ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

PATRICIA F. R. CUNNINGHAM

MAY 29, 2014

Q. I am Deb Ballam. Today's date is May 29, 2014, and I am interviewing Patricia Cunningham as part of the Voices for Women Project. And Patricia's birth date is?

A. March 14, 1979.

Q. All right. And thank you for coming this morning, Patty.

A. Thank you, Patty is perfect.

Q. And I know you have been at Ohio State, both as a student and as an administrator. So we'll try to cover both worlds during today's interview. So could you start off describing the different roles you've had and positions you've held at Ohio State.

A. Sure. I entered Ohio State, this is funny because I don't talk about how old I am, so students don't now. I could be 19 or I could be 50. And I came here in 1997, and I did not think I would end up at Ohio State. I wanted to go to Case Western. But I came to Ohio State and lived in sort of like a pilot first-year experience sort of honors space. And so that was fall 1997, and I graduated in 2002 the first time. And then I stayed to do my Master's and graduated in 2005. And then I graduated in December 2011 with my Ph.D.

Q. Okay. And what other roles have you played besides as a student?

A. You want to know like student organizations?

Q. In terms of, you're being a staff member now.

A. Right.

Q. We'll just kind of mingle both of them.

A. And then I was recruited to stay to be, and you understand being a hybrid, when you have so many roles. And so I was recruited to do dual appointment in the Poverty Center and also with Student Life. But my main reporting line would have been through the Poverty Center. What I did not know, this will be juicy, what I did not know is that some people don't play nice in the sand box in the higher-ups. And so the person who was over the Poverty Center at the time, Howard Goldstein, did not play nice in the sand box. He was recruited from Florida to be here to be over the Poverty Center. But the Executive Director was Dr. Melissa Brooks-Phillips. And so that's who I reported to. I never saw Howard Goldstein and I didn't know what his role was, and I didn't know that he, I just thought all white guys worked well together, and apparently that's not true. And so I was there a year, and all of a sudden I start hearings things about, "They're going to dismantle the Poverty Center," and we were just about to put on this national conference. I'm developing this work on the Near East Side as the pilot community for the work that I do now. And I just thought, "Well I'm doing really good work. The Center seems to be doing really good work. Why is it under a microscope?" And I just didn't really understand that professionally because I had never really seen that before, that you would dismantle a center based on someone's personality, and not just replace that person, but because he was tenured, there were some things that were protecting him. And the way to sort of get him out of that space was to dismantle the Poverty Center, which was the way that he was getting money. And then also that would make a climate that he would leave. And so the University kept the Poverty Center for nine months and everyone either had to sort of find either reappointment or eventually leave. And so the Executive Director, she was a clinical psychologist by training, so she just went and opened a private practice and

she was recruited to do things elsewhere. But she did a really good job in trying to salvage the people who were working in the Poverty Center. Now I was dual appointment, so I felt pretty secure about where I was, because I felt like Student Life would absorb the work that I was doing, because it was so progressive and different. But the 50 percent that was Poverty Center then went under Outreach and Engagement for a couple months. And then I got to see that side, because Outreach and Engagement during this time, what is the lady's name who was over Outreach and Engagement?

Q. Joyce Beatty.

A. Yes, Joyce Beatty put Outreach and Engagement in the red, and that's, like, public record. You can look at where under her administration, they were not in the black. And so those were new things that I learned as a young professional. I'm like, "Oh my goodness, look at how all these people do things," and I always do things on my budget and really try to be right about things. And I realized that doesn't mean that people above you are right about things, or even if they're a person of color like myself, or a woman, that doesn't mean they're going to do the right things either. And so she had already left. Dr. [Valerie] Lee was named the Vice President of that and ODI [the Office of Diversity and Inclusion], and I thought, I've never seen a white male have to do both of those jobs. So I thought that was very interesting. And to see her try to react and respond to that. So I was in that space and then it eventually just became 100 percent under Student Life. And now I think the past year and a half really has flourished and now with my own department, with 22 people sort of working with me, I've gotten 100 percent support that I should have been getting along the way, because the work is evidence. I really do evidence-based models of neighborhood engagement, and I feel my role is really

connecting faculty, staff, students, undergrad and grad, to helping find solutions to poverty. So still like the Poverty Center a little with me, but it's taken a different form.

Right now I oversee a neighborhood transformation project, where we're with five communities in Central Ohio that are high-need. So that's Franklinton, Hilltop, Weinland Park, the Near East Side, where there was a shooting last night and a 16-year-old was killed, and Linden. And so there's 22 sites currently. In the fall there will be 30, where we have students, really just using their human capital, to help create change in those neighborhoods. And of course every model has to be different because every neighborhood is very different. Franklinton, the original Columbus, 1793, are mostly Appalachian white transplants. And so their understanding of navigating whiteness is very different than a suburbanite and an urban white person, very different. And so the needs of that community – 60 percent of the folks there live below the poverty line, 94 percent are low income. It's the poorest concentrated part of the city. And people think, "Oh, where the black folk live, that's where the poverty is." And I'm like, "Have you been to Franklinton?" So just the challenges with that. And then I oversee a multiple prison program called Buckeye Reach. And so with Buckeye Reach we're in five prisons, four juvenile facilities. And so students serve as mentors to the kids really who are incarcerated. But college students are closer in age to the kids who are incarcerated, so that relationship and mentorship, it's an education-based program, which is the number one thing to reduce recidivism, so that rate of going back. And so with that, the teaching, and the research, I oversee the Appalachian Project and the PI4. So doing all of those sort of pieces, makes for a really busy department, but I think that I still get to do what I was recruited and hired to do, and then some

Q. We’re going to have a lot to cover in the interview. This will be great.

A. Yes, I hope so.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about your family background and experiences that shaped you before you came to Ohio State?

A. Sure. I don’t know if you know I did a Ted Talk.

Q. No, I didn’t know that.

A. I’ll send you the link.

Q. Do, definitely. We’ll link it to this interview.

A. Okay. And so that, being invited to do the Ted Talk was the first time on an international stage I was going to tell my story. And so for me, because I was talking about activism, but I felt like I still need to tell them about my personal journey with activism. I’m a first-generation college student. It was really hard growing up. My family dealt with being poor and living in poverty. My eldest sister was in college when I was born. My family was homeless. So for her she grew up poor. But for me, my experience was even more devastating that we could be thought of, because we were in high poverty. It was really rough. It was rough competing with the lack of resources. When you think about, I was able to get into a good school because I tested very well, an elementary school and stuff like that. But I didn’t have a computer. I didn’t have access to resources that a lot of the kids in the schools had. And so knowing that in hindsight made me realize that when I got to college, and everyone had cell phones and laptops, I had neither a cell phone nor a laptop. And so I was still running, even when I was in college. But I think the programs that were really helpful for me is, I did do Head Start. With Head Start still always on the chopping block, it’s just ridiculous, because with Head Start I was able to read at three.

Q. And what town did you grow up in?

A. Springfield, Ohio. So 54 miles from campus.

Q. And you did Head Start. What age were you when you did Head Start?

A. I started, I think, at 2 ½, and they found out I was already really bored, with games and everything. I think also because I had older siblings who were in school, I just always loved learning. They were able to really teach me how to read really early, because none of my siblings learned to read that early. I tested in kindergarten, and tracking was very much a part of that school system. In the Springfield City School system, tracking is the thing. Basic is the lowest track. General Ed, college prep, and then AP. And so I was tracked at the highest, and I think that's because that Springfield historically has a lot of racism, North High School is the white high school, South High School is the black high school. Then you had the suburbs and foolishness. And for me, I went to the white schools. I never saw the black kids of the school because they were tracked lower. And I think for me the hardest part was that my brother, who was only four years older than me, was tracked lower. Black males, again being tracked lower, and that whole pipeline which is something I work on today, which is kind of full circle. And I got to see him really be devastated and feel stupid. His little sister scoring higher, but I also was tracked higher and I learned to read earlier. So there were some things ... are there are levels of innate intelligence there? Possibly. But if we look at what works, early childhood education, I'm being tracked higher, so my perception of self, my self-efficacy is higher. His little sister is doing better in school than he ever had. I think there was a lot of stuff for him that was very difficult, especially along the lines of gender. And things like that.

Like this girl's doing better. Those are all sorts of things wrapped in that. And it made us growing up together very difficult because there was always a lot of tension.

Q. How many siblings did you have?

A. I'm the youngest of four from my mom. And I was the youngest of, I think, 15 for my father. My father was married before my mother, and they divorced while my mom was pregnant for me, which left my mom destitute. But yes, I grew up in Section 8 housing. Once we actually got housing, it was Section 8. And all the houses were green. And we lived next door to people who sold drugs. I never thought about it. And I tell this story to some students who have some similar backgrounds and let them know they shouldn't feel ashamed about growing up where they grew up. And they would say, that there was this dude named Shot to us. His mother was named Miss Janet. We honor elders in our community and my family. Miss Janet had a son named Shot, and he was older than one of my sisters, but I remember being a freshman in college and asking one of my sisters, "What was Shot's real name?" I didn't realize until college, until I was distant from it, that probably wasn't his real name. Shot. He was like the 50 cent of our block, because he was always getting shot, because he was in gangs. Every time he would visit it was because he was in and out of being incarcerated, and he would have bullet wounds patched up. And so they called him Shot. His real name is Fred and I never even knew that, because for me I had so much imagination, I would always see myself outside that space. Like I never thought I belonged there. And I really didn't. I liked to read. I was just so different, counter cultural to what that space was. Even though I played with those kids and I played with kids who were from my school, I never saw myself as someone who was going to be doing that activity as an adult. I thought, "I'm going to college." I

was going to be an astrophysicist, but I knew in the third grade exactly what I was going to do. And so that allowed for me to do that.

But growing up it was very difficult. Food lines, the food stamps, and my mom worked two jobs while I was in high school. And she would work 80 hours a week and as a grad student, in my doctoral program, it's so funny, I say my family are workaholics but we are. We have a really high work ethic. But I think about when I was in my last two years of graduate school, I was making more money than my mom ever did in her whole life. And I thought that was devastating. I had a GA-ship [general assistantship] and even though you weren't supposed to have outside jobs, I sure did. And so I had my assistantship and then I was adjuncting at Franklin University, and I taught there for three years while I was in grad school, and then I worked for a nonprofit because I was tired of being poor. But I had to finish school. So I was like, "Okay, I'll just work more." And so those three years of still making less than $30 [thousand], but it was more than my mom had ever made. I was just like, "I can't believe we survived." I was struggling making $20-something, and my mom raised us off that.

Q. Now you talk about Head Start as being a critical component. Were there other mentors along the way in grade school?

A. Absolutely. I remember my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hunt, she was not very good. And my first grade teacher was Mrs. Metz. I remember all the teachers. I have a really good memory. Second grade, Patty Lawson. Life changing. She said something and we had just found out Maya Angelou died yesterday, and Patty Lawson was my first Maya Angelou. She was like, "There's clouds. Look at the rainbow in the clouds." And although Maya Angelou was quoted as saying those things, there's lots of people who

said those things. And so Patty Lawson was, she was under five feet tall, and I was probably the same height as her in second grade. She just seemed bigger than life, and she had so much energy. I look at her now and she is in her 90s. She was in her 70s when she was teaching. She just loved teaching. She was good at the art of teaching, and she could play the piano. She would make music go with math and go with language arts. We would sing things. And we now would sing things, and we now know how important that is to kid's brain development. But she was doing that without the research to support her. She just knew that's what worked with kids. And we did things with puppets. We acted things out. And so there were never behavior problems in her room. Kids liked being there. They liked her, that she really believed in us. She said, "If you can read you can write. If you can write you can read." And that to me was just like, "Yes!" That so made sense to me and I still remember all those gems that she taught us. After that I had Mrs. McCray. Patty Lawson was African-American. She was my first black teacher. Mrs. McCray, she also was African-American. That's when we turned oton the science because of her class, and I loved science.

Q. What grade did she teach?

A. That was third grade. And that's when I got invested. STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] was for me and I never accepted those messages. Like there was a Barbie Doll at the time that would say things like, I didn't own this Barbie Doll. This was on TV and other girls had it. But there were Barbie Dolls that would say, "Want to go shopping. Math is hard." And I think about that, like especially with documentaries, like "Miss Representation." If you haven't seen it, you need to see it, and all these really great documentaries that talk about the plight of being a woman and media messages, and how

that affects us. Those messages were out there and I didn't know where I was. Maybe it's because we didn't have cable. But I just never accepted that. I was always performing my own experiments. I got in trouble because I used all my mom's perfume because I mixed it with glue and starch. It's not like we had a lot, but that perfume was really important to her. And I got my ass whooped. I deserved it, because then I realized as an adult that perfume is really expensive. And I sure did mix it with glue and starch and I made something. I said, "Look what I made." And she said, "What did you make that with?" But even her righteous whooping and the messages in the media, I still was like, science is for me. And I would try to make a telescope out of junk. There were just things that I would try to do. And early on just that notion of work ethic. Me and my brother, we didn't really get along much, but we got along when it came to trying to make money. So we would mow lawns, do leaves. I don't see kids doing that anymore. And there's not this huge age gap really. We would dumpster dive. I came to campus and people would make fun of homeless people or people who are hustling, dumpster diving, because you threw away a TV. I was just like, me and my brother would do that all the time. We would dumpster dive and get cans and cash the cans in for money. We were always trying to make money before we could work at 14. And I just thought to myself, "He would hold my legs in the dumpster." And then college basically was trying to teach me to be ashamed of that. And so I never talked about it. I never talked about those sorts of experiences and I just talked about the shared experiences, like slumber parties and those things. I didn't talk about the things that really helped shaped me. I didn't feel like the slumber parties shaped me. The dumpster diving and picking up leaves and collecting

cans and bottles, and riding our bikes to the recycling center. That shaped me. And that was not something I could talk about. Because there's shame built into that.

Q. And how many of us have done that and don't want to talk about it?

A. Right. Or who end up coming to college. I didn't see privilege. I didn't really see how poor I was until I came to college, where everybody seemed to have a car in high school. We didn't have a car until I got to high school as a family. We used public transportation. People have multiple cars. Like the child has a car and then the parents have cars. I'm like, how do you have all these? They're so expensive. And then I realized that people actually made more money. Not everybody is poor. Middle class was something I didn't understand. Because you either had a lot of money, like Michael Jordan money, and the middle class is what I learned in college. And that middle class had access to resources. You went to camps in the summer. And you got private lessons. You got academic coaching. And my mom couldn't really help me with homework really after elementary, because it was far advanced from what she knew. And she would be tired. And I think about stay-at-home moms. I was like, if a woman don't work, she don't eat. To understand women not working, I had so much judgment around girls with a mom that didn't work. I said, "What do you mean she didn't work? Her job was being a mom. My mom was a mom and she worked."

Q. I'll have to listen to that Ted Talk. That will be neat. Okay, in what ways, you've touched on this some, but in what ways do you generally identify yourself, in terms of how you see yourself as well as how others see you, in terms of gender, race, sex, religion, and class?

A. There's so many stories in that though, because my mom is Native American, but people read me as black. I'm a black girl with good hair, because my hair is really long, and so they don't see the different browns. You happened to be black and so the world treats me as black. But I was raised with Native-American traditions. And so that also became something hard to navigate, because you also get a Native-American name. I have a family nickname, a Native-American name, and my birth certificate name. And those are all things. The only thing people know is my birth certificate name. Because there's no one, people want to simplify humans and don't realize our complexities. And plus, what would be the honor of sharing my Native-American name? You don't know anything about my history and tradition. You don't even understand black, let alone Native American. So for me, it was really a challenge, because someone told me I was the best code switcher they ever met because I always had a code switch. In school I had to act a certain way. My mom said, "Don't ever talk like me." And that's because she didn't speak the king's speech, and so she wanted her kids to be articulate and speak like white people, which I kind of talk about as academy. You've got to speak academy. And so for me, having to not speak African-American vernacular, or not speak in a Native-American traditional way, or what you eat at home. Who wants to know that I've eaten chipmunk and squirrel and possum and beaver, and that's what we had at family reunions. You have hamburgers and hot dogs. That's not what we eat. That's even further removed from black folks. And black folks are eating hamburgers and hot dogs like white folks, and we're having anything my uncles trapped. So it's still a really different experience, and also not having the language to talk about it, because poor folks have smaller lexicons, and a lot of times cannot explain, "This is why we do this, this is how we do it." And like

the Appalachian culture, "This is just how we do it." I didn't talk about eating beaver until I was much, much older, because I think people would think, "Oh, you eat beaver. You're lesbian."

Q. You eat beaver because you're a lesbian?

A. Right, cause beaver is like a connotation. And I also perform the Vagina Monologues and so we think about sexuality I see as something very fluid. But I do identify as heterosexual, and if people think that I'm something else, I don't care. First of all, it's not for you. This is what I do. But because I performed in the Vagina Monologues for six years, and I'm such a feminist and all these things. It's funny, I was getting ready for my senior high school reunion and my best friend growing up was this girl named Jessie, who was a middle-class white girl, working middle class. I was so busy rocking with this on racial issues, and women issues too, but I didn't realize that people thought that my crew, that we were lesbians, because we weren't sleeping around. We always were together. And I was so radical and mouthy, that people thought that the group was lesbians. People just said that kind of stuff. But she never told me because she realized I was dealing with so much other stuff, that it just wasn't worth it. So I thought that was really beautiful. But coming to college, I think to me activism, you've got to be an advocate. You learn to be an advocate for everybody. So to start, one of the things I was very prideful of starting was, The Other Prom, because at the time I was really sad that my GLBT folks felt like they couldn't celebrate what they wanted to do or party how they want to, and I know what that feels like. So I was on the Other Prom committee, but I was also on different women's studies committees. I was just an advocate for everyone.

And so I think it was hard for people to place me because I was always in somebody else's stuff. I was in the Minority Engineering banquet and I wasn't in engineering. But my best friend was an engineer and I would go with her and support her, cause she was from out of state and her parents could never come. So people would read me as an engineer. So as someone with multiple identities, I just got even more. People would say, "Is Pat an engineer?" No, but I would be with all the engineers, and it just so happens that a lot of girlfriends end up being engineers and scientists. And I left the Science Board after the 30 years I was here. But I think identifying as African-American female most of the time, and then whoever needs to be an advocate, people would read me as part of that group. To me, especially with an in group, if you feel like you can do how you want to do and I'm there, that makes me feel well. Because you're not changing who you are because I'm in your space. So that is something that I've learned. So I've been able to go to different Asian groups in undergrad. I was in every type of committee, advisory group, that you can think of, and that to me made me feel very honored, that folks would want to do business as usual even though I was there, and I didn't look like them.

Q. I do remember when you were an undergrad you were involved in all kinds of activist things.

A. Right, and I think that if someone asks how do you self-identify, I would say an activist, a scholar activist. And I think that to me, to restrict my race, I've got to move on past those things. And although I experience the world still as this colored person, and as a woman, I still think that we have so much further to go. I do have to respond to how they treat me, but at the same time I need to make sure I'm looking out for other folks.

Q. That's how you always impressed me.

A. Thank you, Deb.

Q. I think you might have covered this but in case you didn't, I want to ask you, how have all these different identities shaped your life? They clearly have led you to activism on a broad scale.

A. I think growing up poor, I never thought I would do work advocating for the poor. I came to school to be an astrophysicist, and to me that meant that I would work for NASA and I would discover a planet, and I'm Patty, Jr. I'm named after my mom. I would name a planet after my mom, which really means it would be my name too. And so that was the nine-year-old dream that I had to let go because I spent the year working in a lab that was radioactive. And I was like, "This sucks." I couldn't listen to NPR for like three years after being in that lab cause it was me putting under a hood or carrying radioactive material, and it just wasn't me. Outside the lab in the classroom, I was just his huge activist. And as I said, the coming of Jesus moment, where I changed everything. I think how that kind of leads back to the question is, I was born to be an activist. I was a rebel. I led my first coup in fifth grade, Mrs. Brookings class. She saw that I was into creative writing. When people were acting up, I'd be writing. And so she was like, "Do you want to write our fifth grade Christmas or holiday play?" And I said, "I'll take a stab at it." And Jason Curtis was this kid who was supposed to help me. And we were supposed to do it during recess and work on it. He didn't want to stay in and work on a play during recess. He wanted to go to the monkey bars. So I worked on it. I completed the play. She re-wrote it out so people could actually read it because it was chicken scratch. And we had this play. I was very introverted to this point. You see this person now, but I was so

introverted. Mrs. Brookings, what I didn't realize as a child, is that she started missing class because she was trying to get trained to work at central office. She was trying to move up, from being a teacher to work at central office. And so I understand that now but she did not explain it to the children. And that's the part where she failed. Kids are so attached to their elementary school teacher. We saw that as a sense of betrayal. And so it actually empowered me as this girl, I saw myself just as a girl at that point. Race was still complicated. I was so confident about it. We were practicing. And we had a substitute teacher. And then I feel really bad about this, but I think this is kind of funny. We had a student teacher named Mrs. Hussein, who looked white. I didn't know at this time, as an adult, did she have Arab background. I'm not sure because you can be any color and be Arab. But I watched the news and I would call her Saddam. I feel bad about that, to this day. But I think it's really funny that this fifth grade kid would watch the news, see that her student teacher's last name was Hussein, and call her Saddam. And I realized now if I saw her I would totally apologize. But what I think was also interesting is, because if you don't use intelligence the right way, you can hurt people. So that was I lesson I learned then too. But that substitute teacher was invested in what we were doing with this play. I had written parts for the personalities of the people in the room. So everyone really liked the play and I was getting all this like self-efficacy and I felt good about myself. Mrs. Brookings wasn't there for the dress rehearsal or the play. And I was like, "We can't do this. Mrs. Brookings is not here." Because that's what an elementary kid is going to say. And then I was like, "No, we're going to do this. It doesn't matter that she's not here. You guys know your parts. You know everything. Why do we need her?" And that's when I was born really about leadership. About gathering people and organizing, and

despite adversity, this is what we're going to do. And that was like in this little 11-year-old mind, and then it just exploded. It just took off. I'm sort or grateful that Mrs. Brookings sort of deserted us in our 11-year-old space because that gave me the opportunity to grow and gain a voice. So that's how I really identified as a leader and despite I was a person of color, despite I was poor, and despite I was a woman, people would listen to me and I could be in charge. And so from that point on, I never thought that despite all these things, that I could not be there. I just was like, "I'll just do what I want." I was always just [thinking] I can do what I want, at 11, which is crazy because a lot of girls and women and folks who deal with different identities, just don't grow in that capacity. And having that early on was just so helpful. Because I just came in, I was just bold about everything. So I think the part that's hard is how all these identities shaped me, and how it continues just to be hurtful. To be the poor kid, to not have clothes, one pair of shoes. And if I get emotional, I apologize. But to deal with that as an adult, and I just think about how you do that when everyone just seems to not like you because you're bigger than them, not like you because you're dark, not like you because you're female, oh my gosh you're poor, you must smell. And that shapes you just as much as the times.

And it didn't stop coming to college. Some of the most overt racism I ever experienced, was in Stradley Hall. And there was this white kid from Aliquippa, Pennsylvania named Doug, and we called him Bad Doug, because there was a good Doug. And he was a Bad Doug because he sold drugs on our floor. And, like, cocaine. I had never seen cocaine. My mom did a really good job of making sure we were in the house, don't go into other people's houses on the block, because she knew what was going on. And so we never did. And so I never saw anyone take drugs, even though drugs

were sold on my block. This kid, talk about white privilege, was selling drugs on the floor. I saw him take cocaine off a CD case. I was like, “Can somebody arrest this kid?” Like the policies in the residence halls were, let’s get him into recovery. He didn’t care. He was making money. And he was a drug addict. And so I was like the activist. I said, “We’ve got to get him off the floor. He’s getting other people into drugs. This shit is becoming a mess.” There was this kid named Jeff, who was from a lot of money. His father owned golf courses. I knew what that meant at that point. And he was getting into drugs. He was buying the drugs and he would get drunk and high and be sexually explicit on the girls’ side. And would sexually harass me. And he was this little bitty dude. I could have like crushed him. But I knew, because he had money and privilege, if I were to do something I would be in trouble. And so my hall director, I told her. She did nothing about the drug addict. She did nothing about the sexual harassment. She didn’t believe that this white boy would sexually harass this larger black woman. And I was just like, “So you won’t believe what I’m saying?” So I had a recorder and I recorded him saying that stuff to me. And she was like, “I’m so sorry.” I was like, “Get these people off the floor and get this drug addict out of here.” So there was me, one other African-American girl who became my best friend to this day, who was from Iowa. This black girl from Iowa. And it was me and her, and the RA happened to be African-American. And the RA was like, “If you don’t get this drug dealer off my floor, I’m leaving.” She left. They did not do anything about it. And it turns out, I’m trying to remember his name, the area director, so it was like the hall director, then the area director, what is his name? Because he ended up going to prison later.

Q. The area director?

A. Yes.

Q. A student or a staff member?

A. It was a staff member. He was over the hall director. But I can't remember his name because he just passed away in prison.

Q. Oh my gosh.

A. I'll write it in. But he was this white male who was gay and I just didn't understand why I had no advocacy. And I didn't know Bill Hall at the time. And so I was like, "This is wrong. Drugs are illegal. Sexual harassment is against the law. Why are we letting this go on?" And it turned out, this dude, his front job was working at the University. He was selling drugs to people in prison.

Q. The area director.

A. Yes, and that's how he got arrested. Not only was he selling drugs, but he also selling drugs to young gay males. Access and all that stuff at that time was just a mess. And used it as a manipulation to have sex with them. So that's why it was important that he was gay, because the party lifestyle under a microscope at Access was just a mess at that time, and he was a part of that.

Q. I vaguely remember that now.

A. It was in the news. It blew up when I was in grad school. I was like, no wonder he didn't care about this drug dealer, because he's a drug dealer. I was like, "What?" I couldn't believe it. I was just appalled. So he's passed away, so I'll just tell the whole thing. I was not going to come back to college after that.

Q. This was your freshman year?

A. It was freshman year. I thought, "This is college?" People can commit against the law and nothing happened to them? Why would I want to be here? So it was really difficult but for me, I think the strongest party of my duty, was I always was a church goer, huge Holy Roller, whatever you want to say. And that's for me. That's what works for me. And so that part of my identity was just like praying and feeling like, "God, what am I supposed to do?" Although I still really didn't have the language to talk about being an activist, I really feel like it was divine intervention for me to come back.

Q. So that was your freshman year?

A. That was my freshman year.

Q. And you were in an honors space?

A. Yes, they are the worst, because they know how to break all the rules.

Q. What made you come back then – because you prayed about it?

A. Yes. I was in a Bible study group and that group was diverse.

Q. Was that here at Ohio State?

A. Here at Ohio State. And we had, like, 1,000 students, so there's all those Bible study groups. But I found a group of women who were about the Bible and not about judgment. You know what I mean? So it was a cool sweet spot because I felt like a lot of the large Campus Crusade for Christ, and a lot of these large groups, really pushed people away if their ideology wasn't their specific ideology. And I felt like I read the Bible and felt like God came to save the poor. He didn't judge folks, like ultimately his power to do. And so I felt I needed to find people who were like that. And I felt that the world is real diverse, and at that time Campus Crusade was just around 500 people. Now it's even more. And I was just lik,e all the folks were white folks. And I also didn't worship like that. Worship

for us was more colorful. It was just more colorful. And engaging and not just so stiff. And it helped me find these women who would be my friends to this day. And so I've been in 22 weddings, and mostly because of what happened with us five. It helped us find each other, and everyone has gone on their own path spiritually. Some folks have become agnostic. And my spot works for me. But we still are friends and we call ourselves the inner circle. So I keep talking about how all my girlfriends are doctors. And they are. They all became optometrists, other Ph.D.'s, MD's, JD's, and having that dream team, my group, even though some of us were black, some of us where white, some of us were Asian, some of us were Middle Eastern, and Indian, Pakistani. Even though we all looked different and had different life experiences, at first it was the face that brought us together, then it was lived experiences. I just feel like that is what brought me back, because I had a support group.

Q. Where did you live your second year?

A. Taylor Tower. You would think I moved because of honors people. But we all decided, most of us, decided to go to Taylor Tower.

Q. So it was your Bible study group?

A. Yes.

Q. Oh okay, so you got to live with them?

A. Right. And so Taylor Tower, I just flourished from there. So I started to, that's when I met Josh Mandel. Do you know who that is? Our state treasurer. He was USG president twice. He's not our state treasurer. You know who he is. Let me look at him. And how he flip flopped his policy. He was for domestic partnerships while he was USG [Undergraduate Student Government] president, but as he became Republican, all of a

sudden he was all these conservative views. And he happens to identify as being Jewish, and so it's like, I know that it broke Dr. Asher's heart, that here he had this great mentee. I think Dr. Asher identified with being a little bit more liberal. And to see that not happen, probably one of his proudest protegés, was probably very sad for him. But we were friends in undergrad. Because at that time he was like liberal. He recruited me and I'm like so liberal. So to see him who he is now is so weird.

Q. So he recruited you.

A. Right.

Q. Tell me a little bit about what you did with USG, Undergraduate Student Government.

A. Right, Undergraduate Student Government. I do not think it was for me, because I was class president, and those people were fools that I had to organize. They didn't work. They were lazy. But then I got into student government and I realized it was a bunch of all of us who were the presidents and who were doing all the work, but all together. And I thought, "Okay, we can do this." So he brought me in to serve on a committee and I served on, and this is how I got involved in University policy, I got on the committee to find the student Board of Trustees member. And that's how he brought me in, and the next year I got a Directorship. But he brought me in as a sophomore to serve on this committee and he asked me, "Did you talk during that meeting that you went to, the first one?" And I said, "I really didn't say a lot because there was all these University people." And at that point I hadn't really met them. My experience from freshman year was, that these people are not going to advocate for me. They're not going to listen to me. And something that Josh Mandel did, he's like, "I put you in there because you have a voice." And I was like, "Whoa, okay." So then I was like, "I will talk anywhere I want to.

Administrators do." Because that first-year experience really almost silenced me, because I didn't find the advocacy. And then I just realized, like that 11-year-old self, you have to self-advocate, and just keep shouting until people listen. And so I loved it. And so Kevin Filiatraut, he became that board of trustee member. And this is good for what happens two years later. And so he was a law student. He became a graduate member of the Board of Trustees. So that was really fun and interesting. And then I got involved in the hall council, and I stayed there until I graduated. It was something about Taylor Tower at that time. People stayed their second, third and fourth years. It was such a great community. I have not seen that since I left the dorm.

Q. Because people usually try to get out.

A. Right, and people didn't leave. And the people who left, like Mufta Lane, moved to like right across the street, and then would come and hang out. It was just crazy cool. And so to organize talent shows and diversity programs, I really got my feet wet when it came to organizing and doing programmatic efforts. With USG I got to do it in Taylor Tower, which was smaller, and then in USG we're going to do this whole initiative. So it really helped to kind of have both. And then I joined the Black Student Association. Then by the time I got to my senior year, I was a leader at Hotate Shalom, which is a partnership of blacks and Jews. I left the lab and I was working as an outreach person for Hillel. So here I was again, people thought I was Jewish. They thought that I was Sephardic because I was this person, I knew everything. I could do all the Hebrew prayers and I was picking up the Jewish Studies minor. And for me, it was to strengthen my own faith, because I thought I was going to go to seminary and be like an Old Testament scholar. And if you want to study Old Testament, you study the Tanakh. You study the Jewish

literature. And I loved it. And I studied with a rabbi for a year. Loved it, loved it, loved it. Baruch Hashem, everyone thought I was Jewish, which was cool for me. I was like, "Oh, you think I'm Jewish. That's awesome." Because it meant that I was part of the group. And I got awards, student leadership awards, from Hillel. At the same time, I was doing stuff with international students, international student advocacy. And so I was the only domestic student ever in Ohio history to receive an international leadership award, which again, being part of that group, people saw me as part of the group. I definitely was born here. So it was one of those things where all these different groups I felt appreciated by. And so I was getting these awards and doing these things, and Kevin Filiatraut, his last year as the Board of Trustees member, an undergraduate who had never earned the board of trustee leadership award, and I got that.

Q. Well-deserved.

A. And I recently went over the transcript from that meeting, because I had been thinking about in preparation for this, and what are some things. And I remember I was sick that day. I remember the outfit I wore. I really wish I would have worn something different. But I was sick that day and so my voice was weird. But they just had the transcript, so people can't tell my voice is weird. But it really felt great to have the Board of Trustees, who was the leadership of the school, be like, "You've done some good things here." And I was just like, because I am always going, and never really pausing to think this was a big deal or this award was something that was important. But that really made me pause. And I was like, "Wow, this is a big deal, to be the first, and to be a woman of color who advocates for all these groups." Angelea Cooper, in her book, "A Book from the South, 1890," said, "When and where I enter, my whole race enters with me." And she

was talking about the complication of being a woman of color, and saying it is not just double consciousness. If you're a woman or a person of color, if you have another identity besides gender, it's way more complicated. And so her words always stick with me, where and when I enter I'm bringing all these groups that I've helped or represented with me. And so that day I remembered her words.

Q. Of all the things you did during your undergraduate years, what are you most proud of?

A. Oh my. I think if you would ask people it would be like a different thing, because it depends on the group. I can tell you the funniest thing. The funniest thing, that was actually a big deal, was a testicular cancer awareness campaign, because again, I'm advocating for young boys, because testicular cancer affects 18-24 year olds the most, and I brought in Cleveland Clinic people. We had this big event on the Oval. But for two years after that, I was known as the balls girl. That's right. Because I was on the megaphone saying, "Check them out once a month." It was really funny, because I was in the performance thing. But I guess, looking back, I guess even on the opposite end of testicular cancer, was that I did the Vagina Monologues. Because that took me through graduate school, and I did it for six years. So I did it for undergrad and my Master's program, three years of my Ph.D. And it changed me. It changed me.

Q. Doing the Vagina Monologues?

A. Yes.

Q. How did it change you?

A. Channah was this girl who had the idea. She was a freshman in Taylor Tower. I was a senior. And she saw me as having some sort of power, more power than her. And power is perceived. But I knew more people than her for sure. And she was like, "I really want

to bring Vagina Monologues to campus." And I'm laughing because vagina, ha, ha, ha, is pejorative. And so I'm laughing and I said, "What is this?" And I read the work and I saw it being about a movement. I'm like, "Okay, I marched on the federal court about the Michigan court case, and I put myself in ways that I could have been arrested for advocating for things that were important, but what does activism look like?" It made me pause again and made me think of, can we use performance as a way of activism? And I was like, "That's dope." I just thought that was the coolest thing ever conceptually. And I think now I'm able to articulate even better because I was excited but I didn't know how to articulate activism as performance. Or performance as activism. And so we recruited women to perform and we had our first show, and hundreds of people came. I was like, "I can't believe people came to hear us talk about vaginas." I thought that was pretty cool. But it's bigger than that, right? It's about the women's lived experience. The first time you had sex, the plight of women in Kuwait, rape used as a weapon of war, Native American domestic violence. It was bigger than vaginas. It was about the collective women's lived experience, and telling that story. And I felt the story that Eve Ensler left out, was talking about older women. Especially if you're older and a person of color. And I have the funniest matriarchs in my family. One of the cool things about when you bring Eve Ensler's work to college campuses, you can write your own. And so I always wrote my own piece and performed it. The first three years was about the different matriarchs in my family, but I always talked about momma Pat, my mom. And in my family, you referred to people not as Auntie or whatever, it was momma so and so. So it's Momma Toosen, Momma Kay, Momma Pat. And so all my friends called my mom Momma Pat, even my white friends. Momma Pat. It's just how it is. And so I talked about the third

monologue was done, was how Momma Pat got her groove back. My mom didn't date. After the devastation of my father, which I was not alive for, she did not date anyone. And back in the day I guess my mom was known as someone very fast. She was like whatever, I love myself. And it just devastated her. So to see her see herself as sexual again, I thought it was something to be celebrated. You know my brother was just like, "I don't want mom dating." Misogyny. But I was like, "Mom, do whatever you want. Mom, you old." I was born to a menopausal mother. My mom now is 74 and I think about all my friends' parents. My friend's grandparents are my mom's age. And my friend's parents are my sister's age. My sister is 54. And I just think about how my mom got her groove back. I thought that was dope. I thought that was something to be celebrated. And I think the celebrating the sexuality of women who are older, and do it on a stage, and do it front of hundreds of people, and so I did. And I was very proud to do that, to honor her. And then we brought her, because my mom doesn't drive on the highway, she never did. So we went and got her and brought her up. She just was so Miss America. She wore like a leather hat, leather coat, looking crazy. But people loved it because people had been hearing about people who came for the past couple of years, heard about this momma Pat icon. And my mom is a person who feeds off of other folks. So she's just eating it up. People came up after the performance to talk and meet her, and take pictures with her. I wrote that stuff. But I was mad about it then, because I was still with a child's mind, but it was really great for my mom to have that, cause people really validated her experience. And I thought that was really beautiful and I was able to do that and honor the women in my family. And then I wrote other pieces after that. But Vagina Monologues transformed the way that I saw activism. It transformed me. I got to tell

women’s stories very differently, even though Eve Ensler was doing it, although I really respected her. And it left me unabashed. I thought, if you can talk about vaginas on stage in front of hundreds of people, you can talk about anything. And so I was unabashed about talking about whatever political, religions, and economic issues. Women don’t want to talk about money and negotiating. I helped so many women negotiate salaries. I’m like, “You better get your money. Cause you know what? A white male is getting his.” And I would negotiate.

Q. What did you wind up majoring in as an undergrad?

A. Sociology and Women’s Studies and minoring in Black Studies, and doing work in Jewish Studies. And so totally different from Astrophysics.

Q. It all fit in very well with activism.

A. Right, it all fit. And I lamented, not doing science, because it was like I thought I was going to do. But I just wasn’t passionate about it. But now I’m able to help kids study physics. I still can use it, and that makes me feel good too. But yes, I couldn’t be in a lab. That’s not my personality.

Q. So you got your undergrad in 2002. Did you immediately enter graduate school?

A. Yes.

Q. And what was your Master’s program?

A. Higher Education Student Affairs.

Q. Okay, and your activism clearly continued.

A. Right. I got to work, I was the first graduate student to be the GA of the Vice President for Student Life.

Q. Oh, and that was Bill Hall?

A. That was Bill Hall.

Q. Can you talk about that?

A. I call him Daddy Warbucks. He came off, I don't know if you got to know him at all, he was military, and he comes off so, like Daddy Warbucks initially, right? Rough. He's a big teddy bear. I didn't grow up with a father figure and I just really felt like he was professional with me, but he was like the paternal, he gave me the paternal things that I never had. He would have me bring students to the farm and we'd do things on the farm, but I felt like the things he taught us on his farm were paternal things. It wasn't him as a Vice President of Student Life. It was like, this is how you brush the horse and this is how you do this. And stay away from that poison ivy. I just felt that that was very paternal in a very positive way. Not paternalistic or derogatory, but teaching life skills. And I thought that was so beautiful. And it was in his element, so he just didn't have that mask. And so I just felt like, wow, his sons are so lucky, because he is a good dad. And I thought that it was really good for students to see him, as not this sort of disciplinarian, gruff dude. He really was just this farm kid. He was born and raised on a farm. He married a woman who loved the farm, and they had this beautiful farm together. We got to really go play on this farm. And it was great for team organizing and doing all these things too, the soft skills or whatever, intangibles. But it made me realize, there's no box form to leadership. He really allowed me to do things outside the box and I did NCBI under him. I moved away from National Coalition Building Institute. I think it's junk now. But when you're a kid you don't really have any other models. I didn't know about social change model. I was trying to find stuff to help students. He really allowed me to sit in on meetings. I remember, it was, which meeting was it, because I was writing for

The Lantern. I also wrote for The Lantern, three times, undergrad, master's, and I wrote the last year of my Ph.D., which I don't know how I did that and wrote my dissertation. But it was a meeting, I think it was around the reorganization of Student Life, and people were afraid about losing their jobs. And I think because he was a brigadier general, you just don't leave a man behind. That military mentality. So where people were afraid for their jobs, he was trying to rally his troops and be like, "This is a great thing. We're going to be changing. I'm going to be your leader." Because I was also on the search committee. So I was on the search committee that brought him up. He was an assistant VP when I met him, then he became the VP, and then I became his GA later. And he said, he used me as a way to kind of make a joke, which was fine, he was like, 'Cunningham," he always called me Cunningham. That's very military. "Cunningham, don't put this in The Lantern." It kind of helped people relax a little bit. Because he let me in on all the meetings. And I thought, a mouse can look at a king, that he was the kind, if he was the leader, I was just the mouse, and he allowed the mouse to look at the king. And it made me really think of leadership, that it can be So hierarchical. And he allowed me to be like, "Your input is important. You can do this." And he just really believed in me. And it was after all those fails with so many University people, he really was just like, "You're it."

Q. He was a great guy.

A. He really was.

Q. Did you work for him in your Ph.D. program also?

A. So he passed away, I started my Ph.D. program when I graduated in fall 2005, and he passed away November 2005. So I got to speak at his memorial service here. And that

was probably the most important talk I've ever given in my Master's program. To honor him. And I really grieved him. I was like, how am I going to get it together and not cry on stage, because he would be so mad if I cried on stage. You know what I mean? And I just couldn't. And I think his passing taught me a life lesson, that someone else's joy is more important than your pain. And there's something about that. And he was good. He worked, he had pancreatic cancer. He had a death sentence and he just took treatment like a gangster. And he took treatment and it still worked. And then he got to the point where he couldn't really drive and I would drive him around. It just broke me. This man really worked until he died. And loved people until he died. And I still think he was under-appreciated. So even we have the Hall Complex named after him, he died in 2005 and his kids don't even know what he did for them. But I will remember. He will always live on.

Q. The people he touched will always.

A. Absolutely. And there was more than 1,000 people in Mershon that day. And it was also live streamed. It was important for me to tell the student story. He would always say at the end of our meetings, "Carry on, soldier," and he would salute me. And that to me was very honorable because I have military men in my family. All the brothers of my mom are military men, in different wars, different parts of the military. But they never saluted me. I just thought he really honored me by that. And I said in the talk that I gave that day, whenever I see a salute I remember him.

Q. He was a good person. So what was your Ph.D. in, then? Higher Ed?

A. Oh no, I would never get the same degree. Higher Ed is a practitioner degree. And I still was like, "I'm a scholar activist." I still think that the Ph.D. in Higher Ed, it was not as activity diverse as I wanted it to be. And although folks make it that way for the folks

who do really well in that, I wanted to be more interdisciplinary. It would be similar coursework as my Master's program. So I didn't want that. So it took a little longer than I wanted because I was getting something totally different. It was in Cultural Foundations, which doesn't even exist now. I was like the last cohort. Now the College of Education has changed the name. But I loved it because I was able to make it my own. But then again, my undergrad experience, I didn't really have an academic advisor. My Master's degree [advisor], he's retired so I'll talk about him. My Master's [advisor], Leonard Baird, is his name, and I did not meet with him one time and I graduated with my Master's program. Just of benign neglect, right? He had no interest in me, didn't know anything that I was doing. And the last part of my Master's program I received a service award from the college. He had no clue.

Q. So you just made your own way then.

A. Just made my own way. And so my Ph.D. program was so important because I wanted to be a graduate student who did academic advising, so that other students didn't have to suffer like I suffered. And so at that time ODI had this program called MAP. And so it was a way, it was a retention counselor position. It was a wrap-a-round. It was better than academic advising because it was a wrap-around, holistic counseling. And it was students who were diverse students coming to campus. So I advised about 600 students a year, which is a lot. I met with most of them. So I had students who were international students, a lot of Appalachian students, African American, Indian, the whole range. I loved it. And I think I grew into seeing activism as a way. My sister said, "Patty, what are you doing to replicate yourself?" And not make mini-me's, but really invest in other people. And I was able to do that, as a graduate student, is invest in all these future

students. So I was a student investing in other students. Writing letters of recommendation. I wrote over 400 letters of recommendation while I was a GA, to get people into graduate programs, internships, whatever they needed. I'm still doing that, as a full-time professional now. But it really taught me how important it is to have someone in your corner, because I didn't have that academically. And I think when I sort of learned a different word for myself, what one word describes you? "Scholar activist" I've used for a long time, but I really now feel like I'm a "king maker." A king maker is someone who is all those things, but you're developing talent. And I just think, I don't want you to be like me; I want you to be better than me. And I feel like so much faculty and staff don't want people to be, they want the students to help them look good. And I'm like, I want you to be awesome in the field you want to be awesome in. I had a student call me yesterday, Monica Sakuchesi, I helped her to get into, she's a Columbian student who got into med school. She called me because she thought I would be mad that she wants to take the year off, finish her research, and then re-apply, and re-take the MCAT because she got a 27, and she really thinks she can do better, because she did better on the practice exam. And she thought I would be mad, because I'm her mentor. It was harder for her to talk to me than talk to her parents. And I said, "Monica, I love you and I support you. I think your reasons for taking a year are great. Finish your research. Get more experience. And then it's okay to want to be in a more competitive med school program. That's great. You're 22, so it's totally okay." And she said, "Oh, I'm just so glad that you're okay with me." I've never called myself the king maker. A girlfriend of mine told me I was the king maker this year, and I was like, "That's probably the best way to describe me." So during my Ph.D. program, I also came up with the project that

[I'm the Principal Investigator for] now, which is the Appalachian project. I saw all these Appalachian students coming under-prepared, and we got rid of remedial courses, remedial English and remedial Math. We don't even do that anymore. We have all these kids with inflated grades. I would sit down with these students and say, this is all on public record, because you can get the interviews we have, this girl went to Logan High School. So she tested into French. She took French three years and got three A's. So you think she would be ready for French. She played Euchre for three years in French without a French teacher and got A's. So not only was she done an injustice, but the school, we're not equipped to know that this kid really should not be. First of all I said, "You cannot take French here. You need to pick another language." So we worked that out. Again, the academic coaching of folks, these students from this region need, because of the gross level of inequality, [a student] came in, ridiculous ACT score, he's in honors chemistry, he gets to lab and they say, "Take out the Bunsen burners." He had never seen a Bunsen burner before. It's not his fault. His school didn't have Bunsen burners. His school was falling apart. The pictures that we have from some of these schools, you can't fault the kid. His ACT scores are 33. He has the aptitude. He did not have the content. And so that's the kind of stuff I was seeing, and I said, "Who is advocating for these kids?" And I know what it's like to not have enough resources. And for me it was just like became a passion. And so the project, Appalachian project, is answering the question, how do we get more Appalachian students to go to college? How do we address the brain drain?

Q. So that's one of the things you're working on now?

A. Yes, so that project, as I was writing my dissertation, I started a research project.

Q. And so now you are an administrator at Ohio State?

A. Right.

Q. What is your current position again?

A. Director Social Change out of the Office of Student Affairs.

Q. And one of the things you work on is the Appalachian project?

A. Right. So that came on with me. If you're going to bring me on, I need to keep this research project that I've been working on and expand it. And the Governor's office gave me a grant, and so I was able to build a team, get a partnership with the Folklore Department to do the archiving. So how the Archives are here. To do the archiving because we're making a video ethnography. So you can see all this stuff that I'm talking about. Vinton County doesn't even have a grocery store. Talk about food deserts in Columbus, where it's just a neighborhood. How about the whole county? Such devastation. I was just like, "This is crazy." And to see the [Ku Klux] Klan still active in Shadyside, Ohio. To see some of the stuff like, why do some of these kids come with such stereotyped pre-conceived notions? Why are people so homophobic? Why are people so racist? Well I've been there and I know exactly what's going on. There are certain places in Appalachia that we have to leave before dark, because I will not risk this blackness over some foolishness.

Q. So you're working on the Appalachian project and you mentioned the prison transformation and the neighborhood revitalization.

A. With the neighborhood transformation project, we're in five neighborhoods. Hilltop, the Near East Side, Franklinton, Weinland Park, and Linden. There are six high-need neighborhoods out of 19 neighborhoods in Columbus, but we're at five, which is pretty good since I've only been doing this for 2 ½ years. What we're trying to do is to move

the needle on poverty. I think with the 50th anniversary with the war on poverty, we've thrown a lot of money at poverty. It hasn't solved anything. Sixtieth year, Brown v. Board of Education, we are more segregated now. And so for me, the money and supposed equal access to things, has not moved the needle on poverty. And so my thought is, what we have not done, is human capital. What I think was so important in the freedom summer in '63-'64, is that all folks of different colors came from colleges in the north and went to the south and it worked. I think there's something about that formula that works, human capital. We know that mentoring works. We know that kids need one-on-one attention. So if we're doing more of that, we can probably change some things. And we're seeing that happen. So we're in patterns in two of the neighborhoods. The East Side is our pilot neighborhood. We're in all the schools. We're at Champion Middle School, which is the worst middle school in the State of Ohio. We're at the elementary school, the middle school, the high school, the YMCA. We're at the Urban League. We're at the library. We're at the elderly center. From [the ages of] 5 to 105, we're trying to address the needs of the neighborhood in a very different way.

Q. So when you talk about "we," you're bringing students together to volunteer.

A. Right. So we have about 500 students.

Q. Oh wow, that's powerful.

A. Who get trained by other students. So I hire students. I train them and invest in them, and then they train and orient other student volunteers. So it's a lot. It is a lot.

Q. That is phenomenal.

A. And the fact that we have a gang intervention program in Linden, but the kids see it as a leadership program. With the kids in middle school going to leadership program, it's a

gang intervention program. What do we know about gangs? They're really good leaders. Right? You know really good leaders? CEOs. They have the same skill set, but different intent. Those are transferrable skills. We need these gang kids to see that life can be experienced differently. They're the next CEOs. I tell folks all the time that the cure for cancer is in prison. I've met some really high-talent kids who are so innovative, etc., but I have this kid, when he was 11, he's from Marietta, Ohio, so from Appalachia, white male. His stepfather had him selling drugs at 11. So he of course gets caught because he's 11, and then he can't go to state juvenile facility because he's too young. So they hold him in a different facility until he's 12. He's now 16. He has grown up in prison. But it is very, very sad. He made a tattoo gun from junk in the prison. Now people think about tattooing, they see negative things. But I'm like, "He made a tattoo gun that worked, and made ink, while incarcerated. This kid is an engineer." So I'm trying to get, how can we help these kids through education models, to see themselves, through positive self-efficacy, and transfer their skill set? He never even thought about engineering. He's an amazing artist. He can look at something and draw it. And I'm just like, "This child is being stifled because we incarcerated him at 11." Why didn't we send him to private school? You know what I mean? So it's this kind of thing that I'm pushing against, in trying to dismantle the pipeline, with Buckeye Reach. But it's important for us to be in these neighborhoods, because these kids are coming from these neighborhoods and getting incarcerated. The average age of a kid getting inducted into a gang for males is 12. For females it's 9. So we have to be also in the neighborhoods but also in the prisons, in the schools, in the libraries, in the rec centers. We need to be everywhere.

Q. Wow, this sounds powerful.

A. Yes, I love it.

Q. Well, certainly you've continued your activism. I think you've answered a lot of these. One of the questions is, did you personally work to effect institutional change around equity issues, which you certainly have spent your whole life doing.

A. The one committee I felt that I was appointed to, and you might remember this committee because, Eunice Hornsby was on the committee, and it was about the sexual harassment stuff that was happening around graduate student women who were international, and that's how the committee got started. And I felt like we didn't push that enough. I thought that we did the human resources stuff, but I feel like, I don't know if we pushed it enough. So that to me is where I feel like I've been a part of some policy changes and helping things, but I feel like that was where I didn't know enough. I was a student member of the committee and I was loud. But now I think even more, we could have pushed that further. And I think that, when it comes to the women's report [the Status Report on Women issued annually by The Women's Place], that's done by the office that used to head, we have not gotten, what people make is public record. What women are making at the Vice President level is not what the men are making at the Vice President level. And a lot of times they're doing more work. They have more direct reports and these kinds of things. And I'm like, well, that doesn't seem very equitable.

Q. It's highlighted every year.

A. Every year.

Q. How do you think the University could make progress on this?

A. The leadership has to be present in the Board of Trustees, and I'm hoping with our new President he will see, I don't know if he even knows this is an issue. But I think it is also

a reflection of the Board of Trustees. What I've learned a lot from serving on so many Boards of Trustees, selection committees, and things is, that you get folks in there that come in highly privileged. And so they don't know enough, I think, to know that some stuff is not right. And so if you're a CEO of a company and you happen to be a woman, your orientation of what applies to women is probably different because you're like, "Well, I'm a CEO and I make all this corporate money." And not really understanding that you can't be what you can't see. If I am a woman with a director's title, and there's plenty of women with a director's title, so I came in as a director. I teach, and then I'm also a director. There's not much further for me to go, right? And I just think about, if I don't see myself represented in leadership, where am I supposed to go? And then you don't retain your best and brightest, because they will go somewhere else.

Q. I guarantee, as someone who held that position at The Women's Place, it's the leadership that makes all the difference. The top leadership. If they are not committed, it's just really hard to force things to happen. Where do you see your next ten years of activism?

A. That's a really good question. I don't believe in the ivory tower. I'm not an ivory tower person. And so I just bought a house in Weinland Park. My mom never owned a house and I get to own a house, which seems very surreal. But I bought in one of the communities that we serve, so like the little brown girls across the street live in Section 8 housing, which is very much how I grew up, can see this is what a doctor looks like. It looks like you. She doesn't have kids. She's young. You can do this, and I own this house. I'm not renting it. And so I want them to see that a doctor is not a white dude in a lab coat with glasses, and he's white. I need them to see this. And I'm right across from the elementary school. I can throw a rock from my back yard. My hope is that we do see

these transformations in the community and we know with social change it takes four to five years to see things. In five years I hope it's been rattled, that we see some things, that we see improvement in scores, that kids experience themselves differently, that Ohio State students have really made an impact. In five years, I'd love to see that. In ten years, I hope to have written three books, because I'm working on one now. There's some things professionally I'd love to be able to do. And not to be arrogant. I hope people feel like I'm the expert in the room around poverty, not just because I've experienced it, but also because I've studied it and I live it and I'm working around it. And they see me as the person who is like the go-to around it, and not just still folks who ivory tower it, who look at secondary data and live in Dublin. Like stop using people as a petri dish. I'm just like, "No, I live with these kids and I taught them how to double Dutch." You know what I mean? This is the kind of thing I feel that I might have been, probably if I wasn't black and female, I would be the great professor, like a professor from the '60s, because I'm that person. Be with the people and do this. So I hope like in ten years, like that's very meaningful and I've impacted folks lives that way. And that I see more kids from the schools that we're at going to college, and that this Appalachian project gets enough attention nationally, that we address, there's 13 other states that have Appalachian counties, and here's the model. This is what we need to be doing in these other states.

Q. It's powerful work.

A. I hope that's the case and I hope that where and when I enter, my race enters with me. I really feel like, hopefully, just moving the needle on all the things I touch, that women are reflected in leadership with equal representation.

Q. Now the Voices of Women project is really trying to preserve the history of what it has been like to be a woman, and all women have other identities, during their various roles have been at Ohio State, and you've certainly given us a lot. Is there anything else that you want to add that we haven't touched upon, about what it has been like to be a woman of your different identities, both as a student and a staff member at Ohio State?

A. I just chaired, it's so funny, because we do these Deb Ballam symposiums, but I haven't seen Deb at them, for associate staff and faculty women, but I chair those conferences these past two years.

Q. Oh I didn't know you chaired.

A. Yes, and so these past two years I have. As soon as I graduated, I said, "I need to be in the Association of Staff and faculty women," cause I need to be in a space to help women and be a part of women. And what I really hope, I've seen a lot of things there women sabotage other women, where it's not me but I'm watching and observing. I'm hearing the stories. And I'm like, 'This is awful. This is really bad." That needs to be part of the historical record. Like there is something wrong with the Kool-Aid that people are drinking. Cause how can you not be for another woman? That just pisses me off. I don't care that she doesn't look like you. Like if she's working hard and stuff and you see her as a threat, you work harder. Why has that become, I've got to put her down? And I'm sure folks feel a type of way about me. This is me being observant for other women. But especially just a phone call before coming in here with you, I was just really appalled about those kind of things still happening, how we cannot move forward if we're still holding each other back. And how that is so self-sabotaging. And so I think that as much

as, I got to be one of the first Vice Presidents of OUAB and now OUAB has a $1.4 million budget.

Q. That's the Ohio Union Activities Board.

A. And I got to be where we still have to hustle to have Taco Bell on our T-shirts. I just think about all the things I've gotten to do, to write for The Lantern, and I got hate mail. We talked about police profiling and this dude from Virginia, because The Lantern is online. This dude from Virginia wrote me, and my friend now, Dr. Diane Horvath-Cosper, we wrote a series during the summer. Who thought people read The Lantern in the summer? And we wrote about the schools of America and all these things that we just felt a certain way about, and he wrote us this hateful letter and said we should die and all these horrible things. And so for me, when you speak up and out for other people, there's probably going to be backlash. And I shared definitely some backlash and people calling me and everything but the child of God. And I think that's 2014. Those things are still happening.

Q. We have a lot of work to do still.

A. Yes, it's not time to sit down. And when you see that kids are suffering, that we're not taking care of the elderly, there's all these things. For me, it's like, how can we empower more folks to help other people?

Q. That certainly is where you're the king maker.

A. I'm trying. I think that for the record, women have to be better for other women. And we have to motivate each other, because the top still looks very 1960s, and I think that we still need to be pushing. All these women, we're producing women Ph.D.'s. Where are they at the top? More women are OB-Gyns, but if you look at the national boards and

things, it’s dudes, and old dudes, which is just so funny to me. So I just still think that we have far away to go. The way that we legislate women’s bodies, and people making decisions on legislating women’s bodies are white males, and they are not doctors. What do you know about the vagina? So for me, it’s like, we have to speak up, speak out, and do more. And so I feel like so many times, when people are the first, they sit down too soon.

Q. It’s clear to me you’re never going to sit down. And that is a gift to the world.

A. I hope so. I just pray always for the energy to keep up with it.

Q. Well, thank you. This has been a wonderful interview. Thank you so much.

A. I’m happy to do it.