

**TRANSCRIPTION RE:**

**CSUMB Founding Faculty  
Oral History Project 1995-1998  
Rina Benmayor, Project Director**

**Interview with Frances Payne Adler, Professor Emerita  
Creative Writing and Social Action  
Division of Humanities and Communication  
College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Interviewer, Rina Benmayor, Professor Emerita  
Division of Humanities and Communication  
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences**

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**Narrator: Frances Payne Adler**  
**Interviewer: Rina Benmayor**

1           **Benmayor:** *Okay. This is August 23, 2015 and this is Rina Benmayor. I'm in Portland, Oregon and*  
2 *I've come to interview Frances Payne Adler for the CSUMB Founding Faculty Oral History Project. Fran,*  
3 *could you please say your full name and then tell me if we have permission to use this recording. Leave a*  
4 *little space in between your name and the permission.*

5           **Adler:** My name is Frances Payne Adler. And yes, you have permission to use my oral history.

6           **Benmayor:** *Great. Okay. I should say for the record that Fran and I are colleagues from the*  
7 *Humanities and Communication Division of California State University Monterey Bay and we are part of*  
8 *this Oral History Project and we are interviewing each other. Franny, let's start with what your motivation*  
9 *was for coming to CSUMB. Do you remember back then?*

10           **Adler:** Yes. Actually I'd like to go back to when I first heard about the job, when I was living in  
11 San Diego. I was teaching part-time there in creative writing in the English Department at San Diego State  
12 University and had been teaching there part-time for several years and looking for a tenure track position. I  
13 first heard about the job in the *Chronicle*. I saw it advertised and it had this amazing description about "this  
14 is what we stand for and come and create your own position. Design a job that you would like to have,  
15 propose it to us, we'll consider it and then we'll interview you if you make the cut." So I put in a proposal  
16 to come and teach Creative Writing and Social Action, which is something that I had personally been doing  
17 for many years, working with photographer Kira Carrillo Corser, her photographs and my poetry about  
18 various social issues, homelessness and lack of access for health care, lack of access for prenatal care. I  
19 thought what a wonderful place to come live in Monterey and teach with people that are committed to  
20 diversity and social justice and interdisciplinarity and all of the various things they named in the job

21 description. So I wrote a proposal, a job application. Never, never heard a word. Never heard a word. And I  
22 was so looking forward to having a possibility there. So I moved on and I was still pursuing a tenure track  
23 position somewhere, hopefully in California. But I didn't find anything in California and was recruited and  
24 got a job at the University of Wisconsin in La Crosse. So I moved to the Midwest. They brought me there  
25 to teach Creative Writing and Social Action and diversity issues and they were thrilled to have me or so I  
26 [3:53] thought. I went to work there and what I discovered was that as long as I kept my gaze directed  
27 outward into the community they were happy. If I was talking about homeless issues in La Crosse that was  
28 fine. If I was talking about diversity issues in La Crosse that was fine. But as soon as I became involved in  
29 a faculty hire that was a targeted minority hire, and they hired somebody who was not Hispanic or Native  
30 American or Latina, they were very critical of my asking questions about why did they hire an Anglo man  
31 for a Native American Indian position. I just knew it wasn't the place for me. I had been there a year and a  
32 half. So that's when I started to look. I looked in the *Chronicle* and there was another ad for CSU Monterey  
33 Bay. Only this time it was more particular. It was more specific. They were looking for a creative writer.  
34 Before, there were no disciplines. And I was *so* excited. So I put in another application and I didn't really  
35 expect to hear back because I hadn't heard a word the year before. So I get a call that they would like to  
36 interview me over the phone. So I remember sitting in my kitchen. I remember sitting at my kitchen table, I  
37 might even have a picture of it. I have all my notes on the table and I think I had a candle glowing, you  
38 know. [Chuckles] I was really happy to have a shot at it. Rina, you were on the committee and Cecilia  
39 Burciaga was on the committee and Qun Wang was on the committee and I don't remember who else. We  
40 had a wonderful talk. And you so got what I was talking about. I had come from 30 years of living in  
41 California and in Wisconsin they really didn't know what I was talking about. They didn't know about  
42 applying diversity issues to what they were doing. They didn't know about social justice as it applied to  
43 reflective things they would need to do by themselves about themselves. I felt at home before I was even

44 there and I wasn't hired, I was just interviewing. And then I didn't hear for many months. Months! Yes!  
45 And so I thought okay, it's the same old thing, you know? But I had gotten farther this time. And then I  
46 [7:20] heard that there had been a death at CSUMB, that somebody male in administration had hung  
47 himself. I thought oh, my gosh! But maybe that's why things are just not proceeding. So I didn't give up.  
48 But I thought what's going on at the university? That's what I thought. Anyways, then I get another phone  
49 call. And yes, they apologized for the delay and "we would like to bring you out to interview." Well, that  
50 was a thrill. I remember I came out to the West Coast. I stayed in Monterey where Kira was living at that  
51 time, Kira Carrillo Corser, a photographer from Carmel Valley, the one that I had been working with for 20  
52 years. We did a ceremony at the Carmel River blessing me for the job! Then I came for the interview and it  
53 was like falling in love! It was really like falling in love. I sound a little, I don't know, well I'm not gonna  
54 say what I sound like, let somebody else say what I sound like. But it was a little bit like falling in love  
55 because I understood them and they understood me. I remember giving a workshop and it was in Building  
56 18. I remember that the students were very intense and committed and engaged. There were maybe 15  
57 people in the room and there were faculty there, too. You were there. I think Qun was there. And Tomás  
58 was there.

59 **Benmayor:** *Tomás who?*

60 **Adler:** Wasn't it Tomás Kalmar? He was still there. He was there. I did an exercise where I asked  
61 the students and the faculty to write about something that they couldn't forget. Something that kept coming  
62 up. Something that burned in them, some memory that rose to the surface. I remember how intense it was. I  
63 remember looking at you, Rina, and your whole face was flushed. Really. I thought, wow. The engagement  
64 level was wonderful. I quoted some writer, some creative writers that talked about silence and being  
65 silenced and claiming our stories and writing about them even though people may have told us not to talk  
66 about them or write about them. I remember after the workshop a young student -- he had a guitar--, and he  
67 asked me to come outside and he wanted to play a song for me. Yeah! So we did and it turned out to be a

68 song about his grandfather coming across the border and being beaten and left for dead. He told me that his  
69 grandfather had told him never to tell anyone about it. But he had never been able to forget about it, he'd  
70 written a song about it and he'd never played it outside. I think he played it for his girlfriend. I said why are  
71 you telling me? And he said, "Because I couldn't *not*. I couldn't *not* speak it now." I said, "Oh, my gosh,  
72 this place." So I just crossed my fingers. And I got the job! So it was a gift to teach at CSU Monterey Bay.  
73 Yeah.

74 **Benmayor:** *Do you remember anything about the interview itself?*

75 **Adler:** I do, Rina. I remember where I sat. I remember who sat on my right. You were on my right.  
76 Cecilia Burciaga was on my left. Qun was across the table. There was a student there. And Betty McEady.  
77 I think Betty McEady was there.

78 **Benmayor:** *Oh. She was our outside person.*

79 **Adler:** That's right.

80 **Benmayor:** *There must have been a community rep, too.*

81 **Adler:** Right. But I don't remember who that was. What do I remember about it? Not much. I  
82 remember being very high on the conversation. One thing that pops up that I do remember very clearly is  
83 Cecilia Burciaga. She said, "We need your energy." And I said, "I have endless energy." And she said,  
84 "Oh, boy, are you in the right place!" And looking back on that I so understand now that I had no idea what  
85 that meant at the time. You know, how hard you all had worked putting it all together at that point, it was  
86 the first year, and I came in the second year. I was so eager and so full of passion and energy. I remember  
87 working 18 hours a day. I could see where a year later I would say the same thing to the next group of  
88 faculty because we put so everything into it. So much that you just got drained bone dry.

89 **Benmayor:** *And that was 1996. You came. . . .*

90 **Adler:** Yes. In August of '96 .

91 **Benmayor:** *Right. Your interview was in the Spring of '96 and then you came.*

92           **Adler:** That's right. And so I could see it's like *fresh blood*, you know? [Chuckles] But I had no  
93 idea what was ahead in terms of the amount of work we would be doing, I would be doing and we would be  
94 doing together.

95   **[14:10] Benmayor:** *Can you tell me a little bit about your assignment? So you arrived in August and you*  
96 *found a place – oh, you had looked for a place to live earlier, no?*

97           **Adler:** You know, Rina, Kira, the photographer I mentioned before, lived in Monterey and I well  
98 knew how hard it was to find housing. I knew I did not want to live on campus. Not that living on campus  
99 wouldn't have been wonderful, but I wanted to live near the water, I really wanted to. I also wanted to  
100 separate my work life from my personal life. Working so hard on campus I wanted to be able to refresh  
101 fully. So I looked in Pacific Grove. But I needed a place to stay in order to house hunt and my very good  
102 friend, Rina, offered me her home. And so I arrived July 3<sup>rd</sup> or something and you were in Spain or  
103 somewhere.

104           **Benmayor:** *New York.*

105           **Adler:** New York for a month. And so you graciously lent me your home and that was my house  
106 hunting headquarters. I remember I couldn't afford very much. I had no idea how much prices were. Do  
107 you want me to go into this? And eventually I found a home.

108           **Benmayor:** *So when you started up in August, late August, what was your understanding of your*  
109 *assignment as a faculty member? What were you supposed to be doing? And what did you start teaching?*

110           **Adler:** Well, I started teaching Creative Writing and Social Action classes and people didn't know  
111 what that was, really. What differentiated Creative Writing with Social Action from Creative Writing? And  
112 so I had to establish what that was, and set, you know, the description, write the description. Then start  
113 teaching the classes and by developing syllabi develop the program. There was no other program like it in  
114 the country. There was no other creative writing program specifically committed to social justice and  
115 diversity issues and I invented that. There was June Jordan's "Poetry for the People" at Berkeley. That was

116 the only one. It was a model but it wasn't declared in that way. It was a creative writing class that she  
117 developed around that issue. This was declared with requirements. Now in the time that I came at that first  
118 semester, there were no set out requirements. I didn't even know there were University Learning  
119 Requirements. I certainly didn't have criteria written down, any of that came later. But at the beginning I  
120 knew what I wanted. So I started teaching those classes and the students really were affected by it. I  
121 remember, I'm sure it was that first semester, where Marian Penn . . .

122 **[17:43] Benmayor:** *Who was the Director of the Service . . .*

123 **Adler:** . . . of the Service Learning Institute, she said, "You're a natural, Fran, for teaching Service  
124 Learning." I said, "What is Service Learning?" She said, "What you're doing." Because what I was doing  
125 was developing the students' ability to write about issues in their lives, in their personal lives, that were  
126 directly connected with the community. You know, Latina/Latino students whose parents were  
127 farmworkers or students who were farmworkers themselves, we would have these discussions about, well,  
128 what is it like to work in the fields? And issues of health would come up. A lot. We would begin to read  
129 about it. We would begin to research the background, the context of that. I remember tears. I remember  
130 anger. There was a connection between the work they did and the uncle who had lung cancer or the father  
131 who had skin rashes. All of the connections weren't yet made. Doing the research, making the connections  
132 of the life issues that they experienced in their communities, and bringing that into their writing and  
133 claiming it on paper as real and worrisome and "I'm not gonna take this anymore" kind of thing. So writing  
134 about their realities as a way to document the effect of noxious conditions in their lives. Toxic racism. I  
135 remember looking at that, where incinerators and dumps would be located in low income communities,  
136 who didn't have as much access to power as others. These are the kinds of issues we dealt with. It was a  
137 very exciting time to be making the theory come alive. And it wasn't theory. I'm not a critic, you know,  
138 I'm a poet. I do it because I see the need. Then somebody comes along and says, "Oh, but the meta-

139 something is what you're doing." And I say, "I don't know the name for it, I just do it." You know. So  
140 that's what it was. It was inventing the program at the beginning.

141 **[20:24] Benmayor:** *Do you remember how many classes you taught at the beginning?*

142 **Adler:** No, I don't. I remember how many committees. I was on 13 committees. 13 committees! I  
143 do remember getting a class release time for the amount of committees but I think I was teaching three  
144 classes.

145 **Benmayor:** *I think at the beginning we were doing 2/2.*

146 **Adler:** Maybe 2/2.

147 **Benmayor:** *It didn't go up to 3/3 for a long time.*

148 **Adler:** Right, okay. 13 committees and two classes, then. Oh, I remember asking. . .

149 **Benmayor:** *So what committees were these?*

150 **Adler:** Oh, it's a blur. I don't remember that. Well, Service Learning, I remember that. The ULR for  
151 Artistic and Creative Expression.

152 **Benmayor:** The ULR was University Learning Requirement.

153 **Adler:** Yes.

154 **Benmayor:** It was the equivalent to General Education Requirements.

155 **Adler:** Right. I'm not sure we had that name for it yet. But it was a lot of committees, I do  
156 remember that. I do remember one other odd thing when I first arrived. I think I needed file folders and I  
157 asked the office staff for a requisition and there was no such thing. I had to invent a requisition to order file  
158 folders. [Laughs] I thought, "Wow, this is really inventing from the ground up." [Laughs]

159 **Benmayor:** *You're lucky we had a secretary at that point. I'm not sure we did. [Laughs]*

160 **Adler:** I'm not sure we did. Maybe we didn't. I'm blurring time sequence, but I remember teaching  
161 at San Diego State for so many years as a part-time faculty and everything had a requisition and everything  
162 had a procedure and everything had a way to do it and we didn't have any of that.



163           **Benmayor:** *So, Creative Writing and Social Action was the only class that you taught that first*  
164 *year?*

165           **Adler:** No. I taught Literature as well. I'm not sure, maybe it was Women's Literature? I think I  
166 taught Women's Literature. I don't know. I don't remember.

167           **Benmayor:** What was in your mind? *You said that you were creating the program and it was a*  
168 *unique program in the country because of its focus on social justice and social action.*

169 **[23:04] Adler:** Before you ask that question I just want to say very clearly that there were poets, students  
170 and faculty writing social action poems always. The difference was two things. One was that the program  
171 was named that. Committed to that. And the other unique part of the program was that it was part of an  
172 interdisciplinary Humanities program. Now that was totally unique. I know there were people, poets and  
173 writers, students, writing social action poems. They didn't call it that. But they were writing about their  
174 lives, all of that was happening always, probably forever in the United States and certainly in this century,  
175 but it wasn't in a program committed to that with requirements for that. And it wasn't part of that  
176 interdisciplinary Humanities program which was so rich. When I worked with Kira, the photographer, Kira  
177 Carrillo Corser, when I lived in San Diego and taught at San Diego State and she was working for public  
178 broadcasting TV and radio and we started working on our work, before we would do a photography-poetry  
179 project about say, access to healthcare, we would have to research it. Or about homelessness, say, which  
180 was our first exhibition. We'd have to research homelessness. We'd have to go into the community and do  
181 interviews. We would have to learn how to do interviews. We'd have to learn about all the many cultures of  
182 people who were living on the street. We would have to learn the history of homelessness, we'd have to do  
183 all of this. We'd have to go to different departments to do it. So within Humanities and Communication, the  
184 students were required to take Oral History, they were required to do research and critical writing, in  
185 addition to the creative writing. They had to learn about relational communication. It was all required for  
186 them. So all that they learned in all of the other disciplines within HCOM helped them so much in their

187 creative writing. Then I've heard that the creative writing that they learned in our classes helped them in,  
188 say, Practical and Professional Ethics or Pre-Law or all those other disciplines. So that's why it was so  
189 unique to have the Creative Writing and Social Action program set up in this way, because each fed the  
190 other.

191 **Benmayor:** *What obstacles did you encounter in establishing this program or developing it?*

192 **[26:05] Adler:** Two things come to mind. First, at the very beginning I remember being at Asilomar. This  
193 is about two blocks from where I lived, by the way, right on the beach. Or I lived two blocks from the  
194 beach. Asilomar was on the beach. In this big, terrific room we sat around a table and big glass walls. I say  
195 big because I just remember it being expansive not only literally but metaphorically. We were looking out  
196 at the ocean, and at the trees.

197 **Benmayor:** *Who was the "we?"*

198 **Adler:** "We" was our Humanities and Communication Department.

199 **Benmayor:** *It was a retreat, I think, planning retreat?*

200 **Adler:** It was a planning retreat. You were Chair, I remember. Do you want me to name who was  
201 there? Nah. Whoever was hired at that time was there. We were imagining what we could be. You had  
202 arranged it to be there, I guess, because it was such a gorgeous space and it was away from campus and all  
203 the work we had on our backs, so we could think and imagine. We were so brand new. I mean I remember  
204 proposing the Creative Writing and Social Action Program and I will say that there was resistance. They  
205 wanted it to be Creative Writing, but not Social Action. Not named. *Do* social action, yes. But don't call it  
206 that. I was very committed to having it called Creative Writing and Social Action. I was new. I had never  
207 been a tenure-track professor before. I asserted myself, but at a certain point I almost gave in and settled. I  
208 was about to say okay, Creative Writing. Then Ilene Feinman, who was a part-time faculty person, she had  
209 her Ph.D. in History of Consciousness from University of California, Santa Cruz and she was working with  
210 us at that time as part-time, and I remember it was on the tip of my tongue to go along. Anyway, I

211 remember she was sitting beside me. She put her arm in my arm, she hooked arms with me and she said,  
212 “Go for it, Fran. Stick with it.” And I did. I’m not sure I would have without her. Now, here I am junior  
213 tenure-track faculty. Here is this part-time person who I really didn’t know very well but liked very much  
214 and felt akin with, she’s encouraging me. So I said, “Okay, I’m going to stick with what my instincts are.”  
215 That has been a credo of mine and had been, to listen to my body when my body was telling me to stick  
216 with it. My newbie academic mind was hesitant. But thank goodness for Ilene because she stuck up for me  
217 and stuck up for the program and naming it that. So it was. And once I was firm, then everybody got firm.  
218 And that was a lesson to me. You know? It really was. Ask for what you want. I did. And it was scary  
219 because I’d seen at other universities how first year faculty got smashed, you know, really smashed. I never  
220 felt that at CSUMB. I always felt supported. I was nervous about getting tenure and all that, but I didn’t  
221 lead with it. I always felt supported in my work and respected for my work. Yeah.

222 **[33:36] Benmayor:** *You said there was a second incident.*

223 **Adler:** Oh, yes. You’re good! I’d already forgotten that. [Chuckles] Okay. Second time was when,  
224 I don’t remember who, but some people had been urging me to – this is much further along and I can’t tell  
225 you exactly what year although probably you could help me remember it. It was when Barbara ...

226 **Benmayor:** Mossberg?

227 **Adler:** Mossberg was Dean.

228 **Benmayor:** *Oh, gosh. [Chuckles]*

229 **Adler:** So whatever year that was. People had been for a couple of years saying to me, “Fran, why  
230 don’t you go for an MFA in Creative Writing and Social Action?” To be honest, and I’m putting it in the  
231 record here, I really didn’t feel the need.

232 **Benmayor:** *You mean to design an MFA program.*

233 **Adler:** To design an MFA program. And here is why. I felt there were so few jobs out there for all  
234 of these many, many graduates of many, many MFA programs across the country. I felt, could I in good

235 conscience put out a degree here, and have people come and put all their heart into getting a degree, not  
236 only for a job, but that's one really big deal. I felt that in this country, we don't need another MFA  
237 program. However, it would have been the first one in Social Action. So, I said, "Okay." I think because  
238 it's the first, and several faculty across the country were *utzing* me to do that. *Utzing* is Yiddish for  
239 encouraging me in a kind of a pushy way. Cynthia Hogue, for example, was the Director of the Creative  
240 Writing Program at Bucknell University. She had heard me give a presentation at the Associated Writing  
241 Programs Conference one year. She heard me give a talk about our work. I think it could have been when  
242 the students came with us to AWP and were part of a presentation. She was so impressed with the students.  
243 Sarah Lerma was one of the students presenting. I think Kristen La Follette and Sarah Lerma er were the  
244 two students. And Cynthia Hogue was so impressed with it, she came up after and she said, "Do you have  
245 an MFA Program in Creative Writing and Social Action?" I said, "No." And she said, "Why not? We need  
246 one." So she came to campus to see what we were doing so that she could take back to her university and  
247 apply some of what we were doing there. She subsequently moved to Arizona State University and has  
248 applied some there. But it was that kind of external encouragement, my colleagues saying we need  
249 something like that. That's what got me going. So, okay. I sat down and designed a program with a Diana  
250 Garcia and with Debra Busman. I think you helped us look it over. We put together a proposal. And it went  
251 to Renée, who was the chair. Renée...?

252 **Benmayor:** *Curry.*

253 **Adler:** . . .Curry, who was the chair. And she loved the idea and supported it and it went to the  
254 Dean, who was Barbara Mossberg. That's where it stopped. Barbara Mossberg said "no." If we would go  
255 for an MFA in Creative Writing, it would be an MFA in Creative Writing, not an MFA in Creative Writing  
256 and Social Action. And Renée was not happy. And I was not happy. And the two of us went into Barbara's  
257 office and sat down and talked with her. She was stubborn, would not sign off on it. So it never went  
258 further. Uh-uh. I remember her saying, "Well, what about if a student wants to write about a tree?" I said,

259 “They can write about a tree but it will probably have something to do with the environment in addition to  
260 the tree. If they want to only write about the tree, there is an MFA program right up the street in San Jose  
261 or Santa Cruz or, you know, San Diego.” So anyway, it never went past her desk. That was the only other  
262 time that I was stopped. And this was a stop. Yeah.

263 **[36:00] Benmayor:** *Well, spinning off of that, Fran, what were some of the general issues that you*  
264 *remember going on on the campus, struggles around other issues that you were involved in, have memories*  
265 *of?*

266 **Adler:** Oh, my. [pause] I remember I was sitting in the Black Box -

267 **Benmayor:** *Which was?*

268 **Adler:** Which was a theater. It was one of the old buildings on Fort Ord and the students had  
269 converted it into a theater performance space. Luis Valdez I think was involved a little bit. I was  
270 sitting next to, oh, gosh, my memory with names...

271 **Benmayor:** *Octavio. Villalpando.*

272 **Adler:** Octavio Villalpando. Lovely man who worked in the administration building who was ...

273 **Benmayor:** *He did institutional research.*

274 **Adler:** Institutional Research, right. We were talking about this and that and the meeting hadn't  
275 started yet. I can't remember exactly what the context was but he startled me by saying that he was about to  
276 stand up and report on something for which he might lose his job. I said, "What could that be?" He said,  
277 "You'll see." He got up and he talked about the research he was doing. It was research he wasn't supposed  
278 to be doing but he was doing it on his own time and he was doing it because that's what he was passionate  
279 about. He was documenting the progress. . . this may not be exactly what he was doing, this is how I  
280 remember it and know that I'm not a researcher, I'm a poet. So memory, I'm not sure. But this is what I  
281 remember of it and how I remember it. He was documenting the progress or non-progress of Latina/Latino  
282 students through the University. Why is that not part of his job? I was stunned! Not only why is it not part

283 of his job, I would think that would be primary given what the University was established for. And I  
284 remember – oh, here’s another person whose name I don't remember, and I’m interrupting myself, oh, gosh  
285 --, he did the initial demographic research.

286 **Benmayor:** *Ray González.*

287 **[38:33] Adler:** Ray González Am I lucky you’re interviewing me! [Chuckles] You’re filling in the holes.  
288 He did the research that the legislature required to support the need for a university in Monterey, something  
289 to do with the large number of high school students that were coming up that were in the Latino/Latina  
290 community and that there was a need. He documented it. And the legislature passed it. And we built the  
291 University. But if that was the basis on which the University was built, why was Octavio afraid of losing  
292 his job?! So here I am a poet and somebody committed to breaking silences. And to documenting the  
293 people resisting, keeping you from speaking and to encourage the ... I’m losing words. And to encourage  
294 the courage to break the silence. So I was very surprised that he was afraid of losing his job. And he  
295 continued to get up and speak about it, report about it. Now he did, down the road, lose his job. Or stopped  
296 teaching there. I don't know the exact story of that. What my little piece here is just the surprise of what is  
297 going on in Building One, in the Administration Building, if a man who is the head of research on the  
298 campus is afraid of losing his job about reporting on something on which the University was based. That  
299 was my question. Yeah.

300 **Benmayor:** You were also at some point involved, weren’t you, with the committee to design the  
301 mission of the university?

302 **[39:58] Adler:** Oh. Yes, I was. Huh. It was a huge committee. I don't know, maybe 28 people. Students.  
303 Faculty. Administrators. Community members. Staff. Alumni. It was an enormous committee and one that  
304 worked for six months. I was on a subcommittee of that, which was to design the mission statement. But  
305 that 28-person committee was to project the next five-year plan, kind of thing.

306 **Benmayor:** Five-year plan projections.

307           **Adler:** Probably. Something like that. Okay, but this was the first five year projection plan and so  
308 they needed a Mission Statement committee. I thought, “Well, that’s cool because I’m a poet. I’m, you  
309 know, precise with words. How hard can that be to come up with a Mission Statement? It’s going to be one  
310 sentence. Oh, piece of cake!” It took months because it had to say so much with so few words. We worked  
311 very, very hard. Then we had to bring it back to the large committee and get it approved. But it was very  
312 hard to find the words. I remember finally, finally we came up with this incredibly, what I thought,  
313 speaking modestly here, was a very precise definition of who we were. Now, given the Vision Statement  
314 you can take so much of the Vision Statement. You can focus in anywhere. How do you come up with a  
315 sentence that takes everything in... or the most important? What is the essence of the Vision Statement?  
316 And what we came up with is... let me get it right. “We prepare ethical students.” No. “We prepare ethical  
317 leaders for a multicultural” – was it society or world? “We prepare ethical leaders for a multicultural  
318 world.” That was the Vision Statement.

319           **Benmayor:** *The Mission Statement.*

320           **Adler:** The Mission Statement. Yeah, Mission Statement. So then we took it back to the larger  
321 committee and we had a lot of discussion and we passed it. We were so excited. Everybody was so excited.  
322 I remember Joe Larkin was the chair of that large committee and Diane. . . who was the Provost.

323           **Benmayor:** *Diane Cordero de Noriega.*

324           **Adler:** And she liked it, too. And so we didn’t know, I don't think we were told this, really. No, I  
325 will clarify. We were not told this next thing. That now we need to take it to the University and pass it  
326 through the University. That was *not* told to us up front because we had no plan for that. Had we known  
327 that, we would have still had the same Mission Statement but we would have made a plan. Because putting  
328 it out to the whole university killed it. Everybody had their two cents. It was like going back to the  
329 beginning. We’d already done all the negotiation. We’d had representatives from all the communities  
330 across campus in the committee. We did the negotiating. We came up with *this*. That was our charge. And

331 then it went out to the community and it was like minus-one. So it never passed. Then they said well, what  
332 are some ideas? And they came up with this statement. I do not know it. It was a lot of prepositional  
333 phrases within the Mission Statement, you know, speaking as a creative writer, it just didn't ring in a way  
334 that could be remembered. So that was a very big disappointment. It also taught me never to put so much  
335 into being on a committee because it will be manipulated in the end and I didn't trust the administration  
336 after that. So they lost my trust, because I went in believing that that might happen, and I was so sure that  
337 what we came out with would be what it was, that I began to trust the process. I put my heart into it. I  
338 worked very hard. And then the rug was taken out. So they lost my trust. I wasn't on any committee in any  
339 passionate way after that. I mean I was on many committees but not in the same way.

340 **[46:20] Benmayor:** *Well, you mentioned the Vision Statement and we haven't really talked about the*  
341 *Vision Statement, which is another one of the topics that we are covering in this oral history process. So,*  
342 *I'd like to ask you, I know many of us were attracted by the Vision Statement in our initial applications to*  
343 *the University. What was it that attracted you because it's a pretty broad Vision Statement?*

344 **Adler:** It's a very broad Vision Statement. There were two things. Three things. Social Justice.  
345 Diversity. Four things. Social Justice, diversity, interdisciplinarity and community service.

346 **Benmayor:** *And when you came do you feel that you were actually enacting the Vision?*

347 **Adler:** Oh, absolutely. So here's the thing. I want to talk about Service Learning because I had  
348 never heard the term before. As I said, I'd been doing it. I'd been applying issues that matter to me in the  
349 community. Taking the work I'd been doing with Kira on homelessness and health care issues, creating the  
350 art, the poetry and photography, then taking it into the community but not showing in fancy art galleries.  
351 We would take it to community centers. We would take it to universities. We would take it to churches and  
352 synagogues and City Hall. Somebody suggested City Hall. I remember then it went to the State Capitol  
353 Building in California. And then somebody there said, oh, let's take it to Nebraska and let's take it to  
354 Washington state and then let's take it to Arizona. And oh, let's take it to the Capitol Building in



355 Washington, D.C. and show it in the Capitol Building. So each step along the way somebody suggested this  
356 because they were responding to what we were doing in their own way, whoever it happened to be. But it  
357 showed me what could be done. So, when I came to campus, I think part of why I was hired was because of  
358 the work I was doing in the community. But as I say, I didn't have the Service Learning name. I didn't  
359 know that there was pedagogy around it. I was only doing it. But here's the thing. I started teaching Service  
360 Learning and I didn't know what I was doing, I really didn't in terms of, the readings that were necessary.  
361 So I studied hard and Marian helped me with that. Then there was a professor at MPC, Monterey Peninsula  
362 College, by the name of Carol Lesquade who was the Director of the EOS?

363 **Benmayor:** EOP?

364 **[49:25] Adler:** EOP, thank you. Equal Opportunity Program. And her particular focus was on single  
365 women with children who were on welfare and going to school. She had come to the Service Learning  
366 Program at CSUMB because she needed help. She wanted her students to be reflected honestly in the  
367 media. They were being misrepresented as – quote – “Welfare bombs, welfare moms.” And was it Seth by  
368 that time or was it still Marian? I think it was Seth. I think Seth Pollack, the Director of Service Learning  
369 after Marian. He had heard about my work and he knew Carol and he put the two of us together. I  
370 remember meeting with Seth and Carol at the Service Learning building, and Carol saying to me, “I want a  
371 book. I want a book about my students who are hardworking, dedicated moms, who are holding down part-  
372 time jobs, going to school, finding care for their children, all on no money at all, working long, long hours  
373 and being misrepresented in the press. I want a book that reflects them as who they are.” And so that was a  
374 terrific project. So we partnered with MPC. And the students in my class read a lot about history of welfare  
375 and the history of welfare reform. Now, welfare reform started in Wisconsin, where I had just come from. I  
376 remember being in La Crosse, Wisconsin, when students started coming into my office and saying that  
377 Tommy Thompson, who was the ...,

378 **Benmayor:** *Governor?*

379           **Adler:** . . . Governor of Wisconsin, was putting into practice this welfare reform. It was one of these  
380 things where they started in one state and they get it passed there and then they trickle it across the country.  
381 The students were very upset, of course. I was teaching in both English and in Women's Studies at La  
382 Crosse. So there were students in both departments coming to me. What had happened was that the Senate  
383 in Wisconsin was sending around Senators, three or four Senators, to meet at various communities to talk  
384 about this in order to get it through. And they were coming to La Crosse. So the students organized a  
385 protest. This is tangential to my work with Carol Lesquade. I remember that we had a hearing on our  
386 campus and you had to sign up to speak. I went to sign up to speak and I was 35<sup>th</sup> on the list because the  
387 first ten people were already on the list before they ever got here. The TV cameras come at the beginning of  
388 the hearing, and so all the people in favor of this are on the TV. It's such an eye opener. I was 35<sup>th</sup>. And I  
389 had 100 papers to grade so I didn't stay. I went home and I wrote a poem instead. I couldn't grade. I  
390 couldn't concentrate. So I wrote a poem instead. I came back to the hearing and I read the poem to the  
391 Senators. And I remember I didn't have a place and they called a guy's name who had left the hearing  
392 because he had papers to grade, and I answered to his name. And the Senator said to me, "And are you  
393 Tom whatever?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And I read the poem. Because, you know, they were duplicitous  
394 in setting it up, and I thought well, "You set the model." Anyway. So all this background to say that I knew  
395 from the ground up about welfare reform and how cruel it was. So I brought all this on the street experience  
396 to my work with Carol. My students, the HCOM students, they researched welfare reform, and then they  
397 interviewed the young women at MPC and wrote poems about these women's lives. We took photographs  
398 of the women and we made a book. MPC funded the book. They found \$5,000 to fund the publication of  
399 the book. The reason that was so exciting, well, first of all our students got published. So that was very  
400 exciting. They saw and learned so much from the young women. And the young women at MPC felt really  
401 respected that their stories were on paper. This is what they did with it. They took the book to the Trustees  
402 of the Community College system in Monterey and they used the book and they read their own poems

403 about them to the Board, to the Trustees. They asked for changes to what was being proposed by the  
404 County and they got it. They got them!

405 **Benmayor:** *Wow.*

406 **Adler:** Yeah! And they also took it to Sacramento, I think. That, to me, was such a substantive  
407 example of the work that we were doing. It was certainly very effective in terms of making happen what  
408 Carol wanted to make happen.

409 **[55:47] Benmayor:** *So in that sense it was enacting the Vision, was it not?*

410 **Adler:** Yeah. It was enacting the Vision. Yes.

411 **Benmayor:** *Were there other examples of how the Vision guided your work?*

412 **Adler:** I think it guided everything. I mean, the pieces I took out of the Vision, let's put it that way.  
413 I saw in the Vision part of myself reflected, and so whatever I designed was part of the Vision. It was  
414 circular.

415 **Benmayor:** *So at the time that you retired, that was about 15 years of working at the University?*

416 **Adler:** Yeah.

417 **Benmayor:** *What do you say about the Vision at that time? Or how have you seen the Vision being*  
418 *enacted or not?*

419 **Adler:** I'm heartsick about what's going on with the Vision *now*. [Sigh] When I first came to  
420 campus if you would take a picture of the diversity of the students then, and I think visually, when I think  
421 of my classes at that time, there was true diversity among the students. I can't speak to what it is today  
422 because I've been retired for three years. But when I left, my classes were not as diverse and my experience  
423 of the University's direction is away from where we started. I can remember talking with a recruitment  
424 person in Student Affairs, and they were recruiting from very white populations. Here would be an  
425 example. The communities along the ocean in Southern California, of sons and daughters who grew up  
426 there and wanted to stay near the beach but leave their parents, they were attracted to Monterey because it

427 was a beach university. It was located near the beach. That seems to be a marketing tool, which it is. But  
428 it's like a leading recruitment tool instead of the diversity issues, the commitment to social justice, that kind  
429 of thing. I think we believed, and I am speaking for myself and maybe people that I was close with in  
430 HCOM, believed that what we were doing could be a model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the CSU system with  
431 our focus on diversity, particularly. With California now more than 50% Hispanic, right? I mean I don't  
432 know what the statistics are but it's moving more and more in that direction. So if the state is going to be  
433 equipped for that kind of truly diverse population, here's a university that's filled with it and leading with  
434 it, and implementing and applying these kinds of issues to prepare our students to be leaders in this. Here it  
435 is! We offer it to you in the system. And we've worked out a lot of the bugs and this is what we're doing.  
436 And that hasn't happened. We have this expression more and more that we were being CSU'd. Implicit in  
437 that word is the word lassoed. You know, pulled back into the box. I have another story that I just  
438 remembered. When I first came to CSU Monterey Bay, it must have been two weeks after I came, and as  
439 exhausted as I was, I went to a poetry reading at UC Santa Cruz. I remember after the poetry reading I went  
440 back to one of the Vice President's house for a late dinner with the people who turned out to be some of the  
441 founding faculty at UC Santa Cruz. They were *so eager* to hear about what we were doing at CSUMB.  
442 They were all ears. They were pumping me with questions. They didn't know, just what they read in the  
443 papers and there wasn't that much. So they were pumping me and I was telling them and I was so excited.  
444 And it was all about the Vision. It was all about all of what we've talked about. There was such a longing  
445 in that room, and they said something to the effect of, "You remind me so much of how it was when we  
446 started UCSC." They said, "And watch out." I said, "What?" They said, "Watch out. Five years down the  
447 road they are going to put you back in the box." I said, "What are you talking about?" They said, "Well,  
448 after seven years, the university needs to get accredited and around year five they'll get very nervous that  
449 it's like 'Well, what you've been creating is all very nice. Now you've had your time to experiment but we  
450 need to get accredited and we need to get our stuff in order and no more of that. You just need to be like a

451 CSU.” And I’m motioning with my hands to pat you back into the box. So I really didn’t get what they  
452 were talking about, except it actually happened. That’s exactly what happened. Yeah.

453 **[pause in recording]**

454 **[102:30] Benmayor:** *Okay, Franny. Let’s pick up where we left off about an hour ago. I would like to ask*  
455 *you a little bit about the campus culture and issues of work and creativity. I was wondering if you could*  
456 *describe, and this may be a difficult one to answer, but if you could describe a typical day in your life as a*  
457 *faculty member at CSUMB? [Chuckles]*

458 **Adler:** Oh, my gosh. Okay.

459 **Benmayor:** *I mean I know you are far removed from it now but what do you remember?*

460 **Adler:** Right. What do I remember. Well, a typical day for me would begin with waking up and  
461 going to walk alongside the ocean. I would throw on my sweats and I would walk along the Asilomar  
462 Beach and along the waterfront for two and a half miles. I would see the otters and the whales and the  
463 egrets and the cormorants gaining flight with their wings lifting off into the wind. That was a gift to me and  
464 it saved my life. And then I’d go home and get dressed and go into work. But it was a gift because I would  
465 take *that* inside me through my very, very, very busy day. And it helped keep me calm. So, I would get into  
466 work and prepare for classes -- if I was lucky enough not to get early morning classes, because I’m not a  
467 morning person --, do any copying I needed to do, get the books together. I’d already prepared all this  
468 before but just last minute things, and I’d go in and teach my classes. Classes were not lecture model  
469 classes. They were, thank goodness, not lecture model classes because I never felt that that was an effective  
470 way to teach. So what they would be would be more conversation between myself and the students and  
471 between the students and each other and participatory kinds of classes like that. We would do writing  
472 exercises and we would share the work within the class. Many times they would have already looked at  
473 each other’s work before coming to class. They would send each other the poems or the stories online and  
474 people would comment on them in class after having read them before they came to class. And it was a

475 very productive way of teaching creative writing. The other thing that was really important within the  
476 Creative Writing and Social Action culture, talking about this first before the wire culture, is that breaking  
477 silence can be scary. So what I was teaching in addition to craft and commitment to advancing some action  
478 in the community from their writing, was also teaching courage. Modeling courage. Teaching courage. And  
479 that was *hard*. But what happened was when one student would break a really difficult silence and they  
480 wouldn't be struck dead by lightning, you know? It's like, "Oh, my gosh, I said that and I'm still here!"  
481 Other students took that in and saw that it was okay to do that. And what this kind of culture created was a  
482 feeling of intimacy in the classroom, of safety in the classroom. For example, I've had over the years  
483 several students come out as gay or lesbian within the class for the first time. Such admiration for the  
484 courage that goes into that! I've had students talk about how difficult it is in their Latina/Latino family to  
485 say, "I want to go to school, I don't want to work in the fields." And the wonderful parents, not all certainly,  
486 who would get behind them and support that. I remember one student who came to me and said, "My  
487 parents don't understand why I want to be in school. They want me to be working in the fields bringing in  
488 money. I can't explain that to them. I can't seem to get through to them with that. And I need support." So  
489 what she did is she got support from her friends. She got support from other students who were going  
490 through the same experience and didn't look to her parents for that. She realized finally that she wasn't  
491 going to get that. On the other hand, there were some parents that were all for that. But I often wondered as  
492 a parent how do you choose which of your children does go to school and which help the family advance  
493 and which stay in the field and what kind of family interactions decide that. So some students would write  
494 about that. It was rare for that kind of intimate writing to be done. But these are the kinds of issues. So  
495 teaching courage was a really big deal. And I would start it off by modeling the courage and sharing some  
496 of my work outside of the class as evidence of that. Then they would model for each other.

497 **[1:08:30] Benmayor:** *So outside the classroom you go back to your office? And then what happens?*

498           **Adler:** And then there's office hours and the students come in and talk to me about their writing  
499 issues, a lot of times about their personal issues. And some students don't show up and that makes me  
500 really irritated because I set the time aside, all of that. Then the culture within HCOM, you know, Rina, I  
501 learned so much from my colleagues. I never even heard the term Oral History before I came to HCOM. Or  
502 Ethical and Relational Communication as a study, you know? Or Diversity Studies in all of the many  
503 facets. I learned, like the students learned in the classroom, I learned from how we worked together as an  
504 interdisciplinary unit. I can remember so many times sitting around the table in Building 2, and we would  
505 be talking about a particular issue and each of us would bring to that issue our own particular discipline. I  
506 was in awe not all the time, we had our rough spots – but I was in awe of the way we thought through  
507 issues together as an interdisciplinary unit, never mind interdisciplinary unit, as a group of people bringing  
508 particular areas of expertise to the table. And I often thought, “Geez, they know so much that I don't know.  
509 And I know so much in my area that they don't know. And what a wealth of information to bring to an  
510 issue.” I often thought, “There's nothing we can't solve if we each bring our particular expertise to it.” Of  
511 course there were many issues we couldn't solve, but so many we did. I learned so much about how to  
512 think through a difficult decision and how to ask for help from people who have information that I don't.  
513 That is something that I never saw in any other university that I taught in. Granted, I had never taught  
514 anywhere before as a full time tenure track faculty, but as a part-time faculty I was probably not in on a lot  
515 of conversations but the way academia is siloed with each field is separate and each department is separate,  
516 so I think I was really lucky to teach in an interdisciplinary unit. And particularly with the people, the  
517 particular people... I just learned a lot.

518 **[1:50:01] Benmayor:** *And how about the campus culture outside of HCOM? Out the door. Out the*  
519 *building.*

520           **Adler:** Out the building. Okay, well. At the beginning I didn't know what was what. You know, I  
521 believed the Vision Statement was the Vision Statement. I believed we were brought there to do the work,

522 to invent a new way of having a university. And more and more, I saw how corporatized we became. I can  
523 remember reading or hearing someone say the “client.” The client. The student is the client. Not the client.  
524 The customer! That’s the word. And my mouth dropped open. You know, I’m a word person. If I hear the  
525 word customer instead of the word student. . . . Now granted this was in terms of promotion of the  
526 University, of recruiting, that kind of thing. It wasn’t in HCOM and maybe it wasn’t in the Senate. I never  
527 heard faculty talk like that. But I did hear the administration in many of its different departments talk about  
528 the customer and I was, quite frankly, appalled. So how does that affect...?

529 **Benmayor:** *How did that affect you in the things that you had to do on campus? You were on all*  
530 *those committees. You were working in the ULRs and with the Creative Expression ULR. So you were in*  
531 *touch with lots of different parts of the campus, were you not?*

532 **[1:13:50] Adler:** Yes. The Corporatization. I experienced that as ... speedup. Produce more with less but  
533 there are no more hours in the day. The classes got larger. The committees got a little less because we were  
534 more developed over time. So the classes got larger, there got to be more of them. The expectation that I  
535 took in, was produce more with less as the State budget was cut. You know, I remember at the end of the  
536 first year, a summer break, and I was so exhausted. You know, we have as faculty, we are lucky to have  
537 two and a half months off in the summer because we need to prepare, it’s really two months off -- for our  
538 own writing and for advancing our own learning. But I remember being so exhausted it took me a month to  
539 recuperate. I also remember planning to go on a vacation to somewhere where I could remember what  
540 Saturday felt like. I went to the rain forest in Puerto Rico, is where I went. Anyway, I won’t go into that  
541 whole thing but that’s what I needed. I couldn’t remember what leisure was. Then, okay, came August and  
542 I’m preparing for classes and so I wrote a poem. I was walking by Dell Felder’s office, the Provost at that  
543 time, and I remember the windows leaned out overlooking the grass area near the flagpole, and she leaned  
544 out through her window as I was walking by and she said, “Fran, Fran, I hear you wrote a poem about the  
545 University and I wonder if I could see it and if you would read it at the Welcome Back.” So I have to



546 interrupt the other story and tell you about this one because I did write a poem about the University, about  
547 first coming to the University and I was intrigued and elated about being at a university that used to be an  
548 army base. As a poet I wanted to write about that. So I thought I'm seeing what I'm seeing, but I don't  
549 know what I'm seeing. So I contacted Hank Hendrickson who was the Vice President for Physical  
550 Facilities, which means he was in charge of the buildings and the grounds and the chief guy there.  
551 However, he was also the [former] Commander of Fort Ord Military Base and I thought, "Perfect." So I  
552 emailed him and asked him and I said, "Hank, when you walk around the campus you see everything with  
553 four eyes. I see it with two. I would like to be able to see it through your eyes. Would you walk around the  
554 campus with me and tell me what was what, what used to be what?" [static interference] So he did that. He  
555 walked around the campus and he showed me what was what. And I wrote about it and that's the poem that  
556 Dell heard about. So I would like to read that poem if that's okay with you.

557 **[1:18:07]** So the poem is called "Possibility." And there's an epigraph:

558 *In 1991, Fort Ord, a military base in California for 80 years, is closed down.*

559 *In 1994, California State University Monterey Bay opens on its grounds.*

560 **"Possibility"**

561 Who would have thought it possible, to call the troops together  
562 in the mess hall one morning, Monterey fog not yet burned off,  
563 and say *we're closing down the base*

564  
565 Who would have thought it possible to load guns and missiles  
566 into crates, artillery onto trucks, cannons onto flatbed railroad cars  
567 to board up the windows of the barracks

568

569                   And the grass grew long and quickly took over the fields,  
570                   thousands of soldiers marching down Inter-Garrison road  
571                   dwindled down to twelve then none  
572  
573                   Who would have thought it possible to transform the chapel  
574                   that held the Panama coffin of Sergeant William Delaney Gibbs  
575                   into a music hall that swells with the sound of the poetry  
576                   of Sekou Sundiata and the sax of John Purcell  
577  
578                   Who would have thought it possible to turn a  
579                   blood bank *when we go to war we carry with us our own blood*  
580                   into an environmental research lab. And students,  
581                   after the microscopes and studies, marching  
582                   against strawberry blood laced with methyl bromide  
583  
584                   Who would have thought it possible to board up the soldiers'  
585                   club with its great oakwood bar and glass walls leaning the ocean  
586                   at Fort Ord, named after a general "famed as an Indian fighter"  
587  
588                   And, two years later, for Andrea Woody, a student  
589                   in the Institute of Community Memory, to dig down, to research,  
590                   to call her Cascade grandmother back to her, to hold her  
591                   photograph, her letters in her hands  
592

593                   Who would have thought it possible  
594                   to transform jeep and tank garages into public art studios  
595                   the radio transmitter station into state of the art computer tech  
596                   the artillery vault into an on-line library  
597                   the battalion headquarters into the president's office  
598  
599                   Who would have thought it possible  
600                   to transform a survival training station into a child care center  
601                   to turn parachutes into small sweaters hanging from hooks,  
602                   gas masks into little laughing shoving mouths at the water faucet

603  
604                   Who would have thought, in the unused rooms of the campus,  
605                   soldiers' beds would be piled, years and years of soldiers' beds,  
606                   mattresses still ticking with cigarette burns

607  
608                   Who would have thought  
609                   students would now walk back and forth with their books  
610                   past these boarded windows, and inside, the eyelids  
611                   of the war dead would open, flutter like hummingbirds

612  
613   **[1:21:35] Benmayor:** *Oh, so beautiful.*

614                   **Adler:** Thanks, Rina.

615                   **Benmayor:** *And you wrote that in, what, the second or third year of being there or first year?*

616                   **Adler:** I wrote it in the summer of 1995.

617 **Benmayor:** *No.*

618 **Adler:** Yeah. I did. I didn't write it within the school year because I had students.

619 **Benmayor:** *No, no. But it must have been '96 then.*

620 **Adler:** I'm sorry, I'm sorry, you're right. I came in '96 in August and I wrote this in the Summer of  
621 '97. That's right. That's right. At the end of my first year when I was on break and I had time to write and  
622 the mind to write and the space to write, that's when I wrote it. That's the poem that Dell Felder heard  
623 about.

624 **Benmayor:** *And so there's another part to the story but I also want to come back to it. So. Go*  
625 *ahead.*

626 **Adler:** So that's the poem that Dell Felder leaned out the window and asked me if I would read. I  
627 gave her the poem and she looked at it and she wanted me to read it and I said sure. And so the first day or  
628 the first week when the faculty got together for the University, I read that poem. However, I also read  
629 another poem that she didn't know about and this is the 'breaking the silence' part of what I do. She invited  
630 me to contribute to the University and then I invited her to hear what my experience was on behalf of my  
631 fellow colleagues, because I had heard similar stories from them. So this poem. . . I was a little nervous to  
632 read it because again, I was on tenure track. You know. I had learned to trust HCOM in the context of what  
633 I had learned about academia as a part-time faculty where I saw such ugly things at other universities not  
634 supporting their tenure-track faculty. It was like running through a gauntlet and that's not ever how it was  
635 at HCOM. Or at CSUMB. So I was a little nervous to read it but again this is the courage part. I really said,  
636 "Fuck it, I'm gonna read it." Is that okay to say? Yeah? [Chuckles] That's what I said.

637 **Benmayor:** *Yeah.* [1:24:10] **Adler:** Fuck it, I'm gonna read it. So I did. And this is what it is. It's  
638 titled "*All My Relations.*" And there's a dedication.

639

640 *For my colleagues returning from vacation.*

641                   And the night before returning how was your heart  
642                   as you leaned over the sink, washed your face or later,  
643                   turned down the lamp, did some sense of dread rise  
644                   in you remembering the electronic mailbox weighted  
645                   with messages and more coming in even as you  
646                   answer, the nights leaving your desk long after dark,  
647                   the clank of the door and you look up, surprised by the moon,  
648                   not that it's that late but that it isn't on a screen,  
649                   doing twelve things at once and the bite in your gut  
650                   of no sense of completion, that round thing,  
651                   remembering the student's face darkening when you  
652                   turn her away, run to committee meetings, the ache  
653                   in your chest to put students first, isn't that why we're here,  
654                   the yearning for just plain time to think,  
655                   remembering waking at night, your head tangled  
656                   with meetings, phone calls to make, who said what, what  
657                   you said, what you'll say, and you get up, find a pen, unload  
658                   these lists and still you can't sleep,  
659                   remembering your neck in a knot sitting too long  
660                   at the computer, salads day after day eaten at your desk,  
661                   working through lunch, through dinner, remembering  
662                   some wonderful thing someone said at a meeting, wanting  
663                   to know them better, each of you saying so and it doesn't happen,  
664                   the ache to have a life.

665

666                   and me? I think of my grandmother, bessie sitting on a low chair  
667                   with her legs apart her elbows out her hands on her thighs  
668                   her stockings rolled down below her knees *I vorked tvelf*  
669                   *sometimes sewenteen hours a day in de shop sorting buttons,*  
670                   she would say in thick yiddish-english, switching her v's and her w's,  
671                   *vot a life,* and she would nod her head, shake her finger and say,  
672                   *but you, you, francela, you vill go to college, you vill not do such a ting,*  
673                   And here I am doing such a thing.

674

675                   I know you came here with a dream in your hand,  
676                   I, too, came with a dream     it had a round shape  
677                   it walked with a spring in its step, it laughed easily  
678                   all my relations would be here and you are  
679                   you are the place I dreamed, the workplace love of my life  
680                   I cry for the tangle we are making.  
681                   *bessie would say, don't tell dem I told you,*  
682                   *but dey're giwing it to you, too few vorkers on de line.*

683

684     **[1:27:44] Benmayor:** *I love that poem.*

685                   **Adler:** I still choke up when I read it.

686                   **Benmayor:** *I know. What was the reaction of people when you did read it?*

687                   **Adler:** I got a standing ovation.

688                   **Benmayor:** *Ah.*

689           **Adler:** It's probably the only time I've ever gotten a standing ovation for reading a poem. I think I  
690 caught some of what we were upset about. Yeah. And *that's* what I mean by corporatization. I remember  
691 when Ronald Reagan was President in the '80's. He led this drive for businesses to fire people. They called  
692 it the lean, the mean. "Make it lean, be mean" kind of thing. Cut out the fluff. So what the result – this is  
693 my interpretation of it – the result was that there was half the workforce of a corporation and no new hires.  
694 People were doing the job of two people. *And* they wouldn't complain because they might be next. It was  
695 like lining up a few people in a village and shooting half of them, --and that's a little extreme but--, it's the  
696 modeling, you can get fired if you don't go along. So people didn't speak up. That was the corporate model  
697 then and I felt that we were being asked to carry too big a workload for the number of people that we were.  
698 And we didn't speak up. Not, I don't think, because of being fired. But because we loved the job. I wouldn't  
699 want to work anywhere else. This *was* the dream job for me. And I just worked like a dog.

700           **Benmayor:** *And I think that the –*

701           **Adler:** Dogs don't work that hard.

702           **Benmayor:** [chuckles] *Dogs don't work. They sleep.*

703           **Adler:** Right, right.

704           **Benmayor:** *But I think that was true for the faculty across the board. And the administrators also*  
705 *worked very long hours, too.*

706           **Adler:** Very long hours, yeah.

707           **Benmayor:** *But they had other agendas and other pressures and it was in the middle of budget*  
708 *cuts, also..*

709           **Adler:** Yes. So what are you supposed to do, right?

710           **Benmayor:** *Well, '97 wasn't budget cuts. We were still, at that early stage, we were still flush.*

711           **Adler:** I know we were flush. I remember walking into the conference room the first day and  
712 looking at those chairs and saying, "How could they afford those chairs?" Apparently they were taken

713 from the President's conference room. Somebody scored some great chairs. I was, you know, as somebody  
714 coming from San Diego State where you had little chairs like the ones we're sitting on.

715 **[1:31:05] Benmayor:** *And in those early days I remember that we were working very hard but there was*  
716 *still that sense of building and creating.*

717 **Adler:** Yes.

718 **Benmayor:** *So the balance between drudgery and creativity was there.*

719 **Adler:** Right. Yes.

720 **Benmayor:** *That's how I remember it at any rate.*

721 **Adler:** Yes, exactly. There's no way that I would have left. Ever. You know, my grandmother  
722 worked, as she said, "Seventeen hours a day" but she had to, to put food on the table. I could, I suppose,  
723 get another job, maybe wouldn't be as happy because it wouldn't be the kind of teaching that I wanted to  
724 do, so there was no way I was gonna leave. So I worked liked we all did, crazy hours. I remember a guy  
725 that I was dating at that time. He said, "Fran, do you have time for a relationship?"

726 **Benmayor:** [Chuckles] *There must have been some feeling of satisfaction as well as the feeling of*  
727 *being drained.*

728 **Adler:** Yeah.

729 **Benmayor:** *So where was that satisfaction lodged? What was the source of that satisfaction?*

730 **[1:32:15] Adler:** Okay, first of all I'll respond to the poems. I was so pleased that I was able to find the  
731 words for those two poems. They meant a lot to me. They still mean a lot to me. I was really surprised  
732 when I choked up when I read that last poem. Where does the satisfaction come from? The students. Oh,  
733 my gosh. Such great students! So committed. And smart. In ways that I'd never seen before. You know, for  
734 example, many of our – particularly Latina students --, how they collaborate! They do it! They just do it!  
735 I've overheard conversations of people saying, "Some of them are not prepared." So maybe in language  
736 skills. They certainly speak – many, many, most – much better English than I speak Spanish. So they have



737 skills to bring to their colleagues in the classroom that most of our students don't have a clue about.  
738 Collaboration. Compassion. Service to the community. Those are gold. You know? It's part of who they  
739 are. It's their fingerprint. So I learned so much from them and of course many of the students brought skills  
740 to the classroom that helped me model what I was trying to teach. That kind of satisfaction was amazing.  
741 And then there are students who came into the classroom and took a basic Creative Writing class because it  
742 seemed to them easier than some other art class. Didn't like poetry. Didn't like to read. And suddenly they  
743 read a poem by Martin Espada or Patricia Smith, who is a wonderful African American slam poet. And  
744 Martin is a brilliant lawyer turned poet teaching at Amherst with a booming voice. He's like six foot four  
745 and he's got this booming voice. And so much charisma. And so much to say. They would read their poems  
746 and then they'd say, "I didn't know poetry could be like this." "I didn't know I could write about my life."  
747 And that's where the satisfaction comes from. Then I started hearing from my colleagues that what they're  
748 learning in the Creative Writing and Social Action class is spilling over into their other classes, their  
749 Critical Writing classes and helping them read more and write better. That's the satisfaction. Yeah. And the  
750 satisfaction of building the Creative Writing and Social Action Program with the faculty that we hired.  
751 Diana Garcia, award winning poet. By the way, you know her book has gone into reprint after reprint after  
752 reprint. She has this wonderful collection of poems about her life growing up working in the fields and her  
753 family, you know, living in Merced. It's an award winning book. It won the national poetry American Book  
754 Award. And she brought so much to the program because of her lived experience and her skill with  
755 students. Then we hired Debra Busman who was an activist *in utero*. Her mother was a union organizer  
756 and, when she was pregnant with Deb, used to bring her to marches. Deb brought particular skills as well.  
757 She is a fiction writer and who recently had her book published. She's on the road now and giving readings.  
758 But she brought a particular skill. She had years of experience with the National Coalition Building  
759 Institute. She brought the skill of how to have people talk to each other in a classroom. They learned that in  
760 Josina Makau's class and Debra Marty's class as well. And many other classes. But Deb brought it to

761 Creative Writing and Social Action and she has a particular skill that she modeled that many of our  
762 graduates are now out there in the world teaching that -- to yet again another generation. So it's very, very  
763 exciting to have worked with both of them. We were constantly frustrated by the fact that the poems and  
764 stories that we wanted to teach, that we used in the classroom, that repeatedly semester after semester  
765 successfully inspired our students to write. . . . We would bring together pieces of writing in a kind of  
766 piecemeal way and use them as models to students. I'll say the 50 pieces of writing we would bring  
767 together there were, say, 20 that would repeatedly inspire students, semester after semester. And we kept  
768 saying, "We need a book. We need a book. We need to be able to take these reliable inspiring pieces and  
769 put them in a book." Eventually we did that. We got a grant from the University to write a proposal to  
770 develop it. It took us six years because none of us wanted to give up our summers to do that because that's  
771 the only time we had to produce creative writing of our own, and during the school year it was exhausting  
772 work so who wanted to go back into their brain with a couple of hours at night to recoup to work again on  
773 the anthology. So it took us six years.

774 **Benmayor:** *What year did it get published?*

775 **[1:39:31] Adler:** 2009. It was published by University of Arizona Press which is a very wonderful press.  
776 And it was called *Fire and Ink: An Anthology of Social Action Writing* and it won an award. It won the  
777 Forward Book of the Year Award for Anthologies. And it's still selling these many years later and it's  
778 being used in classrooms. That's where it's mostly being used.

779 **Benmayor:** *Wonderful.*

780 **Adler:** So that's great because it gets ordered again and again and of course the publisher likes that  
781 very much. The one drawback was that University of Arizona Press said, "We want to publish the book,  
782 we will publish the book but we will not do two things. We will not pay for the rights to each of these  
783 pieces. And we will not be the ones to go after the permission." Because they'd done one anthology before

784 and they said, “Never again,” that part of it. They loved the anthology but not that. We found out the hard  
785 way how hard that is because there were 100 writers in the book. And we went after big names.

786 **Benmayor:** *Did you have Adrienne Rich?*

787 **Adler:** We had Adrienne Rich. We had Toni Morrison. We had June Jordan. We had Martín  
788 Espada. I mean just on and on with – I wish I had it in front of me.

789 **Benmayor:** *Naomi Shihab Nye?*

790 **Adler:** Yes, Naomi Shihab Nye. And Marilyn Chin.

791 **Benmayor:** *100 people.*

792 **[1:41:30] Adler:** A hundred people. If we wanted to do it more economically and not have a lot of  
793 expenses for permissions we would have put out a call for unpublished material. But we wanted the writing  
794 by the writers who had inspired the students. Patricia Smith’s poem, for example, called *Norma*, about one  
795 of her students in one of her classes, that inspired so much writing among the young African American  
796 students in our classes. Martin Espada’s poem, *Imagine the Angels of Bread*. That repeatedly semester  
797 after semester inspired writing. His other poem, *Federico’s Ghost* about pesticides being sprayed over  
798 workers in the fields, these are the pieces. So, it ended up costing us a fortune. We had to do it from our  
799 own pocket. We didn’t have time to write a grant and it was deadline time and it was a lot. Biggo.  
800 Thousands of dollars, which we paid out of our own pockets. And we did it! It was an act of love. We  
801 wanted the book out there. It’s being used. That was social action, hard-ass social action, right? So I’m very  
802 grateful that it’s out there in the community. And the other piece that I’m happy I was able to write was a  
803 piece about starting the program, that’s in *Social Justice* that Cecilia O’Leary and her husband, Tony Platt  
804 published. That talks about the founding of the Creative Writing and Social Action Program. So I feel that  
805 the program is strong and solid and very much an integral part of the HCOM department.

806 **Benmayor:** *And that was down to you? You started it.*

807           **Adler:** I started it. I'm having thoughts that are coming up now about my worries and concerns  
808 about the Program not going forward. In terms of money. In terms of cutbacks. I'm worried about that. But  
809 I feel that Deb Busman, particularly, and Diana are staunchly behind it and very capable of defending it.  
810 However, I am concerned. It's not Reading, Writing, Arithmetic.

811           **Benmayor:** *It is a concern. It is a concern and I think that the University is growing and there's a*  
812 *lot more competing demands on lines and we're not any longer in control of our lines. That's the big issue.*

813           **Adler:** I know, I know. Yeah.

814           **Benmayor:** *We can't replace people that we lose. Yeah. But hopefully the program will be so*  
815 *strong that it will survive.*

816           **Adler:** That is my hope.

817           **Benmayor:** *I want to take you back to the earlier days and on a happier note.*

818           **Adler:** Okay.

819           **Benmayor:** *The Writers Series that you started in the first year. Remember that?*

820           **[1:45:45] Adler:** Oh, yes, yes. Oh, I do. Oh, I do. That's a funny story, Rina. I can remember sitting in  
821 Building 18. I had just been hired. I was sitting in your office. I don't know, maybe I was there three or  
822 four days into the semester and you said, "Fran." I don't think you were calling me Franny yet. But, "Fran, I  
823 know, let's start a Writers' Series." I said, "Good idea, Rina, let's do it!" I said, "Is there money?" "Yeah,  
824 we'll find money to bring in writers and poets and fiction writers." It couldn't have been three or four days  
825 into the semester because I would not have been worried about this. Okay, so I said, "How often?" It  
826 must have been a couple of months because I was already working all the time. I said, "How often?" You  
827 said, "Once a month."

828           **Benmayor:** [Laughs]

829           **Adler:** Okay, so you're the Chair. I'm the new hire. You say once a month. I say okay and take a  
830 deep breath because I know what goes into organizing that and promoting it and getting people in the seats.

831 I know the amount of work that goes into it. So I do it like a crazy person. We brought in -- my memory for  
832 names! I'm so upset about it.

833 **Benmayor:** *Lorna Dee Cervantes.*

834 **Adler:** Thank you. Lorna Dee Cervantes was the first one. And I remember that she came at the  
835 time that Cecilia's husband died.

836 **Benmayor:** *Tony.*

837 **Adler:** Yeah. Cecilia Burciaga's husband died and she dedicated the reading to him. And then we  
838 brought in our new poet laureate.

839 **Benmayor:** *Juan Felipe Herrera.*

840 **Adler:** Juan Felipe Herrera. And we brought in ....

841 **Benmayor:** *Aurora Levins Morales.*

842 **Adler:** That's right.

843 **Benmayor:** *And we had Alberto Ledesma who was on the campus -- he was a colleague.*

844 **Adler:** Yes, yes. We brought him.

845 **Benmayor:** *And you brought Sekou Sundiata.*

846 **Adler:** Not that year. That was the following year.

847 **Benmayor:** *Oh. Okay.*

848 **Adler:** Because by the following year I said, "Once a semester. Not once a month." [Laughs]

849 **Benmayor:** [Laughs]

850 **[1:48:25] Adler:** So we brought Adrienne Rich in September of 1997. We brought Sekou Sundiata in  
851 February of 1998. That reading with Adrienne was amazing! There were a thousand people there in the  
852 University Center that only seats 600. And they were sitting on the floor. They were standing in the back  
853 and out the door. It was just amazing. Then the students had private time with her over lunch.

854           **Benmayor:** *And that model actually became replicated years later when Renee Curry, who was the*  
855 *Dean, resuscitated the Presidents Lecture Series and brought in writers. Those writers would have sessions*  
856 *with students.*

857           **Adler:** Right.

858           **Benmayor:** *So it was your model.*

859           **Adler:** I hadn't realized that. I knew about the series but I didn't know that it was replicated. Oh,  
860 and then dinner with the faculty. Lunch with the students. Dinner with the faculty. And then the reading.

861           **Benmayor:** *It was the same model.*

862           **Adler:** Wow.

863           **Benmayor:** *Yeah. Yeah.*

864           **Adler:** It was very special for the students to be with her. How are we doing for time? Ooh. I'm  
865 going to have to go.

866           **Benmayor:** Okay, so we'll wrap up now. I think we've covered a lot of things, Fran. And we do  
867 have a sense of the legacy of the Creative Writing Social Action Program. Maybe a few words about when  
868 you decided to retire and why you decided to retire.

869           **Adler:** Well, it's a personal story. My kids live in Portland, Oregon and they called me and asked  
870 me if I would consider moving to Portland. I was stunned. They said they wanted a grandma. No, they  
871 wanted a "Bubbe" living nearby. It wasn't that they wanted a babysitter. They wanted a Bubbe nearby for  
872 the kids.

873           **Benmayor:** *Bubbe is...?*

874 **[1:50:50] Adler:** Grandma. Yiddish for grandma. My daughter-in-law, Molly had had a grandmother  
875 whom she had a very deep relationship with. She was lucky enough to have that, and she wanted that for  
876 the kids. My son was very happy to have me here. So I saw that as such a gift of love, that request, that I  
877 said, "Well, I'm not ready to retire. I can't afford to retire, I'm not ready to retire. But if I can find a way to

878 come to Portland and continue to teach, then maybe.” So I went to the Dean, Renée Curry was the Dean,  
879 and I said, “You know, Renee, you’ve been talking about developing more online classes and I’ve been  
880 resisting with Creative Writing because I made case that in Creative Writing and Social Action, you need to  
881 be developing a safe environment. You need to model courage. And it’s hard to do that online.” Besides, I  
882 didn’t want to be on the computer anymore than I had been. So I said, “But now I’m proposing it.” She  
883 said, “Sounds good. Let’s do it.” So I did the Faculty Early Retirement Program which is where you retire  
884 and you teach one semester full time and then you’re off one semester. But I had never taught online.  
885 So I wasn’t about to move to Portland before I knew how to do it. So I spent that summer learning. Troy  
886 Challenger and Erin Justice, a graduating student in Technology, the two of them spent all of June teaching  
887 me how to teach online. It was hard because – for them it was hard because I don’t lecture. You can’t just  
888 take my class and stick it up online. All the experiential exercises that I did. . . like there was an exercise  
889 that I have where I give out post cards and I tell the students to describe what they see, not tell a story but  
890 describe it in minute detail. Then they stop after, I don’t know, ten minutes and then I say, “Okay, trade  
891 your description with somebody else.” Then I say, “Take out a new piece of paper, and I say, “Draw what  
892 your partner described.” And of course it’s very difficult. They say, “Oh, I’m not an artist. I’m not an  
893 artist.” But it doesn’t matter. I say, “Use stick figures but just draw.” And so of course they can’t do it  
894 usually very well because the description is missing something. And we talk about that process. And I say,  
895 “Where did it get hard to draw?” And they realize what’s missing is the description, and this is a very  
896 effective writing exercise. Go translate that into an online experience! Well, Troy and Erin figured it out.

897 **Benmayor:** *How did they?*

898 **Adler:** They scanned some of the photos. They put them up online. They found, I think it was  
899 “artpad.com,” where you can draw online. And we made it happen. So we spent a month, them teaching me  
900 and me giving them the opportunity to be completely challenged by this. Then I spent all of July teaching  
901 one class in order to learn the model of how to teach Creative Writing and Social Action online. Then I

902 moved to Portland and taught for four more years online from Portland. It worked out very well. I must say  
903 that I personally prefer in-classroom teaching, but empirically does the writing gain as much? If I look at  
904 the writing at the beginning of the semester and I look at the writing at the end of the semester I would say  
905 there's an equal amount of learning that goes on in the classroom as compared with online. The writing gets  
906 stronger, much, much stronger. They learn. Now what do they miss? The social interaction, I think. That's  
907 the choice that you make when you take an online class. So that's why I decided I could retire. I wasn't yet  
908 ready, economically. But five years later I was ready. And it was great. I really enjoyed it. I miss the  
909 University. I miss my colleagues. I miss my friends. I miss the ocean and the cormorants. And the deer that  
910 used to walk down my street. However, I do not miss the workload!

911 **Benmayor:** *[Chuckles]*

912 **Adler:** I need time to think about what I teach while I'm teaching it. I need time to process as a  
913 human being and I enjoy moving at a human pace. I am very, very busy with my own work right now. And  
914 I am enjoying being able to work at a human pace, talk at a human pace, and know that I don't have 4,000  
915 things – that's exaggerating -- to do. I like doing one thing at a time. I like completing it and moving on to  
916 the next one. I don't like carrying 14 balls at the same time. The pressure to do more even when I'm doing  
917 14. So I don't miss the workload.

918 **Benmayor:** Would you do it again if you ...?

919 **[1:57:11] Adler:** In a minute. It's a good question, Rina, because I loved teaching at CSUMB. I am so  
920 grateful that I had the opportunity to be a part of that.

921 **Benmayor:** *Especially at the beginning. To be a part of it at the beginning.*

922 **Adler:** Oh, my gosh. To co-create a vision of teaching that's respectful of students, compassionate  
923 with students, that regards students as our teachers as well learners, to collaborate with colleagues in  
924 different disciplines, to be equally committed to social action and social justice. To see the results semester  
925 after semester, graduate after graduate, is a gift.



926 **Benmayor:** *I think we should stop there, Franny.*

927 **Adler:** Yeah, yeah.

928 **Benmayor:** *You're tearing up and I'm tearing up.*

929 **Adler:** I know! And here's the thing, Rina. I didn't think I would remember enough to speak about.  
930 Not forgetting memories but just I really am having trouble with people's names, I've got to admit that. But  
931 you know what? I've always had trouble with people's names.

932 **Benmayor:** *Yeah, you're not around the University. They're not names that you're hearing every*  
933 *day.*

934 **Adler:** But I didn't think I'd have enough stories to tell. So thank you for your interviewing skills  
935 because you brought up a lot of material that was right there.

936 **Benmayor:** *And thank you for being a part of this project because it's really tremendous. I feel*  
937 *that in some ways this project is a continuation of the comradeship that we established in the very first*  
938 *years.*

939 **Adler:** Right.

940 **Benmayor:** *It's taking us back to those moments where we were really excited. So, to be able to*  
941 *record our memories and to leave a record I think is extremely important.*

942 **Adler:** To leave a record. There is a piece of hope that down the road some of what we lost,  
943 somebody will hear this and say, "You know what? They were doing that then. They were doing that then."  
944 Of course we should be doing this. They had the roadmap. They, we had the roadmap.'

945 **Benmayor:** Let it be so.

946 **Adler:** Let it be so. Okay, good.

947 **Benmayor:** *All right. We're ending the interview. Thank you, Franny.*

948 **Adler:** Thank you, Rina.

949 (END OF RECORDING)