



EAST-WEST CENTER
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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Lyn Flanigan Interview Narrative

4-10-2009 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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Lyn (Anzai) Flanigan

4/10/2009 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

I'm one of the early East-West Center grantees. I was born in Paoli, Indiana, which is a small town in Southern Indiana. Second of two children, and when it came my turn to go away to college, I wanted to go someplace far away and different, and I went from Indiana to a women's college on the West Coast, actually. Mills College, in the Bay Area. And it was at Mills College that I started taking what they called "Non-Western Studies." Courses in Asian history, Asian sociology and religion.

I commuted over to Berkeley to take Japanese language courses, and I did a summer program in Japan with the Experiment in International Living, which is a program similar to the American Field Studies program. I lived with a family in Kanazawa. And it was actually Mills in the Bay Area that, sort of, opened my eyes to a world much bigger than a small town in Southern Indiana, where there was no ethnic diversity, very little religious diversity.

In my small town, there was one Japanese-American man, married to a woman from that town. And there was one African-American family. Everyone else was Caucasian. So, going to college in an area that was very ethnically diverse really was a big change for me. And a wonderful change.

Leaving the Midwest

I guess I must have been curious, or I wouldn't have gone from the Midwest, against my parents' hopes, you know -- to go to college far away. They had encouraged me to go to a very small liberal arts college a hundred miles from where I lived, where my father had

gone to college. And that would've, sort of, carried on the status quo, and -- I said, "Well, I think I'll go all the way to California." So, there must have been something there, striking out for different places, although I didn't recognize it at the time. (laughs) It was fun. But it was somewhat sheltered, because Mills was a women's college. You know, I didn't just go straight to Berkeley, which was, you know, a much more open society. However, this was the '60s and there was a lot of protest over the Vietnam War and social unrest on campuses but we were still on a women's campus. We didn't "act out" but we had discussion and dissent.

Life at EWC

Impact on UH, Mid- '60s

And so after Mills, I came straight to Hawai'i as an East-West Center grantee to do a master's degree in Asian Studies. And I've been here ever since.

I was looking for programs to do a master's degree in Asian Studies and return to Japan. And I just wanted to come to Hawai'i. Mills College had information in the guidance program. This was 1965. The Center had three or four years to start getting information out, and the college knew about the East-West Center. The whole concept of the East-West Center sounded wonderful.

When the East-West Center started, the East-West Center did wonderful things for the graduate program at the University of Hawai'i. When I came, the Asian Studies Program existed, but most of the students were from EWC.

The Center had a lot of graduate students, and we were pretty much providing students for several of the University programs. Many of the students in Asian Studies were on East-West Center grants, and many of the students in economics and

linguistics – a lot of departments were just full of East-West Center students.

Student Life as a Grantee

Well, I went to the beach a lot (laughs). We were all involved in lots of things. I'm sure there were over 600 student grantees. So it was a really, really lively place. And one of the liveliest places within the Center was the cafeteria downstairs at Jefferson Hall. I think, as you talk to grantees from the '60s and '70s -- we can't understand how people get together and really get to know each other without having that common cafeteria area. But Jefferson Hall was the meeting place -- downstairs in the cafeteria, and upstairs, in what is now the Imin Center, was a casual lounge area with all the mailboxes. And those were the meeting places.

Graduate school is the time in people's lives when many find their life partners. So it's not unusual that East-West Center students were falling in love and getting married. The interesting part was all these inter-cultural marriages, cross-cultural marriages. My husband was a resident assistant in Hale Manoa.

There was an association [*for grantees or participants*]. There was a lot more staff involvement in the student activities, because there were so many students.

Staff coordinated a lot of activities including the international fair, the cultural night, orientation programs and picnics.

The [*most memorable thing was the*] excitement of getting to know a lot of different people. I'm sure living in the dormitory now is quite similar to living in the dormitory then. We were segregated -- women were in Hale Kuahine [*residence hall for women at the time*] and the men were in Hale Manoa [*residence hall for men*]. And there were just so many diverse interests, ages, backgrounds and different areas of study. There were

smelly things from the ocean in buckets in some lounge areas, because that was part of peoples' study if they were in oceanography or marine sciences.

Perhaps the negatives kind of disappear after a while. I'm sure we grumbled about things, but I can't remember anything that was drastically a problem.

Field Studies

Field studies were pretty much part of your grant at that time. And we were busy planning our field study opportunity from the time that we first came, so I went to Japan to study language because I hadn't had the opportunity to study Japanese in depth before. The college I went to didn't offer it. I had commuted to Berkeley to take Beginning Japanese for one year, so I was studying Japanese here, and went to Japan for six months to concentrate on Japanese studies, which was wonderful. I loved living in Japan.

And then I came back to graduate, and not long after I finished my grant -- I'm trying to think -- I worked for Japan Airlines for a while, and then I spent a couple of years at the EWC as the head resident in Hale Kuahine. After that, because my husband was working for the [U.S. government's] General Accounting Office and this involved travelling and working in Asia, I travelled with him. We were in Japan for awhile and Bangkok for several months. And then back in Japan.

EWC Program Officer

When I came home I started working again at the East-West Center. And I worked at the Center for about 12 years, as a program officer for degree students. With Sumi Makey and Rose Nakamura, yes -- it was a wonderful time. Orientation, helping students through the University, helping them plan, and make contacts and arrangements for their field studies, and sometimes advising them through the woes of the dissertation. And

families would come, and so then you're hoping you can help them get families settled. And romances would come. You know, every now and then, you're trying to hold hands with people, and advise them. (laughs) And that may be my most memorable period at the Center, because I was relatively young, my children were born during this period in time, we were the same age as a lot of the students who brought their families over.

Friendships with Students

We had students and their families over to our home a lot. And I distinctly remember my children as they grew into toddlers, playing with their friends from Indonesia and Afghanistan and all over. And I know one time my parents came to visit from Indiana, and they were just sort of amazed at all this diversity. Friends from Afghanistan left their little boy with us overnight, while they went to the hospital for the second child to be born -- and the kids were playing with a toy cash register, and they were saying, "Let's use Indonesian money, no, Afghan money, no, let's use Chinese money."

I could see that my parents were just amazed that these children were so young, and they were so aware of different cultures, and different kinds of money. They were playing at a very elementary level, but it brought back to me the exposure that children of East-West Center staff and students were getting indirectly from the East-West Center experience. During the student days, you're always worried about your studies. And you're always worried about your dissertation, and your field study and you've got a certain amount of pressure on you. I don't think I had quite that pressure as a staff person, and I was more able to be a hostess, and enjoy the relationships during the years that I was on the staff. I lived very close to campus and we had students over often. We had lots of potlucks at my house. And the students really enjoyed that because at that time we didn't have all

the kitchens in the dormitory like now. So they liked the opportunity to be in homes where they could get in a kitchen and cook a little bit.

Students in '60s and '70s

Now I know that the student program is large again. Four hundred to 500 students. But I think -- when I was here, and even when I came as a student, we weren't as sophisticated as the East-West Center students are now.

We were younger, as a whole. There were undergraduate students from the Asia Pacific area to take English as a second language, who maybe had not traveled outside of their home country. There was a junior year program that brought in undergraduate U.S. students. And many of the graduate students were straight out of college. A lot of the students I meet now have a lot of experience when they come to the Center. On the whole they're more worldly and have more experience. We were more naïve in the '60s and '70s, because we hadn't had those opportunities to travel and study abroad.

Institutional Transitions

Introduction of the Institutes

We were always jumping, as staff are now. I mean, there are always new programs, new seminars, you go through orientation, you've got another one coming, you've got a program, you've got another orientation... The institutes were developed. The Center is constantly busy and changing.

And we moved into institutes organized around areas of research: cultural learning, communication, population, food, technology development institutes. And there was some discomfort organizing people into subject matter institutes.

There would be fantastic students and research staff -- who fit the East-West Center, but

their research didn't quite fit an institute. And so -- there were growing pains.

And staff, like me, were here when we had a wide-open degree student program with students in all different programs. "Bring them here, give them the exposure, work with other people, live at the East-West Center --" And that would be good.

Then we moved to concentrated subject areas. And to some extent, it excluded the social studies. For example, comparative literature majors didn't have a home, but had been a natural fit at the East-West Center. And so there was some friction.

Law School

Things just kind of happen, as you go on. I was taking graduate courses in education but I was also interested in EWC's Law of the Sea program. So I entered law school and continued to work at the Center the whole time I was going to law school.

And I managed to work -- probably, on an annual basis, three-quarter time. I would cut back my hours a little bit during the semester. And then as soon as I finished exams, I'd return fulltime for the vacation and the summer period. And I concentrated in Law of the Sea. So then I came back to work at the Center and thought, "Well, now I'll specialize in Law of the Sea."

Right about the time I was going to law school, countries around the world were negotiating a treaty that would allow access to resources in the ocean. The concept was that all countries, even landlocked countries, would have access to ocean resources and those resources would be shared on some basis. It's a fascinating concept, and of course, very idealistic -- but controversial and difficult to negotiate. That was an area that was ripe at that time -- there was a Law of the Sea Institute, and the University was kind of leading the scholarly approach to that. And the law school had classes and seminars in

that area. We had staff at the East-West Center -- I believe the director of the Law of the Sea Institute was a joint appointee at the University and East-West Center -- so I thought, "Oh, this'll be great, I'll come back to the Center, I'll specialize in this area."

But then, after a year, I thought, "Maybe I should go out and see what practicing law is about." I had an opportunity to go clerk for one of the local federal judges, and at that point, I had put so much into going to law school and passing the bar, I thought, "I really need to go try this."

So I did. I weaned myself from the East-West Center, which had been my home in Hawai'i ever since I came here. And then I developed in my legal profession, which has been interesting -- but certainly not the same, as far as personal satisfaction, as the relationships at the East-West Center.

Life after EWC

Board of Governors

About 10 years later, I was asked to be a member of the Board of Governors, and I was so happy. I was delighted to come back. I served on the Board of Governors for nine years. It was a very challenging time for the Center, because we had lost much of our federal funding -- we had been a darling of Congress during the so-called "Fulbright Cold War Era" while Senator Fulbright was in Congress. When I came on the Board, we had been cut back so far, we were wondering if the East-West Center was going to survive, to be very candid. I think at that point, the Hawai'i appointees became very strong within the Board because we recognized the importance of the Center.

Strengthening Alumni Ties

We worked to bring the EWC alumni into the Board activities. There had been this

period when the Center leadership didn't recognize the important role that alumni could play with the Center.

And so we reached out and asked the chair of the Alumni Association to serve as a Board member. And so Amy Agbayani came on the Board. Governor Ariyoshi chaired the Board. We hired a new president -- Charles Morrison. We worked to rejuvenate student programs because the Center had moved far into research. We redefined the focus.

And with stronger Board and staff leadership, and certainly support from Senator Inouye, things began to look a little better. Confidence built in the Center and its continued role. We just felt it was a really good time at the Center. After my three terms, I went off the Board, and since then, I've been working with the Alumni Association.

[Flanigan is asked why she thought the importance of the alumni hadn't been acknowledged earlier.]

I think there was some concern as the Center started changing from, basically a grant-giving institution as it was in the '60s, into more of a research institute and the student population fell. Really fell. And there was much more of a concentration on research programs. The alumni group is very much dominated by degree students. It's the degree students who lived here, and were here for extended period of times, who have, in general, been the strongest alumni. And there was a philosophical disagreement as to where the Center was going, and what the Center was doing.

[Flanigan is asked about the percentage of alumni on the EWC Board of Governors.]

You know, I don't know. Let me see -- Puongpun *[Sananikone]* may be the only alumni on the Board right now.

Plus the chair of the Alumni Association serves as an ex-officio member of the Board.

But Puongpun is not only on the Board, but he's the chair of the Board now.

Impact of EWC

On Career, On Perspectives

I think there must have been some amount of receptivity on my part, in that I was able to make friends across ethnic and cultural lines. It's certainly affected my life. My friends are East-West Center people, and I'm aware of what's happening in other parts of the world, and I know, even in my current job, which is as Executive Director of the Hawaii Bar Association, the EWC influence comes in.

We recognize the benefit of relationships with legal groups in other countries, we have an international law section, and we've coordinated with groups in Japan and Australia and other countries on friendship agreements and programs. We've hosted some of these groups, and paid reciprocal visits.

Personally, there's a greater awareness of what's happening in Asia and the Pacific that, I think, would be very different for me if I had stayed in the Midwest, gone to school in the Midwest. Living here -- you know, your friendships and world focus just broaden.

Communication is one of the biggest issues that I struggle with in my daytime job. You know, communicating with all of the lawyers in Hawai'i. And trying to tell them the different programs we have, and ask them what they want. Communication is a difficult problem, and it's complicated by different cultural aspects. But it's critical to recognize core values and deal with each other with respect, recognizing difference and the inter-relatedness of all of our cultures.

I mean, I was hearing something on the news just yesterday, that the world sort of sat back and said, "Well, this economic problem is a U.S. problem," and within a month or

two, everyone realized there's no such thing now as a local problem anymore. And with that realization, I think, the East-West Center has a bigger role to play. Or at least continues to play an important role. Recognizing that we're so interrelated -- which, I don't think was as recognized when the Center started.

We're trying to do this within the Alumni Association -- reaching out to our alumni in all of the different regions, and having them help with the communication efforts to our alumni and to potential students, and to the communities at-large in those areas.

EWC's Mission

I think the expression of it [*the mission*] has changed over the years. But the basic concept of developing relationships by bringing people together is still there. We've expressed it in so many different ways. We've talked about bringing students together, because they're the future leaders who will bring the world together. And then it was bringing researchers together. And then it was, "You need to develop communities, and work on different community levels." And now I see, the mission is stated, "Forming leaders and informing leaders." Now it's "Collaboration. Expertise. Leadership."

And I know there's been a focus recently on leadership and development of leadership. The Center is doing different leadership programs. But again, it's the same thing -- it's bringing people together, around different focuses, around different subject areas, knowing that out of this will be lasting, positive relationships.

Ties that Last

At the orientation for the new students last fall, I said they're all here to study and do research, and they're very nervous about that. But I would hope that they all realize that this is a period in their lives when they have a wonderful opportunity to develop

relationships which will last a lifetime. Because those will be the people that you go back to. The people you grow with and especially, the people you share this EWC/Hawai'i experience with. Everybody comes here to get the degree and further their studies and professions but the personal friendship relationship is so very much an important part of what the Center has to offer.

EWC's 50th Anniversary

You know, as I look at my friends and my relationships now, most of them are my East-West Center friends. And part of that is because of the experiences we share. And we can laugh about our cultural differences, and joke about them, and it's fun, because it adds a lot to the relationship. Most of us are still hanging around the East-West Center, this many years later, involved in many ways. (laughs) And we'll all be here next year, for the golden jubilee.

We're working hard to contact alumni, and find all of these alumni that we've "lost" over the years. The 50th anniversary gives us the reason to do that -- and to try to draw as many people back into the fold as we can.

The staff, of course, as well as the alumni, are working on a whole year of events for the golden jubilee. But the alumni, specifically, are working hard on the conference that will be held over the 4th of July weekend next summer. And we're hoping to have a lot of alumni there, too -- to recognize a lot of the alumni, who have become leaders, contributors. And to emphasize the product of the Center. Because the Center has really nurtured and affected so many people.

So if we can do that, we'll be very happy, and, of course, we'll be excited if we can make a statement that's noticed by President Obama, who we all claim as an East-West Center

product. (laughs) The celebration will hopefully bring EWC recognition to leaders and future EWC participants and enhance the “next 50 years.”

So we hope that we’ll have a big splash next year.