

This is an interview with Noel Chrisman done by Elizabeth Strober for the Society for Applied Anthropology Oral History Project. Noel Chrisman has served the Society as its president. He is on the faculty of the University of Washington, College of Nursing. The interview was conducted on January 4, 2002 in Seattle. Elizabeth Strober is on the faculty in the Department of Anthropology, Sociology and Social Work at the University of Seattle. This transcript has been edited for accuracy and continuity by John van Willigen. The interview is archived at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky.

STROBER: This is Noel Chrisman, interviewed by Liz Strober, and it is January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2002, already. All right. How did you find anthropology originally?

CHRISMAN: Accidentally I had an open course slot in my sophomore year of college. I was in zoology, and my advisor said, "well, you'll like anthropology," because in those days [in] anthropology all four fields were taught in one semester. Except for linguistics, so three. And I did, I loved it, because the first half was all physical anthropology, and you know, that fit directly with what I was interested in, and in the second half, I didn't like as much, the socio cultural part, probably because we had to learn basket weaving and stuff like that. But in that same semester, I dropped chemistry, because I didn't understand a word of it, and I had this huge amount of extra time to spend on anthropology. So I read almost everything, I read a lot in physical anthropology, and probably even more in ethnography, and so I was hooked.

STROBER: And it was originally the physical anthropology that you related to most?

CHRISMAN: Yeah. And in my first teaching job I taught physical anthropology. So I taught physical until I got here.

STROBER: And when you started out taking this course, it was just not even particularly of interest.

CHRISMAN: I didn't, it wasn't interesting or not. My roommate had taken it the semester before, because I remember him one of the textbooks was Le Gros Clark's little book on *The Antecedents Of Man* and I remember the green color, and one of the assignments that he did, though I didn't, was to do a genealogy, what I later learned to be a genealogy. He just had a big piece of paper and he drew on it [Chuckles – Strober]. So it's, I hadn't the faintest idea what anthropology was.

STROBER: And then once you kind of got a toe in there, what do you think? It kind of sucked you in?

CHRISMAN: I was sucked in anyway, and you know, it was first physical, then ethnography and then I went through a hiatus, I, I got angry at the professor because he gave me a B for very good reasons, so I got a C on the final. And so I tried out sociology, and I hated sociology.

STROBER: Really!

CHRISMAN: . . . except for two things . . . we had to do two book reports. One of them, and we could choose from books, and the first set, I chose Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, perfect. And the second set, I chose William Foote Whyte *Street Corner Society* and Whyte, as you know was one of the founders of the Society [for Applied Anthropology] and has been my hero ever since.

STROBER: It just took one book.

CHRISMAN: Yeah [Chuckles - Strober], well, it taught me that . . . anthropologists, I mean even though he was a sociologist, he has worked with anthropology, and so I could see in '*Street Corner Society*' that I could go do that kind of stuff, you know, ethnic urban research in the United States, and then it would be valuable and interesting. In fact, [as] part of that book report I did some field research, by accident and I, you may remember that part of the book is what later became network analysis of the 'Corner Boys' and I did kind of a slap-dash one of the teenage boys who came to visit my cousin at Christmas vacation, because that's where I was during that time. So I did research.

STROBER: At the start of your career, what questions were you interested in?

CHRISMAN: Huh . . . let's talk about graduate school.

STROBER: Okay.

CHRISMAN: And I had a very good education in both social anthropology and cultural anthropology, and so, I was interested in, in how life is constructed, how is social life constructed, and I was interested in both the social parts and the cultural parts. So the way that showed up in my dissertation was that I looked at Danish-American immigrants in the San Francisco Bay area, notice how it fits with what Whyte had done. I would have done that research in Kampala, Uganda, except I didn't get the grant, I did want to finish. So, I looked at voluntary associations and their influence on the persistence of an ethnic group. So it was partly structural, you know, how do you form relationships in a city that will maintain ethnic identity among people, and then what are the cultural components, you know, the identity part, what is it that feeds into it. So the question was, how do you construct urban social life? There was a subsidiary question which was applied, and that has a longer history. When I fell in love with anthropology, I went to see the professor and asked what could you do if you were an anthropologist, and he said, "well there are only two things to do, if you're an anthropologist. One is to teach anthropology to anthropologists who will teach anthropology to anthropologists and endlessly." That's what he did. And then the other thing, he clearly was discouraging about this one. The other thing to do is that you can advise the government mostly, and maybe businesses, on how to accomplish certain aims that the government or business has. And the example he used is a continuing

example today, and that is how do you get the “Baga Baga” to accept latrines and that’s still an issue in applied anthropology today. Well, the notion of teaching anthropologists to become anthropologists sounded okay, but didn’t sound interesting, but this business of actually doing something really did sound interesting. So, back to my dissertation. In graduate school, I went to Berkeley, and George Foster was there, who is one of the premiere applied anthropologists, and so I took his course, and then I did a reading course on social change, and in preparation for my preliminary exams, I just read gigantic amounts of applied anthropology. I sat down with the journal called *Applied Anthropology* and then later *Human Organization* and just read it. That’s another place where I fell in love with William Foote Whyte . . . so I, I was interested in applied anthropology. I couldn’t do much with it in graduate school, because of the bias about applied anthropology. But in my dissertation there is an applied appendix. I was getting my money in public health at that point, and so I looked at the effects of this construction of social life in a city on mental health, and I didn’t do a very good job at that, because I didn’t know what I was doing. There was an automatic applied feature to whatever kind of work I was doing. So, the two questions then were how do you construct social and cultural life in cities, and second, how do you apply this information, and in my case I wanted to apply it on health issues.

STROBER: You mentioned a, a bias that was felt during your graduate school years. What was that like?

CHRISMAN: There is a hundred . . . two-ton gorilla in the middle of the room and no one talks about it?

STROBER: Yes!

CHRISMAN: Well, this was not a two-ton gorilla, because it was such an insignificant issue, but it was in the middle of the room and no one talked about it. And that most, most of the reason why people didn’t talk about it was because it didn’t enter their consciousness.

STROBER: I see.

CHRISMAN: I don’t remember any explicit conversations, the people I ran around with had a variety of interests, psychological anthropology, Latin America, some Africanists. There was a big fad, a couple of years before my orals, in being interested in the history of anthropology. So there was no cohort of people interested in applied work. Those of us who took the social change reading course had an interest in applied work, but not very heavy. So what—we knew it was the wrong thing to do, it was a bad, you know, that’s a bad choice to make, because it’s immoral to make change.

STROBER: I see.

CHRISMAN: You know, I’m imputing that.

STROBER: . . . So it [was] taboo. [Chuckles – Strober]

CHRISMAN: Well . . .

STROBER: . . . it was an early anthropology taboo.

CHRISMAN: Yeah.

STROBER: Have you always been interested in applied anthropology in the sense that did it play a role in your work from the very beginning?

CHRISMAN: Well, you've heard about it in my dissertation.

STROBER: Mm-mm.

CHRISMAN: Then, what I did after that I did a post-doc in public health. I did that because I was interested in what was going to become medical anthropology. But that work in public health really solidified, and it formed my way of understanding applied anthropology. In some cases there was a synergistic interaction, and in some cases it was just brand new stuff, like epidemiology. **But, since I think applied anthropologists have to know two fields, their own and the one they work in, this was, you know, a real leg up, and that's what Foster had said was, he wanted me to take courses while I was still in graduate school, and I didn't. But he said, it will teach you how to talk their language, and that was just crucial.** So there was that very early . . . And then in my first teaching job, I taught applied anthropology most years . . . and the thing I think is so interesting is that I taught at first in 1967. I used Benjamin Paul's book on health community and health culture and community [*Health, Culture and Community: Case Studies of Public Reactions to Health Programs*, 1954], as one of the textbooks, and, but we only spent two weeks of class time on what later became a yearlong piece of work for me on medical anthropology. So, applied has always been around, it's always been applied medical in some sort of way. My research at that time . . . was urban, and not applied, and not medical. And then when . . .

STROBER: Down the line.

CHRISMAN: Pardon?

STROBER: De—urban down the line.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. And there was where all my publishing was, it was on urban stuff. In fact once I went to the University of South Florida for a visit. And the first time I went, I was an urban anthropologist, and then I went ten years later, and they had invited me as a medical anthropologist, and I was talking to this woman who didn't remember me, and I said, "well, don't you remember? I was here ten years ago." And she said, "Well, I just thought that was another Chrisman" [Laughter – Strober]. So I guess your identity is hugely important in this field [Laughter – Strober]. So, when I got

here, I conceived of everything I did as applied anthropology, because my job was and still is, to help nurses and other health practitioners make change in order to make lives better for patients. So I, my teaching is not direct out there, doing whatever applied anthropologists do, but it's applied in an academic setting. I was saying on the phone to somebody yesterday though that I had to be talked into joining NAPA, because I didn't see my work as applied enough to join NAPA.

STROBER: How would you conceive what folks in NAPA were doing?

CHRISMAN: I thought of them as the ones who were employed by business or government to help the Baga Baga adopt latrines.

STROBER: I see. You talked a little bit about that change that happened in your own identity and at the same time in the field of moving into the label of medical anthropology. Has that been a helpful thing overall?

CHRISMAN: Well, I didn't change the label, I added. I mean I haven't stopped being an urban anthropologist. I have stopped teaching that course here. I mean the last time I taught it, it was about five years ago, and that's just because I'm so busy doing applied anthropology that I don't have time to fiddle around with it, and I still keep up to some extent on the literature. It turned out that the addition of an official medical anthropology statement to myself was real helpful in the field, in the general field of anthropology. I started making that change in the early seventies, and not long after that, by the mid to the late of '70s of medical anthropology started to take off, and so there I was, you know, right in the beginning of something that has now, I think, become a really significant sub-field in anthropology. So that was helpful. You know, in the '60s and '70s, medical anthropology, at least the way I read it was much more applied, you know, it, in my mind came out of applied roots. For me, medical anthropology was applied anthropology. My research, however, was pure anthropology, well, influenced a lot by health services and medicine. But it wasn't—and it could [be] applied, I mean I used all the data and theoretical jumps that I made in my teaching so that I think it was having an applied effect, but I didn't think of it as applied. There, there is a parallel story here . . . it took me a while to become a member of The Society for Applied Anthropology, and I can't remember if I did that in the '60s or the early '70s. But that was, you know, there's, there is something that took a while, like I was a member of the AAA, starting in 1964, so I conceived of myself as an anthropologist, that, just I didn't do much with applied in an official way.

STROBER: And then what do you think change that attracted you then to SfAA?

CHRISMAN: It's the only place to go, and, and remember my interest had always been applied anthropology. I was teaching it. So, if I can remember when I started, which probably is not hard '72.

STROBER: '72.

CHRISMAN: . At that point, let's see, I was trying to get out of Southern California, and I really wanted to work in a health science center. So I think that I conceived of that shift as much more applied.

STROBER: And when you went and joined SfAA, who were the other characters that you related with, or worked with, on early projects that were also members?

CHRISMAN: Nobody. I, I went to my first applied meeting in 1973, I think, just as I was taking this job, and I didn't know anybody. I knew the people from South Florida, because I had visited there, but I didn't really understand what they were doing, and I only knew two or three. I met some people, like Joan Cassell whose name you may know. She does the work on surgeons, and Del Jones, you know, who just died. But that was, you know, sitting around at a party b-s-ing. So, I never did see much relationship between my work and what I could read in *Human Organization*, or whom I met at the SfAA meetings. The SfAA meetings were a time to, you know, like any meeting, to sit around and talk and get to know people better and to hear papers. Now, there was a big shift for me . . . and—oh and I did not attend meetings consistently. I attended that one, because I was looking for a way to get out of southern California [Chuckles – Strober] . . .

STROBER: That seems significant.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. Sometime in the early '90s, I needed to learn some stuff, and t . . . about how to do evaluation. And so I went to the meetings. I think these were the ones in Albuquerque, and I just went to every session I could, and just sat there and took notes, you know, just like a graduate student, learning all this stuff. So, evidently one's interaction with the meetings depends on what you need to know.

STROBER: That makes a lot of sense.

CHRISMAN: At the AAA meetings I tend to go to papers that friends give, or sessions that sound interesting, but it's not this thirst for having to have a particular kind of knowledge at a particular time, that I feel many times at the SfAA meetings.

STROBER: Mm-mm. Which collaborations and projects thus far have been the most memorable for you?

CHRISMAN: , well, one of the most memorable collaborations was with Arthur Kleinman, and that didn't have much to do with applied anthropology at all, it, but it was an incredibly exciting and interesting working relationship between about '76 and '83, whenever it would be, the years he was here, because we met in the first two weeks he was here and we started working together at that point. I mean, he and I had exactly complementary interest. He was much better at the cultural aspects of illness, and I was much better at the social aspects of illness, and so the two of us collaborated . I just grew horrendously at that time, and he says he did too. So that was real positive.

And the, the direct applied outcome of that collaboration was the clinically applied anthropology book.

STROBER: Right.

CHRISMAN: So he and I, and Gabe Smilkstein, a guy in family medicine, had been working in the medical school, I had been working in the nursing school, and we were, and there were a few other people across the country who were being sort of self conscious or reflexive or something about their work in trying to change the health care system through changing practitioners. So, it was, it was very good medical anthropology collaboration, and I think a significant step forward in both medical anthropology and applied anthropology to have people start thinking about this stuff differently. So that's one. The second, . . . another really good project and collaboration was the Yakima work that's published in *HO* in '99. And there I collaborated with a woman named June Strickland who at the time was working for the cancer information service in Seattle, and later, about two or three years later, became a faculty member here, in the school of nursing. She's got a PhD in higher education and thinks of herself as a health educator, and she is a nurse. So she had an interest in public health, she had an interest in minority health, because she is Native American and the two of us worked together, did this really neat participatory action research project. There was another of those accidents. We did our work according to where we were coming from, and she came from health education, and I came from applied anthropology, and we literally constructed that project. I mean, we had a proposal and it was funded, but the project was really constructed in the car on the way over to Yakima and back, and we both had the same set of ideas about how to do this, you know, work with people not on them, and do capacity building and empowerment, think at the community level, a whole bunch of stuff that nurses simply don't think of, but she did, and so did I because of applied anthropology. A year or two into the project, my wife was, was doing an internship at the American Lake VA, which is about forty-five minutes away. And she would stay there three or four nights a week, and sometimes, when I had time, I would go spend the night with her, and I always had a book to read while she was doing whatever she was doing, and one of them was William Foote Whyte's book on participatory action research, and I started reading this thing and I said, "holy cow! That's what we're doing!" So I had a term for it.

STROBER: There is the fit.

CHRISMAN: So that was the real positive collaboration. And now days I only work on teams, which I think is what you have to do when you're doing community work. I work on . . . one project in south Seattle with my students, and two projects, one of which is King County wide, and one is south Seattle, with the health department with CDC funding, plus this year while I'm on sabbatical I work at the National Cancer Institute, and in all cases I work in collaboration with other people. XXXX For example, one of the projects is called 'REACH 2010,' and it's a nation-wide CDC funded project, REACH stands for Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health, and we had an evaluation team meeting yesterday. There are two outsiders, two university people, one

a health economist who does a lot of evaluation work, and me; he does the quantitative part, I do the qualitative part, and then the rest of that committee [are] representatives from each of the three ethnic agencies that are carrying out the intervention, plus some staff from the health department, and that's an unbelievably exciting circumstance. I was listening to one of the reports, we're only about six to eight months into doing the intervention, and since no one knows how to do this, least of all us, we're inventing it. I was listening to one part of an intervention . . . one, one difficulty they were having, and I said, "holy cow, you know, maybe we're cheating people in these communities." And I said to the co-pi, you know, this was more of a service issue than a research issue, but I thought that they interacted, and we're only getting real small numbers of people into our support groups and education groups, and I said, "that may be cutting back on people's learning, you know, community people's learning." And everybody around the table started saying, "yeah!" you know, and we brainstormed for about five minutes on how we could make changes. And that's so exciting! Plus . . . my—the other part of my job with that is to evaluate coalition growth, and when I see things that I think need to be done, based on my experience, or my reading of the literature, then I'll say it from the perspective of an evaluator, and I, we'll have a retreat in February, next month and part of the retreat will be the preliminary results from this year's interviewing, you know, that tell us what things are going well, what things are going poorly, so that the coalition can take that information, you know, how PAR works, they can take the information, have me do new stuff and then, you know, they can, it's actually we, can help move the coalition to new places. Slick.

STROBER: That's pretty exciting stuff.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, and you know, this finally seems to me like real applied anthropology, and I'm out doing research, I'm analyzing it, the research has an affect on what's happening in the real world.

STROBER: When you're bringing your perspective to the table as a member of a team, what do you think it is that the other members of the team are looking for you to, to provide?

CHRISMAN: That's an interesting question, because what they are looking to, for me to provide and what I provide are different things. I am only guessing on what they look to me to provide, and I'm now mixing the two big projects I work on, because I have to do exactly the same thing with the other one. Too many people think of an evaluator as providing an outside objective distant and somewhat scary evaluation, and you know from your work with [David] Fetterman that that's not the way he thinks of it, and it's not the way I think of it. So I think of that as collaborative and working together and we are all on the same side, but there are still a number of people, probably less so on REACH, and more so on Seattle Partners who see the evaluation component as more distant. And that's probably because my role in the evaluation has been a lot less, up until about two years ago. I conceive of it, I mean I, I think that an important part here is my relationship with individuals on these boards, and my relationship with the projects themselves, because I am deeply involved. So what I expect to do, is to be a



member of each of those coalitions to have goals that are just the same as theirs, and to bring a couple of kinds of expertise that I think are important. One is the research analysis. traditional applied anthropology stuff that epidemiologists do and sociologists, and nurses, and, you know, MPHs, a bunch of people do that, so that's a skill set that I have. But the more important skill set, and I'm really seeing it at, back at the NCI, is . . . to be a thorn in people side, to raise questions from what seems like left field. For an anthropologist it's not left field, it's just that we are so strongly grounded in what's happening at the community level, and with real people, that we don't get as stuck in epidemiology or public health, or medicine, or nursing, as people from those fields do. My, I'm, next Friday I'm going to facilitate a retreat of people, a small group in the National Cancer Institute, and that's going to be, I'm going to try and influence them. They are very influence-able people, because they're, most of the way there, but I'm going to try to influence them to take even more seriously the need to change the paradigm at the NCI, and the same thing is true in these two community boards. There is not a fully accepted pattern for those of us who work in a community to do community work, you know, empowerment, community-based participatory research is what some in public health are calling it. And there is a huge amount of work to be done. The research needs to be done to find out what the hell it looks like. The theory needs to be done. I mean there is a lot, there is a big start. Theory needs to be done, so that we can learn how to look at it, and then we've got to circulate the word, and part of that is to community members who don't, don't know enough about it because those of us who could teach it don't know enough about it either, very exciting stuff.

STROBER: Absolutely, and if you imagine the way this will unfold, will the theory, and the evaluation and everything kind of come together, or what will lead it?

CHRISMAN: Huh, let's see. Let me focus first on the what's going to lead it. It's going to require funding to get something done, and the CDC is already making hesitant little baby steps in the direction of funding stuff like this, but there is still a heavy-duty demand on the part of the CDC that we behave just like the CDC wants us to behave, which is contrary to good CBPR. The fact that I'm at the NIH suggests that there are little pockets of the NIH that are willing to entertain this new way of doing things. Two months ago, in November of 2001, I went to a two-day workshop that the National Institute for Nursing Research put on, and did the state of the science address to start that thing off on doing CBPR. So the fact that NINR is interested, I mean that's only one in an infinitesimal baby step. It sounds like there could be some change there. Also I'm working with National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, and although I'm working with them on issues of adherence, I constantly stick the community issue into the middle of the dialogue. The private ones, in particular Kellogg and Robert Wood Johnson are doing similar things, so there is a little bit of movement on the part of fund-ers, so that's where that's going to be important, because, where the money is, people will start to do work. The other leadership, the other things that are happening and will continue happening, arise out of an American cultural statement, and that is, as De Tocqueville said, you know, we build on, we count on volunteerism, we count on voluntary associations, we count on inter-personal relationships around getting jobs done that will help the community. So, I think there's that strong core value in America, and

institutions like the Department of Health and Human Services, are saying more on prevention and more on community. So I, I think that there is this kind of belief infrastructure that will help us get there, just belief on the part of Americans. Then, it's going to take smaller, but I think growing numbers of applied social scientists ranging in public health through nursing, anthropology, medicine, working together, learning how to work with community people, because we are so arrogant that, you know, we turn people off. So there is a gigantic amount of learning, but the excitement, both methodologically and theoretically is just unbelievable. I can see in [David] Fetterman's case that empowerment evaluation works perfectly, or nearly perfectly, if you are well known and an organization comes to you and says come work with us. But in public health and in the rest of the health science fields, they don't usually come ask, in particular, and we have to be able to be convincing to people who are not convincible, you know, the medical types and epidemiology types that this kind of evaluation makes sense, and it makes automatically no sense to them, and just that, and I think theirs makes a lot of sense is just . . . too narrow. So, that challenge, at least that's what motivates me, and I suspect it motivates others who do the same thing.

STROBER: But it sounds like there are little openings, little shifts going on.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, I conceive of it as the little mammals running around the legs of the big dinosaurs, and soon the asteroid is going to hit.

STROBER: That's lovely. How has the Society for Applied Anthropology changed over time, and in particular its role within anthropology?

CHRISMAN: The real answer to that one is I don't know, so, how has it changed? In the really olden days, in the '40s and '50s, the Journal *Applied Anthropology* was more, was full-er of applied anthropology. Now the journal, and now and for last probably twenty years or more, the journal is full of good international anthropology with some kind of an applied basis to it. When Erve Chambers started *Practicing Anthropology* at South Florida, thirty years ago, or whenever, I think he was trying to solve that problem, because *Practicing Anthropology* speaks to practitioners that's not written in an academic style. It's even more applied than the early applied anthropology journals were. So there is a shift. The Society for Applied Anthropology has always been, I think, real academic, located in departments, more concerned with teaching applied anthropologists to be applied anthropologists than concerned with actually doing it. I had a conversation with a friend at the applied meetings that were here in Seattle about five, four or five years ago, however many, and I told her that I had heard one of her graduate students, one of the graduate students from her department saying that her department was discriminating against the use of social marketing techniques in doing work, and in public health, it's not a very well known way of doing community change, but it's an accepted way and I thought, what in the heck is this anthropology department down on her for, and it's an applied anthropology department. So I had this discussion with my colleague and we went through all the faculty in her department and most of them don't really do applied work, they do anthropology with applied implications, which is what I did, you know, in the very beginning with my

career, and so I think that that's a place that applied anthropology has been in, I, there is a huge amount of possibility for change in that. Ten or fifteen years ago, the Society started working very hard to get practicing anthropologists into the organization. That was probably about the same time NAPA started, so that may have been part of the stimulus. The other part of stimulus was that the SfAA had split from the AAA and the AAA wanted to have some sort of applied arm. Now at the meetings, I have missed the last two or three meetings because of being either president elect or president, which means I don't ever get to go to meetings, but I'm still able to find, when I get to go to sessions, I am able to find some things that are very pragmatic, and there are still some things that are not as easily useable. But I always listen to them for their utility, and they're probably made easier, you know, more user friendly for utility anyway. So the journals changed, the society's changed, the meetings have changed, and then did, was part of your thing about . . .

STROBER: How it fits . . .

CHRISMAN: Was the future . . .

STROBER: . . . into anthropology generally.

CHRISMAN: How it relates to it?

STROBER: Yeah.

CHRISMAN: Well, the main relationship is that anthropology really, really loves to have its bias about applied anthropology. To me it's an incredibly powerful thing. I didn't go to a session that Laura Nader was in some years ago, but I heard about it and she said, "you know, the anthropologists who work for these corporate outfits are just selling their souls," and whoever told me the story said, "you know, Berkeley, which is where Laura is, has to sell its soul to corporate interest every hour of the day, in order to just survive," maybe not the anthropology department but . . .

STROBER: The Lawrence Livermore Labs?

CHRISMAN: Yeah! They're used to be the Robert Lowie Museum of Anthropology and now it's the Katherine Hearst, of course Katherine Hearst's money is doing something about it, and has always. So there is that. But let me tell you about what's happening right this minute that may change that. As, as an aside, one of the things that, that I remember learning from an article by Raymond Firth, about social change was that there three levels, one was on the personnel level, one was the change in the way we do things, and another is the change in structure, the values, and norms changes. The personnel level is often overlooked, but in this case personnel is making a difference. Some years ago the AAA, who are consistently in one kind of trouble or another, partly because the field is so broad, put as part of their strategic plan that they wanted to do more in applied and practicing anthropology, and so the personality of Louise Lamphere, who was just the outgoing president of the AAA,

combined with the personalities of Linda Bennett and me, Linda was the president of the SfAA and I was president elect, Louise said, “we’ve got this strategic plan and we need to work on it, and we need your help.” And at least I have always been interested in trying to get the AAA to become more rational, you know, and actually work in the real world. And so Linda and I just jumped at it. Now, other presidents of the AAA wouldn’t have come, and other presidents of the SfAA wouldn’t have responded. So at the individual personal level . . .

STROBER: That worked.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. So what we have is a AAA-SfAA commission for applied and practicing anthropology that’s an organ of the AAA, and a commission is a relatively high level something or other. We started, our first meeting was in Merida last March, and our second meeting, which was the one when every single person was there, was at the AAA in Washington last month, in December of 2001. This commission has the possibility of making applied and practicing anthropology much more visible, both to anthropologists and to the rest of the world, but first to anthropologists, and what we are proposing. I better tell you about the thing—I chair it, and it has both the president and the past president of the AAA, the president and the past president of the SfAA, another past president of the AAA, James Peacock and I wanted that kind of person on this commission to tie us more strongly to the AAA, because the other AAA people are a guy named . . . Ferguson, who is a, an archaeologist who does, has his, his own independent business, Mark Nichter who is the president of the Society for Medical Anthropology, Sue Squires who is the president of NAPA, I think that’s it. And then the SfAA has Ed Liebow who is going to be the president of NAPA, Meta Baba, who is now a dean at Michigan State, a woman named Mary from the Washington Association for Professional Anthropology, WAPA. Jay Schensul, who is an independent, runs an independent research outfit in Hartford. So it’s just unbelievably powerful, well written, well respected bunch of people. And what we’re going to do is start transforming the training system, you know, how Fetterman does his shtick at AAA meetings, or at least he did at the one in San Francisco. We’re going to try and draw together all of these kinds of trainings, so that we can have a common menu and make it much more easily accessible to people who go, either to the SfAA, or to the AAA.

STROBER: That’s going to be great. Very user friendly.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. And we are operating, we believe that we can’t just work in academia, we’ve got to take to account of people like me who need more training, or people like you who need more training, or, you know, when I talk to people, other applied anthropologists, there are all sorts of things that we need to be trained about. So we’re going to do professional, existing professionals, we’re going to try and have an affect on undergraduate and graduate curricula, we are certainly going to try to have an affect on departments and that’s where the AAA is absolutely crucial . We are going to start probably small, but we’re going to, there is a meeting every year at the AAA with anthropology departments, and we’re going to insinuate ourselves into that meeting, starting this coming year, I think.

STROBER: That's going to be a very interesting trajectory.

CHRISMAN: Yeah.

STROBER: Yes.

CHRISMAN: So it's going to be wonderful, and the people who are on the table are, number one, so smart, so we get these great ideas, and number two, energetic, you know, because they all have way too much to do. So, you know, I, if it works, it's going to be great.

STROBER: I really like what you were saying about the continuing education piece.

CHRISMAN: Crucial! I get my continuing education mostly from reading and then sometimes from going to a workshop. The challenge is going to be how to get those workshops around. We have given some thought to a circuit rider idea, you know, a person goes to this university, then that one, then the other one, but that would kill off the person who is doing it. Faculty exchanges, practitioner faculty exchanges, all sorts of things. By the way, there is another really exciting thing going on in applied anthropology, not just from the society, and that's this consortium of applied and practicing departments. I can't remember what it's called, I just call it the consortium. Now there are fifteen or sixteen departments across the country who pay into a treasury and are a body, and they're talking to each other about improving graduate education in applied anthropology, to some extent undergraduate education, so the Linda Bennett is one of the founders of that, and she sits at the commission table. So that's a gigantic resource that we have for kind of rationalizing how anthropology can see applied anthropology. By the way, there is one other change that has happened that is important for the relationship between anthropology and applied anthropology, and that's the fact that somewhere between forty and sixty-five percent of people who graduate with their PhDs anyway in anthropology, or maybe it's all advanced degrees, are going into applied work of some sort, and they're usually ill prepared. They don't have a good identity, because the academic departments say you're either an academic or you're not an anthropologist, and so we are hoping that departments—now our department here hasn't made this shift yet, at all. But we're hoping that departments will start to say, holy cow, maybe we are phrasing what we talk about in a dumb way, maybe.

STROBER: At some point, those paths may cross.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, we'll hope so.

STROBER: Yes. Well it's certainly an interesting moment over in the anthropology department with Gene Hunn being chair.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. And I don't, I, it looks to me like he is doing a good job as chair. He is one of the very few over there who is willing to open his mouth and say he thinks applied anthropology is okay.

STROBER: Absolutely, and I think he has really been a voice of, of reason of flying the flag of the statistics you just quoted, which is what becomes of our students.

CHRISMAN: Yeah.

STROBER: Yeah. What is the most important lesson you communicate to your students about anthropology?

CHRISMAN: The place I would like to have the students be when they're done fiddling with me is that their minds, this just thinking about my nursing students, that their minds will be thirty degrees out of kilter, that instead of approaching their clinical problems in a clinical and a nurs-y way, that they will have been influenced to not only do it in a nursing way, but also to think about it out of the box. That actually happens with the graduate students, because I get them for a longer period of time. It does happen to some extent with undergraduate students, but probably only the ones who are really susceptible. The susceptible ones are older, maybe have started their families or have already had their families, and best of all, if they worked overseas. I think that's the message of anthropology, think about the world in a different way, and then for applied anthropology, make sure that you know how to get that different way back into the world. That's probably the difference I see between anthropology and applied anthropology .

STROBER: And when they leave you, after having had classes or worked with you, do you see that thirty degrees off of center both in their clinical work and their writing and their thinking, or is it mainly in their clinical work that you see it?

CHRISMAN: It's mostly only the PhDs who will go on and write . The most successful and prolific of my PhD students is doing extremely innovative work for nursing, one other one is doing relatively innovative work, but much more strongly in nursing and you know, not as anthropological, even though she works cross culturally. One I wasn't successful with is the one who is the most like a social worker. I mean she is a nurse, but she is interested in social work kinds of interests. One, I have two graduate students now. One of whom has been heavily, heavily influenced by anthropology, and not because of me, but because I sent her to anthropology classes and she just loved them. So, she is doing an incredibly innovative dissertation. Another one who just graduated, is an immigrant, so that has changed her perspective, and actually her perspective changed mine, because she did such a good job with critical theory in her dissertation that it inched me a little bit, and the one who's just finished her general exams, if she pulls off what she wants to do, is going to be very innovative. She is working on the Navajo Reservation. So the writing that these people do is going to be different, and their clinical practice and so far as they have one, because they'll probably all end up in academic positions, except for the one, the social worker type

who does independent contracting, I think, and some teaching. So, yes there are changes in their clinical, well, I hope there are changes in their clinical practice. Some of them teach, and I know that there are changes in their teaching, and those who write, I suspect there are some changes.

STROBER: What is the biggest issue you're still working on in your research?

CHRISMAN: That one I mentioned before, how to bring this message of working cross cultures, and we haven't talked about that at all today, and working with communities, into the health sciences in a way that they don't have to be looked down on, in the health sciences, the bias, you know. There is this bias in anthropology against applied anthropology. The bias down here is against qualitative research, and since both cross cultural work and community work depend so heavily on qualitative research, then we fit right into that bias. There is another piece, and that is that most health practitioners, even those in public health, have, [they] don't have a really good idea about what cultural differences mean. They just see these cultural factors as being things that are done almost on purpose to distress them. So, we've got a really tough challenge ahead of us to help people understand we can work on prevention, on community participation and prevention, that we can do this community participation and prevention across different cultural groups. So, that's what's going to have to happen, and that's where I devote all of my energy, you know, in one push of that or another.

STROBER: Mm-mm. And over time, in terms of being a qualitative researcher in the health sciences where this bias is occurring, has there been any improvement in that, overall?

CHRISMAN: In the nursing school. When I first got here, one of my first graduate students came sneaking into my office one day, just as I had sneaked into George Foster's office one day when I was a graduate student. I told George I was into applied anthropology, don't tell anybody. This graduate student came in to see me and she said, "I'm interested in doing qualitative research, don't tell anybody."

STROBER: Classic!

CHRISMAN: Yeah. And it has changed so much now that a couple of years ago I was talking to a PhD student who, who said, "I want to do quantitative research and people are laughing at me." I said, "well that's just as much B.S. as twenty years ago when it was the opposite." So this, school of nursing has seen something different. The other thing is that within the sort of national picture of the health sciences, nursing, medicine and public health, nursing is seen to be way ahead on cultural competence issues and way ahead on qualitative research, just no question about it. So, and medicine is, is in the toilet, as far as I can tell on both of those issues though there are little pockets of people who are interested in it, in them, both culture and qualitative research. Public health is doing a little tiny bit better but not much. So the biases are still there but there is change under way. It's interesting that the change takes place in

nursing, you know, which is the, one of the lesser valued bunches, because it's full of women, and you know, there is not a lot of power.

STROBER: Right, I was going to say that the parallel there is social work and it's the exact same dynamic that you're talking about.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, precisely, although social work seems to be a lot more quantitative and a lot less culturally appropriate.

STROBER: Yes, true, and I think there are the folks that are working on those issues are the ones who are bringing it front and center into, into the medical realm . . .

CHRISMAN: Yeah.

STROBER: . . . as the nurses do.

CHRISMAN: Yeah. Well in this school, social work has made big strides in the last ten years, in both of those directions.

STROBER: Yes, and there is a lot more work to do.

CHRISMAN: Yeah.

STROBER: But I, I agree with you that nursing is out in front, absolutely.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, so it's the minority group who has to, they can't get any worse off, I guess, so they might as well do it.

STROBER: Mm-mm.

CHRISMAN: Plus nursing is more interested in the people part of health equations rather than the organ system, or the clinical trial, in the case of public health, so, you know, they've got kind of an internal motivation to do it.

STROBER: Absolutely, absolutely, and wait until it be lessbothered [Laughter – Strober].

CHRISMAN: By the way, thinking about my students, one of the things that I do to annoy people, is to say, as I did to a nurse practitioner student yesterday, what is she doing nurse practicing, you know, where she is only going to have to take care of one person at a time, she ought to be doing community work. And she already got her PhD in anthropology, what is slowing her down? So I try to, to help people, and you probably saw that in the class you took from me.

STROBER: Yes.



CHRISMAN: I try to help people identify that their interests already are similar to a minority of interest in anthropology. Now, if someone comes to me and says, yeah I do have an interest, I always say, don't go to this department unless you're willing to put up with a bunch of junk, and you know, the, I think my anthropology training was excellent, even though it wasn't applied at all, because I think in order to be a good applied anthropologist, you need to be a good anthropologist.

STROBER: Absolutely, absolutely.

CHRISMAN: So, I do try to be a thorn in everybody's side.

STROBER: Sure, that's very effective.

CHRISMAN: Yeah, well, it pisses them off.

STROBER: And that's how it's effective [Chuckles – Strober]. All right, thank you.

CHRISMAN: You're welcome, and thanks for your interview, because, some of those things I hadn't thought of before, it makes it more fun.

STROBER: Well good!

[End of Interview]