

# GWSS

UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

GENDER  
WOMEN  
SEXUALITY  
STUDIES



Autumn 2018

## Saying Goodbye to Sue-Ellen Jacobs

Reflections from Clare Bright, PhD



1974 was an exciting time for the UW Women Studies Program. That was the year Sue-Ellen Jacobs arrived as our first tenure-line director, bringing more skills, knowledge and experience than we could have hoped for in one individual.

She came with both activist and academic credentials. Her background included liberation work with and for a variety of marginalized groups: African-Americans, Chicanos, anti-war and labor organizations, as well as a diverse array of women's groups. And while teaching at Sacramento State University, she helped create their women studies program. How fortunate we were to have such an ideal leader for our Program!

Sue-Ellen also became an invaluable mentor for me. As a Philosophy graduate student at the UW, I had chosen Feminist Ideology as my dissertation topic, despite disparagement from the all-male faculty. Fortunately, Sue-Ellen valued and encouraged my work and was willing to serve as my unofficial advisor. My subsequent career as a women studies scholar, teacher and administrator was due largely to her support and friendship. Over the years she continually made time to benefit many others with her mentorship

From the beginning Sue-Ellen wasted no time in advocating strongly for the program. Increasing its autonomy and authority were primary objectives. Sue-Ellen's ambitions included hiring more tenure-line faculty and developing more women-designated courses. She created "Anthropological Studies of Women" and seven other courses for the Program. Long before interdisciplinarity was a common approach to higher education, Sue-Ellen worked with other programs on campus, especially those in American Ethnic Studies. She insisted from the beginning that women studies courses must include content on race, class, gender and sexuality.

A more extensive goal of Sue-Ellen was building a discipline that would garner recognition and respect in the

larger world. She envisioned women studies as a locus of cutting-edge scholarship. Sue-Ellen's pioneering efforts in this regard were not limited to the UW. She was on the founding committee for the National Women Studies Association, and she spearheaded efforts to establish the North West Women Studies Association.

As a believer in the view that women studies should be the "academic arm of the women's movement", Sue-Ellen attended not only to the content of the UW women studies program, but also paid close attention to its structure. Although she held the institutional power, she delegated many of the program's decisions to the Women Studies Advisory Committee, a governing body composed of students, faculty, staff and community representatives each with an equal vote. As difficult and emotional as the meetings often were, this process of shared deliberation empowered us all. Despite differences and disagreements, we were united by a desire for fairness and equity. Sue-Ellen characterized us as "collaborative dreamers."

It was not all academic work; we played together as well. Our softball team, the Women Studies Amazons, competed in the UW intramural league, and at times Sue-Ellen was one of those on the field. There were also parties, picnics, potlucks; we flouted the traditional relationship hierarchy of the university. When reflecting on this time Sue-Ellen described it as one of "camaraderie and love."

Along with shepherding the Program, Sue-Ellen somehow found the time for research and scholarship. Her first publication, *Women in Perspective: A Guide for Cross-cultural Studies*, was intended as a resource for feminist teachers. She authored or co-authored a dozen more books along with copious articles, reviews, speeches. A noteworthy contribution to both the LGBTQ community and tribal communities was the anthology she co-edited with Wesley Thomas and Sabine Lang, *Two-Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality and Spirituality*.

In the 1970's a car breakdown in New Mexico proved serendipitous for Sue-Ellen. It led to forging connections with the people of Ohkay Owingeh (formerly San Juan Pueblo) and resulted in her lifelong engagement with indigenous people's issues. As an anthropologist she shared her resources and expertise with Ohkay Owingeh in ways that would provide them with ongoing benefits. Most significantly, together they created the Tewa language preservation project.

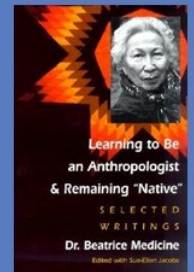
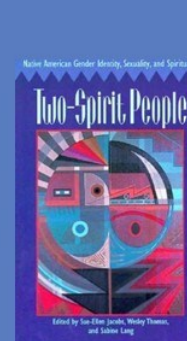
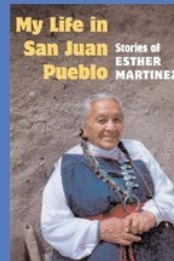
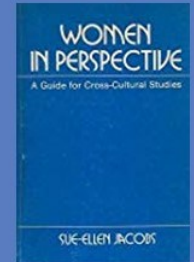
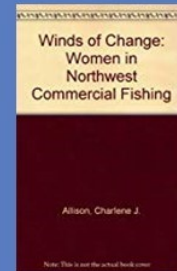
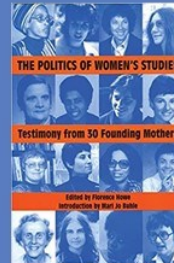
After her retirement from the UW in 2004 Sue-Ellen moved to New Mexico, lived near Ohkay Owingeh and continued her work with them. Concurrently she and friend/colleague Tessie Naranjo began a Pueblo Indian Studies Program –unique in the US-- at Northern New Mexico Community College. She and Tessie taught most of the courses, including one on Indian Women. They also hosted a successful Pueblo Indian Conference in 2012.

Obviously "retired" never applied to Sue-Ellen. "Tireless" would be more accurate. If there is a theme to Sue-Ellen's life, it is a fierce devotion to social justice whenever and wherever needed. Whether profession-

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The Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies at the University of Washington includes thirteen full-time faculty members, as well as 98 adjunct and affiliate faculty who hold appointments in other departments and share the feminist mission of GWSS. Intersectional and transnational analyses foreground our studies of race and ethnicity in U.S. and global contexts, as we analyze how these social formations intersect with gender, women, and sexuality in specific times and places. Our research and teaching complement and contribute to Ethnic Studies, Transnational Studies, and Women of Color scholarship.

In addition to our Feminist Studies Graduate Program leading to a Ph.D., we offer undergraduate majors and minors in GWSS and graduate certificate programs in Feminist Studies and Sexuality and Queer Studies. All undergraduate majors are required to complete a senior capstone course and participate in an internship—distinctive marks of our commitment to excellence in writing and critical thinking, and to linking those skills to community-based social justice practice. Our alumnae hold important positions in academic, professional, and non-profit institutions.

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