

Interview with Laura Jung

**Interviewed by Associate Dean Ann M. Pflaum
University of Minnesota**

Interviewed on June 4, 1999

Laura Jung - LJ
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: I am with Laura Jung. It is June 4, 1999, and this is Ann Pflaum. Laura is a graduate student in Forestry and she's going to explain how she got to the university, where she took her earlier study, where's she's from, and, then, she's going to describe some of her experiences as a student and student leader. I turn the tape over to Laura.

LJ: So, it's pretty open-ended?

AP: It's pretty open-ended, right. This is not [unclear].

LJ: I'm from the area so I'm not going to be too creative there. I grew up in Mendota Village, which is right between Minneapolis and St. Paul. I graduated from high school and I did rather well in high school academically, but I was never, ever involved in anything. I just was not a joiner *in* school. I was always a joiner outside of school.

AP: What did you do outside of school?

LJ: Four-H, Girl Scouts, other little community clubs. I didn't really associate school with clubs until I got to be a graduate student.

The first college I went to was the College of St. Catherine. I chose that simply because I got an academic scholarship to go there. I did well over there, too, but I wasn't used to private schooling. There are a lot of big differences there between private and public schooling and I guess I was just more comfortable with a public school.

AP: Can you describe a little bit more about what you mean by that?

LJ: In a public school, I'm used to being influenced by a diverse crowd. I miss the diversity. They didn't seem to have any in the private school. The presence, having a lot of nuns around and always having that kind of influence felt stifling. I got bored. I didn't have enough diverse things to do.

I transferred over to the U of M because it was close by. My dad [Laurence Jung] had gone here in the 1950s. He got a geography degree and went on to be a St. Paul city planner, so don't make any jokes about that. I really liked the university. It was really big and everyone was talking about feeling like a number and everything, but I guess I was more comfortable with that. One thing about being in the private school is it really took me off guard for faculty and teachers to call me by name. I was really surprised to be called by my name and it made me uncomfortable—I don't know why. I think my attitudes are changed now. I'd probably prefer the smaller. But when I was younger, I wanted to remain anonymous.

AP: Did you transfer before you completed your bachelor's degree?

LJ: Yes, I did.

AP: Which college did you transfer into?

LJ: Liberal Arts.

AP: CLA, okay.

LJ: I still kind of floated. I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I ended up getting a degree in English and journalism.

AP: Did you do any papers?

LJ: I did papers.

AP: Any that you're proud of?

LJ: No, I'm not proud of any of them. [laughter] I got a pretty high GPA [grade point average] for course work really. The only thing I'm proud of is I worked on a magazine as an undergrad.

AP: What was that?

LJ: The *Agassiz Review* and it was produced by the English Department...A-g-a-s-s-i-z. It's a literary...

AP: It sounds like a geology review rather than a literary review.

LJ: It's a literary journal. I think it's out of print and it probably only lasted five years.

AP: Did you research the stories, write the stories, edit the stories?

LJ: No, they wouldn't let me do any of that. I could have submitted some but they probably wouldn't have chosen any stories. I got to edit and choose which ones went in.

AP: Are there faculty members that you remember from your time when you transferred to the "U"?

LJ: Undergraduate faculty?

AP: Right.

LJ: There are two of them. One was Patricia Hampl. I just admired her greatly. Then, the other was an older gentleman there—I forgot his name—at the department. He was really old. He used to ride a bicycle to school everyday. He just reminded me of one of those old Irish writers if they were still alive today.

AP: Chester Anderson?

LJ: It might have been. He was very old at the time.

AP: Do you remember what subject he taught?

LJ: He was Irish Literature.

AP: It will come to you.

LJ: Yes. Those are the only two that really had any real influence on me, I think. Even so, when I graduated, I just graduated and didn't know what I was going to do.

AP: What year did you graduate?

LJ: In 1992 or 1993. The reason why it's so open-ended like that is I continued to take courses but not here. I would take them at the community colleges as my jobs would demand. For example, the first job I got out of the U of M, graduating with an English degree, was working at the Department of Natural Resources [DNR]. They were impressed that I could write and I ended up producing all sorts of brochures and pamphlets and magazines for them. I really enjoyed it. But, then, the more I hung around the Department of Natural Resources, the more I realized I was always much more interested in natural resources than English. But English is a wonderful skill to have... writing.

AP: Was it chance that took you to Natural Resources and you suddenly discovered I really love this or was there a little bit of design that got you there? Was it just pure serendipity that you found yourself in Natural Resources and said, "Gosh, this is what I really love?" Or did you have enough interest in the field that you got yourself the job there and it confirmed your feelings?

LJ: I think I had enough previous interest in the job. A lot of maturation took place between being an undergrad and a grad. For one thing, I had no idea people got degrees in natural resources when I was an undergrad. I had no idea that this kind of stuff existed. I thought this would be fun! Once I went to the DNR, I realized all these people, that's all they did. What a wonderful life! Of course, they have downsides but...

AP: Did you work for a year or two before you, then, went back to graduate school?

LJ: I worked for two years there and, then, the job was cancelled, because I think they got what they needed out of me and they couldn't promote me anymore because I didn't have any natural resources background. Then I ended up floating around as an administrative assistant and other kinds of secretarial work, which I absolutely hated. I would do some free-lance editing and writing once in awhile, but I just hated being a secretary.

So, I decided to go back to school. I was kind of shopping around for classes. It never occurred to me to leave the Twin Cities area because this is where my family is and this is where my fiancé lives. I shopped around here and I found out about this new program that was just starting at the College of Natural Resources. The new program was called the Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership, which, basically, combined an education degree with a natural resources background. It was a perfect fit for me. I had to go back to school and get a lot of that science background I'd never had. I'd never had biology or math or chemistry as an English major, but I went back to school and learned all that on my own at community colleges. Then I came here. It's just a great degree. I'm almost done with it. I have just my project to do.

AP: It's a master's degree?

LJ: It's a master's degree, yes.

AP: It's called a master's in environmental...?

LJ: Environmental Learning and Leadership.

AP: It's fairly new?

LJ: It's very new. It only started in 1997. I'm one of the first people to ever go through the program.

AP: Do you have a sense of the paper you're going to do yet? Did I hear you say, "Paper?"

LJ: It's a project and a paper. I, too, will be doing a series of interviews in order to get the information I need. This sounds a little self-serving, but I'm working toward a hypothesis of what do graduate programs in environmental education need to be successful? Graduate programs in environmental education are really rare. There's plenty in environmental sciences or undergraduate, but not graduate.

AP: So, this would be, as you said, the College of Education. It's somehow for teachers of environmental science at the high school or post-secondary level?

LJ: All teachers, any teachers who are interested in environmental education. Environmental education is very interdisciplinary. You can't really slot it in any one...

AP: Do you get a teaching certificate along with it?

LJ: No.

AP: You are going to be the teacher of the teachers?

LJ: Right, I'm getting a master of science. I may teach, but it would be informal.

AP: The career path would be another university with one of these degree programs?

LJ: The career path really goes back to the experience at the DNR when I was communicating for a lot of scientists and biologists who do wonderful work but, frankly, a lot of them can't write, can't speak, and don't know how to say things so that other people would know what they're talking about.

AP: I certainly know, from working on the university history, that to try to tell the story of what these programs are and do is much more difficult than you would think because most of the people use internal language or use words that are sufficiently technical. For example, Endodontics is a division of Dentistry and it would be so much easier if you were writing a story to say, "I think it's work on the gums."

LJ: [laughter]

AP: So that you're not leaving the reader wondering whether it's the eye, ear, or nose. It's too bad that the world isn't as literate as it might be. But, it's also probably a good thing to have people move more to the general literacy.

LJ: That goes back to interest in diversity. Natural resources contains a lot of diverse interests. You've got forestry, fisheries, education, water resources, people dimensions, all of that. That keeps me really interested all the time, because there are so many things to focus on at any one time. My trick is to communicate this wonderful work to everybody else, whether it's through teaching or writing or communicating in any way.

AP: One of the things we're working on in the history is a bibliography, to try to have one or two seminal books listed, so that if somebody picks this book up and says, "Gosh, I'm really interested in natural resources," or in agriculture... Are there any just wonderful books that you've encountered that if somebody could read just one book in your field, not a book you wish you hadn't read because it was too hard, but one that is just wonderful?

LJ: About my field... There are so many out there.

AP: Think about it. You've got my number so you can always give me a call if something comes to mind. Is there a journal that people could subscribe to that is very good?

LJ: There are good journals out there. Some are very academic and I would only recommend you're into the academics. As far as just general interest magazines, the *National Audubon Magazine* is great. It gets people interested. The Minnesota Department of Resources *Volunteer* magazine, I think gets people really interested in this state. More widely, everybody loves to read the *Sand County Almanac: [with Essays on conservation from Round River]*, Aldo Leopold's vignette.

AP: I don't know about it.

LJ: That's a book.

AP: Published in the 1980s, 1990s?

LJ: It was published in, I think, the 1930s [correctly 1966].

AP: The 1930s! It's simply impressions of natural...?

LJ: If you can think of interpreters out there like you might see at a state park and there might be naturalists at a nature center. He wrote the bible for naturalists and how to interpret what's going on around us naturally...to groups.

AP: It's an educator piece.

LJ: He also has a great love of the outdoors that's really transferred through the book. There's a lot of passion. He had a twisted career path, too. [laughter] He began being a hunter and, then, a forester and his ethics changed over the course of his life.

AP: Your college is one of the most intimate in the university.

LJ: Yes.

AP: Have you felt welcomed? You must know just about everybody?

LJ: Yes.

AP: I've forgotten the number of students enrolled, but it's small, one of the smallest in the university, which must be a very nice experience for the students.

LJ: It's small. As a graduate student—I have an office right here—I get to know a lot of the students really well and faculty. As an undergrad being here, anytime you're in a situation where you have to bounce into a building, take a class, and leave, you're not going to get to know your fellow classmates too well. There are two factors though: If you have a building which is nice and welcoming—this is a plug for the architects—people tend to stay around after class is over and talk and this building is wonderful, this complex, and then the other plug, of course, is the teachers taking the time to get to know each and every one of the students and there are some really wonderful faculty here.

AP: That doesn't sound like the University of Minnesota that everyone thinks about.

LJ: I can see that. If I was an undergrad and had to take one of those notorious classes where there are a billion people in a class, I wouldn't really go for that. I had to take one here like that and I did not like it.

AP: It is interesting to me that that is one of the points about the university, that not everything is large and, in fact, statistics show that the average class size has got fewer than twenty—I've forgotten the mean or average. But it is much less large than one thinks, just a small number of huge classes.

LJ: It depends mostly, I think, on the learner. If you are motivated to learn and do well, you're going to really enjoy your classes.

AP: Have you had other student experiences? We've been sort of talking on the academic side, since you became a graduate student. Are there other facets of what you've been doing that you wanted to...?

LJ: As a student?

AP: Yes.

LJ: Getting involved in clubs, I guess. I took on a student group here. It had dwindled down to one person.

AP: That's very small. [laughter]

LJ: She left so she said, "Will you take over?" This is one kudos to add to my list: it's up to twenty some people again and we are really active. We were awarded over \$1500 in grant money this year to put on certain projects.

AP: Great.

LJ: Yes. I'm involved in that group and, then, I'm also on the Student Faculty Board here. Between the two of them, I have been to environmental learning centers where I'm walking on high ropes. [laughter] I have been on outdoor interpretive nature walks with master naturalists. We've facilitated panels in which speakers come from the field and speak to the students about what it takes to perform

their job. I'm still an active mentor to a Native American girl. She lives in Minneapolis. In fact, I'm going to see her Monday. This was all through student groups.

AP: What is she doing? Is she in high school?

LJ: She's a middle school girl. She's twelve years old. The main purpose of this program is not to necessarily recruit these kids into joining the College of Natural Resources when they grow up; it's basically to encourage them to stay in school so that they could go to college.

AP: How long has she been your own [unclear]?

LJ: For about a year.

AP: Are you ever tempted by a Ph.D. program or does that sound too far off?

LJ: Ohhh, I could. I could join a Ph.D. field. The fear I have of that is just becoming a little too focused on one thing for too long. I'm getting bored with being in school again. I have to stay diverse. [laughter]

AP: Sounds like eclectic is a...

LJ: I need to flex some muscles and actually do stuff instead of just read about it for a while. I may go back for a Ph.D. someday, but if I do, I don't know if I could get a Ph.D. in Environmental Education. I don't know how I could. I don't think there are any like that.

AP: Do you go back to your English literature roots and do they mean anything to you anymore? Or are those books all getting moldy and dusty?

LJ: No. I definitely have my preferences for what I like to read.

AP: What are they?

LJ: I like good fiction. There's a lot of transparent crap out there that you see at Barnes and Noble but I like good fiction.

AP: What would be good fiction?

LJ: My favorite writer is Cormack McCarthy and Annie Proulx, P-r-o-u-l-x. It's a treat to be able to read fiction so when I read it, they'd better be good.

AP: You're not going to read lots of LaVyrle Spencer and things like that, supermarket fiction?

LJ: Nooo, no. I can appreciate people who do want to read that. I like books where you get to the end of the story and you just say, "Wow!" and it really makes you think about it.

AP: Certainly Patricia Hampl is a wonderful teacher and writer.

LJ: Yes, has to move you emotionally somehow, [unclear] just be a story that entertains you.

AP: One of the things I'm going to do when I leave here is go over to the entrance to the College of Forestry. There's a big plaque on the entrance and it's the story of reforestation of the country of Korea. One of the alumnus of the college, basically, was given that task after the Korean War. It's a description of the impact... Can you imagine anything more major than reforesting a country?

LJ: A whole country, no.

AP: The number of trees that he arranged to have planted is just phenomenal.

LJ: A Johnny Appleseed.

AP: Sort of a Johnny Appleseed, exactly.

LJ: When you leave, the whole history of forestry in Minnesota is on a mural on the wall out here.

AP: Oh!

LJ: I'd be happy to take you on a little walking tour of that.

AP: Would you?

LJ: It's a neat mural. It goes back to Indian times and to when the mural was painted, about the 1950s.

AP: That's terrific.

Do you have any sense of public issues? As we're looking at the history in the 1960s, there was a tremendous amount of student activism. Are there students around you—there haven't been that I've noticed—demonstrating on big public issues?

LJ: There are some. They all have good issues. Students should exercise their abilities to critically think about an issue. I am afraid like any young student or anybody who is immature—me included—you react instead of think about it and then act. That sounds vague. What I'm talking about is if a student here gets real passionate about some subject and just comes at you gangbusters about it, that's going to turn more people off than win them over to your side.

AP: Sure, so you need logic and [unclear].

LJ: You want to have a planned attack. That's the pedagogy of me speaking here. It is the teacher's side. You can't just yell at somebody about how bad something is, because nothing will happen of

that. You have to be able to offer solutions or facilitate a reasonable discussion about it—but that comes with growing up.

My mother [Patricia Jung] was a university employee in the early 1970s and had some firsthand with the activists then.

AP: Oh, really?

LJ: Yes. They fire-hosed her lab over on the East Bank in the old Zoology Building that's been torn down. I guess her stories about that, to me...

AP: Did that ruin her research?

LJ: Yes, that did at the time. She had brought her kids to school one day; that would be me and my sister. We were ages two and four and she was pregnant with a third. She said that students ran up to her and started screaming at her about overpopulating the world because that was big time into the zero population growth movement... Paul Erhlich's book [*Population Bomb*]. She had two very unfavorable experiences with activism.

AP: Did she finish her degree?

LJ: No, she never got a degree here. She already had a degree. She was just working here.

AP: All right.

Is there anything that I have not asked you that you think I should have, that a thoughtful interviewer would have, or that you would like to say?

LJ: No. I think I'm another case where it's a family legacy. My mom worked here and my dad went here and both of my sisters got degrees here.

AP: Your dad's degree, you said earlier...

LJ: He had a degree in geography in the 1950s and became a city planner for St. Paul.

AP: Your mom worked in the Zoology Department?

LJ: I've forgotten which department it was, exactly. I know it was medical research.

AP: Health sciences?

LJ: Yes. She still works there.

AP: Oh, she does?

LJ: Yes, right now, it's nephrology but it's health sciences.

AP: Does she have the same job or has she changed jobs?

LJ: She's now a senior scientist but, at the time, she was probably a researcher.

AP: Where did she do her undergraduate work?

LJ: Ohio State University at Columbus.

AP: And she's still at the "U". That might be fun. What did your sisters study?

LJ: I have one sister who...just like me, English. She went on to teach in Korea.

AP: How did she end up there?

LJ: She's like me again. She got bored here and just wanted to see new places. She's a world traveler. She's been everywhere.

AP: What is her name?

LJ: Rachel Jung.

AP: Do you know what year she graduated?

LJ: I think in 1995.

AP: Then, you have another sister?

LJ: Yes. She graduated just last year, 1998, with a master's in landscape architecture. What she does and what I do are kind of related. We talk all the time. Her name is Dana, D-a-n-a. She works for downtown Minneapolis now at an environmentally friendly architect firm. [laughter]

AP: Where did she do her bachelor's degree?

LJ: The same place. She got her BLA and MLA, that's what they call it here.

AP: Landscape architecture, both times?

LJ: Right.

AP: There's kind of a naturalist scientific bent in your family, isn't there?

LJ: Yes. We grew up in Mendota Village and that's right in the Mississippi River Valley. It's a very old, old town. It is *the* oldest town in Minnesota, no matter what people of Stillwater tell you. [laughter]

AP: Is that where the Sibley House is?

LJ: Yes. It's still in a pretty natural, rural state despite being encroached on by the Orin *Thompsonvilles* of the world. I think we all grew up close to nature and appreciating it.

AP: That's a very nice family touch.

LJ: Yes, it is.

AP: Did you ever go to football games as a family?

LJ: No. Nobody is really sports...

AP: It would be interesting to ask your dad if he remembers going to football games.

LJ: He'd love to talk about this.

AP: Could you give me his number? It would be kind of a fun thing to talk to...

LJ: He's home and retired right now. He's very articulate; he'll talk all day. [laughter]

AP: Perfect.

LJ: His name is Larry. The number is 651-452-2671.

I know that there's a Borchert Map Library over at Wilson [Library]. One of his professors, I know, was Mr. Borchert. I forgot his first name.

AP: John, I think.

LJ: He knows John Borchert. He can go back to that.

AP: I will give him a call.

LJ: Okay.

AP: Thank you very much.

LJ: Yes.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

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