

Computing Educators Oral History Project

An Interview with *Graciela Perera*

Conducted Thursday, 18 October 2007

At Orlando, Florida USA

Interview conducted by Vicki L. Almstrum

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Context: This interview was conducted during the 2007 Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, held in Orlando, Florida, USA. We met for the interview in a hotel room, with technical support from Barbara Boucher Owens during the process. We met in a hotel room, which a fairly quiet location except for a period when the hotel's cleaning personnel were running a vacuum cleaner in the hallway just outside of the room.

1 [0:00]

2 **Vicki Almstrum:** This is an interview with Graciela Perera from Youngstown State
3 University in Ohio conducted by Vicki Almstrum. This interview is being recorded on
4 October 18, 2007 at Orlando, Florida. This is part of the Computing Educators Oral
5 History project. Did we pronounce your name correctly?
6

7 Graciela Perera: Yes, you did, thank you.
8

9 **V:** All right. So, I'd like to start thinking about your parents and their backgrounds. Did
10 they go to college, did they study math and science? Can you tell us a little about them?
11

12 G: Yeah, both of my parents did go to college. They were latecomers, after they got married
13 they went to college. They graduated from journalism, both in the same career, in the
14 humanities. They all come from humanities background.

15
16 **V: Interesting. Did they study in Venezuela?**

17
18 G: Yes, both of them studied in Venezuela, in a private Catholic university.

19
20 **V: OK. So in your early education were you a good student?**

21
22 G: Yes always ... always.

23
24 **V: So you liked your studies, all subjects, or were there any particular subjects that were
25 your favorites?**

26
27 G: Science, math, usually were my favorite subjects. I started early in school, because my
28 sister—I have a bigger sister—she started school and she’s only two years apart from me. So
29 I saw her going to school and me, trying to compete, saying, “Well if she’s going, I want to
30 go.” I was in school when I was like three years old or something like that. And they
31 accepted me, I was two years younger than the rest of the students, so by four or five years I
32 was reading. But it was just because I went to school earlier, and I liked school.

33
34 **V: So you mentioned your sister. Was she studying a math or science area?**

35
36 G: My sister had troubles, she wasn’t a good student. She was very nice but she was never ...
37 she liked the sciences, but she was never a good student within the sciences. And she
38 graduated, my big sister, all my sisters have bachelors degrees, and she’s a pharmacist now.
39 Graduated in Venezuela. My younger sister—I have two younger sisters. My first younger
40 sister that follows me has a law degree and the other younger sister is a dentist. And both of
41 my younger sisters, I guess pushed by me going to grad school, are also getting their graduate
42 degrees.

43 [2:18]

44 **V: That’s fantastic. So did your parents influence you particularly, you and your sisters,
45 on going to college, on what you might study?**

46
47 G: What I studied, I knew since I was like 3, 4 years old. Engineering and computers were with
48 me all my life. Ever since I was like 5 years old, all my toys were electronics-oriented:
49 gaming, computers. So they knew pretty much where I was going to ... They left me alone,
50 but in my family there was an emphasis of going to college. It was very important that ... my
51 mom and dad said, “All our daughters must go to college. If we have to pay for it, great, if
52 you get a scholarship, fine, but you all have to go to college.”

53
54 **V: So it was a clear expectation from an early age ...**

55
56 G: Yes, yes, it was very clear.

57

58 **V: And did they try to guide you in particular directions for what you would study?**

59

60 G: No, they knew. They already ... it was very clear. To my other sister it wasn't as clear as I
61 was. I knew when I was in high school ... before high school, my first year of high school, I
62 knew what I was gonna study. It was no surprise.

63

64 **V: And so through high school, are there any particular mentors, any particular teachers,
65 that helped guide you?**

66

67 G: In high school there was logic. I come from a Catholic background because Venezuela ... I
68 am originally from Venezuela and that's where I spent most of my high school years, and I
69 come from a Catholic background, which is the only religion basically in Venezuela. And
70 during there I met one teacher, my chemistry teacher, which influenced me a lot in teaching.
71 And then my spiritual guide, which is a Jesuit priest, he's now dead, but his education was in
72 logic, and family issues, and divorce.

73

74 **V: So logic from the point of view of ...**

75

76 G: Logical point of view, logic, like Aristotle logic, he taught ...

77

78 **V: Right, from the philosophy point of view.**

79

80 G: From law, he used to teach law students logic. Sets, things like that. Theoretical logic.

81

82 **V: So he had influence both on your way of thinking and your way of viewing the world.**

83

84 G: Yes, very much. Especially the difference between man and woman. The role of man and the
85 role of woman, how to handle relationships, personal relationships.

86

87 **V: Would you like to talk a little more about that? That's interesting.**

88

89 G: Yes, he was a Jesuit priest. He was a very big authority in Venezuela. He was leading a
90 foundation and he was in charge by the ... he decided in the Catholic Church if somebody
91 should get anointed for their marriage. So he did that. He also taught other priests. I first met
92 him in high school, and he gave us a talk of how you should have a relationship with your
93 boyfriend, what should you be expecting, and how to handle that relationship.

94

95 He later influenced me because when I had my boyfriend, which I was engaged to, the first
96 thing I felt was bringing it to him just to make sure I was on the right track. And he helped
97 me sort out in that moment in time what I really wanted. I was engaged, but I think I was
98 pressured to be engaged by society because that's what everybody expected. I was in high
99 school, I went through college, got my bachelor's, went on to get my master's. I got a
100 boyfriend, he was working, everybody thought he loved me. And you have a 4-year
101 relationship, you're expected to get married, and that's not what I really wanted. And [the
102 priest] guided me, explaining to me what the role of a woman was, what the man expected. I
103 come from a Latin culture, so what we call "Latisma" is that the woman stays home, the man

104 should always be professionally and intellectually better than the woman. You should have
105 children, dedicate your life to cooking. Your priority is always first your house, your
106 children, and *then* if you have time, your work. But work was never ... I love my work, I feel
107 passion about my work. It's part of me, it just drives me. It's something that I have to have.
108 Even if it's little, I have to have that. He wanted to take that away from me, and that made
109 me very unhappy.

110 [6:47]

111 **V: He, you mean your fiancé.**

112
113 G: My fiancé wanted to strictly take that away from me

114
115 **V: And so you understood this from the talking with your priest ...**

116
117 G: Yes, yes.

118
119 **V: ..._or was it earlier that you had already suspected this?**

120
121 G: No, it was from talking with the priest, yes, because he was contradictory. He [my fiancé]
122 told me he was supportive of me completing the master's, but he did everything to contradict
123 that. So his actions were contradicting of what he said. And when I talked to the priest he
124 said, "Look don't ever follow what a man says. Only follow what his actions are guiding you
125 towards. If he's saying 'I love you,' but on the other hand he's not showing you in actions
126 what he's doing, he evidently wants something else."

127
128 **V: Right. OK.**

129
130 G: So he kind of said, "If he doesn't say something people usually are fun. If the job of a man is
131 to make you happy, if somebody loves you, it's because they want to see you happy. It's not
132 at their expense of happiness that they're gonna ... making you unhappy is how they're
133 going to be happy."

134
135 **V: So it sounds as if starting in high school and throughout your college years in**
136 **Venezuela, you had this Jesuit priest as your spiritual guide and a life advisor of sorts?**

137
138 G: Yes he was. He was explaining to me my problems. The woman's are different than man's
139 problems, how women view different the world than men do, they are problem solvers, more
140 oriented. Not that every woman is like that, and many issues that he explained, that I
141 understood, I told him I wanted equality, that I don't want to be submissive to a man. And he
142 said he was gonna teach that to the other priests, cause I drew him my own model of what I
143 thought a good marriage should be, and he said he was going to teach that, so he was gonna
144 try to change.

145
146 **V: So you were able to teach him while he was teaching you?**

147
148 G: Yes. It was an exchange. So, he wanted to update the priests so they could teach people in the
149 spiritual way that they should accept girls more in one way than the other.

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V: And you indicated that he has now passed?

G: Yeah, he died. He died of cancer in 2002.

V: So five years ago.

G: Five years ago, yes.

V: And were you already in the United States?

G: No, I wasn't.

V: Then you had been able to continue your relationship with him?

G: Yes, I went to trips, brought him presents. He likes owls because it's knowledge, it's wisdom, so he liked very much. I always brought him something from all my trips.

V: How nice.

G: Yes.

V: You mentioned a chemistry teacher in high school. Would you like to tell a little bit about that teacher's influence?

G: Yes. What she did was show me how to teach. She came with a strong voice, she made a lot of sound when something was important. She was very indicative of what's important, in class, and what is not. She seemed to be very, very tough, but she was very lenient. I was very scared of her, but then I was very scared in a nice manner. She showed me tricks like banging on the table. And after her actions, I tried to figure out what she was doing. She said, "Education has to be triggered by some kind of emotion. If you sit there and you would transmit any excitement, love, hate, fear for the student, you can't activate somebody. You have to activate, engage the students through feelings rather than an object." So she did it through capturing your attention by banging on the table when something was important, because she scared you, you know, "This must be done." She also taught you that that was important. So she was a great influence, and she was always supportive of what I did, and she always told me to keep on going.

V: Did you have her for a single class or did you have her ... ?

G: For a single class, yes.

[10:48]

V: OK. And so when you finished at high school, you continued to university immediately?

G: Yes, I did. I got accepted into a private school, and I got a scholarship.

196 **V: This was in the same city you've lived in ...**
197

198 G: Yes, I was born in Caracas, Venezuela. Sorry. And when I was from 9 to 15 years old, I lived
199 here in the States for three years and then four up in Canada. So, half of my education was
200 between the United States and Canada, and the other one was in Venezuela. And then,
201 immediately after high school, I went to college to study what they called systems
202 engineering, which is kind of a mixture between industrial engineering and computer
203 engineering. I went right through after I finished high school.
204

205 **V: Were there any particularly significant teachers as mentors that you had during your**
206 **university days?**
207

208 G: Not the university days, no.
209

210 **V: And then on to your master's.**
211

212 G: Yes, of course. In my master's there was a girl, a woman really, who changed my life, she
213 was my advisor. I first started my master's dissertation with a man, and it didn't work out for
214 a year, so I had to switch, and then found my advisor during my master's program, which
215 happened to be the chair of the department. I had met her before because when I wanted to
216 start my master's program, I went up to her and told her I wanted to start a master's. She
217 looked at me, she was very harsh, and said, "Get out of here, you have nothing to do here,"
218 right in my face. So, I walked away. I said, "Well you think that, thank you very much. I'll
219 do whatever I think," and then went and applied and got accepted. She thought of that,
220 there's a reason I was coming from a private school. And the university where I was applying
221 for my master's, it was at the higher level. It was scientific, it was technical, and I came more
222 from a business school, a university oriented toward industry. So she would have probably
223 thought that my background wasn't good enough for the master's, or that I had to work. If I
224 didn't realize that I had to work a lot in order to obtain a master's from that school.
225

226 So later on she became my advisor of my dissertation, she always was very harsh on me but
227 she was right. I can say I sometimes went home crying. But she let me know myself, she was
228 very tough, but she was right. If something is wrong or right, you have to accept it. So she
229 made me look at the world from a logical point of view. She introduced me to algorithms,
230 data structures. She made me look at things very, very differently, from a rational point of
231 view. So she took out the rational part of me and made it more dominant in analyzing stuff.
232 She also was a very good teacher.
233

234 And after I graduated I got an offer from Microsoft in Venezuela. And she did all her effort
235 very much to keep me within the University. She told me if I wanted to, I could work with
236 her. And nobody liked her very much, most of the people around her were scared of her. She
237 was very tough, she could chew somebody up, and then throw them ... man or woman. She
238 was very intelligent, and she knew that. She was very ... what's the word? ... arrogant
239 because she knew she was more intelligent than you. Not many people liked her. But I didn't
240 care, she was a source of great knowledge and great wisdom, which I completely tried to take
241 anything that I could from her in the sense of knowing. And I got to know her on a personal

242 basis when I started working with her, got to know her family, her daughters, her two
243 daughters, her son. And I worked with her after my master's and she encouraged me to go
244 get my Ph.D. at the University of South Florida. She said ... by the way, [I] still keep in
245 contact with her. She's a great influence. Because ... I don't see her as a perfect teacher, but
246 she's very knowledgeable, she knows how to teach, certainly. She has good ethical and moral
247 values, and I admire her. One of the best things is that I really admire her, and I see her also
248 as a woman. She went through a divorce, she divorced, and I was with her at that period of
249 time. She was a chair, she told me many confidential things during being a chair, and I kind
250 of understood. And she was very powerful because she was the chair, and she was involved
251 with many things in the University and people came around me just to try to get to her but
252 she had no problems with that, and she protected me.

253 [15:34]

254 **V: And it sounds as if you may have protected her as well.**

255

256 G: Yes, it was kind of ... yes.

257

258 **V: So you became acquainted with her first as you were working on your master's, even**
259 **before you came into graduate school. And it was a relationship that evolved over how**
260 **many years?**

261

262 G: Since 1993 to 2003. 10 years.

263

264 **V: So your master's took how many years?**

265

266 G: From 1992 to 1995. About four or five years.

267

268 **V: And then you worked with her until you moved to Florida?**

269

270 G: Until I moved to Florida, yes, that's correct.

271

272 **V: Are there any other stories from your time at university in Caracas that you would like**
273 **to share?**

274

275 G: Yes, I met ... well, she was called my mom, and then I worked with another guy, he called
276 himself also my dad. He was the first, he was the one who... He was the founding professor
277 of our department in University of Simón Bolívar. He graduated from Georgia Tech. He was
278 gonna be the first student that actually graduated from Georgia Tech. He studied with the
279 current dean of Georgia Tech right now, so they go back that far, many good years. My
280 University had exchanges with Georgia Tech, many people went to study there, and people
281 came to my university where I graduated from my master's degree because they had a lot of
282 things in common. He's now in the Academy of Sciences, he's in anything that has to do
283 with technology, he's a big person in IT technology. And he's very famous, he worked for
284 the elections, he knows a lot of people in the government. Like if somebody here had
285 connections in Washington, he was called to the Congress to say anything that had to do with
286 information technology. He was the creator, he was the father, at least in my country.

287

288 So I got a chance to work with him, beside him, and I learned many things, as being
289 sarcastic, about teaching, he protected me also, about logic. His dissertation was really on
290 mathematical logic, which is the foundation of logic, and he got me into mathematical logic
291 and all that theory and formality, which I quite don't understand still, but I'm trying
292 [laughter], I am definitely trying. And he showed me political, he had a very nice laugh, so
293 he kind of knew how to defend himself but not in an aggressive matter, the aggression of
294 words. So I saw him fight with people politically, but they were laughing, they were shaking
295 hands, and they were telling each other how ... ripping each other apart. Because they were
296 saying crude things but in a nice manner, and I thought that was very neat. You don't have to
297 go to punches, or hit somebody. You can still be aggressive, but with words, and it's kind of
298 ... it sets the tone to make the distance. He influenced me greatly intellectually because he
299 was a very logical thinker.

300
301 So most of my logic, or the way I think, was really transformed by these two people. And I
302 still keep in touch with him. They are older, in the 65's. I usually call them my mom ... my
303 intellectual mom and dad.

304
305 **V: Right. And so you continued to work with both of these people during the years before**
306 **you went to Florida?**

307
308 G: Yes. And after Florida, I keep in touch but in a personal basis.

309 [19:05]

310 **V: And during those intervening years were you conducting research or ... ?**

311
312 G: Working. Working on projects, mainly. Application projects. One with the library, the
313 National Library, because was very known ... he'd recommend me. So I got to work with an
314 oil company, with one of the biggest oil companies, because he, again, recommended me.
315 And with my advisor, helping her in a big project, was trying to automize public
316 administration in Venezuela. So I was trying to help her out in controlling software
317 development, to develop a public administration software for the government because they
318 wanted to take up corruption. They were in the elections when ... it was very hectic. One of
319 them even got shot at, so it was ...

320
321 **V: Heavily dramatic!**

322
323 G: Yeah it was ... yeah. It was dramatic because we never knew if it was because he ... the
324 elections ... well, he didn't get shot but his car got shot at ... or it was just delinquency that
325 normally is in Venezuela. They are very big on ... they were handling projects that were
326 huge amounts of money.

327
328 **V: So you mentioned this idea of delinquency. Were there influences, safety issues, that**
329 **influenced the way you grew up, the protectiveness that may have come upon you and**
330 **your sisters ... ?**

331
332 G: Oh yes, because Venezuela is a very dangerous country, there is a lot of delinquency. You
333 can get robbed, you can get kidnapped. So you have to watch out where you're going, when

334 you return home, you have to look behind a mirror just to see if somebody's not following
335 you, to take your car away, things like that.

336

337 **V: So do you think this has influenced some of who you are now and the way you conduct**
338 **your science?**

339

340 G: Oh no, I don't think that influences me in sciences. Although it makes me more aware, be
341 more analytical. Like if you are feeling safe, you don't look around. I always look around to
342 see who's behind my back. So when I do analysis, I try to do a more complete analysis of
343 what's going on, what's around. It makes me be more analytical than usual. But from my job,
344 I don't think it ... it helped me because it made me be more analytical but from the safeness
345 point, I know here I'm safe, there's no problem. But that's a good point.

346 [21:32]

347 **V: Yeah. I was just curious because thinking about your advisor being shot at, for**
348 **whatever reason, seems like a fairly dramatic happening.**

349

350 G: Oh, but that didn't scare me, no. I went to protest in Venezuela. And I'd been in Cuba, also. I
351 thought that if I don't stand up for what I believed, then I'm also dead, so if I die, physically,
352 or if I die, the other way, it doesn't matter. So I went to protest, and then I realized, what the
353 heck am I doing here, somebody could shoot at me right now and then I'm gone! [laughter]
354 But I had to do it, there's some things you have to do because you believe in liberty or
355 whatever. And going to Cuba was just an experience. I had an opportunity to do a
356 programming workshop over in Cuba. And the Pope was going to go to Cuba, so I thought it
357 was neat to go see the Pope in Cuba for the first time in history and also be able to go to a
358 programming workshop when there were top people from Europe going over there and gonna
359 be teaching object-oriented, Prolog, logic programming. So it was quite an experience. When
360 I arrived there, again, I realized you could disappear from the world and your parents could
361 not even know where you are and you would never exist. But then that makes you value
362 more what freedom is. And you don't realize what you have unless somehow you lose it. So
363 when I got to Cuba I realized how fortunate I was in respect to other countries, to be free, to
364 be able to speak out, to be able to do many things.

365 [23:10]

366 **V: Interesting. Is it a good moment to transition to what led you to move to Florida?**

367

368 G: Oh yes. The government. Politically. I was working at my University and I wasn't even
369 getting paid. We had like three months and we didn't get paid. I was working for free, I was
370 living with my parents. I saw no future at all because I wasn't earning enough money to
371 move away, I was big enough to move on my own, I wanted to be independent, and there
372 was no opportunity for me to grow in the University. My advisor was going to ... everybody
373 kind of fled when they saw that there were no opportunities. My advisor went to Spain, a lot
374 of faculty were migrating. So, as other people did, I kind of looked for my opportunity, saw
375 Florida open doors for me and I said, "This is my opportunity," and that's why I chose South
376 Florida. I also had an offer from Texas A&M, but it was too far away from home. South
377 Florida won because of the locality.

378

379 **V: Did you move by yourself?**
380

381 G: Yes, yes, I did. I did it all by myself. I got to grad school, everything. My dad and mom
382 didn't probably know about it because as soon as I didn't get married, they were against my
383 education. They are very formal, old-fashioned, and they thought the best thing for me to do
384 was to get married. And they weren't looking for *their* daughter to be working. They wanted
385 more for their daughter to have a family. So, through my Ph.D., I knew they were not going
386 to be too happy about ... Although they would contradict, they would say, "Yes, yes, we'll
387 support you." But then they would do other things to go against it. Although they knew, I
388 didn't let them know all the information, so I could make the decisions. I let them know
389 something, but kept enough information so I had the power to make the decision. So my dad
390 didn't realize that I was leaving until maybe two weeks when I actually bought the plane
391 ticket. So he knew, but he didn't digest it because I had told him, but very softly, without any
392 drama. That affected them quite a bit. They were very emotionally affected when I left home.

393 [25:28]

394 **V: You were the first of the children to move so far away?**
395

396 G: No, my sister had married, but she was *married* and moved to Miami about eight months
397 before I left. But my sister left *married*, so that was a good thing. But my dad sounded like,
398 "You're not getting married and you're moving on your own. In our culture you're supposed
399 to get married." If you're moving, if you leave your house, it's because you're married,
400 somebody's gonna take care of you. I don't need nobody to take care of me, I'm a grown
401 woman.

402
403 **V: So you were somewhat of a pioneer, or a rebel, in that?**
404

405 G: Yes, very much, very much, I fought for every right, everything in my house. I was the first
406 to date, first to have a boyfriend. My big sister was kind of laid back. I had to actually fight
407 for most of the things because I was the first one to go do it. I fought for my master's degree.
408 They were very much against it. And I said, "Well you're against it, I'm sorry to hear that."
409 They realized later on that it was a good thing to do, but at the moment of time ... It's like
410 when you have children, some children set new paths, and sometimes that's scary for parents
411 because you can't protect them. You know, where they are going, they're going to this big
412 tunnel, and you don't know if they're gonna come out of it. So you're really scared for them.
413 So I understood their point of view, although I didn't share it. So I went my way, so I told
414 them, "Look I'm going that way. Bye-bye." So, I did the same thing with my PhD. "I know
415 you don't want me to move alone. I'm going over there, bye-bye. I'm not asking you for
416 money, I'm not asking you for anything, I've got my funding, bye-bye. I'm going over
417 there."

418
419 **V: Did it make it easier for you once you got over there that your sister was close by in
420 Miami?**
421

422 G: No, because my relationship with my big sister has always been very competitive. So she's
423 always seen me as her competitor, and I've always won. Cause every time ... in school I was
424 better than her in that I was always very competitive. When she went to University, I ended

425 up graduating before her. So I was very competitive with her. I was sometimes very mean
426 because I said, "Look I won!" And I was kind of the kid that laughed at her, "Ha ha ha!" and
427 I was waving, "Here! Bye-bye! You're way behind, I'm up here!" But no, not at all. She
428 moved to Miami, I moved to Tampa. That was just coincidence because Tampa was the
429 nearest university where I got accepted from home.

430 [28:03]

431 **V: I wanted, while we were talking about family issues, to talk about the sister that had**
432 **joined you ...**

433

434 G: Mm hmm, Carolina.

435 [28:15]

436 **V: ... for the SIGCSE conference and find out what her connection was at the university.**

437

438 G: She's my younger sister. I have two younger sisters, she's the oldest of my younger sisters. I
439 always was very close to her. In some ways ... she's very, very smart ...

440

441 **V: So, to return to the question ... your next-younger sister ...**

442

443 G: Carolina, yes. I was very close to her. She's very smart, she's very logical. She's very, very,
444 very fast, she's a fast, fast thinker. She's very intuitive, she catches things on the fly. Things
445 that are perceptually maybe ... not many people see them, she catches them, so we have a
446 special communication because she's really fast. During my master's she thought I was
447 crazy, so she didn't talk to me too much.

448

449 After I left home, she wanted ... all the things that were going to my country, my dad also
450 knew that none of my younger sisters had any chance of being professionals, it was not a
451 good environment for them to be developing. So I was the one that helped her come to the
452 States and get a master's. I also knew that she was very good with languages, and she knows
453 how to teach. So I got her to go to French school back in Venezuela with me and kind of led
454 her to know that she was very good at that. And she didn't even know that I was trying to
455 lead her toward that. So I've always been protecting her and trying to lead her without she
456 even knowing ... she likes to be led, but without knowing that she's being led by.

457

458 She was a very good teacher, she taught French. She speaks French, English, and Spanish.
459 She has a very nice ear for languages, and I knew that. I helped her out to go to a master's
460 program at USF, the same university where I was, and get funding, also. She's graduating
461 this December [2007], Spanish literature. She's a good teacher, she teaches Spanish at USF
462 very, very well. I learned a lot from her just talking about how we taught, and students, and
463 what we should do.

464

465 She also has a boyfriend who was one of my colleagues, was one of my friends in the Ph.D.
466 studies, so she's very close to me because of that. She didn't realize that I cared so much
467 about her until she saw all the effort and all the things I went through to get her there. She's a
468 very good teacher, and I wanted to see if we could extend our sister good relationship with a
469 professional relationship because I really think she has very good ideas. So I brought her to
470 SIGCSE because I know there was technology, she's not that bad in technology, to try to

471 update her on the latest technology, to see if she would get enthusiastic about trying to mix
472 Spanish and technology. She's very reasonable, she's very logical. So I wanted to get her
473 more in the area so we could publish together something within the educational: reviews,
474 journals, etc. And I'm still trying, she was hesitant to go there. And I said, "Well come here,
475 get a plane, go to Covington." She actually, when she met you, she was very excited, and
476 we're trying to find a way we can work together and publish, because she cares. We talk
477 through Messenger: "What happened to me with this student, what should I do?" I ask her.
478 "This is happening to me." "Should I do this?" "What test questions, how do you decide test
479 questions?" "I'm not doing this right. Who should I talk to that's doing this?" "Happened
480 something to the student, or it's not emotionally ..." So we keep a lot of communication,
481 especially because of the teaching part. So we talk a lot about that.
482

483 **V: Sounds like a lot of mutual mentoring going on.**

484
485 G: Oh yes, it's both ways. Yes it is. And when I got my PhD, the first thing that came to her
486 mind was, "I have to get a Ph.D.!" [laughter]
487

488 **V: So she's finished her master's and has now embarked on her PhD?**

489
490 G: No, no, I told her, "Look, a Ph.D., you have to think about. If you really want it, go for it, but
491 not just because I have it, you have to have it." So she still has her comps [comprehensive
492 examinations]. Although she's in the master's program, they make her do comps. So she's
493 presenting her comps in a bit.

494 [32:27]

495 **V: Very exciting.**

496
497 G: Oh yeah.
498

499 **V: It's fabulous that you have each other. It's such a productive relationship.**

500
501 G: Yes it's emotionally and... It's always kind of like me protecting her so she'll be safe,
502 somehow. And her boyfriend is much like me. She understands her boyfriend because she
503 tells her boyfriend, "I can understand you because I know Graciela. If I didn't have a sister, I
504 would probably not be able to understand you." And he helped also her understand some
505 issues about Ph.D., about computing, that she may not have realized. So it works out.
506

507 **V: So, continuing to your Ph.D., and the studies, the experience. Are there any mentors
508 who are particularly meaningful, any stories you would like to tell about that path?**

509
510 G: Yes there's a mentor. There's a couple of mentors, not really a fixed length in time. But I
511 have a math teacher, a mathematical logic teacher, who's very supportive. He always told me
512 to go do whatever you want. Big problems, go for it, very supportive. He was on the
513 committee of my dissertation. I also found a teacher who was a psychologist, but he had a
514 master's degree in computer science, he graduated from Stanford in psychology. His name is
515 Dr. Rundus. We used to have chats, morning talks, about teaching. He's very excited about
516 teaching, so we used to get together and just say, "What's the best way to teach? I'm worried

517 that I'm teaching this way. Am I getting the students to respond as I want to? Should I do a
518 survey? Should it be more ... don't use PowerPoints? Should I use more of the board?
519 Should I do some more handouts? What should I do in order to improve my teaching? Did
520 you know the latest software? Did you know Alice came out? Did you know this other
521 software came out? How can that be used to improve teaching? Novice, experts, approach?
522 Who's a novice, how to teach novices to become experts, what's the requirement?" So we
523 always talked about teaching, and he was very reasonable, very logical. He was spoken out,
524 very light-toned. I was always attentive to what he had to say.

525
526 I got into MentorNet. That was also a very, very big help. Because in the beginning, I was
527 with Dr. Rundus as my advisor for one semester. Then my advisor who I graduated with took
528 me from him in the sense that he told me, "Come to my class." And I switched from Dr.
529 Rundus to Dr. Christensen, who was my advisor during my Ph.D. So for a year, it was OK
530 when he was trying to get me to work with him. So I said, "I'm not a networks person. I
531 never thought of networking as my specialty in Ph.D. I have no previous background. I come
532 from programming languages, I come from algorithms. You're a very practical person. I
533 don't know if this will be ..." And he said, "No, no, no," and he let me choose my area of
534 research, choose whatever area of research has to do with networking. "We'll work
535 something out." He was very open. I said, "Well he's letting me work on whatever I choose
536 to work. That's something better than just working on something somebody tells you to
537 work." So I made him a proposal on peer-to-peer networks. He liked the proposal, he took
538 me in.

539
540 I got into MentorNet. So I registered and got in contact with an e-mail mentor, so he e-mailed
541 a lot. He was a physics professor at Duke University during that time, and he helped me out.
542 He was very reasonable, scientific. "Do this because of this. Do this under these assumptions,
543 do this ..." He was very logical. Although physics has nothing to do with computers, he told
544 me things that were common sense. He had very spectacular writing. He knew how to write
545 very well, very clear. So I learned also how to write clearly because of the e-mails we
546 exchanged together.

547 [37:50]

548 My family came to live with me because my sister, Carolina, came to live with me. My mom
549 also came to live with ... My other little sister came to work here because they were
550 migrating to Venezuela. So I had a lot of family responsibilities which I didn't have before.
551 My dad came for a visit and got sick. He had to go to the hospital, he fainted even. And I was
552 doing summer ... I was teaching classes. Although I think he [my advisor] really liked the
553 way I worked or whatever, he was very tough on me.

554
555 But he really helped me out to finish my dissertation. He wanted me to finish, and he helped
556 me with my dissertation, which was kind of contradictory. And at the end I said, "Well what
557 the heck? I got what I wanted. I wanted to graduate, I found a job, there's nothing that has to
558 do with you." But since I had that relationship, everybody knew that we had our big
559 differences. Which I think is better than what other people do because at least we told each
560 other that we had the differences, and it was a more sincere relationship than pretending that
561 you have a nice advisor.

562

563 So I went to counseling services because I had so many problems. I never fight with people. I
564 never wanna see myself be a rebel and doing the minimal, doing all this stuff. I shouldn't be
565 doing that. If he has issues, he has issues. I even bought a book, *How to Deal with Annoying*
566 *People*. Because I wanted to solve the problem. I never had personal problems with anybody
567 or professional problems. And if I had personal problems, it didn't get involved with my
568 professional work. So I bought a book, I went to counseling services, I told them, "I just want
569 to finish this chapter, break to my new life, this is something else." I went to counseling
570 services, he [the counselor] said things like, "That happens. Don't worry about it, keep on
571 going." He did some tests. He told me my personality is this, this, watch according to this
572 test, have a happy life, see you later!

573

574 **V: So you were very proactive in trying to ensure that it was going to be OK?**

575

576 G: Yes, because you can't be an atoned ... I'm always very logical with people. "You don't like
577 that? OK, you don't like that."

578

579 We initiated a networks group, so I got another person to be the president. We started
580 meeting, so there were students, Ph.D. students, meeting together in our department, like
581 eight of us. That captured the attention, that had never happened in our department. We got
582 pizza, we started bringing in speakers, so that was not the usual thing. And that was a very
583 good thing, because intellectually, we got involved many other people, and we started a good
584 group that I still maintain contact with.

585

586 But he [my advisor] got kind of like, "What are you doing? That's not important, you have to
587 focus on your research, publish papers." I was always doing something or being involved
588 with somebody, trying to get projects done. I can't sit and just work on one thing. I can do
589 that, but I need to have other projects. I can work on something three days, and then I work
590 one day on something else. Then that will help me, when I go back to my other work, to see
591 my work in a different way. So he didn't let me do that, he wanted me just to work, work,
592 work, work, work.

593

594 **V: So how difficult was it as you finalized your dissertation and were able to get it signed**
595 **off, defended and signed off?**

596

597 G: Once I got a job, he turned ... he was very helpful. "You have to finish your dissertation, this
598 is what you have to do," and we kept on going. He wanted me to practice for a week for my
599 presentation, he was very happy with my presentation. As long as you're happy, and you can
600 sign, that's fine with me!

601

602 **V: So were you working for Verizon during this last period of time?**

603

604 G: Oh no, no.

605

606 **V: I see.**

607

608 G: But I wasn't the type to work in industry. Verizon, I didn't get the job. They didn't ask me
609 for a job offer, but I knew that was because of what I said during the interview. They didn't
610 want an independent person, they wanted a more structured person working with others. And
611 I knew that Verizon was not gonna call me. I sometimes know what to ... Like for the poster
612 presentation last night [at the Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing], I knew I wasn't
613 gonna get called. Because I kinda knew what they were expecting, and I know when you fill
614 out the role for ... I somehow know. I know sometimes when a paper is gonna get accepted
615 or not because you can easily read what the paper wants. I can know when something is
616 gonna get accepted or not just because I read it.

617 [50:21]

618 **V: So it sounds as if the opportunity with Verizon to interview was very important as a**
619 **turning point, even though it didn't result in anything.**

620

621 G: Yes, it was out of Heaven.

622

623 **V: So, tell us about the process of finding the position that you're in now. You've**
624 **graduated ... Or are there other stories you'd like to tell about your Ph.D.?**

625

626 G: Not that I remember.

627

628 **V: OK, so you've defended, finished all of the things surrounding your Ph.D., and you are**
629 **looking for an academic position.**

630

631 G: Before I finished the Ph.D., I looked for an academic position. In December of 2006, I
632 applied for a scholarship from the CRA-W because it was supposed to help you find jobs in a
633 teaching school, because I love teaching, and that's one thing I really wanted to do. And they
634 let you go to a SIGCSE conference, they pay for you to go a SIGCSE conference. My
635 advisor and I have published a paper in the last 2004 SIGCSE conference. He went when it
636 was published. He didn't say anything, he told me it was a very nice conference. But he
637 didn't even take me or told me to apply for a scholarship. He didn't do any effort for me to
638 go with him. And I said, "Well, what I've heard of this conference was really nice." I would
639 like to get in touch with more of education because that's what I want to do. I want to be
640 more in the teaching school. At the workshop, they told me some tools that you have to do, I
641 followed that.

642

643 I met a presenter at the workshop, and she was eating with me at a table. She worked in this
644 school, she started talking about this school [Youngstown State University], she made a very
645 good impression on me, she still does. She's my current neighbor in the next-door office. She
646 said, "Well why don't you apply for the job?" And I said, "Well, I'm not a security person,
647 you're looking for a security person, I'm a networks person." And she goes, "Well, we may
648 not hire a person in security because there may not be, why don't you apply?" She was very
649 reasonable, she just said it twice. I immediately sent her my CV. I immediately applied for ...
650 a couple of weeks later, I got a call. Three weeks later, I was getting an interview, I hadn't
651 finished even my dissertation. Four weeks later, five weeks later, "Do you accept?" I accept.
652 This was around the middle of March. March, probably April, first week of April, March, last
653 week of March. I said yes.

654
655 I went to my advisor, said, “Look, I got a job, we have to finish up.” And he said, “Well, let’s
656 go for it.” I went for it. Didn’t sleep, didn’t eat. Saturdays, Sundays, all days were just
657 continuous. I was just reading and working and working. I defended the 21st of May, and it
658 got signed off. Get ready. And I was doing my Grace Hopper poster against my advisor’s ...
659 because I needed to do something on my own. I said my goal was to graduate with some
660 independent work, even if it was very little. So I said this poster seems to be ... I know this is
661 a good idea, I can put it down. It had to be some kind of research. But I have to tell myself
662 that I can do some independent work. So I sat down, didn’t sleep for two days. I sent it off to
663 Grace Hopper, it got accepted. I applied for a scholarship, I got a scholarship.

664
665 So before I started my job, which was actually in computer network security, I already had
666 something that I could start my research agenda with. So I was very happy to ... I finished
667 the Ph.D., I got my research in what I wanted to do, my independent work, going. I got my
668 work going.

669
670 And my chair [at Youngstown State University], we talked in the interview. I told him what I
671 wanted to do, and that’s what I wanted to, and he has set me up exactly where I told him to
672 set me up to do. So people say, “Well, you’re lucky.” No, I told him that I wanted A, B, C,
673 and D, and I really did want A, B, C, and D. It wasn’t because it was the interview, it’s
674 because those were my goals. He set me up with A, B, and C, and D. Well that’s what I’m
675 doing. There’s no magic to that. So he’s been very supportive, and here I am, and hopefully
676 everything will go well, but I know I have to work a ton, maybe 10 tons. But I’m definitely
677 looking forward to that.

678

679 **V: Very exciting. So you’ve been in this position all of 2 months?**

680

681 G: Yes, since February ... since August 20th.

682

683 **V: And so what I’d like to do before we talk about the experience specifically right now is**
684 **return to a theme that’s come up again and again, and that’s your passion for teaching.**
685 **So let’s talk a little bit about why it is that you’re so passionate about teaching, some of**
686 **your teaching philosophy.**

687 [55:55]

688 G: OK. I love teaching because I can help people and also getting money out of it, maintain
689 myself. It’s a work that you can do, that you get benefits, economic benefits, like money, so
690 you can sustain yourself, you don’t have to depend on others economically. But also you get
691 another kind of reward, which ... seeing a laugh, a face, working, helping somebody be
692 something, and that really, really, really helps. Maybe somebody may come in a class, and
693 they don’t think of themselves very high, they don’t think they can do it, and then helping
694 them, discovering, being a part of their discovery process of the world of knowledge of
695 something else, because I always view education as a discovery process.

696

697 I started teaching my last year of my bachelor’s degree as a TA. I said, “Cool! I can help
698 people, and I can get money!” And then I got a job after I graduated for 3 months, and my
699 boss sent me to teach the software I was maintaining. Cool! He gave me a bonus! So I get

700 more money, and then I can also help people. And that was very cool. And they all came to
701 me and asked me questions, and that was very rewarding, seeing their faces light up, and
702 “Now I can do this because you told me how to do this!” And then I went to teach during my
703 master’s degree. Cool! They’re gonna pay my master’s, plus I’m gonna get some money, and
704 I’m gonna be teaching! Hey, this is very, very nice, I get to work and what I want, and also I
705 get to study. Not too many people get that opportunity. I got engaged with the students, and
706 they were just wonderful. They came to me after class. I didn’t have to tell them when they
707 have to work, but generally those students in Venezuela at university, they are like that. My
708 philosophy of teaching was trying to make them discover, try to tie things ... finding creative
709 ways for them to discover the same concepts. I believe that you can use the knowledge that is
710 all around us to associate it with what you have to teach. And I love that, just trying to look at
711 things from different points of view. I learned from my own nephew, who, he’s ... He can’t
712 sit still. So in order for him to learn, I have to put things in his hand. I have to wave at him. I
713 have to be in motion, which is not my traditional way of learning. And it was very incredible
714 for me to try to show him something, and I had to adapt, from his point of view, so I can
715 actually teach him something.

716

717 **V: How old is your nephew?**

718

719 G: He’s 3 years old. But he’s very, very, very bright. I had to move things around because he
720 wanted ... I had to actually move my hands to get his attention, so he could learn. So my
721 philosophy’s trying to tie whatever I need to teach, not only to real world concepts, but to
722 common real world concepts. So what I try to do sometimes is make my students go through
723 an experience, all of them together—a video, a movie—so I know that all of them share the
724 same thing, and then using that to teach whatever I need to teach.

725

726 So that’s my philosophy. I just feel very rewarded when I see, especially girls. In Venezuela I
727 advised a girl. She wasn’t a very good student, but she was hard worker. She was very
728 intelligent, although she wasn’t a good student. And she got the job. I was advising her.
729 Saturdays and Sundays, I sat with her during software design, analysis, charts, and she
730 actually followed and got the job. And that feels very rewarding when you know that a
731 person is putting the time, you’re putting the time, and the person is getting to where she
732 wants to get.

733

734 Teaching allows me to be creative. It allows me to be myself. There’s no pre-judgement,
735 there’s no structure. Anything could happen. It could go good, or it could go ... there’s no
736 preconditions, there’s no limitations. That’s what I really like about it.

737 [60:09]

738 **V: So you didn’t quite finish saying, you said it could go good, it could go ...?**

739

740 G: Bad. [laughter]

741

742 **V: So the question is, what do you do then, how do you ...?**

743

744 G: You keep on trying. You keep on trying. If that doesn’t work, don’t do it again! You try
745 something else.

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V: All right. Now you are an associate professor.

G: No, an assistant professor. Pre-tenured. I'm not yet tenured.

V: Pre-tenured, assistant professor position. And so you are beginning to evolve your teaching philosophy. Can you talk a little bit about how you've evolved already in the short time you've been in this position?

G: That's a very good question. I think I'm evolving towards ... I'm centering more on how to make those students that are not the brightest students, how can I change and teach those students who are average or underneath the average? How can I make them go up a level? I'm not centering more; my university is an open-access university, so there's very good students, very good students who will always be very good students. But I need to take care of the other half of the class. So what can I do, how can I make a class in such a way that the good students will not be bored? I can give them projects, I can get in touch with them, telling them ... try to make them do more. But then teach to those who are not as bright as they are. And I think, my university ... I'm switching more from concepts to hands-on experience. And not hands-on experience with computers, hands-on experience with toys. So what I try to do is go to toy stores, because we all have the children inside of us, and try to bring toys that they have previously handled, so they have that previous experience, and thinking of how those toys, you think about them, and tying — because they were small, they were children when they played with those toys, or even a teenager — and putting that so I can teach them the concepts and then use that to bring them up a level, to try to bring them up to expertise. I haven't yet evaluated if that's possible, but that's what I'm right now doing. I bring cards to class. I bring toddler toys to class. They are very colorful. I can throw them in class, and they'll follow the toy. And I try to bring as much as possible ... My examples are always about them. You get up in class, you go to class, what do you do? I try for them to tell me what they do. I have students who work, so all my projects are basically, "What do you think this project can bring to your work, to your boss? How can you not only impress your boss, but how can you use this in your work?" I think that's where I'm trying to lead.

I love community-service learning because I believe that students need to be more ... Computer science, you're always fixed to a computer. You don't get to have too much of a social interaction as other humanities careers do. So I'm trying to bring together the community and that social aspect because I believe the student has to have the technical, what he needs, has to have the professional, but he's still some member of a community and a member of the world. So he has to have some social skills, some social ability, has to be socially aware, especially in the global environment in which we live, of what's going on with the community. So I wanted them to have the community service learning instead of having a project that's gonna be graded and doesn't have anybody who cares about the project, maybe I can lead a student to help a non-profit organization. They don't have the money, but the students can get involved, and they can see that reward that usually is not seen in industry, in internships, but they can help somebody and they can see that what they're doing affects somebody else. So I'm trying to push that in the university, in the world, in an overview in the university that I work at. I've received a little bit of help from

792 other people I've met at Kent State University. And a master's student in leadership, she's
793 willing to help me out, to start the program and see where it goes from there.

794

795 **V: So you're putting some mechanisms in place to make it easier to conduct this**
796 **community-based learning?**

797

798 G: Yeah, I want something to be quick, and I want to evaluate it, so I want to be accurate and
799 reliable. I want to evaluate something so that the evaluation can be me and what I expected
800 because that's how you teach. If you're teaching something, you need to know if ... how far
801 away the students are from what you expect the students to be, so you need some kind of
802 accuracy of what you're teaching. This is where I want this student to be, this is where he is.
803 And you want a quantifiable way of defining them. And then you also need, that if this is a
804 test, I'm a human, I need for this test to reliably measure what he knows. So if I tested 10
805 people, like him again, I would get the same answer. All kind of the same answer, but there
806 has to be some ... You have to reproduce the same test, you should be able to get the same
807 answer. So that's part of what the assessment is supposed to be doing. And I want the
808 assessment to be multiple-choice, very easy, so I can get people, other faculty involved. I'll
809 make the work easy for them. You just have to give them this, a package, and that's it. I
810 believe in more of the American culture, keep it simple, keep it short. If I have to implement
811 community service, it doesn't have to be a big program, this huge program. It could be
812 something real quick, real simple. I'll tell you how to package it effectively. Use it, and it's
813 even better than doing project-based ... Make it easier for the faculty member to implement
814 it.

815

816 **V: Very interesting. One of the things I can imagine is also challenging as you begin your**
817 **career is the balance between teaching, service, and research. What have you**
818 **experienced so far in that balance?**

819

820 G: Right now, I'm more in teaching and research than service. But I have to switch. I talk to the
821 dean on Tuesday, this coming Tuesday. He came to the department and talked to us, he said
822 that we should be doing research, teaching, and service. That's what's expected of us. So I'll
823 be switching my ... probably in teaching, I'll dedicate more time to research than I will do to
824 teaching. Because you can always try to be very effective. So what I will do is have maybe
825 less homework, which I have homeworks every two weeks, have less project-based ... So I
826 will try to take some time from teaching and put it more into research without ... There's
827 some basic things that you have to teach, and I'll try to teach always that. But teaching will
828 come after I tenure because I can dedicate more time to teaching now that I'm tenured, I will
829 have more time. But I will set up in a way that I still have what I need from teaching. I think
830 the students can put up the time instead of me trying to guide them. But definitely I have to
831 switch to research, teaching, and service as my priorities if I want to be in the academia in the
832 current university where I am.

833

834 **V: Of the courses that you've taught so far, which ones have been your favorites and why?**

835

836 G: So far, from ... currently I am teaching?

837

838 **V: You've taught several things over the years. In Florida, you've done some teaching, and**
839 **now you're teaching your first classes at Youngstown.**

840
841 G: Computer networks, the current course I am teaching. Basically, because I'm leading all the
842 way. I get to choose what I teach, how I teach it, and I love computer networks, it's just
843 something that fascinates me, how things move from one place to another. And how to make
844 them move, and how to make them reliable, and how bits travel through the wire, that really
845 fascinates me. And that you can actually do some cool applications like peer-to-peer
846 networks, file sharing, web, e-mail, things that can transform the lives of others. I take away
847 e-mail from everybody, what would everybody be? It really transformed the way we look at
848 things.

849
850 **V: Do you have any particular stories to relate about any of your students?**

851
852 G: Currently, right now, yes. I have a student who's ... I have many stories of students. I love
853 students. I went to Youngstown and they told me, "Well, they're not Stanford students."
854 They're students. To me the students are the most treasurable thing I could ... They're the
855 future, they're the continuation, they're the future! So you shouldn't say bad things about the
856 students. They're working, they're putting stuff there.

857
858 I have a student who took a test, he wants me to be his advisor, he's a master's student, and
859 he did very bad on the test. And then he wrote me an e-mail, this very long e-mail telling, "I
860 feel very bad that I blew off your test," and all that. I said, "Look, even if you had got a zero,
861 I would still be your advisor." I know he's a very good student, he's also a teacher, he's a
862 teaching assistant. So I don't want to lose him. I see the potential that he has. I go, "Do not
863 worry. I'm not the one to judge you because I'm not here to be a judge. I'm here to help you
864 get to where you want to be. If you blew off a test, who hasn't?" It doesn't really ... a test to
865 me, my definition of a test, is really for you to learn, is not to measure what you learn. A test
866 should be a learning experience, not a torture experience. And I tell all my students, "Make
867 mistakes." Because a mistake is not something wrong you did, judgment, because people
868 always put judgment there, a mistake is a lack of knowledge. So if you made a mistake, you
869 better head down to your books and go read more, so you won't make the same mistake. It's
870 just a lack of knowledge. Because I believe that all students ...

871
872 I don't believe too much in IQ, but I know people have studied more so their knowledge base
873 has grown, so they seem to be more intelligent than somebody else. But if somebody else
874 puts the effort and tries to grow their knowledge base, they're gonna be as intelligent as the
875 other person. But some people over the years have worked more on their knowledge base
876 than others, so it's very hard to catch up. [laughter] But some other people, they can catch up.
877 They don't have the knowledge base small enough that, I can give you the books, I can give
878 you the papers. I've been there. And I started knowing nothing. So I can help you build a
879 little bit of that knowledge base. There's a student who comes to class, and he's very good,
880 he's always active, and he wants to be a teacher. His wife came up to me in a meeting. She
881 came up, "Graciela," she said. "Do you know who I am?" And I said, "I have no clue!" [She
882 said,] "Well I work in nursing school and am the wife of one of your students." So it was
883 very rewarding. This was my first semester, and I get the wife telling me that I influenced the

884 student so much that he's telling his wife about what he learns in class. So your influence is
885 not right there in the class, it's also affecting their personal life. Other people are knowing me
886 because of me teaching classes. So I think it's really cool that you can really influence
887 somebody's life, hopefully, and I think in a very positive way.
888

889 I have a student right now, he doesn't seem to be the brightest student. He's working on his
890 project. I didn't tell him to work on his project. Sent him a couple of papers to read, he
891 already read them, he told me what he liked about them, what he didn't like about them. He
892 sent me more links. He told me other papers that had to do with it. That's a 100% to me. He
893 got a 100% on that test to me because he's doing the work, he's the one learning. and that's
894 incredibly rewarding. And he's not the best student. So if I can get those students who are
895 OK, to motivate them to learn, that's one of the biggest things I think, that's one of my
896 biggest goals that I have.

897 [62:56]

898 I have other students in security class who are grad students. And I have this girl; she's a
899 non-traditional student, she's African-American. She speaks very softly, but she's
900 participating in class. She gets the right answers. So it's very rewarding to see women, to see
901 ... And I have other women in networking. They're so bright, they're so bubbly. They speak
902 out. And one of my goals is to bring them next year to Grace Hopper, make them do a poster,
903 make them do anything. They're so bubbly. I can feel their curiosity for doing things. They
904 sit down at the computer, they are hands-on. They are very bright. I just have to tell them to
905 put the time into whatever they want to do.
906

907 And I have tons of other examples. [laughter] I better keep it short.
908

909 **V: I think that your enthusiasm is probably infectious as well.**
910

911 G: I hope so.
912

913 **V: And just for the recording, Graciela is animated and excited and her eyes are sparkling**
914 **as she's talking about all of this. It makes my heart warm just to hear the strength that**
915 **you bring to your teaching.**
916

917 G: I love it. It's passion, it's really passion, it's not love, so I have to be careful!
918

919 **V: That's right, that's right. Good point. Professional organizations. Are there any**
920 **professional organizations you've been a member of, and how have they contributed to**
921 **you career up to this point?**
922

923 G: The networks group was a big plus because I had, back at USF, University of South Florida, I
924 had a whole bunch of fellows in the networks area, they were all guys. And they really
925 helped because I could go up to them and talk about, curse out about my advisor, and they
926 go, "No problem at all, we are all behind you," learn about what they were doing. So it was
927 more of a support group, and they're friends, and they were also good professionals, they
928 were also interested in teaching. So it was seeing that somebody cares about what you were
929 doing. You're not just one person sitting in front of the computer talking to your advisor.

930

931 **V: Sounds like, in general, you've been surrounded by people who are supportive of your**
932 **ambitions and caring about teaching, and that that's been very encouraging to you.**

933

934 G: Yes. I currently ... in Youngstown, I was invited by the ACM to give a talk about my
935 research. And I went there and tried to motivate them, and they liked my talk. And they were
936 very ... they even mentioned that to the chair, and the chair came up to me and said, "I heard
937 you gave a good talk to the students." And they say "hi" to me all the time, and people say,
938 "Do you know those students?" And I say, "I just met them. They're not my students, but
939 they came to my talk." So I think I can build some good relationships with students.

940

941 **V: And it sounds as if already at this stage in your career you've done a lot of advising,**
942 **you've been able to help students that are behind you figure out what they want to do.**

943

944 G: At Youngstown, maybe not too much. At USF, yes, I tried to help, maybe not as much
945 because I wasn't her advisor, but to a woman ... I started a woman's group at USF before I
946 came here. And we all got together, we did go to two lunches together, and we were talking
947 about women's issues, how women should support each other. They came because I was
948 telling them about interviews, the questions you get at interviews. I was the first to graduate
949 from that group and get a job, so I was trying to help them out, and had very good friends. So
950 we were getting together, talking about woman things, and that was very, very nice. But I had
951 to leave, but I'd still like some e-mails to see if I could get something going there.

952

953 **V: So both of these examples are fairly local organizations. Have you been involved with**
954 **organizations at more of a national level yet?**

955

956 G: No, no, not at all. I'm trying to start a Latin organization at YSU to see if I can recruit more
957 Latin people because they usually fall out of high school, and see how I can get that. And at
958 YSU, of course, I belong to a more global ... it's called a junior faculty group. So I hang out
959 with a lot of junior faculty when they have their events. So those people from economics,
960 young faculty who are also in the same position that I am. And we play sometimes cards,
961 cricket, whether we do a lunch. So I get to meet a lot of the other people who are going
962 through the same thing.

963

964 **V: So it sounds as if it's a social network, a support network, to help you as you're getting**
965 **settled.**

966

967 G: Yes, yes, it is. And you hear, "What did the dean say to you?" "What are you thinking over
968 there in that other college?" And also you can build up research with economics, there's
969 people from geology. I've been very involved also with several projects, the person who told
970 me to come to Youngstown to work, that I've gotten myself into. "We are IT." We're
971 organizing for November 16th a "We are IT Day", which is an initiative led by Ohio, by the
972 Ohio government, state government. They gave a grant to my friend to make a one-day event
973 for the girls in high school. So I'm helping her organize. I got a keynote speaker, who's a girl
974 I met in Ph.D. at Carnegie-Mellon. She's African-American. She'll be a good model for the
975 women to follow. I'm involved in the activities of that day. It's a service activity. It doesn't

976 count too much for tenure, but it's definitely something I love being a part of. Writing letters,
977 getting grant money, seeing where you can get some pennies out of here, pennies out of there
978 to set up the activity.

979
980 And I also belong to the OLN, which is the Ohio Learning Network. My friend also had a
981 grant from there and she invited me to be a part of it. So what we're trying to do is clickers,
982 is class response systems, so we're trying to lead the way for YSU to get class response
983 systems. That's also a little grant that's going on. I got to meet people from Kent State and
984 from different parts of Ohio. So I've only worked for eight weeks, but ...

985
986 **V: You've accomplished in a lot.**

987
988 G: I'm involved in many things. Hopefully I can have the strength to keep them all up.

989
990 **V: Challenges. Are there challenges that you faced along the way that we haven't talked**
991 **about yet that you'd like to share?**

992
993 G: I think the biggest challenge in general that I always face is that I need to be flexible and I
994 need to change into that. And I know everybody wants to stay the same way because there's
995 no effort to it. So what I try to do is always try to put a challenge or something that I have to
996 change, I have to adapt. Because when you're teaching, it's not about how you learn, it's
997 about how they learn, and it's a process in which you have to learn all the time. You have to
998 learn what they need, you have to learn what they want. Do you want to be a good teacher?
999 You have to accommodate the expectations. They're gonna get a job. Where? I have to learn.
1000 I have to learn what job they're going to get. Where are they gonna get, what are they gonna
1001 do, what technologies are going to be ... There's always learning, learning to me, it's always
1002 been a challenge. I love it because it really keeps me growing and growing, growing and
1003 growing. But the biggest challenge is to be able to adapt and change to whatever the needs of
1004 my institution and my students should be.

1005
1006 **V: Are there any compromises you've had to make in your career?**

1007
1008 G: Oh yes. I had to decide between career and getting married. That was very tough at that
1009 moment. But I was very happy about that decision.

1010
1011 Of course, my Ph.D. My family came to live with me. I didn't have time for my personal life.
1012 Because I had my dissertation, I had my PhD, I had to take care of my family, they were
1013 living with me. I had to decide, either you help your family, or you get your personal life
1014 straightened out. So I decided to help my family and said this is not the moment in which I
1015 can have a personal life. I'll put that away for a while, but I know I'll get it back.

1016
1017 So, now I got it back. But it was a compromise, in a moment of time you have to decide, you
1018 can't have everything. But your decision, you have to go all the way with it. You have to
1019 know if you made a decision, you have to keep it. Don't worry, you'll get to your goal, and
1020 then you can change your ... But you have to be honest with yourself, with what you want,
1021 and you have to know that you can't have everything. Now, of what you can have, what do

1022 *you* want? And if you be honest with yourself, and know, I want this, and this, then it
1023 shouldn't be any problem. But you have to choose.

1024

1025 **V: You have to choose. Do you have any strong outside interests that will help us**
1026 **understand you better?**

1027

1028 G: Oh yes, I have one very big strong outside interest. I like running. I like speed. I started
1029 walking first, when I was doing my dissertation, for the stress. And I started literally walking.
1030 And I walked faster. Then I walked faster. And I started walking faster. Then I started
1031 running. Then I ran one mile. Then I ran three miles. Then I ran six miles. Now I'm up to
1032 nine miles. So that's the way I am. I'm there, I'm constant, and I always want more. And I'm
1033 planning to run the Cleveland half-marathon, not the complete marathon, this coming March.
1034 And that's something I do. Nobody else has to know about it, nobody is controlling how
1035 much I run, nobody else is seeing, taking the time, or anything, but I'm there, it's constant,
1036 and I see the evolution of it. Each time I go running, it's a challenge. I never know if I'm
1037 gonna make, I'm gonna do the six miles I intend to do. And on the way, I was like, "I wanna
1038 quit." And I'm like, "Nope, you're not gonna quit, you're gonna go ahead and do it."

1039

1040 So running to me is a parallel of how you should lead yourself. You don't need to go all the
1041 way the first time. You go baby steps. One step at a time. And life, those baby steps, will lead
1042 you to where you need to go. You need to take more baby steps, eventually you will evolve.
1043 You will take more. When I started running, started first walking, then a little bit faster, then
1044 a little bit faster, and that's how you should. You don't jump to the expert level. You go
1045 through different phases, and that's exactly what my life has been in my professional life.
1046 Baby steps. One step at a time, but ... limits? No. None. Only time and physical limits. But
1047 limits? No. Nine miles, twelve miles, I'll see wherever it takes me.

1048

1049 **V: 13.1 miles this March.**

1050

1051 G: Yeah. So I'm up to nine miles. So here I am, we'll see where it's gonna take me.

1052

1053 **V: Very exciting. Good luck with that, it will be fun. How about outside interests that have**
1054 **a shaping effect on your career? Any such ideas to add?**

1055

1056 G: Outside interests. Well, I like sports, running, jogging, dancing, of course, but that have
1057 influenced my professional life ... What do you mean by outside influences?

1058

1059 **V: The running is one example of an outside interest or an influence. I was just curious if**
1060 **there was anything that we hadn't talked about that ...**

1061

1062 G: I like movies. I like very much watching movies.

1063

1064 I enjoy very much reading. I also dedicate a lot of time to reading math books. I have this
1065 passion for Gödel, the incompleteness theorem. And I'm reading a book by Rudy Rucker
1066 called *Infinity and the Mind*. And it talks about how math, the basic concept of math, because
1067 I'm always worried of math concepts, which are the basis of any science. So people have not

1068 looked well at the foundations, so we need to be careful because we're building things and
1069 maybe foundations are not as strong as they should be.

1070
1071 I have a passion for set theory, trying to understand it, and puzzles, Gardiner, old logic
1072 puzzles, to get your head thinking, to be able to look at things in a different way. Because we
1073 tend to always look at things in the same way, have a routine. So I try to put myself to do
1074 puzzles, so we can look at things in a different way. I love reading logic books. So the one
1075 I'm reading now is Rudy Rucker, and philosophy. All that influences me a lot. Popper,
1076 Aristotle, Plato. I love any book that has to do with philosophy. Now I'm reading a book on
1077 Western philosophy by Russell, Bertrand Russell, which is a guy who influenced very much
1078 AI. So I know a little bit of AI because of that, and I'm reading to see the great philosophers,
1079 the way they looked and approached problems. Because I want to be able to look at problems
1080 the way they did, empirically, theoretically, doubting, anything that has ... Kant, Popper,
1081 people who were ... positivism, things like that.

1082 [87:10]

1083 **V: Interesting. I'm glad we talked about that.**

1084
1085 G: Yeah, I forgot about my passion for philosophy.

1086
1087 **V: It's come up before when you talked about your Jesuit mentor.**

1088
1089 G: Yeah, yeah, I said philosophy for ... while I was teaching I did actually ... I started my
1090 master's in philosophy. And then that's where I got in touch with the Greeks, with Plato,
1091 Aristotle read politics, where I read the books. Justice is a very nice concept. How to make
1092 things equally...

1093
1094 Economics is a thing I also like to read about. So I read Galbraith sometimes from Harvard.
1095 And there's some papers about economics that says that people are usually very selfish, they
1096 don't wanna share. And there's some other economics who think sharing is natural in people.
1097 So I like to view things, how they're viewing economics from a perspective that people do
1098 like to share, they're good, thinking all people, under the assumption that all people are good,
1099 and the other one saying all people are basically selfish, "The Tragedy of the Commons,"
1100 sometimes, they call it.

1101
1102 **V: If you could give advice to a young woman just starting out, what would it be?**

1103
1104 G: Be persistent. Don't give up. Go for what you want, not what everybody else wants.

1105
1106 **V: Certainly been a theme in your life, I think ...**

1107
1108 G: Oh yes. Of course you have to compromise. Before you go, you have to think. You have to
1109 make a decision. Don't just run up there and say, "I'm going for it, bye-bye everybody!" You
1110 think and say, "Well I'm not affecting anybody, I'm not hurting anybody. This is what I want
1111 to do," go do it. But first think, and then do.

1112

1113 **V: If there's one decision that you could change in your life up to this point, is there one,**
1114 **and what would it be?**

1115
1116 G: Oh. I don't know, I think ... probably the decision I wanted to change was I should believe
1117 more in God. I think I'm very grateful to what God has given me, and I have not been very
1118 caring to God, so somehow along the way be more faithful and have more faith in God, that
1119 He's doing some good and He eventually will get there. But all other decisions, I pretty much
1120 ... if they hadn't happened, I would not have been led to this moment. So I'm very, very
1121 happy with ... of course not everything has worked out, but the things that have not worked
1122 out have been to help you work things out later on in life.

1123
1124 **V: Is there any other story that you want to tell so that it's going to be remembered?**

1125
1126 G: Any other story? I think that how I met you, in a van, going back from the SIGCSE
1127 conference. How you influenced my sister. She still asks me, she goes, "Did you tell her (and
1128 this is a good time) that I said 'hi'?" You influenced her a lot, and it was really nice because
1129 you got her involved. I wanted her to be involved, but you also motivated her. And she still
1130 writes to me, "When are we gonna do the paper thing?" Finish your comps, and we'll finish
1131 up the paper.

1132
1133 How I got my job, how I finished my dissertation, it's incredible, it was one thing after
1134 another ... it was heavenly. It was one thing after another how I got to the Grace Hopper, my
1135 paper got accepted.

1136
1137 The sequence of these things that had been happening to me since I graduated. Finding my
1138 boyfriend, it was out of Heaven, out of the blue. I never expected it. It took me out of
1139 surprise. My boyfriend works as a professor at Youngstown State University. I met him the
1140 first day. I walked into the meeting, and I had no idea, I had no clue, and I had met him
1141 before. Because he actually works with the person who told me to get the job at Youngstown
1142 State University. So I tell him, "I knew you before I even knew you" (because she talked
1143 about him and how they worked together) "and I didn't know it was you!" And then I went to
1144 the interview. He had been offered to interview me, so we would have met through the
1145 interview, but somebody else from his department interviewed me. So when the person was
1146 talking about geography, I always thought about this guy who was on the search committee
1147 interviewing me. And how we met, he wanted a pen, I had my door open, he came in, and
1148 that's how everything got started. So I think it was also heavenly. He teaches at the same
1149 school, I knew that I couldn't have a relationship with somebody outside. He has been
1150 through the tenure process, he knows what it goes through, he's been very supportive. I think
1151 we made a very, very good match. I don't know what it's gonna lead to but the way I met
1152 him, it was heavenly, it was really out of the blue. It completely ... I was never ever
1153 expecting to meet somebody like that. And Youngstown, the first day, it was incredible.

1154
1155 **V: It does sound incredible.**

1156
1157 G: And I met his family, I met his parents. And he also has the same religion as I do, which is
1158 very difficult. In Venezuela, everybody is Catholic, but in the United States there's many

1159 different religions. I'm a very religious person, he has the same religion. He has the same
1160 goals as I do. He's in the same conditions, we're on the same page, which is very difficult to
1161 find. He loves books, so he likes going to Borders for an afternoon. He doesn't drink, I don't
1162 drink too much. He likes having water, I drink water. It's very hard to find a person that you
1163 share so many things with. He loves movies, I love movies. I think it's just heavenly. Maybe
1164 it won't work out, but the way we met, definitely, it's heavenly. I have to ...

1165

1166 **V: I think it's wonderful for now.**

1167

1168 G: For now it is! I don't know later. But what starts good usually ends good.

1169

1170 **V: Anything else that you'd like to share before we finish this interview?**

1171

1172 G: That you can have your life, that you can have your profession, and then you can also have
1173 time for you. Because women, and I include myself, forget about ourselves so many times.
1174 So my recommendation is always, always, *always* dedicate some time to you. We're taught
1175 to be nurturers. You can't nurture somebody if you're on the floor. So you have to take time
1176 off and do whatever—jogging, running, watching movies, computers, whatever—whatever
1177 fascinates you, whatever turns you on and nurtures you. Don't wait for people to give it to
1178 you. You have to give it to yourself. Don't wait for others to give it to you. Even if you're
1179 married with children, always dedicate time to yourself. Even if it's little, but dedicate time
1180 to yourself.

1181

1182 **V: Wonderful. This has just been absolutely energizing. Thank you so much Graciela.**

1183

1184 G: No, thank you for interviewing me and telling you my story.

1185 [94:38]