RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSEMARY AGRISTA

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This is an interview with Rosemary Agrista. The interview is taking place at 205 Longview Terrace. Are we in Meyersville?

Rosemary Agrista: Yes, we are.

MG: It is very confusing around here.

RA: Well, this is Longhill Township. It's a township and it's made up of smaller little villages, but Meyersville is the hamlet of Longhill Township.

MG: The interview is taking place on Friday, March 13, 2015. The interviewer is Molly Graham. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

RA: I was born May 21st, 1953. The hospital was in Plainfield. It was called Muhlenberg, which is not a hospital anymore. I think it's just maybe like emergency services now. But the family lived in South Plainfield.

MG: Is that where you grew up?

RA: Yes, I grew up in South Plainfield.

MG: Tell me about what South Plainfield was like during the late ‘50s and ‘60s.

RA: South Plainfield was very suburban. It was a blue collar, more immigrant type of neighborhood where I was, because I was on the Piscataway border with Camp Kilmer, which is the campus of Livingston now. Actually, that was a Nike missile base. That was actually ground zero. Then, if you lived on the other side of town, it was closer to Plainfield at the time. That was a little bit more, if you could imagine, metropolitan for the area. But South Plainfield was basically children of parents who emigrated, in my neighborhood, from other countries. My grandparents emigrated from Italy. My mother was born in a house in South Plainfield down the road from where we lived. Two of her older siblings were born in Italy, but the rest of her siblings were born in that house--not the one that we lived in--but a couple blocks away from the house I grew up in, in South Plainfield. We had family at the head of the block, we're in the middle, down the other end of the block was family. It was that type of an era--returning war veterans. Actually, the neighborhood that I was actually born into was a temporary neighborhood; it was for returning war veterans. They actually did temporary housing. I'll never forget when we had to move out. My parents built that house that I grew up in. [I remember] visiting back once with my mother for some reason, and in horror, watching them tear that house apart [laughs]. Not realizing it was a temporary neighborhood. But they did things like that for the World War II vets.

MG: Your father was in the Army.

RA: Yes, my father was in the Army. He was basically a foot soldier, I believe. He started out in Bakersfield, California, then was off to the Schofield Barracks in Hawaii. [He] was on his way home when World War II broke out, and he had to turn around and go back, and that was what happened to him.

MG: Had he met your mother by that point?

RA: I'm not sure. I think so. I think he met my mother while he was at the Schofield Barracks. Probably came home, I imagine, on a visitation. Because then she said they had a code. When she didn't know where he was going to be deployed, he would put that as his middle initial on his return address. So she knew if it was an "A" he was going to Africa, which he ended up in North Africa. He didn't really end up in Normandy or any of those other areas. So yes, I guess so.

MG: What do you know about his military service?

RA: Basically, he enlisted because he wanted to see Hawaii and he did. He basically was an artilleryman. I guess he did artillery. I remember him talking about machine guns. He basically did it just to go see the world.

MG: Was he in Hawaii when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

RA: He just missed it. He was on his way back to Bakersfield. He was in transit.

MG: It was a close call.

RA: Yes, I guess he had a close call. He had other close calls too. At one of the beach landings, he fell off the top of his ship and he fell down to the bottom deck, but on top of other soldiers. [laughter] So, he had a few close calls, yes.

MG: How did the other soldiers fare?

RA: I have no idea. [laughter]

MG: Yikes. What did you mean when you said Camp Kilmer was ground zero?

RA: Well, that was a Nike missile Base. I remember growing up and seeing the dish continually spinning around. I guess at that time if we had to launch missiles, Camp Kilmer was going to be one of the sites. I don't think we would have survived. I don't think the whole area would have survived--Piscataway, Edison, South Plainfield. Then the Livingston College campus, a lot of it was [the location where they held] the prisoners of war from foreign countries. [Editor's Note: Rutgers utilized former prisoner-of-war barracks at nearby Raritan Arsenal (known colloquially as the Raritan Campus) to house students during the GI Bill era of the late 1940s, when housing was in short supply, as well as barracks at Camp Kilmer.]

MG: Can you tell me a little bit more about your neighborhood? Was it mostly Italian immigrants that lived there?

RA: Italian and Polish.

MG: Would the Italian families stick together?

RA: Yes, I think so. I think you had those dividing lines, and it took a while for people to accept one another. But yes, I do believe so. But the church that I went to was a Polish Catholic church, so listening to church services I grew up listening to it in Polish. Now, mind you, my parents did not teach me Italian and they sure did not want to teach me Polish. So, I lived in a

world where very often I could not understand people, what they were talking about. Only if they spoke English.

MG: Just tell me a little bit about the culture and traditions you had in your household. I love interviewing people of Italian heritage because I get jealous of their big family dinners and the meals it sounds like they had.

RA: Sure. Well yes, my grandparents--my mother's parents--lived, again, in the house my mother was born in, a couple blocks away. Then she had siblings that lived on the same street with their families. My grandmother, my gosh, she had about nine children, so we had lots of cousins. So the traditions were always that the holidays were for family, and there were big meals at the holidays. Sunday, there was always a proper Sunday dinner, and then visitations with families afterwards. So for us, it was usually a walk. Other people, some relatives, may have lived in neighboring towns and they would drive over. But things did start to change after the grandparents passed away. But then there was my mother's eldest brother, the one who was born in Italy, then people kind of gravitated there. They had this huge giant oak--I think it was an oak tree or a maple tree in their backyard and everybody gathered around that tree. It was heartbreaking when the tree finally died. It had to be taken off the property, probably around the 1990s. But for a long time, that was the flag--we kind of rallied around that tree, as if that was our gathering point.

MG: Are there ways you still maintain these traditions today? Do you still get together with family regularly?

RA: No. A lot of that has disappeared. It's holidays; you know we still try [to get together with] who's left. Unfortunately, this month I actually lost two relatives.

MG: I am so sorry.

RA: Yes. So the family is dying out. I did discover though, through Facebook, an entire vein of the family in Italy. I did not know when my mother's father--I don't even know if my mother even knew this--immigrated, he left behind a brother, a younger brother. Thanks to Facebook, we have found each other. Now it seems like they got this big family in Italy, and they still keep up the traditions there. Even if it's via Facebook every morning, every evening. It's really interesting.

MG: That is nice. Do you think you'll go over and visit?

RA: I really don't know. We don't know each other. We're basically strangers that have the same traditional last name, although it was my mother's maiden name, but it's not my name. But yes, perhaps.

MG: What do you know about your family history on your father's side?

RA: Well, that's very interesting. His father passed away several months before he was born, and his mother passed away when he was a young teen. So he basically was raised by his stepfather, and his half-siblings were in his family. It took me a long time to realize that the man I called "grandpa" was really not his father. I actually started getting pictures from--he has a

half-sister, who was still living--she's like ninety-one now--and she's finally coming forth with all these photographs. So I do have photographs of his parents and of his grandparents. It took a long time to get them.

MG: Where were they from?

RA: They were somewhere in southern Italy. I'm not really sure. I'm not really sure where they were from. I know my mother's family was out of the area north and I think his family was out of the southern area.

MG: Do you know how they came to settle in New Jersey?

RA: Not really. I think my mother's family, her parents, had come through Ellis Island. But my father's family did not. Apparently, there was a stop in Brooklyn [where] you could have gotten off and not go to Ellis Island. How did they find New Jersey? I really don't know. I understand my mother's father went back several times between Italy and New Jersey before he had the house built, where she was born. They didn't talk much about their parent's past. I don't know if it's that their parents didn't say much, but it was something that I had to go dig for.

MG: What did they tell you about living through The Depression era?

RA: Well my mother, again, she had a lot of siblings, so everybody worked and contributed. They personally did not have a lot of hardship. It was just that things were difficult to buy and to get, and of course you were frugal. I think my father's family had a different experience, because they lived in New York. I'm not sure where. I think my father said Bedford–Stuyvesant. His siblings were younger, so they weren't able to go to work and contribute in the same way my mother's family, her elder sister and brothers, were able to do. But I think that it's an experience that they never forgot.

MG: Do you know how your mother spent the war years?

RA: She spent the war years actually working, and I guess writing letters to my father. But I think they had a lot of local fun. She talked about the movies, and she talked about the blackouts and being silly during the blackouts. On the other hand, she did have brothers that were in the military. They all survived; no one was a casualty.

MG: For the record, what are your father and mother's full names?

RA: My father's name was Dominic Salvatore Agrista. Salvatore was his father. And my mother's name was Mary Marie, and the last name was DiCanto.

MG: What did your father do for a living?

RA: My father was a tool and die maker. He did go to high school in New York, where it was kind of a manual training type of high school. Then he went to the military. Then he tells me he did do night courses someplace--I really don't know where--to have this profession. From there, he worked for a small factory in South Plainfield that then become Mattel Toys. They had a plant in South Plainfield. That's the type of town South Plainfield was; it was not a professional town, it was a factory type of town. Then ultimately, before he retired, he was the plant

supervisor. They had two locations, one was at Camp Kilmer and the other one was on Oak Tree Road in South Plainfield. My mother only went to the eighth grade, and then she went to work in a factory that made pocketbooks. She sewed pocketbooks. She did not go to high school.

MG: What other memories do have from growing up in South Plainfield?

RA: Well, just that it was a close-knit town. For me, when I started school, it was a neighborhood school. All my relatives were around the neighborhood. Even my dog would come and wait in the school yard. My one uncle, one of my mother's brothers, was a policeman, so very often he was in the squad cars in the neighborhood. Another one was a fireman and worked on County Road, so the family was very well known in town. Then later on they had to build a junior high school. Then thereafter, the high school was overcrowded and we were on half-day sessions in South Plainfield High School. I guess it was all these returning veterans and their families that made the whole area grow. We had to go to school half day sessions. I started out high school, it was called staggered sessions. We would start at different times and leave at different times, and ultimately it was completely half days.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about school--your favorite subjects, teachers that stand out to you.

RA: I had a hard time in school when I first started because there was no daycare, there was no preschool, so I had very limited exposure to being away from the family and with other children. Because also, the neighborhood I was in, there was not a lot of young families. It was kind of people who were aging out already, so I had a hard time adjusting when I was in elementary school. I think my favorite topics though were always music; I used to like vocal music and singing, as I still do. I didn't particularly do well until I believe I matured. I had a hard time with all of the different subjects. Math was hard, science was very hard for me in high school. So I guess my favorite topic would've had to have been--in high school and when I look back, it was music. When I look at now television they have *Glee*. We had an outstanding music group, so I kind of put my efforts there. But it was difficult. Again, in high school you would drop a subject every day because there wasn't time for all your subjects, so you had a drop schedule. There were no lunches. There were no study periods. You had to be there early in morning and you had to be out before lunchtime, because here came the other session.

MG: When you started to mature, what subjects did you become more interested in or what skills did you discover you had?

RA: Well, the skills that I discovered I had were music, singing, vocal music. I had a big interest in dance. It was not something my parents fancied for me, but as I got older, I put myself in dance school. I used to save my lunch money and not eat my lunch so I could go pay for a dance lesson. Ultimately, one day, I did own a dance school--it was well after graduating college.

MG: What kind of dancing would you do?

RA: Ballet.

MG: Would you ever go into New York and see ballets or perform ballet?

RA: Oh, yes. I used to go in New York to see ballet. The dance school that I attended would have recitals, and then ultimately that's the school I ended up owning, so I would produce them with the students in my own school. When I was at Rutgers at Livingston, we were able--then, it was a "federation," and it meant that all the classes were open to you. You had to declare your majors at your particular college. Well, I transferred into Livingston. I started out at Union County College, even though I lived in Middlesex; Middlesex College ran out of room. So I ended up going to Union County College. There was an urban campus in Plainfield, I started out there. From there, I was able to go to their main campus in Cranford, and that was a very highly rated, what they called at the time, junior college. Now they call them "county colleges." All the credits did transfer over quite nicely.

MG: To Livingston?

RA: To Livingston. Yes, they did.

MG: I wanted to ask you what it was like being a teenage in the late '60s. It was sort of a time when the world was changing quite a bit.

RA: Oh, yes. Well, it changed mighty, mighty fast. I graduated high school 1971, so it went from being what you would call more preppy to absolute chaos. It was hard on me, too, because I was looking ahead to become someone. I had an older brother, and I would look ahead to see what he was doing, and I would try to follow in his footsteps, but things changed so darn much. For example, on television you grew up watching Patty Duke and *Gidget*. I fancied fashion and so I tried to dress accordingly, and then all of a sudden, here came the hippies. It was [a] very difficult mindset to change to. The class of 1969 in high school, I think, was notorious across the country. That seemed to be when teenagers came into their own and made some, I think, profound changes in culture.

MG: They were notorious for what?

RA: They were notorious, I think, for being the original changers, counter-culture, and then I think the rest followed suit.

MG: Could you maybe describe yourself in 1971?

RA: Yes, in 1971 I was committed already to making changes, positive changes, in culture. I was already committed to the idea of service. The slogan then was, if you came out of the urban league, "Give a damn about your fellow man." I lived through the Watts Riots; the Watts Riots happened in California--Watts, Plainfield, and actually Asbury Park. But of course, I lived through the Plainfield Watts Riots. [Editor's Note: The Plainfield riots, also called the Plainfield Rebellion, occurred from July 14 to July 17, 1967, and resulted in over one hundred arrests, ten gun violence injuries and the death of white police officer John Gleason. Gleason was killed by a mob after shooting a young African-American man on the third day of the crisis. That same day, civilians seized arms from a local munitions factory. The National Guard was then deployed to the city and a truce was negotiated on July 18th.]

MG: For the record, could you explain the event you're referring to?

RA: Well, that was the racial tension that finally erupted. Again, I guess that it started in the West Coast, and then it did spread to the East Coast. So in Plainfield, what happened was is [that] their high school had what was called a tracking system. They had a college track, they had a business track, and they had a lower track. From what I understand--because I did not go to high school there--it was racially divided. So riots broke out in the high school and then it spread into the community, pretty much like what you see in Ferguson now, but on a much larger scale. In fact, I hope Ferguson does not spread like that again. From that, though, it was at the right time I think with the movement, with the Haight-Ashbury culture and the flower power movement and the hippie movement, to join forces. I think that, in a way, it was water that calmed that fire.

MG: Were those movements that you identified with or participated in?

RA: Oh, absolutely. I remember skipping days in high school to go protest the Vietnam War, where we'd have sit-ins. I remember those days. Yes, I certainly did. I belonged to a high school club out of the YCMA that used to be in Plainfield, and from there as well, we got a lot of exposure to different speakers, different experiences, and it was different. Even though the towns were side by side, if you set foot into the town next door, which was Plainfield, it seemed to be moving a lot faster. Whereas in South Plainfield it was still pretty much a laidback community, even though the kids were changing. The parents did not know what to do; they thought we were just all crazy. I'll never forget the day I came home with a very expensive pair of Bass shoes that looked like work boots and my mother started to cry. [laughter] But needless to say, as time went on she did buy a pair herself, but it was a big shock and change for these people, who had perfect hair and perfect clothes and matching jewelry. Then, we all decided that we were all going to dress down and we were going to side with the actual people that were in the trenches. I think it was reflected in attitude and clothing style, and it was a very big change.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about the sit-ins. How they were organized and where they took place?

RA: Well, again, nothing much like that ever did happen in South Plainfield. I don't even know if Piscataway ever did anything. But because Plainfield had a racially divided community, things would happen there. So you would just hear about it, you'd see it on a poster, very interesting. No cellphones, no internet, but words would get out. Then you would just appear there. The sit-ins [that] were about the Vietnam War usually would happen at a municipal building or a city hall. There was a park that bordered South Plainfield and Plainfield, it was called Cedar Brook Park, and every Sunday you would just go there and you would just sit. It would be called the "be-ins" and you would just be there. That's it. You just enjoyed nature, you sat there.

MG: Tell me a little bit more about your brother. What is his name? When was he born? You mentioned earlier following in his footsteps.

RA: His name is Stephen. Stephen Joseph Agrista. When was he born? He was born in 1948. We were almost five years apart, but that path he paved was just like an example to follow--to go to school, to go to college. I'm the first woman in my family that ever went to college. Before me, it was something if women did not drop out of high school and just go into the workforce.

MG: What was that like? Was there extra pressure? How did it make you feel?

RA: Yes, I didn't realize that until very late in life. I just kind of went along with the experiences that I was having and I just kind of followed what the trend was at the time. At the time, the trends in high school were to, of course, stop people from dropping out and to push people into college. Although my high school was not very highly ranked, because we were on split session. Most people went to teacher colleges. At the time, teachers and food store clerks were making the same amount of money. So it was not an idea that had any appeal to me. So, when I say about following footsteps, that's basically what I'm talking about. That was a very big positive change in the community.

MG: Did you see higher education as a form of activism at the time?

RA: No. If anything, we were counterculture to higher education. Although, I do remember going to protests about stopping the cuts to higher ed. It was during a time--now we're talking about college days, even when I was at Union College and ultimately also into Livingston--professors and teachers would also go on the protests. I remember showing up, when I was at Union College one day, to a class and there was a very big sign on the window--"Go to Trenton and protest the cuts." Union College actually did rent the bus for us to go, and we did. It was the first time I got to see a presidential candidate. It was [George] McGovern, and he was there at Trenton. But also at Livingston, we very often--in fact, the first time I ever got chased by a K-9 dog [laughter] was from a protest. I went with a group of people from Livingston and, again, it was to stop the cuts to higher education.

MG: The first time? Were there other times you got chased by K-9's?

RA: No, no. That was it. [laughter] It was interesting. The fact [that] the person I went with actually was a writer for the *Livingston Medium*, the newspaper, which at the time was really quite an active newspaper. It was a forum. It was where people were able to write articles that were counterculture even to Rutgers. Rutgers was always pretty much represented [by the Daily Targum]. The Targum used to represent Rutgers; the Livingston Medium represented the undercurrent.

MG: I wanted to ask if you were seeing younger men from your generation leave for Vietnam, come back from Vietnam, or not come back?

RA: Yes, it was hard to get a date. It was hard to find--there was more girls than there were boys available at the time. Sure, people would go off to Vietnam, and a lot of them used drugs. There was a lot drug addiction. A lot of the addiction happened while they were at Vietnam. Also, they were not very well-welcomed when they came back, and it was because the feeling was [that] there were people who were protesting, they were burning draft cards, people were leaving the country, going to Canada. There was a lot of disrespect for them, because people felt as though--that's being naïve--that they could have done something to stop the actions, by not joining the military, by not honoring the draft card. So, unfortunately.

MG: Speaking of dating, was that something you did in high school? What would you do for fun?

RA: Yes, I would date in high school. Well, this is something that the kids today don't have. We had weekly dances. They were at a local community [building], like a PAL building. The high school itself would have a monthly dance, so dancing to the music of the time was a very big date. Movies were a big date and it was affordable to pick a girl up, I guess, and take her to the movie and take her out for something to eat. Things are so much more expensive now. These kids today in the high schools I don't believe have dances, because they're afraid of insurance issues. This was not something that seemed to be an issue when I was growing up. If you fell down and got hurt, you got up again. It seems like now it's not the case anymore.

MG: What were some of your favorite bands or musicians of the time?

RA: Well, of course I liked a little of the '60s rock groups and, some of them are still around. Led Zeppelin. Then we had Cream. The English--I was part of the English Invasion era. Started with The Beatles, of course. I also loved the Beach Boys; I never gave up my love for the Beach Boys. I've seen Brian Wilson several times in concert. I still won't give up on Brian Wilson.

MG: I think he is on tour again right now.

RA: Okay. I have to go to the website and look. But yes, I used to like Cream. We used to like Jimi Hendrix, The Who.

MG: Were you able to go to some of these concerts?

RA: Yes, I was able to go to a lot of the concerts. There was Convention Hall in Asbury Park [and] that did survive the Watts Riot. Nobody took down Convention Hall. I had a boyfriend that worked there--he went to Monmouth College, and he had worked there at Convention Hall. They use to have the penny arcade where you would play games. He would go walk next door and he would buy tickets. They were also more affordable than they are now. I believe I saw a lot of groups there.

MG: Do any stand out to you, any favorite shows?

RA: Actually, Yes was a standout. They had a fantastic act. Even though they weren't spectacular to watch, they were tight musically; their lights were just always so perfect. They were a standout. Emerson, Lake and Palmer were kind of flamboyant. They would burn things on stage and they would beat up his synthesizer. I don't know how that started. That was a standout. I remember a group [called] Poco--they were loud. I just remember them as being absolutely loud. Black Oak Arkansas, extremely loud. Later on, I started carrying earplugs at concerts, because I realized early on it was not a good thing. [laughter] I remember being at the boardwalk, at Convention Hall in Asbury Park--because my brother did go to Monmouth College, so my parents would go down there to visit him--and the Jefferson Airplane were there. Then when my parents got up to there and they saw everybody sitting cross-legged on the boardwalk--because that was the other thing, you never sat on chairs, you always sat cross-legged on the floor--they wouldn't let me go in. So I remember my senior year, I was having a dream one morning that I was going to enter the stage and sing with them. Gracie Slick wasn't there; it was going to be me. Then my mother woke me up to go to school. [laughter] I guess I never got over not being able to go inside to see that concert. Linda Ronstadt had opened for the

Eagles and no one knew who she was. She would come out to the boardwalk with her cutoff jeans and her pigtails and she would try to at least get some attention to herself by just performing outside in the middle of the day. People were like "Oh, who's that?" "I don't know. She's opening for the Eagles. We're here to see the Eagles." Well, it was Linda Ronstadt. Loggins and Messina--one day my boyfriend at the time, his older brother was dating a woman who had a family that owned record stores. For some reason--I don't remember how--one of her brothers had a job detail to watch Loggins and Messina's dog. So I saw him up on top with this dog, and it was an Airedale. I grew up having an Airedale, so I was like "Oh, my goodness." I started waving to him while I was walking on the beach, and I walked over and fell over two men on a blanket. Well, it was them. I stepped on them, I stepped on Loggins and Messina. Bruce Springsteen used to like to play at the beach before he was very popular. Again, one night I was staying, my brother had an apartment there. He would let me and a friend of mine come down from time to time. He drove a cab while he was at Monmouth College, and he said "Okay. I'm going to pick you up at this spot at seven o'clock. You better be there." You know older brothers. I looked and I had time, so I said, "Let me go one last walk on the beach." There, again, I stepped on and walked over somebody sitting on the beach playing his guitar at the water's edge. It was Bruce Springsteen. So, I've had some interesting moments with some the music and the people who made the music at the time.

MG: And you have a good conversation starter if you ever run into those guys again.

RA: Well, I don't think that's ever going to happen, but they probably will look at me like, "Yeah, you and everybody else." [laughter]

MG: Is there we're missing from growing up, or family life, that we didn't cover?

RA: Well, just that my mother was very close to her family. The idea would come up to relocate and move, and she could never leave the family. That it made it hard on me growing up because it took a while--in fact, not until I got into Livingston College did I realize that I was still in that mindset. So it was an eye-opener, even to leave high school. Going into the junior college was still pretty much the same, but Livingston was so different. That's when I realized how my upbringing was. My upbringing was very much, I thought I had the world at my feet. I really did not. When you stay stuck in a culture where you don't want to venture out. I think we're seeing that happening again today. I think that's why there are some many people who are--I hate to say this, but it looks like the hate groups are coming back again.

MG: You said something about earlier how we didn't have cellphones, but you were able to mobilize. Today, we have so many means of communication, but very little mobilization.

RA: Right. Everybody wants to do everything by themselves. It's even hard if you walk down this street, you don't even know if people really do ever come out of their houses. I see very few children outside today. We were always congregated outside, and I guess that's how we did things then. It might of have been like the "back porch mentality," but for us it worked. Growing up, I would have to say, the idea of women working and having a career, it was like "Well, you work until you find yourself a husband." My mother's mantra was every time I would want to do something or learn something, "Why? You're only going to get married." Like my brother would play an instrument--he played accordion, which was very big not only in the

Italian culture, but I think in the ‘50s and early ‘60s, that seemed to be an instrument that was popular. He was like "Why? You're only going to get married." I was like, "Well, I want to go to dance school." "Why? You're only going to get married." So yes, I think that was part of the growing up. But on the other hand, too, we had a lot of support. There was always somebody home. It was very rare if you saw a child who had a working mother. Usually it was a hardship; that was the only reason a mother worked. I know a lot of people today say the kids are better off leaving home early and going to preschool all day, and I really don’t know about that. I think that we were able to stand on our own and I think that's why we were such an era of mobility, is because we had learned how to be independent and be an independent thinker. I think the kids today are highly skilled, but they're not independent thinkers, they're not critical thinkers. So I think growing up we did learn to become critical thinkers.

MG: Would your mother have discouraged you if you wanted to go away for college?

RA: Yes, that was a very big problem. So yes, she did.

MG: When she would say you were just going to get married, how did that make you feel?

RA: Made me feel like I was never going to get married. And I didn’t, it took me [a while]. I was thirty-six when I got married. I kind of took that to heart. It's like, “Well, that’s what you think.” [laughter]

MG: Well, let's talk a little bit about Livingston [College]. [It] was founded in 1969. Were you aware when it was in its early days?

RA: Yes, of course. Yes. Everybody was aware, only because my neighborhood was so close to it. I was in the town next door.

MG: What did you think about Livingston? Did you think, “That might be a place I'm interested in going, sort of this experimental, free-thinking [place]?”

RA: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, I didn’t even apply anywhere else. If I didn’t get in there, I don’t know what I was going to do. I guess I would have [gone] back another year to the county college.

MG: So you had attended some school before going to Livingston?

RA: Yes. Union County College, because Middlesex College was full. I didn’t do well with the SATs. That was the other thing--we were allowed to take the SATs once. You can take SATs over and over again now. You're allowed to do the PSATs twice, but you had one shot at SATs, and I was not a good test taker. In in my experience in high school, no sooner you sat down and got settled into a class you had to move on, because that's how crowded school was. It took me a long time to settle into that. When I first started going to school and the classes were regular time, it was difficult. When I got into Livingston, I went into the Urban Communications and Journalism Department, which basically was the curriculum for news writing and cable television. There was lot of studio courses and classes were long. They were more than regular credits, but you had a longer period of time, and it was hard. I was like "Oh my goodness, why

am I still here? Why am I not moving on to a different room, a different topic, a different course?"

MG: Tell me what drew you to that subject, that major?

RA: I was always interested in writing. That was another little passion that I had growing up, was writing. I used to like to write creatively. Then I guess I got interested in video, cameras, television, so I chose that curriculum from the beginning. It was very interesting it was a fantastic place to be.

MG: Maybe for someone who is listening to this interview, can you talk a little bit about the early mission of Livingston College?

RA: Again, historically, if you look at it--and this is just my opinion--it had to come out of the urban, inner-city situation that New Jersey found itself in. You had colleges for people who wanted to be teachers, for those who wanted to be engineers. Of course, there was always liberal arts, but I think out of the whole era after the Watts riots, it became known that there was a lack of equality in education. I do believe that Livingston was the inner-city college; it was the answer to this situation. However, the people who formed Livingston said, "Okay. Sure. But we are going to make this place spectacular, we are going to make it special, and we're going to bring in the best." It was. It absolutely was. At the time, it was looked down upon. People thought it was a substandard school--"How could Rutgers do this? These people don't belong in college." But I think it made its mark and it absolutely has permeated the rest of the university now. I think a lot of the programs that were started at Livingston now have changed the course of some of the curriculums in the university. The people who taught there were not only top-notch in their field, they were renowned in their field. So the early days of Livingston were experimental, but so was any other school that decided to have co-ed dorms, who decided to have pass/fail as opposed to the point-4 system, who brought in topics that were not necessarily traditional structured type of courses, but were able to make it so.

MG: Can you talk about some of the faculty at Livingston? Who they were, who were some of the experts?

RA: I can talk about the ones that I had, because again, I stayed three years there but I didn't start there as freshman. But Jerry Aumente, who is now professor emeritus to the dean, was the head of the Urban Communications and Journalism department. I believe he might have come out of the news writing field or the newspaper field, but brought in also the video program and it was hands-on. Rutgers had a Communications program--I think Todd Hunt was the director at the time--but it was basically theory, it was theoretical. So, we had Jerry Aumente. Barry Ortman was another fantastic professor that was at Livingston in that department; he was really very good with videography, doing video in the field. Let me tell you how heavy those cameras were--they were not meant for women, they were very heavy in the front, the lenses were very heavy, it was hard to hold the battery packs, but we did it anyway. We had to prove ourselves all the time, all the time. The Jazz Department at Livingston it was renowned; you had Larry Ridley, who is still out there teaching. He teaches at Julliard now; he does special courses. He was top-notch in the field, he's still top-notch in his field. Kenny Barron. We had had so many jazz greats that were teachers there. I was not in that instrumental program, but they would be

outside at the quad. Livingston had a big square quad. I have a lot of pictures. I have a lot of photographs of the original campus. There they would play any jazz great you could think of because they knew all these people. They'd say "Why don't you come on down to Rutgers and do a master class or come and play with us outside? Let the students see you, let the students hear you." So, that was an outstanding department. The photography department, Nathan Forbes--he was of the Forbes family--was the photography teacher. He was outstanding. People were quirky, you know, he was one of the quirkier ones. But he was worth being there because if you wanted to learn photography, who else other than someone from the Forbes family? Who else was there? I understand, there was a woman--I can't think of her name--but she was an anthropologist, and she did a lot of work in Java. I wish I could think of her name--but she was also very well known in her field. I hear people, I'm on the executive board of the Livingston College Alumni Association, when you hear about people talk about their departments and who headed them and who was there, these people have become famous. Michael Greenberg, now a very famous urbanologist, he taught the courses there because we were in the Urban Communications and Journalism department, we had had to take [courses from the] Urban Studies department. I took a course with him, it was called "senior seminar." You had to go out in the field, you had to do papers. He was teaching at Livingston at the time.

MG: You also mention on your survey someone who was pretty influential, Master Joe?

RA: Yes, Master Joe, the Tai Chi Ch'uan. Yes, he would be outside. No one knew what it was. He did not speak English at all, and he was doing the basics of what's very popular now, tai chi ch'uan. Ultimately, when I had my dance school, I ended up having a tai chi ch'uan class and it grew into an actual tai chi ch'uan school. The man that I had teaching with me, who I ultimately studied with for almost thirty years, T.C. Chao, actually helped Master Joe when he came to the country. I believe Master Joe started with T.C. Chao, with tai chi ch'uan. Master Joe, I believe, was brought to the medical school to teach. But he would be out in the quad [and] nobody knew what he was doing, and they would have drummers drumming, and he would just drill people, over and over again. Ultimately, I didn't know what it was either. I would watch, but I did not realize [until] later in life how close I would become with him, with T.C. Chao. I had no idea I'd ever have tai chi ch'uan school or be a tai chi ch'uan player or instructor, and that started at Livingston as well. He's renowned in the field. Up in Warwick New York, he had a place called the Tai Chi Farm, and people from all over the country and people from China would come, and teach workshops there over the summer. We would go there, we would take classes, and sometimes I would go with my instructor, I would help teach the classes there. So, it was a very different atmosphere at Livingston. Pete Seeger would show up, and even people from the Socialist Party would come and speak. It was just an open door. What I remember most, of course, are the Hare Krishnas. The Hare Krishnas were always in the Great Hall jumping up and down, chanting, playing their drums, giving out food. I had an internship from Jerry Aumente's program--we might have been the first interns. We went to WOR-TV, so I got my internship there. I actually interned with the woman who did the Romper Room show [laughter] at the television studio. Then they would give us a tour of the AM radio, the FM radio station. It was at 1440 Broadway. I would go outside, and there would be the same Hare Krishnas, [but] now they're on a truck, and I said, "Are these people following me?" But it was just the way that culture was there. If the people were in Manhattan they happened to also appear at Livingston, no matter what they were doing. If they were playing jazz, if they were the Hare Krishnas, if

they were doing a public speaking engagement, very often they would make a stop at Livingston. And I think it had to do with the faculty that was there.

MG: Who is Livingston College named after?

RA: Governor Livingston.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about him and who he was?

RA: Not really, no. [laughter] No, not really. I don't know much about the history of that. I think it's something you could find on Wikipedia.

MG: I didn't know if his philosophy sort of mirrored or inspired those of the college.

RA: I really don't know; that's a very interesting question.

MG: Who are some of the early leaders involved in founding Livingston in the first place?

RA: Well, again, not being there from 1969, I really don't know how it came about, how the university decided to do it. I think it was at a time when New Jersey seemed to have money to build colleges, because Ramapo College, Stockton State College, and Livingston College were all built at the same time. I guess Rutgers University, being the state university, said "Well, there's funding to build a school." So I guess it came about basically financially from that perspective, but how it came about to be what it evolved into or how it started out, whose idea it was to make it unique, whose idea it was to a make it an inner-city campus, I don't really know.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the student body?

RA: People who attended Livingston were people from, again, the inner-city. So you had African Americans, you had Hispanic Americans, the Latino Americans. Then you had other people who chose Livingston instead of going to another type of college. That was unique, because also you had this campus all unto itself. At the time, all of the Rutgers schools had their own campuses. It was a new campus; it was always under construction. It's nothing new there. You go there now and there's dirt mounds, "Oh, okay. This again." But it was a new campus, with a new idea, a new concept, and I think it was what the student at the time was looking for. Rutgers was traditional. I actually did not live on the Livingston campus. I actually rented a room in a house that was off of College Avenue. So it was more traditional. For me, I guess, I was a little bit more--well, I couldn't get a place at Livingston because I transferred in. It was so overcrowded at the time [that] even [at] Rutgers, the dorms had lotteries. If you didn't get a number in the lottery, you did not get a room. I didn't enter as a freshman, so that I meant I was not entitled to housing off the bat. But Livingston was a school all unto itself. It had its own campus, of course, it had its own facilities, it had its football team, it had its own baseball team, it had its own basketball team, it had its own cheerleaders. It seemed to have mirrored curriculums that were already present in Rutgers, so whatever curriculum Rutgers College had, Livingston also had, with the exceptions of some the obvious things like the Engineering School or Cook College with the agriculture. So that made it unique too, because when the students from the Communications program at Rutgers College came over to Livingston, they didn't have any hands-on classes there even though it was considered a Communications program. I would

think you would find differences even in the History department that was Livingston as opposed to the History department that was at Douglass or the History Department that was at Rutgers College. If you chose Livingston, you chose it because it was not the usual middle-of-the-road type of education.

MG: Were you able to take courses at the other colleges?

RA: Yes, that's why it was federated. Yes. But you couldn't really major there. Or if you did, your diploma said "Livingston."

MG: Right. You said earlier that some of the courses from Livingston has influenced the courses today at Rutgers, and I was curious which ones those were?

RA: Well, again, the School of Communications, for sure. Now you have the Library Science School, which is basically a lot of technical education. Most likely some of the Women Studies, probably what was called "Black History," now probably is more of a cultural African American type of study. The Latino--now you've got a big Latino Center right on College Avenue.

MG: With so many different people from so many different backgrounds, was your mind sort of opened up to new cultures or political thoughts, things like that?

RA: Oh definitely. Most definitely, yes. Yes to both.

MG: Do you have any examples?

RA: Well, again, culturally, if you ate at the Livingston College dining facility, it was very interesting [because] we also were part of a meat boycott growing up. I don't know what happened with the meat industry, but there was a meat boycott. Well, Livingston had meat. The other dining halls were kind of meatless. But if you ate at Livingston, I guess you have more of an influence with maybe the different taste of the cultures, whereas if you went to the main dining halls you probably just got your standard cafeteria fair. However [in] Douglass' dining hall they did have silverware. I remember the girls use them to jam the windows open. They would put knives and forks, and then they would bend because they were silver. The other thing is we had pubs on college campus because eighteen was legal drinking. So if you went to the pub at Livingston the music was disco, Latino. If you went to the pub at Rutgers [College], it was whatever was [the] popular music of the day. If you went to the pub at Douglass, they were folk singers and it was quieter. You had no choice but to taste and see different things. There was a lot of people making music. If you went to the Rutgers campus, they had ethnic houses there. I think they had a Latino house there, at Rutgers, where people of that background were able to live together. They would come out with their conga drums and they would play. If you went next door, maybe closer to what's considered Bishop Beach now, there used to be two guys that would harmonize, and they would sing with their guitars, and they were quite good. Again, at Livingston, there was African dance. I think there was the Liberated Gospel Choir; they still meet today. They still practice together today. You had other types of events that were unique. So you had this wonderful [environment]; you had the world at your feet at the time if you went to school there. Because the university allowed it too, though. It was wonderful the way you were able to go through all the campuses. I had courses at all three campuses. I took so many dance courses at Douglass. They couldn't give me a dance major because I was just missing one

course, and it was kinesiology. Otherwise, I would've had [a dance major]. I graduated with almost forty extra credits that I could not matriculate into anything, but so what? Because later in life I ended up becoming and owning a small dance school. I also worked at the time, too. I worked for AT&T and it turned into Lucent, but I had this part-time passion business. Because I was able to join the music groups, I sang with university choir. I sang with the original Queens Chorale. It was called the Rutgers Women's Chorale, now it's called the Queens Chorale. When I was at university choir, we were the concert choir for Carnegie Hall. So every time Carnegie Hall needed a vocal choir, it was us. So I got to sing with major orchestras under major conductors, Michael Tilson Thomas, the Royal Canadian Orchestra. I just missed Leopold Stokowski; he was the year before I joined. We were at Carnegie Hall very often. New Jersey Symphony would take us on the road with them.

MG: That is so exciting.

RA: It was very exciting, yes.

MG: Where on the road would you go?

RA: Well, New Jersey Symphony stuck to New Jersey, but we were always on the bus or I was always on the subway trying to get to Carnegie Hall. Marilyn Horne's husband was one of the conductors of the New Jersey Symphony. One day, we were doing Beethoven's 9th and it was at the old gym--because the new gym did not exist on the Livingston campus. For some reason, a photographer--I think he was probably from the *Star Ledger*--got too close to him at his podium and he started snapping pictures. He stopped the entire symphony to chase out the photographer, and then all of the musicians from the New Jersey Symphony got up and started yelling at the photographer. [laughter] These crazy things used to happen. If you had a performance in the gym, if it was during the diving team's practice, you would hear the whistles and the diving boards. Carnegie Hall had the subway which [would] shake underneath and you would hear the Fifth Avenue subway come through on Carnegie Hall. That gives you a lot of experience with overcoming [obstacles]. Let me just say that. Those were things to overcome, and to learn to be professional. Because of the federation, I was able to join these things. It wasn't closed to me because I went to Livingston College

MG: Did have you a favorite place on campus that you liked to be, or a certain spot that you did most of your studying?

RA: Yes, sure. At Livingston, just being out at the quad every day because of all the activity. There was so much to see. I used to study, of course, a lot at the room that I had rented in this house on Huntington Street in New Brunswick. I used to like to go to the Alexander Library because they had those cages. [laughter] They had cages in the center--they were for studying, they had a desk. That's a very old library. I don't know if they're still there. I used to like to lock myself in the cage to study. That's when I wanted to get really serious and knew I couldn't have any distractions. But I basically studied in the room I had rented.

MG: Was that important, to find a structured environment in an unstructured curriculum?

RA: Yes, that's right. It was, yes. Because [it's] going back to how fast things changed again. They did. It was like one day life was this way growing up, and then the next day, and within the

next year, things were very different. I used to try and find that happy medium, but it seems like when you want to go back to your roots, how you learn to do things, it had to be a little more structured for me.

MG: I know that the high school I went to in Maine was built in the 1970s under this philosophy of open learning and so there were no walls or doors, but the time I got there they put up curtains and dividers. I am curious why these kinds of schools don't last.

RA: Well, that's very interesting, because as I told you, South Plainfield High School needed a new high school, of course. Besides being on split sessions, the ceiling was falling down, so they built an open space school after I graduated. In fact, my 1971 graduating class was the last class to graduate South Plainfield, the old high school. So [in] September of 1971, the new open space school did open. They hired an open space principal that came out of Upstate New York. South Plainfield High School had the same problem; the students could not learn that way, and it cost the taxpayers a lot of money, ultimately. They had to end up putting walls up, as well. Same thing as what happened to you in Maine. That's very interesting to hear that that happened to you.

MG: What's good about a school like that? What are the benefits?

RA: Of what?

MG: Of an open learning, experimental, sort of school.

RA: I really don't know. Like I said when I was in [high school], we didn't do it. Then when I was in Livingston, we had walls. We were always in the basement. With the studio courses particularly, we were always in the basement of Tillet Hall or something like that where the courses were. Then the other classrooms were regular self-contained classrooms, so I really don't know what the benefit could be of sitting in a fishbowl like that, when somebody is doing math while you're in history and you're side by side. I mean, I don't get it.

MG: What about the kind of school that Livingston was?

RA: Livingston was not [an] open space concept school, but it was multi-ethnic. So, it's the world. You learned and you had tools to go out into the world, to go out immediately, to be successful.

MG: When Rutgers enveloped Livingston and Livingston became a campus of Rutgers University, what do you think was lost?

RA: I think opportunities for people who, like me, came out of a disadvantaged school system. I think that, unfortunately, is lost. Some people's argument is college is not for everybody. Well, that's not true. Of course it's for everybody. Maybe not everybody is going to matriculate to a certain major, but if you're there and you're taking courses, it's for you. So I think that was lost. The critical thinking that happened on Livingston, I think that did permeate the rest of the university, I really do. The living experiences that we had together, I think that also permeated the university. But I think really, what may have been lost, again, is the fact that some people

are not able to take the straight path from point A to point B to get to college. You can get there from different avenues and Livingston had those avenues.

MG: It must of have been nice to have the flexibility and agency to design a course curriculum and find the teachers that met your learning styles.

RA: Yes, that was very nice to do. Yes, it was.

MG: When you go to Livingston today or when you participate on the board activities, what characteristics of the college still remain today?

RA: Well, the fact that they're always digging. [laughter] There's always a mound of dirt somewhere. Other than that, not a lot. I'm a little concerned that one day--I mean, new buildings have to be made. Let's face it. This is the State University of New Jersey. You have to make way for new buildings. Those square buildings were just put up in hurry. But I don't think there was a historical site survey to be able to save historic sites. Now what would be a historic site? Well, a lot of the handball court walls were always decorated with murals, and they always expressed what people were thinking at the time. There was a big one that said, "We support Wounded Knee," and that was the uprising out on the South Dakota reservation. It was a beautiful mural that was there. There may have been other murals that had to do with thoughts about the culture at the time. I think Tillet Hall used to have original maps made by the original urban planning students; there was a very big urban planning department. Now you've got the big campus, you've got the Bloustein School. Well, the original school was at Livingston, and I think those maps might have been painted over. I think that, unfortunately, the actually physical history has disappeared. Not to say that the buildings should not have been improved upon--yeah, of course--but I think that's gone.

MG: I think this project, this oral history project was designed preserve the institutional history, which we're also at risk of losing in a few generations. So I am hoping you could talk about anything else you remember from the three years you spent at Livingston, [or] memories that stand out to you.

RA: Well, again, the memories that stand out to me were how the professors were always communicating with us. We felt equal. They were people who just knew more about what it is we wanted to do; they were mentors. So that stands out. Again, whatever was happening in culture, happened at Livingston. It was a microcosm of the rest of society. It was all happening on the campus at Livingston. Now, is that gone? Yes, I think might be gone today.

MG: We've talked a little bit about what took place in the classroom and the kind of courses you took, but what would you do for fun on the weekends?

RA: Well, on weekends I went home, because I lived so close. In fact, the whole campus--even the Rutgers campus--used to empty out on weekends. There were no fraternities or frats at the time; they were looked down upon. I see there's been a resurgence of that again. So that was basically it. I think a lot of people went home.

MG: Were you at Livingston when the Newark riots and the Puerto Rican student movement took place?

RA: Are we talking about the Watts riots we talked about before? That happened in like '68?

MG: There was the Newark riot in 1967, and later, in 1974, the Puerto Rican Student movement riots.

RA: No, I don't think was there for that.

MG: On your survey you said that you took classes at the School of Social Work.

RA: Yes, at the graduate level I did. Yes. That was at Rutgers, though.

MG: That was after you graduated from Livingston.

RA: Yes.

MG: What do you remember about graduation at Livingston?

RA: Oh, graduation at Livingston. Well, again, it was optional cap and gown. We had graduated out on the great lawn. Larry Ridley's quartet played us "Pomp and Circumstance." Our speaker at the time--I can't remember who he was, but we graduated during Jimmy Carter's recession, and he told us that we were graduating in very difficult economic times and how difficult it would be to find a job. He was so right. I also just remember--I've got pictures. I took my own pictures--I had the camera around my neck--of the graduation march. My department head Jerry Aumente walked in front of me, because I was "Agrista." I was always behind him. He had his motorcycle boots on underneath his cap and gown and his jeans. He pretty much looked like Jerry Garcia at the time. I've seen him recently and I've told him about that. But basically, that was it. We had our own graduation, and it was unique to the culture at Livingston. Who gets to march into Larry Ridley's quartet playing "Pomp and Circumstance" at a graduation?

MG: What did you expect to do or hope to do after you graduated?

RA: Well, I had that internship with WOR-TV and they kept me on through that summer. In fact, I had to get graduation day off, because when the field engineers would go to the Mets baseball stadium, Shea Stadium, they still needed help, but I was only in the video library. So I had hoped to stay in the television field, but then I realized I was having a hard time with the New York commute every day and being inside Manhattan. So I had hoped I would be able to do something with cable TV. It did not work out. I was a young woman in man's world; I was one of the first. Talk about the glass ceiling, there it was. Then with the recession that hit, it was very difficult to get any work at all. No one told me when I was in Livingston College--and I think it's happening even today, in media schools that are college-based, not ones that are institutes--about the labor unions. Without a labor union sponsor and being a member a labor union, there was no work for you in television. So that dream never really actualized itself for me, so I ended up during the whole recession just working little jobs that I could get. Ultimately, I did end up at AT&T, but even there, all the women were supposed to go into the typing pool. It didn't matter what your degree was, which was hard to believe. They built this huge facility in Basking Ridge; it was the world headquarters. But I went in later on as a temp from a temp agency, so I ended up not having to go through the typing pool, but I ended up doing other type

of administrative work. They did value their engineers, so by that time if you were a woman that graduated [from] Steven's Institute of Technology, you had a job there. [In] Bell Labs you had to have master's degree.

MG: So what were you doing with AT&T?

RA: Actually, it was administrative work that had to do with tracking down large equipment for--it was called "4ESS switching"--for the larger telephone providers of the world, all the switching equipment that would actually allow communication to happen. After their divestiture, they didn't know where their equipment was. So, it was an effort to try and find where in the world all these huge data switches ended up. So I ended up on the administrative end of that, and then it turned to Lucent Technologies and the rest is history. Lucent Technology did not survive; it got bought out. But in 2001, they had asked a bunch of us if we would just take an early retirement and leave.

MG: Is that what you did?

RA: I did. I probably in hindsight should not have done that, but I did at the time.

MG: One thing I forgot to ask you about, from Livingston, is about your experience as a student peer counselor.

RA: Rutgers had a peer counseling center called "56 Place." Yes, I was a member of 56 Place. It was a student drop-in center, peer counseling, telephone intervention. I started that from when I was in high school--telephone intervention crisis centers became popular. So, I actually started in my later years in high school, and then the institution was still strong in the country. Again, it came out of that, "care about your fellow man" [idea]. I think the counseling center now is now at 56 College Avenue so we had a student peer counseling center there.

MG: What kind of crises were people experiencing?

RA: The usual crises that people experience living away from home, fitting in, anything at the time that was causing stress. There [were] one or two serious incidents with people on top of roofs of dormitories. I think that happens every year.

MG: People feeling suicidal?

RA: Yes, sure.

MG: What made you a good peer counselor?

RA: Probably the original training I had got when I was a peer counselor in high school, and then the college itself. The 56 Place provided excellent training from the Psychology Department. We were highly trained.

MG: Do you remember who did the training?

RA: I remember his first name [but] I can't tell you his last name. His first name was Jack, and I can't tell you his last name. I don't remember, no, but he was out of the Psychology department. He was a graduate student.

MG: Before we talk more about your career and life after Livingston, is there anything else we're missing or anything else you want to talk about, in terms of Livingston?

RA: Just that it was the most profound experience. To this day, has still influenced me and still has prepared me for the rest of my life and what was to come.

MG: In what ways today do you draw on your Livingston experience?

RA: Well, again, besides the profession, just the diversity and the critical thinking, the self-reliance, and the independence, and the high expectations. Very, very high expectations were placed on us, especially in our department. We actually were doing video tapes for the New Jersey Project for the Humanities, and mistakes were not an option. You just had to step up immediately. I think we were pushed to do that, too, because maybe we were considered the stepchild of the university.

MG: I think that is sort of an unfortunate misconception of Livingston and other schools like it, that because it's seemingly loosey-goosey, there aren't these high expectations.

RA: Right, or because somebody didn't score in the top percentile with the SATs, as well.

MG: When did Livingston become part of Rutgers University?

RA: Well, the idea to centralize--actually, it was happening while I was there. It really was, because there were already protests going on. I think the last graduating class of Livingston College was within the last few years. Was it 2009? 2008 or 2009 might have been the last graduating class of Livingston College.

MG: Who was the dean while you attended?

RA: Who was the dean when I attended? Let me think. You know I'd have to look it up. I don't remember.

MG: How did you feel when Livingston College became centralized?

RA: Became part of Rutgers?

MG: Yes.

RA: Well, I knew that, again, there would be a lot of loss across the board for some students who would not be able to get into Rutgers, maybe not be able to get into college. I also knew that it was a sign of the times though, because there's a lot of homogenization that's going on now. People are not so distinctly different now, [not] wanting to be identified as being different now as they were then. I can't remember who the dean was, but actually my year [which] was 1976 did not publish a yearbook.

MG: They did not publish a yearbook.

RA: No.

MG: How come?

RA: I don't know. So our pictures are in the 1977 yearbook.

MG: You had talked earlier in the interview about connecting with family via Facebook. Have you done the same with people you attended Livingston with?

RA: Livingston College Alumni Association has a Facebook website, but I actually have not, no. One night we had an event on campus--it was a legacy program and it was for the Communications Department. One person did show up that I did attend school with.

MG: Is there anything else about Livingston that we should cover or I haven't asked you about?

RA: Just that the yearbooks do not tell the story.

MG: What do you mean?

RA: The yearbooks, if you look at them online, there are pictures of certain moments in time, but it does not tell Livingston's story. Not at all.

MG: What is missing?

RA: I think, again, it's the timeline that's missing, but it's also [that] it was such a diverse culture. It's just not captured. You cannot imagine the diversity that was there.

MG: When did AT&T become Lucent Technologies?

RA: That was 1996.

MG: When you were thirty-six, you got married. I'm curious how you met your husband and how you spent those years from graduating until then.

RA: Well, I graduated 1976. Again, after no longer having the job with RKO General for WOR-TV, I spent a lot of time job-hunting. It was tough; again, Carter's recession, we had the hostages in Iran, the country was stuck economically, there was another housing market debacle. So I would work small jobs. Friends of mine who also were community activists worked in these type of organizations and said, "You know what? We're going to start this program. It's going to be for mothers who need to work and they need to have a place for kids to stay after school." Well, I worked summer day camps for the Plainfield YMCA, and then from there, they had Title 20 programs, which I would work while home on semester break for child care. But I was made the director of the first after school program in the state of New Jersey. It was at a little school in Bridgewater; the town was called Finderne. Little tiny mountain school, the Finderne School. So I did the after school program that was there. I also tried starting a business, again from this friend of mine who did the training with the crises intervention center and the hotlines. We were going to try to provide training workshops, because this was still a very big institution in New Jersey. Mental health centers had crises intervention centers, and communities did. So we tried that for a while. It didn't go very far, although we had some work.

But basically, I did that after school program. Then from there, I actually got into a school in Montclair, which is defunct now. It was for multi-handicap children, and they were deaf. I worked a few years there and learned a lot. You learn an awful lot about a population of people who are usually shunned and you're not exposed to.

MG: I'm curious about that, what schools like that looked like before the Americans with Disabilities Act.

RA: They were usually privately run, and then the local school boards would pay for these children because they could not be kept inside of their own school system. Whoever owned the schools, of course, set the standards for their education.

MG: Do any of these students stand out to you? I spent my early years doing a lot of babysitting and as a nanny, and I still always wonder how those kids are doing and think really fondly of those jobs I had.

RA: Oh, of course I do. Sometimes, especially with all the years I spent with the Plainfield Y Camp, I'll see a name and a face, and I'll say, "Oh, I think I had that person. I think I was that person's counselor." Yes. When I had my own little small dance school, the same thing. I went to mail a letter last year, and the woman who drives the postal truck pulls up to me and starts talking to me and knows who I am. I looked her and she said, "You don't know who I am, do you?" I had her daughter when she was in my dance school. But these multi-handicap children, you just don't know what happens to them. You don't even know if they're still alive. A lot of them were wards of the state.

MG: When did you have your dance school?

RA: I had my dance school from approximately 1980 up until about 1999.

MG: It sounds like a lot of your work overlapped with each other, that you had multiple jobs.

RA: I had multiple jobs. The school was always a part-time endeavor, Saturdays and after work. It was not a big school. I'm that type of a business person, but it was just a passion that I had. Then the tai chi class with T.C. Chao started from the dance school. I had my own interest in tai chi, and the woman who literally gave me the dance school--because I was her student--adopted children from Hong Kong, and they were searching for their roots. So they found T.C. Chao, they found him as a tai chi teacher. I brought him in just for me, and a class grew out of that. That's when I found out this connection with Master Joe with Livingston College.

MG: Tell me a little about tai chi. I've never done it before.

RA: Well, it's Chinese traditions and a martial art. A lot of people look at it and think it's a dance-like exercise form. It's truly a martial art form. I still keep it up today, I still have a teacher today. So if you wanted to learn tai chi ch'uan, it depends upon where you would study it. Because now it's also being used for people who have arthritis, and that's a completely different set of exercises, a different type of intention.

MG: Are you able to say why you worked so much? Was it because these jobs were part time, or did you just enjoy everything?

RA: No, I was always in a pickle for money. But I always wanted to do something that I enjoyed. I mean, it's hard, even today. I still work today, but it's still hard to make the kind of money that is needed to live in New Jersey. New Jersey is very expensive to live in and every now and then, you hit on something that you really do enjoy. That whole concept of being in service--Livingston, if you went to Livingston College, you made a commitment to service and I haven't let go of that. If I'm doing work that is not related to service, I'll do something else that is related to service. Now I work for a doctor of natural medicine, and it's nice. I'm always passionate about natural medicine and we help as many people as we possibly can. But, again, it's hard for me to ever imagine that I would have ever have been on Wall Street. I don't think Livingston College when I was there--of course that's changed--we all know who some of the famous graduates now are from Livingston. But during my days, the early years, if you wanted to be on Wall Street you didn't go to school there. You would have been eaten alive. [laughter] You wanted to make your contribution to the world. So I guess I have never let go of that.

MG: When did you start learning about natural healing and medicine?

RA: Well, it was something I was always interested in. My family was always wary of doctors, but natural healing and medicine happened when I was a member of an organization called the "Association for Humanistic Psychology." We were the center of the human potential movement. It's funny, because I used to see signs up about it at the gym at Rutgers--I never knew what in the world it was--or inside a Student Center. The organization still exists today, but it's pretty much academic today. But it was a big huge community; it was the beginning of the human potential movement. It was, again, very much like Livingston, very open to experimentation. I learned a lot about natural medicine by being a member of that community. I was also the state chapter president for a good many years. I was one of the conference organizers--these were all volunteer jobs, again, but we used to organize huge conferences in Canada, at Princeton University, in Philadelphia.

MG: What is the human potential movement?

RA: Well, what was it? It's not what it is today. It was self-actualization. It grew out of--for lack of a better word--more of the natural movement that happened back in the '70s, getting back to nature, dropping the facades. That was also very prevalent when I was growing up; we would hear the phrase "plastic people." So the human potential movement was about self-actualization. Everybody is kind of coming down to a common denominator.

MG: Even literally, with the plastic surgery.

RA: Well, that's true. So here's one of the shocks [from] the first time I went back to Rutgers. Once I left school, I didn't go back for thirty years. Never set foot on the campus. Thirty years go by; I go back. It happened to do with my mother becoming ill and realizing I could no longer travel far from home for a while. So I said, "All right. What else can I do? Okay. Let me go see what's going on at the college campus." My husband likes football, so I say "Alright, we'll go to a football game." I was in total shock when I saw the marching band. I saw the

cheerleaders, and I said, "Oh, my goodness. These young women are really very pretty." Then I went to a homecoming, and I started to look around at the people there, and it was so completely different. A lot their images today are exactly what we fought against. We didn't want to look like that, we didn't want to wear the makeup, we didn't want to do the hair, we wanted to be called women, we didn't want the wear the high heels. But I think their mindsets are different, though. For us, it was to break the mindset, we had to break the physical image. But I think young woman today can go back to looking the way that they feel like they want to look, but still not be stuck in the mindset. So it's very interesting. We worked from the inside-out, but for us it meant total change, physically as well as the mindset. So when you look at all this plastic surgery today, I think that there is a group of people out there that are like that. It's true. But I would hope that the young women today don't feel as though they've got to do that. I think if you want to be in a certain kind of business--and it seems like the entertainment industry is becoming a big business--I think that people are going to do that. That must mean that people are looking up to them as a model, and so that's a little scary.

MG: This is an aside, but reality TV doesn't really reflect reality.

RA: Well, the culture's more surreal today, if that's what you're thinking. I'm thinking the same thing. It's a surreal culture today. The United States government no longer represents the people, it no longer reflects the people. Congress no longer makes people happy, but they don't represent their constituency any longer. So the country is becoming divided in that way. People talk about it being compartmentalized, [and] maybe this is what they mean. Where we were more homogenized, we were a movement, so human potential was a movement.

MG: What is the name of the doctor's office you work for now?

RA: It's the Natural Path, in Watchung, NJ. She's Dr. Nikki Conte. She actually started out at Robert Wood Johnson, but in her last year decided she wanted to switch to natural medicine. She went to Bastyr in Seattle, which is a premiere college of natural medicine. New Jersey doesn't like natural medicine though; we're a pharmaceutical state.

MG: Yes, there is a strong partnership between the pharmaceutical companies and the state.

RA: Yes, there is. Education, too.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about some success stories that have out of Dr. Conte's office?

RA: It's good for chronic conditions where you could lessen using a medication. Not to say that it's going to cure you if you have a chronic condition. My own mother, at the age eighty-five, she was finally diagnosed with her issue which was [that] she had a congenital heart defect, which no one knew about. So the supplementation--especially with the elders, because let's face it, your systems break down and you no longer make the essentials--were able to help her to maintain her health. She lived to be ninety-one, with pancreatic cancer on top of it, too. So, it can improve your health, especially with a chronic condition, but it's not to say that if you really needed medication that it could replace that or make any cures. I think this is a lot of the reason why so many people misunderstand natural medicine. But the problem with the pharmaceuticals and the state of New Jersey is there's a lot of disposable income being spent on supplementation. They can't get their arms around it; they'd have to retool their entire factories to be able to

produce the supplements, and then they don't cost a lot of money. Hopefully, it doesn't happen, because there's a big movement in Europe, it's called "Codex." Codex is the name of a particular type kind of standard -- like for example, this country knows ISO, I-S-O. When we were at Lucent we had to be ISO-compliant, because they were manufacturing and then we had processing, so we had to be compliant with that. So ISO [Codex] is a type of movement like that, that's happening in Europe, and if it happens in New Jersey and pharmaceuticals grab hold of that, you will end up paying two hundred dollars for a bottle of twenty-dollar fish oil. That would be the co-pay, and the dosage would be minimal. So it's becoming, unfortunately, industrialized. It's a sign of the times; it's pretty upsetting. It seems like the country wants to legislate health now, too. It's no longer becoming a personal choice, it's becoming legislation. We're headed for some scary times with that.

MG: What's your position in the office?

RA: Office manager.

MG: I was curious how you met your husband.

RA: My husband came into my tai chi school. T.C. Chao was the teacher; I never taught the class. Apparently, he signed up and then never showed up for classes, so T.C. Chao asked me to call him. I said "Why don't you call him?" "No you call him, ask him why he's not coming to class." I said, "All right." So, I called him. I had no idea who he was. His name was Arthur McDonald. I [said], "I'm calling for the teacher. He wants to know why you're not coming to class," and then he started to come to class again. We were going to take a few students to look at another school in New York. This other school had a different technique of teaching, so I wanted them to see it. My husband--he wasn't my husband at the time--but he showed up to come to look at the school in New York. He had offered to drive because he was a New Yorker, and he says "Well, why don't I just drive?" I said, "Fine. You drive." I had someone else with me. That's how I got to know him.

MG: Maybe tell me a little bit about him and how he became someone you married.

RA: Well, my husband Arthur McDonald [was] born October 25th, 1945. There's an eight-year difference. He's eight years older than I am. I met him through my school. Like I said, I wasn't teaching the class, [but] I was a member of the class. We had hired T.C. Chao to be our teacher. It was interesting, because on this trip to see the school in Manhattan, I sat in the front seat--there were other people sitting in the back seat--and we came upon a toll, and I handed him the money for the toll. He took the money out of the palm of my hand, and when he touched the center of my hand, something very interesting happened. It was like all the voices in my head calmed down. So it was like we had this energetic connection. After that, he started coming to class more, and we started going out on little outings and dating. Within three weeks of our dating, he asked me if I wanted to go to Maryland and get married. I said, "Are you out of your mind?" Then his mother had also taken ill. She was entering a nursing home, and he had gotten saddled down with a lot of her expenses so that [delayed] our marriage for three years. But that's how I came about to marry him. So when I got married, I got married in that Polish church I told you [about that] was in our Italian neighborhood. The priest at the time gave a little kudo to the tai chi teacher who there at the service for bringing us together. He stood up and he took his bow.

[laughter] It was funny. He served in the Navy. Actually, he had left school. He was living in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn is where his family was from. He had left school. His father passed away. He didn't do so well with that, being a teenager, so his mother gave him the choice to either straighten up or go into the Navy. So he went into the Navy, and he ended up working on an air strip, never set foot on a ship. He was stationed in Savannah, Georgia, and then he was in Morocco. He had earned then dual equivalency diplomas from being in the Navy, and then after he left the Navy, he was in the reserves. On the G.I. Bill, he went to Brooklyn College. I didn't know him at the time, of course.

MG: What was he doing for work when you met him?

RA: He always worked for the metals industry, where they broker metals to industry as opposed to--not metals you would go to a jeweler. So he was working for a place called Conklin Brass. It was in Brooklyn at the time. He was commuting, he had moved to New Jersey. He's still in the metals industry today. He does the same the same type of work. They broker metals to the construction industries and different industries that use metals for whatever.

MG: When did you come to this part of New Jersey?

RA: When we got married, which was 1989. Because my building was at Liberty Corner, which is nearby the AT&T building, and he was also working in an area in Fairfield. So we had just thought, "Well, let's look around here."

MG: Anything else about your married life, memories you want to share?

RA: Well, again, we met in the tai chi class. And again, it was something that I had been very interested in, [that] I got exposed to in Livingston College. Going back to the Rutgers football games has been a very big part of our relationship and it brought me back to the college. Married life has been a lot of fun, and we're still going forward. I think he liked the fact that I was from a different era than he was. I think he liked that angst in me. He entered the military at such a young age, he was already on a military base the day JFK was assassinated. I was a young elementary school child at home. So we have a gap between us, but our politics were not very far apart. We have very [similar] type of views about culture. I think that is something very interesting about our marriage. It is interesting that different eras do coincide, they really do. They're not always opposite of each other, because history it's a circle.

MG: Was it a trickery transition going from being single and independent to being married?

RA: Oh yes, it was very hard. That's why I never dropped my name. Being at the age of thirty-six and being married. First of all, AT&T had a lot of McDonalds. Then there were other reasons that had to do with an ex-wife and credit history, things like that, but it was very difficult to become married at the age of thirty-six. Yes, it sure was. I had a job, I had the dance school, I was certainly self-sufficient and self-thinking. I got married because I wanted to be married, not because I had to. So, it is. Some days I feel like, "Why did I do this?" [laughter] You say to yourself, "I did this, why?" You sit down and you got to remind yourself. But yes, that's completely different. It wasn't like my mother said, "Don't bother doing this, that or the other thing because you're only going to married." What she forgot to say is, "and you're going to get married."

MG: Did going back to Rutgers with your husband reacquaint you with the college again? Is that how you got involved in the board?

RA: Yes, it was a class reunion weekend and there was a luncheon at the Rutgers Club for the Livingston College Alumni Association. I walked in, and I guess because I showed up--I don't know. [laughter] It was Marty Siederer, I guess--how does he pronounce his name? "Siederer," I guess.

MG: I would have to go back to the record.

RA: Poor Marty. I just murdered his name.

MG: We can get it right on the transcript.

RA: But he asked me if I would consider being a board member. Let's face it, it is the youngest college of Rutgers, and the Alumni Association is the youngest alumni association of the college. The college only lasted about forty years, so you have to go about things differently. You can't draw back on hundreds of years of history to find board members. You have to find people that you identify with and that you recognize as people who can get things done.

MG: Why was it important for you to be involved in the board this way, or in the Livingston Alumni Association?

RA: Because of my love for the whole experience. It took me a long time to realize it, because when you graduate school you want to leave in a cloud of dust. You know, you've had it. Then other things happened. It's not like I didn't have anything else interesting in my life happening to me. I did. I did a lot of very interesting things. But again, realizing I was going to have to stay close to home with an ailing parent, I said, "What should I do now?" I said, "Let me go back. Let me take a look at this again." That's how I became involved.

MG: What things on the board have you seen change, or just notable moments in your involvement?

RA: We sponsor the career networking night along with the career center, and Rutgers Alumni Association. The original idea was for graduating seniors to come and speak to alumni about their experiences with their first job and their first interview. Now it's anybody that wants to come, any student. We get freshman all the way up to people who are graduating or have just graduated. So the very first one or second one--I'm not sure which one I was present for--was at the Livingston Student Center. It was one of the older buildings, it was probably the old Great Hall, and it was set up with round tables and two alumni per table to students. Well, I was dumbfounded; I couldn't even contribute, because I couldn't believe the curriculum changes. This one student said, "Well, I have a quadruple major," and this other man who probably graduated around my era looked at me and said, "They can do that?" I said, "I don't know. I guess so." That has changed a lot. The people are coming to us and telling us they have triple majors. It's like, "Really?" [laughter] That has been quite an eye-opener. Why to be a member of the board is, again, to preserve Livingston's legacy, and to also give back to the university, because it did give me so much. But the number one reason is to preserve Livingston's legacy.

MG: What do you hope people who access these interviews learn from them about Livingston?

RA: I hope they learn about the history, and I hope they have a window into who we were, the type of people we were, what our experiences were. I hope it's educational.

MG: What else are we missing about your life, your experience at Livingston College? I know we went through your career pretty quickly, so if there's anything you wanted to go back to and discuss.

RA: I think, career-wise, like I said, I chose something that was difficult for a woman at the time. Nobody told us, "When you get out into the world, maybe you can't really do this" because the attitude was [that] you have to try to do it, and you have to do it. You have to succeed. But that was difficult, so sometimes I feel like I turned my back on the career. Maybe I should have given it another chance. But at the time--and it was told to us--a lot of the creative side to television went out to Northern California. I did not relocate to Northern California, nor did I try to. In New York it was still pretty much very technical. Anything that was creative was already pre-taped and premade in California, and was just brought into New York via technology. You had news shows, and you had a couple of occasional live shows. So that was a disappointment. The cable television, it was difficult to get into. They were not interested in us. They didn't want anything to do with me. They had basically one or two people who did news. Everything else was rebroadcast television shows. So already the media and television industry had changed by the time I graduated in 1976. So I kind of feel like I missed the eight ball on that, and I wasn't creative enough to make my own opportunities somewhere. So that was disappointing. I think though now, going forth, it's more congruent for people, the education and the opportunities that are available. But the rest of it, I mean the little things that I did for fun, really turned out to enrich the rest of my life. The music, the tai chi ch'uan, the learning how to interact with different people, multi-ethnic communities, it's made my life so much more interesting and so much more livable. You can't put a price on that. You can't give a degree for that and you can't put a price on that.

MG: Who else should I talk to about Livingston's history?

RA: Are you going to talk to any of the professors?

MG: Yes.

RA: You should take to Jerry Aumente, for sure. If you want to speak to Larry Ridley, I am still in touch with him. He was head of the Jazz Studies department. I think you should talk to Larry Ridley, because he had a lot to do with the atmosphere and culture that was there. Leroy Haines, who is still available, you need to speak to him. He's been there from the beginning; I don't think he ever left. [laughter] I think his original suitcase is probably still there from when he was a student. I think you should talk to those people. If I could think of anyone else, I'll be glad to email you. Definitely do not miss out on Jerry Aumente, do not miss out on Larry Ridley. I'll email you Larry Ridley's email.

MG: That would be great. I know that Leroy Haines is on my list, too. Well, if I listen back to this and have further questions, could I schedule a second session with you? Or if you think of things you'd like to add to the record, don't hesitate to get in touch.

RA: Okay. I'm pretty dry for now.

MG: Well, Rosemary, thank you so much for meeting with me. This is really a treat. Thank you.

RA: Oh, my pleasure. I hope our project comes to fruition.

MG: I think it will.

RA: It's going to take time, it's going to morph into different things, but I hope these interviews are put to good use.

MG: Yes. Always the big first step is to conduct the actual interviews, and then the second big step is making them available. Well, thanks again. I'll turn this off.

[Tape Paused]

MG: So we are back on. There was just something you wanted to add.

RA: Yes, I wanted to add that because of having to study Urban Studies and being in the Urban Communications department with Michael Greenberg, I am now active in my community with master plan reviews, interpreting master plans, but on the activism side. We're here to preserve the environment and to ward off developments, so I have become a valuable asset, again, thanks to the Urban Studies department at Livingston and to Michael Greenberg. I think it's very important.

MG: I agree. It must be extra tricky in state like New Jersey, where urban development seems like a powerful force.

RA: It is. We are the most densely populated state, as you can tell. That's why there's all the development on Livingston campus, and there's going to be redevelopment on the New Brunswick campus, because have the population. It's still up-and-coming; there's no letup in the amount of people coming into the state, but on the other hand, we are here also to preserve our environment and not to destroy it. Again, thanks to Michael Greenberg, his courses. Sometimes he would have people come in and talk about conservation. It made an impression. I'm able to at least to contribute in that way and still be active and still be an activist.

MG: Are there certain parks or buildings that you've been able to specifically preserve?

RA: Yes, right down here. As you notice, we are a hamlet. We are this little tiny village around this little circle. There's a piece of property that's pretty famous. It was called Archie's Resale. In fact, he made the center of the Land's End Christmas catalog about ten years ago. He had an ice skate exchange back from the 1920s. Unfortunately, the property was also what you would call kind of a junk yard. If you didn't want something, he would take it, and maybe somebody would come by and want to buy it from him. He looked like Santa Claus--he had a long white beard and long white hair, and he would play Santa Clause at the tree lighting. He would have his own deer come in on a sleigh. So when he passed away, the family sold the property. A very greedy person--and I say a person because he's not a land developer, he's actually an architect--but he has bought this property. It's only a little bit more than an acre, and he keeps wanting to

build, and make these huge, huge proposals. His original proposal was to destroy the entire downtown area, bring in this eco-village with a couple hundred units of housing, tear down the old white Meyersville church that's in the center of town, tear the Meyersville Circle, level the restaurant. It was outrageous. I was able to help with other members of the community with master planning, and to change ordinances and make it so that this type of development would not be possible. Now along comes other members of planning boards--this is unfortunate in township government, because you don't have a mayor that's elected; they're appointed. That's the problem with township government. But there are people who come along in these in new roles as committee members of township boards, which are planning boards or township committee, again, wanting to placate and push through development. We just did it again. It was a six year battle we just finally won against this particular piece of property. I've been able to access the library at Rutgers, over at the School of Urban Planning, to be able to also support our particular arguments for different case studies and different ordinances, especially in a hamlet zone. So, I just wanted to add that, that even though I wasn't an urban studies major, the idea that we were part of the Urban Studies department has paid me back many times over.

MG: Good. It sounds like you're paying it forward to the state and the community.

RA: Well, certainly the local community, where I live.

MG: Well, that's a good thing to add. Thank you so much.

RA: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Meghan Valdes - 5/26/2016
Reviewed by Molly Graham - 10/2/2016
Reviewed by Rosemary Agrista 3/25/2017