



Wypiszynski: As far as the first question, what activities did you enjoy doing as a child?

Pershing: Oh wow, I saw your first questions and I thought I have to remember back. I'm 57 this year, going on 58, so it's been a few years since I was a child, let's see... I guess I was what people would say I guess what people would say a "tomboy."

Wypiszynski: Ok.

Pershing: I was the youngest of three children.

Wypiszynski: Ok.

Pershing: Two daughters and a son. Um, was sort of the one who didn't conform when I was young both to gender norms and sort of idea of propriety for children. So I was inquisitive, probably very talkative I guess. I liked to explore, I like to play outside. Not a real traditional thing girls are encouraged to do, like um worry about makeup hair, playing with dolls all that kind of stuff, didn't fascinate me quite so much. Um, so as child I think I was out exploring a lot. I liked art. I remember that. Wish I was still doing that, um let's see what else. Always outdoors, camping, hiking, those kinds of things, swimming um so nature animals all fascinated me.

Wypiszynski: Um just for my own curiosity, where are you originally from?

Pershing: Ah I grew up in Los Angeles.

Wypiszynski: Ok, my aunt lives in Pasadena. So I was just trying to get a mental picture.

Pershing: I was born in LA and grew up there.

Wypiszynski: Ok very cool, I know where you're talking about. And then as far as your parents, um if you can just give a brief description, what their like ,what they do? Or what your family life was like.

Pershing: Ah yeah let's see, my parents both came to California from Indiana just at the end of WW11. They grew up in Indiana farm communities. Both of them graduated from high school, but neither of them went to college, but it wasn't really a thought or aspiration for them, just because of their backgrounds and the kind of work that my father did, didn't require a college degree. Oh wow how those times have changed. He was a graphic artist and ah came out as the end of WW11, and my mother and older brother who was a baby at the time, and the war was ending, and they went west to get jobs. All of that idea about taking opportunities available in the west. They followed that and came out to California in 1845 after the war.

Wypiszynski: Interesting, very interesting. And you said that you have, you ah have two siblings you said?

Pershing: Yes a brother and a sister, both older.

Wypiszynski: Same as me. Sorry

Pershing: It's ok, it's hard when you're on the phone to know whose talking and who isn't. But I should have mentioned my mother was a homemaker. My whole life she was the one who stayed at home, took care of the house, took care of the kids. She was a really active parent in all of the

FFA, Girl Scout, all of the extra curricular stuff. We were a really classically middle class where my father's income was enough to support us. And you know two parents didn't need to be able to pay the bills, so that's also changed.

Wypiszynski: What kind of school did you go to?

Pershing: Ah I went to ah public schools, always K-12. However, my parents moved out of downtown LA into Pales Verdes. Which, I don't know if you know that area, it's not far from the beach communities down near Manhattan, close to where Torrance is, but it is on a, on a hill, outside of the boundaries of LA, and it has a higher tax break because many of the people who live there, especially now, have higher income, so they are renounced, for example for having really good public schools. And one of the reasons my parents moved was because the school system was really good. And the other reason where we moved in all honesty where we lived was become much less white and much more inhabited by African Americans, and my parents where extremely uncomfortable about that, and pretty racist about that. So they moved out of LA to avoid that.

Wypiszynski: And then as far as school itself what was your favorite subject?

Pershing: Oh wow, in early school I really liked math, and I was pretty good at it. I loved to read, I think literature, math, um those were my two favorites as a young child.

Wypiszynski: What were some of your least favorite?

Pershing: You know I can't remember not liking any particular, well that's not true. I took one class in what used to be called Junior High School, but now is called middle school in Home-Ec. And it was all about, mostly girls in the class, learning to cook and clean and plan menus, and how you keep your house tidy for the man in the house and all of that. This would have been in the 60's. And I really hated it. We had to sew an apron from scratch. Well there's a stereotype these days. And I remember just hating it.

Wypiszynski: Yeah they do some similar things now when I was in Middle School. We did a little sewing, but now aprons, and the guys had to do it as well.

Pershing: And we know now a days so many people do make aprons from scratch right?

Wypiszynski: Yea (laughter). Um, ok moving on, as far as college background. Which specific college or university did attend?

Pershing: Ah, I was first in house, well I'm the first generation to go to college, well that's not true my older brother went to one of the Cal State campuses, because the idea was by this time, which would have been late 60's/70's that a boy probably needed to get a college education to get a decent job, but coming out of a white middle class family, what I heard growing up was I was supposed to get married and have a family, so there wasn't nearly the idea that girls should do that as much as the boys. I was the first girl in my family to go to a four-year college, and I wanted to go to college and have a career. So there was definitely a generational change there. I went to Occidental College, which is a private school in LA, and it was the perfect school for me. It had small class sizes, interaction with faculty, small campus, all of those kinds of things that worked for me.

Wypiszynski: And then when you were at the college, how did you decide what you wanted to study?

Pershing: I took a couple of classes from a couple of professors that I immediately clicked with. I was interested in religious studies at the time, and I actually thought early on that I wanted to get a degree that would allow me to work in a church, as either a minister or a youth pastor or something. I later took a completely different turn of events and didn't do that at all, but that's what I initially thought that I was going to do and I took a couple courses in religious studies at Occidental that were brilliant and really wonderful in seizing my imagination and make aware of what I was capable of doing. One of the professors that I had that was life changing, his name was Keith Beebee. Was a religious studies professor that also did archeology. And every summer he went to Israel on a dig, an archeological dig, and this particular summer he took students so I went with him, which was an absolutely fascinating experience and just opened my eyes to lots of things. So I did a degree in religious studies with a minor in German, and spent a semester in Germany, which was also life-changing kind of experience.

Wypiszynski: Interesting, did you even return back to the site where the dig was?

Pershing: No, I haven't been back there since. I imagine they have done much much more with it since. It was Caesarea? It was a very extensive dig that they had done for years. So I don't know what else they have recovered since then, I'm sure it would be amazing.

Wypiszynski: Definitely. And where in Germany were you studying?

Pershing: The University of Saarbrucken and the way that's spelled is Saarbrucken with an umlaut, and ah its in the Faarland. Not too far from Frankfurt, Germany.

Wypiszynski: Are you fluent at all still?

Pershing: Well I I can listen to German and understand most of it, but after all of these years the problem is maintaining the vocabulary. You know I can I can understand it, but what I cant do is I'll listen to a conversation and a lot of the words I cant remember you know because I haven't used it because there aren't a lot of options for using German for where I live you know?

Wypiszynski: Yeah, exactly very true.

Pershing: And I didn't want to go on and teach German particularly so um ah yeah I've kept some of it but I'm certainly not fluent anymore the way I was. Um the other thing I would add about that experience, besides seeing some of the world and realizing that you know there is so much outside of the United States and people think and feel so differently in other cultures and other things that happen when you go abroad. It was the year that Richard Nixon resigned the presidency and it was really a fascinating experience to be in Germany while that was happening and watch the international reaction to it, and it was one of the experiences that made me realize how sheltered my experience had been growing up and how little I understood about how the rest of the world looks at the United States. But it was a pretty great experience as well.

Wypiszynski: Yeah I would say, definitely a lot of students that are studying abroad now that have heard news stories about the UW, things that are going on in the United States while

studying abroad. It's definitely something that I wish I would have done but, it seems like an awesome experience.

Pershing: Maybe as a grad student.

Wypiszynski: That's what I was thinking. My sister lived in Czech Republic for about four months, her boyfriend was playing professional basketball there. So she definitely had a different experience living there in a little apartment in a town that didn't speak much English um so definitely an interesting experience. It was right outside of Prague.

Pershing: Wow, Prague is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Oh my god.

Wypiszynski: Yeah, they loved living there, the train ride was about thirty minutes, and so they would go there because they could get a lot of American products and um-just kind of experience the culture there as well. Ok well kind of moving on, just kind of a subset question of when you were in college what was your first job? And what did you like about it, or not like about it?

Pershing: (laughter) Oh well first job was working at Taco Bell. And I think about it now and it makes me laugh. I think it was the summer that I turned 16 and in California at the time I believe a law that you couldn't work even a part time job before you were 16. So I think I worked the summer before my senior year, and ah just to earn money during the summer and worked at a taco bell, I don't know part time, full time, but just the person at the window, taking orders. What an experience.

Wypiszynski: Yeah we all have to start somewhere, and definitely when you're in high school the options are kinds of limited still these days. But very interesting. You had mentioned that your trip had really influenced your life as well, um but looking back is there a specific person, you had mentioned a couple different professors or um a group of persons, an organization, or institution that has had the greatest positive influence on your life story?

Pershing: Yeah definitely, well I had some fabulous fabulous teachers when I was young you know K-12. Several of them who were those teachers who recognized in me some ability that I either didn't see in myself or I was too young to even thing about who encouraged me to do things that I wouldn't have tried to do so. Again, largely a thing of my parents not having college degrees and not really understanding how important education is. It just wasn't part of their background so having these teachers that could see in me, wow you really do have talent, in something rather it was in math or reading or writing. I used to do some creative writing as well. There was a teacher I remember who encouraged me to do that, who gave me special assignments to write stories, for example, and I began to get the message, gee maybe a do have a brain after all. Maybe I've got something to offer that maybe I would have gotten from home because it just wasn't apart of the socialization from my parents. So I did have those teachers K-12, but in college I had two professors in the religious studies department that immediately took me under their wing, that I think of now that is sort of funny and typical of that was that they were both men. And it's because when I went to college, which was 71 to 75, there were no women teaching in the department, in the religious studies department at all. And there really weren't that many women faculty members there, there were by far more men then women. There were not women's studies classes, none of the things I got interested in later even existed then, but I did have two fabulous professors in religious studies. I took classes from them in the

first semester I was in college, who immediately sized me up and thought I had potential, and I ended up working closely with them for the rest of my college career. And they are really the ones who gave me the message that you could really go on and do more with this if you want.

Wypiszynski: Interesting, do you think that that has had a huge influence since teachers and professors had a huge impact into your 20's, maybe one of the reasons why you continued your education into graduate programs? Has that influenced your teaching styles as a professor in anyway?

Pershing: Yeah, absolutely. I've called on them. One of them, Keith Beebee, who took me to Israel, actually died a couple years ago, and the other professor Jean or Eugene Bammel, I still stay in touch with. He lives in Arizona, I visited a number of years ago. He's a philosophy professor, but taught in the religious studies department, but he and I still stay in touch, which tells you something about how much he meant to me. Um, and I kept in touch with him all through grad school, after my first teaching job, I actually just took a trip out to Arizona to where he retired and went to see him a couple of years ago, so that give you an example of how important that relationship is to me. Um so defiantly the experience of working closely with them, their confidence in me, and them modeling what teaching could mean was very important. But another thing I should add in there was I didn't thing that when I graduate from college that, or even after my masters degree that I even wanted to be a professor. That was never apart of my plan, so it wasn't until later that I sort of put those pieces together. All I knew was that they had confidence in me and they helped me take my next step. But after college my next step was not to be a college professor.

Wypiszynski: What was it if you don't mind me asking?

Pershing: What I did was I went to a masters program at Princeton Illogical Seminary, which is the religious studies school that branched off of Princeton and I got a, you'll love this, I got a masters of Divinity Degree, and it don't you love that they call it that. M.Div. is the sort hand, and it is the degree that most people get if they are going to become a minister or pastor in a congregation. It's a three-year degree professional program, kind of like a masters of social work program would be for that field. Ah, it's a terminal degree, and most people do that if they want to work in a church, and that's what I did, thinking that's where I was going to go. I ended up doing something completely different. Um, so I went to the M. Div program at Princeton, finished up that degree, during those years, and that was 75-78, I got involved for the first time in the Women's Movement which was really taking off in the US, at the time. And started reading feminist literature, starting listening to feminist speakers, and it changed my life completely. And what I decided I wanted to do when I graduated was not work in a church, in fact I never worked in a church, after that, and I left the church as a result of that, but I I went and helped start a program to serve battered women and their children in the late 70's early 80's when that movement took off across the country, and people were setting up hotlines and shelters and all of that. So that's what I did first with the degree, and I never would have guessed that when I started college that that was where I would end up.

Wypiszynski : Many different twists and turns. My dad always tell me, especially throughout my undergrad career that no matter what your degree that doesn't determine necessarily what you are going to do.

Pershing: Very true.

Wypiszynski: That's something he always mentions to me, so that's another great example of that as well. Um, but um, kind of moving on to specifics, of some achievements that you have completed, what is something that you are very proud of and why?

Pershing: Something I am very proud, well I um I'm trying to remember what year this was, let me see, um I think it was 2009, but I would have to check that date, I think that's right. I got an invitation to go back to go back to San Francisco, which is where I went, ah to help start that organization to serve battered women and their children because they were celebrating their 30th anniversary and they asked me as one of the founders to come back and speak at one of these big gala's that they had, ah and it was also a big fundraiser that they were smoozing with people in San Francisco to get them to donate money to the program. And going back there and seeing the fact that number one that it even survived um you know we were, I'll tell you about that in a second, we we're nickel and diming and doing anything just trying to raise enough money to cover a phone line and counseling services etc. It is now a full blown very developed agency that's central to services in San Francisco that services domestic violence victims and seeing that flourish and take off, and become institutionalized, be recognized and be celebrated that was a great feeling. Ah particularly because it was just three of us who were students who graduated from Princeton Seminary in 78, and we decided that when we graduated, rather than working in churches we were all going to pick up and move to San Francisco, get part time jobs to fund ourselves and pay the bills of rent and then um start a battered women's service program, somehow by the seat of our pants.

Wypiszynski: I was going to say, that must have taken quite an enormous amount of strength. Ah that's amazing and pretty unbelievable.

Pershing: Yeah, it was amazing to see. It is crazy enough, and I think about this now, if I heard anyone say they were going to do this I would think that they would have completely lost their minds. But we each worked half time jobs, some of us worked more hours than that. And we rented one big flat, and in San Francisco they have multistory buildings, but a whole floor is one building, and it had like five bedrooms in one big flat. We rented a floor with our salaries and we lived in two or three of those rooms and the other rooms we used to have battered women and their children when they were fleeing an abusive spouse and their children, and we actually housed them with us. I think about that, and we ran the hotline out of our house. And we did our work schedules so that we could cover 24 hours so that somebody was always there, um you know just craziness, but we were young, fearless, but these are the things that young people do that older people are to stogy to try to do.

Wypiszynski: That is total grassroots movement right there. That's insane.

Pershing: Yeah, and that was the way these women were starting these kinds of centers. They were out of their homes, and offices, and whatever. It now has state funding, city funding, etc. So anyways to answer that question in a long long way that felt great. It felt like we had started something that had survived. It has now served, I honestly don't remember, but I'm thinking they have said something like 100,000 clients you know, kind of thing in thirty years, and that felt like a great contribution.

Wypiszynski: Definitely. To see how that can flourish and help so many people starting from just an idea that a couple individuals had is unbelievable. Very cool.

Pershing: And that organization, let me give you the name so it goes in the record, so that would be nice for them to get a little recognition, it's called, its an acronym. It's called WOMAN, Inc. So we called in WOMAN, Inc. It stands for Women Organized To Make Violence Nonexistent. We had to think of an acronym so that's what we came up with, so anyways and that organization is now the central hotline for San Francisco but the entire Bay Area, so that was a great thing.

Wypiszynski: Definitely. Are you still in contact with um you said it was a couple different women that you worked with?

Pershing: Well I've kept in contact with one of them but it's been on and off because we live in different parts of the country. But the other person, and this is kinda a funny part of this, my spouse, my husband, he and I who both graduated from Princeton the same year, the other woman whose name is Debby Clifford started the project together so yes I am in touch with my husband.

Wypiszynski: Yes (laughter) still in close contact with some of the individuals. Um, as far as, going along with the type of question, what is the best compliment you've ever received, is that something along the same lines, or is that something a bit different?

Pershing: Um, I think that the best compliment to me, because I've shifted career paths several times in being an educator, well I got my first teaching job in 1990, I taught as a part time instructor while I was a graduate student starting at about 1980 or so, um is I think that the best compliment to me is that I have opened up the world in some way for another person or another student. Ah part of my job as an educator is to do what was done for me, is to let a student know that they have talent, they have the capability of doing, um tremendous things in their future if they are willing to put in the hard work and pursue it. And I've encountered many many students who have never had a teacher tell them that, and if I can give them that gift, get them to believe in themselves enough, and then give them the skills to move forward with that then that's that's the best compliment to me that I've made some influence on their life.

Wypiszynski: I'm not even a student of yours and I found that very powerful. Coming from a student's perspective, anytime that a professor can give you that type of opportunity or faith that can play a tremendous amount in your future as a student. That's awesome, I definitely agree. As far as another question here, what is the most important value in human living? Kind of a loaded question but...

Pershing: What is the most important value in what?

Wypiszynski: Human living.

Pershing: Oh my Gosh, there's a big question. Most important value, two things together, I cant say one is more important then the other... Love and Justice. They have to go together because, just love or compassion or caring is very important but justice and equity are equally, so you cant have one without the other and really make it work.

Wypiszynski: are there any specific examples that would like of make you answer in the way that you did?

Pershing: Yeah lots of things I guess. I ah, all of my academic work in one way or another has focused on areas of power and privilege and social justice issues, because in the women's studies department, which is the only department I've ever taught in, even though I'm a folklorist. Those kinds of issues are always front and center. They are important to me personally and morally. In looking at what's going on in our world, they also seem very fundamental in terms of what's happening in both our country and around the world, and at the same time, ah you know there's Emma Goldman's quote "If I cant dance I don't want to be apart of your revolution." That's not the exact wording but it's something like that, we have to have joy, we have to have love, there has to be warmth and human conviction in order for life to have meaning for me. So those are things that I also value but also justice and equity kinds of concerns because they are both on the table there.

Wypiszynski: As far as personal strengths and weaknesses, are there any specific, strengths and/or weaknesses if you want to just pinpoint one or?

Pershing: Yeah let's see, um weaknesses. My weakness, particularly as an academic, is that I have a minimum tolerance for bullshit, and that is not a particularly useful trait to have because there's a lot in academia. There's a lot of power dynamics that go on, and a lot of hypocrisy in terms of what academic institutions say they are versus how they really operate. And I don't have a very high tolerance for that. I tend to be short on patience, I'm not diplomatic enough often in dealing with those kinds of issues. So um that doesn't always serve me well. (laughter) Let me just put it that way. There's a thing a thing that I would say is a weakness. If you're going to do this kind of work it's important to recognize that that is inherited in academic institutions and is just going to be part of the deal. And it is what it is and you learn to work with it and negotiate it. In this business, I'm not always the best person to do that. So that would be a weakness I would think. A strength, I think my connection with students, ah I care a lot about attention, and I put by far my most time and energy in my job into teaching, and I ah serve a population of students, I teach at University of California at Santa Monica, which is part of the California State system. Most of those students who attend those schools are middle to lower income, and are more of a working class student base than middle class. Many are first generations to go to college. We have a high percentage of ethnic and racial minorities, and I don't like that term, but we have lots of students of color in our campuses, lots of working class students etc. and they are the ones who need the most help, the most services and are the least funded by our system. So, um I make it a point of trying to be helpful to as many of those students as I can. I think partly because what I mentioned about being the first in my family, in knowing what that's like in recognizing what difference education can make in their lives if given some opportunities. So there would be strength, educating for students.

Wypiszynski: This is just a side note, what are the class sizes like of the University that you teach at?

Pershing: When I came, I'm in my tenth year there, the class sizes were 20-25, they are now 40 and more, so they have doubled in the last ten years, and with the budget cuts we expect that to go up. So yeah, it used to be that we prided ourselves on being an institution where there was a lot of student faculty interaction. That is becoming less and less the case.

Wypiszynski: Yeah I mean it's, coming from a perspective of um the UW, it is definitely a different experience coming into a junior and senior level year when you have the ability to be with a professor with a class of 20 kids, it is different then my freshman year with 400 students in some classes.

Pershing: And especially, which campus are you on?

Wypiszynski: Madison.

Pershing: Yeah, well you know at an intuition like that which is a nationally recognized research institution, the faculty there get hired because of their research, not because of their teaching. And you know there's that huge emphasis spending time writing and doing researching, and less time on interacting with students, so you get the big lecture hall class thing routinely for introduction classes, I would guess huh?

Wypiszynski: Yep, most of the introductory class, 200 level, the classes are going to be at least 150 kids.

Pershing: Yeah, that to me is just a horror. What a ridiculous notion about teaching that is, and it is purely because they are saving faculty time and resources for research not for teaching.

Wypiszynski: Yes, you definitely go through transitions, of what you get used to your freshman and sophomore years, and then you get the one on one opportunity your junior senior years, but it makes you stronger to approach professors.

Pershing: And that's what's different about the kind of institution I teach at. At the Cal State level, um our equivalent, would be the University of California System, which would be like Madison. Um, our schools, because they are kind of a notch down because of both prestige, and what kind of grade point averages students have to get in those schools, they are much more about teaching and less about research, so as a result of that we get a smaller class size opposed to Madison, which is a research one institution known for that.

Wypiszynski: There is a research emphasis on the campus, its interesting reading the textbooks from your professors.

Pershing: Yeah, I love that assigning your own textbook for you students to read.

Wypiszynski: Yeah I didn't expect that coming on campus, but it is nice if you have a question to ask you have your professor.

Pershing: Yes it is, on another cynical note, Professors sell a lot of books when they are assigned.

Wypiszynski: As far as, just one last question about your background and then we will get into some specifics about your work, because we are coming on about 43 minutes here, and I don't want to take up too much of your time. This last question here for general background, how would you define a good or successful life?

Pershing: Oh wow, these are big questions. A successful life, I think I have a different sensibility about that now being in my 50s rather than when I was your age and younger. I care so much less about things like reputations and prestige and public recognition. A lot of things that

scholars are encourage to invest in you know, how can I do a study, write a book, publish something that makes a big splash in my field, ah how can I get recognized for that both at my institution, nationally or internationally. Those are kinds of things that scholars are very often encouraged to invest in, ah I care less and less about any of that. The things, as I get older, that I do care about are um issues around quality, how how I spend my time and is it meaningful to me. Does it enrich my life, does it enrich others. Is it significant and meaningful. Does it change the world in any particular way. I care way more about those things now and way less about the rest of it. Maybe partly because I'm getting towards the end of the career, and I'm looking back thinking how do I want to spend the time I have left. I think the other other part of that is I have a daughter.

Wypiszynski: Ok, I was going to ask because you had on your voice recording I heard Zoe so I wasn't sure if that was a dog?

Pershing: That's wonderful that people would have a dog.

Wypiszynski: Yeah, I wasn't sure, I didn't want to assume anything. (laughter)

Pershing: Yeah having a daughter now who is an adult, the process of watching a child grow up, realizing how quickly time goes by. To me time is my most precious commodity, you can't get it back you know? I look at being in my 50s thinking I'm your age, and I have no idea how 30 years have gone by, so that feeling of time being precious, and wanted to spend time on things that are meaningful and not wanted to get invested in things that aren't meaningful, I just don't think is useful or I care about. That's what I sense the most in terms of value.

Wypiszynski: How old is your daughter?

Pershing: Let me think, she is 26. And the other piece of that picture that we fit in the biography is that I did not want to have children particularly while in my 20's. There was so much I wanted to do. I wanted to go to grad school, I wanted to see the world etc. It wasn't until my late 20's that I even started thinking about kids, and even decided to um get pregnant and have a child but I was 30 when I did that. And I'm really really glad of that because it gave me a change to do things in my life that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.

Wypiszynski: Definitely, a lot of students um now, my peers, not until our 30's there is so much out there, and yes I want that opportunity to start a family but like you said there are a lot of things to experience before that. Did she go to college or what kind of university did she attend?

Pershing: Yeah sure, what an interesting thing that happens in two generations. Of me being the first to go to school, especially as a girl um my husband came from a family of teachers. Both of his parents were teachers, ah he actually retired early and went back and got a teaching credential and because a high school teacher himself. And I've been a college professor for twenty some years, so you can imagine the only message she got growing up was education education education. What we always told her was that schools was sort of her ticket to do what she wanted to do in the world, and getting the education she needed to do it and the credentials she needed to do it was her real avenue to make a difference and change the world, and she took us seriously. Um we used to laugh about the fact that we told her when she was young that we told her that we would send her to any college and the best college she could get into, little did we recognize that she did really well in school and she applied to Yale and got in and went there as an undergrad.

Wypiszynski. Wow.

Pershing: So that was an amazing experience, both for us to observe and to watch her go through because it was so different of an experience in terms of what I had, in terms of what was available in a school like that, which is endless resources. And she graduated from Yale and took a year off and spent it working at an HIV clinic in Honduras, ah just to kind of get some real life experience and breath outside of school for a bit. And then graduated and then excuse me she applied to go to Columbia Law School, got in, and she just graduated last year. She is now an attorney and working in Los Angeles. Who would have guessed we would have a kid that would go to two Ivy League schools and become an attorney.

Wypiszynski: My aunt is a lawyer and does family counseling. What part of LA is she an attorney in?

Pershing: She's interested in human rights law. Right now she is working in a large multinational law firm in Los Angeles firstly because they offered her a job and she has \$200,000 of law school debt.

Wypiszynski: Yeah it racks up.

Pershing: Yeah, she did it all on loans. We played for her experience at Yale, but we were tapped out at that point.

Wypiszynski: It's so expensive.

Pershing: So expensive. So she's doing it on loans, and part of her way of paying that back, because she doesn't want to stay in a corporate environment for too long. I think this is a first job for her.

Wypiszynski: Well it is a good opportunity to get your feet wet, and pay some of the bills with is definitely um, education has become very needed and wanted but very expensive.

Pershing: Yeah, how much are your tuition and fees at Wisconsin now?

Wypiszynski: Um we pay, I'm in state from Green Bay, WI, so I pay 3600 a semester, and probably by the time I graduate 4000, so 8000 a year. Out of state tuition is probably about 15,000 or 16,000 a year.

Pershing: Yep it just keeps going up.

Wypiszynski: Yeah, just the segregated fees and just additional things, and then now they are trying to "privatize" the university so that may change things, so we'll see.

Pershing: Terrible.

Wypiszynski: But by the time any big changes happen I'll be out, hopefully at grad programs, but we'll see what happens then. Moving on to specific things pertaining to folklore and gender, and know you had mentioned, that a focus of, um like specific work is not how you determine a successful life or, but I had a question of what piece of work or contribution are you most proud

of as a work in the gender and folklore studies. If you understand what I'm saying, I kinda said it in a weird way.

Pershing: I had a really lucky opportunity. I did my graduate program University of Texas at Austin when they had a pretty strong Folklore Masters, Masters/P.HD program there which it's still exists but many of the star faculty who launched and taught in that program left. And that happened just as I was finishing my degree, so I lucked out, and I was working with a couple of faculty there who got a brilliant idea with us as students to go to a symposium and all day symposium, at a national conference at a national conference at the National Folklore Society on Folklorist Feminist Theory. And it was really one of the first venues in which that had been done as a academic discipline. We put out a call for presentations and papers, we did an all day symposium, of all kinds of presentation from people all over the country. And together we pulled together an edited book out of that call "Folklorist Feminist Theory" of which was one of the first real publications that tried to bring those things together and as a grad student I got to work on that and became one of the three editors of the volume.

Wypiszynski: I'm familiar with the book that you're speaking of, I have a copy, my Professor gave it to me.

Pershing: (laughter)

Wypiszynski: So I have been looking over it because I have been doing work with her specifically on creating the archive and then we are going to do like the welcome page. So I have been doing some other research with her as well and she had given me a copy of the book so.

Pershing: Who was it who gave it to you?

Wypiszynski: Um, Professor Christine Garlough.

Pershing: Oh yeah yeah, great. Well that's great. I consider it now, you know it's a pretty dated text, and I look at it now and sort of chuckle about what our ideas of Feminist Theory was. But it was early you know, it was really important to open up that field you know and create a space for it. So that that was great, and it also help start my publishing career, and I was just getting ready to finish my PhD program and take a first teaching job, so that was a wonderful opportunity for me to get started. So anyway that was an early contribution that I consider, it made an important impact on the discipline.

Wypiszynski: Definitely, she has a copy and gave it to me, and I had been looking through it and I had seen you name mentioned, um in it so I had just been doing some skim reading of it as of right now so. So I know what you're referring to, I have the book.

Pershing: Um I got to work on another of other projects since that time, and my focus has really become women's expressive culture that somehow has a political mission or bend to it. I'm really interested in how women use expressive forms, cultural forms, sometimes-traditional forms, to convey their views of their society power dynamics in this society, their relations in the world, all of those things through folk expression. So I've done a series of things since then that really have that as a theme. One of them was an article I did with Peggy Yocum about the crazy yellow ribbon phase.

Wypiszynski: Yup I had read that article.

Pershing: Yeah um you know during the Golf War with Bush 1 and that crazy and awful war, and yellow ribbons just spreading like fever across the country. Um that whole phenomena which we got fascinated and quite disturbed by. Um, so we wrote a piece about that. I wrote my dissertation about the peace ribbons project that was used during the Reagan years, the Pentagon and all downtown Washington D.C. I, which was a common theory on Ronald Reagan that left him the nuclear arms race. So there's another example of what became political expression that was originally women's needlework done in fabric arts. I got fascinated by that.

Wypiszynski: The Sunbonnet Sue right?

Pershing: Right, the Sunbonnet Sue article was this crazy group of quilters um in Texas who were creating these images that um really were contraventions of any kind of norm of what girls and women were allowed to do in society. Many of them making them possibly scandalous and then using that as a kind of commentary on gender um I did a series of those kinds of projects that just sprung up along the years.

Wypiszynski: Um yeah, Professor Garlough had mentioned the Sunbonnet Sue article when I was a freshman and then again this year. It's really interesting. And then you had also done some research and work on the popular Disney movie Enchanted, and I was just any movies right now that you are specifically looking at or had a critique of? They are doing a lot of different Folklore remakes, we were just discussing in lecture a couple days ago about the new "Little Red Riding Hood" and things like that.

Pershing: Yeah, do you know about Pauleen Ree Hill's work, she just put out an edited volume, what is it called...I'm just grabbing it here. It's about films and feminist folklore, she calls it "Feminist Fairy Tales Films" by Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix, just edited and it just came out last year, a book. And I have an article in there about "Enchanted" and there are a whole series of feminist articles in there that are analysis of fairytales, so there is some really fascinating work out there. And I am um going to take an new endeavor next year. I'm not sure whether I think this is a great idea, or a really terrible idea, but I'm gonna teach a large lecture hall course for the first time which is a race class, gender, cultural analysis of Disney films.

Wypiszynski: Oh that sounds so interesting. I would be taking it for sure.

Pershing: And I'm going to teach it in a women's studies context, and we're offering it as a Gen. Ed. Course. And we'll see how that goes. But I will tell you that of all the things that I've taught about it, and that includes reproductive rights and war, and you know some pretty heavy duty kinds of topics, people have gotten more upset with me in class talking about Disney, then anything I've ever thought (laughter). It's like sacred ground to people, you know. In particularly with students of this generation who have grown up with it, and consider it just apart of their childhood and socialization. The idea of critical thinking about Disney films does not always sit very well. So, anyway I'm going to try a class which is really a critical gender and race analysis of Disney films and we'll see how that goes. And I'm just going to build on the work I did on "Enchanted." I'm actually now working with a student on an article analysis, on an article I hope will get out about "Tangled."

Wypiszynski: Ok yeah.

Pershing: It came out about last year about Rapunzel. So there's another example about a Disney film that came out and it promised in the end kind of a spunky, self-actualized female character. But what happens in the end, which what seems to always happen in the end, is she and the male protagonist fall in love and live happily ever after.

Wypiszynski: Of course.

Pershing: Here we go again right (laughter). So that is a project that I'm working on now, and I'm actually going to coauthor with a student.

Wypiszynski: That's very interesting. I would definitely would be taking that course. In another one of my gender and women's studies courses we talked about the role that Barbie plays at well, which is another semi-controversial topic as well. There was a book we had to read, and I can't remember what the name of it is, but it kinda of falls along with those lines that it's pretty close to the heart for young girls. But when it comes to it when you're in your twenties, it definitely a different feel and look to it.

Pershing: Yeah, it is funny how students are so embedded in this mindset and the material that it is very hard for them to think critically. So part of what I will be doing is just trying to open the door to what is what does it mean to be saturated in a culture when specific meanings and ideals, and how do you get some distance on that to think about it critically. But we'll see, I'm reserving judgment about it (laughter). So we'll see how that goes. The other research project that has been a big part of my work for the last few years, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and um I published a piece and did a lot of work about Cindy Sheehan who was the mother who went to Crawford, Texas when um Bush Jr., second president Bush was on his ranch on a vacation, after he had declared war in Iraq. In 2004 Cindy had went out to his ranch asking to talk with him or meet with him because her son had been killed in the Iraq war, and she wanted to meet with Bush for him to explain exactly what her son had died for. And as a result of her going out there and the media being there at the time, there was a huge media blitz around Cindy Sheehan and the idea of a mother who has lost a son, the president refuses to meet with her. And it picked up on the wire, and that news went around the world and it created a pretty big sensation. Within about a week and half there were 15,000 people who came out to Crawford, Texas who came to join her in support in asking questions about what are these wars about. And I've been out to Crawford, I've interviewed Cindy and did a lot of field work with her and how she got involved in being a peace activists and that's been another big project of mine.

Wypiszynski: That's very interesting. I had read a little bit of um, background on that topic. Its definitely very interesting. Just a couple last questions um, what ah, where would you like to see the study of Folklore within the next 15 to 20 years? Um, Folklore and Feminist Theory, where would you like to see that academia follow?

Pershing: Um, yeah I would like to see more links with, um Feminist Theory, Cultural Theory, Critical Race Theory. Those are the fields, Political Theory, those are the fields that are most interesting to me, and also I think that they are areas that resonate with other kinds of scholars, to help with the issue of Folklore Studies being so marginalized, and often trivialized I think. So I would I would love and always encourage development in those areas, are important to me.

Wypiszynski: I agree with you, even with our Folklore Department, it's not very well known on campus. For my personal experience, but once you get involved in the class work it's so interesting, and um just it would be great if even the theory, this archive itself will help bring people into the field work I think. And then just a last question, just personally for undergrads and grad students that are interested in perusing Folklore and Feminist Theory, what are some pieces of advice that you would give to undergrad students.

Pershing: Oh my goodness, undergrads. I work only with undergrads because we don't have a graduate department here, so I understand sort of that focus and it is sort of where my mind is most of the time. Ah I I think um, give me the working of your question again, I want to make sure I'm answering what you asked?

Wypiszynski: Oh no problem. Um it just is what are some pieces of advice that you'd give undergrad students interested in perusing Folklore and Gender study, either within their undergrad program, or post graduation?

Pershing: Ah, advice, well I find myself of two minds and I don't quite know where to do with this. On the one hand what I always want to encourage undergrad or any students is do more education, pursue more education, follow the things that interest you because that's where your passion is and that's what will make your life meaningful to you. At the same time I'm looking at a shrinking job market and I'm looking at the cost of higher education and realizing that students are considering do you go on for a graduate degree, do you think about for example becoming a college professor, and teaching some form of Feminist Theory and Folklore itself, and are there any jobs out there to do that? And the reality of that is there are very few. So I feel of two minds in terms of being honest with students about what to tell them, you know are you pursuing a field, and I hate these words but it's what is used, is it "marketable?" I'm going to get a little drink of water here.

Wypiszynski: Oh no problem.

Pershing: So, um I don't know quite how to answer that because the reality is, if I did now, if I were your age, and I did now what I decided to do what I did in my twenties and thirties which was go on to get my Ph.D. in Folklore Studies and try to get a job in a women's studies department. Are there actual jobs out there for people to get? Not very many. The hiring situation is so pathetic, and the budget for education is so deflated that I hate to tell students to pursue an avenue that I'm not sure there's going to be any job at the end for them. So it's hard for me to know what to say for that. Because on the one hand I want as many educated and creative thinkers and people out there as we can get, and I think both feminist and folklore studies are both fascinating fields in terms of what you do with them in the real world. But how many opportunities are there out there when you get that degree, and the reality of that is not that it has shrunk so much in a generation. So it's hard for me to say. You understand where I'm going with that?

Wypiszynski: Yes definitely. My self-reflecting at grad program, researching and talking to professors, I totally, I definitely understand what you're saying. With all the cuts to education in general it is a daunting task to think that I could be entering into fieldwork and into a path that will not have an opportunity for me to have a job once I've completed my education. So um I

totally agree with what you're saying it's a difficult situation to be in, excuse me with this market that we have and we are definitely at the center of it this year at the UW.

Pershing: I mean I have, in my own department, we have a relatively small women's studies department, our school is only 20 years old, and part of it is we have not grown into a full sized University yet. But we have three full time, tenure track faculty in Women's Studies, and we have about six lectures, and five of them have PhD's and they can't find permanent jobs, and it's not even for all of them that they have families or have houses here so they need to stay local so they aren't able to fly all over the country etc. Several of them have applied all over the country, they've applied for years, and they can't even get an interview. And I look at that and think, it makes me sick, cause they are incredibly qualified, they've got the credentials, they've got the education, there just are no jobs. So to keep fueling that system with new students, I don't know what to say about that.

Wypiszynski: Yeah.

Pershing: I want young educated Feminist and Folklore scholars out there but what kind of opportunities are there?

Wypiszynski: Yeah it's a double-edged sword. I agree with you with, wanted to pursue your education and wanting to have those opportunities, but when it comes down to it, are there going to be positions for advancement. I'm not sure if that's something that's going to be available but we'll see. Hopefully things get better.

Pershing: The one bit of advice that I could give because I've seen my students do this in the last few years, and I thought it was a very wise decision, and that was to branch out, to be flexible about exactly what kinds of degree programs that you apply to as you go on, and what kind of work that you might end up doing that you didn't think about when you started. You know that funny thing of where your life path takes you. But I've seen for example Women's Studies majors to do public policy degrees, to go on to law school, to go in and work in the health profession. To do a bunch of different things that they probably didn't think that they would do when they started and those are areas in which they can use some of their expertise and it's not just folklore studies or feminist studies, and some other combination and those things seem to make sense. Particularly I was thinking of you and your background, didn't you say in political science?

Wypiszynski: It's going to be in Rhetorical Studies, I'm apart of the Comm. Arts Department here on campus, and then I was also thinking Rhetorical and Cultural Theory as well.

Pershing: Yeah ok, so yeah all of those kinds of things in that they are all inner disciplinary programs and with those, what you have is more flexibility to go into different kinds of grad programs that weren't what you studied as an undergrad, or in other kinds of fields that may be related or may not be called exactly the same thing you know? So that was similar to me as a folklorist I landed my first job at State University of New York at Albany where I was right out of grad school and they needed somebody who did cultural analysis, and they never dreamed they'd hire a Folklorist, you know it just happened to match. And then I ended up in Women's Studies and liked it so much that I stayed there. So the fact that I had an inner disciplinary degree let me apply for more different kinds of things, and I think that's true for women's studies,

feminist studies and the things you mentioned, cultural studies, folklore studies you know? You have more variability you know in terms of what you have to do.

Wypiszynski: Yeah you have to keep your options open. The path isn't always leading you exactly where you think it might. In listening to what you had been saying, um I think that is great advice in these unstable economic times, you never know what's going to be thrown at you next. I just wanted to thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to interview with me. I could listen to you for hours. I wish I was in California right now with you so I could meet with you one on one.

Pershing: Well it was fun talking with you too. Do you ever go to Folklore Conferences?

Wypiszynski: No I submitted a paper to a Communication's Conference this year, but I have not done any folklore yet.

Pershing: I was going to say if you happen to be going to any of those, that's often when I get to meet people so if that ever happens maybe we will cross paths.

Wypiszynski: Definitely. Hopefully grad programs are in my future um so I will have some further opportunities to meet some excellent scholars. It would be a great opportunity to meet you one on one. How far is your campus away from LA?

Pershing: We are about 2 hours south. What we are is north of San Diego about 45 minutes and a little bit south of Orange County so about half way in between there. Um down by Oceanside that area.

Wypiszynski: We will see if I ever come and visit my aunt maybe I will stop by, it would be great to meet you one on one and pick apart your brain a little more. It was great getting to interview with you. I really really appreciate it.

Pershing: Oh your welcome. I hate to think of having to transcribe all of this.

Wypiszynski: Oh not it's ok I'm working on a study with the Comm. Arts department focusing on education policy within high school school district and I actually do transcribing for credit for them, because they are using it as apart of the REDD study, so I've go decent at it.

Pershing: Well that's great. I think the other thing I will throw into the mix here, and this will make sense for you being in Wisconsin especially, in fact one of the reasons I got delayed in addition to having a student in my office, was we had a big rally on our campus all across California with all of California's University's about the budget cuts and in the twenty some year I've been an educator I've never seen anything as desperate, I've never seen things as um educators as disheartened as we are now. And the attack on public education is truly monumental. This is something that has seeped into every kind of facet of our society and become kind of the par land and the general language we are hearing in mass media an by political language. The attack on public education is truly breath taking right now. And again that double buying of I cant think of anything more important then having young become become advocates for higher education and at the same time I know the daunting odds that face the people that want to go into those fields. Because if there was a time ever that education was under attack it is now, it is just a breath taking thing to see, in terms of every public school

system being eroded as we watch it happening so it's quite a time to be an educator. Pretty breath taking, pretty disheartening, and ah how do you keep energy going, how do you keep the will to do this work when there's so little support for it. So a tough time.

Wypiszynski: It erupted here in Wisconsin, and it is unfortunate the cuts that it has come down to, and that have been made. The sacrifices that are being made within the school districts is just unbelievable, it is just sad to see what it has come down to, in my opinion. But hopefully we can get through these tough times, I am not sure what it is all going to end up to mean. But like you said it is definitely disheartening.

Pershing: Yeah that's a whole other discussion (laughter). What is it going to take to change this huh?

Wypiszynski: (laughter) I have no idea, but hopefully we can make some progress in the positive light. So...

Pershing: Yeah, just keep plugging on. Well I hope that's helpful. Anytime you need um any clarification of anything give me a call, and good luck with your project.

Wypiszynski: Thank you again, I really appreciate it.

Pershing: Ok. Bye!

Wypiszynski: Bye!