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**WOMEN AT THE CENTER:
HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

TAPE LOG

Shakuntla Bhaya is a lawyer with the Delaware law firm of Doroshow, Pasquale, Krawitz, & Bhaya. She was a Women 's Studies minor as an undergraduate, entering Women's Studies as a freshman. There was no major at the time.

Name of person(s) interviewed: Shakuntla Bhaya

Other people present: Elise Wolpert
Interviewer: Sarah Foster

Date of interview: May 10, 2012

Location of interview: Law Offices of Doroshow, Pasquale, Krawitz, & Bhaya
1701 Pulaski Highway, Bear, D.E.

Special conditions (noise, interruptions, etc.): Some noise from street and hallway

General description of contents: Bhaya's experiences at Delaware as an Undergrad between 1978 and 1982. She describes her personal and academic experiences from the department, and their lasting impact on her work as a lawyer today.

Recording Format and disc number: Video on DVD

Total Running Time: 72:39 minutes

Page 1 of 5

TOPIC SUMMARY

Counter No. Contents

0:00 Formal Introduction; Sound test

00:27 Background: born in New York City in 1960; Parents immigrated from India; predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Relocated to Delaware in 1972; schools still not desegregated; predominantly white neighborhood. Concord High, helped implement de-segregation in 1979; Brown v. Board much earlier

03:13 Growing up as a girl; gendered experiences in very traditional family; girl had restricted mobility; Equal in education for kids. Daughters had more freedom of movement than mom; this injustice later made Women's Studies attractive

05:39 Discussion about interests and studies in college. Interested in politics, drew her to Political Science

07:04 Discussion about Law School

TAPE LOG CONTINUED

Page 2 of 5

Counter No. Contents

07:19 Women's issues; first tennis match between a man & a woman; Women and sports; Title IX

07:52 Discussion about why study at the University (1978-1982) Bhaya's time at UD; why she picked UD (in-state tuition, help parents out)

09:24 First involvement with Women's Studies and why; First course in Women's Studies, first or second semester freshman year with [Sandra] Harding; gave a political context for her childhood, It provided a way to "Channel hidden anger in a constructive way" — felt less different, found people like her in Women's Studies

11:02 Met people involved with women's rights issues, anti-Apartheid issues, had a lot in common; Also got involved because she didn't make the Women's Field Hockey team

12:05 "So what would you say your feminist light bulb moment was?" First class in Women's Studies, activity, and "newness" began. Sophomore year, more involved in left groups, like Women Working for Change

13:34 Discussion about experience with Women Working for Change: Women Working for Change: community and academic based; dealing with issues such as working in male dominated fields, survivors of incest, safety issues on campus; Social aspect of the group, sisterhood, pot luck dinners; Aimed at changing institution and oneself as well

15:41 Activities: Take Back the Night marches, teach-ins about women's reproductive freedoms being restricted under Regan's administration; Meeting with administration about safety, challenged use of male escorts; Outcome: no real change, made people more aware about safety; Call lines put in, some change; not there long enough to see change.

18:28 Discussion about major and interests: Areas of interest: double major in Political Science and Philosophy, minor in Women's Studies; focus in political theory; would have been WOMS major had there been one then.

19:23 Real change, making now as a lawyer; credits this to education ad UD/Women's Studies. A lot of her study focused on how to do research; no objective criteria.

20:39 Bhaya was considered very Left while in college, a Lesbian Separatist; Came out while in college; discussion about feminism, She is a feminist, proud of the label; importance of labels; "Co-opted": work within system; more conservative now

23:23 Civil Disobedience necessary for change; starts the dialogue

24:46 "What was the campus like for activism?" Anti-Apartheid movement (UD had investments in South Africa); Marxists were the critical thinkers on campus; Gay and Lesbian group, not involved herself.

TAPE LOG CONTINUED

Page 3 of 5

Counter No. Contents

26:29 Discussion about Affirmative Action, included on councils to create the policies; Fighting for Women's Studies: more courses, equal pay.

27:43 "As a student was it noticeable that this was going on with Women's Studies? Only those involved; boycotted fraternities who were inappropriate.

28:26 "What was your experience with the minor?" Wished there was a major; women's program when she started there.

29:24 Discussion about the environment of Women's Studies offices, she hung out there; Teaching Assistant, studied there, typed papers on the Women's Studies type writer

31:11 WOMS Minor gives value to people who are teaching it; Major means they are giving money for research.

31:52 People go to college to get a job afterwards, more now than when she went to school

32:40 Minor vs. major, interdisciplinary approach; debate over whether to have a separate department or not; Bhaya always wanted it to be a major: Women's Studies needs a home, for research and students. Women's Studies provides an education and a home for their students, especially those who, like Bhaya, felt different.

34:50 "What sorts of activities did you do through Women's Studies, and what sorts of opportunities did it offer?" Teaching Assistant for Women's Studies as a senior

36:09 Co-authored article with Harding; worked on research projects, attended Brookings Institute think tank on the moral dilemma/ thought process over abortion; academic and disconnected.

37:08 Personal experience: high school friend's struggle with deciding to have an abortion in 1976; human experience, it is a loss

39:01 Worked with professors from other universities, graduate students, took graduate courses; inclusive environment—even smoked and drank coffee during their theory classes; Theory and community experience—bridged two together

40:18 Mentors: Harding, Goldstein, Andersen (different disciplines) Elaborates on mentors—to professors now; connecting with students makes a difference/impact

41:39 Shout outs to the professors she mentioned, Harding, Anderson, and Goldstein, they have made a difference, in her life/impacted who she is; she pays it forward now

43:13 "Do you think that your Women's Studies experience was a lot different than your Political Science or Philosophy experience? Yes, as a department it was different

TAPE LOG CONTINUED

Page 4 of 5

Counter No. Contents

43:49 Discussion about Stereotypes about Women's Studies at the time; perception of Women's Studies (women bashing men, lacks intellectual vigor); more comradery

45:38 Did have good Political Science experiences, such as with Professor McGee.

46:20 As a department, Women's Studies may be different now (has other needs it needs to fulfill).

46:32 "What do you think of the name change from Women's Studies to Women's and Gender Studies"? Good, sounds like a department; reflective of what WOMS is about now; was more about women when she was there

47:47 "How do you think that Women's Studies impacts your field and career now?" Critical thinking biggest thing she learned in college, second was to be careful about assumptions, third to take ego out of investigation and understanding. Law school, no critical thinking; emphasis on the law; Almost quit law school

51:48 Going to court is not always the answer; did family law at first; Women and law, divorce, etc. in the 1980s; One of the first Alimony cases she took on was when a woman had the money. Is a fan of alternative dispute resolution: through agreement, people become empowered.

54:05 Women's Studies/critical thinking and her Pro-bono work: children in foster care system; Women's Studies—think outside the box.

54:30 Most rewarding—helping change laws in Delaware for inclusion of LGB (not T yet) in laws; anti-discrimination (took 12 years); importance of building relationships

55:42 Changed perspective from college (wouldn't have wanted to work within system then, etc.); Building blocks, relationship building makes a difference; senators, etc. became their friends

57:06 Civil Union bill introduced; took only 3-4 months; same people fighting for it (influential politicians backed them, grassroots)

58:30 Women in Senate, and House especially, were the key movers for the bill; accomplished it in a way that only a woman could do it (grace, respect, no ego, but firmness)

59:37 Bill Oberly, white male republican, started HB 99 to end discrimination in public sphere by sexual orientation; President Obama's announcement on gay marriage

61:01 Bhaya's civil union: inclusive celebration, personal celebration and a political statement, the Personal is Political!

62:13 Co-opted some, yes... her activism/position now, she is a "bridge" —the advocate to speak for others; Voices of the people, stories, more important/matter

TAPE LOG CONTINUED

Page 5 of 5

Counter No. Contents

- 63:58 5/09 testified against a bill to protect mentally ill/ about involuntary commitment
- 64:33 Women were/are second class citizens— understanding applies to other disenfranchised groups
- 65:05 Constitution is an evolving document
- 65:29 What other people she knows have done with their Women’s Studies education? Gender Studies, process; transgender people, need to work on that now.
- 66:58 President Obama’s announcement-- forced or staged? Notice his reliance on family/children; Believes nobody wants to treat people less than—ignorance, fear, scarce resources causes isms
- 68:06 U.S. still struggles over the idea of a woman being president. Wasn’t surprised that an African American man was president first, same as history, civil rights movement occurred before women’s movement; Women as political leaders elsewhere; don’t necessarily like their politics because they are women, “Sarah Palin, sorry don’t support you”
- 69:57 “Well thank you very much for this, would you like to add anything else to the interview, any final thoughts?” Research on Women luncheons; Bhaya presented research
- 71:10 It’s been 30 years! Things have changed, where will we be in the next 30?
- 71:52 Importance of oral history
- 72:39 End of interview