Transcript – Helen Fitzgerald Cserr, Class of Faculty

Narrator: Ruth Cserr (daughter of Helen Fitzgerald Cserr)
Interviewer: Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist
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Mary Murphy: Okay, good afternoon. Let's see, it is November 13, 2017. My name is Mary Murphy and I'm the Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist and I'm sitting in Alumnae Hall room 205, sitting down to interview Ruth Cserr, daughter of Helen Cserr who was one of four members that were part of the Louise Lamphere class action lawsuit against Brown University. Also attending this interview is Amanda Knox, graduate student at the Simmons College graduate school of library and information science, and also assistant archives assistant here at the Pembroke Center Archives. Okay, so that's that. So we begin. So Ruth –

Ruth Cserr: Yes.

MM: Let's begin the interview today just by you telling me a little bit about your own background. Tell me a little bit about your own story, when you were born, take us back to the beginning and then we'll move on to your mom.

RC: Okay, sure. So I was born in 1966, and to give context on my mom, she was at Harvard at that time, just finishing or having just finished her Ph.D. And then we moved from there to North Dighton to a family house in 1970 and that's when she came to Brown. And I went to Lincoln School here in Providence and then I went to Dartmouth. I studied art history and English. I went to University of Pennsylvania, got a master's in landscape architecture. I went on from there, actually right after my mom died in '94, and worked on my Ph.D. at Princeton in landscape architecture and architectural history. I focused on queer theory and women's studies and things like that – body and space. I did not finish. And now I live in New Hampshire and I'm married. We have a daughter who's almost 18 coming to Brown. And I do a lot of photography, am sort of a feminist activist, and a political lefty which is fun in New Hampshire. [laughter, overlapping voices]

And so I think that I had always imagined myself to be both a scientist and an academic when I was young and that didn't happen partly because of the experiences, I think, that I had with my mom growing up. And I am an only child so I had a very close relationship to my mother. She would take me places when no one else could and she would say "well, you know, everybody else seems to have a wife at home but since we're both working" – I got to go lots of places, I spent lots of time here, once she came here. So, yeah, that's pretty much how I arrive at it all. I joke often, I had a really good friend at Lincoln when we were both ten and this case was going on – we'll get back to it – Thea Browder [?] and we became radical feminists when we were ten at Lincoln. We just, like, that was it. And she's off doing women's studies too so –

MM: Wonderful.

RC: Yeah.

MM: So I want to circle back to your own activism, I think, at the end of the interview which will kind of carry us through.

RC: Okay.

MM: So, your mother's time at Brown University – as we talk and as you reminisce and tell us the story from your perspective of your mother's experience, do keep us posted on where you're at. So you said that your mom's time at Brown – you were how old when she comes to Brown?

RC: So she first came to Brown in '70 and I was just turning four. And she had been offered – so I was just still really young. I was at home. I had had a nanny when we lived in Winchester and she came with my parents. It's sort of interesting but it wasn't really working. Anyway, my mom came as a lecturer to Brown and that was on the recommendation – I hadn't quite remembered all this but I have been looking at the files lately. But it was on the recommendation of Leon Goldstein who was in the department and had also been at Harvard. I don't think he was in Pappenheimer's lab which is where my mother was, which is a very prestigious lab, actually. And she had, she had been really happy there. So she came here in '70 and actually had some

concerns that she might not have enough time for me. So it was like, I'll be a lecturer for a little while. And I'm not sure exactly what happened but she got a program project grant. Or, what are they called? At the time it was – oh! Career development award, which is a big NIH funding for research she wanted to do. So suddenly she actually had this grant that was going to pay for her. And, like, it's a big deal. They have another name now. And so that sort of starts in maybe '72. I don't remember, exactly. But it was [5:00] big and she found someone else and I had a good situation at home with someone who could watch me when I came home from school. And, you know, she still was home nights. My dad's a psychiatrist so he worked long hours. And, yeah, it was all going along fine, as far as I knew, we all knew. She stopped just being a lecturer and was – I think it was like a, I don't know if it was a contract or – anyway they rolled her into the tenure track thing which is –

MM: Can I, can I pause?

RC: Yup.

MM: So you – so a colleague of hers, Goldstein?

RC: Leon Goldstein.

MM: Who was, basically recommended that she come to Brown?

RC: Right. From, I think that that's how it started. They were looking for a lecturer and then she was ready to leave Harvard because she had gotten her Ph.D. there, you know, and was starting to think what to do next. And I was little. Oh and my great grandmother had died and that's the house we moved into. So it sort of worked in North Dighton. We had been living in Boston and my dad kept working in Boston. And so it seemed like a good thing. Okay, we'll try Brown. And it, I think it rolled into being a little bit more than she initially thought on hiring because she got this grant and then she was sort of put into the track of people getting tenure.

MM: Okay.

RC: So that, you know, and then there was some – there's always a question about how many years do you have to do that, and –

MM: Right.

RC: So, yeah.

MM: One of the things that we're noticing, that I'm noticing, Louise Lamphere was here last week visiting –

RC: Oh, good!

MM: So she helped me prepare we sat – or, it was one or two weeks ago – we reminisced about the case again and the one thing that she highlighted was the word of mouth – how people found out about these jobs in the first place.

RC: Oh, right.

MM: And that really the first step, or the first inkling of "networking," in quotes, was really, you know, from the time, any professor joining the university they're hearing about jobs from colleagues and friends and things like that. But that, too, can have an implicit bias so I'm just interested to hear –

RC: Oh, and I would say, on that front it's a little more complicated about why they knew about it. I've also seen some of those first letters. It's, so the year I was born – 1966 – that summer my mother started going to the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory which is in Bar Harbor, Maine and it's a summer, it's now year round, but it was a summer research facility that a lot of people went to do comparative physiology. And so a lot of people from Yale, Harvard, anywhere, Tufts found a group, whatever. She started going that year because Dave Rall who was at NIH liked to work and had said "you should come." So she goes actually on her own, runs her own lab there doing her research. It was on the blood brain barrier. All her work was on the

blood brain barrier. Although it changes over time but its, like, about flow across the barrier. So she started there that summer and went pretty much every summer for – until well into the '80s. Almost every summer. So she had colleagues there who also – so, Leon Goldstein the same person who was at Harvard, they are both going to MDIBL. There were some other people there who then recommended her because of her work there. All me, I'm going to say, at that point because they were all, except for Bodil Schmidt-Nielsen who's another very interesting person in physiology, older than my mom and a great scientist. She was there but otherwise it was all men.

MM: Mostly me supporting her work.

RC: Well, yes, initially. Exactly. So they said, "this is good word." And Dave Rall had seen her work and said you should come, and also had invited other people, or encouraged other people. It's been a little bit funny. In that community I've heard when they're writing the history, like, "oh, so Helen came to work with so and so." And I have to say, "no, actually –" so it's always like Dave Rall had a group and then if you – actually I was reading the letters recently and it was, "Helen Cserr has taken the lead on all these people in this group," so, you know how it is. So there was a lot of that and that was part of the issue. So that's part of the connection. So she, yeah so that was, for me, my whole life, I would go there every summer and have this whole community. Some of them were also at Brown but they were elsewhere. So I have lifelong friends out of that as well which is interesting. Yeah, so she was here and then it wasn't something we really, I certainly, was thinking about. She was going along with her life –

MM: As her job begins to roll into this somewhat trackey nature –

RC: It definitely becomes clearly, suddenly, she is on a tenure track. So she's been here five years which is more than most people but that's because she starts as a lecturer [10:00] for the first year or two. I don't know the details. I'm sure that's also somewhere in the papers. But, so she comes up for tenure. I just remember in our house my mom, dad, and I, were like she'll get tenure because she's doing so well. She was, you know, everything was good. She was publishing, she was always funded. She always had NIH grants after this career development award but always had NIH, NSF, Army/Navy, she always had money. Always had groups of

people, collaborations. So the story, the thing I remember is that, so I'm going to say this was '75 but I could be wrong. It was right around the time I started at Lincoln. So, I think I may have just started there or it was right before I started there, because I was unhappy in the public schooling

MM: And you had been at this point, how old?

RC: Nine or ten, yeah. And I was in the kitchen with my father and my father gets a phone call from Leon Goldstein who's in the department with my mother. He wasn't chair at the time, later he was chair. He's calling to tell my father, because my mother's in England, like at the Physiological Society something giving, I don't know, the keynote, whatever she was off – it was some big thing. And he calls and tells my father that my mother didn't get tenure, which was in and of itself this incredibly bizarre –

MM: Like, inappropriate –

RC: So my dad is just like, "what?" And, so, I don't know exactly what happened but she came home and was like, this is not appropriate, shouldn't have happened. I remember bits about trying to find out why some of what she got to see didn't really convince her. It was like, oh you're teaching is bad or oh you got this one really bad recommendation from one of these peers.

MM: Can you take us back to the moment, something that I've been speaking with Louise about is really just the trauma of the news of hearing no. Because Louise also, in my conversations with her, you know, she thought, she was quite certain the she was going to get tenure so it was this surprise, a shock, like an emotional shock, when suddenly it was a different answer. So, like, do you remember when your mom came home from that trip what that was like, just any memories?

RC: What I remember was it was just all around traumatic. That was my, you know, she was trying to not be upset, I'm sure for me, but there was a lot of pain. I mean, it was clearly there. And, in a sense, I mean, it was really, she was very indignant because she just couldn't figure out

what this was based on. Especially actually given some of the men who were tenured. She was having a very hard time saying “okay. If this is the basis, then why did I not get tenure?”

MM: It’s something we hear throughout. And also in the Lamphere interviews. Definitely.

RC: And so that is when she went – I mean, I don’t know exactly how it fell out but she – and that, I think, is in the files I have. Sort of what she documented. He first letter to this committee saying, “well could you explain?” And her second letter saying “okay, well if it’s based on – “ like trying to pull the thing apart. Trying very methodically say “well, why? Okay, but why? You’re giving me an answer – “ and so I think we can see what she was trying to do. That was actually one of her real strengths is she, my mother was really methodical –

MM: She’s a scientist!

RC: Yeah, as a scientist it was great help and she could run these big projects. So here she is pulling this thing apart and trying to understand it. And I don’t know at what point, you know, I think she – and my dad was really supportive of her – said let’s get a lawyer. And they initially – so I don’t know –

MM: Do you know how much time –

RC: So it wasn’t that long after she came back. I don’t think it was that long when she first went to see a lawyer to say “this isn’t right.” And that was somebody – I don’t know why someone was recommended to her. She was – I just remember I was in the car, we were at post office square in Boston. So she went to see someone there, in Boston, and then I don’t know if that was a few times, and they referred her to the law firm – Stanzler, I’ve forgotten all their names. The law firm that was handling Lamphere. She hadn’t gone straight there. I’m not sure – part of me thinks that she almost didn’t think at first that it was sexual discrimination per se. She just couldn’t figure out why. And the reason I say that is at the time my mother had had like her father was incredibly supportive – she had three younger siblings – but, you know, he – [15:00] you can do anything. He didn’t, like, think the girls couldn’t do anything. She goes off to college,

does really well. She works with Pappenheimer at Harvard who was notoriously difficult but got along really well with her. So she's like going about her life not being a strident feminist in any way but certainly, you know, she just thought – she'd protested the war, she had supported women's rights, she thought women should have jobs. But she wasn't sort of, like, out burning her bra or anything. Everyone who knew her would always say she was really well dressed, and gracious, and kind. Not meek, but, you know, sort of not this strident feminist which, of course, she gets labeled later just for suing, right? But I think that – so she was just sort of going through life not realizing that somebody might put up a road block without reason. And then I think it sort of dawns on her then. I mean, that's being overly simplistic. But I think she was just succeeding and it was good and she hadn't encountered that kind of behavior before. Not even from the – she went to Middlebury. Whoever her teachers were she hadn't had a problem. So suddenly she has a problem and doesn't immediately, I don't think, identify it, you know, with hindsight. I don't think she identified it first off as sexual discrimination. She just knew it was wrong.

MM: So where does that change?

RC: Well, I assume it's all with once they start actually discovery in the case. Which was –

MM: See the language in the letters and things like that.

RC: Yeah. Not all those things. I think that it becomes "oh, that's why you were doing that." Like, not that that was out of the realm of possibilities but that wasn't how she was operating. Because I think if she had been she probably would have run straight to the Lamphere lawyers.

MM: So she is then recommended – let me get my Lamphere timeline. So your mom goes to see her own attorney in Boston. They, then, are aware that Brown University is already mired in a case that's building, brought forth by Louise Lamphere. So your mother then joins the case. Do you know what number joiner she was?

RC: She may have been the fourth.

MM: Okay, she may have been the fourth. So we've got Claude Carey and Patricia Russian –

RC: Yeah, Pat Russian, right.

MM: – join the suit as named plaintiffs in 1976.

RC: Oh, no. Then maybe she was – that's about when she joined so I don't know the order. And one of them, right, was a contract not a tenure dispute?

MM: Correct. So it was three tenure disputes and one contract issue. So do you have memories – can you tell us about once she joins? Like, oh my god, here we go.

RC: Yeah, well, so –

MM: Do you remember in your house or any conversations?

RC: Oh, well the things I remember were – So I started at Lincoln by then which is interesting. So it's great because I have like these teachers who are going "oh, your mom, cool!" [inaudible] And my friends and their parents, so that was –

MM: Can I pause you on that? They were supportive at the Lincoln School?

RC: Yeah, actually, because it's a girls' school. It's a Quaker school. So, actually, my fifth grade teacher, she was like "oh this is so great!"

MM: Really?

RC: Yeah. It was good.

MM: I'm surprised by that. That's great.

RC: And then some of my friends, of course, they were also liberal too. Or, like my friend Thea Browder's dad was a math prof. And they were like "yeah! Go get 'em!" But I think I was just in a lucky – for me. So that's why I remember it. And I – so the thing in terms of the lawyers – and I remember Jordan Stanzler the best who's the son, something, I don't know if he did the most but I certainly remember interacting with him the most. He was really great and we would go to the office for, like, depositions of other people. And, I don't know. I guess mom would often be in the room and I'd be out hanging out. And I just always remember afterwards this sort of, "oh my god I can't believe what was said in there!" So this was discovery for her, not for the other women. So it was just simply that sort of thing. And there was this one really big one – and I have found the transcript. They read into the record – there were a lot of concerns for the attorneys for the University – this transcript from the sessions where they determined that she wouldn't get tenure. So they had actually had this whole transcript that someone – Now, I heard, I don't have notes on this, but my mother said the reason this got saved was that the woman who normally typed up the minutes for these meetings had been sort of concerned because – oh, no. She was on maternity leave so there was someone in her place [20:00] who didn't usually do this. Now, this is just what my mom told me, like, a long time ago. But, so, somebody saved these that might not have gotten saved.

MM: And you have that transcript?

RC: And they were fully transcribed at some point and then read into the record and I have what was read into the record.

MM: Nice!

RC: So it's sort of funny.

MM: Can we have them?

RC: Yes, yes. Definitely! Yeah, you can definitely have those. So, but, that was a big one in that it had just stuff –

MM: Unbelievable!

RC: What they were saying. So, it was things like, I won't get the exact stuff but it was along the lines of, you know, that – well, these other men who got tenure, they have families. And my mother had, you know, a husband who could afford things because he was a doctor. And she had a daughter at home, so there was that. And there were just some other very weird, weird, things. And then, I don't know if it comes out in there, it may. There was a whole bit about a letter. Somebody, and I've forgotten his name, it'll come back to me, in that group who keeps insisting that someone from the Maine people had given her a bad recommendation, but it was like verbally. And he kept insisting on this. And then when they found out about it, I guess it was through the transcripts maybe, they went and checked with her – it was Bodil Schmidt-Nielsen – and she's like "no, I never gave Helen a bad review." So this was just sort of like a follow up once they found that they were saying these things in the record.

MM: Oh, I see, I see.

RC: So it was just these weird things, like that she –

MM: Wait, so can I pause?

RC: Yeah.

MM: So that group, the group of professors at – was it professors and administrators who had determined the tenure case?

RC: It was a funny mix, I can't remember exactly but there was like a dean and then various people. They weren't necessarily in her department. It was like one, I mean this is at the point it's decided higher up in the department.

MM: She the decision committee basically meets, of which there is this transcript, and in this decision making meeting that is transcribed, they're basically hanging a bad review on another woman faculty member as having given your mother a bad review?

RC: Yeah, well she was at the MDI bio lab. So, not here. And she was there year round which was weird. Most people weren't. So she had moved herself there full time. That and actually they had gotten another letter from another person at the lab who had given her a very good recommendation initially but this one also says "well, I'm not sure she's up on the current research," when all the other letters say something different. And this individual is someone at the bio lab who I knew was sexist as I got older. So, you know, there was a complicated little bit of a mess there but most of her colleagues were not there and had written really – from the letters I saw – there were all incredibly positive. It's just like a couple little funny things and then claiming to have gotten this verbal response that they didn't actually get. Because when go back and check the –

MM: From a woman.

RC: From a woman. From a very – and Bodil was incredibly well respected. Her father had been a famous physiologist, her ex-husband. And she was very well respected.

MM: And her name again? Slowly and clearly.

RC: Oh, sorry. Bodil Schmidt-Nielsen. And Bodil died just a few years ago.

MM: How do you spell that first name?

RC: B-O-D-I-L.

MM: Okay.

RC: And so – she was Danish. I mean, Danish-American. I think. Or Swedish. Danish. So, yeah there had been this idea that they were claiming that she had said things that she didn't say to the one guy in this group.

MM: So the attorneys go after this.

RC: They go and that's I think part of that discovery that becomes so embarrassing.

MM: It's so controversial.

RC: Yeah. It's just so clear that they messed up. And it's so clear that they did it with intent. It wasn't just oh, you know, we have a bunch of good people. It was – this was clearly like, going after her. And there was – oh, another aspect of what they held against her was a teaching issue. And I don't remember again exactly how it came out but I know it required handwriting experts because there were multiple – it appeared that all of these bad recommendations were in the same handwriting.

MM: Oh my gosh. Okay.

RC: And she did not generally have bad recommendations. But then that was also part of the claim.

MM: Was that mystery ever solved?

RC: As far as I know [25:00] she always thought it was this one particular student elsewhere in the department who she knew really didn't like her.

MM: Okay.

RC: But, I don't know. Did people go to him? Who knows?

MM: Strange.

RC: And I don’t remember names or anything but it was kind of a mess because, you know, it didn’t line up with the rest of things.

MM: So, your mother did do teaching reviews? Like, reviews of her teaching?

RC: Yea, so this is the other thing that comes out of it is she starts going after them. She may have even started doing this before she got the lawyer. This teaching thing, she’s like, “I don’t get it, what’s the – how are you doing it? Are they regular reviews? Are they signing? Is everybody doing it? Who do we know has actually done one?”

MM: See, this happened with Louise, too. She said that there wasn’t a practice, or wasn’t a clear practice around teaching reviews. And then suddenly, I can’t remember if she said that she was asked to do teaching reviews or something like that like right as she enters the tenure review –

RC: Yeah, that sounds familiar. There was something like suddenly they do a review on a course. In mom’s case it was like a course maybe she only did part of. You know, one of those big intro to physiology, or something. And then that’s the only ones they had but they don’t have them from all the other classes. You know, it was a really weird situation.

MM: And, like the language around what kind of questions were going to be asked on the teaching reviews and then, in Louise’s case there wasn’t really a lot of comparing, it didn’t seem like. Were other professors being asked to do them or just Louise?

RC: Yea, that sounds exactly like the same situation.

MM: That’s really interesting.

RC: It will come up later, so this is different, but after this is all settled and after the consent decree, my mother was involved with some other women who were purely biomedical faculty as

opposed to sort of college, and they were having the same issue. So I know she was – I have the files on that too – she was helping them try to push that forward. So you have the consent decree and all these things about hiring and I know there was something about teaching that was supposed to be enforced and then they were having these similar problems. Like, they didn't apply it everywhere.

MM: So you, just going back, so you remember being in the attorney's office when they're doing, taking the depositions for your mother's piece of it. Do you remember if each woman was sort of assigned an attorney or was it just the one legal team and they worked across each of the cases, and that all the depositions were rolled up together? I'd be interested.

RC: I'm pretty sure that all the depositions were independent. I know that we were – mom was always with, almost always with Jordan Stanzer who's the son. But I remember Martin, the father, I don't really remember other people when I was around. I think that was pretty much who she was interacting with.

MM: How old was Jordan Stanzer at the time?

RC: He was young. Pretty young. Yeah, he was pretty young.

MM: So then you remember this process. It of course never comes to a court room. There's never the big reveal, right? But how – do you remember the amount of time your mom was spending at that point in her life thinking, working on it, producing documents, like, can you tell us about that? What was that like around your house at that time?

RC: Well she was stressed all the time. All the time. And I think she was still teaching, and if she wasn't teaching – no. She may not have been teaching because – but she had that funding so she was still drawing a salary from that funding and they couldn't kick her out basically. So she was still here because she had that. It was something like that, I don't know exactly. But yeah. It was stressful. She didn't – there were other people in the department, the chair at the time, she was not happy with that relationship. Like, I don't know what part he had in it but – what was his

name? Stewart? Something Stewart. There were a lot of these guys and they were all just being guys, I guess. I mean it was not pleasant.

MM: Did your mother feel – Louise has recently commented that she, you know, part of the trauma was the fact that she felt that she was in camaraderie. That there were friendships – her department was based on friendships before her tenure decision came up and that part of the great, you know, trauma over this is that these are people that she considered friends as well as colleagues. Was that the same for your mother or not as much in her department?

RC: I think to an extent. I mean, she was there. She was teaching. I think that, yeah, these were people we had been socializing with, yeah. There were other guys who got tenure. Some of them had kids, you know. [30:00] But then it suddenly didn't feel right. But I think that the chair in particular made that uncomfortable. I don't remember what he did per se but it wasn't good. So she was still going, you know, right across the street from here into work, like, every day, like a regular person running her lab while that was going on and then going to see the lawyer.

I do remember just hours and hours of my parents going through. So it would've been, like, through the paperwork for the transcripts of the depositions and correcting things or putting notes or, you know, writing notes on things just – but then it would go back to the lawyer.

MM: Doing their own footwork, basically?

RC: Yeah. To say, like, oh that doesn't make sense. Or there were things in the transcripts where they didn't say, like with Bodil, maybe they didn't understand the name, someone would have to clarify who people were talking about. Just all sorts of little things like that. And I know that in the long run the entire case, I mean, the – it made my mother feel really devalued because she had gone from being a very comfortable teacher to, after all of it, to actually spending a long time getting really nervous. I mean, I think she was fine in the end. But really having to deal with a lot of anxiety caused, certainly caused by the case. You know, it was traumatic.

MM: It made her question her own quality.

RC: Yeah, to – I don't even know if she was really questioning it but just being – it just made her nervous suddenly. And then she got it back with time but she did stay here which was its own difference, I think, from everyone else.

MM: So during the case she really enters the class action in 1976. Do you remember what, if she had – if any relationships she had with women friends at the time or – I mean, '76, so we're right in the heart of sort of consciousness raising. Even if she didn't consider herself a feminist it's starting to really kind of consume –

RC: So I think that the – not so much Louise, I think she was busy – but, Pat Russian and Claude Carey became closer to mom. I mean, we would see them and everyone would sort of commiserate, so there was that. But my mother's best friend who she'd met in Graduate school, her name's Marion Murray, she was at Harvard starting when my mom did. Actually, where my mother met my father, too. He was in medical school. And the three of them were all friends. Marion then switched to McGill. But anyway Marion Murray is an anatomist –

MM: Marie?

RC: Murray.

Together: Marion Murray.

RC: Right. And she's been in Philadelphia now for a long time in the suburbs. I still see her. So Marion was single and a physiologist turned anatomist, I would say. I don't know exactly. So she ends up down at Medical College of Pennsylvania which is MCP, right, male chauvinist pig. So it's like 1976, she's busy fighting with everyone so when that movie just came out about Billy Jean King, I don't know if you've seen it –

MM: No, I haven't yet.

RC: It was great. I took my daughter. But the thing was I remembered how much Marion would talk about that. You know, she was on her own in the work place. She was having a difficult time in her own way as a single woman. But I remember she really liked tennis – so those sorts of things. She was always there for my mom and was supportive. Mom was always there for her. They were never at the same institution except that Marion did work some summers in Maine where she would like to cause quite a stir and do some really funny things. Like, okay, I'm just going to tell you one because it's so funny.

So Homer Smith, he's this famous scientist who basically discovered how the kidney works and he did that at the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory a long time ago. So somebody had a litter of kittens and all the kittens got named for various people at the lab and Marion had Homer Smith and she did a lot of electron microscopy. So when he was neutered she had a giant photograph that said "Homer Smith's sperm" nailed on her door which – it was so great.

MM: Oh my god! Yeah, yeah.

RC: So anyway, yeah. There was support there.

MM: Hardcore. Hardcore.

RC: Yeah, it was support with her, but – certainly she was there and then my mother's sister who's totally not in the same world but she was also really supportive of my mother, always. So that was a nice thing.

MM: Did other male colleagues, male colleagues, or friends come to support your mother or did suddenly she find herself in sort of a gendered [35:00] world?

RC: Okay. You know, at Brown she didn't really have support but in the larger community –

MM: From women or men, do you know? I mean, except for the women in the case?

RC: And I don't even think they were really, well Louise has the same – there weren't really women in the sciences at all, you know. I don't know. It's probably a little better in, you know, the humanities. They just weren't there, really. There were students, lots of graduate students who were very supportive.

MM: I'm sure.

RC: Both hers and other people's labs in her department. But in terms of colleagues, not a Brown. But certainly elsewhere. You know, she had great relationships with people. Her closest colleagues in London, Copenhagen, and New York, you know, other places.

MM: Who are male colleagues?

RC: Yeah, pretty much all male. Mostly, I can think of one female colleague. Because, again, there were just so few women. But, yeah, there were plenty of men that were like "this is nuts." You know, "why is this happening?"

MM: That's really – I'm trying to find those strains, those things that don't fit the, you know, where are we? Does this all fit a stereotype? Women just treated poorly and –

RC: Well, I do think the difference between the sciences and the humanities is big, right.

MM: Though I'm still looking for the solidarity in between women on this campus. Like, even if it was humanities professors where potentially there were more women. Where were those women during this case? And I don't know. I don't have the answer to that but do you remember? Do you remember other women professors from the humanities?

RC: Not that I recall –

MM: You know, just poking a hand up a little in solidarity or?

RC: Not that I recall. It doesn't mean it didn't happen. I think that mom was pretty isolated there. I mean, I think she felt pretty isolated, right, so it's not – there was another woman who actually was involved with that very committee that didn't give the tenure but I don't think she was particularly helpful.

MM: Okay. So let's fast forward just a little bit. So you come – over the time – so you're at this – by the time your mom joins the class action here with Lamphere's attorneys it's basically – or the attorneys representing the group – for about a year, right? And so it looks like in 1977 Howard Swearer is sworn in as Brown's fifteenth president in January. So this case is churning along and then he pulls the whole thing up, sounds like, up short. He comes in and he's like "we have to – this is probably nutsey."

RC: "We have to settle."

MM: "We have to, like, find a way to settle." And then that happens. So it's almost like, and tell me if I'm wrong, that year in your life, really, where it was brutally intense around this case, would that be correct?

RC: Yeah. Absolutely.

MM: So now, do you have a memory of when the decision came over the wire and your mother learned of the settlement?

RC: I don't even remember where we were. But it was really exciting. But I don't actually, you think I would, because – so I'm not sure. I wonder if we were in Maine or something. But, yeah. It was exciting. It was like okay, I think there was also a but, what does that mean, you know? And I don't remember because it wasn't meaningful to me, like when they agreed to settle there were the nuts and bolts of what that meant, right? Because they wanted to institute affirmative action and there were all these various things they wanted to do. I don't know if it was like – if that had been worked out and that's what we heard. So I think there must have been some process around it that made it not just that sudden.

MM: Did your mom want her day in court? Like, was there any part of your mom, or do you have any memory, or between your mom and dad's conversations about her wanting, like wanting to see it go to court to kind of have a public voice on this or?

RC: I don't think she wanted to go to court. I do think she always felt like the people who had done wrong should've been dealt with.

MM: Paid more of a price.

RC: Yeah. The people, you know, who actually made the decisions and did some sort of sneaky stuff.

MM: And nothing did happen to them, right? I mean, as part of it.

RC: Most, I think that part of why the chair of her department left was sort of fallout and I think that there were a couple other people in that larger biomedical sciences that were affected. Later there's another person who's also [40:00] – yea, some other stuff comes up and they manage to find out – it was sort of like why can't you just fire these people? We know what they did. So I think that all was painful and painful that you would actually have to still go to work with them around. Not in her department anymore. But there she is going to work and you know the guy in the next building over is the one who's done all these things.

MM: Would she talk about that when she would come home at all or, like that was another, this was another weird day, or?

RC: Well, she, I think, she would actually just point – you know, when things happened she would probably tell me or both my dad and me everything. So, yeah, she would be like "ugh, that was awful," or like – the other thing was she ended up spending a lot of time worrying about female students because female students started coming to her pretty much after it was settled. Maybe while it was going on but saying like "this male professor proposed x. What do I do? Am I going to get an F if I don't?" That sort of thing. So she was having those sorts of conversations

with students. I think she was just busy trying to mentor her own students who – she had plenty of Ph.D. students and also the other ones so. I would definitely hear "oh I can't believe what somebody came and told me today" sort of stuff.

MM: And these are just the general student body from the sciences.

RC: Maybe from within people who would know her in that department. Like, maybe other people who taught in her department that they were responding to. Or students in other people's labs.

MM: So, take me forward. From that time on, the settlement comes. She's successful. Does she feel successful on campus?

RC: I think she knew that her work was successful. My mother did say to me at one point, it couldn't have been that long after. Maybe about '80 or something. I was probably in high school. She was like, "well, I would've left and gone somewhere where I was more comfortable but this was a good place to be and we weren't going to move." Because we had the two, my mom and dad, and she wasn't going to pick me up and then move. So she just wasn't going to do it. She loved when she had her sabbaticals. That was always fun. So she did stay with some reticence. But she also then had other colleagues here eventually. She did really well. I forget what chair she was named to when she – yeah, it worked out. She became full professor with absolutely zero trouble.

And then in the interim there she was helping these other women in the biomedical thing. Or working with them to make sure that they had the appropriate rules right for teaching regulations and for how you came about making these decisions and trying to get – there was even a suit about the consent decree applying to the medical schools. I'm not sure exactly. But she was involved with that. So, pretty busy I think.

MM: And the Affirmative Action Monitoring Committee that was basically established post trial to – and that's made up I think of administrators and faculty committee and that – was Arlene Gorton on that? No. Different era. But there was Anne Fausto-Serling.

AK: I think Karen Newman was part of that.

RC: Yeah, Anne Fausto-Sterling. Definitely.

MM: And they're both interviewed in separate interviews that we have as part of this collection. But – so I know that committee was busy, busy, busy. Right. So your mother is given, as part of the results of the case, she is awarded tenure.

RC: Right.

MM: That's immediate?

RC: I'm pretty sure.

MM: Or was it that they backdated it?

AK: They did. It was retroactive.

RC: Yeah, they did. I think it was backdated it. And whatever, I believe salary, maybe, I don't remember that. And, of course, they paid the legal fees. They had to pay the legal fees.

MM: Right. Okay. So just suddenly overnight it was like hell on wheels and then boom she's a tenured professor.

RC: Right. Right. And so that was good. That was like a big relief.

MM: But also sort of startling, I'm sure. So she goes on. Tell us about her remaining time here at Brown and tell us just a bit more about her life after that time.

RC: I think that her research went really well. She was doing interesting things. She had her colleagues all over the world. So starting, let's see, '80 to '84 I was in high school. I think she

was pretty happy [45:00] then. We would commute together. I had a horse out in Rehoboth so there was a complication. I got a horse probably because of the suit. I was a big rider but she was so – well, it was before it was over actually – because she was so busy and that's what I liked to do. I remember it was something like "well do you want to spend your whole summer at summer camp or do you want a horse?" I was like "well, um, I think – " I had been riding for a long time. So we would commute in in the morning and then I would get a ride out to Rehoboth and the she would pick me up on the way back to Dighton and then one night a week she always taught one of her courses, one of her seminars, like a Thursday night so I would stay and no go to the bar. We'd go to dinner. That was like our routine. And most, yeah, up until I could drive, so that was most of the time.

And then, so in '84 I left for college, '84 to '88, I actually stayed in Hanover two more years. And things were good then, too. She actually stopped in '86 going to the bio lab in Maine and I think there were some similar problems from the letters I've been reading with – the reason, also – so this is not Brown but the reason we actually ended up with a house in Maine is the Mount Desert Biological Laboratory has housing and they – it's different now, but it used to be that people came through the whole summer. Mostly is was men whose wives watched their kids. And they wouldn't give my mother a house because – one person told her it was because my father would come vacation on the weekends. We all had a good laugh. We were like, what are all my friends' mothers doing? So we, like we stayed in some really rotten places or they'd move us from place to place so we ended up buying this little place, which is now great, that I have. So it was just one of those kind of like the horse thing. I'm like well you guys were being so sexist we ended up with this ended up with this great little house, thank you very much.

MM: I really like that horse.

RC: Yeah, yeah. This is good. You know, she had some ongoing issues there and looking at her papers I see that she went about it – she knew exactly what had happened here. It was something about she hadn't published enough only she had like two books that were coming out or something. It was utterly absurd compared to anyone else at the lab. And so she just went back at it the exact same way and then decided that actually the comparative thing wasn't what she was doing anymore so she stopped doing research there but was part of that community.

But, so every summer, you know, there was Maine, which was work, and even after that she would spend her summers mostly writing. Either writing papers or writing grant applications or, you know, working on those sorts of things. And in, I mean, it was all fine. I went to graduate school from ’90 to ’93 at Penn. And then in the summer of ’93 she went on sabbatical to Australia and she became very sick. She couldn’t talk and it turns out she had a brain tumor. My father had to go get her and bring her home and –

MM: That’s just unbelievable. I mean, you’re doing research on –

RC: Yea, so it was in her speech center so she had trouble speaking and so this is the same tumor that, like, Ted Kennedy had and I assume it’s what McKain has. You can’t get rid of it, it’s not – it doesn’t metastasize but it fingers out and so you can’t really cut it all out without taking a lot of brain. So they had already taken some out and they were treating it. And she still had – she was so persistent. I remember she’s having trouble talking, she’s still writing down notes on the work that she was doing with Paul Knopf. He was running her grant because she was sick and she had been on sabbatical. It was some big program project or something. So all that year she kept trying to work on it. She just didn’t want to stop. But, yeah, it became clear that she couldn’t beat it so she died in the summer of ’94 from that.

MM: Here? Where was she?

RC: She was at home. Yeah, she was here. He brought her back from Australia immediately. It was very unfortunate with the doctors there. My dad got there and it was bad. So he immediately got her back here into the Dana Farber. But there was just not much you could do with that one. It was really scary. So there were funny moments because she and I were really close. So she’d have these, like, doctors explaining things to her and I could see she’s frustrated, you know, and I’d say, like, “you realize that she wrote the chapter in the book.”

MM: Yes! Like, What?

RC: Like, explain it in a way – you know. And most, she had great doctors but occasionally you were like, no, guys, I know what she wants to tell you. [50:00]

MM: Like, that's her name in the book.

RC: Yeah, right. So, I mean, that's not what she worked on per se but, you know, she was working always on brain volume regulation and trauma and that sort of thing. So, yeah, that was – it was a little weird. But, you know, I was able to be around for a lot of that time which was good so – oh, it was hard. So yeah, she, I mean, she intended to stay and finish out her career here but it didn't happen.

MM: So then your mom passes away. No tell us, as we kind of wind up, about that legacy in your life.

RC: Yeah, so, definitely, like I joke about when I was ten, I started being, you know, a real –

MM: A radical feminist.

RC: And then, so I had the impression, which was not correct, or it's partially correct. When I was going to go to college, Brown would've had – Brown had to pay my tuition wherever I went. It was a bonus that she had at the time. So Brown would've been perfectly happy for me to come here. Like many of her colleagues here. I, of course, was like, I am not going to go to Brown where all these awful professors are so rotten – you know.

MM: Yeah, yeah.

RC: But I also was used to my mother's students who were Brown students who were not Dartmouth students but I didn't understand that. So I go off – and also, Dartmouth had a great horseback riding team and I'm a horse person so, of course, that was really important to me. But – and I love it there. It's beautiful. I mean, I live there now. I live outside Hanover. But I sort of got there, it's 1984. It's the reelection of Regan –

MM: Yes!

RC: And I'm like looking around going, oh my god who are all these classmates of mine who are set in the Dartmouth Review who smashed the shanties while I was there. I was like, oh I kind of must have made a mistake. I used to call my mother and say, like, you know you had hall phones, "Mom! What am I doing here?" She's like, "well, we did try to mention it but –" And it worked out for me but in a way, I think – so the other, the first thing I thought was "well, when I get to Dartmouth I'm going to have to worry about these professors." But strangely I had more trouble with classmates than professors. And, you know, I realized that pretty quickly. But it may have been also why I went into the humanities. I don't even know. But I wasn't comfortable when I was in the math department there. I just wasn't. And maybe that was –

MM: I'm sorry, your undergraduate degree is in?

RC: Art history and English.

MM: Art history and English, okay.

RC: So, and then, you know, I didn't know about art history. I mean as a profession. Actually, I know an art historian really well who was the wife of one of these people at the bio lab. She's still a friend. But I just didn't think about that. And then I discovered that. But I felt myself like pushing away that science thing. I mean, it was so funny. It was like my male classmates and these guys of the Dartmouth Review, whereas I didn't have trouble with my professors at all. I'm hearing right now Dartmouth's in the news for some stuff with professors but it was not like a notorious problem that we were thinking about when we were there in '84 to '88. So I also joke that, so I start out being this pretty radical feminist and by the time I get out of Dartmouth I'm like oh man, watch out, you know. So then I go on to Reid. I think that the English department there didn't particularly, or at least not my professors, I wouldn't speak to all of them, like, emphasize this sort of theory that I then discover at Penn and Princeton which was really important, you know. They weren't reading Foucault, at least I wasn't, or Derrida. [inaudible] So to me, afterwards –

MM: Favorites among us.

RC: Yeah, right, yeah. So, you know, those were the things that I didn't discover until grad school. So that was sort of the legacy of that combination of Brown and Dartmouth. It's funny that I actually had the more – well, it was about the faculty not the students. It was just the switch between Brown and Dartmouth.

MM: And other political activity? You carry it with you now.

RC: Yeah, so I have been really involved in the past. Not so much at the present in New Hampshire politics. My town, Orford, is the home of the slogan "Live Free or Die." The governor for a long time in the '70s was Meldrim Thomason, he was from my town, and he coined that. He also did some other notorious things like, I think he used the national guard against protestors at Seabrook. And, also, he's on record saying some pretty disturbing things about South Africa. Anyway, his family's [50:00] still in town and we have very active town meetings.

But at the time that I moved to town like nobody would run as a democrat on the – even, you couldn't vote for a state rep who's a democrat. Like, they weren't on the ballot. So one of the first things I did was – I mean, before that I was doing like ACT UP stuff in Philly – I started, I got myself on the ballot and I, my daughter was two, I ran for state rep as a democrat. Like, I would joke she was my campaign manager. And I did it again when she was four I think. And I didn't win. I knew I wouldn't win. But afterwards, actually, our district changed. So I just like to be part of that. And, you know, more recently there's a good sort of feminist community around Dartmouth these days and they've always been there so –

MM: Do you feel the Lamphere and your mother's legacy – do you think it did kind of drive you?

RC: Oh yes. Oh, totally yes. I mean, I don't think right at college it did because I had a different – by the time I came out I was like wait a minute. Definitely. And I have to say to people all the time – more men than women – but some women who are like oh well it's okay now. And I'm

like, no you need to compare then and now and if some things are better but really – well, given the news now, it's not better now – but I mean it's, I constantly feel like look, let me explain to you why this is not okay. So I definitely carry it around all the time.

MM: Wow. That is such a cool legacy.

RC: Yes. It's very cool.

MM: That Lamphere et. al. got, you know – prompted a woman to run for political office.

RC: Yeah, it's amazing.

MM: That's super cool.

RC: And, you know, I'm thankful that Swearer did what he did, right.

MM: Yeah. He made the right decision. Absolutely he made the right decision.

RC: Yeah. And I don't know if it had gone to court – but I assume. There was so much muck I can't imagine that it wouldn't have turned out in their favor anyway but.

MM: So, just lastly to finish up. So what do you think about – so Louise Lamphere has made amends with Brown University and she's in good terms with them now. What do you think your mom would have thought about that? About – do you think she, I mean, she continued on at Brown. Looking back now.

RC: Oh, I think she would think – I would think she would think it was good that Louise could come back, that she chose to and that she could and that that was workable. I mean, I know that she felt that she was still improving things while she was, my mom, while she was here. Paying attention to all sorts of stuff constantly. I think that yes, so she would be happy with that. I don't

think she had any particular anger at Brown. It was just the particular people and the systems in place that weren't working. So it was never like, oh Brown is bad –

MM: Bad or something.

RC: Right, at all. No. Not at all. And she always had wonderful students and she did end up having good colleagues here but later.

MM: Later?

RC: Yeah, you know, later. Yeah, you know, it was just uncomfortable to stay at first but I'm sure that once she'd been here a while things were beyond that.

MM: Now, also I just – So, you are about to begin a new generation of connections to Brown University.

RC: Right.

MM: So what was that like as your child began applying and Brown University was in the mix?

RC: yeah, so I actually, my husband and I both sort of thought in the back of our head that she might like it here, given who she is. So basically I did the driving to college visits and we went to all sorts of places but this was definitely on the list. And, yeah, I was perfectly happy with that. Like, that seemed good. She was very adamant that she wasn't going to Dartmouth no matter what.

MM: Ah! Yes, yes!

RC: She'd taken a couple courses there. They do this thing for local students and she was having none of it. Too conservative for her.

MM: Very conservative.

RC: Yeah. And not as much as it used to be but still not – and too close to home. So she liked it here. She liked people. She actually had met, we, turns out, know some of the Sharpe's –

MM: Oh!

RC: Because they go to Maine and so Austin, she's a senior now maybe, anyway she had given Trillium a tour and that helped, you know. That was fun. She had just offered one. Had seen her at some function. Yeah, it was really, it was great. And then she just, yeah, it was a good fit. There was a lot of talk about Smith, she decided it was too small. She also liked Wesleyan. I don't know. I think you can see why those were all, that there were no other ivies that were going to fit that, the person that she is and what she was looking for. So yeah. I think it's great. [1:00:00] I think she'll be happy.

MM: Wonderful.

RC: Yeah. And then two of my very best high school friends were here too. So, Carolyn Blackman who you met –

MM: Who brought us together.

RC: Who brought us together. So, I'm seeing her Friday.

MM: And the names of your two friends again? I just want to make sure we have it on record.

RC: Carolyn Blackman and Sue Cooke. So they were both class of '88 and they had both gone to Lincoln.

MM: And I'll just say for the record your two friends came to the Louise Lamphere exhibit.

RC: Well, Carolyn Blackman did. Sue Cooke – the other person who came to the exhibit was, she was a grad student of my mothers.

MM: Okay, that's right.

RC: And she and Carolyn ran into each other. Sue Cooke is just a different friend.

MM: But the exhibit was great. To see that the exhibit prompted a reaction. And I think rightfully so. Our exhibit did focus on Louise's piece of the pie but it was really awesome to have that work bring someone else out of the woodwork that could bring us more history.

RC: yeah. It was really fun. When I got the text from Carolyn saying she was here, that she'd run into the other student of my mother's and they were trying to figure out where mom was. And I had said "oh, well I saw online and so I think it wasn't focusing on –" so. It was great. I was glad for the exhibit.

MM: Any other parting thoughts as we wind up this interview? Things that you want the world to know about your mom or about the case or particular things that come to mind as you think about this interview being used for research? Things you don't want us to miss.

RC: I think it's important to remember exactly how extraordinary it was, what they did. Like, it was just, you know, mostly it was a revolving door. Women didn't get the job and they left. I think there's a history of science compendium by a woman that actually talks about that and that case. And it's especially about women in science. But I think that's really important because it just happened all the time. Everywhere. I know that lots of other universities were furious with Swearer for settling.

MM: That's right.

RC: So, like, you say this case and it's sex discrimination and then people are like oh well that's great. But it was so prevalent and for them to actually, Louise first but then for all four of them to

say wait, we're going to – so they either I think, in my mother's case, she was fortunate to have the support to do that. And I assume all of them had it one way or another. I think my mother's primarily came from home. But I, like, I can't imagine how it would have been if she didn't have a safe home to go to. She didn't have those colleagues here.

MM: A partner who was supportive.

RC: Who was totally supportive, right. So yeah, he, my father was probably more angry than my mother. He still is.

MM: He's still pissed.

RC: He's still pissed. He still can't believe that this happened. It was so much more than a court – it didn't even go to court, but a case. And, you know, we've come a long way but it's not fixed.

MM: We have further to go.

RC: Yeah.

MM: I'm going to ask for your father's name, for the record.

RC: Oh, it's doctor Robert Cserr.

MM: Well, thank you so much.

RC: Thank you.

MM: I'm going to turn off the interview now. Amanda, do you have any last questions?

AK: I don't think so.

MM: Okay. Alright, well, thank you, Ruth. And we will make sure that this is recording.

--End--