

Transcription of Legacy Project Interview with Meg Conkey, Professor Emerita, Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley.

Professor Conkey was interviewed by her colleague and friend Ruth Tringham, Professor Emerita, also UCB Department of Anthropology. The interview was conducted on March 10, 2023.

The time-signature below refers to the YouTube video recording.

00:40 Ruth Tringham

My name is Ruth Tringham. I am a Emerita professor at University of California, Berkeley, and was in the Anthropology department, or was a full professor in the Anthropology department, and I retired 2011 at the same time as Meg Conkey retired. We retired together. I first met Meg Conkey when I was a baby professor at Harvard University, and I can't quite remember which year it was I think it might have been 1973 a couple of years after I had been at Harvard. And Meg invited me to go to her house and where she was and to the University of Buffalo at Binghamton State University, and to to come to a workshop that she was organizing. I think I had to drive there with a French colleague of hers, but that's when I first met her in this gorgeous house of hers in Binghamton, and just love. Fell in love with Meg, right, right at the beginning. So, Meg, I don't know if you remember this, this meeting, but it might be that you remember it too. And could you tell us also, you know, what were you doing in Binghamton, of all places?

02:24 Meg Conkey

Well, thank you, Ruth, for dipping into deep prehistory of our relationship. I do remember the meeting, and it was one that I was asked to organize just after I joined the faculty at the State University of New York in Binghamton in the mid 1970s because I had previously been teaching at San Jose State, because I came to California first in the late 60s with my then husband, who took a job at UC Santa Cruz, and I started teaching at San Jose State to the two of us, John Fritz and I, took positions at Binghamton on what was then a very original arrangement, because hiring spouses and hiring couples even today is a very fraught enterprise. For many universities, they don't quite know what to do with a trailing spouse of some sort. But John and I took these jobs at Binghamton for a number of reasons, one of which had had a wonderful graduate program and were both where I had been before, and even at Santa Cruz, there were not yet a PhD program in anthropology. So the graduate students, as soon as I got there, pressured me into saying, Meg, we've got to do something. We're really worried about the status of women in archaeology and in anthropology, and you need to put together some sort of a conference, or some sort of way that we can learn about what the possibilities are, what the status of women are, and so forth. And we invited you, Ruth, because you were a outstanding excavation field director in archaeology, which were then still few and far between, except for a number of pioneers in in the discipline. So we had a rather rollicking good conference with people at the time, and I think that was one of the first instances in which I actually got quite involved in taking a really good look at the profession of archaeology from the point of view of the status of women.

04:30 Ruth

Okay, so at that point, Meg, in the midst 1970s you must have been in the middle of the new scientific wave in archaeology that we call the new archaeology. In from your doctoral research in Chicago and all of that, getting steeped in this new archaeology, and yet you were a little different in that you were dealing with. European or old-world archaeology in terms of the Pleistocene Paleolithic hunter-gatherers. Can you tell us a little more whether you were really in the middle of it, or whether you were on somehow moving beyond that?

05:19 Meg

Well, that's a great question, because at the University of Chicago, when I was in graduate school in the mid to late 1960s with a number of people and other colleagues, all men, it seems, who were very involved and central to the discussions of this movement that became called the new archaeology, which took a very explicitly scientific approach, and delved a lot into the philosophy of science and how we could explain things. And in fact, my husband, at the time, John Fritz, was part of that very movement on explanation in archaeology. And of course, much of it was sponsored or sort of promoted by a very charismatic, charismatic archaeologist by the name of Lewis Binford, who had influenced a number of scholars who were very prominent in the dialog, no matter where they worked in the world. However, my interest always had been in some of the kinds of things that were really on the side of what the new archaeologists were looking at, they were primarily interested in a systems approach, subsistence systems, what people a resource acquisition and some economic factors like that. But I had been a double major in college at Mount Holyoke College in both ancient history and ancient art history, and then I did my master's thesis on, sort of how we can interpret this whole phenomenon that we call Paleolithic art, which was the images and paintings and so forth that were made in caves by people during the Ice Age, during the Paleolithic, as we call it. And so I already had a little, sort of a side aspect to what I was doing, because certainly making inferences about symbolism or ritual or art or whatever was really sort of at the sidelines of the new archaeology at the time. But one of the kinds of things that Binford had argued for that I was very interested in and did influence my work, and still does, is to try to understand what we might call the social geography of people, no matter where they were, how are they related to each other? How did they make contact? What kind of social networks existed, and although the variation in material culture that we found as archaeologists, and the implications or inferences we could make about social network were not something people were taking up too much, but that's the direction that I went. And actually, unbeknownst to me, there was a little corner of some of the new archaeologists who were interested in the very popular at that time, structural approaches, that is, to looking this, of course, was influenced by the great anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss. And people were interested in under and inquiring into the underlying structures of human behavior and human life. And so I carried out a structural analysis of engraved bones and antlers from the Magdalenian period, as we call it in northern Spain, about 15,000 years ago. And so I was already looking at this kind of thing called the Social geography, which I've always been interested in ever since.

08:37 Ruth

And it was that kind of work that you were doing, which made you such an exciting, attract and attractive possibility for perhaps working together by that time, when in the 80s, when I had moved to Berkeley, and I was just thrilled when We started to look for an archaeologist to replace Glynn Isaac,

who had left Berkeley for Harvard. And I, meanwhile, had been hired by Harvard not to replace Glynn Isaac. I was hired in 1978 but by the mid 80s, we were looking for somebody to fill that archaeology position. And I and Jim Dietz, who was also there and very interested in the structural aspects of archaeology. I was interested in your whole social geography aspects, and we just were very interested in putting you forward. But unfortunately, it was very difficult to prove that you were a real archaeologist. For some reason, the fact that you did not have an excavation going on at that time made it just almost a huge barrier of. And to be able to hire you as an archaeologist, well, she's not a real archaeologist. She doesn't excavate so but we, I You knew about, obviously, the Berkeley department at that time, and you must have known that we were looking, that some of us were looking to hire you, and I'm just wondering, what were your thoughts about returning to California, possibly at that time, because you were no stranger, as we've heard, to the sort of transcontinental relationships.

10:38 Meg

Oh yes, well, I had known being in Santa Cruz, living in Santa Cruz, based in Santa Cruz, although I started teaching at San Jose State, first in the anthropology department and then in environmental studies, which was the first time that environmental studies was really being developed in the 1970s in regard to the Earth Day and many of the environmental movements, and they were looking at San Jose State for somebody who could teach about the human relationship to their environment in a long term perspective. One of the wonderful things about being in the Greater Bay Area in the late 60s and early 1970s including with the archaeologists at Berkeley, before you came Ruth, was that there was a gathering. And this is Glynn Isaac, who is probably one of the most interesting and important archaeologists, actually, in my life. I really consider Glynn to have been a mentor, but he was very instrumental in bringing together archaeologists of the Bay Area in terms of having these little gatherings at his home, which included people like Jim Dietz, our dear colleague from Berkeley here, and Ezra Zubrow from the Stanford University, Mike Stanislawski, who was at what's now Cal State, East Bay, and others in these gatherings called archaeologists, for you know, occasional gatherings or whatever. We had some sort of an acronym, which I can't remember, and met at people's houses, mostly here in Berkeley. And then after I moved to Binghamton, I had, by then, John Fritz and I had gotten divorced, and I had developed a relationship with Les Rowntree, who had been a colleague at San Jose State, and who was stayed at San Jose State, even though I was in Binghamton. And so we began a 10 year cross country, bicoastal marriage and relationship. And so in 1979 1980 a, I had a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship to work on the study of Paleolithic art. And came because les was out here. We lived in Santa Cruz, and I actually had a postdoc position here at Berkeley, a non-paying postdoc in 1979 you weren't here at the time, so I actually had your office, which was great, but in any event, I had known and I developed a close relationship with Mary LeCron Foster, who was the wife of George Foster, who was the chair and a big major figure in the anthropology department here, Micki Foster, as she was known, had invited me to join a wonderful symposium that was held in Austria, which she co organized with Stanley Brandes, who is another faculty member here at Berkeley, on symbolism and how we can deal with it. So already I was moving away from subsistence, if you will, as the core of what lots of people were interested in towards the human symbolic behavior. And in 1980 joined what became a very key volume on symbolic and structural archaeology that was edited by Ian Hodder, who at the time was a major figure in getting us to think more broadly about the human experience in the past. So I did know who you were. I was invited in 1986 to come and be an actual visiting faculty member, which, of course, was wonderful. And

then it was in the fall of 1986 when you advertised again for a position in anthropology. But I have to say, I've recently been going through the boxes of my materials, my files that I did keep that I didn't throw away immediately when I moved out of my large office on campus. And I have found some things that, of course, I completely forgot about, some papers and books that we were going to write, and book I was going to co-edit, a book with, with Glynn Isaac and Stanley Brandes, I believe. So there were a lot of things in there I forgot. But I saw actually that I had first of all applied for the job that you got in 1978 and then I was invited to apply in 1985 and I turned it down. And I said I was I had a commitment to the program at Binghamton, and that we were developing and we were going to improve our graduate program and everything. And I can tell myself, I can't believe I actually turned down the opportunity to apply. But then in '86 you all invited me to apply again, and it was after I had been here as a visitor, and I decided, you know, and of course, it was crucial, not only because I knew you all and I had worked with you and found wonderful colleagues in collegiality, but it was also very handy, so to speak, in terms of a resolution to my cross country marriage. And we at the time, I had a daughter from a marriage with John Fritz and Les had a daughter from his previous marriage, and both the girls decided they were, you know, going to be sisters, and they were going to be together. And so really, my decision was, as we would now say, was a decision that was as much from the heart as it was from the sort of objective notions of why you would change and come to a place like Berkeley. So I was really surprised to see that I had applied. And I think I've shredded all those documents now, but now I remember them.

16:30 Ruth

That's fantastic. I did not know that you applied for the job that I when I got it. I didn't know who had applied. I had no idea, you know, it was one of those things coming off, rebounding off the Harvard now time to go, sort of thing. But anyway, in 19 after, in 1987 when we did the whole voting, we finally made it to be able to hire you. It was such a such a relief, perhaps for all of us, but it was, it was the start of an amazing reinvigoration of the Department of Anthropology. You made such a difference. And along with Kent Lightfoot, who we hired at the same time, it was like it became a new department, not so much a Department of Anthropology, but a new group of archaeology. Of it was a new sub discipline, or whatever, within Anthropology of archaeology, it was just and it was reinvigorating for me in terms of my interest in archaeology, but that came from another source. The year after you, we hired you, and you were, we were already teaching together, and so on, you organized the conference that we call the wedge conference, in 1988 in the spring, and that was huge change for me. You saved my life sort of thing. And it wasn't exactly like that, but that made such a difference, and I know it was an important step for you as well.

18:17 Meg

Well, the Wedge, this was the name of a plantation in South Carolina, which hosted conferences. And given -- and I don't think my concerns, my interests and even my publications in aspects of feminist and gender archaeology were really on the table when I was hired at Berkeley. I think it was my work as an archaeologist of deep time of the Paleolithic, even though, as an aside, I'll say there were a lot of faculty here, especially in the anthropology department, who are not extremely happy that I was hired because of they had hope for a different kind of archaeologist of the Paleolithic. And we'll just leave it. Leave it at that. But everybody has their moments when they realize that they weren't somebody else's first choice for a job. But anyway, I had done some work, starting actually and again, going through

papers. I realized that even in 19 early, 1970 1972 I taught a course at San Jose State called men and women in evolutionary perspective, and I had served not just on but as the chair of the American Anthropological Association's Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology. So I had been doing some work in the area of the Status of Women and the understanding of women's roles in prehistoric societies. And I had then published a paper that many people have termed to be a pioneering sort of a path breaking paper with Janet Spector from the University of Minnesota, called "Archaeology and the Study of Gender." And for many people, this. As a wakeup call that, wait a minute, we had not been paying attention to women, that, in fact, we were attributing all of the great things that ever happened to men and so forth and so as a result of that 1984 paper with Janet Spector, I had struck up a collegial relationship with another archaeologist, Joan Gero. She and I decided, at the urging of a publisher, that we should put out a book about this topic. And we said, put out a book, an edited book. How can we do that? There's no there are no publications we it's not like we could go and say, oh, we'll take this paper, we'll ask this scholar or whatever. So Joan and I decided to try to organize a conference for which we got funding both from the National Science Foundation and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and to put on a conference. And the point of the conference was to ask people to take their subject matter that they really knew well. And for you, for example, it was architecture, for somebody else, it was ceramics, for somebody else, it was paleoethnobotany -- plant remains -- and think it through again from the point of view of females, women, a feminist perspective, and most people, maybe not as radically as you felt, oh my gosh, I have no idea what to say. Quite a few people did, but we managed to have this path-breaking conference, which then produced an edited volume called "Engendering Archaeology", not as one of my French colleagues called it, "Endangering Archaeology," but "Engendering Archaeology," and which also was, has been considered to be a very major contribution to the development and the expansion of what is today a thriving field of the folks who are interested in gender, in women, and in the feminist practice of archaeology. So you know, you were part of that, and I did, as you once said, drag you kicking and screaming into this conference, but I think it was an important one for changing the field. And as with everything that you know, we've done on that field, in that field and so forth, it's been a collaboration. There are so many people, so many other scholars, who've been a part of it, that it's really, to me, a testimony of the kind of collaborative work that characterizes archaeology, and that's necessary for archaeology.

22:35 Ruth

Yeah, I absolutely agree. But your role in all of this has been such an amazing leadership role. And not only that, you were a leadership role in changing the whole face of archaeology at Berkeley. You, you know, we, we hired people from that conference and from around as a result of a large number of positions became available. We were just hiring and hiring, and many of them women, very high quality women, archaeologists. And I think it was really a result of your efforts that Berkeley became, or had the reputation for being a leader in that in the field, in the country, if not globally, for women in archaeology, women archaeologists taking leadership roles.

23:39 Meg

Well, at one point, it certainly was the case that we could take the number of women archaeologists and established tenured positions around the country. We could take three or four institutions, and we still had more archaeologists than all of those other institutions put together, women archaeologists. And

actually we did just recently. Berkeley has done a wonderful job of pulling together 150 years of women at Berkeley, and we did a whole section on the women archaeologists. And so all of our bios, biography information and so forth from all of us who have been here at Berkeley, and there must be 10 of us. And that is now part of the archive of 150 years of Women at Berkeley, of all the women archaeologists. So I think we're well represented in that.

24:35 Ruth

And one of the things that I wanted to bring up was that you were, you were such a leader in it that another university wished to grab you away from us. This was a very dangerous time for for us. I think it was in the mid 90s, quite soon, you know, five years after you hired.

24:56 Meg

Well, it was the University of North Carolina, and they had a very exciting offer, even though my husband really didn't want to go to the south. He's a Californian. He went to Berkeley High. He was happy to be in Berkeley. So you do have to manage some of those things. He was, you know, doing a great job. He's by then, he was the chair of the Environmental Studies Department at San Jose State. But I did do it. Several of my former colleagues from Binghamton were then at North Carolina. So Berkeley was wonderful in terms of what it offered me at the time, Carol Christ, who's now our chancellor, was the vice Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, Bill Simmons was the Dean of Social Sciences at the time, and I think we came because of our collaboration of what we were doing at the time. Ruth, it was actually in 1996 that Berkeley put together a wonderful counteroffer. And the counteroffer allowed us to develop together a multimedia teaching center for Anthropology, for archaeology and which we call the MACTiA, the Multimedia Authoring Center for Teaching in Anthropology. And it was had a physical base in one of the buildings along Piedmont Avenue. And it was just at the time when getting more involved with the things digital were happening, and you and others had started a really exciting course that blended outreach, that is being a public facing institution and developing an outreach program with middle schools in Oakland, underserved middle schools where our undergraduates went there, worked with young children to develop their digital skills, many of whom did not have computers yet in their homes, if they even ever did, and to teach them how to create digital stories anyway. It was a wonderful combination of things that we were able to do because of the response that Berkeley gave to allow us to develop the multimedia teaching laboratory as a result of an external offer.

27:14 Ruth

You enabled me to have funding as well to put into the Multimedia Authoring Center for Teaching in Anthropology. It's a big mouthful to say instead of MACTiA, but that's okay, and you, with my Presidential Fellowship in Undergraduate Education, that was a fantastic thing. You are such a magnificent enabler and organizer, and that is one of your strengths, but it's a very, very significant strength in terms of taking responsibility for administrative and organizational skills, facilitating collaborations where none happened before, that kind of thing. And you took this into professional societies as well where you became the president of the Society for American Archaeology, for example, and several other roles like that. I'm not sure if you ever took on the chair of Anthropology.

28:22 Meg

Oh yes, I did. Yes. I think twice, yes, right? Both times it was an interim chair position because of some other personnel sort of changes. But I would add that one of the other benefits from Berkeley that has made a very, extremely rewarding time here has been doing Senate service. And I was fortunate enough to participate in many different committees of the Senate. And I chaired the former Committee on the Status of Women and ethnic minorities, otherwise known as SWEM, I also chaired a committee on undergraduate access and diversity, which then got merged with SWEM and I was tapped to serve on the Budget Committee, and actually ended up chairing the Budget Committee for one year. The Budget Committee is sort of a misnomer. It sort of has to do with budget, but it's really the personnel evaluation committee on campus, and for me, this was such a this was the best of Berkeley was working with other colleagues from completely different fields, where everybody left their own biases as much as they could at the door and worked to respect and to inquire into all of the kinds of things that the faculty here do in terms of merit increases and hiring and promotion, and, you know, doing something like that intensive as it was. It was before the days of being able to access records digitally, and we all had to show up and sit in the office and read files. But it allowed me to understand the extremely productive and interesting research and teaching that was being done on this campus. It's a vision or a perspective that I don't think many regular faculty get, and while it was an onerous job, nonetheless, it was one that was more than worth doing. And I've made friends you know. When I talked to some colleagues, they say, Well, I don't really know very many people. I say, do Senate service. You'll meet a lot of people that way. So that's been wonderful, especially since retirement. You know, one doesn't cut off all of those kinds of relationships, and so continuing to serve in areas of choice, where you want to be is, of course, the benefit of retirement.

30:58 Ruth

We'll come back to the retirement part in a minute. I want to come back to MACTiA. But first I want to talk a little about how you led the archaeology group into some directions, which, again, were innovative and made Berkeley again have a leadership role in archaeology in North America, and that was to encourage indigenous people from indigenous backgrounds, or less likely backgrounds to apply to archaeology in graduate school or as undergraduates. And you started to do this, I can't remember when, but it was very early on, and it made a huge difference in how archaeology was seen in the country, worldwide, globally as well.

32:07 Meg

Well, I have to say that, looking back on the on my career, I would say that the ability of the department, the ability of the archaeology group, and the interest and commitment to training PhD students, who came from Native American backgrounds or other underrepresented groups, if you want to say that particular phrase, that is one of the things that I take a huge amount of pride in. And we also have turned out an amazing cadre of women archaeologists as well, who have gone on to populate many other academic departments and also into contract archaeology or federal or agency archaeology, as it's sometimes called. And I think one of the earliest students, of course, came to Berkeley, originally to work in Turkey and a woman who found her previous master's degree program not so satisfying, and she came here to study the Near East, and of course, turns out to be one of the leaders of indigenous archaeology in the United States, which is a real field with books and all sorts of aspects of it, and to work with with Sonya Atalay, you work with her in the field and as to and she worked also with Professor Hastorf. And I worked with her in just an everyday kind of support, but also especially when

she became a President's Postdoctoral Fellow here, and others who I had met at conferences and encouraged them, you can apply to Berkeley. We'd love to have you. And so I think we now probably have produced, if you will, at least a dozen Native Americans with PhDs in archaeology. And now they are, you know, as I say, populating the discipline, where some of their concerns and issues have taken a center stage. In many ways, relationships between archaeologists and Native Americans have never been great, and I think there we've turned a corner. And I think the Berkeley program. And of course, this could not have happened without Kent Lightfoot and in terms of his field work here in California, his collaborative archaeology. So I think when Kent and I came together, we didn't know each other. We were both hired the same year, in 1987 and it was one of those things, when suddenly you don't have a say in who's hired, and you don't have a say who was hired before you. But we all actually managed to click, if you will, in a way where we shared values. We shared a vision for what archaeology of the late 20th, early 21st century should look like, and got to work on doing that. So, it was a conjunction of the right people in the right time and getting together. And I think we, among the archaeologists, were particularly concerned to not develop certain kinds of relationships with our graduate students, which were more the patron-client sort, but to be collaborative in having our graduate students have two advisors instead of just one, something they could oftentimes feel trapped by. So I think we all worked on it together and that was great, but certainly getting engaged with the growing number of indigenous scholars who wanted to get a Ph.D. and return to their tribes or to their fieldwork or to just, you know, be really good at what they do, certainly was something that I think, in looking back, I feel really, really proud about.

35:59 Ruth

While all this was going on, you've got all this administrative and leadership roles and other interests, you were actually also developing your archaeological research in France. Your previous research had been in Spain originally. But then you started a project in France, and this was one, which actually did involve excavation as well as surface reconnaissance. And I'm wondering, can you sort of take us back to how this project relates to why you became interested in Paleolithic studies? Was it just the art aspect, or was there something else?

36:57 Meg

Well, it's, of course, the development of a project is always interesting to look back at the origins and look at what motivated one to put together a project with a certain set of research questions. And again, mine relates to recognizing the role of my relationship with my husband, and also looking at the fact that we started this project while we were still commuting, which was the idea that both of us had skills. He was a geographer and landscape geographer and had done his research in the mountainous areas of Austria for his dissertation. And I had decided I could no longer work in Spain as of the late 1970s because I was just about blown up in a bomb, a Basque terrorist bomb in the train station. And my family said, you know, as long as the Basque terrorism is going on, we don't want you going back to northern Spain. So, I said, okay, I'll just jump over the border and into an area where there had not been a lot of research on the part of either international or French scholars. It was kind of a marginal area, and this is the foothills of the Pyrenees, where there was definite evidence of the there's cave painting even, but there was definite evidence of a late Paleolithic period, the area that I was interested in dealing with modern humans, anatomically modern humans, homo sapiens sapiens. In the late 80s, before I came to Berkeley, Les and I started exploring the idea of a project together that would blend

his interest in landscape archaeology and my question, which was, again, more about, how can we know more about the social lives of the people who did paint in the caves? I just really wanted to get engaged with what was their the landscape of their lives that would have them going into caves, and we knew at the time that they weren't really living in caves, despite the caveman sort of stereotype. Yes, they did live in some caves, and this was preferred by archaeologists, because the cave sediments are alkaline and things preserve and the cave is well defined in terms of a space. So, between Les and I, we developed the idea that maybe it would be interesting to figure out what was going on between the caves. And we developed this project, which went on for 15 years or almost 20 years, called "Between the Caves," which involved this open air landscape survey, which my French colleagues thought was totally nuts. Well, if you want to do that, you know you're not going to find anything. And, of course, we did. We found thousands of stone tools that still need to be developed. And this has been a great irony to me, because when I was doing Paleolithic archaeology, which is very focused on knowing your stone tools, knowing how to typologizing them, knowing where the raw materials come from and what I had promised myself that I was not going to get involved with lithics. So the irony of running a field project for 15 or 20 years where all we did was go into farmers fields and collect lithics and then have to deal with them as sort of really come home to roost as a challenge, but that was the genesis of the "Between the Caves," which we were working up into a monograph at this point, and then, as a result of that, well, yes, we did encounter a very interesting, unusual, unique archaeological site. And so in the early 2000s we began excavating there. So again, when your colleagues back in the 1980s said, Oh, I'm not a real archaeologist, and this indeed is a bias, and has been a bias in archaeology, that you're not a real archaeologist unless you have your own site, which, of course, today is even a worse kind of thing, because nobody, no archaeologists own sites. But there was that mentality. And so the great irony toward the end of my career of not only working on lithics, but actually doing excavation, directing excavations, of this site called Peyre Blanque in the Ariège region, south of Toulouse in France. And as for how I got to work in France instead of Spain. It all came down to that event in Spain. I'd done my dissertation, I'd worked with bones and antlers. There was a new collection available. So, in the summer of 1979 I decided that I was going to go back to Spain and go to the museum in Oviedo in the north to work on this new collection. I take the plane, fly from San Francisco to Madrid. And in Madrid, I would be going to the train station of the North and take a train to Oviedo. And so, I got there and was in the waiting room. It was the beginning of August, which is always a big travel time in Europe for the August vacation. And I was sitting there, and I had jet lag and so forth. And then somebody came on and announced that my train was actually already there in the train station. I thought, oh, this is great. I'm going to go and get on that train, because now I can doze and I'll be on the right train, if I fall asleep, it'll be okay. So I go downstairs, and I get on the train, and it's way downstairs, deep in what we would call the bowels of the train station of the North, and I'm dozing away and so forth and wondering why the train didn't leave and it didn't leave and it didn't leave, and finally it left and I slept. It was just a few hours to the north, and I get to Oviedo and get a cab from the train station to my hotel and get a few more hours of sleep. And I go to the museum the next morning to start my research, and the woman at the desk is just absolutely apoplectic about the fact that my husband keeps calling. Where is she? Has she shown up? Can you find her? And so forth. And I thought that was really a little over the top, that he was maybe a little overanxious. I'd only been gone a day. And then she said, well, I think he was concerned about the bomb. And I said, the bomb? What about the bomb? And she said, oh, didn't you know? And she pointed to this newspaper, and she showed me that, in fact, the train station of the North in the waiting room where I would have been had I not gone downstairs to get into my seat, and

the lower depths of the train station, I would have been blown up. Meanwhile, the reason my husband was very anxious was, well, he knew about it. It was on the front page of the San Francisco Chronicle when he picked it up the next morning, and he decided to call the State Department to see if he could get any news. He called the State Department, and they, very matter of fact said, well, if you have any idea about her jewelry, we have a lot of arms and legs, and we might be able to identify her by her rings, which understandably really upset my husband. I was amazed at the serendipity of having gone downstairs and sat in the basement while this whole thing transpired. Needless to say, my family said no more research in Spain, Mom, until that Basque terrorism is over, and thus I fled to over to the Pyrenees, and have continued to work in the wonderful part of the Ariège region in the southern part of France to this day.

44:56 Ruth

Fantastic! So we were teaching together, and would bring in our own research as case studies of teaching and one of the things that we use was the Multimedia Authoring Center for Teaching in Archaeology, to teach regular courses like European prehistory or other kinds of courses through media, media rich sources and presentations of the data in different ways or interpretations in different ways, and the courses that we taught there was the idea that they would be regular archaeology courses, but taught in a different way, in a studio way. And we had various colleagues who did that. I did a lot of them, but you never did one. And I'm wondering, that's always been a question. And I thought, oh, I'm going to pitch this one to her and see how she answers. I've never asked you that before ...

46:11 Meg

.. that I've never taught a MACTiA course, a multimedia course? Well, I've collaborated with you on them, right? But you know, I'm not the full video kind of author. I guess I have not done as much with that as others have. And well, I think it's because it involves a commitment to learning all of the kinds of skills that one needs to do this. And I have stayed the course with writing for some reason, even though I've used too many words and my sentences are too long and things like that, but I don't know why. I've never sort of got around to sort of teaching a multimedia course, per se on my own.

47:07 Ruth

I suspected that your response would be exactly right this, and it's absolutely fine. And so when other people would ask me, Why doesn't she? And I'm saying she does different things. The whole point of Meg Conkey is that she's supportive of things that she actually doesn't know or want to do herself. And that is a tremendous gift, not to want to interfere with other people, but to let them find their own way, which is what you did with me all the time. And we joked that you would set me out on the ice and push me and let me find my way and fall in. And so, I would start things like digital teaching, teaching digitally and so on. And that is, it's a very important thing. You were the sort of real strength behind MACTiA. You were the one who arranged the funding and you had the – it has your – what's it called, the title of it? The full title of MACTiA was the Class of ..

48:27 Meg

the Class of 1960 and I'd like to give credit to the Class of 1960. I was awarded their chair. One of our chancellors had at some point decided that it would be a great way to raise money for endowed chairs,

to contact different classes, and as they celebrated their 50th reunions, or whatever, that they would endow a chair, the Class of '60 did so, but they hadn't appointed anybody the Class of '60-chair. And then when I got the offer to go someplace else, this was part of what Berkeley gave in return. And they also allowed me to hold that chair for quite a long time. And the Class of 1960, which I had quite a lot of communication with ... My husband, actually, had he stayed at Cal, which he didn't, he would have been in the Class of '61, but he knew a lot of the people in the Class of 1960, and so it was, you know, really an interesting reconnection. But their idea was, when they were here in the late 50s and graduated in 1960, they felt that Berkeley was primarily a research university, and they did not think that undergraduate education was being paid too much attention to, and they wanted to give their money to somebody who would do something with it, to support and promote undergraduate education. And even today, I mean, of course, members of that class who I've stayed in touch with comment on the amazing development of attention to undergraduate education that Berkeley has done in the last, you know, 40 to 50 years, the number of courses and support, and teaching and learning centers, and then, of course, there's been a number of other chairs that have been dedicated to this. In fact, I think the class of 1961 also endowed a chair, but again, hoping that the recipient of that chair would be developing and working on, primarily reaching out to undergraduates. So, the Class of 1960 was instrumental in helping to continue to fund the Multimedia Authoring Center, and it also helped fund bringing a number of undergraduates to the field with me in France, so that we were able to, you know, really reach down. And of course, the other thing that most of us who've ever enjoyed it have at Berkeley that has been really instrumental in getting research done has been the Undergraduate Research apprentice program, which really combines, allows people to students to see that research and teaching here at Berkeley are not separate, but they are actually integrative. And so thanks to the Class of 1960, thanks to the Chancellor and the dean at the time of my retention, that I was able to hold that chair and make contact with a lot of Cal alumni who, of course, are moving on their way along the lifeline, and we just need to be grateful to them for that.

51:35 Ruth

So we did a lot of teaching together, and it was always a joyful thing at first. You know, teaching jointly in classes, had not been really thought of as a legitimate way of teaching and you didn't get equal evaluation or credit for two people teaching at the same time. Because often when people taught together, it would be like a one teaching one day and then the other teaching the next day, whereas we always made sure that we were right there, present throughout the course together. And that was, for me, one of the best ways of teaching. And we together, we developed this pedagogical system of getting the students to really participate by really doing their own research. You know, we bring our research into the teaching, but we would get them to be responsible for their own learning and their own teaching, which was excellent. And one of the first courses we taught together was on the goddess and archaeology. And this was this whole response that when, when you teach about the feminist practice of archaeology, people think that you will be automatically supportive of the idea of the goddess civilizations, or goddess worship, as being supported by archaeology. And we were actually quite critical of that, and then we're asked to write some articles about that. I didn't want to spend too much time on the goddess, because I know that you and I have spent a lot of time with it, but I just wondered if you would like to say anything about it.

53:35 Meg

I think the fun thing about working together and having the flexibility for teaching here at Berkeley has led us to having some innovative courses such as this, the course on archaeology and the goddess, which is the notion about figurines and the power of women and the matriarchal societies that might have existed in sort of the Neolithic period of European prehistory. But we were also able to teach a wonderful course on life in Ice Age Europe through fiction, where we read fictional stories about the past that and compared them to archaeological data. But all of those courses also had another element, as you mentioned, with a pedagogy, which was our development of teaching and having the students participate in panels, and that they would take their own research topic, and they would work together as a small group. And that whole notion of sort of project-based teaching, which we started in 1990, is something that has become much more important these days, instead of what we call the bankers model, where you just deposit knowledge in them, and the students then withdraw that knowledge on a test. But having these project-based, learning-based groups of students, you know, really pedagogically, was very much in line with feminist practices and philosophies. But also, I think the students gained a great deal from having to do their own research in their own small groups. So that was really one of the no matter what we taught, we were using them.

55:27 Ruth

That was at the heart of MACTiA, right? Yeah, sorry about the acronym. And then when we decided to retire, we decided to retire together and it was going to be in June 2011. But that last spring semester, we just taught courses together. Right? One was on cultural heritage, and the other was on the muse, archaeology and the muse. We said, let's just teach whatever we want. And we did, and it was great. And I ask myself how was it that we decided to retire at that point? And for me, it was time. It just felt right, and probably for you as well, but also, since we've been retired, you've been teaching a lot. I've been doing some teaching. We did teach a course together. Vowed never to do it again, not because we didn't like it, but for various financial problems. Let's not go any further into that. But so, you have been tremendously active, still in helping with the administration aspects of the university, with that kind of support and you've been teaching a freshman seminar course regularly. And you're still doing research.

57:21 Meg

Well, the thing about retirement is that it's about choice, and you can decide, you know what you want to be involved in. You can try out new things and so forth. And I think a lot of people are kind of panicked about it and don't have any plans. I think we talk about this a lot. I found new little clusters of people to be engaged with. I've continued to do work on issues of gender diversity and equity in Cal Athletics, and I've continued to stay as a faculty fellow with the women's Lacrosse team, which I've enjoyed enormously. I stay in touch with the students about what their academic issues and concerns are. It gives me sort of a connection, as does teaching a freshman or sophomore seminar every three or four semesters or something like that. I have found that rewarding. And I teach on something that has nothing really immediately to do with archaeology. I've been teaching a course on Frances Perkins, the first woman in the presidential cabinet, who is really the person behind the much debated -- even today -- Social Security and many labor laws and things like that. And the students are fascinated. It's really great to introduce them to something that they never knew about before and just see the challenges that even in the 1930s were had to be met by somebody in her particular position. And I've continued to stay involved with a couple of organizations on campus, like the Women's Faculty Club or

the Berkeley Emeriti Association, that I was of course, not involved with them before. But anyway, this is a way to maintain connections, still meeting new people. And as we know, there are so many really interesting people on the Berkeley campus. And I've continued research. I'm writing up the monograph on the "Between the Caves"-project, and right now I'm coediting a volume with a colleague in Australia and a colleague who is Spanish, but he's based in Canada, and writing a couple of papers for some of those kinds of things. And I think you and I are giving a paper together at those European archaeology meetings in September.

59:40 Ruth

In Belfast. How could I resist going to Belfast, right?

59:45 Meg

So it's all about choice and finding the kinds of things that still can be rewarding, but without making you feel like you were burdened by various things. I've continued to stay in touch with the archaeological research facility and its developments, and so there's plenty to do if one wants to do it.

1:00:09 Ruth

Meg, we've been talking terribly seriously for the last few minutes, hour or whatever, but we haven't talked about what you do for fun.

1:00:20 Meg

Well, everything is pretty much fun. I have family in the area. I have grandchildren, I have neighbors. We have pizza parties in the street. You and I go to concerts together. I garden and we have breakfast. Yes, I lure her over to Berkeley for breakfast, and I have a garden. Given my late husband's family situation with a grandmother who was a pioneer in California native plants, I have a native plant garden and work on that. And I walk the neighborhood a lot, especially with some colleagues who live down the street. The day is always full.

1:01:13 Ruth

Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Meg, for your patience.

1:01:15 Meg

Thanks for the great questions.