[Video: BRIGHTVIDEO.mov]

BRIGHT: Hi, I'm Clare Bright, no middle name. My first name is Clare and it's C – L – A – R – E. No "I" because it's the English-Irish spelling, and that's my ancestry.

I am teaching part-time as a lecturer right now for Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. My focus, though, is teaching in the Honors Program. I teach courses on gender and human rights.

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JACOBSON: How did you come to work here?

BRIGHT: I started teaching here when I was a graduate student, getting my Doctorate in Philosophy. And then I worked elsewhere and came back in the '90s to Seattle and started being a lecturer again for the department here.

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JACOBSON: What were some important political and social issues of the time when you came back to the University of Washington?

BRIGHT: In the '90s? Are you thinking of the department in particular or—? I felt like the department was in transition when I was first with the program, which was in the '70s. It was more community-oriented; there were more community people involved both as students and as teachers. And since then, particularly while I was away the department became a department – it used to be a program – and it became a lot more institutionalized, so more tenure line faculty and more of a fit with the rest of the university. That was a shift over time

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JACOBSON: Who was the Chair of the department when you first started teaching?

BRIGHT: When I first came to the department to talk about teaching for them – as I say I was a graduate student, I was working on my dissertation on feminist philosophy – and I found out about the Women Studies program and thought that perhaps I could teach the material that I was researching because I was very interested in it. So I approached the committee, which at that time was composed of teachers, students, community people and I brought my suggestion that there be a Philosophy of Feminism course which I would teach. And they accepted that idea and I began teaching in the winter of 1975. The school year of '74/'75 was the same year that Sue-Ellen Jacobs came to be the first director of the program. The few years before that, there was graduate student in History who coordinated the courses.

Initially there was only one course in the program, Introduction to Women Studies. But gradually, through the late '70s and into the '80s and of course '90s, more courses were added. So my course was one of the first few courses in the program here.

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JACOBSON: How did you got interested in teaching the Philosophy of Feminism course?

BRIGHT: I was very interested in philosophy in general. My Bachelor's degree and Master's degree as well as my Doctorate are in Philosophy. But when it was time to write my dissertation I really thought about what area of philosophy would be interesting enough to focus on it that much and for me the Women's Movement… This was in the late '70s, and in the late '70s the Women's Movement was becoming a lot more prominent and I was interested in it and thought about the ideas of the Women's Movement, so the philosophy behind the Women's Movement. And because I was doing that with my dissertation I also thought about teaching, sharing those ideas with other people.

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JACOBSON: How else were you involved in the Women's Movement, aside from teaching?

BRIGHT: I would say in my early days that I went to events and marches, protests, etc. I've been a member of NOW but I've also been a member of other groups that I would consider more radical groups. But NOW has been an ongoing presence in the Women's Movement, it's still around. Most of those other groups are not around anymore.

JACOBSON: What do you do with NOW?

BRIGHT: At this point I am just a supporting member of NOW, so I support them on their issues and legislation that they are behind, and so forth.

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JACOBSON: Would you tell me about some more radical groups that you were involved in that might not exist anymore?

BRIGHT: They didn't even always necessarily have names so much, but more in the order of consciousness-raising, I would say, of women just getting together more informally to talk about their situations. Also there was a lot of interest in women's music and women's art and so supporting those kinds of things and helping those to come about. And conferences, I was part of the National Women Studies Association from the beginning and I was on the steering committee of that for a number of years. We tried to look at, of course, all the issues that affect women, and not only women in universities, but certainly that was important too.

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JACOBSON: When did you first become involved in feminist issues?

BRIGHT: I first learned about feminism, I would say in the late '60s. And before that, having grown up in the '50s – a very conservative time and there really wasn't any discussion of feminism at that time, but there started to be, and of the things that really kicked it of was Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*. A lot of people were reading it and I read it and women I knew read it and we talked about that. So I think it was a gradual thing of realizing that there was another way to look at women's lives and women's situation. And also to just realize that women were not equal people in society, but that we deserve to be.

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JACOBSON: Were you in college when you read *The Feminine Mystique*?

BRIGHT: I was actually in college, but I started on my master's degree at that point.

JACOBSON: Did that change your course of study?

BRIGHT: I don't know that it changed it exactly but I think that it did start to shape my interest in feminist philosophy because as far as I knew, there was no feminist philosophy before that time. Of course there was, actually. Mary Wollstonecraft and people like that, but I never had any of that in my courses. And in fact, in my three degrees in philosophy, I never once had a woman teacher. Not once in philosophy, and hardly in the rest of my courses either. So it was a change for sure.

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JACOBSON: What issues were most important in the philosophy of feminism when you first started that field?

BRIGHT: I think some of it was just defining what feminism was and also looking at the different groups within feminism. There was then, and still is, a strong socialist

feminist branch and their theories of how socialism applied to feminist issues. NOW was one the first organizations and the issues of NOW, which were legal changes, political representation, that sort of thing. Many women – and I would probably include myself – would call themselves more radical feminists, and I think the slogan "the personal is political" came out of the radical feminist groups. So it was a matter of looking at a lot of personal things in women's lives and how those things were not just neutral, or not just a given. That the way women were treated, for example, or the expectations of women in terms of traditional sex roles, that those in fact could be debated and maybe there were other ways, better ways, of doing things for women.

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JACOBSON: How would you define being a radical feminist?

BRIGHT: I think that radical feminists— one of the ways I would define it is in terms of really looking at everything in women's lives, personal level as well as the political level or the public level. That would be one thing. And I think also radical feminists were more skeptical of the ways that society was structured and felt that that really needed to be changed, not just to move into the mainstream but make some more permanent and deeper changes in what our society looked like.

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JACOBSON: Do you think that the radical feminists of your time have made those permanent and deeper changes?

BRIGHT: Well, certainly not completely because there's a lot of resistance to those ideas. I think that radical feminists have had an impact on the rest of the movement. I think that all branches of the movement now look more at the totality of women's lives, at the personal level as well as the political or public level. So in that sense something that radical feminists were always very concerned about was violence

against women and I think that that's now a general issue that feminists address. It is still a huge problem but I think there is more awareness of it. There is more awareness that it's not OK, whereas it used to just be acceptable for men to violate women in all sorts of settings or ways, and now that's not the case. So I think that there has been an influence, definitely, from radical feminism. Society as a whole and the structure looks pretty similar to what it did, but I think on a more informal level people's attitudes are somehow different from what they were. And that includes men's attitudes.

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JACOBSON: I always linked being radical with activism, do you have that same association?

BRIGHT: Well yes, although certainly liberal feminists are very active too. They are just active in somewhat different ways. I think it is clearer what the activism looks like in the liberal movement because it fits in better with what is already in place, so find a change a representation in government, for example, changing laws and so forth, whereas the radicals were always more informal. But things like battered women shelters, rape centers, women's clinics, midwifery – a lot of that came out of radical feminist energy, initially.

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JACOBSON: What were your goals as a young radical feminist?

BRIGHT: All those issues were important to me and I would do what I could around those issues. I think for me personally a lot of my feminism is involved with my teaching and to try to take those values into my teaching situations and into my courses. And most of my career I have taught Women Studies as well as Philosophy. I guess I would call it my activism in a way.

[0:13:07.7]

JACOBSON: How have those classes changed since you first started teaching Philosophy of Feminism?

BRIGHT: I no longer teach Philosophy of Feminism. I think the people that are teaching it now in the program and the department have made some changes in terms of what they include, what issues they include. I am not teaching that exact course but right now I'm teaching a course on human rights movements for the Honors Program, and one the movements we are looking at is the Women's Movement. We are also looking at the African American Movement and the Gay Movement and making comparison between those movements. So in that way you might say that I have branched out to some extent, to take a larger look at the movements, see how they work together or don't work together. And I try to encourage my students to think about ways that people can work together.

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JACOBSON: How have your students at UW changed?

BRIGHT: Certainly students now are more aware of feminism and that's good, but what is not so good is I think that feminism in general has gotten a negative reputation, that it has been misrepresented a lot in media and in other ways. So many times students will come in to class not knowing about feminism, not knowing anything accurate about feminism, and saying that they are not feminists. And very often they go out of class, saying, “Yes I am. Now that I know what it really means, yes I am.” So that's different. I remember my first Women Studies class that I taught here which was in 1975, and I would say that my students, I think all of them were feminists and very strong feminists, so there's been a shift in that.

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JACOBSON: And what would you attribute that to?

BRIGHT: Well, I would attribute it partly to the fact that when this program first started it was not a mainstream program in the university. It was kind of an outsider program, so the people that came to it were people that were also questioning the mainstream in some way, or willing to study something that was new and more marginal than just the established classes. Now there a lot more students that are just going through the university in regular programs but they will take a Women Studies course or in the Honors Program, they'll take one of my courses, just out of interest. So we are drawing from a different group, I would say.

[0:16:10.8]

JACOBSON: Would you consider the Women Studies Department mainstream now?

BRIGHT: Much more so than it was. I don't think it's completely mainstream, and there are still some values in the department that would not necessarily be accepted by everybody in the university.

[0:16:31.0]

JACOBSON: Could you talk about what made it an outsider department?

BRIGHT: Well, in those days – so the days I'm talking about now are the '70s – there wasn't any sense that there needed to be something like Women Studies. People didn't think—Well, I will just give you a personal example. When I was looking for a job after I was finishing my Doctorate in Philosophy and I went on interviews and I would go to philosophy conferences and talk to people, talk to potential employers. And what they would say basically was, "Well, that's interesting, but it's not real philosophy. It's not real scholarship. That is not a legitimate field of study," and it wasn't a field of study at that point. So Women's Studies programs all over the country and even in other parts of the world had to make it a legitimate area of study. And now there a lot of trappings of that, you know, just

the fact that we have departments, that we have tenure line faculty. We had to argue to get tenure line faculty, because really when it first started the teachers were pretty much— they were graduate students perhaps, like me, or community activists, or usually both, that were teaching in the program. And there was no way, of course, that people would already have an academic background in Women's Studies because it just started. Now you can study Women Studies in lots of different ways. As a graduate student and an undergraduate, and so you can come in with academic credentials in that field, but we didn't had that initially, we had to create that. This department didn't have a graduate degree until the '90s.

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JACOBSON: Can you talk about some things that you did in particular to legitimize it or to change Women Studies into a more academic accepted field?

BRIGHT: I'm not sure I can because I had mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, I certainly wanted it to be more legitimate, to be accepted in the university, but I knew that there would be a cost to that. And the cost would be less connection with the community and less of an activist focus. So I was frankly mixed in what way the department should go. So I didn't actively try to get tenure line faculty, although I was on hiring committees for people, and in that way tried to assist getting good people in the department. I was on Nancy Kenney's hiring committee for example.

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JACOBSON: Earlier you described that the department is now sort of more institutionalized.

BRIGHT: I would.

JACOBSON: Do you consider that a negative thing, or problematic?

BRIGHT: It's not a negative thing because the more institutionalized it is the more solidity it has, the better foundation, and the more likely it is that it will become and remain a part of the university and not some outside program that can be cut at any minute, which has happened to other programs. A program doesn't have the same kind of foundation as a department does, so it was important for us to go from being a program to being a department, and I supported that. I think it's necessary to be more institutionalized. What I would hope, though, is that always there would be in people's minds, the tension between feminist values and the values of the university, which are not necessarily or not always feminist values. For example, the university is extremely hierarchical. Most feminists are not in favor of hierarchy, and yet we have that here because we have to, to be part of the institution. But to at least see that, to see that discrepancy and for that to be something that people are aware of and talk about, and not simply think, "Well, you know, we will just do whatever the university wants and never question that."

Initially the governing body of Women Studies when I came to it and when it was a program, it was not just faculty making these decisions. It was faculty, staff, students and community people, all voting equally about things. That is a big difference. And that really was unacceptable as we became more a part of the university. That's not the way departments are supposed to do things, and so now we have the faculty making decisions. And I really think we have a wonderful faculty on this department, I have a lot of faith in them and how they think about things. But it is a difference in structure, and because it is a difference in structure it can go a variety of ways. As I say, I think we have a great group of people now here.

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JACOBSON: What do you think that the Women Studies department does differently than other departments in the University of Washington now, in the present day, despite just course content?

BRIGHT: I'm not really familiar with other departments but I think that there is more interest in students in this department and more effort to involve students in what's going on with the department. I think there is at least some emphasis on activism in a way that doesn't exist in most departments, maybe it does in Ethnic Studies, for example, but not most departments. So those would be some things.

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JACOBSON: Earlier you talked about the disconnect between the academic world and then community outreach and activism. How do you bridge that gap?

BRIGHT: I think it's getting harder to bridge. And I think that that has to do partly with the field of Women's Studies – and I'm just saying Women Studies even though I know we have changed our name but the field in general of Women's Studies – because feminist theory has become much more academic and much more obscure and not accessible to the women on the street. It used to be said that Women Studies was the academic arm of the Women's Movement, and I'm not sure that you could say that now. I don't see a lot of connection between the activists and the academics. I think there is still some attempt to do that, and some people feel very strongly about it, bell hooks is an example of an academic who really wants to keep community connections. But I think it's not automatic now that there are those connections.

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JACOBSON: Do you think that feminist theory and academics makes it more inaccessible for people?

BRIGHT: I do. Especially if you look at, say, Post-modernism, that's one of the areas that Feminist Studies has gone into. I just tried to talk to my class today about post-modernism. And I'm not saying that those things shouldn't be studied, to me

they are extremely interesting as a philosopher. But then how do you make sure that you are connecting with women at large? So I think that's necessary, and I think mostly women at large connect with liberal feminism and liberal feminism is not paid much attention in the academy anymore.

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JACOBSON: Are you involved in feminist work outside of the university?

BRIGHT: Let's see, am I? Not officially. I am no longer serving in the National Women's Studies Association, although I'm still a member. And I'm not serving actively in other organizations, so I guess not.

[0:26:05.8]

JACOBSON: Where do you see the future of Women Studies and feminism going?

BRIGHT: I am not sure where it's going, I do think that feminist ideas are here to stay, and that's really good. And maybe that's all that's needed, maybe it doesn't matter whether people call themselves feminists or have some respect for feminist theory. I'm not sure where it's going to go. I think the basics of feminism have been established. The idea that men and women are equally worthy persons and should have equal choices, equal opportunities, equal treatment – I think that idea is pretty firmly ensconced in our culture now, and it's because of feminist activists and theorists that that has happened. So that's good. Whether we will actually move toward more in-depth changes in society, that I don't know because there is so much backlash against that idea.

In the '70s a lot of things got done because the backlash hadn't organized yet. So there are things like the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Roe v. Wade, Title Nine, things that really made changes in women's lives. And almost got the Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution, but now it's not that people aren't

still trying to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed – they are – but every time it's tried it gets bogged down by the people who oppose it with amendments and, basically, things that make it not feasible to happen. So it's great that we have some things in place that we got early on. I think it is harder now to make changes, basic changes for women.

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JACOBSON: Do you have any ideas of how you would be able to fight a more organized opposition that you were describing?

BRIGHT: That's why I'm a philosopher, not a politician. It has to happen. It has to happen and there certainly are good people in politics, and Washington is the first and only state that ever had a women governor and two women senators at the same time. And I think all of them were certainly feminist in their approach and still are. And I think we do what we can and if you look at Seattle and Western Washington it's a very liberal area because the people here have worked to make it that way. But then you look at states in the South or the Midwest or other parts of the country where you simply don't have the numbers of people that support more progressive ideas. And so that makes it hard to do things on the federal level.

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JACOBSON: What do you think are the most pressing feminist issues today?

BRIGHT: Violence against women continues to be a huge issue. It's not abating, really. The statistics are about the same as they have always been, maybe it's because there's more reporting – I think that there is, because it's more OK now to report, but still it's not easy to do it, not easy to report. So that is a huge area that needs change right there. And I think women's reproductive rights because that is such a crucial dimension of a women's life. If you have some control of that or you don’t, it makes such a big difference in a woman's life. And I think that we still— I mean,

I look at my students, I look at my female students and they are smart, they are expecting to have careers, they have a lot going for them but they still don't have a lot of confidence in themselves. And that is crucial if we are going to have change and if those women can help to make change they need to have more confidence in themselves than they do. Some do but many don't. So those, I think, are important things.

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JACOBSON: Where do you think a woman could find confidence to make those changes?

BRIGHT: I'm happy to say that very often students say to me that just being in Women Studies helps their confidence, so that's a great thing. There used to be something called assertiveness training that women would take and I think that was very helpful, I don't think it's around much anymore.

JACOBSON: Did you take assertiveness training?

BRIGHT: I didn't specifically take it, although I have done some teaching of it, just as part of my courses.

JACOBSON: What is it exactly?

BRIGHT: What is it? It is like a practical workshop in how to deal with situations. So if somebody is treating you in some kind of negative way, or saying things to you, or whatever, that you learn ways that you can respond that are assertive without being aggressive. Because of course when women are assertive they are accused of being aggressive. But to try to— the fine line. And just to respect yourself more and be willing to say that. So that's what it is. It's usually a lot of specific— like people role play situations and think about what they would say.

[0:32:47.8]

JACOBSON: Were those things you always knew how to do it or did you have to learn how to do those as a young woman?

BRIGHT: I think that I learned those things through feminism. My family was always very supportive of me in terms of my education. And I was lucky that way because in the '50s there was this idea around that if you were female you didn't want to appear to smart, or boys wouldn't like you. And it wasn't OK to be a tomboy. Well, I didn't get those messages from my parents. They thought it was fine for me to be smart and it was fine for me to be athletic, so I was fortunate. But I think society in general at that time pretty much gave the message that females were supposed to be passive and pleasing and take some work— I mean, the first thing is just awareness that why should it have to be that way? And then think about how can you make changes, at least in your own life and how can you help students if you are a teacher.

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JACOBSON: Did you grow up in Washington State?

BRIGHT: No, I grew up in Pennsylvania outside of Philadelphia, went to high school there. Then I got my bachelor's degree at Penn State, which is my father's alma mater so he was happy about that. And I realized pretty soon after I began college that I wanted to major in philosophy, it was just who I was.

[0:34:25.1]

JACOBSON: Did you parents support you in being a feminist?

BRIGHT: Yes. I don't know that my dad, especially, would have ever used that word but— and I would say that increasingly so as I got older. My mother, I think always had feminist values and my father took a little more coaxing but they came around. So

again I was lucky in that way. They mostly supported my choices and when they didn't support my choices I let them know that I was going to make those choices anyway, so they kind of got used to that idea.

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JACOBSON: Do you think that your involvement in feminism changed your mother at all?

BRIGHT: Definitely. And I think it was good for her because she really— Well, for example she was quite smart and she got a scholarship to college but her father wouldn't let her go to college because it wasn't practical. And because he wanted her to have secretarial skills so she could support herself until she got married and had children. So I think she lived vicariously through me in a lot of ways.

[0:35:53.2]

JACOBSON: Going in a different direction, what do you think about the name to Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies, because you have just been referring to it as Women Studies?

BRIGHT: Right, because it's easier to say then that other stuff. I have mixed feelings about it, to tell you the truth. I think it's probably necessary in terms of being timely, keeping up with the culture and people's interests. I think that more people will be attracted to Gender Studies that they would be to Women Studies, especially men. But I also think that some of the emphasis on women and women's issues is not going to be lost but it's going to not be as central, not be as important. Which— that's exactly what the name says. It's not just going to be women now, it's going to be gender, it's going to be sexuality as well.

JACOBSON: Do you think that the new name opens it up to more people other than just men but maybe to people who have different identities, like lesbian, gay, transsexual, bisexual?

BRIGHT: Sure, I think the sexuality part does that. I personally wished that they had just said Gay Studies or Queer Studies or something like that, and been more up front about it, but I think it will be more appealing to more people, so that's good.

JACOBSON: And we're you part of that decision?

BRIGHT: No. I'm not tenure line faculty.

[0:37:34.5]

JACOBSON: What are your goals in your teaching?

BRIGHT: Certainly I want to raise awareness. To get people to think about things and encourage students in critical thinking, just not taking things for granted. And to really help them realize that has adults they are responsible for what they think and what they believe and what they value, so they need to give it a lot of thought and not simply accept what's around them, whether that's their family, or religion, or society. And that as citizens of the world they have a responsibility for making things better and they can think about how they want to do that because there are lots of ways to do it. And social justice issues are always part of my teaching.

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JACOBSON: What do you do to encourage your students to get more involved in making change?

BRIGHT: Mostly I try to get them to think about where they are and where they want to be and what they think needs to be done. I'll say to them. “Who thinks the world is perfect the way it is?” Nobody raises their hand. “OK. So then if it's not perfect, what do you think needs to be changed and how might you participate in changing that?” Being a philosopher I'm sort of on the theoretical level more than guiding

them specifically to activities or whatever. But hopefully to instill in them the idea that there are things that they need to do and values that they need to examine.

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JACOBSON: Have you accomplished the goals and dreams you had when you were the age of the students that you teach now?

BRIGHT: I'm not sure what my goals were, exactly. But certainly I wanted to feel that I communicated with my students and helped them become more critical thinkers. And I believe that I have done that in a lot of cases, certainly not all, but a lot of my students have given me feedback that suggests that I have done that.

[0:40:15.1]

JACOBSON: Thank you. Do you have any last things to say?

BRIGHT: I think it's wonderful that you are doing this project because in the '50s when I was growing up and in the '60s when I was in school, I had no idea that there had ever been women's movements or women philosophers. I didn't really know anything about my history as a woman. Women Studies, now, has been around for a long time and I hope that the people that are in it now can have a sense of the history of it. So the fact that you are doing this and all of you who are doing it and making a record of our history, I think that's very important and I'm glad it is being done.

JACOBSON: Me too. Thank you.

BRIGHT: You're welcome.

[End: BRIGHTVIDEO.mov]