

An SfAA Oral History Interview with Linda A. Bennett

The Impact of Disciplinary Leadership in Applied and Practicing Anthropology

Linda A. Bennett has made remarkable contributions in a wide range of leadership roles in applied and practicing anthropology at both the national and the level of her academic department at the University of Memphis. This transcript documents some of her considerable accomplishment. Linda has been the president of the Society for Applied Anthropology, the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, and the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists. Having served as president of these three organizations is unique and testimony to her ability to negotiate various organization and still maintain her personal vision of what anthropological practice can be. As important as these was that she was the founder and long-term chair of COPAA (Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology). Her research is focused on health and more specifically on alcoholism. She has done considerable research in Croatia and Slovenia. Since 1986, she has been on the faculty of anthropology at the University of Memphis. She did her graduate work at Indiana University and American University. The interview was done by Barbara Rylko-Bauer and the transcript was edited by John van Willigen

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Many of these interviews are transcribed. As of July, 2014, twenty-one of the transcripts have been published, mostly in the *Society for Applied Anthropology Newsletter*. These are accessible in the newsletters archived on this website.

Published transcripts are all edited and have introductions and, while some are abridged, many are full length.

Suggestions for persons to be interviewed are always welcomed. Contact ant101@uky.edu.

Linda A. Bennett
Barbara Rylko-Bauer
John van Willigen

RYLKO-BAUER: I'm really look[ing] forward to talking with you and learning about the development of applied anthropology, because you've done so much in the discipline in research and writing and teaching and organizational development. I

thought it would make sense just to start from the beginning. How you got into applied anthropology--

BENNETT: I think, specifically, my movement in that direction occurred when I made a decision to go to American University for my doctorate. And when I knew American University, [which] had a new doctoral program at that time, was located in Washington, D.C. and was picked up as being the center of applied anthropology in the country.

RYLKO-BAUER: And why did you think that?

BENNETT: Because of all the work that was being done in government, and just the dispersion of people throughout different parts of mostly government work in the city. And also, the department said (laughter) that that's what their interest was in, in developing their doctoral program. And so just the decision to go to Washington, American University, set me in that direction. And, I must say, that was a departure from what I had actually planned to do the previous year, which was to go to University of Colorado, Boulder and become a biological anthropologist.

RYLKO-BAUER: Oh, interesting.

BENNETT: So, I made a major change in my long-term career plans. And then, [as] I was completing my dissertation at American University, I had an opportunity for a new position at George Washington University Medical Center in psychiatry, to come in and to work collaboratively with colleagues from other disciplines on [a] new grant on alcoholism [and its] transmission over generations of American families. So, in some ways, even though I had an earlier, more general interest in becoming an applied anthropologist, it was this twelve-year history with [the] Center for Family Research at GW that launched me in a very explicit kind of way. So that was kind of the beginning.

RYLKO-BAUER: When did you start getting involved in the local anthropological organizations, and which ones [were] there in Washington?

BENNETT: Well, as a graduate student, I immediately started going to meetings of the Anthropological Society of Washington [ASW], which is the oldest American anthropology organization that's been continuously in existence. It had members who were from all the academic institutions in the city: the Smithsonian Institution, the NIH [National Institutes of Health]. It was a hodgepodge and very interesting mix

of anthropologists. And so they would have monthly meetings, and I just got used to going to their meetings. And, in the mid-seventies, the Washington Association of Professional Anthropologists [WAPA] was created, which was a very different kind of group, and a very interesting, very vibrant kind of group of practitioners and some academic people. And a happenstance moment occurred, when I was finishing up my dissertation and I was working at GW, and the director of the Center for Family Research, David Reese, psychiatrist, took me out to lunch. And, one of the things he made a point to say was even though I was working outside of anthropology, per se, but as an anthropologist, it was really important for me to stay active within my discipline. So, I took that to heart, and one of the ways to do that in Washington was to be very active in both the ASW and WAPA, which I was, basically at the same time.

RYLKO-BAUER: When did you first become engaged with WAPA? I mean, how many years after--? 'Cause I think WAPA was begun in 1976 or something like that?

BENNETT: I believe it was '76, and, so I think I must've been one of the early people who started going to meetings. I'd been going to ASW earlier, 'cause it was around. I can't tell you precisely what year, (laughs) but I think it was pretty early on that I heard about it being formed. And it was a lot of life in Washington, focuses on work, dinner parties, and going to meetings, so-- (both laugh)

RYLKO-BAUER: Were they able to combine those in WAPA?

BENNETT: Yes, a lot of combination. Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: What do you remember from that time period when you were involved in WAPA? Because at one point in time, you ended up becoming the president of WAPA, right? That was in 1981 to 1984. So just like six, five years after you finished your PhD.

BENNETT: Oh, yeah. It was a very vibrant organization.

RYLKO-BAUER: I was just wondering if you remember some of what was going on at that time in the organization, and, how did you get to the point of becoming a president of WAPA. [What are] some of the issues, because this was early on, and, [WAPA] is that one of the earliest local practitioner organizations.

BENNETT: There was one earlier in Arizona [SOPA] that then didn't continue, and so WAPA is currently the oldest standing LPO. It was a really interesting mixture of

people of a variety of ages, but strong emphasis upon careers outside the traditional academic routes. And, it was my recollection is that there was a sense of mission there, because it was a new idea. And the people who came to WAPA came from so many parts of the city, so many different agencies, government organizations, universities, and that it had a wide range of ages of people who were really active. There were a lot of reasons why it was so lively and there was a sense of commitment. It was partly that it was a functional organization in the sense if somebody came to town and they were looking for a job, if they were an anthropologist, first thing you would say, "You gotta go to WAPA meetings," and the networking really made a big difference there. And so there was the functionality of it that was so critical, but, at the same time, it was very social.

And I've always believed that in the long-term life of an organization is dependent so much on people actually just wanting to see each other not just for functional reasons. And I think WAPA was a good example of that.

RYLKO-BAUER: It sounds to me that it's recognizing that one's social life and one's professional life and the work that one does and all that are not separate things.

BENNETT: Right.

RYLKO-BAUER: You know, they, they all intersect[ing] and it's healthier--

BENNETT: And it's very much that way in Washington, that interconnection.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, you've mentioned some of the roles that, WAPA played early on. I'm assuming that they were very involved in helping to professionalize? Or, I mean anthropologists were already, obviously, in positions, in government. But were there some issues, some problems with [the] actual kind of legitimacy, or how you define yourself, vis-à-vis, as an anthropologist, vis-à-vis the work that you're doing in other disciplines? What were some of the questions that they were dealing with, and were they successful in addressing them?

BENNETT: I think that that was a really important aspect, for people who were not in full-time academic positions. And, because it was a time to get together and to retain that sense of identity as an anthropologist. But it was also really important as a modeling place for the younger anthropologists coming up, (laughs) you know through the various--'cause Washington has a lot of universities, and there are, like, you know--there's more than one doctoral program. There are a couple doctoral programs. There's a third one now, Maryland, and lots of master's programs. And so

there were a lot of anthropologists, probably more in Washington than any single other city. So, there was that going on. I think that there was a sense of specialness, as a footnote, I really enjoyed going to ASW meetings. I mean, they did things like-- Margaret Mead was a speaker there. They did some really important lectures, and they published their lecture series every year, but it was [a] much staid group or much more traditional group than WAPA was. WAPA was definitely feeling on the cutting edge.

RYLKO-BAUER: Did they fulfill any functions in terms of like...? I mean, one of the challenges must have been how you find jobs in the public sector.

BENNETT: Very, very much, yes. And that was, I think, a huge motivation for a subset of people, at least, who came to WAPA consistently, was that it was a way to not just network with people in that area but throughout the country. Because these people, there was a lot of [them]--those who worked for the State Department, USAID, Census Bureau, they were doing so many different kinds of things, and they would know things that you wouldn't know if you just hung out at American University. It was the social networking aspect.

RYLKO-BAUER: Was there any training that was involved?

BENNETT: I can't remember if we did, uh--(laughs)--I'm trying to remember if there were workshops that were held at--you know, in Washington at WAPA meetings, but what--I don't remember that happening, but I could be wrong. But what WAPA did was--I think WAPA initiated having training workshops at the, at the AAA meetings. And they probably did with SfAA, too. AAA was what are now--like, NAPA workshops [were] originally were probably WAPA workshops. -

RYLKO-BAUER: Interesting.

BENNETT: I mean, it's expanded phenomenally.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right.

BENNETT: But WAPA members put together workshops and they would, you know, frequently pay their own ways to go to wherever the meetings were if they weren't in Washington. I think the fact that we were in Washington, that AAA was located in Washington helped that.

RYLKO-BAUER: And the meetings cycled through Washington more frequently than they do now.

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: Do you remember any person or people in particular that, you feel had a real important role in the evolution of this organization? And also, in your own evolution leading up to you becoming president of this organization?

BENNETT: I remember having early--we met in different places, like at the Quaker Meeting House. [That] was probably the place we met most often during the time I was in Washington.

RYLKO-BAUER: Where is that?

BENNETT: It's in Northwest Washington, near DuPont Circle. I think it's R Street. But we also had meetings at, Shirley Fiske's house, not where she lives now but another house on Capitol Hill.

RYLKO-BAUER: And what was Shirley doing at that time?

BENNETT: She was working--I think at that time, if I remember, she was working for NOAA.

RYLKO-BAUER: Okay.

BENNETT: And, she was very active, also, in WAPA. And Bob Wulff.

RYLKO-BAUER: I'm assuming that part of that involvement together led to--

BENNETT: The Praxis Award.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yes. And also the book that they--

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: It was one of the early applied anthropology collections.

BENNETT: Yeah.

RYLKO-BAUER: I forget now what, what it was--the title of it.

BENNETT: But the, the Praxis Award itself, attracted a lot of attention to WAPA. And that was, you know, Bob and Shirley. Not everybody's still in Washington, but there was a very devoted group of people.

RYLKO-BAUER: When you, then, become president, what was it, three years that you were president?

BENNETT: I think what it was, president elect and then president. I think that's what it was.

RYLKO-BAUER: But so, can you think of several different issues that you dealt with at the time, or initiatives, or, some-interesting developments that occurred during your time there?

BENNETT: One of the things, that I learned from that experience. First of all being WAPA president was it required a lot of time and attention to try to do a good job at it. One of the things I learned, which has held me in good stead over the years, about working with people in organizational matters, is that no matter how hard you work on some and how much you attend to details, things will still go wrong. And along with that, when things go wrong, the best thing to do is to take responsibility even if you were not the one that was [the] cause of the. . . that doesn't work all the time, but it's amazing how much it diffuses irritation. I remember one very painful meeting, and I won't mention names, between two members, I think, around the way of planning a workshop. It was at Shirley and Steve's house, and it just got really, really uncomfortable. I guess I mention that because it, it's as though you need to anticipate when you're actively working in leadership in an organization that it is impossible to avoid conflict. And, issues that need to be if not resolved on the spot worked through over time.

RYLKO-BAUER: So that was kind of a good chance to learn the strategies that you've obviously, I'm sure, had many opportunities to apply later on.

BENNETT: Yes, and that was one that came out of the blue--(laughs)--and I was totally blown away. It didn't really involve me, but I happened to be president at the time.

RYLKO-BAUER: Anything else that you want to say about that time period?

BENNETT: I moved to Washington in 1970 and left in '86. We went to Memphis. During that time, I had my applied anthropology work in Washington, D.C., but I also had parallel with that, work I was doing over in former Yugoslavia. And, there were some cross-themes in the way--since I worked in a department of psychiatry, and my colleagues on the research project included psychiatrists, psychologists, social worker, sometimes a sociologist, myself--you know, people who came from different disciplinary backgrounds and learned on the spot, not just in theory--of all the great things that come out of having interdisciplinary cooperation on a project, and where you draw upon differential strengths in making something work.

RYLKO-BAUER: What was the project?

BENNETT: This was, one of the first of three--there were three projects, over a twelve-year period on alcoholism in American families, and basically the transmission or non-transmission of alcoholism over generations of families, but from a socio-cultural point of view, rather than from a biological point of view.

RYLKO-BAUER: And was there a parallel study then going on in the former Yugoslavia? And which parts of the former--

BENNETT: I worked in--my main home base in former Yugoslavia was in Croatia, in Zagreb, but during the eighties I worked in Slovenia and Serbia, as well, but my home base was always in Zagreb and in Croatia. I'd been first in Yugoslavia in 1970, and then for several months in '73, and then in and out through the seventies, but I returned for two months, with really good funding support in 1980, and my plan was--and this was-- a lot of lessons I learned this way, too, in terms of being flexible-- (laughs) my plan was to try to replicate some of our research in Washington, among the hospitalized patients being treated for alcoholism in Zagreb at their main treatment in that republic. And, got there and I had very good cooperation with, the chair of the department, and all of his colleagues. But immediately I realized that was not going to make a lot of sense to do the same project that I had in mind doing. But one of the reasons why I got entry so smoothly in 1980 was that I had several years under my belt of doing this work in a psychiatry department, being able to work with psychiatrists, on a very practical kind of problem and issue of alcoholism. And so, because of that, they were very receptive to my coming and, and being in the hospital in Croatia. But I also had opportunities there to do research that was a very different kind of research than what I've ever done in the United States. And, by being flexible and picking up on those opportunities, really opened up a lot of--I mean, it was like for several years in the 1980s, so just, like, no end of projects that I

might have been either the lead on or a collaborator with and I truly learned a lot about collaboration, cross-culturally and cross-disciplinarily over there. And my closest colleagues over the eighties and--still come out of the biological anthropological field.

RYLKO-BAUER: Interesting.

BENNETT: But they're a mishmash of different specializations in anthropology.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, how was the research different? Was it just the focus that it was more, I mean, anthropology in Eastern Europe meant something different than it did here to some extent.

BENNETT: Yes, and in Croatia, I have to say, my ties were with medical practitioners and with biological anthropologists, and, to some extent, linguists over there. Those were my strongest ties, rather than with ethnologists. And, it partly had to do with just the work I'd been doing in Washington, and when you establish--you know how it is; it's when you establish with people and they go well then you build on those relationships, and you never know where it's going to go. I mean, we know that in the United States, but working there made that even clearer.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, I think if you work in another setting, another cultural setting, you, you come--you then turn around and look at your home setting through a different lens.

BENNETT: For the first time, I had never paid much attention to--I mean, I had heard about alcoholism treatment in the course of doing so many interviews with people in the US, but I never really had spent much time focusing on the means of alcoholism treatment and the different modalities and that sort of thing. But when I got to Zagreb in 1980, that was my home base was smack middle in the main treatment program. And it was great because, it was almost like, learning how that system worked, but by a true criticism and observation. And, then reflecting on what I thought I was observing and hearing in that system. So--but I didn't know much about that. When I came back to the US, I realized I knew a lot more about treating alcoholism over there than I did in the US other than Alcoholics Anonymous.

RYLKO-BAUER: I think you finished your tenure at WAPA in 1984, and then you left Washington in '86. And, you went to the University of Memphis, and we'll talk about that a little bit later.

BENNETT: Okay.

RYLKO-BAUER: But, at what point did you start getting involved with NAPA, the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology?

BENNETT: Well, NAPA was formed in 1983, if I'm correct--

RYLKO-BAUER: Formed in 1983.

BENNETT: And, there was--I was at the AAA meeting in--must've been in '83, which there was this huge meeting about the formation of NAPA. And the formation of NAPA was, in part, a response to the movement of the Society for Applied Anthropology, to become a totally independent entity, and without the AAA, handling its membership and its finances.

RYLKO-BAUER: Before 1983, what was the relationship, between the SfAA and--?

BENNETT: I've actually been trying to document, 'cause I lived through that time in Washington, and I have recollections, but I've been trying to for a piece that Keri Brondo and I are writing, try to document exactly what happened when, and the reason. It was under a new tax law, or reinterpretation of the tax law that the AAA needed to restructure in the 1980s, early '80s. And the, the implication of that restructuring meant that the Society for Applied Anthropology-- if this is correct--I think this is the correct way it happened--could no longer be its own independent organization if they were to continue to be, so-called managed, you know, in terms of membership and their accounting system and all that sort of thing by the AAA, that they either had to let that happen, and they would become--and I don't know what the language was at the time. I don't remember. It's--they didn't use the word "section," but, they become, basically, a unit within the AAA, and the Society for Applied Anthropology made a decision not to do that. And they went independent. And I was involved in their efforts to basically to make sure they were on their feet, their financial footing in a very solid kind of way. It was not easy in the early years for the SfAA. But so I was kind of involved in SfAA and was observing some of these things happening, and at the same time--'cause I was in the ASW, and I also had the anthropological site at Washington, and I also was an officer there, and the ASW could--it was a local organization, and they could no longer stay as an independent local organization within the AAA. So, I saw this from two different organizations, and there was--you can imagine--I mean, this caused some stress and strain. And I know a little bit more clearly from ASW, it was extremely difficult for them to then handle their

own finances, and to continue to publish a volume every year and that sort of thing. But they, they persevered. And so that meant the AAA, no longer had really a clear presence of applied anthropology within the AAA.

RYLKO-BAUER: And this was at a time when it was really necessary.

BENNETT: Right, that's right, yeah. And who initiated the idea of NAPA I'm not absolutely certain, but there was this huge meeting in which people didn't all agree with each other--(laughs). I remember this hall, you know, big old hall, which people were discussing how to form NAPA, and, that's a place that I saw Meta [Marrietta] Baba for the first time and she was clearly a very strong-minded and strong person with ideas. I was impressed. . . NAPA, grew in membership. It had a pretty significant membership from the beginning if I remember correctly. But, as it expanded its accomplishments and what it took on--'cause it took on workshops, it took on, just all kinds of--I mean, it was a real presence from the relatively early on at the AAA meetings and has, of course, continued that way ever since. But that meant that we had the Society for Applied Anthropology meetings, and then we had NAPA within the AAA, and then we had local practitioner organizations, and so things, I guess you can say, starting in the seventies, and then especially picking up steam in the eighties, we get more complicated and more varied terrain when it comes to organizations--

RYLKO-BAUER: A multi kind of level landscape of applied anthropology.

BENNETT: Yes. Something maybe is appropriate to mention here is that this separation of SfAA from the AAA wasn't a happy one for all people. And, especially in my general generation, there were--some people, I think developed a loyalty to the SfAA, and somewhat of an, I won't say animosity, but not happiness with the AAA. And I think some of those sentiments still exist. But for some reason, that is not the direction I ever took.

RYLKO-BAUER: (laughs) Well, so you were really kind of involved in NAPA. I mean, you, you must have joined NAPA?

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: I guess it was about nine years later you became president. Did you have some positions, like on the board or something?

BENNETT: Yes. I was on the board, and I did the NAPA bulletin on LPOs. Meta Baba was president, and she-- I can't remember whether I was asked to run for the board or

what. But then when I got that, she made it clear that that's what she wanted me to do in my position, was perfect for me to do. I did telephone interviews with a lot of people to do that bulletin, and it was really interesting.

RYLKO-BAUER: How many--by that time, how many LPOs had developed? Because when you were at, at WAPA, uh, it was just that that, that form of organization was just evolving.

BENNETT: It was. There were--and, and you caught me, 'cause I don't remember how many there were, but what we did was we also included the Arizona group that had gone out of existence. We must've had ten to twelve at the time that were mostly smaller than WAPA. But, you know, providing a needed niche, sort of following maybe not precisely what WAPA had done, but as an opportunity for people to gather together regularly in that there was one [in] southern California, SCAAN. And there was one in New York City. There was one in Chicago. There was one in the Philadelphia area, and, you know, and some other smatterings here. Oh, and, Plains group.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah. That's a very active one.

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, you were in Memphis at the time.

BENNETT: Yes, yeah.

RYLKO-BAUER: Was there one for that region?

BENNETT: Yes. There was one called MSAPA. (both laugh) And--

RYLKO-BAUER: The acronyms are, are funny for some of them.

BENNETT: Mid-South Association--I can't remember if it--they went with professional or practicing anthropologist. That was a somewhat subtle distinction. When I got there, I think one had just been formed, and it was, I think this was a wise decision--the academics in the department, the professors in the department, encouraged alumni to consider doing this but tried to stay out of it. You know, we would go to meetings or anything like that, but not to be the leaders of--

RYLKO-BAUER: A formal sponsor or something--

BENNETT: Yeah, right, yeah. And, and MSAPA existed pretty strongly through the time we held the first meeting in Memphis in '92. And, then, after that, it sort of dissipated a bit. And it comes and goes. It's probably going to be reformed again now.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, when you became president, what were some of the key issues? Because by then, I mean, NAPA had evolved. They had a bulletin. They were doing all kinds of workshops. They were working toward, I'm sure, professional development and things like that, so kind of where in the evolution of that practitioner organization, when you stepped in, where were they? And, and what did you see as the issues that really interested you?

BENNETT: Well, the big thing that got done during my tenure as president--and half of which I spent at--in Geneva, at WHO, and that was pre-email. People in the Fed--the Feds were using email, but beyond that, there was very little email, and nobody in the mental health division at the WHO--only one person had email. So, we used telephones and faxes a lot. (Rylko-Bauer laughs) But the big thing that got done as I remember was that the careers in anthropology video was done.

RYLKO-BAUER: Oh, yes, with Elizabeth--

BENNETT: Elizabeth Briody.

RYLKO-BAUER: --Briody, yeah.

BENNETT: Yes. And so that was today it might not--today people might wonder why was this such a big deal thing. It was a really big deal thing. First of all, Elizabeth and her, her group raised the money probably mostly from, members who contributed money to actually physically do the video, including taking, you know--doing the video physically, but also making the video. And, it's--I don't know--have you watched it?

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah, I have a copy of it.

BENNETT: It was fun then to watch, but it's really fun to watch now. And we had also a booklet that went along with it.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yes, I remember that.

BENNETT: But getting it published, this was a NAPA effort. Conceptualized, done, and paid for by NAPA. When it came time to get it published, in order to publish anything, because NAPA was a unit within the AAA, it had to get the agreement of the executive board of the AAA, because it was going to be a AAA publication. And, because I was president, the way AAA was structured then--it's structured totally differently now, I had a seat on the executive board automatically because I was the NAPA president. And I remember, it was touch-and-go whether the vote was going to be in favor of publishing.

RYLKO-BAUER: Really?

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: And what were the reasons against it?

BENNETT: I think the--(sighs)--I don't know that they were well articulated. It was that they had never done anything like this before. And it was an innovative idea that, of course, emphasized the wide array of jobs that anthropologists are holding across the country, were holding then, and still holding now. And so, it just had, like, [a] totally different theme for any-and the format was totally different. So, there was just this, this discomfort, because it was outside of the normal zone of AAA.

RYLKO-BAUER: It wasn't a journal. (laughs)

BENNETT: Right. No, yes, wasn't. Jim Peacock was president at that time. And I've always had a lot of respect for Jim Peacock, going way back, but his, support of that, you know, was extremely important.

RYLKO-BAUER: Interesting.

BENNETT: It's unbelievable, (laughs) I mean, that they, they could've maybe not had that published. (laughs) It's like--

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, I think it's hard to change, and maybe, perhaps--do you think that, some people kind of were threatened by that, or somehow felt that the AAA, it somehow would tarnish their academic image in the sense of, you know, that it was a different format and things like that?

BENNETT: It probably was, but I don't remember hearing it articulated. I think that that--I mean, here was this new whatever we were called then, NAPA, as a unit, [a] sort of up-and-coming kind of unit--

RYLKO-BAUER: Upstarts. (both laugh)

BENNETT: --yes, yes, yes, upstarts, absolutely, you know, taking that huge step, and doing it on their own, and it wasn't like the AAA had envisioned this and gone after it. It was like, we did it, and that means Elizabeth and her close-knit group did it.

RYLKO-BAUER: Did that somehow open the door more within the AAA to, kind of viewing, the applied and practicing anthropologists in a different way, or the roles? I mean, what, what was the consequence of that step?

BENNETT: Well, I think because it, it did very well, and I think people had a very positive reaction to it. It was used in classrooms and things like that. I think that was a precursor to all this material you see on the AAA website now like careers. It made it clear that not only was this a legitimate thing to be doing, but it was a necessary kind of thing to be doing to continue to advance the discipline.

RYLKO-BAUER: Any other things that occurred during your tenure that you remember, some initiatives that you especially were involved in?

BENNETT: I know the workshops continued. I can't remember, to be honest, when we started the mentoring program.

RYLKO-BAUER: Oh, okay.

BENNETT: Ed [Edward] Liebow and others, and Mickey [Madelyn] Iris were involved. I don't remember precisely what year we started what, but that--

RYLKO-BAUER: But that was during your time as president that had started?

BENNETT: I'm not sure because I'm not sure when they started that.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah.

BENNETT: 'Cause, uh, because I was so involved over quite a few years, and I don't remember precisely what happened which year.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right.

BENNETT: But we did have the tenth anniversary, 'cause I remember coming back from Geneva for that, the AAA meeting. We had the tenth anniversary of NAPA. We had a big reception. And, in fact, I still have at home the signature book for that.

RYLKO-BAUER: And what was--by that time, what was the relationship of NAPA vis-à-vis the SfAA.

BENNETT: They pretty much operated independently. I don't remember, you know, what evolved over time, but I can't tell you precisely when it started was that ordinarily NAPA would, at SfAA meetings, have a business meeting there. And they'd have a presence at SfAA--

RYLKO-BAUER: With sessions and things like that.

BENNETT: Not so much sessions as, they would have their business meeting. I don't remember if NAPA's ever--they may have, but I don't remember.

RYLKO-BAUER: I mean, when I think about--there's such an overlapping membership.

BENNETT: Yes, there's definitely, yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right, it's more like the Society for Medical Anthropology and several others that sometimes link with them.

BENNETT: SAE has done that, too, with SfAA. Yeah. But my impression was they went in parallel, but pretty distinct, directions. And then what you have is a lot of overlapping memberships and, to some extent, overlapping leadership --people who are active in both. Like Shirley's been active in both. A lot of people have been active in both.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, that's kind of a nice segue into the next. . . think that I was hoping you could talk about, because you obviously also were very much involved in both, and eventually became president of the SfAA from 1998 to 2001. I mean, during that time period, then, from, let's say, '94 to '98, you know, you were involved at the SfAA at the same time as you were involved in NAPA--

BENNETT: Oh, going way back before that.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah. Okay.

BENNETT: I've been going to SfAA meetings since, the mid to late seventies. Well, this is kind of an aside, but one of the things I heard from people a lot who went to both SfAA and AAA meetings was, one of the reasons--the motivation to continue to do both was AAA was extremely important, but the SfAA meetings were a lot more enjoyable and a lot more manageable, and a lot better to bring students into the meeting. And so, people who could possibly afford to go to both -and wanted to go to both would do that, but they were different, very different experiences. And they continue to be rather different experiences with--in my mind and as people talk about them. So, I was pretty active in organizing sessions for the SfAAs, along with the AAA, and I can't remember if I had any leadership role in SfAA other than that. When I was asked by Tom Greaves, who was president. I think when we met in York, I think he was president at that time. And, he asked me to be the program chair for the '92 meetings.

RYLKO-BAUER: Okay.

BENNETT: And as you know, that's a big job. It was good for the department, but it was also a big job for the department. And that, I think, definitely solidified my commitment to the SfAA--but not meaning I didn't have commitment to the AAA. It just was, was different from--
And then, right after that I was asked to run for the executive board, SfAA, and I did do that, and that pulled me in to eventually I was asked to, to run for the presidency. Which I did do.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, you--just to backtrack for a moment, you mentioned that, NAPA and SfAA were, you know, starting in, let's say we're talking in the nineties and you know, toward the end of the century. They were kind of parallel, but very different in a number of ways. I thought that's kind of an interesting--you know, if you could elaborate on what ways were they different. 'Cause we can think easily how they're similar, starting from overlapping membership, but their functioning in the goals that they set or the mission that they had?

BENNETT: Well, I think it's--the SfAA was an independent organization, and NAPA was a part of the AAA, and that just flavored everything. I'm saying that NAPA is just part of this bigger enterprise and so that has a lot of positives to it. But, it's really interesting; both organizations--and I'm thinking--I think NAPA leadership--I just

remember going to these extremely lengthy board meetings for NAPA. It was the same way with SfAA, extremely lengthy board meetings. But there's a sense of mission that NAPA had, you know, and also, for a long time I think a fair number of people really felt like we're doing what really needs to get done, but not getting necessarily the respect that we should be getting. And, which in some ways becomes even more motivation for drive to have a presence and to do things really well. And to do things differently than what other people were doing in the AAA.

RYLKO-BAUER: Yeah, and I can see that, um, within the AAA, I mean, you've got the *American Anthropologist*. Well, what role do practitioners play in that?

BENNETT: Right, yeah.

RYLKO-BAUER: And things like that, which I know over time has evolved. But that must've been--so there must've been a number of structures like that, where there probably was a feeling that the applied and practicing anthropologists within the AAA didn't quite have the niche that maybe legal anthropologists or medical anthropologists had, you know? They also were obviously overlapping, because medical anthropologists also applied.

BENNETT: Well, another thing that is a distinction between [SfAA and NAPA] when you go to SfAA meetings, even though there's always the presence of practitioners there, and they, they've been invited in different ways, but, NAPA has a much larger percent of people who are not full-time academics, you know, practitioners in that sense of the word.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, do you make that distinction in terminology? I mean, you see applied anthropology versus practicing anthropology in what ways?

BENNETT: For me, practicing anthropology has to do with one's career trajectory more than it does with what one is necessarily doing research-wise. I guess I think applied anthropology as being more generic and encompassing both the academic and the practicing and I say non-full-time academics, because so many of them are also doing academic work, too.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right. Interesting.

BENNETT: But that's just the way I look at the words in my mind. But I've also not been someone to be too hardcore around the lingo. (laughs)-

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, you can get hung up on terminology and miss the bigger issues. (laughs)

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: During your tenure in the SfAA, what were some of the key issues and key initiatives that you were involved in?

BENNETT: When I was elected I had one major thing that I wanted to initiate, and it was based on some conversations I'd had over a long time, mainly with Erve Chambers, about how at that time we were getting more and more departments of with applied anthropology in them and how it would nice to have exchange of faculty to basically interconnect our departments better, rather than them being, or feeling like we're competing for students or competing for whatever. And so, I decided to create what we, sort of Erve and I came up with the term "consortium," so that's a word we used. And fortunately, the department of anthropology, I had moved out of the chair's position and was in the dean's office by then, the department agreed to host, I think it was in 2000, February of 2000--to host colleagues from I think it was nine different departments across the country with applied anthropology to come to Memphis, and they had to pay their own airline ticket, but we put them up in the hotel and, and had meals and everything for them. And everybody came but one. One person couldn't come. But everybody else came. And that was the big [event]--we spent two days in consultation with each other about what kind of an organization might this be.

RYLKO-BAUER: Do you remember which departments?

BENNETT: Uh, we had American University--let's see how many I can remember. Okay. John van Willigen was there.

RYLKO-BAUER: From the University of Kentucky.

BENNETT: Yes, University of Kentucky. Linda Whiteford was there from University of South Florida. Erve Chambers was there from University of Maryland. Bill Leap was there from American University. Bob Harmon was there from Long Beach. And Meta Baba was there from Wayne State.

BENNETT: And, uh, I may be missing one or two other people. There were eight. Bob Trotter was invited from Northern Arizona, but he couldn't come.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, what was the end result of that meeting?

BENNETT: Well, we decided it was a good idea, and we formed ourselves, and we had a meeting. That's one thing about the consortium is that we frequently had meetings at both SfAA and the AAA, and one the critical aspects is that the consortium was formed as an independent organization that had strong ties, we had most of our meetings at the SfAA meetings but we also have had meetings at, at the AAA meetings. But made a point to be independent as an organization.

RYLKO-BAUER: And why was that?

BENNETT: That just seemed to be the way to go and it's never created any problems. Because we've always gotten good cooperation from the SfAA and a major thing that the consortium's done over the years has been to organize sessions on things such as tenure and promotion for applied anthropologists, but lots of different sessions. And it's one of our claims to fame. But in the first year, one of the big accomplishments was to decide on our name. And, so we, after batting around a lot of different possibilities, we decided on the Consortium of Applied and Practicing Anthropology Programs, and then we called that COPAA, two A's. And, it stuck. We have another website. That was, that was another big development over the early years. We used to do a web--we do a nice website. And, we have--in the SfAA newsletter, we have always updated on what's going on.

RYLKO-BAUER: And that's why I thought maybe there was a link, but you have regular kind of summaries or kind of news items in the newsletter, right?

BENNETT: In the SfAA newsletter. There's an implicit link, but we've always been independent.

RYLKO-BAUER: So initially it was to network and to compare programs and maybe learn from each other and perhaps support each other, but, what else--obviously, it's come a long way, 'cause--and you were chair from 2000 to

BENNETT: Two thousand ten.

RYLKO-BAUER: --2010, yeah.

BENNETT: Yeah. Um, it's come a long way in a lot of ways, like, I would say especially through holding several sessions in the area of tenure and promotion, but with different focuses. We then, as the AAA--and this is where the whole thing gets organizationally sort of more complex--is the AAA then formed the Practicing Anthropology Working Group, and then the COPAPIA, which is the Committee On Practicing Applied and Public Interest Anthropology, COPAA, who had--which was an organization that had some history by that time, started to collaborate with this AAA committee, especially in the area of tenure and promotion guidelines for anthropologists in departments, and that's one of the recent initiatives that we worked on together, so--and, like, the employer expo that's going on right now, COPAA is a cosponsor, mainly because we give a contribution to the reception at the end of the expo, along with COPAPIA, the AAA committee. So, this is a sign--it's not, like, we are constantly doing projects together but there are some key things that COPAA has, has continued to connect with other organizations, while retaining its autonomy. And it's, you know, expanded from those initial nine departments to twenty-seven departments now.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, it sounds like there was a kind of a, a gap, maybe, in terms of concrete strategies for the continual professionalization of anthropology of applied anthropologists, I mean--in the sense of your mentioning tenure. How do people who do applied work but in, are in academic settings, what they needed to do, and how the departments needed to view the work that they did.

BENNETT: Yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: I mean, was that part of--

BENNETT: That's actually very much part of it, because one of the--one of the goals of the member departments--and I think that makes us a little bit distinct from other--(laughs)--organizations in that the members of COPAA are departments of anthropology that have a commitment to applied and practicing anthropology and for educating students, practitioners, and faculty members is the idea. So, the basic thrust of it is how we as a group can learn from each other to do a better job at educating our students to go into the discipline in a more open-minded kind of way. And so we initially started to address that through sessions at meetings, but we now have this--the visitors program that is a competition every year for a department to apply for support from COPAA to have a visitor come in to the department to help, you know, so called educate the students and, and again, it's like, you know, just a

strong ethic of cross-pollination of ideas. I remember taking a strong position when my department agreed to do this, contrary to another faculty member, who basically said, "Well, don't we want to keep our students here?" And I just said, you know, "If this is not the best program for them, (laughs) that is not what we should be doing. We really need to know." And I feel very strongly about that through COPAA I think we know a lot more about what different departments do, and do really well. And so that if students are really interested in certain kind of applied, practicing anthropology, and if they can do it, then they can consider going to the right department. And I think as a collective group we have come to know a lot more about the strengths of each other.

RYLKO-BAUER: What about curriculum development? Is that an area of interest, or is it even, an area that needs work?

BENNETT: I think there's been exchanges of ideas around that and they may be-- since I moved out of the leadership, they may be working in curriculum development, but it doesn't ring a bell. I know AAA from time to time has done curriculum development activities.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, I'm thinking also of, you know--I mean, you have the applied programs, but then you have all kinds of other graduate programs where students, you know, end up finishing the program, either at the masters or the PhD level go out onto the job market, and , from the beginning decide that they aren't going to be in academic, or, you know, because of the fact that the jobs aren't as plentiful as they used to be, end up looking for elsewhere. So, this--I mean, I don't know where this issue is of how you train students for, you know, what's really the reality of the job market in nonapplied programs, and is that an issue that's come under discussion?

BENNETT: I'm sure. Yeah, it's definitely an issue, and--because we have a hard enough time to do it in programs that--(laughs)--are committed to doing it. And I know, curriculum development is, is probably something really worth focusing on, and especially that that deals with internships and practicums and things like that.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, are you still involved in with COPAPIA, or COPAA?

BENNETT: They keep me on their listserv, I go to their business meeting every year. Yeah, I definitely am involved.

RYLKO-BAUER: 'Cause you were--I know you were also, just for the record, um, from 2007 to 2009 you were the chair of COPAPIA.

BENNETT: Yes, I was, yes.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, there was kind of overlap time when you were in the leadership position in both of these.

BENNETT: Yes, and I had done three years of PAWG chair ship before that, which--

RYLKO-BAUER: Three years of what?

BENNETT: PAWG, the Practicing Anthropology Working Group of the AAA and that was the precursor to COPAPIA. And, that was a very labor-intensive and really interesting experience, because we did research to feed back to the AAA executive board about kind of the status of things in terms of where people had careers outside of academia by doing interviews. We did a lot of telephone interviews, and then - wrote up, you know, summaries of all those, and gave these--(laughs)--I mean, I, I don't know I ever have done as a group done so many reports. (laughs) Tony Paredes used to come to Memphis. Well, his wife worked at the University of Memphis for a while. He used to come, and we would sit down and spend the full day working on a report for PAWG. He was on the PAWG group. And then we recommended that a standing committee be formed which they did do with COPAPIA, which I chaired for a couple years.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, what is the relationship between NAPA and COPAPIA?

BENNETT: COPAPIA's a committee, NAPA is a section within the AAA. I can't tell you for sure how many past presidents of NAPA who served on COPAPIA. We recommended from PAWG, and they followed through on having representation from different parts of applied anthropology, practicing anthropology on COPAPIA, like museums, archeology [to] make sure it was not just a sociocultural group.

RYLKO-BAUER: Right.

BENNETT: And, business and you know, so it's been a really eclectic group of people.

RYLKO-BAUER: And, who fits into the public interest part of that title?

BENNETT: I think in some ways everybody does. (laughs) We were given that, probably wasn't the title we asked to be called. I think it has something to do with the political landscape. You asked me earlier about applied and practicing, but then other people were using the term "public interest." And so, I think when the decision was made to form the group to be inclusive and that language is now being used in the AAA, too. So, I think it's just an attempt to be inclusive.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, is there anything else about, the progression of your involvement in these different organizations that you [were involved with] --that come to mind?

BENNETT: Well, a few years ago I remember coming to one of the, I think it was an SfAA meeting, and somebody asking me, whom I hadn't met before, what I was doing, and I said something like, in my job and also in my leadership work, at that time, find myself trying to get an eclectic group of people to work together collaboratively, or cooperatively. And mostly through facilitation style--(laughs)--you could say. But something that changed when I started to do PAWG and COPAPIA was that our meetings were entirely through conference calls which is a very different dynamic from any than I'd ever used before as your main modality of making decisions and getting things done. And that adds a different--very interesting, but a different process of going about doing it. But I do this because in my job as associate dean for graduate programs in a big college, I try to do that with all of my graduate coordinators from all the departments, and it's, of course, sometimes like pulling teeth--(laughs)-- But, it is the way in which I like to operate and to try to get good collective work done. But it's more, it's definitely more pronounced in trying to accomplish things through a voluntary organization.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, it does sound like collaboration is one of the strong themes throughout both your research, your academic work, and your involvement in all these different leadership positions. So that's interesting.

BENNETT: And it has made all the difference in my being able to work in former Yugoslavia was to be able to do that.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, you mentioned that you're now the associate dean at the University of Memphis, so maybe that's a nice way of talking for just a couple minutes about your arrival at the University of Memphis, and, you know, what the department was like in relationship to applied anthropology, and what role you've played there,

and how it relates to the development of other departments over time in other universities.

BENNETT: I'm actually glad we're having a chance to talk about that, because I was interested in the position at the University of Memphis because, like you said earlier, there weren't a lot of applied anthropology programs, and the kind of work I had done I--made me most fitting for that kind of department, rather than a more traditional department. And, Stan Hyland and I are writing a chapter for a book right now that we're close to completing the chapter on the history of the department as it's interacted with the wider community, and the community within the university. This history is 'cause we're about ready to have our thirty-fifth anniversary. And it's the hundredth anniversary of the University of Memphis. And Stan was part of the early scene in the department. He was educated with Dmitri Shimkin. And, one of my other colleagues, Charles Williams, also was a Shimkin student. And they both came to U of M in the seventies, and, but what's kind of interesting--it was really fortunate in the long run, for sure, what happened--the department of anthropology was part of sociology and anthropology, with strong archaeological presence. And when the anthropologists decided they wanted to try to get their own department and develop a master's program, as well as an undergraduate program, the Tennessee Board of Regents said, "You can only do this if you do not duplicate any--you do not duplicate UT Knoxville," which was extremely strong in forensics and archaeology and still are. And second, "You have to address problems in the mid-South community, and you have to work with students on developing careers." So--(laughs)--

RYLKO-BAUER: Perfect.

BENNETT: So, it was like the charge was a requirement. But in some ways, it was like the saving grace of something like--

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, it gave you a framework to start with, definitely. And one that fit--

BENNETT: Yeah. So that's what happened, and we had three concentrations: we had urban and medical and then public archaeology. And where now we have, the medical and urban. The archaeologists have been moved to the Earth science department some years ago. There's so much to be said about how things evolved in the department. And I came there in '86, and very quickly I could see this myself, and it was a pretty small graduate program at that time, and there was already a legacy of graduate students graduating and taking really meaningful leadership positions in

the community, and then working with our faculty as colleagues. And so what's happened over the years with at least two or three hundred alums from that master's program is that so many of them are now serving really critical roles in the mid-South community, or other places in the country, and provide resources for us, that we could never do ourselves, you know, by just faculty doing it, that provide really rich opportunities for our students, undergraduate and graduate students. And, it's a practicum-based program rather than a thesis-based program. And so, it's like we've seeded the mid-South community with anthropologists.

RYLKO-BAUER: Interesting.

BENNETT: And, and there was this much broader recognition of what anthropology [is] than you'd find most places.

RYLKO-BAUER: So, is it a master's program?

BENNETT: It's a master's program.

RYLKO-BAUER: Can you give an example of how this has worked, where you had the former students kind of looping back.

BENNETT: Okay. I'll mention one person in particular, Tim Bolding, who was--I actually met-- he was a student when I interviewed in 1986. And he was in the urban concentration, had actually spent some time in Mexico. But he was very interested in anthropology; otherwise he wouldn't be in the program. But when he graduated and went into county government, which at that time had some pretty liberal components to it. It's shifted since that time, and we have some anthropologists working in county government still, but not like it was for a while. But he ended up founding an organization that existed for fifteen years, something like that, called United Housing. And it works with low income families who are trying to get financial support to buy their, usually, first homes. It's a very complex organization, and he, in turn, has had many of our students work with him in their practicums, and he has hired alums from our program. It's a very highly regarded, recognized entity in Memphis. Tim is definitely seen as a close colleague, to many of us. He teaches in our department. He teaches a night class on Tuesday night and, we get some of our majors because of him. That sort of thing. This is a good sign. You know, I'm in the College of Arts and Sciences, and we have an alumni association event every fall, and recognized Friends of the College. And we've had three people in the last, I'd say, ten years get that Friend of the College recognition who were alums of our master's

program. Very different kinds of people, and Tim Bolding was one of them. So, when we put together an advisory board for the department, we have a lot of people to draw from.

RYLKO-BAUER: Has, the University of Memphis served at all as a model for other departments that developed applied programs? That you might know of?

BENNETT: That's a good question.

RYLKO-BAUER: You know, that's one of the earliest ones.

BENNETT: Come to think of it, I remember Bob Harmon came. We've had people come to visit to talk--this is going back in time--to talk us about how we developed a program and how we did it, but what's happened over the years, especially one of the nice things about being chair of a COPAA group was that if departments were interested in different parts of the country--I'm trying to think--I've just gotten so many calls over the years from a faculty member, like a chair, who wanted to put together a master's program either was applied or with applied in it, and what kind of advice did I have. And then there are issues such as curriculum that come up of course. And so, we've been referred to by external reviewers as, the Memphis model of how we do our education of applied anthropologists. And I think, of course, we participate in a poster session at the SfAA meetings, we send most of our graduate students at one time or the other go to an SfAA meeting. We help to support them to do that. So, the department is very strongly tied to both the SfAA and I would say a COPAPIA and the AAA. And Ruth Beth Finerman has been super active in leadership in the SMA.

RYLKO-BAUER: SMA, and the SfAA.

BENNETT: Yeah, both of them.

RYLKO-BAUER: When you came, who were the faculty in the department?

BENNETT: Tom Collins, who was a socio-cultural sort, economic anthropologist, was the chair. Tom was the chair, and he was--I think the chair, when the department became a department. I don't know if he was immediately the chair, but early on he was. And he brought in Stan Hyland and Charles Williams, who worked in, in applied research. And then Ruth Beth Finerman came the year before me, and then we had archaeologist, Charles McNutt. He's our senior archaeologist, and then David Dye, who was a younger archaeologist. And we had, I think, we had one other faculty

member who was not part of this commitment to applied anthropology. So it was, it was pretty small. And then what had happened, from what Stan tells me over the years, is that they got the urban area pretty solidified early on, but the medical one, people came and went, and--or didn't fit that well you know, because we have always, since I've been there, and before me, emphasized if somebody comes into the faculty they should plan to do some work in the region. And so, you've got, you know, Ruth Beth Finerman who did, you know, years and years of work in Ecuador before she joined our faculty the year before me, and then me with my Yugoslav work, but we both have done work in the Memphis region, too. And we certainly work with students, have them do work. But for anybody who came in, Keri Brondo now and Katherine Lambert-Pennington, have been there--I think this is her fourth year--have done phenomenal work since they came, plus their international work.

RYLKO-BAUER: And is Satish Kedia there, too?

BENNETT: Yes, but he is in the School of Public Health now.

RYLKO-BAUER: Oh, okay. And Satish finished the University of Kentucky which is where I finished.

BENNETT: Yeah, he came into anthropology and was there for several years, and then we were getting a school of public health and he was invited to join their faculty, and decided he would do that.

BENNETT: And that's when, we were down one person, so we've had to readjust to that.

RYLKO-BAUER: Well, um, any other kind of concluding thoughts, or--?

BENNETT: Oh, this is really nice. I'm enjoying this very much. (laughs)

RYLKO-BAUER: Yes, well, same here. (laughs) I know you--when we were talking earlier, before I started recording, you mentioned just how important happenstance was, and taking advantage of, of opportunities, and maybe that would be a good way of finishing up.

BENNETT: Sure. Did I mention already about, how I decided to go into graduate school [in] anthropology?

RYLKO-BAUER: No, you didn't.

BENNETT: Yeah. But that's one of the first--well, first happenstance is I did not sign up for an anthropology course. It was assigned to me, when I was in my junior year in college, my first semester in the junior year, and, got really, really interested in it. And so, later that year, early [in] my senior year, thinking about, where and what I might do graduate study in, and I was thinking sociology, social work, anthropology, and, my advisor, suggested to me that I consider thinking about going into teaching college, which never in my life--I never even thought of that at all. And turns out his wife was a college professor--(laughs)--so that was good. And as soon as I started thinking in those terms, I thought, if you're going to be a college teacher, what better discipline is there than anthropology? So that's what, sent me in that direction.

RYLKO-BAUER: And why did you think that? What did you see in anthropology that you felt lent it so well to teaching?

BENNETT: Well, it, it was intrinsically just so interesting. I think that was a thing. Because my first course, I had combination of the archaeology, the physical anthropology, the socio-cultural. And it's whole--I was very intrigued by this whole new language of terminology, and having to learn these new terms that had never crossed my mind before. (laughs) And it was just fun. And, then I had some archaeology experience. I did a fair amount of coursework as an undergraduate. So, it was a good decision. And then another happenstance thing that was very important--there were many of them, but as I was writing my dissertation. I was collecting the data, and I wasn't quite writing yet. I was in Washington, D.C., it was time for me to start to think about applying for faculty positions at various regional colleges around Washington. My mindset was just shifting in that direction, and I got a call, from the chair of the anthropology department at American, Jim [John James] Bodine, and he said he had just gotten a call from a psychiatrist down at, George Washington University, Steve Vaughn, and he was looking for an anthropologist to work with him on a project he just got funded.

RYLKO-BAUER: Wow. Talk about falling into a--

BENNETT: I know. So, he gave me his number, and I called Steve, and went down a day or two later to be interviewed, and, turns out he really wanted someone who had interviewing experience, of which I had a lot at that point, doing my dissertation research. And I loved interviewing, I think he hired me--(laughs)--without talking with anybody else at that time. And, that was truly a great experience. Those twelve years at GW, working with multidisciplinary people, but really sharp people you know,

where nothing goes out at a center, like, grant applications, articles, and nothing goes out--nothing went out without the senior scientists reviewing things and talking about them. It was very good; it wasn't so much training as experience for me. I probably before then, I would've paid lip service to, it's a good idea to work collaboratively with people from different backgrounds, and really believed it, but this was like--I just learned. And I came to see how, people's--it's not just their educational backgrounds and their professional backgrounds; it's their personalities and everything. You get so many different kinds of contributions to a research project. And that was a pretty nifty experience. So that fell--that pretty much fell-- (laughs)--into my lap. And I've had other, other things like that have happened along the way, but that was one of the more notable ones.

RYLKO-BAUER: We talked a lot about collaboration, but I think people also recognize that it's difficult to do and, you know--and may not even know how to start. And I think this experience gave you, clearly, the tools for doing that?

BENNETT: It certainly helped me--

RYLKO-BAUER: Let's end this with this last question: where do you see, from all your historical knowledge and experience, the involvement that you've had on so many different levels in applied anthropology, where do you see this discipline going? Where are we heading in the next, let's say, ten years?

BENNETT: Well, I'll tell you where--I don't know if it's going to head this way, but I think the momentum is there, and I'm just not sure how much resistance there will be to modifying the graduate programs in anthropology, both at the masters and doctoral level, and, to some extent, undergraduate, as well, to, to a different mindset as to where students should start to envision, and then prepare themselves to move professionally. And that's one thing, for somebody who's worked in academic settings most of my life, in different kinds of roles, but I have to say I'm an academician. But at the same time, I am really committed to this, partly because I've seen us do a good job at, at U of M. And I see other departments doing a really good job. So I think this is, that aspect that I hope the discipline continues to move in, but it requires moving away from a very elitist, stance on the part of quite a lot of our departments of anthropology in terms of what are the good careers that people should be moving into and what are not? So, it's a mind shift. For some of us, it's not, but for a lot of people in the discipline, it is. But I think we're, we're working on that.

RYLKO-BAUER: In the process of, of incorporating some aspect of application, in regular, traditional departments, that's one way of operationalizing this, this concern with how anthropology can be more relevant and more engaged.

BENNETT: Right.

RYLKO-BAUER: And so maybe that's some way of kind of trying to get that message across to more traditional departments, yeah.

BENNETT: Yes. I think there are ways to do it. Another facet of this that I've noted briefly earlier--it has to do with--in order for departments that are committed to applied anthropology, and to career development with their students that are not directed toward academic life it's necessary that the tenure promotion process, and what's valued for tenure promotion, be examined with that in mind. And that's another thing that we have been working on, but I think that's really quite important. And then, I mentioned earlier--talking about the University of Memphis--that one aspect about the way we've gone about the Memphis model is by incorporating our alumni into the work of the department in a meaningful kind of way. It seemed like there was something else I was going to add. (laughs) That's probably plenty.

RYLKO-BAUER: Um-hm. Well, I really enjoyed talking with you, Linda.

BENNETT: Thank you very much, Barbara.

Further Reading

Bennett, Linda A. 1991. *Bridges for Changing Times: Local Practitioner Organizations in American Anthropology*. NAPA Bulletin 6.

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