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Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of dash - indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ ” indicates reported speech.

Use of *italics* indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

Darcy Holtgrave: Today is Thursday, June sixth, 2019. My name is Darcy Holgrave and I am with Elaine Lawless, in her home, in Columbia, Missouri. It is three twenty-seven in the afternoon, if that's important for posterity. And so, Elaine, um, the purpose of this interview is to have a kind of verbal reciprocal ethnography with you in regards to the pieces that have been written in the fenschrift issue, um, and I have a series of questions that I've provided you with ahead of time, um, but I also absolutely want to leave room for you to talk any of the articles that strike you, um, any points in the articles, um, if you want to do that, too. So, um, we can – we can just kind of start out with the, um, questions I sent you (**Elaine Lawless:** That's fine.) and then go from there! Alright, um, so the themes we've had to focus in our inquiry are you as writer, teacher, and witness. You have forged your own way in your career, um, so what have been the rewards and challenges of balancing these three aspects of your academic life?

Elaine Lawless: Okay, that's a great question. Um, I think it's a great question because, um, I think all those things work together. I couldn't probably even separated them very well, um, and that's why they're more rewarding than challenges. Um, what was a challenge always was that on top of

writer, teacher, and witness, I was a – a mother. And that, um, was difficult because the work we do as folklorists, at least the way I want to do it, is to do field research. I mean I couldn't even imagine any other kind of career. Um, you know I didn't want to be an armchair scholar or work in an archive. I really wanted to be out with – with living, breathing people, and that was hard because it took a lot of time. Just took a lot of time. And so, um, I'm not sure, I guess writer. I'm not a writer until I do my field research, right. Ah! So, um, it – the juggling part was always really, really difficult. I remember all the *years* driving down to Eldon when I was doing the first book on Pentecostal women, uh, ministers. And just, you know, Eldon is ninety minutes away and services were at night, and I had, you know, a couple of kids at home and it was just hard to go to all those services, drive home, uh, prepare for classes, yadayadayada. Um, I've always loved, and still do, love writing, but I always felt like I didn't have enough time to write. Um, It's something Pralad[?] and I – excuse me – always talked about. There just wasn't enough time to actually feel like you could leisurely sit down and do your writing. It was always just, like, under the gun and there were deadlines, and you know, you had tenure *looming*, and it was just – it was kind of crazy. It was very crazy. Um, so in addition to wanting to do fieldwork, I also wanted to do work that I thought was important, and that meant advocacy social justice work. Um, lets just make it really complicated, okay? Um, let's not...you know- let's, lets choose topics – I, I remember, not too long ago, I don't know where we were, and somebody said something to Sandy about my work, and he said "Well one thing I can tell you, she never chooses anything that's easy." And that's true, 'cause if I feel like it's worth it, it's going to be probably difficult. I don't know. Anyway, so, um, the writing was wonderful. I loved it, uh, but it came after a lot of field research, sometimes *years*. *Years*, which is really a long time. Um, but I never felt like what I was doing in the field, and what I was doing in my writing, was separate than from what I was doing in the classroom. Um, even though I'm still really, um, shy[?] about asking my students to read my work, and I – it's taken me several years to get over that to some degree. When graduate students in my classes were saying "Okay, but you've also written about this, why don't we read some of your work?" You know, so um, but in terms of the way I think about field research, and the work of folklorists, um, I just felt like it was of a piece, That what I did in the field, and what were going to talk about in the class room, that was – it was just... it was like icing on a cake. It was like, I, here I was doing this fieldwork, often by myself, I mean I...only in later years did I work *with* someone. It was *always* solo. Um, but then to go in the classroom and have these super intelligent, passionate people in classroom to talk through some of the issues was just, it was so – so wonderful. Yeah, we now have a dog *snoring* in the background [laughter] the transcriber will be glad to know.

DH: [laughing] I thought that somebody had a chainsaw! [00:06:20]

EL: No, this is Tucker.

DH: [calling to dog] Tucker! [snaps fingers]

EL: We may also hear the bullfrogs. Ryan thought it was a cow out there the last time they were here, and I said "No Ryan that's a bullfrog." Um, and I guess the witness part certainly is – it, it again goes back to the fieldwork, um, and doing work that I feel like should be done and that I want to stand as a witness, um, that if I can't do anything else, and Todd and I are working on an

article right now that the title, currently, is *When Advocacy Fails*, um, and it – that correlates with the one he's got in this special issue, too. Um, that even, or maybe more so, when we feel like our, work our *efforts*, um, haven't done that much good for the people we're working for, that we stand as witness, that if nothing else, that's what we do. We stand as witness, so I liked your three words writer teacher and witness, I did. I think that's, um, that was good.

DH: How do you think your, your fieldwork has changed *you* through – through this whole process? So there's – there's a lot of discussion in these pieces, and thinking about how it changed the population you worked, and the students who read it and things like that, but what about – what about *you*? What do you think...[drowned out].

EL: That's a great question. I don't know if I can answer it, um it relates best I guess to, um, Jackie's article in the special issue, which I of course love that based on her thesis, and she talks about how, uh, the fieldwork she did with the family – of – her family of women that, that doing reciprocal ethnography with them changed them, and also changed her, and changed all of their relationship and thinking about the grandmother who was their – the auntie's mother. Um, oh, I don't think there's any doubt but what it has to change us. Um, I'm not sure, hmm.

DH: I'll let you think on that for a little bit, if you want to. (**EL:** Okay.) Um, what about um, the challenges piece. So what – what has been... so, what have been some of the challenges of balancing – can you balance all three of them, um what has to give sometimes between witness writer and teacher? [pause] Or can you? I mean, that's also...

EL: Of course we can and, and I wasn't very good at that, um I'm totally a bulldozer in the way I approach things and, uh, I think it finally kind of caught up with me. Um, I wasn't good at balancing. Ah, I was better at juggling than balancing, if that makes any sense. I could have a lot of plates in the air, and the sad thing is I probably don't know where I dropped a plate, you know. I hope it wasn't my kids, or a student who needed more attention, um, or an article that could have been written differently, or, uh, an approach to something that could be done differently. I was, of course, dismayed when I realized that I *hadn't*

[00:10:00]

EL: shown my work to someone along the way, and I feel like I – I did a good job of stopping in my tracks, and saying “Okay, I can't do this anymore. We as folklorists can't do this. We've got to show people what we're writing and then, um, incorporate that.” So, uh, that was a real challenge, um, but I – but I was – um, absolutely *focused* on fixing that. Um. [pause] You know I – I don't know, I don't know how much of this to go in... I forgot how to play. I just forgot how to play, although again, my kids saved me. The kids, and Sandy, I mean, you know, you can't not play with your kids, and they were in sports and I spent a lot of weekends following them and watching their – their games and stuff, and that was really healthy to get out and away from – from the work that I... Even though probably in my head I was constantly thinking about it, um, so I – I actually wasn't very good, I don't think, at balancing. I was... I – I got it all done. Todd says on my tombstone they're gonna write “She got shit done.” [laughter] Which I think will be just fine. I did, and I was

very happy that I got shit done. But um, the balancing part was... I don't know how I – how I did with that. I don't know.

DH: Alright. So the second question I sent to you was, um, what do you think of the obligations of the folklorist in working with our various populations, especially vulnerable ones, um, and then how do you see these obligations shifting in insider versus outsider ethnography?

EL: I – I don't know. I'm not a fan of that question. (**DH:** Okay.) I don't know how to answer it. Um, I mean I think the key, whether its insider outsider, no matter what population we're working with, we have to be... um, we have to be... especially vulnerable... We just have to be good listeners. I just – I really... I think that's our obligation, is to be good listeners and to be transparent about what our goals are, and what we want to do with the material that we, uh, take from them. I know we – we like to say gifted with or something, but we do, we take. We take from these populations, and so I – I feel like the biggest obligation is to be good listeners, um, and to be mighty careful about what we say about the people we're writing about. And I don't think that would be different insider-outsider, although I – I know from the students... I've never... I don't think I've ever been an insider to a group I've studied, have I? [laughter] Uh, and I know that that has become – that has been a real problem for some of my graduate students. Um, I remember, ah, Reinhold and David [pause] working within, uh, a Mormon culture that was their own faith tradition, and how it just it was just so very, very difficult. Um... so I wouldn't presume to speak about that, so much.

DH: It seems like of the populations you worked with, um, at least are closer to your experience, or your, um, yourself, that others have been.

EL: For sure! Women, always. Always, I'm studying women because somebody better! And – and vulnerable women, yeah. [pause] Um, I think the challenge there, for me, has been not to make myself front and center. I think that's the difficult thing there. Um, when I wrote the book on domestic violence narratives, I mean I - I'd written a long chapter about my own experiences in that area, and uh, took it all out. And let's see, somebody... you tell me, it's in one of these articles... I don't know. Alright, if in talking to someone fairly recently, um, who read, um, women escaping violence, and got so frustrated with me, because I hint at it at the beginning, I've got a poem about my own experience, and then maybe at the end, kind of came back to it briefly. And, um, now I'm gonna have to really think about who said this, but her frustration was that she anticipated the author inserting herself and relating it her own experience, somehow to the women in the book, and I never did do that really. And she was really not happy with me, um, because she felt like I'd left something out that would've – would've fleshed it out in a good way. But I think that's a – that's just something you have to decide, and I decided it wasn't my book. It was not my book, and I hinted at it and I – I, I said enough that I wanted to be sure people knew that I knew, to some degree, what I was talking about. That I wasn't just out here looking in, that I'd sort of been there, um, but I didn't – but I didn't want it to focus on me, you know. And I don't know if I'd ever change that. I was surprised that this person's response was that, um, although I get it. I mean, I think there's – there's an awful lot of, um, writing being done these days, some people hate it, and some people like it. A little bit more navel-gazing, and you know, (excuse me), the – the personal,

inserting the personal into the scholarship – that is a tricky business, though. (DH: Yeah.) It's a very tricky business... so, yeah.

DH: So our next question is, as a student, and then a teacher, of ethnography, and at all times a practitioner, um, you have seen generations of thought and concerns. Um, we were talking about this one, and by we I mean Lisa Higgins and I. (EL: Yeah.) We had a road trip recently. (EL: That's great.) Um, in particular regard to the generations of your students whose work is represented in this issue, we were actually pointing out “Oh, so-and-so-and-so-and-so” were in the same kind of...They overlapped, and then so-and-so-and-so-and-so overlapped, etcetera. Um, so thinking about both, you know, every – everything in this issue, but then also just overarchingly. What kind of trends have you seen throughout your career, um, in terms of ethnography, in terms of folkloric concerns, um, whatever you think is interesting. Where have we been, and where are we going?

EL: [laughing] That's *huge*! (DH: I know!) You guys! [makes retching noise in jest]

DH: What are some...what are just some – what strikes you immediately, though? What did that make you think of?

EL: Well, interesting, not maybe not even about ethnography. I've got, I have to think about this a little bit, but, um, one of the things that I'm just so thrilled about is the new book by Shelley Ingraham, Willow Mullins, and Todd Richardson. Um, and again there we've got people who, uh, you know, two of them at least, are more literature people, um, who have tackled what I – I think is, is folklore theory. Absolutely, with the implied nowhere, I don't know if you've seen it yet. (DH: I haven't read it yet.) It's *so* awesome. It's just amazing, and to think that those people, you know, came out of our program, which they all three did, um, and I – you know, when I say our program... the... you know, the fact that all of you, as students at Missouri, you really did, I think you all benefited from, um, first the work of Foley, and the oral tradition more classical approach that actually, um, gave us a niche in the English department that we wouldn't have had, because for those of us who did field research, we were definitely the oddballs, they didn't know what to do with us. But Foley's work as it was, and you know, classical Homer, and Beowulf, and all this stuff, it – it gave us a niche.

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EL: And then for the students to work with Prahlad, and me, and then eventually Joanna, and some other people. Um, I just think that – that we somehow created a program that allowed students, um, not only to do ethnography, because not all of them did, right? But also to think about what folklore really is, and where it lives, and breathes, and how people make meaning. And that book is just – it just knocks me out. It's *so thoughtful*, and it's so new, you know, you'd think “Could there really be one more book on folklore that says something new?” right? And it does! It absolutely does, and I – and it just stems out of this program that allowed them to think about things maybe in a different way. I just... and they got it! You know I remember the day Todd Richardson came into my office and said he wanted to write his dissertation on Bob Dylan, and I just went “Oh...Fuck.” Excuse my French. [laughter] “That's really nice, Todd. I'm glad you want to write...” you know. But even then, he knew why he wanted to write about Bob Dylan. And he hadn't done a

PhD in folklore, but he knew something about what Dylan had, and how he fit, or he didn't know how he fit into the sort of schema of folk music, and folklore and, and, you know, whatever was happening politically and socially at the time, and then he did it! You know, I mean, it was great, and I was so ambivalent. I'm like, okay...[laughter]. You know, and Shelley always picks up the last rock nobody's looked under, and she picks it up, and she goes "Hmm". You know, she's – yeah... She's making me read Shirley Jackson again, um... That book I think really represents where we're going, not where we were. We didn't need another book on the history of folklore studies. We – we need to figure out where folklore fits, um, today. Um, I was thinking about this on the deck this morning a little bit. Um, you know, folklores get their panties in a twist because no one seems to know what we do, and we all think they should. Everyone should know what folklorists do, and what folklorists know. Well, if everybody did there'd be no reason to have folklorists, right? Um, and I think that's fine. You know, we don't all have to know what a business person knows, um, but I do think that in recent years the bridge between folklore and what other people in the Academy, or in the world, are thinking about is, ethnography. I think *that's* the bridge. Um, in – in my work at this university, and in my scholarly world, ethnography is – has a language and an understanding that crosses disciplinary boundaries. So when I started working with the theater department, um, and we did the trouble and violence performance project, I didn't know anything about theater, but right away those people, those professors and graduate students that I was working with, we had all read all the same people, you know, they're... they're talking about Denson, and they start showing me videos of Anna Deavere Smith, and I – and we sit down and have a conversation about The Laramie Project, right? Ethnography, it... that was the language we all knew and we brought something to it, so when I'm on committees and I work with people in sociology, anthropology, journalism, communication, you know, all of them. Ethnography is a part, not all, but it's a part of what they're doing, and it's about studying people in small groups, where they are, and how they make meaning. We all do it a little differently, but we bring something to that table. I just think... I remember the first time I saw a book on the ethnography of a corporate office, and I thought "Oh, that's ridiculous" And then I started looking at it, and I thought "That's not ridiculous at all," right? I mean, this was written by people who were hired to come into a corporation, and do an ethnography. Who – who was talking, who wasn't? Who was leading, who wasn't? You know, how were people talking to each other at the water fountain, or not? You know, it... so I – I just really think ethnography is – is a wonderful bridge, uh, between disciplines, and – and so I don't... I'm trying to think. I guess some of the people in this issue are making those connections, I'm – I'm thinking about Lisa Reggie's article, um, *Reciprocal Pedagogy*, that I guess maybe is an evo...different evolution of reciprocal ethnography, that she says Patti Bowman developed, and that Lisa is an – an advocate for, that takes reciprocal ethnography, uh, which is sort of the relationship between the ethnographer and the people she's studying, into other communities. So, into the classroom, you know, how does that work with the students. Or, into a community, which is also what Lisa Higgins is writing about. You know, how do... What does that bring, um, and we're right back to being good listeners, um, making sure that we're transparent in what our goals are, and, um, giving voice to other groups of people, in, in that – those conversations. So, yeah I think that ethnography and the way people are using... I think reciprocal ethnography is just, I mean it – it just means, um, being careful and listening well. So yeah, I saw

that in – in the articles, and then we had Reinhold talking about, in higher education administration, um, that, there, um, it has that same kind of application, right? Him being a good listener, which I'm sure he really is a great listener, right? Um... [pause, making noise to fill space] yeah...

DH: I'm going to go back to my questions... I turned on my back-up recorder, um, (**EL:** Oh did you?) as an after thought. [laughter] (**EL:** Oh, okay!) It's fine, I'm sure... Um, how about, um, looking – looking way back, you know? Looking at the beginning, in the beginning, you know, when you discovered folklore as a field, um, and, um, moving, you know, moving forward. Have you seen differences in – in the way ethnography is thought of? Um, have you seen, you know, how has it continued to grow? Was it as interdisciplinary as you're seeing now? Um...

EL: I don't know. I... I don't know who used the term ethnography first. Um, for years, and years, and years, I just talked about field research, right? Um, so I'm not even sure how the term has evolved to, um, meaning more in a... You know, than just field research, um, for me, certainly in my own development of reciprocal ethnography, it – it's more than quote just the field research, because it takes the field research, and the interviews and, the observation, or participant observation, and then it – through the writing, and then bringing the writing back to the peo – participants. So there's, for me it's – it's a much bigger proposition. I mean, it's just - it's more inclusive of all the participants. Um, and I – I don't know the history of the word. Do you? [laughter] (**DH:** No.) I should have looked this up! I don't know who first used it, but, um, my guess is that it's probably an anthropological term and, um, it did not include an awful lot of the things I just mentioned, that it was about, you know, an anthropologist going into... I'm gonna, you know be very stereotypical, into the village and observing the village, and the participants, who's doing what. You know, so you got, um, long ethnographies...

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EL: Um, so I remember when I was in, I guess graduate school at Indiana, and pulling down all those big Bureau of American... I think that was ethnology, though. And ethnology in Europe was really the term, and I think it still may be, although CF is society, but international ethnographic something... But ethnology in Europe, um, I think was a much more historical endeavor, as well as observing what the people in the tribe are doing. Um, it also had that historical component, so, you know, in Europe it was about groups of people who have been in various places in Europe forever, you know, and looking at that – the evolution of those characteristics of different people's, right? Which didn't work in the United States where we have no history, whatsoever [laughter], except yesterday, right? Um, so that... Yeah, I think that Bureau of, um, those were Bureau of American Eth...I think it was ethnology.

DH: How did you learn how to do ethnography? [pause] How did you learn how to do...Let me rephrase the question. How did you learn how to do fieldwork?

EL: They just turned us loose! [laughter] You know, kind of like we did here. Um, good question. So in graduate school at Indiana, of course at *Mecca*, at IU...um... Hmm. Be great if I said "Well, all my teachers were my role models for going out and doing, you know, field research." I actually don't

know that I can say that, so let me think a minute. So the kind of professors I had, well Dorsen was, I gotta hand it to him. For all his [laughs] craziness, Dorsen was an ethnographer. He didn't use the term, he used the term field work. And, um, you know he had... I don't know what year he did Negro Folk Tales from [pause] Michigan, wherever he did the work for that, but he actually did fieldwork. He did field research, and I remember he took a group, I wasn't one of them, but he took a group of students to Gary, Indiana, and they did field research together. Um, so it was definitely, uh, something that was done at Indiana, and talked about. Most of my other teachers though, so Ilyan Boshkaz [approximation of name] was my Russian teacher, he didn't do field research. It was, you know, Russian folk tales is what we studied. Um, I guess Alshami [approximation of name] did field research, maybe in Egypt or something, but not local, and he didn't... And his was folk tales too. My dissertation adviser was Mary Ellen Brown and, you know, she – she studied Burns as a – as a poet. Um, a poet who drew on the people's traditions, for sure, but Mary Ellen didn't do field research at all. I'm trying to think, you know if I just go through them. [pause] Linda Degh did field work, um, in Hungary. She and her husband did a lot of field work, um, not sure I remember her teaching us how to do it. Uh-uh... Boy, nuts and bolts. John McDowell did field research in Mexico. South America. I – he also... I mean I don't remember anybody, you know, whipping out the cameras and the recorders like we did here and, and checking them out to students and saying “Do this,” or “Do that,” or “Here's how you do it,” here's – here are the... I don't think so. Um, we've probably talked about it more than we actually did it. One summer, uh, Richard Bauman and Beverly Stoeltje came to IU from Texas, and, um, both of them did field research and they talked about it, um, and I – and certainly if we wanted to do field work it was encouraged, um, and critiqued.

DH: That was a side question, sorry. I'm – I'm getting us off track (**EL:** No.) But I am curious about this kind of lineage, you know. Um...

EL: No, I – I think it's a great question, and I – I just don't - I don't know if other schools... I suspect there are schools that do a better job than others in that nuts-and-bolts kind of stuff, but I don't know who they... You know, I'm... I don't... I think it's *critically* important though, and I was glad to see Jackson writing about the – the veterans oral history project and the work he did, and in the ethnography class on that, and that was not, probably the best semester of that course that I taught, but it was an interesting one, and I think the students learned something, and we really did nuts-and-bolts in that one. I mean, we checked out cameras we, um, we worked in teams. You know, it – it was, um, I don't know what, I'm what word I'm trying to use but it was, um, kind of a controlled environment, if you will, in that: this is what we're going to do, and here are where the veterans are, and we've been cleared to go in with our cameras and tape recorders, and do this work with them, you know. And so, there's a lot of guidance there, that usually isn't true.

DH: Was that – was that the only time you did it that way, that class that way, where you had a specific project that you were collecting ethnographies for?

EL: Yeah – *one project*.

DH: That one time?

EL: Yeah.

DH: Okay.

EL: I – certainly went in my undergrad classes, I often did more nuts-and-bolts kinds of stuff and, and I guess in some of the first-year graduate courses... but yeah, just on one topic, that's the only, I think that's the only time I ever did that.

DH: Alright, let's go on to number four. (**EL:** Okay.) Um, you've said in the past that you see your students as part of your academic legacy, and you've launched students into a wide range of careers in folklore and folklore-adjacent work. What has surprised you the most in the direction that your students have taken your influence, what has challenged you the most in your mentorship of students with such a wide range of direction, and what do you think studying folklore and writing ethnography prepares us for? I know that was a lot of questions, but I just wanted to get the entire question out. Um, lets start with the first one. Um, so, um, what has surprised you about the direction your students have gone? What do you think is interesting?

EL: I think they're *all* interesting. A couple of things, first of all, you come to mind. You and others who, you know, I was really resis...I'm not, uh, a high-tech person, and I was really resistant to this, you know, online ethnography stuff. Um, and I don't know who first started talking about it, but you know I'm so - it's so engrained in me that we're talking about living, breathing human beings, and we're sitting like we are and having a conversation, even though I'm tape recording it, and I have all these goals, and I'm asking the questions. But that to me was fieldwork, that's what that was. And so... And probably because I wasn't, um, heavily involved in the use of technology, like I am not on social media by choice, but I also don't check out blogs, and I don't, um... I utilize technology very little, again by choice. But I also have come to recognize, *so much*, that – that I'm missing things that way, and that, um, those of you who argued for their being, uh, online communities that could be studied ethnographically.

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EL: I mean I'm over it, of course they can, but I – I was resistant to that, um, just because I probably wasn't moving as fast as, you know, all the younger students coming in who were digital natives, and I wasn't, and, um, and that work, I just think that's absolutely taking off. Now, who in our group, who in our graduates has done that? You did. (**DH:** Janis Patomic[difficult to understand]) Yes... Yes she did. Although in my mind, you know, I'm... I was really, uh, taken with her, um, study of the, of the performing communities. Of course, I just, you know, that was great, and the other was, again, just icing, I guess. Uh, not for her probably, um, but I think, yeah, digital, I mean it makes sense and that, so that was... And I don't know who else is still doing that sort of work. Um, I was really happy to see in the collection of JAF articles that, um, people in public sector work – working with local communities still find application of some of the things that they learned with us here at Mizzou. Um, Lisa Higgins talks about that, you know, trying to have a reciprocal mentality when working with communities, and I would imagine what she means by that is, again, being a good listener, inviting different voices into the conversation, um, at Elisa Rath[not sure of name] she talks about that. Um, yeah, I don't think the people coming out of Missouri have this big

split that people talk about, academic versus public sector. I don't know. Um, I don't know if *you* talk about applied folklore in your medical class, if that's a term you use.

DH: It's an idea, that I use[cross talk](**EL:** It's an idea.) I don't know if I really ever call it that, um, I don't know that I – I hammer it over and over again, "This is folklore, this is folklore." (**EL:** Right, right, right, right.) We just talk about systems and talk about how, how they might effect care and things like that, so, yeah.

EL: Yeah, so you talk about traditional systems versus...

DH: Western biomedical systems, yeah, and even like, popular systems and – and aromatherapy, things like that.

EL: Yeah, which is fantastic, and I think that's one of the best courses the Honors College is doing. I'm thrilled! Um, and you were the one who didn't want to teach, right? (**DH:** Yeah.) But – but I... That was a surprise. I think it was a surprise for you too, you know here you are working with medical students who are *only* getting one narrative, right? *Always* and, and not having any understanding that the people coming into the context of the medical system, uh, might have some different viewpoints, and I just think that's *fantastic*. It's just... oh, yeah. So that's a surprise, and it's an application of our folklore training in different ways, and you said, you know, like, what was the book? They... I want to say *They All Fall Down*... (**DH:** Oh, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*.) And *You Fall Down*, right. Um, really had an impact on them, you know. And I think, I think that's, that's great, that's great. So that was a surprise, right here locally in the Honors College. I think that's great.

DH: What do – what do you think that studying folklore and writing ethnography prepares us for? Um, what... How, how does that help us in our next stages in our career? [pause] Aside from becoming academics who write ethnographies, because that's [laughter] that's kind of a no-brainer.

EL: But think about... I'm thinking about Shelly's – Shelly and Constance's article in the, in the issue. Um, you know, Shelly is still deeply invested in literature, and yet, um, the way she's – she can read literature and think about literature is so informed by her folklore training, and even if she's not doing ethnography per se, when she reads a text like one written by Shirley Jackson, and has an understanding of the characters, the people that – that populate the stories, you know, she... or Eudora Welty. I mean, she *knows* what makes those communities tick and, you know that, when the writer is using language that, um, tries to reflect that community, you know, she knows what – she knows what's going on. It just... Inherently, she reads it and she knows what's going on. Um, at the same time she quotes Rosemary Hathaway and talks about, you know, the unbearable weight of authenticity, Where, you know, you can't expect the writer to be able to capture that ineffable essence that is folklore, but some of them get closer to it than others do, and she can sniff it out. Shelly is so good at that. And then – Constance, I'm trying to remember all that she said, both of... Which is interesting to me that they chose to write about the troupe, the performance troupe, uh, for this JAF article, which it was amazing that that's where they went. Um, but it made them maybe even hyper aware of the role of the narrator, and positionality, and, um, the whole

issue of telling other people's stories, and the pitfalls of doing that. Um, the response – I should say the responsibility – of doing that, and then how Constance, um, was able to say, “You know most of these are white women stories, most of the performers were white performers. You know, where are the stories of black women, and how would their stories be different, and – and how would they, um, express the context from whence they come in really different ways,” perhaps than the women that I interviewed in the domestic violence shelter, so I would, yeah I've, Oh...[pause] Studying folklore and trying to understand how it operates, which they are *all* trying to do, prepares them to then move into, um, a better understanding, I think, of something like Constance talking about critical race theory. I mean, she made that huge leap in her article, and I don't think it's a huge leap at all. You know, I read Derek Bell and – and notice how he uses story, and understands story in a particular context to, um, express a point of view, a way of life in an understanding of positionality. Um, anyway I – I mean, obviously, not everybody needs to study folklore, and folklore is not going to save the world, but it might! (DH: But it might!) But it might.

DH: Okay, let's go ahead and go to, um, the last formal question I have for you, which is, um, have you said everything that you want to say about your body of work as a whole, um, and this is in regards to you, you handed me your introduction (**EL:** Oh, yeah) to your forthcoming, um, collection, okay? Is there anything that you wanted to say elsewhere that you haven't gotten a chance to, that because just didn't fit in with the piece...

[00:50:00]

DH: Or, um, that... Any side-bridges to that discussion. Or anything at all that you wanted to say, thinking about your body of work as a whole. And you can interpret... What – what do you think of when I say body of work? There we go, that's a... Let me start with that. *Your* body of work, what do you think is *your* body of work?

EL: I think you just changed the question.

DH: I did *completely!* [laughter] But, I'm excited about it, so I'm going with it. (**EL:** Really?) Uh-huh! What does that evoke to you? (**EL:** Okay.) Is it just your articles? Is it just your books? Is it...?

EL: Oh no, it's everything you and I have just been talking about. And when I say my students, uh, the students I've been fortunate... You know, I don't even know how student – *former* students feel about me saying, “Well, she's *my* student,” right? I mean you're not my student anymore, but I would say [cross talk] – I would try to remember to say, my former students, but, um, if they're... Of course, things in print are a legacy, right? I mean, of course they are, and this collection of essays that is coming out, now rereading them, oh my god I thought I'd die of reading some of the sentences I wrote, right, I mean, at the beginning of my career. But that collection is really about the evolution of reciprocal ethnography, like, you know, so it – that's the thread, and I had to leave them the way they were because I grew, and I – hopefully, hopefully I grew, and the, and the whole thing, um, became more complex as I thought about it. But, um... [pause] I'm getting distracted here... I don't - I don't... The body of work thing... Really, what I'm most proud of, seriously, are what the students from Missouri are doing now, and that they're making... They're changing the way we think about folklore just by the work that you're doing. I hope you found a way to

advertise the course you're teaching, for example. I mean do people know what you're doing here? Um, I just think that's fantastic. The book I mentioned, *The Implied Nowhere*, I really think that's a substantial book that doesn't do what anybody else is doing and I'm – I'm so pleased to see that. Um, and I – you know I don't really care what directions people take. I – I just am pleased that Prelaad [approximation of name] and I were able, and I say that two of us because really it was us, we were able to build a program that we could be proud of and that we could do what we wanted to do within it. That was great, and we had a great run, and it's really sad that it's over, but we – We and the students who were here during a particular moment in time, we thrived and I think that's great. Um, I'm so pleased to see someone like Claire finding a way to be the creative writer that she is. That piece on canning just knocks my socks off. I've seen different variations of that here and there and it's just beautiful and – and it's such a great testament to her understanding of what folklore is, and that in fact folklore is not about preserving things, and that... And as she says, that folklore is messy, and I love it. And – and then you – you do your canning and then you have to clean up your mess, which is great. Um, yeah I'm not worried about a body of work. Um... Wow, I feel like I might cry. The – the piece that really hit me in a good, good way, maybe because it's really still... It's very current, and that's Todd's piece and how... I'm so pleased that he and I worked together for eight years on that Pinhook story, drove down there time, after time, after time, and that he was able to write about our vulnerability, and my vulnerability, and say to, you know, to be... to say that Elaine had admitted she didn't know what she was doing. I – I think that's really important. It's not only important for me to be able to say it, but also for him to *see* it, and be able to say it. I mean, I... This whole JAF special issue deal... *All* this attention is just like a lot, and as I tried to tell Lisa, I – “Okay, *enough!*” [laughs] and she wouldn't let me say enough, and I get it. If we're going to talk about reciprocal ethnography then you could – you should say, at least, inviting Elaine into the conversation, that's fine. I'm happy to enter the conversation. But um, I think we have to admit we – we don't know what we're doing. We're doing the best we can with what we have, and we were given tools by our mentors, and by other writers, good writers. Um, we do the best we can, and we admit that we don't know what we're doing. And that Todd was able to – to write that piece that he wrote, you know, I mean, hell, but just a few months after we've published the book and sort of withdrew from that setting... It's still raw and it's – and it does feel like a failure in the sense that what we wanted to advocate for didn't happen, and all our hard work and art and our good intentions didn't make a damn bit of a difference. Um, but we made a difference. I believe we made a difference. That work changed me, I think it changed Todd, and I think it both helped and changed the people we were working with, at least we were witnesses to what happened to them, and they got to see that at least somebody, um, connected to universities, for example, us, cared and were willing to come back over, and over, and over, and not give up. Um...[pause] So his – his piece was really powerful, powerful for me to read. Maybe again because it's just still so raw, but um, it – that work and, the work with Heather, and the – all the grad students in the performance troupe... Um, over the last 15 years, I've done more collaborative work, and I appreciate that it's a *lonely* business out there by yourself, so I – I've appreciated that.

DH: So that's the end of my formal line of questioning. So now it's open season. Reciprocal ethnography, you've read all of these articles...

EL: I did [cross talk](**DH:** ...using...) a couple at times

DH: And, um...

EL: Hi, honey! That's my husband.

DH: Do you have any... Wait, I should probably... Should I pause for a moment? I will.

[Break]

DH: Alright, so this is part two, duo, um (**EL:** The end.) the end question, um, in the spirit of reciprocal ethnography, um. Granted, these are not necessarily ethnographic pieces about you, or...

EL: Thank god!

DH: But, in the spirit of reciprocity, do you have responses, either to specific articles, or to specific, um, ideas that are common throughout the articles, um, that you want to make?

[01:00:00]

EL: I think I've done that. By reading them a couple of times, there...Yeah, I – I got to know the articles well enough that I could pull them in when I needed to, or wanted to. No, I don't want to single any...In fact, my fear is that I've mentioned every single one of them, except yours, but...

DH: Did you – Did you read mine?

EL: I did read yours! [crosstalk](**DH:** I knew you would) [laughter] Of course! Um, yeah, And I, you know, I loved that, I had not thought about the shadow, whatever, shadow mentoring, or... (**DH:** uh-huh!) Yeah, I think that's a great concept. Although, yeah, I don't know...

DH: They didn't like it. (**EL:** They didn't like it?) as a piece, yes. (**EL:** Well...) And that's okay. It was really more of a thought piece. I think it needs more expansion, um...

EL: If you want to. Like I asked you, like, um, only do it if you're invested, because if you're not, that's okay, too. Um, I – I'm kind of trying to go through them. Tried to print it out, but I didn't get all of them. Um...

DH: Did you mention Kristen?

EL: I didn't, and I – I'd like to. Kristen...Uh, her piece is lovely. Kristen writes really well, also, and she's probably the most, her article is the most academic of all of them. Um, and she's trying to question, and I think this is really important, she's trying to question, um, how – how we write ethnography with a evocative voice, um, if I'm quoting her correctly. But I think what she's getting at, um, is when we use creative nonfiction in our eth – writing up our ethnographies, I mean, what does that do? It – It certainly adds, um, an accessible, um, language that, um, that gets away from what we might consider a more dry, uh, anthropological or ethnographic voice, you know... Um, and I think it allows us to enter the scene. You know, it, um... I tried to do that at the beginning of the book on domestic violence narratives at the shelter, and place myself at the shelter as a

worker, not as a resident. But, um, you know, how do we use language that – that is, um, differently rhetorical, in a more creative way, and I think – I think she’s asking us to be cautious about that, and I get that. Um, and I have been, because I think – you know, It isn’t about us, and yet, we are in it. We are right there in it, and we need to find a way to position ourselves in it, and I don’t know if I’ve ever mastered that. Um...So I think that hers is really, really important, and I, um...Yeah, I didn’t mean to not talk about it because...

DH: Oh no, and I don’t know that it will ever be at any point where we’ll be pulling out, you know, specifics. Um, did we miss anybody?

EL: I don’t think so, I mean, Jackson did the oral history project [paper tearing in background], um, Jackie did the, uh, you know, how it changed her...[dog yawning in background] The women in her family. Um, gosh, I don’t even have the list. So, and Shelly and Ingram – Shelly and Ingram – Shelly and *Constance*, Lisa Higgins, community-based listening and – hearing, different voices.

DH: And Willow (**EL:** Yours) only has the intro, she didn’t have a piece in it, right? [dog whining in background].

EL: And I don’t think I’ve seen the intro. (**DH:** Okay, yeah.) I haven’t done that. So no, I haven’t read anything by her.

DH: Lisa Rathage’s[approximation of last name] piece...

EL: I – I *love* what Lisa Rathage does. Watching her at AFS is just a dream. She is so sure on her feet, and she’s...this local learning, she’s *dynamite!* And she tells the story that when she got to Missouri, she went to see Pralaad[?], and she said, she wasn’t... She definitely didn’t want to be an academic, and she didn’t know if Missouri was the right place for her, just...I don’t know if she tells this in her piece, but anyway, I’ve heard her tell it, but, uh, you know she didn’t know what public sector was, but she knew that was more her inclination than the academy, and teaching, scholarly stuff. And he said, “You’re exactly where you need to be.” And she didn’t understand that, but she came to believe that it was true, that whatever we were doing here would allow her to do whatever she needed to do. And I think she is a prime example of that, right, just - she’s done... As are – As you are and, um, Lisa Higgins, and uh, you know, yeah. I... Anyway, so, no, I – I think one of the things we could do at this point is do what you said. Go ahead and have it transcribed, and you shape it the way you want to. I don’t think I’m very articulate on my feet, and so you just do whatever you need to do (**DH:** Okay) with it.

DH: Yeah, I’ll get some pieces together, um, last question. How weird was it to read, um, these articles?

EL: Weird! Un – And like I said, I mean I just, it’s – it’s like too much. Already, enough! [laughter]

DH: I tried to read them is if – (**EL:** Oh, god!) as if I were Elaine J. Lawless, I tried to think about that, and think about how, um...

EL: And that, that’s one thing I would definitely change, and an editor will do this for you, but every time I’d see “Elaine J. Lawless,” It’s like the whole name is in there. “And then, when Elaine J.

Lawless walked in the room..." I'm like "Get rid of that!" And so the question will be, I guess you'll use "Lawless", but I wouldn't be opposed to "Elaine", um, but the whole "Elaine J. Lawless" has got to go, or Elaine Lawless, just, you know, got to get rid of that, somebody will. But, um, very weird, it's very, very... and humbling, and embarrassing, um, yeah, all of the above. And I really - I really wasn't in the mood to do this interview [laughter] because of that, right? Really, really. (DH: It's the price of fame) No! It's - the only reason I would do it is that you're right, if we're going to talk about reciprocal ethnography, then you should show me what you've written, and let me respond, right?

DH: What does this tell you about how reciprocal ethnography effects the people that you're working with? Do you think they feel weird?

EL: Yeah, I'm thinking about Jackie's people feeling weird, but also, sure, when I took back everything that I had transcribed from the - the group of women ministers here and they hated it. They *hated* it. Um, because whatever questions I had asked, they answered, um, but the question, and this is an interesting... The question and their answer were - they were too limiting. And so, what frustrated them was that they hadn't said X, Y, and Z, you know. They had only answered my question, and then they were pissed off at themselves, and maybe at me, too. But I think what it demonstrates is that reciprocal ethnography is not just about, you know, doing the fieldwork, and even transcribing it and taking it back to the people. But it's what...doing that then, um, facilitated. And that was, when they got their transcriptions back, and they didn't like them, then they were eager to talk about what was missing, and what this had done for them, and could we also talk about this, and, you know, I mean, I couldn't keep up with the sessions *they* wanted to have, to have more, and more, and more conversations. And so when those books were done, they said "Okay, now write another one so we can keep doing this." [laughter] And I - I was like "I'm done! I don't have another book, on y'all, in me!" right, you know. But it - it wasn't just what that did, it was what it engendered, right? I mean, just...Anyway, so, so what I would suggest is that you get it transcribed, and you do whatever you want to do with it, and I will definitely, probably, think about things I didn't say, or you'll see gaps (DH: Absolutely) that we may or may not want to fill. But yeah, I - I think this is adequate. (DH: Alright.) And of course, please know, all of you, that I'm really honored, and surprised. I mean, I remember when people started talking about just a panel, doing this, you know, in Long Beach, and I was so glad I wasn't going to be there, because I didn't have to sit in the room and listen to people [laughter] talk about being in my work, because I - I don't think I could have. And yet, if I didn't go, that would have been really rude, so it kind of worked out. I didn't make that AFS.

DH: Well thank you very much for your time today, I really appreciate it. And, um, this will be a lot of fun to work with moving forward.

End of Transcription

[01:10:44]