

# UC Santa Cruz

## Out in the Redwoods

### Title

William Shipley: Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

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## WILLIAM SHIPLEY



**Interviewer, Irene Reti:** *William Shipley was interviewed on September 25, 2001 at his home in the Santa Cruz Mountains. At age eighty, he was the oldest person interviewed for the Out in the Redwoods project, and his experience of gay life extends back to the 1930s. Shipley was a professor of linguistics at UCSC from 1966 to 1991. He was a student of Alfred Kroeber's at UC Berkeley and is well known for his pioneering work with the Mountain Maidu Indians of California.*

**Reti:** Bill, let's start by talking about your early background. Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

**Shipley:** I was born to a couple of teenage parents in southwestern Oklahoma in 1921. They had run off and gotten married, secretly, and when they turned up with an infant,



they decided to just get rid of me. I was born in a town called Lawton, which is in southwestern Oklahoma. It was one of those towns that you see in movies about the early twentieth century, where the bank robbers are. They left me there about three o'clock in the morning on a December night, when I was three weeks old. I was found the next morning by the town constable, and taken to Frank Shipley, who was the president of the bank in this tiny town. He and his wife decided to adopt me. I grew up in Lawton. My adolescent years were spent in Oklahoma City. When FDR became president in 1933, my dad, who was a loyal Democrat, got a job in Oklahoma City, which is the big place in Oklahoma. So we moved up there and my adolescence was there, which was probably a good idea.

My mother died when I was eleven years old, and my father, who was a very gentle and kind man, but very old-fashioned, had the notion that he had to have a woman in the house. The idea that a household could exist without a wife/mother figure was just not something he could deal with. So he asked his first cousin's husband's sister to come and live with us. Her name was Mrs. Rankin. I was about twelve years old. That was a disaster for me. Being gay in the 1930s, there was zero information, zero anybody to talk to. It was like you had some incredible state or sickness that you didn't understand at all. There was nobody to ask. I went through the public library in Oklahoma City looking for information and couldn't find any. So I was already having the usual difficulties that gay kids have when they first try to figure it out.

**Reti:** You were in your teens when you first became aware that you had these feelings?

**Shipley:** Oh, I was clearly aware of all this just about the time I hit puberty, because it became apparent to me that the other guys were all getting interested in girls, and they didn't interest me at all. What was this? Why did I find looking at these good-looking guys much... Why did I want to do that? There was nobody to talk to. It was unbelievably dead when it came to any kind of information at all about anything, which in a way was a kind of an advantage, because at least when I was in high school there was nobody yelling *faggot* or anything like that. They didn't even know there was such a



thing as gay people, so there was no problem. And I wasn't effeminate or anything like that, so I could just slide along.

I had started in the second grade in school when I was five years old, so I graduated from high school when I was sixteen. Quite apart from any of the gay stuff, Mrs. Rankin was a very difficult person for me to cope with, because she was from Georgia and wanted to teach me how to be a Southern gentleman. My dad was a banker, so we lived well, but it was Oklahoma, which was not the world's fashion center or anything. But she made lots of difficulties for me, which I probably could have coped with better if I hadn't also been trying to deal with this big-time life problem. So when I was sixteen and out of high school, I first tried to get my dad to get her to go away. He couldn't bring himself to do that, because it was not gentlemanly. So I finally arranged with my dad's sister and her husband in Utah to let me come and stay with them.

**Reti:** Had you told anybody in your family about your sexuality?

**Shipley:** No. Nobody at all. I was desperately in love with another boy in the school, who was funny and charming and good-looking and cute—and straight as an arrow. And he liked me a lot, because I was pretty smart, and fun to be with. But it was driving me crazy, of course. The usual thing, no touchy! [laughter] But I found no other gay guys.

Well, that's not quite true. One night just after my mother died, my dad and I went to a dinner party at the house of one of the local bankers in Oklahoma City. They had a son who was unfortunately not very good-looking, but he got me upstairs and seduced me. We were thirteen, fourteen, something like that. But that was no fun, because I didn't like him. I think that was the only thing that happened to me that involved somebody else who was also gay. I remember my father tried to get me to be more friendly with this kid because of the connections to his father. I must have already figured something out, because I clearly remember saying to my father, "I don't want to stay around with him, Dad, because he is homosexual." So I learnt that word somewhere, but I can't remember how. I must have found some book in the public library. My dad asked, "What's that?" I



said, “Well, I think that’s boys who like other boys sexually.” He said, “I’ve never heard of that.” He didn’t even know there was such a thing. In a way that was nice, because that meant no one was hollering *faggot*. No one was picking on anybody. There was none of that in my high school. But on the other hand, it made finding out what the hell was going on virtually impossible for kids who were gay, because there was no place to get any information. There was nobody to consult. What’s going on with me? One book I found when I was a teenager was Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*. I found that. That helped some because at least I found that women had these feelings.

So I went off to Utah for a year to live with my aunt and her husband. It was a delightful and also dreadful year. My aunt’s husband was a munitions expert at an ordnance depot just outside Ogden, Utah, and that’s where we stayed. It was a kind of small military post that had a few officers. No enlisted men, because it was mainly a place to store shells. But the commanding officer, who was a colonel, had a son, Bob, and the son was great! So another relationship got started. This time it paid off because we had a kind of a real affair. He was very charming. But he was, like most [gay] kids in those days, conflicted and disturbed. It’s easy to see why. It’s why everybody later thought it was some kind of disease. It was the society which was producing the problem. If somebody had just said to us—that’s just the way the genes are, don’t worry, just forget it—it would have been an enormous relief. But nobody with an authoritative voice said that at all, or anything about it.

So Bob and I were handling a similar problem but in somewhat different ways. I was already out of high school. I was taking some courses in the local junior college. But he was still in high school. He was very popular, because he was charming and fun, and in those days faggots were unknown. Nobody did stuff like that. He tried to brush me off, finally, after a few months. I remember going at night and standing outside his window. He was upstairs. Doing that lovelorn stuff. But we did get that affair a little bit back on the road later on.

I went home again the next summer. My dad had gotten rid of Mrs. Rankin. But he’d also lost his job. He was in desperate circumstances. So I went down to visit a friend and



her family who wanted to go to California, but none of them had ever learned to drive. I said, "If you'll take me along and feed me, I'll drive." We set out for California. I remember driving on Highway 66 until we came to Santa Monica by the Pacific Ocean. This was before the war, 1938.

I decided to go back to Ogden. I took [my friend's brother], Robbie, with me. He wanted to get out of there. He was another handsome, big, wonderful kid who was straight as an arrow. We lived for a year, the two of us in a room. That drove me crazy. Man, it was awful. I never did anything about it.

After that year, I went back down to Los Angeles. Robbie and I were driving through Oxnard when it came over the radio that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. So of course, Robbie and I both raced down to the marines recruiting station. I was nineteen and he was about seventeen. He got in instantly. He was this big, strapping kid. But I was very near-sighted. The marines were very picky. They didn't take any near-sighted guys. So they wouldn't take me. Thank God. He ended up on Guadalcanal, and went through the whole Guadalcanal campaign and didn't get a scratch physically.

I tried to get into the navy and they wouldn't take me. During the year of 1942, I got a job in Los Angeles. Then I decided to go back to Oklahoma City and work at another job for awhile. At the end of November of that year, I finally went ahead and enlisted in the army. I don't know why my draft number never came up. I just joined up. During all that time, nothing else happened that was particularly related to my being gay.

I got sent to the infantry down in Texas. As soon as I got there, it turned out that they didn't have any company clerks. So only about two weeks after I got there they made me a company clerk, which meant that I became a corporal almost instantly. I didn't have to do anything but sit around the office and type.

A couple of months later, they took all the guys with high IQs and gave them this aptitude test. They pulled me out of there and sent me to what was called the Star Unit at Stillwater, Oklahoma. There they sorted everybody out by giving us more aptitude tests,



and I ended up in Berkeley in a situation where we were to study the Chinese language and the history and geography of the Far East. We were to be sent as interpreters to the American forces in Chungking, where the government was at that time, because the Japanese had driven them inland.

We lived in a fraternity house, thirty-seven guys, half of us learning Chinese, and half Japanese. There are some poignant little things about that. First of all, there was a kid there, whom I instantly fell in love with, and we became best friends. He's still alive. He was also straight. He lives down in San Diego. He's retired. I got along fine with everybody in that situation. It was a wonderful year. We spent a whole year there right in the middle of the war, studying Chinese.

**Reti:** Was that the beginning of your interest in linguistics?

**Shipley:** Sort of. Although what really got me started was back in the ninth grade when I took Latin.

Since we are talking about the vicissitudes of being homosexual, there is a little story that I must tell you. One of the guys of these thirty-seven was very effeminate. Nowadays, it's hard to imagine what the situation was like. Nobody was out. Nobody went around cross-dressing or doing that stuff, or just being out. There wasn't any of that! Well, this kid was a very willowy, unattractive-looking, obviously very gay guy. He was so different from everybody else. He just couldn't relate to the rest of the group. He did relate to me, and he fell in love with me. I felt an enormous amount of empathy and sadness for him. The rest of us would go out and drink beer, go to San Francisco to the bars, and have the kind of fun that soldiers had, always in a bunch. He never did any of that. He'd stay in the fraternity house and walk around up on the third floor, all by himself, singing songs from *Oklahoma!* which was the big show of the time. I spent a lot of time with him because I had great compassion for his plight. I have love letters that he wrote later on, extensively. That was very sad. He was so totally trapped by the cultural situation. I have been in touch with him all the rest of his life. I got a letter from him last Christmas. He lives in Chicago and has an apartment on Lakeshore Drive, so he must



have done pretty well financially. He's still writing me letters and cards, always signed "love," after all these years.

**Reti:** Was he ever able to come out and have relationships with men?

**Shipley:** I imagine he came out at some point, but if he had any kind of a functional relationship with another guy, he never mentioned it to me, and there's no reason why he wouldn't. He used to come out to Berkeley when he had a vacation from his job, and visit. Even after I was married, he'd come and see us. But I wrote him a card last Christmas, and he was always very good about answering, and I haven't heard from him. There's nobody there who would tell me. He was up in his eighties. I'll be eighty in a couple of months. He was a few years older than me. The last thing he wrote was pretty valiant. He was saying, "The doctors are crazy," I knew that he was very bad off. I'm afraid he's dead. But I don't know how to find out, because I don't know anybody out there to write to.

That was going on. Meanwhile, I was mooning over a guy who was straight. We were great friends. People buddy up in the army, and we were really great buddies, but of course he was straight. So again, [laughter] I finally came out to him. We agreed we'd come back to Berkeley together and go to school. So we did. And he got out before I did, because he fought his way all the way across Europe. You know, that big push to get to Berlin and all that.

Well, what happened to me was that they shipped us all back. They didn't send us to China, didn't use us as interpreters, just sent us back to the infantry. Apparently the army just lost track of what they were doing. And it was even more ludicrous, because I was a sergeant. We were all floating around. About half the guys that had been there had been sent to Camp Cook near Lompoc, California. We were just hanging out because we didn't fit into the table of organization.

I was working in the battalion office because I could type, and a circular came in from the army saying, we are desperately in need of interpreters, for someone to go to China





and be with the American forces in China. I went to the personnel officer and said, "Sir, look at this. There are a whole bunch of guys in this regiment who can do this." "Oh yes, Shipley. Yes, I'll do that." He never did it. I reminded him three or four times, and he never did it. So finally I wrote a letter myself (and this is death in the army), to the Adjutant General's office in Washington, and explained that there were these guys there. Well, what they did next was, first there were orders ordering me, but nobody else to go to China as an interpreter, but they ignored the other guys. Then the other thing that came through was a letter to the battalion commander saying, "How is it that you let this man write letters to Washington?" So they broke me from a sergeant and put me down to a private on KP, and sent me out to Fort Ord, as a replacement. I was there for a long time.

I found out that the orders had been cancelled to China because I was no longer a sergeant. I had become a regular infantry replacement to be sent to the Pacific. Remember, I had no basic training. Remember, I was made a corporal so fast. Well, I shipped out with a whole bunch of guys on a boat, and they were mostly taken out of the stockades in this country. They were a tough bunch. It didn't take me long to figure out that my situation was dire. I had no training, and replacements typically live about ten days, the situation being that there's this bunch of guys, and they've been together since they first went in the army. Say you've got a squad—that's six guys. Then they go and get into battle, and one of them gets killed, and he's a big tight friend with these other guys. They've all been bonding. So he's dead, and they're all mourning. Then they send in some guy that nobody ever saw before. The only way you can survive in battle is by helping each other. They just forget these replacements.

Well, I knew all this when I got to Hawaii, to Oahu. We were all sent up there as a temporary place to live. My problem was, how do I keep from getting killed? So I came up with a plan. Now, I've not told anybody much about this before, but it has to do with what we're talking about. I decided that the alternative to getting killed might have to be that I'd get a dishonorable discharge from the army. So I went to the chaplain, and I told the chaplain that I was homosexual. He was a fuddy-duddy creature from Tennessee,



and he said, "Oh yeah. I used to know a feller that was like that." I said, "Well, I don't think it's a good idea for me to be..." I was absolutely, totally capable of behaving correctly in the army and not doing anything, but I said, "I don't think I ought to be around here. I can hardly stand it," and all this crap. He said, "Well, I'll see what I can do about that." I thought, well, it doesn't look like I've really accomplished anything here. I went back to the barracks.

In a couple of days, I was called out to go to a psychiatrist that they had in the medical center. I went to see this psychiatrist and he said, "So. You're homosexual?" I said, "Yes." And he said (I've never told anybody this before), "Well, what exactly do you do?" [laughter] I said, "Well..." You can see that I'm embarrassed right now by this ridiculous situation. But it was a life-and-death matter. He was very nice, this guy. So we talked about it, and he asked me questions about how I was about getting on with the other guys, and without lying to him I tried to make it seem like I had a problem. I really didn't have a problem. Because like anybody, most of the people around you are not driving you crazy with desire. But I had the interview and left.

About a week later, orders came down to disconnect me from this situation I was in, and send me to Admiral Nimitz's fleet headquarters at Pearl Harbor as the librarian for the army officers. I don't to this day know whether they did that because they checked my credentials, or whether it was because I saw that psychiatrist. But one way or another, I got pulled out of that situation, and got put into one of the softest jobs possible for an enlisted man in the whole Pacific. I was there the rest of the war. It was nine months more before the end of the war. Life was very nice there because at least half the enlisted men in that place were gay. The people who knew how to type, who were good with books, who were sort of pleasant to get on with. You can see how it would come out that way. Nice guys. A whole bunch of very charming, sweet guys.

When the war was over we couldn't go home, because all the guys who had been in combat had to go home first. It took a long time to haul them all out of the Pacific. So I spent nine more months in Hawaii. I was on the staff of the *Stars and Stripes*, which was the army newspaper. I had a place to live in the YMCA. No officers were telling us what



to do. I had my own room. I began then to really learn what it was like to be gay. There were guys around and I began to get into it.

**Reti:** Were there bars?

**Shipley:** Not gay bars. No. But there were all these guys in this YMCA, in the showers and in the pool. There were some very charming things that happened simply because of the naiveté of everybody. They were trying to think of ways to help guys pass the time until they could go home. There was a guy who was a choreographer, an enlisted man. They let him start a class to teach all these soldiers and sailors how to ballroom dance, because a lot of them didn't know. But they had no girls around, so we had to ballroom dance with each other! [laughter] Everybody was so naive, but it was wonderful fun. All these guys going around. In Honolulu the nights were just unbelievable, guys wandering all over the place.

In those days, the big problem that gay guys had was to try to keep cheerful. It was so easy to get depressed. You were locked in this peculiar, dead-end situation.

As soon as I got home, I went to see my folks briefly. Then I went back to [UC] Berkeley and started regular school, and finished up. The spring of 1948 is when I graduated from Berkeley.

There used to be a men's swimming pool (it's now been filled in); guys would go out there, and there was a huge place to lie around on the sides. I ran into a guy there named Jerry Davis, and we started dating. The first thing we did was go to the city and see *Beauty and the Beast*. It had just come out. And after a certain amount of time we finally figured out that we loved each other. We were together for fourteen years.

After I graduated that spring, we decided we'd take our bicycles and ride back to Lawton, Oklahoma from Berkeley. So we did. We rode all the way down the coast to Los Angeles, and then across the southern route through Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. It took us about two months, but we got back there on bicycles. You couldn't do it now. In



those days everybody was so nice about things. We'd just get off the road if there was a pleasant little spot with some trees and grass, and roll out our sleeping bags and sleep there at night. Nobody ever would bother us. But many people in the little towns were upset because we were wearing shorts, and in those days men did not wear shorts, ever! Except maybe on a tennis court. The idea of anybody going out on the street in public in shorts was out. But we were on these bicycles going across the desert. Anyway, we wanted to wear shorts. We had that kind of narcissism. We were both young, good-looking, healthy, and well-built and all that. We rode three-speed Schwinn's. We got in enormously good condition. It was a great adventure and of course we bonded like mad. We were together for fourteen years.

We spent the winter in Lawton. The next spring we came back out to Berkeley. I started graduate work at UC Berkeley in anthropology, and it didn't go well because I got into trouble with a couple of the professors, whom I really think were mean about academic things. During the time I was a graduate student, Jerry and I lived in a little apartment about four or five blocks from the campus, on Walnut Street, and there were a whole bunch of other people that lived in this house, and another house behind it. The graduate student in the front apartment was Barbara Bartle, the woman whom I finally ended up marrying. Everybody in that house bonded together, but Jerry and I were together, and we weren't really looking for sexual adventures anymore. We had a fine time.

There was a guy upstairs named Bob who had a lot of money. His father was rich. We all decided that what we wanted to do was to leave this culture behind, especially because in those days the United States and Russia were acting like they were going to bomb each other. It was the Cold War. It was the common belief that if atomic bombs were dropped they would not cause problems in the Southern Hemisphere. If you stayed out of America, Europe, and China, you were safe.

So we decided we were all going to leave the country, after a period of saying, "Let's all start a colony in lower California and be away from everybody." College kids often get into this. I managed to get the promise of a job in Rio, in Brazil. We all went down to



Nogales on a train. What we were going to do was go to Vera Cruz in Mexico, and try to get on a ship. In those days it was very expensive to fly. Bob had money but nobody else did. We all went down to Mexico City. When we got down to Vera Cruz, we found out that there was no shipping between Vera Cruz and Brazil. So we went clear back up to New Orleans, hung out on the docks there, and finally got on an old Norwegian steamer that took us from New Orleans to Rio. It took twenty-three days of floating along. The three of us lived in Rio for a year. I worked there for a bi-national project to teach English classes to Brazilians.

I also got a job with the national radio. There was a young woman there who had been five years with the BBC in London learning about radio. She was the director of this section of government. She hired me to do radio programs. And you know, this is hard to be clear about still, but in my experience, homosexual men are very different from one another in what it is that attracts them. There're some gay men who can get on very well with women. Under certain circumstances, it's a very pleasant and seductive idea for me. She and I got into a charming and delightful love affair. It was one of the great events of my life. She was so charming and so much fun. She loved me. It's unfair to not put that into the mix. I know lots of gay guys who have no ability to relate to women at all. I have one friend who tells me that women are like blank places in space for him, which is a very curious idea for me. It's never been like that for me. Of course, Jerry was with me. So this got a little strange. But he went with it. That's another thing of course, is this notion of fidelity. That's kind of complicated, I think. Always has been.

After a year in Brazil, Jerry and I came back. Then I worked in Berkeley on Telegraph Avenue, for a place called Fraser's, which was a very elegant store full of avant garde furniture and glass from Sweden. I had dropped out of graduate school. I wasn't in school at all. I was the floor manager of this store. A year went by, and I was thinking, I'm really into a dead-end here. We had lots of friends. Jerry and I had other gay couples that we knew. We had a nice social life. But what was I doing? There was no future, really.



One day I was down in the stock room talking to the stock clerk, who was a really nice, smart guy. He had found out that there was a new department of linguistics getting started on the Berkeley campus, that it was for graduate students, and that they had succeeded in getting the state legislature to put up an annual fund of money. It was \$10,000, which was like \$100,000 now. This was to train graduate students in linguistics to go out in California and learn and record Native California languages. So that's what we all did. It was run by a wonderful woman, who was not the easiest person to get along with, but who was a genius, Mary Haas. At the time she was the only female faculty member on the Berkeley faculty. She did it out of sheer brilliance. They would have been idiots not to hire her. Isn't that something? This was 1953.

So Stuart Fletcher, who was the guy from the loading dock, and I, got into that graduate program. And in a year or so, after I'd had enough training in phonetics and field methods, I had to pick a group in California and go and work with them. I picked the Northeastern Maidu, who live up by Mount Lassen. Actually, the people I learned from didn't live there at the time. They lived much closer to Red Bluff. They lived up a ways into the foothills from Red Bluff, in a little place called Payne's Creek. I went up there. That was a marvelous experience, being admitted inside the framework of Native American life, even though it was much changed from the old days. Of course my main teacher was half-white, and only half-Maidu, genetically. She and her mother, who was full-blood Maidu, spoke the language fluently and talked that way with each other all of the time. So I learned it, and at the same time I had this wonderful social experience. They stopped acting like I was a white guy. We had meals together. I was hanging around the house. I had my own place to live further up in the mountains. We became enormously good friends. It was so great. It was the greatest thing, because with many Native Americans, not necessarily everybody, because they are individuals like anybody else, there's a kind of validity that's under there somewhere. I think it must be because they've been pushed around so much. In fact, I've often thought that there are some similarities to being gay. Because they've got to deal with this thing. They can't not be Indians, right?



**Reti:** I was wondering how that was for you, the intersection of your own identity with theirs?

**Shipley:** Yes, I think that helped me with this work. Until the early- to middle-twentieth century, being gay was a crime. Not so much being gay, but if you did anything about it, it was a crime. So the first thing that guys felt was that they were criminals because they absolutely couldn't stop themselves. After that, there was a long stretch [where it was considered a mental illness], and I went to a psychiatrist for years, which was stupid.

That was the stage I was in in the 1950s, when I was working up there with the Maidu. [The definition] didn't seem right, because I knew I was alert, and intelligent, and functional. I could run up and down the mountains, and I could relate to people, and make everything work out all right. So it was hard to know what was ill about it, but nevertheless, it was a kind of general notion that was floating around, and most gay guys, I think, fell for it, which kept that residue of sadness.

I finally got my doctorate in 1959, and almost immediately I got hired onto the UC Berkeley faculty as an assistant professor. Jerry and I were still together, but around about that time, around 1959 and 1960, we were not having a great time with each other. I was a linguist consultant for a psychiatrist at Langley Porter, a psychiatric clinic attached to the UC Medical Center in San Francisco. Barbara had gotten her M.D. degree in Philadelphia. She was a six-year resident at the Langley Porter institute at that time. Since I was working with one of the faculty members at the time, I was over there once a week. We had known each other from that house in Berkeley. We started going out for lunch. In spite of the fact that Jerry and I were still physically together, that had become sort of routine. So she and I started going out more than just for lunch. By that time, I had a real job as an assistant professor. We took some trips up in the mountains, and just gradually worked our way into a relationship.

I got a Guggenheim fellowship in late 1961, for 1962. It involved me going to Europe for some months. I went to the University of Copenhagen. There had been a Danish linguist who had written a theory of linguistics that nobody understood. He had died, but I was



going to go talk to his sidekick who was alive, and try to find out about this theory, because he had worked with the Southern Maidu. The plan was that Barbara would join me in Rome that spring. I was in Copenhagen, and it was winter, and I was cold, and my father had died, and I was miserable. So I jumped in my Austin Healy and drove like mad across Europe, down into Italy. Barbara joined me, and we went to Greece. Barbara's relatives all came from Copenhagen so we ended up in Copenhagen. While we were in Geneva, my daughter Betsy was conceived. By the time we got to Copenhagen, Barbara, who was a doctor, already knew she was pregnant. We bought rings in Copenhagen, and decided to get married.

When we got back over here, my problem was, should I tell her about myself? I was still going to this goddamned psychiatrist, who was really a monster, as it turned out. I think some of those guys were monsters in those days. Information was so hard to get, still, even though it was a lot better than when I was a little kid. Barbara was pregnant. But that wasn't what was driving me. I really wanted to be a daddy and have a family. The only way I could think of to do that was by getting married.

**Reti:** Gay men parenting children just wasn't done then.

**Shipley:** No, there were no arrangements then about anything. If you were gay and you wanted to have kids, you had to get married. I was not averse to that, as I've explained. Having relationships with women is okay with me. I had a dream that I was in a tuxedo driving along in my Austin Healy. This is unbelievable, but the psychiatrist said, "That shows that your marriage will work out all right." I know it is hard for young people to understand this now, but I fell for that. Partly because I wanted to do it, but partly because I thought this guy had the con on what to do. So we went ahead and got married, and had Betsy early the next year in 1963. A year later I had a son, who now works down in Hollywood. So we had these two kids. And then my life for eighteen years was essentially the life of a married man.

We lived for a year in Berkeley after we married and bought a house. Then I got wind of what was going on down here at UC Santa Cruz. They were just beginning to build this





campus. They had built Natural Sciences, and the Field House, and nothing else. I came down to talk about coming here. Clark Kerr and Dean McHenry were the two main guys. They were talking about how there were going to be no grades and small classes. A lot of things never actually worked out, but the idea worked out. I was the undergraduate major adviser at Berkeley for the linguistics major, and I was teaching all the big courses. That's what they sometimes do to assistant professors, make them teach all the introductory courses. At Berkeley, I had 600 people in the introductory course in linguistics. So I knew a lot about the pedagogical problems of the University. One of the great curses was grades. At Berkeley, and any university at the time, you had to figure out some way to get a number for everybody, and grade on the curve. After all these years, and all these experiences with universities, I still think that's a bad idea. What the hell does that mean? The kids would come in to see me and they'd say, "Look, I got a composite score of ninety, and my friend John got a score of ninety-two, and he got an A, and I got a B."

The idea that you could work somewhere where that didn't go on was immensely enticing to me because it fit my temperament very well. I had an upper-division course in linguistics the last semester I taught at Berkeley. I had forty or fifty students in there. When I began the course, I knew I was going to come to UC Santa Cruz the next fall. So I said, "I'm going to leave and go to Santa Cruz next fall, and I want you all to know that if you do anything at all in this class you are going to get an A. I'm going to give everybody an A unless they just leave." I loved doing that. All the kids loved it.

I came down here. I didn't come the first year. The first year there was only Cowell College. There were no buildings so they lived in trailers by the Field House. Their classes were all held there. They tried to get me to come down the first year, because both McHenry and Page Smith, who was the provost of Cowell at the time, wanted me to come down. But they had a rider on it. They wanted me to take over running the language teaching program. It's now called language studies. I didn't want to do that because I still don't see language teaching and language learning as linguistics. It's not linguistics. I wouldn't do that. So they didn't hire anybody to do that at the time. But the



next year they were starting Stevenson College. Charles Page, who was the first Stevenson provost, got in touch with me and I went down and talked to him. They would hire me without the language rider. So I came down at the beginning of the second year to Stevenson College when it first started.

The first year or so we did all the things that we had planned to do. There were lots of independent studies. Sometimes I'd have twelve or fifteen independent studies, as well as the classes I was teaching. We were very loose and free. Of course this was in the context of the middle- and late-1960s, which were beginning to emerge. In fact, I think we may have been a kind of harbinger of some of that [social change].

Alfred Kroeber, a famous professor of anthropology at Berkeley, was a mentor of mine. Remember I told you about the little bunch of soldiers studying Chinese? Well, that whole program was run by Kroeber. So I first knew him when I was twenty one years old, and he was still in his early sixties. Later on, when I was in linguistics he had retired, and he was in his eighties by then, but he was on my dissertation committee. So his grandson showed up in those early years at Stevenson College, and the grandson, whose name was Karl Kroeber, was a very charming, funny guy. He had a pickup truck, and what he wanted to do was build a log cabin on the back of his pickup truck. He wanted to get independent study credit. So I said sure. It was like that.

I went off on sabbatical in 1968-1969, to Yugoslavia. I had a Fulbright. That was the time, I feel, that things began to unravel [at UCSC] about the idealistic, totally different way of looking at everything, certainly by the 1970s. There was one big flaw in the old system that I suffered from and lots of people did. That was that half of the budget that you had for hiring new faculty was controlled by one of the colleges.<sup>3</sup> It was like somebody tore a dollar bill in two, and gave you half. In order to hire anybody you had to get them to agree to match. Well, several really good people applied to be hired in linguistics, people who were really great, good linguists, and would have added a lot to the texture and

<sup>3</sup>Shipley is referring to the fact that in the early years at UCSC faculty appointments were decided jointly by the discipline/board of studies and the college. Boards of studies are now called departments.—Editor.



quality of the linguistics program. But I couldn't hire them because the relevant college didn't like them. The colleges had different criteria. I remember one guy who was here for awhile as an assistant professor of linguistics. That was College Five, which is now Porter. They agreed to hire him because he knew how to make harpsichords. It made it very tough to get anyone. I had some really dreadful experiences with young junior faculty who were really not who I would have hired at all, had I had control of the situation.

**Reti:** Were you board chair?

**Shipley:** I was *it*. For a while I was the only linguist. Then they started putting out these slots for new linguists, but they were always this half-and-half arrangement. It put me, and I'm sure a lot of other people, into a double bind that they really couldn't cope with. If you're supposed to put together a good board, you have to have some kind of consistent idea in your head of what it is that you are trying to do. And if you are always having to conform to a bunch of other stuff over here that isn't related to what you are doing... It was a hopeless mess.

I hit my low point in the middle-1970s, because I was struggling with the problem of a very bad appointment in linguistics. Well, everything got very bad. Now there are nothing but new people so it doesn't matter anymore, but the trouble with new people coming in was that their whole world view was different from the old-timers who had been around here. The reason I came down here from Berkeley was because of the things that made this place different. Those things were disappearing.

**Reti:** Those early years didn't last very long.

**Shipley:** Yes, and I often thought to myself, I'm a damn fool. I should have stayed in Berkeley. UC Berkeley is a great world university, and there I was, voluntarily giving up an appointment on the Berkeley campus to come down to UCSC. Now the reason I came had just fizzled away. There was so much emotion. People would come in and make awful messes out of everybody's feelings, because they didn't understand why it was



that people did things the way they did them, because they didn't know what this place had been like.

Chancellor Sinsheimer did try to close the linguistics board down. During that time, I was still going to a psychiatrist. I was so nerve-wracked by what was going on [in linguistics], that my psychiatrist was medicating me to calm me down. Halverson used to drive me up there. He was in Berkeley. Barbara and I were having troubles communicating. I was just overwhelmed. All this stuff at UCSC about changing the tenor of the University was driving me crazy. Linguistics was taken entirely out of my hands. They appointed a statewide committee of linguists to come here and solve the problem. They hired the people who are here now, or the beginnings of them, Jorge Hankamer, mainly. They started a whole new program in theoretical linguistics.

Where they left me was kind of like when I was in that regiment in the army after I left Berkeley. I didn't have any role to play anymore in the department, except to teach the introductory courses. I taught a course in Indo-European comparative linguistics and things like that, but for the rest of the time before I retired (which was another ten years or so), they had a graduate program. They had graduate students. I had had graduate students writing dissertations at Berkeley, but I never had a graduate student here. I was marginalized. But I must say in all fairness that all of those people were very nice to me and always had been. They treated me well. The only one I see now is Bill Ladusaw, because he's gay, of course.

The old UCSC dream was gone by the end of the 1970s, really gone. None of the people down there now has any connection with the old days. They are all nice people in the department, and I want to make sure that nobody thinks that I don't admire them. But they had nothing to do with the original plan. That is one of the symptoms of the great tragedy of this place. It's now more or less, as far as I can see, ten years after I retired, just like any good university. It has departments and regular programs and grades.

**Reti:** So you ended up leaving your marriage.



**Shipley:** Yes, in 1981, we had been married for eighteen years, and we decided to split up. We had problems communicating. I moved out and I started renting places to live in the early-1980s. Barbara kept the house. She was the campus psychiatrist. There's a picture of her in the front of the Cowell Health Center. She was the campus psychiatrist from the time we came down here. Then in January 1986, we got a divorce. In 1987 Barbara got cancer. She got cancer in May and she died in September.

**Reti:** Backtracking a little bit, when events like Stonewall were happening in the late-1960s, was that something you were aware of?

**Shipley:** Well, I knew it happened. Of course it didn't affect me much, because I was living the life of a *paterfamilias* at the time. I had a wife and kids.

**Reti:** But did it open up any sense of possibility to you as the gay movement got going?

**Shipley:** Yes. Yes it did. It's very hard for young gay folks to understand that I got conditioned about all these things when I was a young kid, and that was way back in the 1930s and 1940s, when it was like I was some monster from outer space. I had no idea what was going on about me. I remember when I was in high school, some friends of mine had found these girls who were willing to do it. And I got trapped in the car with them and one of these girls was cuddling up to me and the other two guys were doing it in the car. It was totally without any interest for me at all. I found all that kind of repulsive. There are still a few people I'm kind of wary of in terms of ever bringing up these matters. But I don't hide out from anybody anymore. And my kids pretty much understand.

**Reti:** When you were a faculty member, were there gay or lesbian students who knew about you, and talked to you?

**Shipley:** Well, there was Bill Dickinson, but he was in the first bunch who went through here. Do you know Marc Okrand? Marc Okrand is the guy who wrote the Klingon language that they use in *Star Trek*. He was a linguistics major here. He was gay. He



knew about me when he was here. But Mark is an exceptionally well-balanced, calm, so-what kind of guy about the whole thing. He lives in Washington, D.C., and has a permanent boyfriend. But he went to school here, and he's kept close in touch with me ever since. He was sitting at a bar in Los Angeles one night and a guy next to him was saying, "I don't know what we are going to do about this Klingon language." They were making the first *Star Trek* movie. Mark said, "I can do that!" Any linguist can make up a language that works. I knew he was gay at the time he was here. In fact, there was a big draft problem at the time. Mark is about five foot, two inches and he weighed in those days about 115 pounds. Well, the draft situation was that if you weighed less than 110 pounds, you could get out of the draft. So Mark and I were having these discussions. Should he tell them he was gay? At that time, we were a little worried about what that might mean for his future, if that information got recorded by the army. So we decided that what he ought to do is go the other route. He fasted for two weeks before he went to the physical and he was down to 109. He got out of the draft that way.

**Reti:** So he was a student here in the early-1970s.

**Shipley:** He graduated in 1972, I think.

I never was known well enough in that way that kids would think of me as a kind of gay mentor. My classes had nothing to do with this subject. David Thomas taught classes with gay content. He's always been much braver than I am. It was fine. Nobody ever did anything to him for it that was bad. But he was always known to be gay.

**Reti:** I came out twenty-three years ago, and I'm forty now. It was still very different when I came out than it is now.

**Shipley:** Yes. I feel a little bit like keeping the barriers up. I feel like a tortoise out of its shell. My kids and everybody say no, no you don't have to do that. But a lot of it is about early conditioning. I'm strongly in agreement with the fact that all of the hard-core stuff in our personalities, certainly including sexual orientation, are genetic. It's in the hard drive, if you are talking computers, and the idea that you have any way to change it, or



modify it, or be somebody different is just out of the question. Still, there is another kind of conditioning that comes from things that you do habitually for protection in your youth. I still think, God, I shouldn't talk about that because somebody will wap me, or something bad will happen, which I can't even maybe identify or describe. Of course, people my age will soon disappear from the scene and that will be over with entirely.