SUSAN MATISOFF

Christina Maslach:
So, we just want to start with some basic demographics. Your name, birth, education.

Susan Matisoff:
My name is Susan Matisoff, and I was born in Michigan in 1940.
And my education is that I got my BA with a major in Japanese from Radcliffe College in 1962, and that summer came straight out to Berkeley and enrolled as a graduate student. This was in what was then called the Oriental Languages Department at Berkeley. But within one semester, I was quite unhappy. The person I planned to study with, who I thought would be my doctoral advisor, had left on short notice and gone to Stanford. So in my very first year, there were only temporary faculty and, having just come from Harvard, it was very disappointing. So, I'm taking all this time because the story has an end to it, long afterwards.

I quickly realized that the strong teaching offerings in the department at that time were in Chinese. There's a certain amount of Chinese history and classical language that one needs in my field, which is pre-modern Japanese studies. So, without telling anybody except my husband, I made a decision that I was going to try to get pregnant, and I was going to drop out, because it was clear that within two years of our getting here, he (who was a graduate student in linguistics) would need to go abroad to do field work. And my department was just too complicated and unsatisfying for me. So, I started taking the best available classes instead of the rational classes that would've been leading toward my degree. Nobody really noticed. And after three semesters I dropped out, by then visibly pregnant. Now jumping way ahead, I never imagined that thirty-plus years later I would end up chairing the department from which I'm a dropout!

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
We spent eighteen delightful months in Thailand, with our small baby in tow. Then in 1967, so that's now three and a half years after leaving Berkeley, I continued my graduate work at Columbia, and I got my PhD in January of 1973, by which time we were back living in Berkeley. It's pretty complicated, but my husband's first teaching job was at Columbia and that's when I did my graduate work there. We did this kind of amazing piecing of things together.

Christina Maslach:
So you moved back to . . . New York?

Susan Matisoff:

We went from Berkeley to Thailand for my husband's dissertation research, and from Thailand to Manhattan where our second child was born the week after we got there. Then a year after we got there, I started graduate school. At that point my kids were one and three. And my husband taught there for three and a half years and then got a job offer from Berkeley.

Christina Maslach:
Okay.

Susan Matisoff:
So we moved back out here and I wrote my doctoral dissertation here in Berkeley, sending the chapters back to my advisor at Columbia.

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
And I would say the very most important step in all of that tying things together was what happened early on, when we had just married, in the middle of my senior year. He was a grad student in linguistics at Harvard. He had just come back from Japan and had returned to Harvard where he'd been an undergraduate. But Harvard's linguistics department was very disappointing for him. So he followed me in my initial plan to come to Berkeley, which people found shocking at the time. And then UC Berkeley at the time turned out, ironically, to be much better for him than it was for me. But then we pieced it all together in the end because he got the job teaching at Columbia, which had been the other place I had applied to grad school. We got faculty housing that had us living only a block away from the office of the person I wanted to study with, and yeah, I went back to grad school.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my gosh.

Susan Matisoff:
So, I finished my degree in January of '73 when we were already living out here in Berkeley.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
As I was approaching the end of the dissertation I started to look for a teaching position. And with the kids still quite young, I felt that I could not look for a job that would cause me to have to fly somewhere. I had to find a job where I could be home every evening. And there weren't any. I looked around to see what other colleges offered Japanese in

the Bay Area. Remember this was in 1972. And the answer was San Francisco State, where there were no openings. Stanford, where there were no openings. Cal State Hayward, also no opportunities. That was pretty much it.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
So I did something that I think didn't have a name then. I think it started being called "networking" later on. But I knew one faculty member at Stanford in Chinese, Chinese history actually, who had been a visiting faculty member at Columbia when I was there. And I thought, let me just go down and talk to him. I took my CV and I said, I'm almost done with my dissertation. I know there are no jobs at Stanford, but if you hear of anything in the Bay Area, administrative, whatever, you know, think of me.

So that was in January of '72 and two months later I got a phone call from the same guy, who was then the acting chair of the Asian languages department there. And the call was very sudden and rushed. The gist was to ask, "Could you come down here? I'm sorry, this is such a rush. The Chinese ping pong team is coming. I've only got a minute." (This was the very first break in U.S--China relations.) And he said, "I've only got a minute, but can you be down here next week to give a talk? We have a new position open in the department." I told him, "You know, I've never given a talk and I can only talk about my dissertation." He assured me that was fine. And so I went on a week's notice.

I went down there, and I gave a talk. And I think my introduction is worth telling you about in context. The acting chair's wife was an academic, on the faculty at another school in the area. And I knew that he was well disposed to me, given how things had gone. But at my talk, he introduced me in this way. This is practically verbatim. "This is Mrs. Matisoff. She lives in Berkeley. Her husband is a Professor of Linguistics and she has two children. And the title of her talk today is…", and I don't know what came over me, but I blurted out, "These are my academic qualifications!?" If I had stopped to think, I would never have done that. But that's what came out of my mouth. And, somebody in the audience whom I did not know, laughed; and he said, "No, no, no, these are your extracurricular activities." And then everybody laughed, and I gave my talk. And a year later when this young man came back and was visiting, he came by my office. And I said, "I think I owe you my job, the way you rescued me from that introduction." I don't really know how I did, but I guess I did okay; it was the first talk I'd ever given.

And I got the job and then some months later I learned about the scheme that had, or the system, the scheme, in a good sense, that had brought this about. The Stanford provost at the time whose name was William Miller -- I want to give him credit -- had put together a pool of money and told departments that they could get an incremental position in their department if they could show that they had a fully qualified woman

candidate. So that's how I was hired. It was essentially a pure affirmative action hire.

Christina Maslach:
Right, right, wow.

Susan Matisoff:
And I remember that I got a questionnaire from Radcliffe around the time of a class reunion, a few years after that. One of the questions was whether being a woman had been a hindrance in employment. And I wrote saying, honestly, that I have to say, in an odd way it was an advantage.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
I eventually learned that there'd been about a dozen women who were hired in '72, because Stanford decided they ought to try to start consciously adding women to the faculty. I don't know how long that program went on. I only gradually learned about that history, but, in any case, I started teaching there in the fall of '72.

Christina Maslach:
But you got your degree in '73?

Susan Matisoff:
I got the degree in January '73.
The very first quarter that I was there, I was still finishing up with Columbia. Columbia has a formal thesis defense. And so I was in the phase of having the dissertation typed in a perfect copy to submit. Going back to actually defend it...

Christina Maslach:
To then do the defense. But you actually started teaching at Stanford in the fall of '72? Right. Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
And I did that commute for 27 years.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. You've had one of the most interesting job talk descriptions I've heard so far. Oh my gosh. Can I ask what your research was all about?

Susan Matisoff:
Well, my research is in pre-modern Japanese literature and theater and, over the years, I got more and more specialized really in oral, or orally derived literature. I mean...it had

to have been written down at some point. I worked a lot on the *noh* theater, working on the texts, not on surviving stage performance so much. And I studied all kinds of popular, vernacular literature from the medieval and through about the 17th century. So, you know, it's a pretty small field, although it's way bigger than it was when I first got into it.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
And how I had first gotten into this was through spending the summer as an exchange student in Japan. I got very interested. I started studying the language. The first research I did using Japanese sources was reading modern literature. As I began to learn something more of the classical language in graduate work, my focus really shifted to the medieval period.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Oh, that's interesting. This is a little sort of side note here, not to take away from you, but when I was at Radcliffe, I got an opportunity to go to Japan in the summer between my junior and senior year. I worked on some psychology research, the very first study I ever did. But in my spare time, I visited museums, and came across the *Tale of Genji* -- which was wonderful!

Susan Matisoff:
Well then, you can imagine it for me; it was the summer after my freshman year at Radcliffe that I went to Japan and lived with a family in Nagano city. I was in a program where there were a group of 10 of us. And we were each expected to be put in a family, living in a family where there was a high school or college age student who knew some English, except they only had nine families like that. And I got the 10th. Nobody, nobody knew any English at all. And I just had to sink or swim. And I guess I swam.

Christina Maslach:
Yes, you swam! An immersion experience, right, and probably a better way to do it.

So, when you joined the Stanford department and started this work, how did that go? I mean, it sounds like people really liked your talk and everything was going well in terms of your research, your teaching, your relationships with students...

Susan Matisoff:
First of all, I would say that it wasn't the main thing I thought about at the time, but as the years went by, I thought about it quite a bit. That is to say, the department was all men when they hired me, and it was very small. I think there were eight people, and I became the ninth, or there were nine and I became the tenth. And you know, in the context of these kinds of interviews about our experience, I realize that then I wasn't

very consciously thinking much about I'm the only woman in the department and whether they were treating me right. This was because it was very multicultural. If you think about it, the faculty consisted of US-born people of Asian descent, US-born Caucasians, Chinese men born in China, and Japanese born in Japan. So, we were all different. I mean, I think everybody was operating on a little bit of cultural uncertainty about what another person might automatically expect. The department members were very polite to each other. And the -- how shall I put it? -- the sherry-loving chair of the department made sure that every department meeting was heavily lubricated by sherry. So for the most part, I don't think I was thinking much about my colleagues' attitudes toward me.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
Though I was increasingly conscious as the decades went by, and for 21 years I was the only woman in the department.

Christina Maslach:
21? Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
But of course, it's very small. So, there wasn't that much hiring. I do think there had been two searches in that interim where men were hired. I tried to be sure that the women candidates got a fair shot. But I had agreed with those hires.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
But from the beginning I did notice things, and they were just little things, you know. For example, I had an office on the second floor of our building. It's, well, you know, the Stanford campus, they're small buildings.

Christina Maslach:
Right, right.

Susan Matisoff:
Along with other faculty, I had one of the offices on the second floor and I tended to prefer to work while leaving my office door open. The staff offices were on the ground floor. But for the first several years it was really clear to me that I was being seen as a member of the staff by those who didn't know me. People would pop into my door and ask questions that belonged downstairs in the department office. You know, questions like, what is the schedule for courses for next semester? "No, I'm sorry, you're in the

wrong place," I'd have to say. The funniest incident I remember happened in one of the other small buildings where I was teaching, the political science building. There was a restroom that was labeled "women faculty." Why? I do not know. It was the only one I had seen on the campus, and I was using that restroom when a real assertive, let's say, older department manager, I guess, came in and challenged me. You know, I was in my early thirties. I still looked like a possible grad student. "Do you belong in here?" she asked. And I remember saying to her, "I'm a member of the faculty, are you?" And she, with some embarrassment, said, "Oh, that's fine then."

Christina Maslach:
Oh my god.

Susan Matisoff:
But it was mostly just little trivial things. And I wasn't particularly, you know, gender-aware, and the nature of my research didn't particularly lead itself to such questions until a lot later when I began to see, oh, well there certainly are things I could take up in my teaching. So, after I'd been there for a few years, I created a course for undergraduates, reading in English translation works by Japanese women writers. Because, I mean, the *Tale of Genji* is this huge monument of world literature. In the period when that was written, there were quite a number of women writers. And then such works just disappeared. And then they only come back again, I'm exaggerating, but they really only come back again in modern times in the 20th century. So this was a funny course, with us reading a certain amount of pre-modern literature and then some modern fiction. That was the only course I ever gave that had a specific women focus.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, fascinating. But in terms of your research, and then the scholarly work, were you able to go forward and do it as you wanted?

Susan Matisoff:
Yes, in terms of the standards of academe. Absolutely. Though it was sometimes a little challenging in Japan, because I was even more anomalous in Japan. There was one very fine scholar who helped me a lot over the years. One time when we were together, he said to me, "You know, there are three sexes." And I said, "Yeah? What are they?" His answer was, "Men, women, and foreign academic women."

Christina Maslach:
Oh, really?

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah. Which said about a million things about women academics, and I don't think he meant just me. Because he, and a few others, seemed like they just couldn't figure us out.

Christina Maslach:
Oh.

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah. I came to understand that pretty much all the academic women in Japan at that time were unmarried. It was kind of like the schoolmarm pattern of America a century ago or something. So a woman academic, of course, she's a dedicated single woman. But I wasn't. So "What, who, what? This woman can't stay and drink with us until 10 o'clock tonight, because she has to go back to her kids!"

Christina Maslach:
Oh, that's interesting. Wow. When I was in Japan, I was never a foreign academic woman. I was a foreign woman, but I was tall and at the time was...

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah, me too. "Tall" was one of the very first words of Japanese that I learned.

Christina Maslach:
Yes!

Susan Matisoff:
Takai. And it means either high or tall...

Christina Maslach:
Okay. Yes. So let me ask a bit more on what you've just mentioned about interactions with colleagues.

Susan Matisoff:
I think I've gotten along well with my colleagues. The thing I noticed was that in the first, I think, two years that I was at Stanford, no one ever invited me out to lunch, and I did begin to kind of think about that. And then at one point, two of them together invited me out to lunch. One was the man I talked about, who introduced me, and the other was another very senior man in the department. I liked both of them a lot. And it kind of occurred to me that they had teamed up to invite me out to lunch because I think they thought it was, you know, maybe not right to be seen eating lunch alone with a woman, even a married woman academic.

But yes, at that point, that year, a man my age who specialized in medieval Japanese history was hired. His field was very close to mine. And, I knew we would inevitably have a lot of academic overlap. And as soon as he came, I thought, okay, he's new here, I'll invite *him* to lunch. And then I started doing that. I started occasionally just asking my male colleagues, even one-on-one, and it was fine. But I think that that combination of them seeing me every other Tuesday, you know, going out to lunch with Jeff, did something to soften their concerns a bit.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. But you touch on an important theme where sometimes there's a sense of awkwardness because suddenly there's something that is not quite the usual way. And are we doing the right thing? You know what I'm saying? It's like, not really sure that anything's wrong, but still that sort of, how do I broach this, or something like that.

Susan Matisoff:
One thing I wanted to think of, and make sure I don't fail to talk about, is my tenuring at Stanford. Because it was interesting. I came up for tenure after six years, just, you know, going right along. And at this point when I was coming up for tenure, I thought, "I don't think I can keep this up." I really was exhausted, and I was commuting three or four days a week. And the kids were still young. I talked a long time with my husband, and I was wondering. Should I just tell them I'm going to quit now, I'm going to leave? Because it was really killing me. And I remember we were out for a walk and I had a sudden thought. We decided I would ask them if I could have a part-time appointment. Then I talked to a couple of tenured women colleague friends at other schools, and they said, well for God's sake, get tenure first, and then ask for the half-time appointment.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
But I thought this department is so small, and the program in Japanese is so very small that this will have a real bearing on a lot of people. If I want to go half-time, I better put my cards on the table as part of the tenure process. So, I did. And they collected a whole lot of outside letters, and the process went on. I got a message from my department chair. He actually called me and he said, Congratulations, there's just one step left, but it's an absolute formality. You've passed the Appointments and Promotions committee. Congratulations. You know, your appointment letter should come in a couple of weeks.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
And in a couple of weeks came a letter from the provost that said in effect, I'm holding up your appointment. We have to consider whether we can afford such an expensive position. Now I, and all of my colleagues, were teaching only small numbers of students, and that had never been part of the deal for them. And I was just really shocked. I remember I picked this letter up out of my mailbox, and I went to the car to drive home. Actually, fortunately, to get a ride home. I was car-pooling with someone I know you knew, Rose Sitgreaves Bowker, who was teaching at Stanford. I don't remember how we had been put in touch, but for years we commuted together.

Christina Maslach:
Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
So, a lovely woman, very quiet. But you know, she was a senior academic, and her husband was then the Chancellor at Berkeley. So, I showed her this letter. I told her, and I was practically in tears, that I didn't know what to do. We talked a bit more and I got home and about 20 minutes after she dropped me off, she called me up and she asked, are you free at, let's say, three tomorrow? And I said, yes. And she said, "Al would like to talk with you." This is Albert Bowker, the Chancellor. So, I went into his imposing Berkeley campus office. I had never met him before, but I went into his office. He asked me quite a bit about my work. He asked me, I remember very specifically, whether I attended all the meetings of the department. And I told him that, yes. I always was there on the day there was a department meeting. He said to me, "Well, my friend Jerry is down at Stanford, and he and I wrote a book together." And he said, "I'm going to give him a call." "Jerry" was then provost, replacing the one who was in that position when I was first hired. He was the person the surprise letter had come from. So apparently the Chancellor here called the provost down there and said, you know, she's okay, or something along those lines. And then I got this face-saving letter from the provost saying, we're going to look into this little bit more. We're going to get a couple more letters. They got a couple more letters. The people they asked at that point called me up and said, what's going on? And then, like I told you, yes, I did get tenure, and a half-time appointment. But it was so fraught. On the other hand, I think it was a really interesting example of a girl slipping into the old boy network between these institutions.

Christina Maslach:
Okay. That's an incredible story.

Susan Matisoff:
Isn't it? I mean, they can't have learned anything more from the two more letters that they got afterwards. It was a way to save face. I mean, whatever works, that's fine for me.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. So then you got the letter that said you have tenure?

Susan Matisoff:
Yes, and they set out the conditions of the half-time appointment. And I remember what was said to me about the half-time appointment was we need you here half the time all year. It's not that we want you to have a quarter off every year.

Christina Maslach:
Oh, oh I see.

Susan Matisoff:
And I said, Oh, that's fine. It's the frequency of commuting and the course load that I need relief from. So that's fine. So all this left the department in the funny position that they had half an unfilled position.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
And, after a number of years, I don't remember how many, let's see, five or six, somebody who was tenured at Princeton and knew that I had a halftime appointment contacted the department and asked if there was any way he could have the other half? You know, Stanford being a private school can hire in more flexible ways. And they did that. But what he wanted, the reason he wanted a half-time appointment, was that he was developing a career as a writer in Japan and he wanted to spend half the year in Japan. So, he wanted to have one quarter off every year. And I talked to my department chair, and talked to the Dean and I said, basically, what's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
He's going to be gone one quarter. Doesn't it make sense to let me be gone one quarter? If we're both there in the winter quarter, overlapping, we'll be together when everything important happens when the hiring happens, when the admission of new graduate students happens.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
And so it became the pattern that I taught from January to June. But it was stipulated that I could teach more than half-time if it was needed and I wanted to, so some years I did, but mostly I taught half-time.

Christina Maslach:
For how many years did you do that for?

Susan Matisoff:
Let's see. Well, from the time I got tenure from '79 to '99. For 20 years.

Christina Maslach:

Yeah. Okay. So then in a sense it became a more permanent part of your teaching, your research – your entire academic lifestyle.

Susan Matisoff:
But what I of course came to realize was that yes, it made it possible for me. But it was really a good deal for them. Because I was on just as many doctoral committees as anybody...

Christina Maslach:
Some things don't go in half.

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah, exactly. I did just as much committee work as anybody. So they were getting more than half-time.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
But I don't really think I could have done it full-time. Because we went through a period of about a decade starting right after I got tenure, where first one and then the other of my children was very seriously ill and with multiple hospitalizations. I don't want to go into that too much, but that made life really complicated.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. Oh my gosh.

Susan Matisoff:
You know, so some of these things meant that I always felt in terms of my own academic career that I didn't publish as much as I would have if I had just been about me. If I hadn't had all the family difficulties, particularly those years of illness. So I only ever published one book, and quite a number of articles. But I got through.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Well, obviously, -- but I do hear from a number of people about the issues regarding the criteria, and about books and how many books as opposed to articles, as opposed to all kinds of other things. So you can see some patterns of women, but also men.

Susan Matisoff:
Well, in my case, I was certainly up to speed at the point that I was tenured, but the first hospitalization of the younger child happened the summer after I was tenured, and this went on for years and years. And I just came to realize I couldn't count on the long stretches of time that writing another book was going to entail, and that doing articles

was a better thing to do. So, yeah, that's what I did.

Christina Maslach:
That's great.
So, next question -- did you do any kind of administrative stuff, or other kinds of activities at Stanford? Given especially the half-time.

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah, at Stanford starting in 1995, so I'd been there for a long time by then. I was appointed the director of the Center for East Asian Studies there. That's a unit that doesn't have its own faculty, but it coordinates, for the students, all kinds of information about all the programs in Chinese and Japanese and who's teaching what, when and how you can put stuff together so you can get all your courses. And it ran a master's degree program where we admitted students. And I ran a lecture series. And eventually I came to realize in retrospect, after I became a department chair here, that, you know, basically it had all of the kinds of responsibilities that a department chair has, minus hiring.

Christina Maslach:
Right. On the job training.

Susan Matisoff:
That's where I learned to supervise staff and stuff like that. I remember a couple of poignant moments: one when I came in and found my staff assistant practicing forging my signature. That was an interesting moment!

Christina Maslach:
Oh, my god, I've never heard...

Susan Matisoff:
He was gone within a few months of that, although I didn't actively fire him, I just started watching him really carefully. And I remember another time when he referred to my management style and I said, what? I don't have any management style. So, I directed that center, and also, I got somehow pretty heavily involved in the national professional association, which is the Association for Asian Studies. And in two different stints, one when I was quite young and then again probably in the eighties and nineties, I was on a couple of big national committees for them. And it was still in the years that I was at Stanford that, somehow, I got a reputation as being a good person to put on an outside evaluation committee.

Christina Maslach:
Oh yeah.

Susan Matisoff:

I was on committees that reviewed the departments at UBC and UCLA, and several other places, which I realized I found quite interesting. So all of this led to the point in 1998 when the Berkeley East Asian Languages department sent in the mail a poster that I found hanging on the department bulletin board that said they were looking for a departmental chair from outside, looking to hire someone from outside Berkeley to come in and chair the East Asian Languages Department.

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
And I looked at that, and my first thought was that my colleague was sure to apply for it. And then I thought, wait a minute, I should apply for this, obviously.

Christina Maslach:
Berkeley.

Susan Matisoff:
Well you know, the stopping commuting part of it was a no-brainer. Any way I could stop commuting was absolutely going to be worth it. And then I began to think that I actually did have some administrative experience, you know? So, I applied for that job, and I got it.

Christina Maslach:
Wow, that's amazing. Can you say something about, that's an odd, it's not a typical hire. "We need to go outside the department to find a chair." Were there some special circumstances?

Susan Matisoff:
There were. First of all, it, too, is a small department.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
One way that it was explained was that all of the tenured faculty in the department, it's probably an exaggeration, but what they were saying was that all of the tenured faculty in the department had served a term as chair, and nobody wanted to do it again. That was one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it was that there was a real schism in the department, not between the Chinese and Japanese sides, but mainly among the Chinese faculty, with two guys with very strong personalities. Both of them, I think, really had the best interests of the department at heart, but they had very different ideas about how it should be. And they were cranky, and the department had really had a history of certain kinds of other troubles in the past. So, they really thought

they needed somebody new to come in from outside the department. And I think the department was in a state called “in receivership.” A professor from the classics department was the acting chair for that year. And it was his job to find someone to take over as the next chair.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. So, we had a few of those here.

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah, it happens from time to time. So those were the circumstances in which I was interviewed. In a way I thought, well, I have an advantage over the other three candidates because I knew almost everybody in the department socially, because I'd lived here in Berkeley all these years, you know, and I would go to talks and I'd meet people. I didn't know the grad students, and I didn't know all the faculty well, but they all knew who I was before I even came to be interviewed. And I think that helped both in terms of being somewhat comfortable with the interview and the process. And it did help, you know, when I started actually doing it...

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
But it was on the job training certainly because, for instance, I remember the first week I came in to my new office and the department manager said, well, the first thing we have to do is a merit increase for so and so. And, you know... I don't think I said, “what's a merit increase”? Because I think I knew from watching my husband's career, I knew kind of what it was, but it's a heck of a thing to come into the incredible Berkeley bureaucracy and start doing this stuff when you have never gone through it.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, okay.

Susan Matisoff:
So that first year was pretty intense. And in terms of managing the people in the department, first of all, again, maybe I'm contrary, but I have to say, I think there was a slight advantage in being a woman coming into that context where they'd never had a woman chair. They'd had a history of being kind of snarky to each other. And I think there was a little bit of a reaction of -- Oh, it's a lady, we should be polite to her. I really do.

And very early on, I said, I understand the department has hardly been meeting at all. And I told them I was not going to try to change anything until I'd been here for a year, that I just wanted to get a sense of the department, you know. And that went over rather well with these two senior guys who, on the one hand, would each like to run the

department but on the other hand wouldn't serve again as chair. And I also developed a technique that I used many a time; and when I retired, I told them what I'd been doing: if one of those two guys came to me with some strong idea and I thought it was a really good idea, I would present it to the other one, just as an idea, without saying this came to me from the first one. Also, I started having the department meet much more often. And sometimes with nothing other than just to have lunch, you know? So actually, though it damn near killed me in terms of the amount of work and the learning curve, I did it for four years. I decided that was enough, but I got some satisfaction out of being department chair.

Christina Maslach
Well, I'm glad to hear that. So, the satisfaction of a job well done. Yeah, that's really great.

Susan Matisoff:
I mean, a thing that was interesting to me in terms of, again, feeling that there was beginning to be a kind of an old girl aspect to the old boy network. There was a woman faculty member here, well certainly I can name her, it's fine. Beth Berry in the history department. Somebody I knew well and she knew my personal circumstances with the kids' illnesses. It was a very hard thing to figure out whether to say anything at all about such a personal issue in a letter of application or whatever. I don't actually remember what I did. But I believe that she told the acting chair, this is how you have to look at this pattern. What's not there is that she's been going through hell with very sick children. My kids are fine now, but it had affected my career. So, I do think that mattered. I mean, she was not in the department, but she was somehow always hovering around... Yeah. So that was important...

Christina Maslach:
I think that those are a lot of the meaningful little things, and there are ways in which other people can step in and help make something move forward. And it's never part of the record and it's all...

Susan Matisoff:
Right. Right. And it's the imponderable edges of things.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. And I think, just speaking personally, as you get older, you begin to realize that you can do the same thing. You end up maybe not always knowing all that happened in your own case, but, realizing that this is something you can do as well for others, or it's almost like a mentoring thing, you know?

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah. I've been thinking about great mentors. I don't know when the concept became so clearly important, and the term became common. But I don't think when I was a grad

student and just starting out in the academic market, I don't think I ever would have referred to my doctoral advisor as my mentor. I think that terminology came in a little later.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, it's a good question. I don't really know. But what I've been hearing from some of the interviews is the importance of receiving some kinds of information and guidance or getting some help in working out how you move forward in life, in this academic area, (which doesn't come easily). So, it was those kinds of things that I think people begin to talk about as the mentor role, someone that people can turn to ask a question or get advice.

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah. I would say that was true for me and also not true, which is just to say that my advisor, who I remained very close to up until his death a few months ago at age 96 -- anyway, he was the kind of person who, in terms of your research and your writing and thinking about literature, is fantastic. He's a man who absolutely avoided any kind of conferences. He just never went to conferences. He didn't do any of this other kind of stuff that I did end up doing. So, I wasn't getting that sort of advice. But he was being no different to me than he was to any of his male students. Absolutely. And it's kind of interesting that this very eminent man, Donald Keene, had lots of women students from early on. And treated us exactly like everybody else. So, in that I was very fortunate.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Absolutely.

Susan Matisoff:
I could never in a million years have lived up to this man's model as a teacher. He lectured in undergraduate courses on Japanese literature. He knew that field so well, and he was so deeply into it. And he had this remarkable talent. He never used a note.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. That's really something to admire.

Susan Matisoff:
You can imagine. You can imagine the talk for the memorial service, that I'm working on constantly in my head.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my gosh. So, there's going to be a really special...?

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah. Well, there's already been a major one in Japan, and there will be another at Columbia.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my gosh. Yeah. Oh, that will be special though.

I just realized that we didn't talk about your promotion to full. Is there anything there?

Susan Matisoff:
Well, I was never promoted at Stanford. I was an associate professor. I have noticed, well, there are not very many of the faculty left who were there when I was, but it's much more common at Stanford to never get promoted to full. I mean, it's not the majority, but there, I don't know whether this is true across the board, but certainly in the departments that I knew, a fair number of people, retired as associate...

Christina Maslach:
As associate professor, yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
In my case, I always thought, well, you know, it's not that shocking. I really haven't published, as much blah, blah, blah, whatever. It's fine. I've got tenure, I've got a job. I'm okay. When I applied for the Berkeley job, and I was discussing it back and forth with the acting chair, at one point he called me up and he said, what's more important: salary or the position, your title? And I remember saying, look, if I'm going to be chair of the department, I know that being at associate rank means that I couldn't act on cases of people who were ranked higher than I am. I think I better be a professor.

Christina Maslach:
Yes.

Susan Matisoff:
So, well, it does make me remember one bad thing about being a woman faculty member at Stanford that I should back up to. It's that although that atmosphere in the early seventies that brought in a bunch of us was strong, then that kind of waned. And particularly in later years, we had a provost who was female, but anti-woman to come right down to it. And I think, I'm not going to name names and stuff, but there were real problems.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah, yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
There were real problems. There was an instance when I wasn't part of it, but a group of senior women faculty went to her, and they said Stanford is developing a reputation as a bad place for women. She had vetoed a couple of appointments in departments where they had found somebody they wanted, and this was long after the affirmative

action thing. But her answer to my colleagues was, more or less it's your fault, if you weren't complaining about things like this, talking to your friends, nobody would think Stanford had a bad reputation for hiring women.

Christina Maslach:
Oh my God.

Susan Matisoff:
And not specifically connected with that provost, but at a certain point, after I was tenured and probably after I'd been there for about 15 years, my salary was so low that it was really getting to be very noticeable, noticeable to me anyway. And the salary setting at Stanford is done totally differently than at Berkeley. There the chair of a department is told this is the pot of money you have from which to figure out what percentage of raise you're going to give each of your colleagues. I looked back over these 15 years and every year I had gotten a 1% or a one and a half percent raise, but I found out that my colleagues were getting 3% or 4% raises, and at one point the person who had been chair of the department for far too long actually said to me, “Well, you are the second salary in your family.”

Christina Maslach:
Oh my God.

Susan Matisoff:
Then, when for the first time there was a woman Dean of Humanities, I went to her with a sheet of paper where I had laid out my salaries starting in '72 and going to, let's say, '87. And I did the math and had listed the percentage of raise I’d gotten each year. And she looked at my little chart and she said, roughly, I know that's really wrong. We're in the process of looking at the salaries of women. If we saw this, we would immediately be acting on it. And they gave me, a $5,000 raise right on the spot. And another one the next year. Yeah, which makes some difference. But I still came to Berkeley with a salary that shocked the acting chair. I mean, in the end I think I said, I think you have steps, you know, and I understand. But can I be professor step one? And then that's what I came in as, and it was a big salary bump. So it was, in that sense, I had not been treated right at Stanford.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
And there is another little wrinkle to that. At my Radcliffe twenty-fifth reunion, I met a woman I hadn’t known at college. Her name is Anne Miner. As we chatted I came to realize that, indirectly, I had her to thank for my hiring. I learned that in 1970 she had been appointed as an Assistant to the President and Affirmative Action officer. It was she who had devised the well-thought out hiring plan. She had come up with the idea of

the pot of money and incremental positions thing. So, it was amazing to meet her at our 25th college reunion and to come to recognize this connection. She herself is now an emerita member of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin Business School.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. That's, that's amazing. Oh my gosh. But it's interesting, it's also sort of that whole issue of where credit is given…

Susan Matisoff:
Yeah.

Christina Maslach:
So, and you discovered this at your reunion. I mean, just by chance, your paths sort of crossed...

Susan Matisoff:
And yeah, it must've been sort of like, I think I know your name. Weren't you at Stanford? Oh.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Yeah. Oh my gosh. Wow. That is quite a story.

Susan Matisoff:
I do, have one thing I wanted to make sure I mentioned. It's about teaching, my very early years of teaching. I'd never been a TA. I didn't have any teaching experience; you know, things were so different then just in terms of how big programs were and what kinds of things you could do. And when I was at Columbia, managing in graduate school with a three-year-old and a one-year-old was not the easiest thing in the world. And I remember that I could have had some teaching experience as a TA, but I didn't have to, so I didn't.

So I just started out teaching, and in my first or second year I was giving a course on Japanese theater. And the roots of Japanese theater really come out of a shamanic performance tradition way back when. So very early on in this course on Japanese theater, I was giving a whole lecture on shamanism, and the history of Japan and trance performance, and that kind of thing. And there was an undergraduate woman student, named Doreen. Doreen came up to me after the class and told me she was majoring in anthropology, so she was really interested in this whole thing I was talking about. But what she said to me made such an impression. She said, "Now, what you were talking about today, do you actually know that or do you just think that?"

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
I answered her however I answered, but I remember thinking about that and thinking, I'm clearly not sounding authoritative. Or she wouldn't have asked me that question. And I became pretty conscious of stopping saying, "I think..." It was a clear message to me that I wasn't coming across as authoritative. And the thing that gives me a tickle is that she finished her degree, got a PhD, and became a professor.

Christina Maslach:
Is that really? I wonder if she ever got that question herself?

Susan Matisoff:
Oh, no. She was a really in-your-face kind of person, which I'm not

Christina Maslach:
But there's been a number of women who've talked about that kind of question or challenge -- doubting that you really know what you're doing or that you're really expert enough.

Susan Matisoff:
In later years, Deborah Tannen published work that addresses this issue. She was actually my husband's student in at least one class, and I've read some of her work and it really fits right in with how I was probably presenting myself.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. Well, it reminds me when I was a graduate student at Stanford, and we had to take a training course in how to teach. And one of the things they did -- and this was for an introductory psychology class that had hundreds of students and many TAs -- is that we had to try out different teaching styles in the sections. And we had to be videotaped once, so that we could see what our students see. And it was shocking to me to look at the tape, and there I am, and I didn't remember doing this at all, but I would be saying little things, like "I'm not sure," or that were irrelevant, and somebody said, Christina, "We know you know that, so why are you saying it that way?" And it was clear that somehow, I was responding to being in an authoritative role, and was trying to be a little bit nicer.

Susan Matisoff:
Little softeners.

Christina Maslach:
Little softeners, you're exactly right. It was just such an eye opener, but it really made me think about where did this come from, why am I doing that? And it wasn't a fully conscious thing at all, but there it was on the screen. You know?

Susan Matisoff:
I think it's the same kind of thing, but you got it from someone who was there to point it out and teach you what to do. I got it from a student who forcefully pointed it out. Yeah. When I thought about it, even while it was going on, one thing I never could figure out about myself was that I didn't feel the least bit constrained about speaking up in faculty meetings. I was in there just as much as anybody else and just as strongly. And I didn't feel any kind of constraint in what I had to say on those national committees and the selection committees and stuff. I think I was actually fairly, you know, sturdy in those contexts. The hard part was being authoritative in front of an audience.

Christina Maslach:
Interesting. We may think we know ourselves well, but we aren't so aware of how other people see us or interact with us. It's like when you hear a tape of your voice, it doesn't sound like the voice in your head.

Susan Matisoff:
Exactly.

Christina Maslach:
I think we've covered a lot. But is there anything else you wanted to be sure to raise in this interview?

Susan Matisoff:
Well I think we've probably covered most of it. One thing I would really have to emphasize, though, is how enormously instrumental my husband was in my being able to do this. First of all, I think we're very unusual for marrying very young. I was 21, and not yet out of college, he was 24, and the fact that at that point, that early on, he chose to follow me...

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
I think I mentioned this to you when we talked once before, about a conversation I had with the Dean at Radcliffe in my senior year. We were a small enough number of students that she followed everybody's transcripts. And she was the one who, when I had switched from being a chemistry major to being a Japanese major, had said "Why this looks like Saul on the road to Damascus!" which it sort of was. And then I had talked to her about the fact that I was thinking about Columbia and Berkeley as possible graduate schools. Well, then I had to talk to her again because we were planning on marrying. At that point, the *in loco parentis* rules, which were dropped very soon thereafter, were so severe that if I had married without my parents' permission or without informing the college, if I'd done either of those two things, they could've expelled me.

Christina Maslach:
Wow.

Susan Matisoff:
So I got my father to call and say, we're not happy about this. But yes, we know she's getting married, so that's okay. And then the Dean said to me, but what about your graduate career? She was so shocked when I said, “He's going to come with me to Berkeley.” I think I made her a memorable moment.

Christina Maslach:
That's true.

Susan Matisoff:
Then after some time here at Berkeley, I had to make the decision that, okay, this isn't working for me. I'm going to drop out. I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm very glad I did that because having the experience of spending time in China and Southeast Asia on account of his research was very interesting over the years. Seeing more than just Japan. But I dropped out because it just wasn't working for me. I didn't know he'd eventually get a job at Columbia.

Christina Maslach:
Right.

Susan Matisoff:
Or that I'd be able to go back to graduate school, and then that he would get a job offer from Berkeley while I was still finishing my dissertation. And then that a job would open for me at Stanford. You know, we were taking some fairly big chances.

Christina Maslach:
A lot of risks there. Very serendipitous. But you look back on it, and you say, wow.

Susan Matisoff:
But it really worked. I mean, there were a couple of things like the fact that we lived only a block away from my classes at Columbia because we had faculty housing, or the fact that when we were both teaching, we were in small departments. Both the Berkeley Linguistics department and the Stanford Asian Languages department were accommodating to our schedules. And we were always able to either arrange it that I was teaching Tuesday, Thursday, and he was teaching Monday, Wednesday, Friday or the opposite. And from a point very early on we had some moment when -- I don't know whether I'd been doing all the cooking for a week or something -- and he kind of said, you know, I'm awfully busy with my work. And I remember saying, look, I'm doing everything you are. If we don't really split this in half, I can't manage everything. And he did take on more. For all those 27 years, on the days that I commuted to Stanford, he

did all the cooking. I mean, stuff like that really matters. Oh, and another thing we haven't talked about is that I did get a lot of women graduate students coming to me for advice.

Christina Maslach:
Ah, okay.

Susan Matisoff:
Especially since for so many years I was the only woman – other than language lecturers -- in the department. Even women who weren't my students, some from the Chinese program, would come to me for advice. And I remember talking with one who in the end dropped out. We can hardly blame her, the woman had triplets. But anyway, I was talking with her about, well, can your husband help? And she said, no, my husband's a lawyer. He's out of the house at 7:30 in the morning. He's back at six o'clock at night with dinner expected on the table. No, I get no help at all.

Christina Maslach:
Wow. Yeah. I think, that's a fairly shared story of women coming to see a woman professor, even coming from other areas, because they want to get some advice or help or "you must have had this, you know, tell me what you do."

Susan Matisoff:
But one of the things that was funny is my husband would be the first person to tell you that he would have been a disaster as a department chair...

Christina Maslach:
Oh, really?

Susan Matisoff:
...in any kind of administrative work. Because he just wouldn't have put his mind on it.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah.

Susan Matisoff:
Enormously productive scholarship.

Christina Maslach:
Yeah. But I just realized that I don't know who your husband is?

Susan Matisoff:
We're both Matisoff. In 1962 it never occurred to me to keep my maiden name. And he retired from the Linguistics Department in 2002. We both essentially did the same thing. He retired at 65. I retired at 66, four years later. But he had a series of grants from NSF

and NEH that ran for almost 20 years. So, at over 80, he just closed down his off-campus office last year.

Christina Maslach:
Wow, oh my gosh.

Christina Maslach:
I don't know many people in Linguistics, even though there were some people in my psychology department with language interests.

Susan Matisoff:
Dan Slobin and Sue Ervin-Tripp are the people that you would know.

Christina Maslach:
Yes, and Robin Lakoff, but I didn't know any others. Okay.
This has been a wonderful interview, Susan – what an amazing story you've told!
Thank you for sharing it.

END.