

Interview with Dr. John Longshore

Interviewer: Jesse Rathbun

Transcribed by Justin Takata

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BOLDED FONT indicates Jesse Rathbun

NORMAL FONT indicates Dr. Longshore

... or ...[unintelligible]... indicates where the words could not be made out due to the tape quality

**Sunday, March 28, 2004. I am interviewing Dr. Longshore at Humboldt State University
Ok, what is your current position at HSU?**

I am a professor in the geology department.

Where were you raised?

I was raised in a variety of places in the United States. I was born in Alabama, lived there until I was about six and went to first grade in Denver, Colorado; second and third grade in the Mojave desert; and fourth through sixth grade in Martinez, California; and seventh through high school in Atlanta, Georgia.

Why did you choose those schools?

I didn't have any choice. I was living with my parents at the time and my father was an engineer and traveled a lot especially during the Second World War working at army bases and that sort of thing. I chose my ... Do you want my college education too?

Please.

I did my undergraduate work at Emory University in Atlanta and I chose that school because it was the cheapest place for me to go at the time and live at home and work at the grocery store that I been working at for six years and I continued that. I spent four years at Emory and then went to Rice University in Houston, Texas got a Masters and PhD ...[unintelligible]

When did you arrive in Arcata?

1965

What brought you to Humboldt County?

A job at Humboldt State. When I finished my PhD I had no idea what I wanted to do and I got three job offers in industry and they all looked interesting...[unintelligible]... and I had no idea what I could teach but I had done a lot of teaching assistantships in graduate school so I started applying for teaching jobs and I got offered at Northern Arizona University and Humboldt. My wife and I both decided that living in this place would be a really good thing so we came here.

What did you think of Arcata in the 60's?

Quite a shock for us when we arrived in Arcata in 1965 after living in Houston, Texas, a big city, and having season tickets to Houston Symphony and other things [unintelligible] Arcata at the time was much smaller than it is now population was about eight or nine thousand probably, no freeway, there were teepee burners from the mills scattered around town. Air was awfully full of ash coming out of the teepee burners burning the slash before they [unintelligible] the mills and we almost turned around and left at the time, as I recall, especially my wife, but we stuck it out and after the first couple of years we never looked back.

What was the town / campus relationship like?

Pretty antagonistic. The town was largely a lumber town, the square still has a lot of bars on it, students weren't

welcome in them and the town thought of the faculty here as elitist and often with reason. There were some faculty members who treated the town badly I guess and you really didn't admit that you worked at the university when you went down to the grocery store and such. It was pretty tough. That's changed entirely now that the university is seen as being the primary economic support here. The enrollment when we got here was about three thousand students like ...

Three thousand was a record at the time.

Yes it was.

Into which department were you hired?

Geology.

When you started were you full time or part time?

Full time.

What stands out most about the time you have been on campus?

The hard work. I hadn't taught any of the courses I began teaching here and I remember staying up until two or three in the morning Tuesday, Thursday night and weekends and [unintelligible] I think I'm a natural teacher but it took me a long time to [unintelligible] that's what I remember most and I remember the life [unintelligible]. One more thing, the camaraderie. Being a small department at the time there were three of us; there wasn't really a geology major at the time. We founded one and we had a cadre of students, I think there were six, before we had a major we were like a family.

Has science always been treated the same on campus?

I don't think so. In the sixties Forestry was the big department, the largest department on campus. So I think a byproduct of that the sciences had to be pretty strong too because it supported the forestry department. I don't see any change in the last thirty years.

How has the faculty view of the science departments changed since you arrived?

The only thing that I can think of is a personal thing. In the 60s we didn't have department chairs we had coordinators, we didn't have a dean of science, sort of a commandant, I forget what his title was, we knew everybody in chemistry and physics and math. We were small enough to do be able to do that. We had meetings when we say hello to people we knew. Now there are 100 and something people in the college of Science and Natural Resources and you just don't know that many people so that is one aspect that changed. I can remember just terrific cooperation. We started a new department and the other departments in our unit, chemistry and physics, donated much of their money or gave up some of their operating expenses to get us started. I'm not sure that would happen now. It was very cooperative. Maybe lack of familiarity and more...[unintelligible]...isolation of the departments now.

What is the biggest change that you have seen at the university?

More buildings and more students I guess that's it. Otherwise less collegiality I guess as far as I'm concerned. I'm sort of a loner anyways, not a party-goer that sort of stuff, but it used to be where I'd know people in history upstairs and English but we have gotten so large now that we don't do that much anymore the president's wife used to go around and visit with faculty at bars but of course that has gotten beyond what the president's spouse can do ...so that's a change I don't know if I miss it because it was a gradual change but definitely a change, the size and the change in the attitude of the town toward the university. As far as our department goes we're bigger now, there are eight faculty members instead of three, there are sixty or seventy geology majors instead of six, but I still see the same enthusiasm and same drive to good teaching, and the same enthusiasm among the students. I talk to people from other schools and they'll always be pillorying what their students are like [unintelligible]. I don't see that here.

How are the students different today?

Well as I mentioned I think the enthusiasm is still there. Uh, I think one of the things I noticed is they don't write as well I don't think they have had as good training in their high schools or maybe haven't had as good training in their college days either but I have them write papers in my class and I see over the years a real well might even be a

drastic change. They're more up on sciences and math, probably they're better trained in math and science than they are in writing skills. [unintelligible]

How is the faculty different?

Well I mentioned less collegiality. Again that may be more from my own personality than a real change, but I think there is less. I see less emphasis among the faculty at getting involved in making decisions. It seems to me [unintelligible]...seems like we all have more to do, I am teaching half time now and I spend ...I hear that a lot...[unintelligible]

What was social life like on campus when you started?

Well, in our department the social life was built around our department. We involved the students and the teachers and had parties and picnics and field trips and all these things that the geology family did. We still do that. Campus wide, campus organizations at the time weren't really [unintelligible] except for the faculty association and the [unintelligible] and a lot of the social life for the faculty were built around those. You knew the people in them and they were part of your entertainment and ...[unintelligible]...stuff like that.

What is the biggest difference between former President McCrone and current President Richmond?

It is hard to tell. Richmond hasn't been here very long. I think in his latter years Alistair McCrone ceded responsibility to his Vice-Presidents and simply opted out of the job. In his early years—I think he was here twenty five years or something like that—in his early years he did help bridge the gap between the community and university [unintelligible]. I think it helped a lot. In the last few years you were here he opted out, played golf instead of being president. I think it is too early to judge this president. Yeah. But having said that I have a couple of complaints about our new president, and his priorities seem to be a little ... [unintelligible] spending money on the infrastructure on the campus, millions of dollars for a revamped [unintelligible]...and telecommunications, and even hiring new administrative assistants, when they usually cut down faculty [unintelligible] and retire other faculty. So I don't think the priorities are straight. It is hard to say, it is too early to judge him.

Has the transition between presidents changed HSU in any way?

I don't see that it has, no.

How has the transition affected you?

Not at all.

That's good. How much has the University expanded since your arrival?

Well we added five thousand students to what it was then, a new library, new buildings, new science building, new student services building, but lots of new buildings, a lot more students, and a much bigger faculty.

How has your style of teaching changed since you arrived here?

I don't think it has changed much. You teach a class once or twice or three times and eventually you have a pretty good enough handle on it and know what you need to get across. And I guess the biggest change for me is I started requiring more writing by the students, so they are prepared for existence in the real world when they get out. I'm using PowerPoint almost exclusively now, but I haven't changed the presenting material, but I've gotten into the computer age a little more than I used to. We didn't have computers when I first got here. They probably in some ways decreased the effectiveness of my teaching in a way, but then grading exceedingly long exams is one of the worst parts of teaching [unintelligible] ... exams that require less of that, not short answer exams [unintelligible] ones you don't have to argue for fifteen minutes about how you graded them. I'm not sure that is a good thing [unintelligible] ... Classes are bigger than they used to be so it is harder to teach, it used to be more personalized in class, but we still have small labs so I can still get around to each student, with a larger audience it is a little harder to be individual.

How has technology changed the way you teach?

Well mainly computers and as far as writing tests and writing internet research reports or anything there is an ease that and so I give a lot more handouts now. I use handouts along with PowerPoint so that they can follow along

with the handout. In the old days I used to have to type out things on the dittos and correct them and ...[unintelligible]...

How are your teaching techniques affected?

I think I've probably already answered that with the previous questions.

Is there any special area of research you cover?

Yeah., most well, virtually all of my research has been involved with volcanic rocks [unintelligible] ... Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, islands off the north coast of Scotland, the Caribbean, and Japan. And in the last decade concentrated on [unintelligible].

What is your proudest achievement here at Humboldt State?

[Laughter] Oh, dear, it has to be 1984, the geology faculty nominated me for outstanding professor award and I got it [unintelligible] ...recognition for teaching [unintelligible].

Why did they nominate you?

I'm not really sure. I, at the time, I certainly hope it was because they thought I was doing a really great job. Which is the probably the best thing you can hope for as a teacher [unintelligible] ...

Have you received any significant promotions?

Just going from an assistant to associate to full professor, never has any desire to be [unintelligible] ...

How has the goal of your department changed from the time you began?

Oh boy, I think when we started and for the first twenty years or so we were pretty dedicated to a straight undergraduate standard geology program just like most other programs in the US, except we emphasized field work more than the other programs, in our geology program, and still do. We established a masters program in I think about 1985 at the time we decided that we didn't want to [unintelligible] ... serve everybody, so we concentrated on geotectonics and [unintelligible] geomorphology [unintelligible] ...so we developed a masters program that is pretty strong. We attracted a lot of outstanding students [unintelligible]. The emphasis is still on the undergraduate education, but our graduate program is [unintelligible] ...

Is there a purpose, a specific purpose, of your department at HSU? A mission maybe?

It has to be just to give to our students the best geological education they can get and in particular to set up in the field. Every one of our classes is field-oriented. [unintelligible] but I still get out there to collect the sample, we want our students to be able to handle themselves independently, particularly when they do field work, and that seems to be a real plus to us, and not only do our students know how to handle themselves, but there is a camaraderie and [unintelligible] we do a pretty good job at it. That is our mission.

In your department is there an emphasis on training the students as scientists or as future teachers?

Ah well primarily as scientists. There is ethics in there too, I left that out in the previous question but I give them a real feeling for [unintelligible] ... we now have, though not much criteria, a second option besides just the straight major and that is the geo-science education option specifically designed for students [unintelligible]...so we got approved by the board of education about three years ago maybe four and we do have the [unintelligible] they all got jobs immediately [unintelligible] But no, we do not specifically teach people or push them towards education. We are not geared that way

Does the graduate program, does the geology program prioritize between graduate and undergraduate students

Absolutely, our emphasis is undergraduate.

Yeah. How do you feel about the tenure process?

Jesus! Oh golly, it is probably as good as any other tenure process in the nation. I know a little bit about some of

the other universities. I like the fact that the primary—what's the right word, criteria? The primary criteria is getting tenure is teaching, it always has been here since I've been here. Clearly this is changing a little bit with more emphasis now on research, to have a number of papers published if you want to get tenure, and I'm not sure that is the best idea for a teaching institution. I may be old fashioned, I came here because it is a teaching institution and I'd like to see it stay that way. I think our new president is going to place more emphasis on research. Compared to most universities in the nation we have a heavier teaching load [unintelligible] among faculty...[unintelligible]... based on faculty input and student input and administration ... but it is probably ok.

Ok. How do you feel about the budget allocations for your department?

This year, last year, we've been cut like everyone other department, we keep wondering how we are going to survive. We've lost a really, really good temporary faculty member Bob McPherson who was teaching half time, had been teaching half time for the last three or four years just has outstanding student evaluations and we had to cut him because of the budget. It is a real sad thing. Our stockroom technician—that job has gone from a three quarters position to a half time position. [unintelligible] on half time pay and our operating expense budget is so far down that our vehicles [unintelligible]...it's looking pretty bad and it looks like it is going to get worse next year. We can't keep going in that direction. Our state politicians are going to have to do something about it, even raising taxes. We can't keep cutting services to the poor and the elderly and the sick, and education and expect California to do any better than it's doing now.

Are you currently involved in any social or academic activities on campus, clubs?

No, I was geology club advisor up until about three years ago so thirty five or thirty six years. I thought it was time for the young people to take over. So I am not involved no.

Any special stories about being the advisor of the geology club?

Ha-ha, oh lord when we first started there were about four members of the geology club and we took an awful lot of field trips. We could get everybody in one car essentially, and we drove to Mt. Shasta and Lassen and I think they are doing less of that now because it is harder to get a bunch of students free on any given weekend. We have to really [unintelligible] but I don't think I want to tell any of those stories. I don't think that should go into the archives turn the tape recorder off and I could tell you some stories, but I don't think that's appropriate.

Do you have any favorite things to do on campus?

Besides teach, no, I don't.

What is your favorite memory about your time at Humboldt State?

Favorite memory. Oh I don't know, I don't remember anything specific, but we had a six week, what do you call it, field trip in the summer time out to the desert, where students ...

TAPE CUTS OFF

I hope it's recording; let it go for about five seconds or so.

We were talking about favorite memories. The Geology dept runs a six week field camp in the desert ... we used to be able to send our students off to other camps because we didn't have enough ... I think I did my first trip about 1977 or 78 and I had thirty seven students and we had camp in a place called Shell Creek in eastern Nevada. Sleeping in tents for six weeks and trying to keep the 37 students happy and busy, worked six days a week maybe 10 hours a day, it's pretty grueling. Takes a lot of stamina and a lot of coordination, but probably my best memories come from that camp [unintelligible] I found it to be a lot of fun [unintelligible] ... So I resisted doing a camp for several years. I really didn't want to be out there with a whole lot of students, but it turned out to be a wonderful experience and I...that is probably the greatest memory.

What will you miss most about the campus?

The students. Simple.

Do you have any plans for retirement?

No, but I'd better make some soon. Because I know I'll miss teaching so much, I better get busy finding something

to do or my wife is going to kill me. I'm been interested in digital photography so I'm going to take that up as a hobby. A friend, a really good friend who just retired is trying to get me to golf, but I'm not going to do that. I'll try to continue to do research and still go to the Modoc Plateau [unintelligible] ... and photography and visit our grandchildren.

Have you enjoyed your time at HSU?

Yep, the whole...100% of the time. Uh, there are times when grading gets you down, there are times when the loony things that the administration comes up with get you down, but the students are always there. It has been and continues to be my favorite time.

Where do you think our involvement on Mars will go, as a geology expert?

I think it's crazy to think of men, of people going to Mars. I don't think it is necessary [unintelligible] ... The expense involved and the danger involved in trying to send people to Mars, I think is just, at this point in time, with present technology, or foreseeable technology, I think it would be crazy to think about. But, having said that, the knowledge gained from Mars history even now... [unintelligible] and will help us understand the development of the ocean on Earth, whether we find life on Mars or not [unintelligible].

Is there anything you would like to add?

No, I think I've said it all. No I don't think so. I hope that the enthusiasm of the students will continue, I'm sure it will, I hope that the faculty tends to continue to emphasize teaching and undergraduate education [unintelligible].

That's the end of the interview.