November 6, 2000 – Interview with Mary Catherine Roper, J.D. 1993

CD: Good morning. My name is Christine Docherty and I am a second year student at the University of Pennsylvania and as part of Penn’s Oral Legal History Project this morning, November 6 at 10 a.m. I will be interviewing Mary Catherine Roper.

We’re going to start with your childhood this morning.

MCR: Okay. That’s where I started.

CD: When and where were you born?

MCR: I was born just outside of Washington, D.C. in Prince Georges County Maryland. But I don’t remember any of that. I grew up in California.

CD: Where in California?

MCR: In Southern California, in a town called Redlands, which is about 80 miles east of L.A.

CD: When? Where were your parents born?

MCR: I believe my father was born in New York. He spent most of his life in New York. And my mother was born and raised in Maryland, in Silver Spring. Umh. And each of them lived until they met in college. They met at Georgetown University.

CD: And when you were living in California, growing up, did both of your parents work, or?

MCR: No. My father worked. My mother stayed at home.

CD: What did your father do?

MCR: Well, when I was very young he was still in grad school. Ah. He has a masters in English Literature and also teaching and he spent most of his career teaching, public high school. But when I was very young he was still in school and he was selling encyclopedias door to door to raise money.

CD: Do you have any children?

MCR: No.

CD: Do you have, ah, any brothers and sisters?

MCR: Yes. I have two brothers. One is a year older and one is two years younger.

CD: Do you think that your place in the family as a middle child shaped your worldview, your career goals or life decisions in any way?
MCR: Ahm. I don’t think it had so much to do with being the middle child as just being very

different from my older brother.

CD: How so?

MCR: First of all I was the only girl in that generation, so, you know, that was a big deal,

particularly to my grand parents.

CD: In what way?

MCR: Well, you known, my grandmothers were just. I didn’t actually know my grandfathers.

They died when, either before I was born or very, very young. And, but my grandmothers would

make a fuss over me being the only girl. But you know, Christmas time they would send

presents and there would be something a little different for me because I was the girl.

When I was thirirteen, my father’s mother, um, took me back east for the summer. And I stayed

with her for a month, and I stayed with, um, my mother’s family for a month. But my brothers

didn’t get any opportunities like that. They never got whisked off to the other side of the country

for a summer.

CD: What did you do when you were with your grandmothers?

MCR: Um. Not much. My grandmother lived in the Pocchinoes. She was the housekeeper in a

rectory for a Catholic priest and she was his secretary and also his housekeeper. So I stayed in

the rectory and, you know, helped cook or clean up, or when there was company coming over.

Catholic priests visit each other a lot. We never had guests on Sunda, of course, but I guess

everybody was busy at his own parish. But during the week we’d have guests very frequently,

so, um, I would help my grandmother in the kitchen or help in the church office. Spent a lot of

time just reading and playing and going for walks. The Pocchinoes are very beautiful and so,

and Canidensis is a very, very tiny town so I was pretty much permitted to walk about as I liked.

There really wasn’t any trouble to get into.

And, ah, then I went to stay with my mother’s sister, my aunt, and my cousins in Silver Spring.

And that was a very different experience for me. They had organized activities. My cousins

attended tennis camp and the family went to a beach house in Delaware for a week during the

summer and had other organized activities. And see, in the house I grew up in there were no

organized activities. You sort of made what you were going to do and there wasn’t this sort of

scheduled thing. I never attended summer camps or something.

CD: What did you do when you were at home over the summer.

MCR: Oh, we could end up doing a lot of different things. I could spend the whole day reading,

sitting in a tree or I could get together with friends and go up to the local park and go exploring

the orchard groves that we were no supposed to go into. Umh.
CD: Why the orange groves, were they other people’s orange groves?

MCR: They were other people’s orange groves. And, um, to the extent that there was a dangerous. There were always stories of people being kidnapped and being taken away to the orange groves and being held there. And that happened sometimes. I don’t think that the orange groves near my house were particularly dangerous. We just weren’t supposed to go there. I’m sure the orange growers didn’t want kids tromping through their orchards and climbing trees and picking oranges. And things like that.

I did a lot of walking. I used to walk all day. I would walk twenty miles.

CD: What did you? Did you visit places when you walked, or were you thinking about things? Or, what was the attraction for you?

MCR: Um. I think it was a chance to explore and see different things. I would, ah. There was a canyon pretty close to where I grew up and I would often go walk along the roads that were above the canyon. I wouldn’t generally walk in the canyon. We’d been warned since I was very small. Any canyon is a potential flash flood area and there were flash floods. This was very close to the desert where I grew up. So I wouldn’t generally walk in the canyon myself. I’d walk around looking at other people’s homes and thinking about how other people lived and just looking at trees and occasionally meeting people. I was a great one for meeting dogs and cats along the way and then having them try to follow me home.

CD: When you looked at how other people lived what were your thoughts about it, or what interested you in the way they lived.

MCR: I think I knew from a pretty early at that my parents ran a less regimented house than other people and that always fascinated me. My friends, they had dinner every night at six or six thirty. And there was no sort of set schedule that way in the house I grew up in. Things were very kind of loose and sometimes the kids cooked dinner and sometimes mom would cook dinner. I was much less organized and the books that I read were about kids who had dinner every night at six thirty and had a set bedtime and had all these kind of rules and routines and our house wasn’t like that so I think I was really fascinated by the idea of how other people lived.

CD: Did you feel like you wanted that or was it just totally different?

MCR: In some ways I wanted it. It just. I wasn’t entirely sure I wanted it. No kid wants more rules.

CD: Did your parents have a certain philosophy that made them more flexible. Was there a reason they did not have a more structured set of rules for you, bedtime, dinnertime.

MCR: I known my mother grew up in a house with rules and the rules didn’t always make sense. For instance, my mother hates eggs and will be ill at the sight of one and she was forced to eat eggs for breakfast every morning because that’s what you did. Her mother fixed her an egg and she and her sister sat down to breakfast and then my mother would go into the bathroom and
be sick and then she went to school. So my mother developed a negative attitude toward these kinds of meaningless routines. We might have benefited from a little more routine but I’m not sure that she saw the point to it. We got what she felt was important in other ways.

CD: What did your mother think was important?

MCR: Taking responsibility for your actions, thinking about the consequences of your actions, school was very, very important. I’m not sure that I can. I guess the way to sum it up was that it was about personal responsibility. It wasn’t necessarily that I needed to learn several things. I needed to learn a general attitude about personal responsibility. She conveyed it in less. Not through routines or specific disciplines. The other thing is that my mother is not a particularly routined or disciplined person. So she would have had a hard time imposing some kind of regiment on us. She would have had a hard time sticking to it herself. It’s just not he way she operates.

CD: Do you think that your mother’s focus or concern for your taking responsibility has corrected your career choices. Certainly in law school we discuss taking responsibility and thinking about consequences. In practice you think of what a lawyer does as thinking of consequences of other people’s actions.

Yes. My. I don’t know how much it was. Actually now that I think about it I suppose it did affect my choice to go to law school. It also, it simply affected that way that I work.

CD: How so?

MCR: Both my mother and father put a very high price on intellectual integrity. I was not ever told what to think. They very consciously and carefully permitted me to develop my own ideas and would challenge me in my ideas but not in a way that says that’s stupid this is the right thing. It would be why? Why do you think that? Why do you say that?

CD: Sounds like law school

MCR: Yeah. I was always brought up to have a well thought out and well supported position and to have a strong sense of ethics in terms of my own behavior. No necessarily judgmental about other people behavior, but a very strong sense of not thins is within the rules, this is against the rules. That is not what I gathered at least. My parents may have wished I gathered more of that from my childhood. But this is right, this is wrong, This hurts other people and its bad. This is a good thing to do. That’s what I learned and that’s what I carried.

CD: You mentioned when you were younger during the summers or when you had free time you would go to the orange groves or go for a long walks. During high school did you pursue the same activities, or did. What did you do in high school during your free time.

MCR: Again, I would walk and I would read. From a very young age I had unrestricted access to any book in the house. That often included books I was too young to understand. But that means at the age of seven one of my favorite books was Edith Hamilton’s Mythology. And I
was reading James Mitchner books before I could completely understand this story. And my parents kept an amazing collection of books, particularly my mother who is just a voracious reader. And so I would just go perusing the shelves and pick out something that looked interesting and start reading. And again I would walk a lot. I was not athletic at all, even in high school. I was not athletic at all until I got to college. I would ride my bike and I would go for long walks. I had a couple friends I would hang out with.

In high school I had much less free time. I was taking a lot of classes and very, very active in extracurricular activities, especially speech competitions.

CD: What did you like about that. I’ve always been very nervous about it.

MCR: Well first of all I’m not. It was simply hard wired. My father was the coach. So it was pretty much assumed that I would start speech competition and my parents would have loved to send me to the best private school available but that was not an option and the schools I attended were mediocre. I learned more about reading and writing and analysis through speech class and speech competition and working with my father then I learned until I got to my father’s eleventh grade honor’s English class. That’s how I learned.

CD: Did you start off in ninth grade

MCR: Even before that. I was entering little grade school competitions when I was in seventh grade. And then in ninth grade I got involved in the regular high school circuit. I enjoyed it because I got to go meet a lot of other people. That was especially important to me because the high school was not academically oriented. I was one of the smart kids and 95% of the school didn’t talk to me. Actually 90% of the school didn’t know who I was. Then there was 5% that didn’t talk to me. We had kind of a narrow circle of friends. We were all the kids who took the college bound classes.

CD: What were the other kids interested in

MCR: Football cheer leading. Drug use. Recreational mostly. It was a rural town and less than 10% of the graduating class would go on to college of any sort. And this was in California where you have the UC system that’s very cheap and very accessible. It just. I understand that the town since has changed a lot. The demographic make up of the town has changed. But then it was not even an incorporated town. It was semi-rural. It was very, very, very conservative and very religious, very. I used to say and this really isn’t far off, the town was half-Mormon and half-Fundamentalist Christian.

CD: It sounds like your parents had a broader scope of interest. How did they end up there.

MCR: They lived in Redlands. I went to Yukipa high school which was the next town over. Yukipa is where my dad got a job. But they lived in Redlands which is a little bigger, a little more cosmopolitan, had a little university, has a little university. Yukipa is where he got a job. I was just a very different place; although it was just a few miles away. And I ended up going there because my parents did not at all like the college prep program at Redlands high school.
CD: What didn’t they like about it.

MCR: It was virtually all student drive,. It was almost like four years of independent study. The student s could kind of pick classes they were interested in and then spend a lot of time on projects. They knew that I didn’t have the regimented discipline to make good use of that type of time. They were absolutely right. It would have been a disaster. I’d have wasted my high school years. So I went to, I transferred districts and went to, transferred districts and went to the high school where my father taught.

CD: In addition to your did you have other mentors?

MCR: Yea. Other teachers. I knew most of the teachers anyway because of my dad. I became pretty close with the man who was my senior English teacher but he also was the advisory of the student literary magazine which I became the Editor of. I spent a lot of time working with him on the magazine and talking with him. He was very interested in poetry and offered me different authors to read.

CD: Did you have a favorite author or poet?

MCR: Not really. At that point I was pretty much a sponge. I didn’t like everything but I was interested in everything.

CD: So it sounds like you were expected to go to college.

MCR: Absolutely. Absolutely. That was never a question.

CD: You decided to go to Bryn Mawr which is on the east coast obviously in Pennsylvania. What influenced your decision to go to Bryn Mawr or more generally to go to school on the east coast?

MCR: I’d grown up in California being told that California was weird and not like the rest of the country. I grew up hearing all the jokes. It’s the cereal state because it’s full of fruits, nuts and flakes. So After hearing all this and not fitting in well in California, particularly where I went to school being blond and tan and athletic was really almost required. And I was none of those. And I though I would try a completely different atmosphere. I thought I would like the east coast better and I wanted to see what the supposed real world was like. So I began looking at eastern college and I made up my mind very early on I wanted to go to a very small school.

CD: What interested you about a small school?

MCR: Well I’d never really been in a big school and I didn’t want to be in a place where I could get lost. At that time I guess I didn’t understand some of the advantages of a big school, the broader selection of curricula and courses. But I still think it was absolutely the right decision for me. I think I’d have felt very isolated and alone at a really big eastern campus. So I was looking for small schools and I was sick of being this smart kid who nobody wanted to talk to so
I was looking for the most academically rigorous place I would find. And Bryn Mawr had that reputation. And it also had a reputation of being full of, well the phrase repeated in the guide book which apparently is used quite often about Bryn Mawr is Gusset Individualist.

CD: What does that mean? What does it mean to you?

MCR: What it meant to me and what turned out to be true is that it's a place full of people with their own opinions about how they're going to live their lives. And not particularly concerned about fitting into any mold and quite often opposed to fitting into molds. And people who are who they are. And that very much attracted me. Like I said I was so tired of being the smart kid, the teachers kid, the only one who ever wanted to talk about a book or read an extra one just for fun. I was really looking forward to college from. For years I was looking forward to college. I started keeping a countdown calendar of how long it was before I got to go away to college.

CD: What did you major in in college.

MCR: English with a sort of unofficial minor in Women's studies.

CD: How did you choose your major?

MCR: Well, I arrived at college with this idea that I was going to be very ambitious and get a double major in political science and economics. And then I sat down with the course handbook and my eyes just about popped out of my head. You could take Chinese. You could take Russian. You could take a course on Middle Eastern Cultures. I mean, I looked at that and I said no way. I want to study. I want to have fun and I want to look at a whole bunch of different things and I want to learn a lot of different things. And so I picked the thing that would be both enjoyable and easiest for me which was the English major. I had some testing credits so I jumped into the second year course in English. Already had part of the major requirements fulfilled. It was the easy thing to do. And, frankly I've always thought that English courses were the easiest to do the homework for. You don't fall asleep.

CD: If you like to read

CD: If you like to read. And you can pick books. You can pick courses that have novels. I mean maybe you like poetry maybe you don't like poetry. But its a lot easier staying awake reading a novel than reading a history text.

CD: And how about Women's Studies. What attracted you to ...?

MCR: Well that is just something I developed an interest in as I was there.

CD: What about being at Bryn Mawr helped you develop that interest? Was it discussions with classmates or other classes you had taken, the general tone of the school.
MCR: Bryn Mawr was just a wash in talk about feminism and about women and studying women, studying with women. It was part of the atmosphere. Something I picked up very quickly once I got there. Someone once asked me if I was a feminist before I went to Bryn Mawr and I had never labeled myself as such but when I looked back on some things I did in high school I could see that I was kinda making trouble back then as well.

CD: What are those things your thinking about.

MCR: Well, for instance I registered for the draft. I was very insulted at the idea that the government wanted a list, in case we were going to go to war, al list of all of the useful people and they didn’t consider me one of those because of my gender. So I registered for the draft. I was asked in high school to write monthly column for the student paper and on a couple of occasions I wrote articles that started rather heated debates around the campus. One of them was about the different in attention paid girls sports as opposed to boys sports.

CD: Still an issue.

MCR: Still and issue. Yes. That one caught the attention of a few people on the high school campus. I would never have called myself a feminist. It would never have occurred to me to wonder or ask. But as I looked back that has always been part of what I think about and at Bryn Mawr it was every where. Within a month I think of getting to Bryn Mawr I said to myself this is the reason I’m here. To think about and learn about and spend time and intellectual time with and developing ideas with and about women. And I realized that this was the only opportunity I would ever have, the only time in my life I would probably be in a single sex environment with so many brilliant women around. You know you walk into a café, the student café at Bryn Mawr and there are people arguing about feminism or arguing about a book or something. So already it was paradise to me. The very fact that it was going on. After what I’d been though in grade school and high school. So I early on became very interested in finding out What this whole feminism thing meant to people and learning about all the different discussions that were going on.

CD: What did it mean to you?

MCR: That developed over time. I think that as, in high school I would have told you that men and women should be equal and have the same opportunities and that would have really been it for me. But through college and then of course since then I developed a different, or perhaps more sophisticated view of feminism. I’m not sure I want to kind of spit it out in a sentence but it has a lot more to do with recognizing the differences in the way a lot of women think and the differences. I think there’s a different feminine culture with different values and that’s not just a culture that exists where women are secluded from men. It exists wherever women get together. And whether that’s in the women’s bathroom at work or at the, during the coffee break or what ever. I think there’s a different culture with different values. And I’m fascinated to explore that and the way women think. There’s been a lot of writing and discussion about dualistic thinking and more, or less regimented ways of thinks and identifying more, or debunking the idea that those things are identified with gender. Those are all fascinating issues to me. And certainly my experience and its perhaps a little bit skewed from being at Bryn Mawr,
most of the women I meet are more inventive thinkers than most of the men I meet. And that’s a generalization. It doesn’t account for individuals at all. I want to put out that disclaimer. But to make those kind of generalizations. And so feminism really is about fostering and now it ties in with much broader philosophies of mine about fostering the strengths and diversity and difference and not just saying everybody can be a man or have all the opportunities of a man. And that was really funny at Bryn Mawr because Bryn Mawr was founded on the idea of giving young women a man’s education. And at the time I was there the administration was really struggling with this concept of providing women with the opportunity for a different sort of education and letting them explore nontraditional things because for a hundred years Bryn Mawr had been about doing exactly what the men did and doing it better. There was a real time of transition when I was there. There was a lot of tension between the students asking for very different kinds of courses and studies and the administration still with its thought and emphasis on the traditional educational model.

CD: I assume that the administration has become more flexible.

MCR: I assume that. Education everywhere has become more flexible I think. Anywhere you go. Not anywhere. The University of Pennsylvania has a much broader and less traditional range of courses now then it did fifteen years ago. And Bryn Mawr College also does. It was just kind of fun and interesting to be there at a point when that tension was palpable. I remember for the English major you had to take the English major’s seminar. In other words it was a small enough school so all the English majors or all the senior English majors could be gotten in one room for a class once a week, to study the same thing. And the topic was chosen for the year and what they chose for my senior year was Freud. Freud and literary criticism. And they decided that they would kind of throw in a little bit of the feminist criticism of Freud. So there was I think on the initial syllabus one book by a feminist critic of Freud and one novel written by a woman and we were reading a number of novels, and it was The Black Prince by Iris Murdoch, which as you might expect from the title is drawn significantly from the story of Hamlet and other Shakespearean stories, but particularly Hamlet and has the theme of the whole oedipal complex. And some of us raised the subject the feminist writers are saying is that Freud has no relevance to them and its not fair to pick as your one woman writer a woman who has deliberately playing on the Freudian themes. That didn’t answer the question. IT didn’t give us and opportunity to answer the question. And the professors were receptive to that and they said that makes sense and went back and revised the syllabus by the time we got to that section there was a lot more and we really got to address the feminist perspective on that very much. But this is the kind of transition time that we were in. The professors quite willing to at least give a nod and some were quite willing to go farther, but they maybe needed a little push from the students.

CD: You had mentioned that you weren’t very athletic in high school and you became interested in college. What did your, what area of athletics did you become interested in college?

MCR: Well I joined the volleyball team. The reason I did that was because the summer before I went to college I got a job with the youth conservation Crops. I was working in the mountains for the Forestry Service, basically digging ditches, moving large heavy objects, digging wholes for sign post, manual labor and hard manual labor and when I finished that I figured there was
nothing I couldn't do. So I got to Bryn Mawr and having not done anything athletic that I could avoid doing for at least four years. In a complete whim I joined the volleyball team. I played volleyball in Eighth grade and certainly liked it better than basketball, which I also played in the eighth grade, and softball which I stunk at. So I joined the volleyball team and it almost killed me. I mean they had real conditioning and particularly at the very beginning. Except for the tennis team at that point Bryn Mawr sports teams didn't cut. If you came to the practices you were on the team. And perhaps you only played in JV games, but they didn't have cuts and they didn't have try outs so they had a really intensive conditioning the first week so that anybody who wasn't really interested would drop. And this is also my introduction to an east coast summer. I'd never been in humidity other than when I was thirteen and visited the east coast. And so I was out running, which is something I've ever done well in and doing four hundred jump ropes and so on. All in this incredible humidity. And it nearly killed me. But that was when I learned something else about Bryn Mawr which is the reason I stuck with the team. We were in the gym on perhaps the second day of my participation in this. We were running relays and I happened to be the last person on my team and I'm a slow runner, always have been, and I was on a slow team. So by the time it got to be my time to run I was the only person running cause my team had been slow and they tapped off my hand and everybody else was done. And all along everybody had been cheering for their own team. You know go so and so. Go Mary. Go Jane. And I set off on my lonely run across the gym thinking this is going to be high school gym class all over again and it would be just painful and horrible and humiliating and instead the entire group started cheering for me. All the other people from the other teams too. Just cheering go go go. And that's when I realized it didn't have to be like high school gym class. And that there could be a cooperative community out there. People cheering for one another. And so I stuck with the volleyball team basically because of that. I wasn't very good. I mostly played JV, but I really enjoyed it.

CD: To go to a personal issue. You are a lesbian.

MCR: Yes.

CD: Was it in college that you came to realize your sexual orientation. Do you think that being at Bryn Mawr, at an all women's college helped you come to this realization or affected your decision.

MCR: It certainly made it easier.

CD: Was it because of the cooperative environment?

MCR: Well, no. It was because it was a topic of conversation. I'd gone to a catholic grade school and then I went to high school in a place that was very conservative and very religious and that was always a big tension. One time the English teacher who had given me various books to read gave me a book of poetry by Adrian Rich who is a very well known lesbian writer. And I thought the poetry was beautiful and a couple of my friends came into the classroom as I was reading aloud and the poem happened to be about two women making love. You had to listen really carefully to know that because it was really just about. It was a poem of images and smells and sounds and it was a very impressionistic poetry and I was really taken by
the imagery and the beautiful flow of the words and I really wasn't focused on what the poem was about and one of my friends, you know, one of the three people in this high school that I would discuss poetry with, got up and said I'm going to get up and leave the room if you wouldn't put that down. Because he was very religious and he would not sit there and listen to lesbian poetry.

So that's where I went to high school and those were my friends in high school. So, I never even remotely thought about it. I mean, as I though back I realized that there were a number of times that I said, you know. I'd notice that a girl was pretty or I really like spending time with somebody. And I'd say that's nothing. But I never really consciously thought about it. I don't think I could.

At Bryn Mawr I could. I mean, first of all, the freshmen get there and the first thing they do is they start hearing rumors about the lesbians and the lesbians are going to come ask you out or hit on you or something. And I found those rather ridiculous. So, I was actually kind of oblivious as to who was ands wasn't a lesbian. I remember one time I came back to my room and I spoke to my freshman roommate and I said you know that woman, she's very noticeable. She has a British accent, bleached blond hair that sort of stood straight up. But she's always so interesting looking. Well we just ran into each other in the laundry room and we just had this great conversation. And I was all excited about it. And my roommate said you weren't nervous, you weren't concerned or uncomfortable. And I was clueless. I said no, what do you mean. She said well because she's a lesbian. And I said is she? No I didn't know. But if I had known it wouldn't have made a difference.

There were a lot of people who came to Bryn Mawr from less sophisticated backgrounds and so among the freshmen it was a big issue. Who was a lesbian. And what did you think about and how did you act with lesbians and how did you talk to them and how did they talk to you. So the issue was right in my face. It was not until I was a sophomore that I started thinking about myself and whether I might identify that way. By the time I was a junior I sort of worked out that yeah I did. And then it was a process of what that meant.

CD: What did it mean?

MCR: Well, that took along time for me to figure out. I had this conviction that it had to mean something different. You know last January I didn't call myself a lesbian and now I do, or at least at that point calling myself bisexual. What does that mean. That must mean something different. How am I supposed to look? How am I supposed to dress? Who am I supposed to talk to. And I was really very confused for a while. And finally I figured out that it really didn't mean anything in terms of how I dressed and who I spoke to. Its only one of the reasons why I think I have a much more independent attitude than a lot of other women I know. But part of that was there anyway. And what it means is that that's who I am drawn to romantically and sexually women and not to me. I have wonderful intimate, loving warm cuddly relationships with male friends but that's as far as it goes. And the times when I was younger and looking for something different from men it just didn't work out. I always kind of wondered if I just had bad taste. And then I realized that it was more fundamental than that. There was nothing wrong with them.
CD: Did you come out in college.

MCR: Yeah. Well, I don’t know what you men by “come out.” I came out to myself. Coming out to other people was a much slower one.

CD: How about the process of coming out to your family. When did that happen?

MCR: I came out to my mother when I was in college. And she kind of treated it as an unpleasant secret. Or at least wanted to keep it a secret for some time. She said, correctly, that it would upset my father. And she didn’t want me to upset my father. And she was absolutely certain that I’d get over it really fast. She didn’t want me telling anybody. She was afraid it would ruin future career chances, anything like that. Because that kind of thing could follow you through your life. I figured that I would never apologize for who I’d been at any particular point. But I didn’t tell my father for a while. Not until after college. Then I. My father and I hadn’t been very close for a long time. I had trouble getting along. And we were making a concerted effort, at times and awkward one to get along better and we were writing back and forth. And we still do, but now its much faster because of the miracle of e-mail. And so one day I wrote him a long letter and said look. You said that you want to know me and this is one of the things that you need to know. And it was a month before he wrote back and I was just . I was a wreck. And one day I came home from work and there was a letter from him. And I was literally shaking as I went upstairs to answer it, or open it. The first thing I did was skip to the end. Which is, which you know you do when you’re reading a book and just gets too suspenseful. So I skipped to end and it said something like you know, of course, I love you. That doesn’t change. So then I could read the rest. That wasn’t the end of that process. That doesn’t mean that, you know, they were okay with it and everything was fine and I could bring somebody home and they’d be nice to her. Anything like that? That took a lot longer. But that was how I came out to him.

CD: How about your friends in college. You mentioned that in your freshman year there was this fear or anxiety about meeting a lesbian. Did coming out in college affect relationships you had with friends from first year, friends who are straight?

MCR: It would affect them and then we’d get over it. I knew some of my friends would be freaked out. Sometimes it would cause a little bit of nervousness on their part. Oh, what does that mean about our close relationship. Oh, what does that mean about trading backrubs. And they got over it.

I got one fantastic letter from my sophomore roommate. Who was actually a senior that year so she’d gone off to med school. And she wrote me a letter. The letter’s beautiful. I still have it. Part of the letter sounds like my mother. You know, she’s saying this is something that can follow you through your life. Are you sure about this? I’d hate to see you do something stupid that you’d later regret. And then part way through the letter she said, what am I doing? As if I knew your brain. As if I knew what was inside of you. You’re the person who understands these things. And knows what you want to do and what you want to be and can calculate your own risks. I don’t know any of that. What am I doing? I should be totally standing behind you.
And in the process of a page an a half she went from really kind of uptight about it to I’m completely behind you. You’re my friend. I love you and if this makes you happy then that’s the best thing on earth.

Certainly being at Bryn Mawr there wasn’t an issue of being ostracized. I wasn’t part of the dyke clique on campus. But I certainly had plenty of friends and enough people that it blew over pretty quickly.

CD: Do you think that your experiences as a lesbian woman at Bryn Mawr differ from those of a straight woman at Bryn Mawr.

MCR: Well. No. I don’t. My experience certainly differed in a lot of ways from the experiences of some straight women at Bryn Mawr. But I don’t think it was all about that. Any person would have a broad range of friends or a narrow range of friends, be involved in the political discussions, and be involved in the political correctness watching that was of course going on at that time. Whether you were straight or gay it didn’t matter.

CD: Did you have any mentors when you were at Bryn Mawr?

MCR: I had some professors that I would talk to. But I think the person. Certainly the person that I remember best and think most about was a man I worked for in the library. I got a job working in the college archives, which was great because it had all of the old photographs. And Bryn Mawr is a place of a lot of tradition. Certainly a lot of famous women have gone to Bryn Mawr, whether or not they graduated. And so the archives are just a complete history of the college. Famous alums. And also is the keeper of gifts to the archival collection. Various people associated with Bryn Mawr have given Bryn Mawr very, very valuable archival collections that have nothing to do with the college. For instance, one summer I got a grant to spend the summer reviewing and cataloging the papers of Lawrence Hausman who is best remembered as the brother of A.E. Hausman, the classicist and poet. Lawrence Hausman was a playwright, most famous for a series of sappy plays about Queen Victoria, but he also was apolitical activist. A very early member of the antiwar movement, the suffragist movement. He knew everybody. He corresponded with Oscar Wilde, people from the Bloomsbury circle. Everyone. And so I got to go through these paper and organize them an catalog them. And doing that work I worked for Leo Delinski who was the archivist. Just a wonderful, thoughtful man. And I learned an awful lot just working with him and talking with him. Just a warm interesting person, fascinated by with is work. But also fascinated with people. And like to talk about things with people. So he’s not someone that guided me in choice of work or classes or anything. He was. He’s the person I remember most in college.

CD: Do you keep in touch with friends from Bryn Mawr.

MCR: A few. Not a lot but a few.

CD: Do you think that experiences since college have affected which contacts you’ve maintained? Is there? With the people you keep in contact is there a professional link?
MCR: Nothing. The thing that has caused the most difference, I think. A lot of my friends from Bryn Mawr have gotten married and had kids. So, that just is such an incredible gulf in the focus of your life. Once you have kids your life is so different. And people with kids talk to other people with kids and talk about their kids. That probably has had as much an effect as anything. Also we’ve gone in different directions. I haven’t kept in touch with. As I read the college notes I get a really frightening number of my classmates have decided to go to law school. Very few of us went to law school right out of college. I didn’t. An awful lot of use have gone back and gone to law school. It seems to be some sort of latent disease or something. But I don’t know them. I’m not in touch with them. And my friends. The ones I am in touch with are doing very different things.

CD: Why do you. You kind of mention it as being a disease or being kind of horrendous. Why is it a negative thing for you that your classmates have gone to law school?

MCR: One a weekly basis somebody says to me my daughter, son, cousin, neighbor is thinking of going to law school. Some young person is thinking of going to law school. And in so many of those cases it’s in default. Now that’s much less likely with someone who’s gone out, worked, considered some options. But I still know some people who have gone out, worked, considered some options, you know, still gone to law school because it was a default. And I know too many of those people in law school and I know too many of those people in the practice of law and they’re not happy. And I think that’s part of the reason why ours is a profession so wracked with angst. There are articles everywhere about people being so tired about the stress of law. There are as many books on life after law as there are on how to choose a legal career or more. And I think its because so many people do it...

CD: How did Bryn Mawr shape your relationships while you were there?

MCR: Are you getting at something in particular. That’s an awful broad question?

CD: No.

MCR: Bryn Mawr was a place where people talked about ideas and issues and disagree on things, or agreed on things, stayed up late and argued about things. And always, always the curiosity, exploring things, intellectual or otherwise. It was a place where people took a lot of chances. And just a really intense curiosity in learning and seeking going on there. And I valued that kind of intensity and willingness to take risks in my perusal relationships. Whether the ones I made there or the ones I’ve made since. My closest relationships are people who will argue with me about things, people who are curious about things, about books. Those kind of relationships.

Bryn Mawr was not nirvana. It was a place of. It was a very high stress place. But it’s the stress people put on themselves to perform. It’s not competitive. In fact, you are permitted ever to talk about grades. It’s part of the honor code. Something that shocked me deeply when I went to law school. People would ask me what I got on an exam. I’m like how could you ask me that. It was a very intense place and very high emotions. All these women in late adolescence. Out on their own and exploring different things. At times it was overcrowded. It still, It was exactly
what I was looking for. It really helped me to become who I am and find who I wanted to be. It was a place where I could be anyone.

CD: What it in college that you decided you wanted to go to law school?

MCR: It was in college that I first got the idea that I thought I might go on to law school. I went to college thinking that I wanted to get into politics and write. I got somewhat involved in politics. My sophomore year I organized and enormous voter registration drive. That caught the attention of the local democratic committee. And they then tried to get me involved in committee work and candidate work. And what I saw of politics, which was very little, I did not like at all. The process really turned me off. And so I really gave up the idea of a career in politics. I didn’t have the stomach for it. And for a while just wasn’t sure what I would do. And then actually one day during the summer during my senior year I was walking across the campus and another woman I knew, who happened to be a lesbian, stopped me and said the supreme court just upheld the Georgia sodomy statute. This was the decision of Bowers v. Hardwick. And when she told me about the decision I said you have it wrong. That can’t be correct. And then I got the newspaper. And I got the decision. And was just stunned by it. Not just by the outcome, but also by what I considered and still consider the supreme intellectual dishonesty of the decision itself. And that, believe it or not, is why I, is when I first started thinking about going to law school. I said this is something extremely important that affects a lot of peoples lives and its been done wrong. If I can go help do it right, that is a worthy endeavor.

CD: You didn’t go directly to law school. What did you do in the interim years?

MCR: My first year I was the assistant manager in a dry cleaning store on the main line. When I graduated from college I was so sick of the idea of school. I didn’t want anything to do with anything that had a desk involved in it. I’d been working as a counter clerk in this dry-cleaning store and spent the next year there helping to manage the place. It was family business. Learned a lot about small family businesses, learned a lot about businesses in general and things like that.

CD: What kind of things did you learn?

MCR: The customer, no matter how idiotic, is always right. That it’s very unlikely that you have any sort of a future in a family business unless you’re a member of the family. Learned a lot about the difference between good management and bad management.

CD: What did you learn that makes for good management?

MCR: The main proprietor of the business was someone who had a wonderful sense of humor and a wonderful sense of what was important and what wasn’t important. And didn’t institute rules for rules sake. And had a lot of leniency with his employees. Although, you crossed a line you were fired. I though he was an excellent manager in a lot of ways. There would be times when I’d disagree with his judgment, but toward the very end of when I was there another member of the family who hadn’t previously been involved in the business became involved in the business. And she wanted rules. And all of a sudden, the door of the office, which we’d
always been able to walk into, was locked. And there were all these rules. And they wanted us to put locks on their lockers so no risk of theft by other employees and things like that. And just the whole tone of the place changed in two weeks and it was no longer a nice place to work. And I went from being someone who’d had an awful lot of responsibility and felt like I was given a lot of respect to nothing. And from my description you can tell I prefer one management style over the other. That was one of the experiences that taught me about different management styles and how they work and what engenders loyalty and extra effort among the employees.

CD: Was it that year that you decided to go to law school.

MCR: No. I can’t emphasize too much how opposed to going back to school I was. That year just working and kind of clearing my head and then said okay well I’d better go find out what law practice is like, cause I’m not just going to go to law school. I started looking downtown and I got a job as a receptionist in a medium size firm in town because that’s what they had available. But I was sort of a relief receptionist, general administrative helper person and I quickly started doing paralegal work and some library work for them. And I was always looking to get away from the administrative stuff I was doing and get closer to the legal work. And some lawyers would give me projects, legal projects, paralegal type projects, whatever. And after, finally it turned out I was just too useful in my sort of gal Friday capacity. And when they passed me over for three paralegal positions I got the hint. And I got another job and that time I went to another midsize firm in town and they were looking for their first law librarian. And while I was at the first firm I had taken a course offered at Jenkins law library in how to do legal research, so I’d learned all about the National Reporter System, the Digest system and how to do research. And I talked my way into this library job. They hadn’t had a full time librarian before. They had someone who sort of did the book updates. And loved it. Had a ball doing that. I got to do some research. I got to do all the upkeep on the library, organize the library, do a catalogue for the first time of their collection and all that kind of stuff. So I really loved that job and the more it did legal research the more I loved it.

CD: What do you like about it, as some one who’s not...

MCR: I suppose the detective work and the deductive part of it, the analytical part that says here’s a case about a dispute over the shipment of shovels from Mississippi to Alaska. And yet there’s something in that case that’s going to be quite relevant to our dispute over this piece of real-estate, learning to use the pieces of the puzzle differently and fit them into the puzzle that your creating over here. Learning to recognize what’s significant even though the case is about shovels, that there is something in there that is still meaningful for you and applying it in a different context. That kind of analysis was always the part that was so much fun for me. And the Digest System and the National Reporter System are kind of puzzle like. I’ve always been math oriented so those are somethings I love about legal research. The detective end of it, creativity. And I figured that if I liked what everybody said was the worst drudgery of the profession. They lied by the way. They didn’t mention discovery. That if I liked what everybody considered the worst drudgery of the profession, I would enjoy being a lawyer. And I liked the atmosphere, not everything about it, but I like the atmosphere of the law office where people wanted to talk about their work and were interested and would debate things. That was
getting close to feeling like I was back at college where I could walk into the café and join
argument over T.S. Eliot’s the Wasteland.

CD: So you were ready to go back? Ready to get back into that environment?

MCR: Well, I wanted to find a life that I could spend nit that environment and it looked like I
could find that in law.

CD: Your first year of law school you went to Hastings. How did you decide to go to law school
in California.

MCR: It was cheap.

I had maintained my California residency by paying taxes figuring that if I was going to go to
grad school I’d go back to California for grad school. There was another consideration as well
which is I hadn’t lived in California since I was seventeen and I had such negative memories I
thought I’d give it a shot as an adult and also try northern California. I knew I didn’t have any
fondness for southern California but to see if I liked San Francisco any better.

CD: After your first year you transferred to Penn. Why did you decide to transfer to Penn?

MCR: Because between the time that I applied to law school and the time I actually started law
school got involved in things here that were incredibly important to me. One was a relationship.
But another was I started my martial arts training and I started training to be a women’s self
defense instructor and I loved the people here that I was working with on those projects and so
by the time it was time for me to leave for California I didn’t want to go. And I figured pretty
soon. Figured out pretty well that I wasn’t going to spend three years in California, learning
California law and try to come back to Philadelphia and get a job.

CD: How did you become interested in martial arts?

MCR: Well, I’d always been sort of interested in studying martial arts and self-defense, but just
never got around to it. And then at some point, a little over a year before I started going to law
school I got a part-time job as a driver and guide for a visually impaired woman. And one of the
things she wanted to do was move from her very safe but secluded suburban neighborhood into
the city where she’d have more access to public transportation and activities and so on. And so
we looked around and She decided she wanted to move the Germantown. And she found a great
room to rent in somebody’s big, gorgeous old house in Germantown. I looked around the
neighborhood and said Joanne, We’re going to go take a self-defense class.

So we found a self-defense class and we took it and not only did I enjoy the class but I also
would work with her somewhat because I knew what she could see, what she couldn’t see. She
also had some hearing limitations. What she could hear, what she couldn’t hear. So I also
assisted her a little bit through the class but I was also taking it myself. I loved that. I had so
much fun, got such a kick out of it and such a feeling of excitement and empowerment out of
both taking the class and helping someone else that at the end of it I walked up to the instructor
and said I want to do this. How can I do this? Do you take apprentices? Do you train people? How can I do this? And she said well we do have an apprenticeship program. In fact, we’ll be starting is up again in a couple of months. In the meantime you should know we require all of our trainees to take a martial art. And so you should look around and pick a martial art that you can study. They didn’t care which one as long as you were practicing a martial art. So I. That fit in with something I wanted to do for years anyway. I looked around, learned about Aikido, which is very different from most other martial arts.

CD: In what way?

MCR: It’s purely defensive. You don’t learn how to punch or kick. You learn how to use the energy from someone else’s attack. Whether it’s a grab, a punch or a kick and use their own momentum to unbalance them and throw them. Ideally, every Aikido encounter ends up with the person who threw the first punch on the floor. And in that. That appealed to me very much because it does not matter if you have as good a reach as somebody else. It’s doesn’t matter if you’re as strong, not very tall, have short arms. None of that matters. It’s not a handicap. And the other thing is you spend a lot of time, because you switch off with your partner who’s going to throw the punch and who’s going to throw the person. You spend a lot of your time rolling around on the floor and flying through the air and that was like the tumbling classes I always wanted to ask when I was a kid. Anyway, I loved Aikido from the moment I got involved in it.

It also, as I got to learn much more about it every martial art is also a philosophical study as well. And I really both enjoy and identify with very strongly with the philosophical underpinnings of the study of Aikido. And find it very profound and it has affected me in every aspect of my life.

CD: What are the underpinnings?

MCR: It is a complete avoidance of conflict by learning to understand the energy that your opponent is directing to you and blend with that energy, change its direction into something that’s not harmful. It is not about harming your opponent. It is highly ethical in that way. You only do as much as you need to do and no more to stop the attack. And to do it right it requires a profound understanding of energy and intention and how bodies work and how minds work. And it’s the basic philosophy is we’re all part of the same universe. It’s about not doing more harm then good. And about addressing the root of conflict and identifying the root of conflict rather than just fighting...

CD: You’re a litigator now. To jump a head in our chronology, you’ve mentioned that your study of Aikido and martial arts has affected your life in many different respects. How has it affected how you work as a litigator.

MCR: First of all I’m extremely calm. There’s very little that can upset and very little that can get me hyped up and panicked. You spend ten years practicing something where people are punching and throwing kicks at you, one of the things you have to learn is calmness. One of the other focuses of Aikido is learning to deal with multiple attackers simultaneously. You just have to be calm. You cannot get uptight about anything because then you’re not ready to respond to the next crisis and the next crisis is now. So that whole sort of ability and let things come and
deal with them as they come is definitely something that has come from Aikido training. And also again this is something I think has roots in many different things, but I have just o time for games. The posturing. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been in a deposition and there’s some. One of the wonderful things about the firm I work at is that you get a lot of responsibility early on. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been in a deposition and its me and a couple of forty year old men on the other side of the table. And some of them think that its fun to try and intimidate or be condescending or whatever to the young woman lawyer. I have not time for those games. Generally they don’t even bother me any more. But when lawyers are picking fights, as sometimes happens. I don’t get caught up in them. I certainly have no interest in it. But it’s much easier to say apart from it because that’s not the conflict. I have a case. That really all I care about. And if somebody’s calling me names, or writing me nasty letters or playing games, I don’t care. As far as I’m concerned that is about my case. So it’s just. It’s easier to stay focused and avoid the little fights.

CD: How does Hastings differ from Penn, to step back in time for a moment.

MCR: Night and day.

CD: In what way?

MCR: Hastings is a sedate school. It was very, very rare for there to be someone at Hastings who is right out of college. Most people had worked and a lot of people coming back for a second career. We had doctors. We had journalists. We had real estate agents. We had all sorts of people in my class. It was older. It was a much more diverse student body in every way. I’m not just talking ethnically. People in my class were, had gone to Harvard in my place, people had gone to Arizona State undergrad. And people had such an incredible variety of life experiences and tended to be more opinionated. And sometimes more curious about things.

It’s hard for me to compare because I didn’t have a first year at Penn and by the time you’re in the second year. By the time you come in second year. I came in second year and I didn’t know many people and everybody was off interviewing anyway. So, first semester second year’s a really bad time to try to get a feel for a law school. And I think that thing that happens at the beginning of second year where everybody runs off in a suit and starts interviewing and barely attends their classes really breaks down whatever kind of class cohesion you had first year.

So I’ve not had the best view of Penn. I probably missed the best part and came in at the worst part. But being at Hastings was like being at Bryn Mawr in that everybody wanted to talk about what we were studying. People would stop me in the halls, I didn’t get that. What was he talking about. Debate things. You know the whole Paper Chase thing. We really did that.

CD: What was the focus of the students at Penn? You mentioned that everybody was kind of looking for a job when you got here.

MCR: I found a small group of people who had some similar interests and took some similar classes and were involved in similar activities. But I don’t recall a lot of. And I wasn’t on law review and it might have been different there. But I don’t recall a lot of people wanting to sit
around and discuss cases or discuss what we'd just talked about in class. We had some interesting discussions and there were some interesting people. But it wasn't the same sort of intellectual curiosity about what we were all doing here. And then again, we didn't all have the same classes. So you didn't have the cohesion of experience. I also. The Penn law student demographics, at least when I came here were entirely different from Hastings. I remember flipping through the face book I got when I enrolled and looking at the undergraduate colleges and its was kind of Harvard, Yale Princeton, Princeton, Amherst, Princeton, Swarthmore, Harvard, Yale, UVA. And moist people were right out of college. It just wasn't the kind of breadth of experience and perspective that I had in my class at Hastings.

CD: Did you have any area of special interest when you were in law school?

MCR: I was. I took a lot of classes in what you might characterize as public interest and civil rights issues. That and civil procedure. I knew I wanted to be in litigation. I never had ahead for transactional stuff. And so, I figured if I knew a lot about civil procedure, the rest you had to learn issue by issue, case by case anyway. And the civil procedure is fun. Its strategy again. Its puzzling things out. So I took a lot of civil procedure classes, a lot of constitutional law, civil rights, those kinds of classes.

And I took every clinical I could get my self into. The Civil Practice Clinic, and also worked there over my bar summer. Took a fantastic opportunity. At that time it was called the public interest law seminar and it was taught by Howard Lesnick and I think Susan Sturm also helped with that class. I took several classes with professor Sturm. She was one of my favorites.

But that was basically you went to work at one of the public interest law centers in town and got together once a week to talk about issues that came up in public interest practice. And I was placed at the Women's Law Project. And that was the spring of 1992 and what we were doing was finalizing the brief for the Supreme Court in Planned Parenthood v. Casey. So that's what I did. IT was very exciting. We all went down to Washington to hear the argument and had lots of dramatic stories about that because it was raining. We got there at about eleven o'clock at night cause we expected to wait all night. There's a long line to get in and watch the argument because only so many public seats are available. So we got there around ten or eleven o'clock at night and around midnight it started pouring. You could not believe. We're all out there with a few umbrellas and some sleeping bags. And finally. I don't mind saying it now because it got in the papers and all. The guards of the Supreme Court building took pity on us and one or two o'clock in the morning they came out and they let us into the basement. They had use sign a roll so they knew what order we'd been in in our line. And we slept in the basement until about five thirty in the morning. And they woke us up and shoed us out and said don't tell any body we'll get in trouble. Well somebody talked to a reporter. What a shame because they put their necks on the line to see us not all catch pneumonia. So that was really exciting to be part of that. Again, I still hadn't gotten over my loathing of being in school.

I'm not just being a student. I always worked. Sometimes too much and got involved in things other than school and the clinics were part of that.
CD: Why did you want to be involved in other activities in addition to being in school? Some people like to just focus on their studies. What was important to you about having a balance?

MCR: My sanity and eating. I was responsible for paying my own way. When I got to Penn I had to borrow money for tuition but I never borrowed money to live on. And that was something that was very important to me, paying my way. And I just needed a balance. Doing nothing but schoolwork. The deadlines aren't immediate enough except for your daily reading. But then there's this big looming thing at the end of the semester, the final or the final paper. And I would just find myself at loose ends. Not working toward. I'd never start my outlines in the middle of the semester. That's what finals week is for. I get very nervous if I was not doing real world things as well as studying.

CD: You mentioned Professor Lesnick and Professor Sturm. Were there other professors at Penn or other mentors you had a Penn who were important to you?

MCR: Sure. Professor Kreimer. Took several classes with him and he worked with the Women's Law project. So I got to work with him in that project and some others as well. And Gary Clinton, who probably in some ways saved my sanity.

CD: How so? If you don't mind my asking.

MCR: I guess this is getting into a whole different topic. As far as being a lesbian, the law school was very closety and uptight. A lot of students weren't out. Gary was the second person I met at the law school. I was actually waiting to learn whether I was accepted. And when you transfer you don't learn two months ahead of time. You learn in August whether you've been accepted. It was mid August and I hadn't heard anything from Penn. I'm thinking well I'm getting kind of nervous. And I was ready to go away on a vacation for a week. And when I was going to come back it was going to be time to start classes and I didn't know if I was going to Penn or to Temple. So I called the law school. We accepted you a while ago. The package got misdirected in the mail. They said well, come down, can you come down. I said I'll be right there. I came down, me with the woman at admissions, started filling out all those forms that were in the misdirected packet. And she said let's just get you your courses selected. And she took me over. And it was summer of course. There were no students around here. Everybody's laid back and Gary Clinton was the Registrar then. And she led me into that little glass booth that was his office and introduced me and sat down. Its funny because to celebrate getting into Penn I had stopped at a street vendor that had jewelry. And there was a very pretty dangly silver earring of a woman dancing and I bought that for myself and I was wearing it. It was just the one. And I sat down and Gary said I like your earring and I said I like yours. And that was sort to the beginning of our friendship and I felt I could always go and talk to him. He was always very supportive and very friendly. The times when I felt like an alien I could go talk to him.

CD: Did you come out to friends when you were in law school?

MCR: Anyone I was friends with knew. I guess frequently even people I wasn't friends with knew. I never made a secret of it. Generally people were not rude to my face, but occasionally. What was harder was the attitude of the other gay students.
CD: What was that?

MCR: You’ve got to understand I spent my first year at Hastings, in San Francisco. The gay students association at the law school is huge and very visible and to come here I saw a sign up for the gay and lesbian law students association. I was all excited and I went to the meeting and I was the only woman in the room. I was the only woman ever at any of those meetings when I was there. And one of the first things discusses was one of the guys turned to the one responsible for advertising the meeting and said you need to put up a big sign in the goat. And I don’t know if they still do but at that time there was a long bulletin board in the goat and every student group. You know, literally. A little section to post notices on so you could walk down and see what every group is doing. And the other guy said I did. I put a notice on our board. And the first guy said no you need to put a big notice on the board so that you can see it when you’re standing in front of the rugby board two sections over so you don’t have to stand in front of the gay and lesbian students board to know that there’s going to be a meeting of the gay and lesbian law students association. And I sat there thinking I’m not in Kansas anymore. It was a really horrible moment for me.

And we started talking about what the student group might do during the year. And we would talk about various things like on coming out day having an information table. It turned out. We talked about these things and then one of the members of the groups your say I don’t feel comfortable sitting at a table that was identified as a gay and lesbian students table. And it turned out that the only people who were willing to be publicly identified was a first year and me. And so we did those things. But mostly it was a pretty clandestine group. That was really hard for me to deal with. There were various times. I remember one time there was some sort of student town meeting or forum and it was about diversity or inclusiveness in general and it was attended by all the gay students but I’m the only one who spoke. The were people from a number of different perspective speaking. But one of the things I said is you folks need to think about the atmosphere because you need to understand that your fellow students, your friends are afraid to tell you who they date. And they’re sitting in this room and they will not speak up. And they will not tell you about their experiences and how afraid they are of you. That just made my blood boil. It didn’t usually affect me on a day to day level, but it just. Things would come up.

CD: You mentioned that there were a lot of other gay and lesbian students that felt uncomfortable expressing who they dated. Why do you think you felt comfortable. What gave you the courage?

MCR: My life was not at this school. My friends were outside this school. My activities were outside this school. I had so many things going on somewhere else. This was just where I went to school. I hadn’t come here out of college to sort of start on a career. And I don’t know what they’re first year experiences were. I don’t know how much of it was their own fear about being able to get jobs and not being ostracized in the community. At the time the legal market was tough. Much tougher than now. Now firms are begging, crawling at your feet. Would you come work for us? Can we pay you one hundred and five thousand dollars to start with. It was a lot harder then. It was a different time. People were afraid about being able to get jobs and everybody said that your legal career is built in the contacts you build in law school. So I don’t
know what they’re first year experiences were. I don’t know if something happened to make
them that afraid, or if was just their own worry.

CD: You had mentioned that your mom expressed concern when you came out to her in college.
Did you mother or anyone express similar concerns that coming out in law school would affect
your career?

MCR: NO. I think that. I don’t think that anybody would have dared say anything like that to
me. I was who I was. And I was not interested in starting what I viewed as my adult career, what
I was going to be doing for many, many years hiding something.
You mentioned that the economy among other things was an issue of concern when you were in
law school. What other issues concerned with when they were looking for jobs?

I would have had to talk to other students about the job search to answer that question. I went on
four on campus interviews. I did as little as I could to get a job. And I didn’t know anybody at
that point. It was the very beginning of the second year. I occasionally heard people worrying
about things, but I didn’t have any conversations with other students about jobs. I heard some
people saying they were going on forty interviews or something. You know, okay, I’ll go back
to being a law librarian. I didn’t have the patience or anything like that.

What issues were important to you when you were looking for jobs. The same things I’d been
looking for since high school. Well, first of all, leaving Hastings coming to Penn, the tuition at
Hastings was $2500 a year. I had to borrow a lot of money to attend Penn. That changed my
plans. I could no longer go directly into public interest work which is what I had been assuming
I would do. I knew I needed to work for a firm. So I was looking for a place that would be
accepting of me, that would not view me as a weirdo or eccentric. But a place that did very, very
high quality work. I had worked in law offices enough to have seen some of the stuff that some
lawyers churn out. And I wanted to be at the top of the food chain because I did not want to
spend my time in stupid discovery battles and I didn’t want to spend my time. I wanted the
lawyers on the other side to be high caliber as well, to test me so that I could develop into the
best lawyer and intellectually find a challenge and enjoyment in the work. And I wanted an
office where people were law nerds. I wanted an office where people really thought this stuff was
fun. They liked talking about it. And that’s what I wen looking for. A place where people were
enjoying their work.

CD: You found that at Drinker Biddle?

MCR: Yeah, we’re complete nerds. We love to talk about our cases. We talk about other things
too. We’re a very congenial bunch. We’re very interested in it and find the work fascinating.
And that’s absolutely essential to me. I could not. I don’t think I could work 40 hours a week in
an atmosphere that wasn’t like that. I certainly couldn’t work the hours I work in an atmosphere
that was like that.

CD: After you graduated from law school you were a clerk for a year for Anita Brody.

MCR: Yes.
CD: How did you decide or why did you decide that you wanted to do a clerkship and for judge Brody.

MCR: Well, I wanted to do a clerkship because it was the fastest Emerson system for learning about litigation and how courts work, really work. Not just reading Supreme Court cases or snippets of Supreme Court cases out of a casebook. My entire approach to law school was practical preparation of my career. And I thought that would be a fantastic opportunity. I didn’t understand. I kind of assumed that would be the case. I had no idea how valuable that would be. It was just. If you want to be a litigator its an incomparable experience to clerk for a judge. What about that experience has been so helpful for you?

Knowing how a judge’s chambers work, knowing how judges think, knowing how they talk to one another. I’ve been incredibly fortunate. Judge Brody adopts her clerks. They’re her foster children, both while your clerking and afterward. She’s very interested in your career and so clerking for her, for instance I’d go watch a hearing or go watch a day of trial with her and on the way back to the chambers she’d be talking about what was effective and what wasn’t. Did you see what that lawyer did, that was really good. And of course I could tell what made her happy and what ticked her off. I learned so much about interactions between judges and lawyers and the best way to practice.

CD: What is the best way to practice?

MCR: Well certainly in a courtroom it is always, always be civil and deferential. You thank the judge for ruling against you. And you recognize that each person in that room has a job and is doing that job. If I’m a lawyer its my job to put forward the best case for my client and if the judge rules against me its my job to make a record of my objection to that ruling. And the judge knows that. And the judge is gonna respect that. And respect me making a record and is not going to think I’m being annoying or argumentative or. As long as I’m not being annoying or argumentative. But there’s no point to doing that because the judge is just doing his or her job. Her job is to manage that cases and to make the best calls that he or she can make, on the spot usually, on various issues. And you just need to have an awful lot of respect for every person in that room doing his or her job the best you can. You don’t interfere with other people doing their job and you don’t take it personally. Their job is not to screw you. Their job is to do their job. Sometimes its not to your liking, you make your record for appeal.

CD: How do judges think about cases?

MCR: Well, different judges are different. But one of the things that I though was invaluable was to figure out where the judge was focused. And sometimes when you’re arguing a case to a judge or presenting a case to a judge you realize that the judge is caught up on some tangent that you don’t think is important. Now you may be wrong. Come to think of it it may turn out that. And you need to turn and focus your attention on that and figure out where the judge is. Not just say your honor that’s not important can we just focus on this. If the judge is focusing on it its important by definition. And either its important because its actuality an important issue in the case or its important because something hasn’t gotten communicated properly and you need to
fix that. And what you want to do is educate the judge to your view of what the important issues are. But the judge is just another individual coming to this case without the same background that you have. So you need to teach the judge about the case and also listen to the judge because the judge may also teach you things about your case. Quite often, I mean they have an extraordinary amount of experience and lawyers who ignore things that a judge is saying are just making a terrible error. But I've seen it happen. I've seen judge Brody dropping broad hints.

Well what about this and lawyers saying oh well no no, this is what we're talking about your honor.

CD: You had said that you also learned how judges talk to each other. How do judges talk to each other?

MCR: Judges talk to each other a lot. For instance, the judges in the eastern district courthouse that's who their peers are. When they get together for judges lunch in a room where law clerks are not allowed to go generally they talk to one another, not so much about their cases but about issues and about members of the bar and the administration of the courts. I mean that's what they do. It's their whole lives. And to think that you can be rude to one judge that it's not going to get around is a really terrible error in judgment.

CD: You. Knowing how comfortable you fell about being a lesbian women, I assume that you were out when you were a clerk for Judge Brody.

MCR: I put it on my resume. I put membership in gay and lesbian law students association on my resume.

CD: Did you. Were there considerations that you weighed in putting it on you resume or was it just natural to put that on your resume like anything else?

MCR: Of course I thought about it. And there wasn't an option for me. It would have been so much worse particularly in a clerkship, which is such an intimate working environment. You spend an entire year with four or five people. Its you, your co- clerks, the court room deputy and the judge, maybe a secretary. That's it. An entire year. And, with judge Brody its not an issue. But even suppose I'd gotten a job with a judge for whom it was an issue and three months into the clerkship somehow I had said or it had become known. I needed to go, my girlfriend was sick or someone in her family died. I needed to go. I'd have a choice between lying, changing the names or dropping a bomb that could disrupt that working relationship. I was no interested in either of those possibilities.

CD: Did you know when you were a clerk, did you know any other clerks that. You'd mentioned that Penn was a very uncomfortable place for some people to be out. Did you? Was that environment? Was the environment in the judge's chambers or kind of in the courthouse in general similar to Penn? Or was it kind of a more open environment?

MCR: I think that in that respect, not in other respects the courthouse in general, and I'm exempting judge Brody and a few other wonderful exemptions, was fairly conservative. I had at the time I was applying for clerkships really an excellent resume. And I got calls from two
judges in the eastern district. I know friends who had much less impressive resumes who got calls from ten to twelve judges in the eastern district and went to a number of interviews. AS it happens, I didn’t get a job with either of the judges who initially interviewed me. One of the reasons is that I interviewed with judge Pollack who I would have loved to work for and he called up one of my professors and it was kind of a large class and the professor didn’t have, I wasn’t in the picture book or something and he couldn’t figure out who went with the name and so he said I don’t know if she’s in the room or not. Instead of saying she’s a very active student. She’s one of the few ones who’s awake at eight o’clock in the morning. She’s always involved in the conversations. And the professor came to me and told me about this when he figured out, when he put the name and the face together. And so he and judge Pollack, both felt, both offered to help me in my search for a clerkship. At this point the standard ones were all taken. I’m not going to turn that down, that offer of help. That was incredibly generous and wonderful that offer of help. At that point Judge Brody was awaiting confirmation and they both thought of her. In the same week they both called me and said Oh, I know somebody who you’d be really, who you’d really fit with. I think you’d really love working with each other. And they asked Judge Brody to interview me and she did. But not until after she’d been confirmed. She didn’t want to jinx the confirmation. At any rate, both because of that and because of a few comments I heard back later, I go the feeling that a number of judges had seen my resume and thought. I think more of them, the opinion they voiced was that they thought I was someone who would make an issue of it because it was on my resume. They didn’t see it as kind of my preemptive thing. But someone who would make an issue of it and that they weren’t interested in. I’ll never know how many otherwise would have been interested in meeting me. But at any rate, the judges knew who I was when I was down there and nobody was ever rude to me or anything. And no judge has ever been rude to me. They’re absolute professionals. And I have the greatest respect for them.

CD: After you were a clerk you worked with the Disabilities Law Project?

MCR: Yes.

CD: How did you decide to apply to work for the Disabilities Law Project?

MCR: My work for the Disabilities Law Project was part of something that is called the public interest fellowship and it in fact was the first year of that program. And the fellowship is a program offered by a number of the larger firms in town. It gives a first year associate the opportunity to postpone the first year at the law firm and go work for a public interest organization. The firm pays you half of your starting salary while you work for the public interest organization so you can pay rent, eat, things like that. And then when you get to the law firm you work for half salary for a year. You basically work off the advance, except maybe you’ve got a bump for another year of seniority and the firm pays for things like money to pay your health insurance when you’re working for the law project and things like that. I had heard that they were talking about this project but I was already putting off my entry into Drinker for one year and I didn’t really have any. I wasn’t really ambitious about doing it. And then I got a call from Frank Fink at Drinker who is someone I had worked with when I did my, I did my second summer at Drinker. And this project was really his brainchild and he was one of the people who helped develop it. And he said it’s the first year of the project and we don’t have
any takers. Don’t you really want to do it. Don’t you really, really want to do it. And I said well sure, I’ll play guinea pig. Let me go around and look. I had decided I didn’t want to go back to the Women’s Law Project. I really wanted to work in the area of disabilities law. It’s always been an interest of mine at least since my first job as a guide for that visually impaired woman. So I talked to the AIDS Law Project and I talked the Disabilities Law Project and the DLP was the palace that had the most opportunities in terms of different things to be done. They also had the most leisure time for training. The AIDS Law Project was just so overworked, I mean there was such a need, but on the other hand, to bring me in they need to train me and give me a desk and commit resources to me. All of which was a little bit in question. Whereas the DLP had a desk and they had time to do training and the resources to devote to that and could. And they were just about to launch into an ADA enforcement project. The ADA was passed in 1990 but had a two year phase in period for some its requirements and a four year phase in for the public accommodations, that is private businesses requirements for accessibility, and that phase-in period was coming to an end. Like, you know, a month and a half before I was to start at the law firm. So I came in on the ground floor of this ADA enforcement initiative, bringing some of the first public accommodations accessibility claims, well anywhere, but certainly the first ones in Pennsylvania. I’m sure there were similar initiatives happening all over the county and we were coordinating with initiatives elsewhere, but this was the big push in Pennsylvania. So it was just a. And I loved the people there and it’s just a fantastic opportunity.

CD: Did you feel that Penn was supportive of your interest in public interest work?

MCR: Yes. I wouldn’t have said the same thing about clinical work. But I thought that Penn tried to provide a lot of opportunities for people who had had interest in civil rights and public interest issues.

CD: Did you feel that there was not enough access to clinical work when you were here?

MCR: Yes. For my taste. My time at Penn they restructured and downsized the Civil Practice Clinic. They changed it in a number of ways but he end result, at least at that time, and I don’t know if its changed since, was that it would accommodate fewer students and there was always a waiting list to get into that class. So I wasn’t particularly supportive of that decision. And we, the students who were in the Civil Practice Clinic asked for an audience with Dean Diver and sat down and had a conversations with him. And one of the things that they did, they hired Professor Lerner at that point and he said what he Bar and the alimony support is prestigious faculty and we need that kind of a focus for that program. And we had an entirely different viewpoint which was I don’t care what the alums are going to support. This is one of the few practical things we get to do her, other then extracurricular activities. So. It’s a different viewpoint.

CD: While working with the DLP, given your past experiences, I assume that you were out.

MCR: Oh, yes.

CD: How did the environment there differ from the environment in the courthouse or the environment in law school?
MCR: Oh. The public interest community is a world unto itself. The Philadelphia public interest community is wonderful and its incredibly tight knit and cooperative and interactive. So for instance the DLP shared office suite with also the Juvenile Law Center and also the Education Law Center or the Education Law Project. And just down the hall was the Support Center for Child Advocates and the Health Law Project and everybody got together and we shared a library and it was wonderfully supportive and absolutely accepting of whoever you were. That was the first time I got to work with other lawyers who were out.

CD: When you were finished working with the DLP and after serving as a clerk, how had your career plans changed?

MCR: Well, the only change. When I graduated from law school I knew I was going to be a firm, knew that I would practice for a while at a firm and then go do public interest work full time. And I think I probably still assumed that when I left the DLP. But after a few months at Drinker I didn’t assume that anymore. Working at the DLP was wonderful, interesting work, truly exceptional lawyers, best in their field and caring human beings. It was all about the client. It wasn’t about the principal or the fame or anything that you might think it could be about. It was all about the clients and about self-determinations. Truly believers in not just sort specific civil rights issue but self-determination for people with disabilities in general, and so am I, but I mean really helped me to develop more support for an broaden that whole idea. It was a great place to work. I wore jeans to work every day unless I had a court appearance or a deposition or something. The hours weren’t long. People were friendly. It was just a great place to work. And I was really afraid when I went to Drinker it would be a terrible let down. Having to wear suits every day and longer hours and not always getting to wear the white hat, doing business disputes and things like that. I was really worried that I was going to be unhappy when I got to Drinker. And I found quite the opposite. Within a month I was more excited about the work that I was doing than I’d ever been in my life because of the variety. The work at the DLP had a common theme, which was reasonable accommodations. There are other themes in disabilities work but that’s what I was doing there and while I’m a true believer in that that idea and that cause I need to do different things. I don’t have that kind of attention span. I like doing lots of different kinds of things. And very soon after I arrived at Drinker I was doing lots of different kinds of things and loving it. And I don’t think I could go back to a single-issue job ever. I couldn’t specialize that much.

CD: Did you choose to go into the areas you work in.

MCR: At Drinker if you’re in the litigation department, unless you work specifically on environmental litigation or on employment and labor matters, you are a general litigator and then people develop more of a specialization depending on the availability of the work and their interests. I’m not particularly interested in specializing, except with respect to class action work. That’s something I’ve always been interested in and I’ve really developed that practice at Drinker.

CD: What about class actions interests you?
MCR: Well from my, my very first civil procedure class at Hastings my civil procedure professor was a lawyer who had spent most of his life in practice and made a good deal of money and then retired to teach law and, among other things, he had done a lot of class action work, particularly as a plaintiff’s lawyer and he was quite frank about the potential for about of the whole class action procedure and mechanism and the manner in which it can be come a machinery for generating attorney’s fees or a machinery for pursuing an attorney’s agenda as opposed to a client’s agenda. Now at the DLP I brought class actions. I’ve worked on both sides, but I have a real sensitivity for the potentials for abuse. It’s a fascinating procedural option. In terms of due process, in terms of the way it works, the way it’s supposed to work, the way it really works, all those things. Its really fascinating to me, so I’ve, While I was working for judge Brody we had an interesting class action case that brought up a lot of issues of how much of it was lawyer driven versus client driven and just all those things combined to make me more interested. And this is just one of the few things the more I learn about it the more I want to be involved in it. Because it’s a procedural specialty as opposed to a substantive specialty I still get the variety. Ever case is different. It’s about different fasts or substantive law. The procedural issues repeat but I still get variety and that essential. I think I have a form of professional ADD. I just can’t do the same thing more than a couple of times.

CD: What was you first experience arguing before a judge like?

MCR: Stood up in person and argued? That would have been one of my cases at the civil practice clinic. A custody case I had.

CD: What was the experience like?

MCR: Oh, it was great. We had a great client. Family law work is difficult cause nobody’s perfect and people are in there saying horrible things about each other. And our client was just perfect. She was pristine. She didn’t put down her son’s father. She was just resisting an effort at harassment. The guy didn’t actually spend that much time with his son. Would let his mother take care of him when he had him for the weekend or what ever, but for whatever reason was pursuing this custody action. And she was perfectly willing for him to have as much time with the boy as he wanted, see, it was just a perfect client. You couldn’t say anything nasty about her. She was a good mom and the guy on the other side was just not as appealing and his lawyer was a real jerk. That was part of what made it so satisfying. To just trounce him. He was really, for instance we went to the hearing and I was the person he’d been dealing with all along and we went out into the hallway and my supervisor was there of course because your supervisor has to be with you when you go to court. And he basically turned his shoulder to me and started talking to her and said I got the papers that your girl sent over, referring to me, and kind of started talking to her about settling the case. And I said excuse me I represent Ms. So and so and you need to talk to me. And he didn’t take that awfully well. He was just very condescending and very pushy and he tried to kind of bully a settlement and when we wouldn’t agree to what he wanted he started sort of threatening to pound us into the pavement kind of thing. Oh wait till the judge finds out this, that and the other thing. None of which is true and none of which he had any evidence of. Drugs and. They have nothing. He was pretty contentious and it was an energetic hearing and then at some point the judge said I think I’ve got an idea of what’s going on here and he took over and he said look you need to spend some more time with your son and
ordered some additional visitation and was not going to change the primary custody arrangement. Just kind of waded in and did some good with... it was a great experience and satisfying that everything went well. I had a hearing a few weeks later where everything went wrong. My client had lied to me. You know, we get into the hearing and there’s all this stuff coming up she’s not told us the truth about... Things about gambling away the marital assets. All sorts of ugly things, so those hearings stand out in enormous contrast in my mind. They were my first two court arguments.

CD: I assume that you’re out at Drinker Biddle.

MCR: Yes.

CD: And in comparing the environment at the DLP and the courthouse and Penn, what is the environment at Drinker Biddle like?

MCR: In general it just doesn’t matter at all. My friends know me then know my partner. They ask how she is. We get together on occasion. I bring her to firm functions. There’s always a stare or two from some older member of the firm who probably hadn’t heard the news. I don’t think they actually send out a memo. No one ever, other than my summer, there was one summer associate who when she found out was very rude to me, other than that no one has ever taken, you know a step back or been rude to me or anything. It’s a great place. You know I don’t mean to pretend everybody is delighted. It’s a big place, there are some very conservative people there and I’m sure some of them don’t approve of my lifestyle personally, but they don’t bring that into our working relationship and that, that’s what is so valuable about the place. From both support staff and lawyers, I don’t need to worry about it interfering with my work and it doesn’t?

CD: Were the issues you considered in coming out at Drinker different from the issues you considered in coming out at the DLP, the courthouse or Penn?

MCR: Well, it was probably an easier decision because there are lots of firms. If one doesn’t work out you go to another one. That certainly isn’t the case with a clerkship. By the way, in my clerkship, where I spent most of my time in the judge’s chambers with my co-clerks and her and her staff, that place was wonderful. That place was a family. Everybody knew me and that was fine. And I suppose at Drinker I had more determination. I didn’t make an issue of it. I made sure it was on the resume so that if that was a problem I’d never be there and actually they were very careful. I heard later that somebody, the summer associate who had been rude to me had said something out of my hearing. She never said anything rude to me, in fact she never spoke to me again once she saw me with my girl friend. But she had said something out my hearing. I didn’t even know about it but there was a meeting. They talked to people about it. How you treat people at Drinker. There was always the expectation there that it has nothing to do with my professional life and its not going to be a problem for me.

CD: Are you considered a sixth year associate now?

MCR: I’m an eighth year associate now.
CD: Do you expect to or hope to make partner?

MCR: I want to. That vote is just about a year away and this is not a point at which I can say I expect to. I think I’m a good fit at Drinker and have had a great career there. You know the feedback is that they’re very pleased with me. But partnership decisions are partnership decisions and on the economics and all sorts of things at the time, but yes, its something I’m going for and am excited about.

CD: How have your career and goals changed?

MCR: Well, when I entered law school I assumed I would spend the bulk of my career sort of in the trenches in terms of public interest work, working in a specialized public interest office. I certainly didn’t expect that I would feel comfortable enough and happy enough at a big law firm like Drinker Biddle and Reath to stay there for this many years, much less to want to become a partner. So I have been pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoy and value the legal community in Philadelphia and my practice. Drinker’s very open to me doing pro bono work and I do a lot of it. And that’s important to me also an they’re very accommodating with that. So I guess when I entered law school I saw one was y of working in the law and I’ve changed my mind about that and see a lot of different ways of working in the law and way s of working toward some of my other goals outside of the law and expect that I probably wouldn’t do the full time public interest thing and accept that perhaps as some sort of sabbatical or break from firm life. But I’m very happy doing what I’m doing at that’s something I would not have expected ten years ago when I was in my first year of law school.

CD: Thank you very much.

MCR: Sure.