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Karlene Roberts Interview: Paula Fass and Christina Maslach, "Academic Pioneers: Women at Berkeley in the 1970s and 1980s." Interviews with Berkeley's pioneering women professors, Berkeley, CA. Conducted 2019-2023.

Christina Maslach:

So first, we're going to start with some basic demographic data. So name, where you were born, education, you know, any family history, jobs and coming before Berkeley. Just background.

Karlene Roberts:

My name is Karlene Roberts, and I was born in San Francisco. I then went to most of grammar school in Northern California, grammar school, high school, but for four years my parents lived in Hollywood. They both have college degrees and they met because of their common interest in drama. And you can imagine what being four years in Hollywood must've been like for them. But I never asked them. And then I went to high school in Northern California, and then I went to Stanford. And Stanford was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, but for all the wrong reasons, my parents didn't send me to Stanford to get a bachelor's degree.

Karlene Roberts:

They sent me to Stanford to get an MRS degree, and that didn't work at Stanford. So I went to Columbia for a year in social welfare. And there I met the person who would become my husband. We parted company, and after he finished his bachelor's degree at Columbia, he came to Berkeley for a Master's degree. I came to Berkeley for a PhD, and we met again on the Berkeley campus and then married and stayed married for 17 years. I also have an honorary degree from the University Paul Cezanne, which I received not too long ago, but that doesn't have much to do with education.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So you got your PhD, in what year?

Karlene Roberts:

In 1967, in Psychology here at Berkeley. And that was at a time when the Psychology department had industrial organizational psychology, but not too soon after that all psychology departments got rid of that. And that was all sent to business school. So now that same PhD is a PhD in organizational behavior coming from a business school, including Berkeley's.

Paula Fass:

Which is what you are teaching.

Karlene Roberts:

Yes. And I taught for a couple of years as a lecturer and then finally was regularized as an assistant professor. And I remember the argument that was made because I was told later what it was. It was, well, we've looked all over the nation for a good professor to bring here to Berkeley. We've interviewed people from Stanford and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And we

have somebody right here who's just as good as they are. So that's the way I got hired. And so it wasn't as though they were hiring me because we now have to hire a woman. It was a different logic. And the person who I competed with obtained his PhD from Stanford and had a pretty illustrious career in Southern California. So, we sort of stayed on the competition block for a long time.

Christina Maslach:

So it was how many years as a lecturer?

Karlene Roberts:

Probably '67 to '70.

Christina Maslach:

Okay.

Karlene Roberts:

As a lecture instructor, something like that. And then I was regularized in 1970.

Christina Maslach:

So may I just say a little bit about that, because that's not a typical, not that we've heard so far, but did someone just come over and say, so Karlene, we're going to make you an assistant professor?

Karlene Roberts:

Well they went on a national search and, came up with a list of people. But, one of my senior colleagues told me that the discussion finally came down to, well, we've got someone right here who's just as good as they are. And so they hired me. But I did get to watch my competition then over the years of their careers to see what they had done. They did very well. It's not that we were a bunch of awful people, so they did very well. So that's how I got onto the fast lane.

Christina Maslach:

So, you didn't apply for the job?

Karlene Roberts:

No, I never applied. I have never applied for a job. Never. I wouldn't know how to fill out a job application. I've just never applied for a job.

Christina Maslach:

Did it not occur to you or, did you have any thoughts that hey, I could...

Karlene Roberts:

Oh no. All of, a lot of thought. And I was very unhappy that they were bringing all these people in to look at this job, and I thought weren't looking at me. And I think that that was probably a difficult hire, but I don't know where it was difficult. There must've been some arguments

somewhere.

Paula Fass:

So they never invited you to it?

Karlene Roberts:

No. And I never, I don't think I ever gave a guest lecture. I don't think I ever did that kind of stuff. I was here.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Yeah.

Karlene Roberts:

So that was how it happened. And I consider myself very lucky for that reason because I know of people, who really ran into tough, tough stuff. Joanne Martin from Stanford is one of them. I think she's a Harvard PhD. She ran into some tough stuff at Stanford. And I worked at Stanford before I got my PhD, as a research assistant, but they never had any intention of hiring me. And a little later on, Stanford interviewed Denise Rousseau, who turned out to be one of my students and Shelly Zedeck's students, and all they talked about during interview was the scores on the baseball games of the last weekend. So it was pretty clear to Denise that they had no intentions to hire her. She has had a very illustrious career, and so it didn't hurt her not to be hired by Stanford, but she knew right away.

Christina Maslach:

So the part about your hiring process, let's go past that.

Karlene Roberts:

Yeah. Because there wasn't, I don't know what the process was because I was sitting right here.

Paula Fass:

I'd like to follow up on that a little bit. So there was an individual in the department who said, we have someone as good as that right here. So was that person a personal friend of yours? Did he become one?

Karlene Roberts:

No.

Paula Fass:

Did he become a friend?

Karlene Roberts:

You know, I thought your question was very interesting about do these people invite you to parties or did they become personal friends? I never had a personal friend in the Business School, any personal friend that was a faculty member. One of my students, we became close.

but that was for another reason. But, anyway, I never had any of that with faculty – a) they were all male, b) they weren't friends with one another. And c) I think the competitive spirit was high enough that it would be dangerous for them to make friends among each other because they were evaluating each other. And the Business School's always been fairly competitive. So I don't think it had anything to do with gender.

Christina Maslach:
Versus...

Karlene Roberts:
Just a competitive place.

Paula Fass:
It's nevertheless interesting that there was an individual who had been watching you, who knew about your talents, and therefore became a kind of patron.

Karlene Roberts:
Well I think there were two. I think there were individually, I don't want to name them because I don't, I think there were two. I think there was that individual who did, and I think I know who it was. And then across my career, another individual stands out in my mind who I will name, and that was our former Dean Ray Miles. At every step of the way, Ray went out of his way to at least make things possible for me. One of the questions you asked me was about teaching load. Ray taught a junior college teaching load the first three years I was on the faculty, so I wouldn't have to, and I could catch up on the research because I was moved from lecturer to assistant professor. And as a lecturer, you don't have time to do research, I only had time to commute and teach and that sort of stuff.

Karlene Roberts:
So, Ray really did that. And then, but very late in my career, the Miles' came to dinner one night, and Ray said to me, had you ever looked pregnant, we would have found a way to fire you.

Christina Maslach:
Oh wow.

Karlene Roberts:
And he finished that thought with, and you would've looked pregnant very early in a pregnancy. He said, "I'm not talking about being prejudiced, I'm talking about the situation as it was." And I thought that was really sort of insightful and a nice thing for him to say. Yeah.

Paula Fass:
Did you ever get pregnant while you were there?

Karlene Roberts:

No. We adopted a child because if I'd ever looked 10 minutes pregnant, they would have found a way to fire me. But we knew that, and so we adopted a child.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. But that's interesting that in a sense Ray Miles was already looking out for you, saying, you better be on a path where you can get some other work done.

Karlene Roberts:

I went to his funeral, and not only the church they belong to, but all of their academic life was very progressive, and you could see what had been done within just that organization that must have taken effect in his life to do that. He said when he married his wife, they married in Texas, and she wouldn't have a wedding unless they invited the housekeeper. That was it. And so they did, but I think much against the family's wishes.

Christina Maslach:

Wishes on that kind of thing. Yeah. So interesting kind of thing.

Paula Fass:

You mentioned something about commuting. Were you commuting to Berkeley?

Karlene Roberts:

For a while, yes, we were living at Stanford. And when Dick Holton hired me at Berkeley, he said, I'll hire you on the premise that you will move closer to Berkeley. And that put my husband in a real bind because guess who was going to have to start doing the commuting? And so, we did, we lived in the Oakland Hills.

Christina Maslach:

And so you both kind of shared a commute?

Karlene Roberts:

Well, it's not far from the Oakland Hills to here, but it was further to Stanford. But today I think that would be impossible. You just, I don't care how you did it unless you can take BART all the way, but you can't really...

Christina Maslach:

You can't. Yeah.

Karlene Roberts:

And so, and I wondered if there were faculty left here on campus who were married to a spouse who teaches at Stanford, and where do they live? Well, you did, but you lived in the city [San Francisco].

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. But we have talked to some people who have had that long commute, or at least for

some part of the time. That kind of commute is rough because from one place to the other, you will always have commute traffic. I mean, you never...

Karlene Roberts:
...avoid that.

Christina Maslach:
But there have been other people who have tried different solutions to that. Or put up with it...

Karlene Roberts:
I wonder if our younger faculty are able to do that, because the situation's just gotten worse and worse over the years.

Christina Maslach:
One of the questions to continue to follow up on -- I mean, it's interesting to say that the whole culture of the Business School is so competitive that it really interferes with establishing more personal kind of friendships.

Karlene Roberts:
Yeah, I don't know what's going on today. But I don't think there were many people in that Business School, who were friends with each other.

Christina Maslach:
But I'm thinking now of later years, because you've been there for quite some time. As other women started to get hired, and other kinds of people -- did any of that change, or is that still pretty much the same?

Karlene Roberts:
I don't know. I was thinking about that last night because, mmm -- well not in my experience with the Business School did those people really become friends. Now I would have said to some of the younger woman who came later that they should be friends with one another because there's a big helpful skill in there, but I don't know that they ever were.

Paula Fass:
Did you find women friends elsewhere on the campus?

Karlene Roberts:
No, no. In fact, it was the meeting that you had of all of us where I realized who these people were. I had heard their names a lot, I had met some, but a lot of them I'd never met, and I thought, Oh my goodness, that's who that is. You know, I don't know what your experience here is, but my experience is, except for committee work, you don't get around to other departments a lot. And we were up here across the street from the stadium and who's going to go down on campus and learn about that sort of stuff. So it was, you know, through some kind of committee work that you really do meet the other people.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Karlene Roberts:

And I was busy and you know, I'm sure this is not a new story. I was trying to raise a kid, be a wife, da-da-da, and a lot of people, including Ray Miles' wife, Lucille, said of me and to me, you have to do everything. And I can remember sitting on the floor, writing a hundred Christmas cards while Don read a book. And that was not Don's fault. It was how the society was set up. And, so I got the right, the hundred Christmas cards. Oh, and by the way, you didn't just sign them, you wrote letters on them. So I got to write the a hundred Christmas cards while trying to think about where I was going to shop for food the next day. I don't know. It's just...

Christina Maslach:
Things like that.

Karlene Roberts:

It's an interesting time though, that you're looking at, because it was a complete change for women in academe. Absolutely complete. And probably everywhere else.

Christina Maslach:

Yes, that's why we're interested in this time because it was such a pivotal kind of turning point, you know, for all kinds of reasons, and what people's experience was. And as Paula was saying earlier, what we're finding is that there is no single story.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. So the next thing was really to get a better sense of what your research program was. Now that you were not a lecturer, you're an assistant professor, you're going to have to start doing some scholarly kind of work. You're going to eventually come up for tenure. So...

Karlene Roberts:

Well, I started doing scholarly work earlier because I published my first two or three publications with people who were already known. So if I was going to get any flack, I certainly didn't, because they were well established and well known, and the publications were in what organizational people did at that time, which is job attitudes. And I did a couple of papers on methodology and did them with people who are pretty well known in those areas. And so I continued to do this kind of micro-industrial psychological stuff for quite a number of years. And then one day, I was in a campus meeting with Todd LaPorte, who's in the department of Political Science. And we somehow made contact with the US Navy, which was bringing into Alameda, the USS Carl Vinson, and Vinson was going to be stationed in Alameda. And that was in 1985, And I'll tell you, that just completely changed my life. I just fell into it and it was the most exciting research time and personal time I've ever spent, but I spent it as a divorced mother.

So I also had to pay attention to the kid, and the Navy didn't like paying attention to kids at all. The Navy is not, it was not then. I think it's a little better now, but it was an organization where the women all stayed in the status of their husbands, but they stayed at home and ran the PTA and did this and that and the other sort of thing; the husband went to sea, but everybody maintained the status of whatever the rank the husband was. And so I went to sea, and there weren't any other women that sea and there are 6,000 men on a carrier at the time (there aren't as many today), but at the time there were 6,000 men on an aircraft carrier. And the big joke was that they had sent me to graduate school without sending me for an undergraduate degree.

And that was all true. I mean, they really in fact did because most of the people at that stage of the game in the Navy, the officers, all of them had gone to the Naval Academy or to University of California, any big college. And so, you know, they were all marked by that. But I'd been to college but not jumped into an organization that was like that, but it was absolute wonderful fun. And at that time I changed from doing this job satisfaction research to looking at the Navy as an organization in which errors can lead to catastrophic consequences. And it is, literally they can, they can kill you off in a second and a half, and for the most part, they don't. So how did that happen? What do they do? And then that research spread into civilian organizations but mainly organizations in which you could have a catastrophe and how do they avoid it? Then it got into organizations that did have catastrophes, and what they do that's wrong.

Paula Fass:

So it was after you had tenure?

Karlene Roberts:

Yes, I, you couldn't do this stuff before I had tenure. And Todd and I never let a graduate student aboard the first three, four years we were aboard those ships.

Paula Fass:

So Todd was there with you?

Karlene Roberts:

Yes, Todd was there at the beginning with me. And then, as time went on, we went our separate ways, but he had been in the Marine Corps. The problem with anybody in any organization, they say, well, I was in the Marine Corps when I was 21, but now they're a lot older. And the Marine Corps changed too. And so that part of the military industrial complex had changed over the years too. And now I wouldn't know what to tell you it was doing because I haven't been near it for a long time, but I had been to many organizations where you could have these catastrophes. In fact, we did a big study on the concept of electric power companies in Japan, and we got out of there and came home and I was doing that with somebody in another university.

And in a student group they asked something about, "Well, are you going to go do more?" And the answer was no, the Japanese nuclear power industry was so poorly run, they were bound to

have an accident, and they did. A big accident.

Christina Maslach:

Wow. I was going to say they had a huge one.

Karlene Roberts:

And so literally these days, I have a whole team of people who are capable now of doing this whole thing, and we go into big organizations, and we'd say, "Oh, this again," because they don't seem to learn, and you can write any number of papers you want. You can give any number of talks you want, but they don't really seem to learn. And so they have accidents. So then we get called in about what was wrong.

Paula Fass:

So you couldn't have done this work before you got tenure?

Karlene Roberts:

No.

Paula Fass:

So tell us a little bit about your tenure process.

Karlene Roberts:

Well, I don't know what to say about this because I really don't know how to look at it -- but I was just put up a little early for tenure. In other words, what they did was they included the years I was a lecturer in the tenure decision. And so I could have been programmed for failure. That's a possibility, or maybe they just said, listen, let's get this thing over and done with. I mean, I have no idea what happened at that stage. And then the tenure process was just like it was for anyone else. And of course, I was just as scared as you all were when you went through that process, and everybody is, and of course we've all had students who we got to hold their hands while they were going through that process, and so it was fairly scary. Fortunately, Ray Miles was the Dean about the time I went aboard those ships, and he kept saying to me, "Karlene, get your grades in. Get your grades in." You know, paying attention to all of the things that would cause me problems if I didn't do it. And, so I did it, but since Ray had been in the Air Force, he knew the organization much better than I did.

And, so he knew what could happen, and they tried to be that organization while we were going through that process, I think I'd gone into it just - slightly important - that the organization tried to be careful with me, so I didn't fail. And so that's important. Some of us have done field research where the organizations say you can't report those data, and I was afraid of that with the military, but it never happened. But you can't do that. And that would have, I know people that's happened to, but I wasn't one of them. So it was okay.

Paula Fass:

So, by 1985 when you begin this work there, were there other women at the Haas school? It's

considerably later...

Karlene Roberts:

It's considerably later. There probably might've been. I didn't, I wouldn't have published with any of them, so it wouldn't be anywhere on my CV that I would know for sure. But I think that probably there were...

Christina Maslach:

There might be some, like economists for example....

Karlene Roberts:

They had to, oh yes, yes. The answer is yes, for sure. Because we've had a couple of economists hanging around, who won Nobel prizes and have been head of the economic community in Washington, D.C. Well, Janet Yellen, Laura Tyson. And I think that Janet Yellen did it the best. I don't know when, and the economist -- it is always a joke in the Business School, that the economists of course ran the place, which they still do. It's not going to be some soft behavioral sort of person who is going to run it. Except Ray was. But you know, they joke about it and it's fine. I didn't run into any problems with them.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. But in a sense, the tenure process, given the scariness and all this kind of stuff, was really based on your earlier work. Then you were able to really branch out in this new exciting kind of way...

Karlene Roberts:

Yeah because then you didn't have to do what was classic and accepted in the field to do. And I had done what was classic and accepted in the field to do, but I could branch out. But both Todd and I made the decision not to branch out with students because it was, it was just so fraught with possibility of inconvenience and stuff like that. And it turned out our fears were not grounded much, but it was fun. It's always fun to be around 6,000 men. That's all.

And have your parents come aboard as my parents did and know what you're doing. And occasionally in that organization, they have to welcome aboard the people who are paying the bill. They're called taxpayers, and they don't know anything about the organization. So frequently I got the job of racing around the ship after people's cameras that they lost and left somewhere and couldn't figure out where they left them, and I'd go find them. But that was sort of how I paid them to let me do interviews and this, that, and the other thing that was reasonable costs.

Paula Fass:

So, your child was with you during this time?

Karlene Roberts:

Brett was born in 1972, and Don and I divorced in 1980 and so my parents filled a big role there,

a huge big role there. Because when I would have to be gone, they'd come up and take care of him. And as they said, it took two of them to do it. I think they enjoyed it. They were retired by that time, so I think they enjoyed it. And occasionally I'd go to San Diego to work, and what I would do is I'd fly on airplanes that landed in Orange County, and I would hand Brett over the fence into my parents' arms (now you couldn't do that anymore). But you know, I don't think Brett cared. And then they would hand him back over the fence when I'd fly back. And if you did that on a Friday, if the kid cried a lot, then you had to buy everybody's drink. But you could not get away with that anymore.

Paula Fass:

First of all, was your husband still involved, with your son?

Karlene Roberts:

It didn't take Don too long to get un-involved, and I know the reasons, but I don't think I'll go into them. But he did get un-involved, and today ais un-involved, and Brett could use his help. But that's the bad, you hit the bad part. And I imagine that happens to a lot of people.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. So let's see, you said '72.

Karlene Roberts:

He was born in '72, Don left in '80. And so I really raised him. And when he was eight, we sent him to sea, with a bunch of other eight-year-olds, and the funny part of that was it's a program the Navy has for their families, where the men are and their ships are coming back from the Hawaiian islands if they'd been deployed, and they come back and then through the Hawaiian islands, in Honolulu, they'll fly the kids out at all ages. And Brett was invited to come along and be the guest of the captain. Well, the Captain has other things to do besides take care of my kid, but there were maybe a hundred kids, on board coming in. And I remember putting all these kids on a flight for Honolulu and, with the wife of the captain of the ship, and we looked at each other and said, "I wonder if the stewardesses have any idea what they're getting into." There's a hundred kids on this airplane, but everybody made it. Brett didn't have a very good time.

Christina Maslach:

Okay. One other question. In terms of affirmative action, were there any kind of issues that came up, whether for you or for other people, of which you were aware?

Karlene Roberts:

Not for me, but I'm sure for other people in the department, I'm sure that was a big deal, but I missed out on that, which is I think good fortune for me. None of my promotions, I don't think the issue of affirmative action was brought up.

But it really did have an impact. And then, I've heard all over the campus and in other places, about men who felt they were badly treated because the women were given the better chance

or whatever. And I don't know how we, how organizations would do it without affirmative action, on the one hand. On the other hand, it has some negative effects all over the place.

Christina Maslach:

We had an interesting experience in our department where we hired two people who were married to each other. We had a position for the woman, as a full professor. And so to get the husband, we had to use whatever they called it then. It wasn't affirmative action per se, but it was a term for the spousal hire. He was also an outstanding candidate, and we thought it was wonderful that we could hire both of them. But he hated it because he felt he was being stigmatized, that he was being considered lower status, or not as good. He didn't see it as a terrific thing, that we could hire both of them. Rather, he was just upset about being designated as the trailing spouse.

Karlene Roberts:

Well, I have a feeling that if you were interviewing my former husband and he even bothered to remember that long ago, he would say much the same thing because he went sailing through assistant to associate to full at Stanford and retired from Stanford. But, I have a feeling that there were times when he felt that he was being the one left out. And I think the most interesting thing that happened to me is Holton saying we'll hire you if you move. Because otherwise we would have stayed at Stanford. I never would've made it anywhere.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. It's interesting. It's that notion of the trailing spouse, you know, which makes it sound like a second class citizen.

Karlene Roberts:

Well, I was thinking about you. You've never had that in your life. I don't think...

Christina Maslach:

I had some, because when I was assistant professor and getting my mid-career review, there were questions being raised about, well maybe it was really Phil's idea. He just handed it to me over the breakfast table and said, why don't you go do this? And so I was not being given credit for even the research that I did without him, you know, published separately. It was still, well maybe he's really the brains behind the throne kind of thing.

Karlene Roberts:

I often thought about that with you, you know, because we knew each other. I've often thought about that, but I've always felt that both of you are very strong researchers and to the public's eye, I mean, I know Phil's president of the APA and all that nonsense, but to the public side, it looks like we have two strong researchers here.

Christina Maslach: ([03:28](#))

But early on, it was a problem.

Okay. Let's get into teaching. So you talked about your initial teaching load and what Ray was doing for you. So can you say anything about the highs and lows of working with undergraduates and graduate students?

Karlene Roberts:

Well, I have always adored undergraduates because they come from a variety of majors and that it doesn't get you much credit in the business school. You need to really be working with MBAs. And I didn't like the MBAs because you knew what they needed. They needed a degree to get out there and get their salaries up. And everybody kind of knew that. But Joanne Martin was at Stanford at the time, and she was talking to some of her colleagues about me and they said, as a group, "she doesn't like undergraduates and therefore she's going to get penalized for it." Yet there were people who came to me for help, what should I do? In fact, I remember one gal from Mexico, and she was expected to get her bachelor's degree, get back to Mexico, and get married. And she saw herself as being more like me. And so she came to talk about it. And this gal represents several students that I've had like that, because she didn't want to go back into that culture and get married immediately. And I don't know what she did, have no real idea what she did, but that happened a number of times, particularly with women.

I had one student who became a good friend, and his name is Charles O'Reilly, and I think you probably know him, and Charles came out of the army after the Vietnam war and had personal experiences that were not exactly great. And he came to Berkeley for a master's degree and he got the master's degree, and then I convinced him to stay for a PhD and he will tell people that, (so this is not something, you know, under the rug somewhere). So he came, and stayed for a PhD and then we farmed him out to UCLA for five years. Then, he came back here and he taught for 12 years. And during that time, Charles and I remained friends, and that's basically the only (although I have some other friends who were my MBA students), but that was really kind of a long friendship. And then when he went to Stanford, he had other things to do, and found a woman who was a good partner. And so I haven't seen him in many, many years, and, I don't think the friendship would be there anymore, you know, it just kind of dissolved, but I don't think that's uncommon. You gain friends, say they go somewhere, you stay here, and then over the years you kind of forget about it or they do

Paula Fass:

You're allowed to take different...

Karlene Roberts:

And your lives take different paths, and all that that happens to you. So, that was the only where I had a long friendship. Now yesterday I had lunch with one of my students who was both a undergraduate student and an MBA student and, and she's past retirement but younger than I am. And it's kind of, I do get together with her every once in a while. And I bet if I really thought about it, I'd think of others that come, that have come back into my life. But, but they're few and far between. I, 'cause it's everybody, as you said, everybody goes into different directions. Their lives take different pathways. It's nothing that anybody gets mad at anybody else or it rarely is.

Christina Maslach:

But do your paths cross maybe sometimes occasionally?

Karlene Roberts:

Well, yeah, we had one of our students, a female student went on to be Dean of a school in Europe. And, so she may have maintained contact with another of my PhD students, who became Dean of the Business School at Rice. And of course they kept contact because they had to go to these Dean's meetings together. And I've heard from Bill, the one who became Dean at Rice, several times because every time Haas asked him to do something, he'll write back a little note about how influential I was in his life, and that's always kind of fun. Just a little paragraph, you know.

Paula Fass:

That's all you need, is a little paragraph.

Karlene Roberts:

That's right. And he's retired now. And, I said, now's the time you could go out and make money. And he said, who said I'm not making money? So he feels he has, and I think one of his kids lives on the west coast. So we've kept a little bit of contact, but not a lot. Oh, but this one, you'll love that particular student. One of our students became Dean at Utah, I think, and he was John Freeman's student. And then Bill became Dean at Rice, and John Freeman had walked down the hall at the time saying, your student, Bill Glick, will never amount to anything. He just infuriated me. You, your student Bill Glick. And Bill's the one who became Dean of the school at Rice.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Are there other things about your career on campus that you wanted to bring up that we haven't gotten into?

Karlene Roberts:

Well, one was Ray Miles. I think that was one that I thought was really important.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah, I agree. And that has been true for a number of people in their interviews, who have pointed to a particular person, or two, who really made a difference in very different ways. There was someone who opened a door or pointed out...

Karlene Roberts:

For us women, it was probably a male.

Paula Fass:

Mostly it was a male.

Karlene Roberts:

Yeah. So, the one thing I wanted to mention when I looked at my CV, I thought the paper that I wrote that got the biggest play, probably even if you looked at citations today, was called On Looking at an Elephant, and it reviewed the cross-national literature and organizations at a time when that wasn't a terribly big deal. So now every paper from then on has to mention that because that was one of the first papers that did that. I'll tell you how I wrote that, I wasn't on anybody's faculty, and I was a research associate at Stanford and one of their visitors from France or somewhere, one of the visitors to that faculty helped me write it and helped me reorganize it. the right way for what our journals like -- introduction to the problem, the methodology, the results and the conclusions and all this sort of stuff. Because I didn't know a whole lot about that, and that really set me on a path, and I can't even remember that person's name, but I thought that's the paper that really set me off because it was on something that the colleagues that I had been working with didn't do. I mean, no one did international at the time really. So, I learned a lot. I learned how to write a paper, you know, because he did it.

Paula Fass:

Did you thank him in the paper? You might be able to find his name in the paper.

Karlene Roberts:

Yeah. I don't know. I haven't looked at the paper in many years, so I don't know. But that's a good idea. I think I could thank him.

And I wonder if I had even asked him to be a coauthor. because I hadn't absorbed the norms of the profession at the time, so I don't even know if I did that. And how many norms, you know, do you have to absorb before you, because if it had been a professor, the professor would've said, I'm going to be the senior author. And that's for sure. And that wasn't happening.

Christina Maslach:

But that's really interesting. I mean that you had that opportunity to have a single authored paper, so early in your career.

Karlene Roberts:

The publication date is 1970.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. think about that, nobody can argue, Oh, well it's really so and so's work. Or you were the junior person.

Karlene Roberts:

Yeah, last night I was looking at my CV thinking, have I ever done anything important? And I looked at that paper and thought that this was kind of a, you know...

Paula Fass:
A turning point.

Karlene Roberts:
Yeah.

Christina Maslach:
No, I think that is really huge because that doesn't come easily early on.

Karlene Roberts:
No, it doesn't. And the other thing I think is kind of huge about people's careers, anybody's careers, but particularly for us because we do struggle through the swamps, is that to have fun with it, to be doing something that you're having fun with because we've all known people who went into medicine and then hated it, and it cost too much to get out of it. And I think for the most part, I've had a lot of fun in the professional things I've done. And I think we should all wish for that, in our students, in us, and everybody. I haven't had fun in a lot of other events in life. That one was one.

Christina Maslach:
Anything you want to say about professional service?

Karlene Roberts:
Okay. I was head of my division in Academy of Management (AOM). I've done that. Denise Rousseau beat me out for president of AOM, and she's quite a bit younger than I am. But earlier in our careers, the membership couldn't differentiate us. It was Denise and Karlene. "Oh, hi Denise." And it would be me. I'm not so sure they differentiated us as when we came on the ballot for president, and I wouldn't have gone on the ballot had I known she was on it, and I'm not so sure she wouldn't have done the same thing.

But she won the presidency. But I think it was more funny than it was anything else, because Denise would tell me at meetings, "10 people came up to me and called me Karlene today."

Christina Maslach:
Oh my gosh, those women from Berkeley, you can't tell them apart.

Karlene Roberts:
Yeah, exactly. And she was a Shelly Zedeck student, and Zedeck went off to Israel on sabbatical and didn't pay much attention to the students, and she was about to go on the job market. So Charles Hulin at Illinois and I put her into the job market, she didn't even have a coat to wear on interviews in the east. And I wrote a letter to Shelly that apparently she kept over her desk for years, which said, you know, it's fine to go away on sabbatical, but -- and then she got hired at Northwestern. I think I told you before that she interviewed at Stanford, and all they talked about was the weekend games or whatever. So she got hired at Northwestern, so it sent her off on a good path. She married a guy from that area and they had twins, and that marriage broke

up and he sued me.

Christina Maslach:
What?

Karlene Roberts:
Well, we used an instrument (a questionnaire) he developed. So he decided he had to get back at me. So he sued me. And, you know, I felt so sorry for the University of California lawyers who have had to defend me in that suit. But it went on and on and I bet it still does today.

Christina Maslach:
You're kidding me.

Karlene Roberts:
And it takes a long time. And even if you don't lose out financially, you lose the time, and this was all over his divorce with her.

Christina Maslach:
Oh, I had no idea. Wow.

Karlene Roberts:
And so there's another woman situation, I think. If there had been a man involved, if I had been a male, I don't think he would've done that.

Christina Maslach:
By the way, I just as a, as a little footnote to that, I remember that happening because when Shelley was out of town, you know, on the sabbatical, Denise came to me, and I was her thesis advisor in the department

Karlene Roberts:
And she came to me.

Christina Maslach:
So, she came to both of us.

Karlene Roberts:
Well that's good. She made a good choice. She needed somebody and I'd like to see that letter because I have no idea what I wrote. And she said it hung over a desk for some years. She now has retired and she married Paul Goodman, who you probably know and they were married quite a long time. And, now she's going to stay, I talked to her not long ago because somebody arranged for us to have a phone conversation, and she's going to stay in the east because her life is really centered around Carnegie Mellon and not only her kids.

Christina Maslach:

She's done well. Well, the next time you talk to her, tell her hello from for me, I haven't seen her in a long time...

Karlene Roberts:

One of her students, who I work with, just published a book with, and I am still working with him. We're conjuring up book contracts and you know, that sort of stuff. But you know, you often wonder what do psychologists do when they retire? The same stuff they did before, I think.

Christina Maslach:

"What's the next book?"

This is great. Thank you so much.

END.