

ULOHP

Interview with Janet Moody.

31 May 2016.

I: I'm here with Janet Moody, thank you very much Janet for coming in to participate in the University of Limerick Oral History project. You were a lecturer I know, in the Department of Education and Professional Studies. Would you like to tell me something about yourself?

JM: Ok, well just before we start on that, I just had a few thoughts on oral history and realizing how many things an interview depends on. I've come back to studying History now in recent times so evidence is something that fascinates me and one thing with oral history ... that's the truth, but of course it's not, because it depends on memory and our memories could be something, could be extraordinarily clear about something that happened sixty years ago and less clear about something which happened five minutes ago, or even ten years ago because one was more important to us. It also depends on perception, that if you have ten people going into a room and they describe half an hour in the room, they'll all describe it differently. It also depends on what both consciously and unconsciously people will focus on. So this is my story with all those caveats. That it's not the truth, it's some of what I remember and some of the things that I suppose were important to me, thinking back now at age seventy.

So, I started off in academia, in the sense that my father was an academic. My father was Professor of History so I grew up in a very academic household and I was apparently told, asked at age seven what I wanted to do, and I said I wanted to be a lady professor!. When I went to college, to Trinity College where my father worked, and then again so much of my story, like many women's stories is dependent on the time and what was available to people at the time. Looking back I often said I would like to have done psychology, it was really very different, like psychology at the time. I could have done History but then I couldn't do history because of my father! because I couldn't be as good as him! So

the other thing that I loved was languages, so I did French and Italian and I was a very studious student. I was a Scholar of Trinity and I got a first class honours degree. And the assumption would be that I would go on to do a PhD. But the role models that I saw as women, the women role models that I saw were what, the term that was used then which is very out of date, was 'bluestocking'. They were all single, they were pretty fierce! And they didn't seem to have a life outside academic life. So instead of doing what I was being assumed to have done, go on and do a PhD, I turned my back on that, and very briefly, I taught for a year overseas and then I did something totally different, I worked in RTE as a researcher and as a reporter and got involved in a tribunal ... the moneylenders tribunal which was a huge thing, it was a tribunal on which I was a researcher and in which I was blamed for a lot of things at age twenty four. So that was, that taught me how to keep a paper trail of anything that you do, of evidence, if there's any difficulty.

Then, when I was in RTE, I was offered a scholarship, I was very lucky, I was offered a scholarship, a full time scholarship to go back to university and to do a Masters in Education, which I did, and at the same time, I did then, I did an HDip. I managed to do the two of them at the same time, so I went back into teaching, and I suppose in many ways, I loved teaching and teaching has always been part of my life. Then, shortly after that, I married, and I resigned from RTE, not so much because I was a woman, but because it didn't really suit me. I think in order to survive in RTE you need to have a huge ego.

So anyway, from then on, for many years I worked part-time. I did work for DCU, I did a lot of work in distance education, and then again, as with many women, I also taught part-time, I taught writing and various things. As with many women my husband was working full time, he was the main bread winner, I was always working part-time, for less and less money very often, and he moved his job to Limerick. So that again is so different now, women, couples are living in different directions and commuting. In those days, I was talking about in the eighties, we moved first of all to Carlow, and then to Limerick. So again I worked part time here and by a series of chances, I did what I called research, for DCU, but I was

told afterwards it was 'grey' literature, not ... not appropriate at all! But anyway, I gave a paper on them, I did research, on research performance indicators, and by a series of chances, I got a part time, first of all, job in UL in the Department of Education and Professional Studies. And for me, the University of Limerick offered me, as a middle-aged woman with children, an opportunity to return to something that I had started off, so I see it as a wonderful opportunity. I didn't have a PhD, if I were to apply for a job now, I wouldn't be shortlisted and I'm very aware of that. I thought at one stage of doing a PhD but my children said to me 'Mum, you get stressed enough as it is, so don't!'. 'Don't go there!', so maybe it's now I should be doing the PhD.

The Department at that stage, and we're talking about '97; it had been integrated into the University, in, I think it was '91, and I know from talking to people then it was a very painful process, and when I joined, the wounds were still ... quite, you know, they were still quite clear. And I was coming in, very much from outside, not aware of what was going on, and there were times when that was difficult, but I came in and again, crazy stuff ... I came in to design a web page. I had never designed a web page in my life, but I had an opportunity, somebody was offering me an opportunity and so I took it, and I taught myself. And actually one of the websites that I designed then on classroom management, it's still up on the web! I don't know if anybody actually accesses it, I'd say it's very old fashioned now compared with modern websites. But I did it, I did the Departmental website, but I, gradually, as soon as I could, I moved away from ICT, which wasn't my first love at all, into the area of teacher education.

And what I particularly enjoyed was teaching practice, where you have one to one relationship with the student, where you really feel you can have an influence. You go out and sit in the back of the classroom, you go out to different schools, different staff rooms, and I meet people now that I would have met in staff rooms, and you can sense the atmosphere in the staffroom. And you sit in the back of the classroom, you stay very quiet unless there was some issue of health and safety, and then you have a meeting with the student afterwards and I did work very much on not telling the student but encouraging the student to

reflect on what they were doing and reflective practice was very much, and is still, very much part of that work. And, although students find it very hard, because in many ways they would prefer to be told 'you do x, y, and z and everything will be hunky dory', that's not the way it works. And ... but students of course find it difficult ... what I used to always start with was with what were they pleased with, because they tend to find fault straight away in what they're doing, and see you as somebody who's going to knock them, so I would have given a lot of time, sometimes probably too much time in helping students to reflect on their own work. And that was something that I enjoyed all the way along.

Now, in terms of university promotion ... I was in the very lucky position that I was, although I was on a contract for many years, I actually wasn't made permanent until 2010, which was a very long time. But I was on a lectureship, whereas now, nowadays I know young women come in and they're on lectureships below the bar, and they have to go through all sorts of hoops to get to lectureship. So again I was very privileged in that sense, that I had that, while it wasn't exactly security, but I was at lectureship level. And also I think one of the things, which is a very important part of university life for the lecturer, is the flexibility. There is fantastic flexibility, and you can concentrate on different things, and I worked on a number of projects with other people in the Department. One of them was, for example, looking at taking, doing videos of students out on teaching practice, and then making very short pieces of that, which could be used for both students and teaching practice supervisors to actually consider what kind of teaching this was, because there was a huge range of people working on teaching practice, both many retired teachers and then the people within the Department. And it was one of the big issues, how can you decide whether a student is an A1 or a B1 or a C1?

And I actually spent three months in 2008 in Australia. I went, my husband had retired at that stage, and so he was my bag carrier, which was wonderful, so I went to Melbourne, to the University of Monash in Melbourne, and looked at their system of teaching practice, and interviewed a lot of students there. And

they had a different system, they had a system of pass and fail, which I still feel is a better system, because our students focus so much on the grades, and trying to please the supervisor, that I felt that really got in the way of learning. But one of the issues was, somebody who has retired, and I can see it from my point of view, I didn't continue with teaching practice, because I didn't want to continue with grading; and I think that I would have got, softer and softer in my grading as I went on! But when I was a member of faculty, that was an issue, because there would be people who'd retired who would give a student an A1 and then the person in the Department ... So there was always two people, which was a very good idea. There was the subject specialist and the educationalist, and we were the educationalists, which meant, I mean, it was fascinating work; you would sit in the back of a woodwork class, a history, well not history, a language class, a science class, all those different classes, and you were there to look at general principles, and then you would agree a grade with somebody from the subject specialisation.

So the videos that we did were a way of helping ... that you'd have a student that a whole group of people were looking at, and they could have a discussion as to what were the issues in relation to that student teacher, and also, there, it was used with booklets that we produced, that we developed and produced, for students to look at particular issues, maybe in relation to classroom management, in relation to organisation, in relation to lesson plans. So again in relation to ... I mean, for me, relationship is very, very important and I heard somebody speaking recently about education and what does it mean to be a good teacher, and I actually, this is since I retired, I put up my hand and said what about relationships? And the person who is very eminent within the University said, 'relationships for what?' So I think, for both students and for teachers that relationship is extremely important. Now some people say I'm being too 'wooly', too 'soft' and all of that. But anyway, I suppose all my time within the University, relationship was very important, relationship between the students and relationships within the Department as well.

I worked a lot with first year students, so you had students who were very naive, particularly young men! - they were a bit like a bat out of hell! You felt that they'd gone away from mammy, and were living on beer and cornflakes, and thought that that was what life was and then they were the ones who tended to fail. And I used to meet students when they failed, I used to give them the opportunity to meet me, and some of them did, but I realized in some cases, they just didn't understand some of the most basic stuff. And they were going to be teaching other people! When all you can do is offer people possibilities. I also enjoyed the ... we did a lot of tutorial work, and I enjoyed that. In later years, I became Director of the Graduate diploma in Education (Languages), which is now a two year programme, you know, it is the equivalent of what was the Hdip., which was then a one year programme. So I could come back to my languages, which I enjoyed very much, and there was a small group of students and again I would have given them a lot of time when they came in. I used to, and I didn't have to, but I would meet them every week, and see how they were getting on in their teaching practice. Because they went in to do teaching practice, more or less, in the deep end. In Australia it was all very gradual and the teacher was there all the time. Here it was very much sink or swim, so I would have given them a lot of help along the way. I also enjoyed working with final year project students and sometimes with post-graduate students for dissertations, and giving them help. Again, I probably gave them too much help, but I found with some of them that it did enable them to move beyond. I certainly was never a person who had on their door; 'I'm available between ten to twelve on a Tuesday!' My feeling was we were paid to be there, primarily for the students.

Now, I suppose on the negative side, I didn't do as much research as I should have done. I did do some, I did some articles – I worked on a research project in relation to ... this was some time ago, whether computer science should be a Leaving Certificate subject or not. And we interviewed a lot of interested parties and I did work on some articles on reflective practice. I did an article following my work in Australia, because I have a very strong conscience and I felt if I was being given three months abroad it was up to me to produce an article out of it, even though it took blood, sweat and tears! I have worked with colleagues,

particularly a younger colleague now very successful, and various professors in the Department, and I worked on an article with him. I was very impressed to see how strategic he was. I would tend to ponder too long, and that's, that's not the way to go to have endless articles, pondering too long! So you need to have somebody who makes up their mind very quickly, so that was, I suppose, a weakness in my direction and I think I inherited that. My father took twenty years to write one of his books, so I think that's something that I inherited!

So overall, I enjoyed the work that I had here. It seemed to go so fast, it seemed to be, I went from new kid on the block to elder lemon within the Department within a few years! I worked a lot on the teaching practice documentation. And again on reflective practice, and I enjoyed working with younger people very much, there were some very bright young people in the Department, and I enjoyed that. And I suppose when you're retired you don't have as many contacts with younger people. I enjoyed that very much. I have to say again, I think it was because I am a woman, I worked, my lecturing was mainly with first years, so very big groups. And I used to have this little soft ball, and I'd throw a ball and ask them a question. It wouldn't be a factual question, it would be something to get them involved. Which worked fine for years, and then one day, there was a group of young men, and they started, I suppose what you'd call, to heckle. I had actually been doing - the things that you remember - I had been doing a lecture on classroom management, and in one of the reports, an Irish report that was recent at that stage, it mentioned changes in young people, and it mentioned binge drinking, that research had been done on binge drinking in young people. And I think that they were probably only half listening, a different group, and I think they probably took it that I was saying they were doing binge drinking and they took offence, I don't know.

And they started to heckle ... so this was during the lecture, this big lecture theatre, the one down below, Jean Monnet, and me on my own, with whatever it was, 200 students. And I think if I had been a man, I might have just shouted. I think if I had been teaching science I might have just shouted, but because we were working on classroom management and being positive, and not doing that,

I found myself in a quandary. And I probably just carried on. And ... I, in retrospect, I found that very traumatic. Now I did get some help; I did tell my Head of Department, and I, he was very supportive, and he said if I ever wanted to have somebody else in the lecture, that that would be fine, I never did. And I also, I can't remember how it happened, I also spoke to Sarah Moore, because I felt, I felt then, and I feel now very much that that is something that I'm sure happens to other people and that nobody says. And ... it's a very difficult situation. The notion that everybody can keep the attention of every young student in every lecture, I thought is a myth.

But I think it's something that maybe people are doing work on it now. Afterwards what I did was, it was coming towards the end of term as far as I remember, but the next term, I had something in the ... module outline that I gave at the beginning of the module, saying that if anybody ... something positive about lectures, and how we ran the lectures and that if they had any disagreement with this that they should email me. But I was much more careful in terms of letting people work together and all of that, because I was not going to let that happen to me again.

But I remember, even to this day, if I think about it, I remember that awful feeling of powerlessness, with a group of students. Now that was the only time it ever happened, but you know, there must be people who have difficulties like that all the time. But I know of teachers who've had it within a classroom, and we talk about it a lot with student teachers, but in that particular case in the classroom, you have twenty or at most, thirty people, so you know who it is, and you know their names, but I was not in a position to say 'You there' because they would just say 'not me there' or whatever. So I think it's something, you know, I was thinking was I going to mention it, because it's something that people feel ashamed of because they feel that we should be the kind of lecturer that everybody thinks is wonderful! And we can't all be like that!

So overall, I mean, I'll come back to what I said in the beginning, that I saw it as a wonderful opportunity. I was, when I started here, I was fifty-two, and it was an

opportunity to, to take up full time work again, because I had done a lot of part-time work, and part-time work for women, is often badly paid, and also I would have done a lot of research work at home, so you have the disadvantage of working at home; it's good for flexibility for family life, but it's, it can tend to be very isolated. Now, on the one hand, I think I was the last generation of middle class women, who had the option of working full time or working part time or, of staying at home all the time, because young women now don't have that option. I had that option. But ... so in some ways I suppose I was, and I was working freelance, I call myself an educational consultant. So what I said is I hadn't had in some ways, I hadn't had a career, but I had a very interesting work life, and UL offered me that, and there was great flexibility.

Now I didn't, as I say, looking back, I should have pushed the research route more, but because I came into it late in life, I hadn't got the research, I hadn't got that background of having read all the standard books. I was coming, you know, I had a lot of experience of teaching, I had my Masters, but I had my Masters twenty years beforehand, whereas people who were academics had been doing that all the time, and building up an expertise. People would say, 'what's your specialisation again? I'm never quite sure'. So, I was very happy here and of course it's a wonderful campus, absolutely wonderful campus. I would have been quite private in ways, that I would have connected a lot with the students, but I would never be 'hail fellow, well met', and 'jolly jolly!' that's, that's not me. I mean I've gone to Christmas parties and all that, but it's not really, I'm not very good in those kinds of groups at all. So it was a very good opportunity for me, very good.

I.: What were the highlights of your career?

JM.: The highlights were definitely working with students, and seeing students succeed. Seeing a student out on teaching practice move from being very uncertain to flying, even a highlight would be seeing a student who shouldn't be a teacher, and spending a great deal of time with them, really helping them to see that they they'd be very unhappy as a teacher. Working with students in, the

tutorials, working with students on their dissertations, again seeing them move forward. I remember there was one student and she was able, but she wasn't doing very much and I had an appointment, I was always very meticulous, I was always a very hard worker. And I had an appointment with her at nine in the morning, and I was there at quarter to nine, because you can't be on time ... to get a parking, you can't be on time, you have to be either early or late. So I was there early. It was the middle of winter and she arrived late. And I said 'Mary, you're late' and she said 'there was frost on my windscreen', and I said 'Mary, there was frost on my windscreen too', and she burst out crying. So I said 'you go on, go outside for a while, calm yourself down and come back in'. And she bit the bullet after that and she worked very hard.

So I would be demanding of students, but I would give them every help I could. So that was the highlight for me. I was on Academic Council for a short period of time, but that was learning a bit about power, it wasn't something where I was confident enough to make my mark. So it was on a, a very much one to one, and in small groups, and then reluctantly in the bigger groups! ... And the learning, I mean, I think it's wonderful to have an opportunity to learn. I think, you know, academic life is a privilege, but I know, and more and more so now, it's very hard work, I know that. So that I was very lucky to have been given that opportunity, I didn't have a PhD, I mean I had, I suppose I had high qualifications in what I did do, but I did have a rather chequered career!

I.: You retired Janet, in ...

JM.: 2010.

I.: So you saw a difference from when you arrived in '97 to 2010, in terms of staff recruitment?

JM.: Within the Department there were huge changes. And very positive changes. That we were a very small, rather beleaguered group in the early days, and I remember, as I say, there was a lot of pain still from the integration, and people had taken different sides, I didn't know what that was all about, but there were ...

I.: This was Thomond?

JM.: Thomond, yes, when Thomond was integrated into the University. I can remember at one stage we were in the Schumann building, and they wanted us to move to here, where we are, and we saw that as downgrading. We felt very unvalued, very unvalued, we didn't have a Dean, we didn't have a professor, all sorts of politics that I really didn't get involved in. But we were quite beleaguered, and the people who had been working with us in Thomond, were in the Science department and various places. It was a difficult time, and particularly for the older people who had been in Thomond, it was very difficult. But in fact, we found, so we fought the good fight, and we managed to get the waffles (ceiling fittings) painted, ... laugh ... and that was a big plus . At one stage they were going to lock us out! In the Schumann because they wanted ... We were aware of the ... the powers that be above us; in fact it was a good thing to move more to the centre.

But our department and our Heads of Department worked very hard over the years. We had quality audits, which again I would have done a lot of work on documentation for that, some of which I think was way over the top but at the same time, we had ... I can't remember the name... we had a person from, Douglas, from Strathclyde University, who had had links with Thomond, and he worked as a facilitator when we were devising new programmes. The undergraduate programmes were devised, revised, totally revised, and we did a lot of group work on that which was very positive, and Douglas helped us, as a facilitator, over that period of time, we had, and our Heads of Department worked very hard to develop the Department. And then Mary O' Sullivan became Dean, and she had a background in PE, so she was really interested in teacher education. At that stage, we were with the medical sciences, and there was a bit of fear that it would be a medic who was in charge, and that they wouldn't have teacher education at the centre.

But that was the big thing during my time in UL in terms of the Department, that the, not the role of the Department, because we were still doing the same thing, teacher education, at a very high level, even though strangely enough, I still find

now, second level teacher education in UL is not well known. People say 'do you work in Mary I.?' Although we had huge numbers of students and we brought in a lot of money for the university, from the big groups of students that we had. But teacher education moved from the periphery and we always had big numbers of students, but our staff numbers increased enormously, and what we have had in recent years, and it continues now, is that young people have come in, done their degrees here, and then gone on to do their PhDs. I would say all the young people in the Department now have a PhD and the research profile of the Department, which initially was very low, because many of the people would have come from teaching positions, and in the early days, other people wouldn't have had a PhD either. Now the research profile is very, very, high, you can see on the notice board the number of things people are doing. But I wonder now, whether anybody comes from ... from the classroom, whether that route is open at all and whether there is a danger, I don't know, but I just wonder whether there is a danger, that there's too much focus on the academic. And not enough links with the classroom, I don't know. But I do know they are working, the teaching practice element is working very strongly, and I know that they, what I was very keen on was that the teachers in the schools would become more involved in the grading. So I think there has been work on that and I know there has been work on mentoring. And so there has also been a huge increase in the number of courses, of programmes that are being offered and revisions, so it's, it's a much more vibrant Department than it was when I was there. And I think it's in a, it's very healthy now, but its so huge that ... who'd want to be Head of Department there! It's a huge Department now.

I.: What do you think the people who came from Thomond found most difficult when they came here? Was it that sense of being undervalued?

JM.: I think there were some difficulties at the time and I think different people took different positions. So I think some of it was personal hurt. But I think it was, I remember we spoke about the 'diaspora', and the 'diaspora' were people who were in Science or in Woodwork and that continued for a very long time ... I mean, so it was six years after it happened, I think it was '91, and I arrived in '97; but that hurt was very, very strong. And then there was, I don't even remember,

but there was a whole shenanigans about professorships and deanships and all of that, but it was the undervaluing and the fact that ... It also, I think, and looking back, and even at the time I realised, even though I wasn't involved, I wasn't there, but it must have been very badly handled. However it was handled, it must have been very badly handled.

But I think that is often the case when you have, I mean, all over the UK, there have been what are called teacher training, we always called it teacher education, but teacher training colleges that were - integrated is a nice word - that were shoved into bigger universities, you know. So I think that it was a combination of all those factors. But that is now, I mean there is nobody left on the Department who was there at the time, and, so, and now, they now, and I'm not up to date, although I do make, I have contact from time to time, I was at the Professor's inaugural, which I was interested in, recently. But there's talk about a School of Education, so that's going to be a whole change, I'm not sure what, I mean, there's always university politics, you know. And what was it said, the university politics are so vicious because the stakes are so low!

But you have so many intelligent people together, who have a flexible timetable, they work very hard, but they have a flexible timetable, they're used to ... and I also think that one of the, the possible losses now, I think, in terms of the way in which the University has moved. I mean, it is very important for UL that they have a strong research profile, I absolutely accept that. It is very important and there is a craft in terms of doing articles so that you can do them reasonably fast and all of that. And I think that's very good, but I think that it can, mean for, it can lead to a very individualistic approach. And the person I think now, maybe I'm wrong, but the person who does well within University, is the person who is focused like that and I don't think, I wonder there where students are in all of that. But maybe it is possible to do all of that. I don't know. But I mean people are pushed into doing ... they have to do a lot of research, so I wonder how the students fare out in all of that.

I.: Thank you very much Janet.