students, day, night, whoever wanted to be involved to come and talk about a women's center. And the other was to proceed with the data that Susanne Paul and Dolly Robinson had by now finished on the returning women. And use that to support the need for a women's center. And to support the women in the community who might not had made it back through the gates of the academy at that point, but who might want to.

I had two very dear friends in Ohio when I was teaching in Appalachia, one of them ended up with four children trying to commit suicide. And the other one was institutionalized her husband. They were perfectly, reasonable, wonderful, normal, average women with kids in a small town. And I lost them. I would write letters to them and I couldn't find them. The letters would come back, "Addressee unknown." So these women were my heart and I thought if they were in the city where would they be, what would they be doing, and what would they need, what would they want? And that's why I went into the kitchens and the libraries of the communities, especially the poor communities and started teaching English 1 to women who wanted to sign up and take those courses. And we journaled.

In one course for example very early on one of the women read a journal entry about how she had been beaten. How she was sorry she was to late to the class but she had been beaten but she had come anyway. And another woman said well that had happened to her. And pretty soon every woman in the class except one confessed that she had been beaten for going to this college class. And I used that to decide well we should have a hotline at the women's center when we get it.

And at the end of that semester the one woman who didn't say she had been beaten for coming to an English 1 class, in the community stayed afterwards and beckoned to me, to come talk to her which I did. And she said that she too had been beaten but she was too embarrassed to admit it. Even though all the other women had. Do you have a Kleenex, is there a Kleenex around?

So part of the work of teaching the women in the classes in the community help me to see what might be useful to do in the women's center, in designing the women's center and helping to envision how it might function. It was the first women's center at a university, just as the women's studies program was the first program to give credit toward graduation in a co-major, or major in the world really. It was the first one.

So those things were going on at the same time. Now switch to the women's center. The women's center was a big huge group of all different kinds of

women, from the day school, the night school. In the early days I had some of the secretaries who were interested. Not too many faculty, I don't remember faculty being particularly interested in the women's center.

Andrea: And the women who came from the neighborhood were a diverse group. What neighborhoods did they come from?

Tucker: We taught in about half a dozen different neighborhoods. And when we did get the women's center we did things in both Spanish and English. And at that time there was the Congress of Neighborhood Women, which was in operation. And I was in contact with them and with the women in the trade union movement who were organizing secretaries. So there was a lot going on at the same time.

Andrea: So the center was at Brooklyn College, but all these other things in kitchens?

Tucker: The center was in Brooklyn College, it hasn't been founded yet but it was already reaching out. We were trying to get those women involved and they did become involved. They became very active even before the center happened. And there were students who helped interview the people when we finally did get permission to get the center. But before that we had to get that permission. So that's that story, am I up there yet?

So we planned to go to the President, Noah, and say that we had done all this work and all this research and we had the program and we needed a women's center. So we made an appointment. And we had made sure that there was a huge crowd in the halls, huge crowd in the main building outside his office. And I went in and I said, "I'm here for the appointment," and the secretary said, "Well you can't have the appointment."

Andrea: It was just you? It was supposed to be just you in the appointment?

Tucker: I don't think that was clear, I didn't think that other people shouldn't come. No I thought all of us should go, I don't know what they wanted.

Andrea: You walked in first and said, "I'm here for the appointment."

Tucker: I walked in first right, and they cancelled the appointment. And I said, "Well you know I don't think that will work.. There are a number of us here and we are counting on this time and place for being able to talk with the administration about our plans. We've made it in advance, it was confirmed, and were here.

Andrea: Sounds reasonable.

Tucker: And so he came out of his office and he said, "Well I haven't read it." I said, "Oh good I'll help you read it." And I walked in with him to his office. And we sat there together and I turned the page, page, by page, by page, by page, and I explained what was on each page to him. And it was a toned down

version I have to say but it was a good one. And he saw that it would be really good for the college to have something like this, especially because we had so many women returning to the school, and it would be a good way to serve it. But he said you have to pay for it. He said, "I'll give you a year, and if you can't come up with the funds to pay for the women's center then you don't get to have your women's center. You can have one year in which to do it. I said, "Okay."

And all of those women who were out there waiting I think were the factor that gave him the impetus to sit there and hear about the women's center and agree to it.

Andrea: But he didn't give you're the financial support?

Tucker: He gave it to us for a year.

Andrea: Oh he did. But you had to be self-sufficient after a year?

Tucker: That's all I needed yeah. And I attribute that victory to the crowd of women who were out there. There were reporters from the local paper, and lots of different representatives of his constituency. And meanwhile of course Lilia was suing him in Albany. So he wanted to point with pride to the women's studies program, and this would allow him to point with pride to serving this new population etc. So he was smart about that.

[00:45:29]

Andrea: And with these different things going on the Melani case was happening, and there was a women's program, now women's center. What was the relations between all these activities, were they very separate, or were you mutually supportive and in what ways?

Tucker: The women's center people we sat down and wrote a proposal for a grant for FIPSY, Funds for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education. And we said we wanted to serve these returning women and here's how we wanted to do it. We wanted to have a hotline, we want to have counseling, and we want to have this and we want to have that. And we went to Washington and we got the grant. So we came back with a \$350,000 grant for three years. It was a very good grant.

Andrea: Wow, big grant back then.

Tucker: Well it was historic, it was historic, another first for Brooklyn College. And we were able to hire two people at a time when ... I mean it was perhaps the last of the hiring, because we were now getting into the middle of the '70s when New York City was going to go practically bankrupt, and we were all going to have our wages garnished.

Andrea: Were these faculty or staff positions?

Tucker: Staff. No we couldn't hire faculty for a non-academic program, and we didn't want to. We wanted people who would be activists and really work to get good programs going that would supplement what went on in the classrooms. And that would work in the communities. For example we had health fairs in the communities, can't do that in a class.

Andrea: Were there any child care?

Tucker: There was a child care program that was established before I got there actually. So there was the child care, Brooklyn Women's Organization, the SUIT, the women's studies program, the women's center, and the returning women's project.

Tucker: So you're right, there was a lot going on. I think we had a division of labor.

Andrea: And from the center you mentioned the hotline, and you had these staff and you did health fairs.

Tucker: And we did programs, we taught people co-counseling in the center. So that we could continue the non-hierarchical ways of helping each other, that sort of thing.

Yana: And around the programming for the returning women was that something that was housed at the center for support?

Tucker: Yes support for the returning women, absolutely.

Yana: Did that include night classes, or?

Tucker: We already had night classes at Brooklyn, we had a big night school. Half of the professional class of employees in New York City went through Brooklyn College's night school, and we had Saturday classes. But yes it did. But we also had classes during the day, we had classes at all times.

Yana: I think regarding the center I'm just wondering ... How it's been explained to me as the center as this branch of community activism which is paired with the practice of all of all of the feminist theory that is being looked at in the program. The ways that you saw those two interacting as someone who is really involved in both of those. You didn't want just one of these things.

And then for your particular story and I'm not sure about dates, but I know you talked a little bit about having this work start being one of the hubs of the convening of the northeastern women's studies associations and then becoming this larger body once the program is established?

Tucker: I did a lot of work going around to other schools. I did a lot of talking. I would always accept when I could an invitation to speak, and try to help other schools put their women studies programs together. And finally I decided, I

think it was in '74 that we needed to have a conference, and east coast regional conference, and we put on a conference.

Yana: It was hosted at Brooklyn College?

Tucker: It was hosted at Brooklyn College, we did it from Brooklyn. And we went around to different schools and we talked to women, we said what do you want to do? We tried to involve them, we did involve them in the planning to the extent that they would work with us. We did some planning at the Graduate Center because that was a central place. And we said amongst other things, we had three tracks there and one of the tracks was about future association, professional associations. Do you want we said, a regional professional association, or do you want a national professional association? Because many of us who were involved in doing women's studies around the country were talking about this question.

And so I said let's ask the people who come. And people came from Maine, to Florida, from Chicago to Long Island. It was very successful. And because we were being battered at the same time we were growing it seemed like strategies for survival would be a good name for the conference. Even though we were busting at the seams, growing at the same time. But as we grew we had to keep from being cut off at the knees, or have our head chopped off, or something.

It was called Strategies for Survival, and we planned how to work with women's centers. How to work with women's studies programs, how to organize professionally. And we had all those three tracks going day and night at the conference. And out of that came a group that called itself the northeast regional women's studies association, and Renate was active with that for a year.

At the same time there were people who were talking about a national women's studies association and a group of us worked in Philadelphia with people there who were interested in that. And we participated a year later 1977, in planning a national women's studies association. And Brooklyn College took five people. We were one of the most active feminist pedagogical centers in the countries, in the world really, we took five people to that conference. We were very active in the founding of the National Women's Studies Association in Kansas at the end of the '70s.

Andrea: I want to bring you back a little more local, what about other campuses around CUNY were you working with other places-

Tucker: Hunter I think was the next campus that followed us.

Andrea: What about Staten Island, didn't Richmond College have something?

Tucker: I don't know if they had a program, they had faculty there, Joe Gilligan and others.

Andrea: There was Hunter, any other places, were there other women in other campuses that you were -

Tucker: From CUNY?

Andrea: - yeah. I guess Hunter-

Tucker: I think Hunter was the main group that formed a program. But the Manhattan community- Nan Maglin was there. I don't know that they formed a program- I don't remember that.

Andrea: But there were no other centers or no other ties, or things that you were doing together within CUNY particularly?

Tucker: Not at that time, no. Hunter people stayed pretty much to themselves I think.

Andrea: You were all very busy.

Yana: I wanted to ask you some questions around, I know that there was some back and forth about the curriculum. Particularly about I think maybe first called "Women's Sexuality" classes that had to be changed to "Human Sexuality," where Renate ended up writing this really wonderful letter to the editor in response to an article in New York Magazine about women's studies programs across the country teaching lesbianism. And then what sort of structural climate of homophobia within the schools was around? And how that impacted your curriculum, how that impacted your career, how it impacted people who were lesbian or gay teaching in the program, what those experiences were like? And if there were any gay students that experienced some of this? And how all of that wove in to either experiences as faculty or in the classrooms?

Tucker: At the beginning we worked with different studies programs, the Africana Studies program, the Puerto Rican Studies program, the Judaic studies program to try to coordinate liaison that would benefit the students and build curriculum. And because I was already teaching a lesbianism course at Barnard the students wanted me to teach a course at Brooklyn College too. That was contentious, that was a big challenge, that was where we ran into the most trouble.

Here was Brooklyn College and here was the financial difficulties of the city ... here was CUNY I shouldn't say Brooklyn College. Here was CUNY really pressed, schools closing, hospitals closing, child care centers closing, freezes everywhere. And the curriculum planning council I think it was at the School of Humanities. I don't remember when the five schools came into one school. I'll have to check the dates on that to see which group this was. But I'm

remembering Ethel Woolf who was the Dean of the School of Humanities chairing these meetings which is why I think it was in the school of humanities. Where the women's studies programs proposed a lesbianism course and they took weeks in the midst of this crisis to debate it. It was so upsetting to them that they went into secret ballot, they didn't want people to know how they voted.

They made up special rules for one of those courses that get taught once maybe later you get to teach it again because it's on the books but that's it, it's not a regular course, special topics that's it, rubric. They went nuts over this course, it was too broad, it was too narrow, it was too historical, it was too specific, it was too everything all at the same time. And I remember some of my colleagues came out to defend this course and they had been having nice respectable careers for years at CUNY and they came out to defend this course. And one of the women, Freddie Wachsberger from the Art Department was addressed by the Dean of the School of Humanities, Freddie with the boots, you want to talk Freddie with the boots?

It was a time when people's nerves were jangled that such a thing should be discussed. We went through that before other colleges did. I think at the time that your ... and that took weeks to do, and finally they gave us permission to teach one course.

Yana: And that was to be taught by you?

Tucker: Oh yes.

Andrea: That's all having to do with the classes. In terms of center and the students, and the community women what was the feeling like then? Was that a period when women were coming out? How were others, aside from the academics and the official classes, how was the issue of gender, and identity, and sexuality playing out as the '70s progressed and people were more open about their identity?

[00:59:51]

Tucker: Well I was going to trace it to the trouble spot that you referred to earlier. But I think people felt that they could be open in the center. I don't think that the same things was true as easily in your average class. Although that was one of the things that we stipulated if you want to be part of the women studies program you had to be inclusive and you had to be open to people of different sexual identities, and gender identities.

Not everybody who taught wanted to do that, or was equipped to do that very well. And so we developed a program called, "Dyke for a Day." If a teacher who taught a course didn't want to deal with the issue, we would supply people from the women's center and the women's studies program who would deal with the issue, mainly from the women's center.

And there were students who walked in and taught the class perfectly at ease and happy and be Dyke for the Day. And then the students could ask them any questions that they wanted. And it was one way of dealing with it at the time. So that was I think a stop gap measure was successful and the students liked it. And it was an out for the faculty who were shy on the topic, or not equipped to do it, or didn't want to do it, which happened.

Yana: And did you end up getting to teach the class?

Tucker: I did teach the lesbianism class. Yes I remember Gloria Naylor who was writing her first book at the time coming and sitting in the front row. And she was there from the student government to see whether this was a legitimate class. [laughter] Yeah it was great, it was a good course, it was very exciting.

The issue I think came later to a head because Sarah Lawrence was accused of encouraging lesbians, and parents began thinking about taking students out of their classes. And by that time we had already formed the National Women's Studies Association and the New York Women's Studies Association. And the campus that the Brooklyn College campus involvement became about because I was coming up for tenure and having a lot of really weird activities going on around my progress through the various hoops that you jump through sometimes some of the women on the curriculum planning council had difficulty just even keeping an appointment with me. And I would have to write a little note, "It's okay to keep an appointment with me. It's about a professional matter, and it's both of our responsibilities to deal with X." I would leave the note for the person and then the person would make another appointment with me.

People were freaked out, I will say that. Not so much the students I think, more the faculty. It was a very difficult issue for them. And there was a star chamber actually held in the English Department when I came up for tenure, a hearing that was actually against the union contract. I remember meeting one of my union buddies in the hall one day and he said, "Why did you do all those things?" I said, "How's it going?" He said, "Why did you do all these things?" I said, "What things?" He said, "Oh you know keeping the men out of your class and refusing to teach literature with marriage in it, and giving all the women As." I said, "What?!" He said, "Yes that's what we heard!"

And then it came about that the person on the budget committee in the English Department had met with two senior faculty members from the English Department who had testified apparently that I carried a lesbian around to light cigarettes for me. That I wore leather pants. That I wouldn't let men in my classes. That it gave all As to women. That I wouldn't teach any literature that had marriage in it. That I talked too much at conferences, I gave too many papers at conferences. Those are the tough ones that I remember I was accused of doing. I said, "You believe that stuff?"

Andrea: And get back to the union please, and so?

Tucker: So then I asked the union guy to come down the hall with me to the women's studies office. I opened the door I said, "Would you please show this gentleman anything that he wants to see in any of our files." Closed the door he went in. He came out and went to the Dean and said, "We've been lied to. And our procedure has not been proper." And so the Dean required the English Department to redo the English Department meeting about whether they were going to recommend me for tenure.

And as I understand it one of the men in the department who had supported me, a very sweet guy, older guy whose wife is about to go in the hospital and have an operation, and who wanted to teach a course in the summer to help pay for it had his course taken away from him by the department chair. People began looking and saying what is happening here, this is not right. So all that trouble that I was having ended up working I think in my favor because people began saying, "That's not right, you can't take Charles' summer course away from him because he voted for her. That's not proper. And why are they having to meet again?"

And so then they met again and at the next level the university committee interviewed me and one of the people didn't show up, one of the faculty members. Because it was a foregone conclusion apparently for this person that I wasn't going to be recommended so why should she bother to come. But the others decided to record the interview. It would be very interesting to listen to that recording if we can find it. But the first question was, "Professor Farley, how can you, as a lesbian, claim to do research?" I'm telling the truth, that's truth.

Andrea: What did you say?

Tucker: I was very happy to answer that, I was glad that the question was out on the floor, and I could speak to it openly. And I talked for half an hour. It was great. I was very pleased with that.

Andrea: How could you do any kind of research?

Tucker: It's no accident that the end of my career I ended up teaching in the interdisciplinary studies program in the honors department. And one of my courses, one of my favorite seminars was the construction of objectivity in five scientific disciplines.*[laughter]* Pretty interesting to look at the destruction of objectivity.

Andrea: How come the union was involved already before that meeting? Before you had been denied tenure?

Tucker: I don't think the union per se was involved, but one of the union guys whom I knew from the union was part of the P&B committee. And he said to me, "Why did you do that stuff?" I was very grateful that he did.

Andrea: Just speaking of the union was there a union presence, were you at all involved around with the union around any issues?

Tucker: Yes I was but later.

Andrea: Not till later?

Tucker: Not till later. That's a difficult question ... that's much later. So this doesn't fall within the women's studies program, the women center. It is women's issues.

Andrea: Well you were not involved with Lilia Melani case?

Tucker: No in fact I was kind of stupid about that. I thought well they're doing that I'll do this other stuff, which I did and I'm glad I did. But I did get a call about 10:35 one night from a person who said that they were one of the lawyers for the Lilia Melani case. I didn't know why somebody would be calling at that hour if this was a legitimate call. It seemed strange to me. Although certainly I've been at meetings that lasted until all hours, so I listened. And he said that the people in the case wanted to take my case because I looked better on paper than some of the men who were full professors in my department and could they please represent me and make me a full professor.

Andrea: You were an associate professor at this point?

Tucker: No I was an assistant professor. But I did go to a lot of conferences and didn't give a lot of papers. I was very active.

Andrea: So they were basically building the case with finding who -

Tucker: I don't know where they were, because I didn't have anything to do with the case.

Andrea: So you said no?

Tucker: I did. I foolishly, stupidly said, "No I'm doing this over here and you are doing that over there." I thought that if they won, or since they won maybe they had already won and they wanted to give me a full professorship. How could you be so stupid as to say no. But I guess I thought I'll fight for everything, and I'll make a case out of it and I it will be part of the education of Brooklyn College and CUNY, be part of my job here.

When I got hired I thought if I did my job right I'd probably be fired, I'll be frank about that. But I did wake up at some point and decide to fight for my job. And after I had this business that I just talked to you about then the school had to make up its mind what it was going to do about me. And the New York Women's Studies Association with whom I'd been very active, as with the National Women's Studies Association, the New York Women's studies Association decided that it would make its first project to giving a symposium

at Brooklyn College. And I think it was Renate that made up the topic, "Frontier or back water, can women's studies survive in the university?"

And we invited various different kinds of positionalities, women who represented different positionalities to speak at a symposium and Brooklyn College at the student union building. And the woman who had put on the first art exhibit at a major museum, Brooklyn Museum and been fired for it came and spoke. And her position was you can't do anything before you get tenure. You just have to toe the line and get tenure, and then you can do what you want.

And we invited a historian from SUNY Buffalo, and she said well you know women studies isn't really an academic subject. And we invited a dean from SUNY Oswego, and she said, "This is fabulous. This is what we have needed for so long." And she gave chapter and verse of what we were doing in SUNY, and CUNY, and NWSA and the New York Women's Studies Association and how this was really a benefit to the university. And I think she probably said good things about me, I don't remember but I'm pretty sure she might have.

And we had somebody else ... I don't remember who the other person was but we should look it up. And then Ellie Belken who was working in the women's center at that time, stood up and said, "Well you know you really can't do anything that's really progressive if you are hired in the system. You have to be outside the system in order to do really great work." And my dean is sitting there right in front of me. I'm trying to get a job here now, I'm having learned from my own working with the unions to fight for my job [laughter]. So it was a very exciting ...

And I talked at that time. And I talked about how as a woman who loved and cared about women, I had to include them in my work in the best way that I could that would really help women become a part of the curriculum, part of the student body, part of whatever works they wanted to do afterwards. And part of the university itself.

And I talked about the barriers to this. And I said look at the language. You have men over here women over here. You have civilization over here, you have nature over here. You have intelligence over here, you have hysteria over here. And I went through and I looked at the kinds of dichotomies in our language. And this was long before anybody was doing continental philosophy or deconstruction. And I was scared to say all this because it just seemed so far out. Of course everybody knows it now but it did seem far out then. And I said, "How is it that this group always ends up being separate from that group and ruling over this group," and "we should challenge this." And white and black, and it was all in there and other things.

[01:15:09]

And I talked about the rat in the cage who was conditioned to get its food by pressing a bar, and then they would electrocute the bar and the rat would end up trembling. I think I was using this as an illustration for what might happen if you identified with the rat in the cage, being educated against your own interest. And I talked about how for a long time I had been taking medicine but I had a stomach ache so I would take more medicine, and my stomach would hurt worse and I would take more medicine and would get really sick. And finally I realized I should have looked at the medicine. And that was my image for looking at the curriculum in the university. I had been denied the right to do a dissertation on a woman author.

Andrea: Who was it that you wanted to do?

Tucker: I didn't even get to the point of picking one, but I had to do men writing about women if it was going to be scholarly. So identified with taking the medicine and getting sick, and finally looking at the medicine, and that's how I got to women's studies. We need to do something about all of this.

And then all this was written up in the newspapers, I didn't know what the impact was going to be. It was not actually ... It would be interesting to read the newspapers and find those articles, because they weren't exactly accurate, because people get rattled. You were asking me about the lesbian problem, the lesbian question and the repercussions so this ties into that. And the next day after this symposium, and a whole group of SUNY Buffalo sent this huge group of people down to the symposium and they all testified from the floor. So it was really good, we had an active debate. It was wonderful.

And I saw a friend- a dear friend of mine who I had worked with on women's studies in the hall. And she said, "How was the symposium?" I said, "Well it was wonderful but I really missed you there. Sorry you weren't there." And she said, "Well I [unintelligible 01:17:48]." And this was my sister who said this. There were very painful times. I was accused of being an imperialist in the women's studies program. I was accused of being an imperialist because the curriculum planning council was taking so long to talk about the lesbianism course. And it hadn't taken so long to talk about the such and such a course in a regular department. So therefore I was an imperialist and the lesbians were imperialists. So those issues came up.

It was hard to find ways to deal with them, not sure we actually did deal with them. I think actually if you look back at the records the lesbians at Brooklyn College took early retirement except me.

Andrea: How long were you there?

Tucker: I was there from 1970 to 2005.

Andrea: I was going to talk to you before you started talking about that, about the change as the fiscal crisis, sort of in the '70s. I guess I was curious about how

the college was changing and even the women's center and women's program. How did they change over those first five to ten years?

Tucker: I remember sitting in the faculty lounge when I first came grading freshman composition papers. And I sat in the faculty lounge to do it because I didn't have an office. In fact I was told at that time when I didn't have an office that I should go up to the top floor of the library because that's where they kept old desks that weren't being used anymore and there might even be a filing cabinet or two up there, and I could meet students up there. I said, "Where am I going to meet students?" and they said, "You could tell them to come up there and meet them.

But it was dusty up there and it wasn't well lighted, and I didn't want to be up there so I was in the faculty lounge grading papers. And I remember a fellow faculty member reading the newspaper at the table across from me and a cop I think had just killed a black student, a black person, a black child, a young person. And the faculty member was saying, "Oh God it's so awful. I surely wouldn't want to be him." And I looked at him and said, "You are much older than this student and you are a white man you wouldn't be shot." And he said, "Oh no I meant the cop. I wouldn't want to be the cop." And he identified with the cop. I was just astonished again that my colleague would identify with the man who shot the kid.

And during those years we did end up founding a multicultural action center. Because over those years there were a number of racial incidents and violence, incidents of violence in Brooklyn, and we felt we needed to have a campus presence to deal with that. I'm not sure that's the question you asked me however.

Andrea: Well no I think the center as I understand the center for example it exists today it actually went last week. The PSC some members there called a little meeting in the women's center. It was so exciting to see the center today.

Tucker: Oh you are talking about the women's center today?

Andrea: So I know that it lasted.

Tucker: I didn't realize what you, I didn't hear the question right.

Andrea: I was wondering in those earlier years how it changed, it was growing?

Tucker: You mean how the center changed?

Andrea: Yeah or even the mood at the college, your experience at the college?

Tucker: I think I was talking about the mood at the college with open admissions.

Andrea: Okay yes definitely. It sound like you responded to the events of the day broader than the college, the community police shootings and things like that.

So would you generally say that the center broadened its reach even in those years, in those early years? Would you start mostly with the local women's issues, and the community issues? I'm just curious how you ... obviously the program became permanent and you got this good funding also for the center that was, right?

Tucker: Yes it was.

Andrea: I'm just wondering how it felt to become more solidified, legitimate, I guess you grew?

Tucker: It grew and it got its own identity. The center really made its own decisions. At the beginning it was designed to be tied to the women's studies program so that both would survive and feed each other. But it did begin to get its own identity, and make its own decisions, and have its own staff. There was a period of time when I think both the center and the program floundered, and we lost space, we lost funding, we barely existed actually for a period of time. But we all survived and came back.

I associated it with becoming more dutiful daughters as [Advian Rich] would say and not fighting for what we needed.

Andrea: You mentioned that many of the lesbian faculty retired early? What accounts for that do you think?

Tucker: I would say homophobia.

Andrea: So that persisted for decades because presumably they didn't retire that early?

Tucker: They retired early for their career, yes they did retire early and they did persist both. And the less they were there the easier it was for it to flourish yeah.

Yana: Can you talk about, I don't know if there's any, about hiring in terms of if a lot of the student body is both black and Latino, in terms of hiring people to staff the center? And also the schools hiring? I know different departments are hiring people that come in and feed, the disciplinary women's studies, but they way that race of the faculty members who are hired, and the race of the staff that were hired in terms of what the student demographic were like? Or how race played out? Maybe it's not in hiring, and maybe it's in syllabus the kinds of things that students are reading. But what was that like?

And you mentioned you're also working with the Black Studies and Puerto Rican Studies programs as well, as the Judaic Studies and all these. But if you could talk a little bit about race specifically as it played out as either the center program whatever you remember?

Tucker: The second person that we hired for the women's center was a black women. But the main area, we didn't have a lot to do with hiring, the departments

hired. We weren't a department, we were a program. The only place that we could hire was in the center.

This was a period of time when Black Studies had just been formed, Puerto Rican Studies was fighting at Brooklyn College for its existence. I remember going down and playing the role of a faculty member who was interviewing the members of the department of Puerto Rican Studies to see whether they met the criteria to be faculty members because there was such a threat to the Puerto Rican Studies program, and a number of us supported the Puerto Rican Studies program and would do things like this at the risk of our own jobs. Well me I didn't have any protection so I'll speak for myself.

The person who ask me how can you claim to do research was from Judaic Studies, so having a great deal of sympathy with Judaic Studies was able to use the necessity for Judaic Studies to talk about the necessity for women studies. But I have a feeling that you have something that you want me to address?

Yana: Not specifically, I guess I'm just wondering the way that you remember race playing out in terms of the faculty who were teaching classes if they were mostly white? If black feminisms are being addressed, if they're not, if that's a huge part of the founding of the program?

Tucker: We said that we should always include that material. I invited Tony Cade Bambara for example to come to my class the very first one that I offered. I always had somebody coming in if there wasn't somebody in Africana Studies or Puerto Rican Studies who wanted to share teaching this material. Because it was really important to do that and to make those presences known and support them, I thought. And I fought very hard for there to be in the core curriculum courses when those were introduced for there to be texts that would include people of color and world literature, hello, things like that.

But I think was going to say the Black Studies programs throughout had just been formed in the late '60s and early '70s, and for them to take on an alliance with the women's studies program made them more precarious. So it was not easy to institutionalize connections other than we would hire faculty who were adjuncts to teach our women studies courses and that way we could bring in people like Mirta Quintanales and Bonnie Dill and other people who were Latino or black to teach the courses, to be teachers. We couldn't force the departments to hire them, we could include them as faculty but we couldn't get them permanent jobs. Is that what you're asking. We could fight in the departments but then we were fighting in departments.

Andrea: You found a way to serve your students the way you wanted to outside of the...

Tucker: It was the way that we could. And then of course as department members we always we always fought those fights.

Yana: The hiring fronts.

Tucker: The hiring fights and the curriculum fights. You had to fight for curriculum.

Andrea: Renate said that also, you said everyone was a battle, every idea, every class you proposed.

Tucker: Every, absolutely, yeah.

Yana: What were your ideas about what content was the most threatening?

[01:29:57]

Tucker: The lesbian content. Not to the students, I don't mean to say that was to the students. To the faculty it was the most threatening, in my opinion.

Andrea: I think we've gone through our things we came up with, but is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to tell us that we didn't think about asking you?

Tucker: Hmmm, I would just say that it was wonderful. The whole experience of working with students, faculty and staff, people in the community. It was a dream come true.

Andrea: That's a beautiful way to end. Thank you so much for this interview it was so valuable to this collection and just future students, and future researchers, and the public to hear these stories. Thank you so much.

Tucker: Thank you.

[After break]

Andrea: We're going to have a little follow up discussion with Tucker. We were talking about anti-war activism and the fact that she knew Bart Meyers in Brooklyn way before she was at Brooklyn College.

Tucker: Right, right because we were both active in the anti-war movement the student movement, the Students for Democratic Society.

Andrea: Where in SDS?

Tucker: I was in Pennsylvania at the time. I was working first at the Institute for Industrial and Labor relations at Penn State. And then I became a graduate student at Penn State. And one of the first SDS groups was there and I was very active in that. And then when that folded I was active in the new university conference. And Bart was a very quiet gentle man who was completely adorable, I had to say.

Andrea: So how did you first meet him?

Tucker: How did I first meet him? Probably at a meeting.

Andrea: And SDS meeting of the new university conference?

Tucker: Probably at a meeting. I don't remember the first time I met him. But I know that he was a backbone at Brooklyn when I came, and was part of the union group that eventually prevailed in becoming the union leadership.

Andrea: So was he one of the people you saw active in the anti-war movement when you first arrived? You knew him but you had already known him?

Tucker: I met him before I had arrived yes, and he was active yes.

Andrea: And was he or other men who were on the left and so considered themselves progressive? How did they work with all the women's center, the women's program work that you did? You knew them from the anti-war movement and how did they deal with your feminism? Your feminist organizing?

Tucker: I don't think that we called upon the men enough to support us actually. It doesn't mean they weren't supportive enough. And I know Bart had great confidence in us as individuals and as activists. I remember one time when I was having trouble with my officemate who was using my...the least that he was doing was using my computer for pornography and leaving the pornography on the computer, so I had to constantly call someone to have it cleaned. And I'd walk in on him in delicate moments and things like that. And finally after we got a sex discrimination policy at the college I said I have a sex discrimination case, and I was told I did not. And the lawyers at Brooklyn College told me they would not support me.

And I turned to the union and the union said to me, "Well you can handle this, can't you just knock before you come in?" [*laughter*] And some of the women said, "You know we only take serious cases." So there was an ongoing educational curve I would say for both the men and women in the union.

Andrea: So what else was Bart involved in as the '70s end?

Tucker: I would say he was the one who was the grand ... I won't call him an old man because he didn't appear to be an old man. But he played that role just being the fountain of wisdom and calmness, and working things through. He was a true leader I would say. Not because he stood up and thumped and waved his arms and gave radical speeches and things like that. He was just a good organizer, he was smart, he was a hard worker, he was somebody you just relied on and loved. He was great.

Andrea: And another follow up question about the Melani case, and I think it lasted for 10 years. And when it was resolved how did it play out at Brooklyn College or anything else you want to say about that case?

Tucker: Well I thought it was going to have an impact on those of us maybe had not been involved in filing suit as Renate had on her own behalf. I thought it would have an impact on the rest of us and it didn't. And so at one point I asked Lilia because when I was granted tenure, which I was I did get tenure after all that big fuss about it. But I wasn't given a promotion. Just unheard of. You do not grant tenure and don't give the promotion. So that was terrible really. So I was always behind not only in pay but in line.

So I asked Lilia, "Now that you won this part of the suit what how come we aren't feeling the impact more in the college?" And she thought for a minute and she said very circumspectly, "Well you know the same people that we sued are the people who are still in power."

Andrea: So it was still up to the administrations to grant the promotions and the faculty committees to decide?

Tucker: Yes, yes. And I know that the people in my department had been worn out, some women had already sued them. And they were so disgusted that they had to leave their offices and go to appear in court I assumed from how they were acting. To fight her case and fight against her that they were not in favor of our efforts. I never knew that woman, but I always felt badly about her. And I did know a woman in biology who came to me, she saw me as someone to talk to. And she talked to me about how hard it was to be a scientist at Brooklyn College and to try to do her work.

She said that the men had carte blanche to develop their projects, to go get money, to be funded, to get release time, to be scientists, to be working scientists. But she didn't and she was always given the lower level courses, and she was the drudge. I don't know if she used that word but that was clearly what I understood her to be saying. She was the workhorse in the department. And how unfair it was but she couldn't say anything because if you said something then that would just add to your bad reputation. And I was very moved by her testimony to me in private.

Andrea: The case had a lot of impact, I mean it did have very big impact. One person I was hearing from when I told them about this project said, "That case made a huge difference. She got a huge raise." And then she turned to me and said, "But I still made 30% lower." She was in technical, computer or something. And said I still made 30% lower than all the men in the college even though she got a huge increase out of the Melani case.

Yana: As one of the suit filers?

Andrea: Yeah she joined the suit.

Tucker: When you joined the suit I think that you did get a benefit, and my mistake was that I didn't.

Andrea: I see, I see. If you did join the case you definitely got a benefit, if you didn't it was up to your departments etc., etc. Okay anything else?

Tucker: I was going to ask you anything else?

Andrea: We talked about Bart, we talked about the follow up on the Melani case.

Tucker: I said that I turned down Yale to stay at CUNY because the work we were doing was so exciting and meaningful. And the students like yourselves were so wonderful, are so wonderful. Despite during the open admissions time, despite the attitudes of many of my colleagues about teaching the ineducables they said, that was so terrible.

Andrea: Did it get better? I know the finances did get better, but in the '80s?

Tucker: When did open admissions they pulled it back, when did they do that?

Andrea: They pulled it back in different ways at different times. They stopped remediation?

Tucker: Yeah they did?

Yana: At City College.

Andrea: But the persistent underfunding is what was really the problem. We know how students can succeed, you have small classes, you have attention to what students needs are, in the same way that the women's center tended to many different needs, not just the intellectual needs. We know how to help students succeed.

Yana: Like how do you get people to where they can go to.

Andrea: Drastically underfunded and the priorities are so warped.

Tucker: That's it, that's exactly it.

Andrea: But so many people like you stayed at CUNY. What was it exactly that kept you at CUNY when you could have gone elsewhere?

Tucker: The students. The tasks, the need to really work in that kind of a setting with the kind of commitment that the university had or should have had. I would say for the most part had. Certainly most of the faculty did. And the opportunity to work with these wonderful students, oh my God did I want to go to Yale, no I really didn't. I really didn't. I loved my CUNY students and my CUNY students did so well. They were brilliant.

Andrea: How so, tell me about it?

Tucker:

Well, first of all I would tell them everything, anything. I would give them everything that I could. That was a pleasure for me. I think that my students know me as well as anybody in the world do and we still get together which is wonderful. And I would push them, I remember times when I had groups of them lying on the floor with a text in the middle of them. And they'd be kicking their legs and talking and arguing with each other, but that was fine. Trying to figure out the different approaches to this text, and how this one could come from this point of view, and this one can come from that point of view. And what was the reality, was there a reality. All the questions they were asking just working together were so wonderful.

They educated themselves, we gave them the context of course, but they asked the questions, they talked with each other, they brought their lives to bear. And if they didn't the other students would goad them. I remember one time a bunch of doctors-to-be pre-med students came to one of my classes, and after the first class they said, "Oh we can't stay here because we have to get As and I'm not sure we're going to get As. We don't have all the answers." And I didn't have to say anything, the other students said to them, "You don't have to have all the answers. You need to have the questions that's okay, stay with it, you'd be glad you did. I felt the same way. Go on back." I didn't have to do anything, it was the other students. That's what mainly the students, the students, the CUNY students. They're the best.

[End of recorded material 01:44:08]