

Dr. Radke-Moss Women's Oral History Collection

M. LaRae Clark—Life Experiences

By M. LaRae Clark

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Box 1 Folder 1

Oral interview conducted by Kapri Kid

Transcribed by Kapri Kid

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KK: This is Kapri Kidd doing LaRae Clark interview, oral interview on September 26, Monday 2005. On women and sexuality and kind of how generations have kind of changed and how it is more open to talk about now as opposed to then and I know that you are the Dean of Women up at the college so I thought you would be a great person to talk to.

LC: For twenty years I've worked in student life and, as I said John L. Clarke was my second husband and he was president of Ricks for twenty-seven years, when we called it Ricks College then. So if I say Ricks,...

KK: That's alright.

LC: I know it is BYU-Idaho now. And I worked, I was over the woman's programs. Women's week and all those things.

KK: How long, how long were you?

LC: Twenty years.

KK: Twenty years you held that positions? Wow. Long time.

LC: I came to Ricks as an instructor in communications, and I came from BYU-Hawaii. I taught over there four years. I had exposure to all kinds of personalities, so I'd been broken in you might say. But then I was a widowed lady, President Clarke was a widower; he had been my college president when I was at Ricks College. It was a four-year school [in the] 1950's and I graduated with a four-year degree in communications and he was president those four years. In fact it was eight years a junior college than moved into a university we say now a days. And that's great I was excited when they made Ricks a four-year. I personally did not want them to change the name.

KK: I know. A lot of people didn't want it.

LC: Uh-uh. But I wanted it a four-year school so you give and take. But they have been very good to me, I have been retired for ten years.

KK: Oh only ten years?

LC: So that's where I've been.

KK: What is your full name?

LC: Margrett LaRae. My maiden name is Pickett, my first husband was Leroy King and my second was John L. Clarke. Now in between, or after I married John L. Clarke, they called us on a mission. When they changed presidents and we served for three years in Boston. And so I got acquainted to the Boston ladies. When we were out there.

KK: What year was this?

LC: That was seventy-one to seventy-four.

KK: What kind of attitudes did you compare to east and west?

LC: Very different. But I like the west coast.

KK: Really?

LC: And so did my husband.

KK: Why? What is the difference?

LC: And so we came back and that's when I went into the Student Life Office. Over women's programs. I have been in the east and seen those woman's programs and the kind of liberated woman, a comparison might be in Boston we lived in a three-hundred-year-old home, it was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's home. That was the mission home. It was a great big thirty-room home. So then we come back to this home and we were gonna tear this down, re-do it, but we didn't move fast enough and the flood ate it. And then after being in the east and seeing those homes, I didn't want to tear it down so we restored it.

KK: Oh good.

LC: That's the motif of this front room is kind of old fashion, old home.

KK: You have a beautiful home.

LC: I like it but I had to learn to like it, you know? The mission home was of this motif and I can look around and this home with that Boston rocker, that's a Boston rocker. That table over there is a Hawaii coffee table.

KK: I spent a semester at BYU-Hawaii.

LC: Oh you know what it's all about, we lived on Moana Street.

KK: Oh you did? Cool!

LC: We could walk to school or we could walk to the temple or straight down to the beach. It was a wonderful experience. And then I went over there intending just to lay on the beaches and after a month they needed a teacher in the Communications Department.

KK: And that's what you got your degree in.

LC: Then I taught for four years. My first husband was in speech and English, and I had three children by then.

KK: Is that all the children you have?

LC: Uh-huh. My son lives in Faquim, WA and he's a president of a software company. I have a daughter who lives out in Hamer, do you know where Hamer is?

KK: I don't.

LC: It's west of here about 30 miles. And she is a part-time teacher. They live on a ranch, cattle, she trains at BYU-Hawaii and ISU and got her bachelor's degree in teaching. And so that's what she does. Then I have another daughter who lives with me, she and her husband. And she is very diabetic. She's in a wheelchair, but we seem to be doing OK. Now when I was her age I stepped out as a Rick's college graduate four years and taught one year in Sugar City and it was fun. I mean I directed the plays and ran the speech program and I ran the girls PE program and I kind of stepped out of Ricks College into the work force. And I've thought about and that's been very interesting to me because women were just beginning to be in the work force.

KK: What kind of feelings do have as a revolutionary, or do you just do it?

LC: You just do it; they had positions open for women. They needed a girl's PE teacher and I had a minor in PE and they needed someone to run the Speech, Drama, and English Programs, and those three combine to be a communications major. So my background at Ricks, my qualifications, I just stepped out among the men and started the women, and now...

KK: What year was that?

LC: 1951 and now it's nothing to see women in Levis and sweatshirts. We had to wear silk hose, panty hose and we had to dress up.

KK: For school or for work?

LC: For work. It was still prim and proper. I never did wear Levis and I always wore panty hose as a teacher and I moved from Sugar City to California and I had 15 years of teaching in the high school level in California.

KK: That's where I'm from.

LC: Where?

KK: Lodi, by Stockton.

LC: I was down in Porterville, do know where that is?

KK: I've heard of it.

LC: I moved into that school system and I moved in as an only woman in the department and California kind of progressive you know, more progressive than Rexburg. And so I moved right into that position and competed with the men for the position.

KK: Was that hard? Did you like...tell me what prejudices did you experience?

LC: I taught, over in Hawaii, I was chair person, chair lady of the Speech and Drama Department. In my teaching I always seemed to be in good standing and it's your style of teaching that kind of helps you get there. I love teaching. I love students. And when I was in California they started the hippie movement in up in San Francisco.

KK: And you were there for that?

LC: No, I was in Porterville, but I was very aware of what was going on.

KK: And what did you think about all that when you're this woman in this male-oriented environment and these hippies were over here, what did you think about all that?

LC: I decided that it was OK to be a teacher in a man's world and we did some good things, I was advisor to all the women's clubs on campus in California and the same when I was in Hawaii, I became the advisor then I became the chairman and reason I became the chairman of the department was because I had a general secondary teaching credential. All the men had master's degrees. They could just be hired. I was asked to be the chairman of the department because I had some experience in education.

KK: Is that unusual to have a woman be the chairman—it seems like it would be?

LC: I put a sign on my door with my name and I titled it chairwoman and they used to tease me about that all the time and you know, I was congenial, I could be teased, they could tease me about a woman being in the work force and I would blink or do something crazy. And they would accept me.

KK: Would you call yourself a feminist then?

LC: No, when I came to Ricks, into the Student Life they considered me a knowledgeable woman of the world that's what they used to say, you're just a woman of the world. Well I really wasn't a feminist but I believed women could do things. 'Cause we can, and we do and we do and we do some things better than men. I started off with that attitude and the men didn't ever give me any problem up to Ricks. You know I'd been in California, I'd been in Hawaii, I'd been in Boston and so I was able to step out when I came back to Ricks and assume those positions because I understood the world. I understood California and I understood Hawaii and I understood Boston and I just went with the flow. I wasn't like a Sonia Johnson who was a real woman feminist, but I got my

own way, women can get their own way, if they don't badger the men. Do you know what I mean?

KK: Explain it a little bit.

LC: We go along and Ok, you think this way. How do you expect me to think about that? You kind of...and go along with them and don't make enemies with men but try to join their club. And I was grateful I could do that, of course most of the men were younger than I and most of the men still work up there. Jim Sessions, Jerry Price, Matt Shirley who used to be in the Executive Office was in that area he and I have been good friends since Sugar City so I had a couple buddies who knew me up there.

KK: So while you were the Dean of Women's what kind of, you [were] that for 20 years, I am sure you saw some changes in the women's attitudes on campus, what were their feelings, what were LDS women's conceptions of birth control? I know that stuff was prevalent then.

LC: They began to give us jobs to do. Like I had been president of a Relief Society, I had been president of the Young Women, I had been a Primary president, you know, executive positions. So they finally decided to give me a chance in the school program and I was successful there and I'm not bragging, that's the way I saw it and in President Hafen's reign, they organized up there a Women's Awareness Committee.

KK: Really, what was that? Tell me about that.

LC: I was the first chairman of that committee and I selected key women teachers from across the campus, we started out with 7 and we, women's, they used to tease me because it spells WAC and during World War II the lady military were WAC's so they used to tease me, "Is the WAC committee meeting today?" you know? The men. But what our purpose was, was to encourage women and to give them responsibility of thing[s] to do and we'd take it and run with it. And it'd turn out swell. They decided we were a pretty good committee.

KK: What kind of responsibilities, like organizing groups?

LC: We did that. We advised women's committees; we wrote a whole book of women's expectations like: a woman should get married, a woman should have children, a woman should support her husband and then we had various ways that women can support her husband. A woman should be a homemaker and see this old lady tried to do them all, I tried to be in the workforce, I was a mother, I was a wife, all those things I was. And we set about workshops and inviting key women out there to come talk to our girls about some of the issues we had concern about.

KK: Which were what? What were some of your biggest issues during your twenty-year span?

LC: We felt as a committee that men put us down. And we decided that we would not be put down. That we had women on the academic counsel, we had women on the leadership counsel, we all of a sudden got women appearing everywhere. They'd always been [be in?] men's positions. We wrote little clips from prominent women in the church like President McKay's wife, President Lee's wife, mission presidents' wives, key women who'd been successful. And then we made this book about this thick with all those things that women should be.

KK: What is it called exactly?

LC: *The Women's Awareness Committee*. And I don't know, after 10 years, how functional it still is. It should be, but maybe some men have put it down, I know. I know it was very functional and active for 10 years.

KK: Is it a published book or is it just in the library?

LC: It's in the library. We made a copy for all seven of the women, we all have a copy, I have a copy and it's really kind of fun, it talks about these things we advocated that finally came about.

KK: That's so cool.

LC: It would be related, I'm sure, to your comments and your positions that you are fulfilling today. We would teach students and we would teach teachers who would shy off and shy back.

KK: And didn't want to take part in the whole...

LC: Student body? I mean we got women in the student body officers.

KK: Really? That wasn't a normal thing?

LC: Uh-uhh. Those were men's positions. The year I retired there were more women on that counsel than men, now you call that a women libist? I don't know, it just happened. But we were, yeah, we, all seven of us were quite outspoken about women's role in the world. That's related to what your paper. And that was one of the degrees that we set up, what should a woman's role be?

KK: And that's in the book that you wrote?

LC: You see a lot of articles today in the Ensign, in the Relief Society's section in the topic particularly that deal with all the ideals that a woman should be. And a woman, I know we had two single women on that council they were teachers and they were always being put down because they weren't mothers. Here's two outstanding single women teaching and the men were just snubbing their nose at them because they didn't have children.

KK: So that stereotype is really prevalent at that time if you didn't have children you're worth nothing.

LC: See I encouraged my children in the home as a mother to get married in the temple and have children and raise them in the Church. And a woman should do that and as I told you I had position in the wards and stake I lived in and that was ok, it was hard to do, but it was ok. And the only caution I would give to women and I give it to my own kids, don't get too involved. You know we're taught in the Church the principle of excellence. So we try to do everything excellent but you know the bottom line is, you can't do everything excellent. And you have, you learn that concept because the Church doesn't teach that you can't be excellent in everything, that was [a] hard one for me because I am a perfectionist and I want everything done professionally, but I had to learn to say no.

KK: And that is something you need to learn...

LC: And what happens when I was striving to do everything I was asked to do. I never say no and do it perfect. I had to learn that and I talk about that every now and again, because I used to talk about being excellent all the time. But I nearly had a nervous break-down and so that's where you go, and you have to decide. Women have to decide when and where to say no. That was hard for me because everything I figured, well this calling has come from the Lord, I will be blessed that I can do it. But that isn't a truism and that was the hard part.

KK: So do you think that sometimes people do that to kind of prove themselves? Sometimes I think that people need to prove themselves.

LC: I had been perking along and I have positions in the ward I had a positions in the stake and I was Dean of Women at Ricks. They called me to a job in the temple and I had to say no. I had a new second husband and still had children still in the home; I just knew and I prayed about it and talked to my husband about it and people didn't see, me, people at school, didn't see me in all these positions so I was married and I counseled with my husband and I counseled with my school boss Matt Shirley and they said, "We don't mean to demean you, but you can't do it all." And they had been men who had been in prominent positions, my husband was former college president, my boss was former student body president. And so I just asked key people and I, so I had to sit and pray one night and that's what I came up with, at first I felt badly about it because I was geared to do everything that was asked of me and do it perfectly. So when I used to talk to girls, some of them would be really shocked that I would tell them that sometimes the answer has to be no.

KK: When they would come in and talk to you, what would be the thing they would talk to you most about?

LC: A lot of them about their dating process and if they should marry this guy and I would ask them questions and then I would counsel them and that was hard, but the Lord blessed me in helping those kids. Somebody needed to talk to them and somebody

needed to talk straight with them and I had been married twice. And so you know, and I had seen our missionaries from out in the mission field go home and jilt their girl, you know, tough thing. And so I have always said my being dean of women I was qualified by being in these leadership positions by the mission field by being a teacher, by being a mother. You know I was trained in all these things.

KK: Where did you grow up? Do you think that had an influence on...

LC: I grew up in Logan and Ammon, Idaho. Do you know where Ammon is?

KK: Right by Idaho Falls.

LC: Out of Idaho Falls that's right, then I went to school, to college at Ricks College for four years. I was forty-four years in the work force. Try to raise your children, try to keep a home, try to please a husband, try to work at Ricks. I liked the, I really liked the students. I liked that very much, I did not ever feel like I was a mean old dean. I never did feel that because I tried to be friendly, I tried to be loving. I would have to send kids home from school for breaking rules sometimes. And that was hard, but I tried to let them know that I loved them. I would quote "kick them out of school," then I would come home and make them a batch of cookies to take home with them.

KK: What kind of rules did you see change when you were the dean?

LC: Levis. I go up there today and I just go, that girl's got on a pair of Levis! But it's ok now. But when I was up there they couldn't wear too tight of shirts, or sleeveless shirts, t-shirt, they couldn't wear Levis, they had to wear dress slacks. And my husband being an ex-president he'd never let me wear slacks or dress pants. I always had to wear a dress and that has changed today I mean I see faculty women in pants and a nice tops students in Levis. I can remember we really watched the girls on tight Levis some of them we could just tell that they sewed an extra seam so they be... And we'd walk behind some girls and we'd just stop them tell them and tell them to go home and change. I react today when I go on campus or to a concert and I see these girls in Levis so that has been embedded and in the school regulations and in my job, we used to as the kids registered, we used to check their Levis, check the boy's earrings, the long hair we used to pull them out of registration lines all the time.

KK: How did they register back then?

LC: They, when if first started out do you know where the big inside gym is?

KK: The inside track?

LC: Uh-huh.

KK: Yeah.

LC: They set tables up in there and key advisors and counselors would man those tables and help kids register and about ten of us would be from Student Life and we would just roam the area and pull kids out of line. I didn't enjoy that particularly but that's what we did and that's what we had to do, that was our assignment. But I could do it. You know and it was, I had to learn to do that, that was an action that was hard on me. I didn't like to confront anyone yet I knew I had to and if I didn't do it others would see me and criticize me for not stopping that girl or that guy, my colleagues.

KK: Do you think you got more criticism because you are a woman in the beginning even at Sugar City too?

LC: Uh-huh.

KK: What about like, did you ever do any group sessions or have speakers come and talk to the girls about if they were getting married what was going to happen like the night of the wedding or did they have pamphlets or anything like that?

LC: All the time, all the time we had workshops and seminars which a little bit of Women's Week, are you aware of Women Week? We got so that on Saturday, all day, we'd have these workshops women could chose which one they wanted. When we first started out with Women Week there was small enrollment because people didn't quite know what it was all about yet, and then it was about the year I retired, about '91 we had to start shutting down Women's Week, the mothers the women would bring their sisters and brothers and aunts and uncles and we just couldn't feed them and house them at the college. We started out with the idea that the mothers could come and sleep in the daughter's bed and the daughters would sleep on sleeping bags on the floor. Well that just grew until it was out of proportion, we couldn't have all the workshops we felt we needed to have.

KK: What were the subjects of the workshops?

LC: They'd have subjects in everything. How to talk to your daughter, what to wear, what is appropriate, and we'd have make-up artists come in and teach the girls about make-up or finger nails, girl things. How to go about catching a guy. What you do and what you don't do. And you know there was enough of us around on our faculty and in the administration that we usually taught workshops. But as we grew we would get Ardath Kapp, from Salt Lake, or Elaine (Cannon?), you know some of the women from Salt Lake to come up and teach workshops. And they would do it free of charge so that was good on our budget. We had a Women's Week budget and at one point we used every day of the week. And that got a little much in the classrooms. I mean you can imagine mothers, aunts, grandmas all coming you couldn't get 'em in a classroom so we had to start cutting down. And we cut it down to only mothers, could attend. Well, I got frustrated over that issue because single women are mothers in their way. And they have a whole classroom of students they're instructing and talking with about something. But in the last five years, they have cut it down to mothers only, no children, no relatives, just your mother or your boyfriend's mother couldn't come either. It got too big and too

impersonal. And at the women conference we select a woman to be woman of the year. And that was fun. And that came from our own faculty and administration every once in awhile we would pick a General Authority's wife, like President Hinckley's wife got it once. We would pick outstanding women and give them a nice plaque and corsage. You know honor them in that way and they would usually give a talk on womanhood.

KK: I was going to ask about the administration, I know you were a part of the administration, you were the dean, but what were everyone else's feelings not necessarily about your position but women in general on the campus, were they just there to get married or did people really care about them in the classroom?

LC: When I first went they were that way, they just wanted to find a man and get married.

KK: You first went there in seventy?

LC: In seventy-one. Anyway there got to be more women and there are more women today in positions up there. I can remember sitting in on interviews for women and men saying very coyly, we don't want another woman in our department. And I'd sit up straight and look at them and then they'd just, "Oh well, just a minute, let us think about this and talk about this." So today, faculty and administration have to have been married, through the temple, if they're single, wouldn't have children. And I'm sorry to say this, some of the women want to be up there just to have a job. And when I retired that was a struggling issue.

KK: Do you think they shouldn't have jobs?

LC: I think they should; I was a widow, that could be considered, single women; I had children when I was a widow. And then the fact that I married John L. Clark helped me along, that was a given issue because I came as a widow I was a teacher in the Communications Department, I was straight out of Hawaii.

KK: Anything else you want to say?

LC: My husband John was very straight and auspicious and we taught him to hug people and especially the single women we'd go up to school they'd be a whole circle of women around him because he finally learned you can be friendly and you can be loving and you don't have to be straight-laced all the time. My children and I tease about that. That that's one thing we taught the president of Ricks College. That is was ok. But you know my personality has been TCH. I am still friendly with people and that's ok. They don't criticize me for it because they know I came from Hawaii so it's ok for me to do that. It's ok to go bare foot, it's ok to wear my moo-moos around the house, it's OK. So there you know there was a lot of proper things that I abandoned when I went to Hawaii. And then came here. And you know the friendliness of that campus. It's ok to hug a teacher, I mean my eyes about bugged out the first time some big Samoan came up and kissed me on the cheek before the lecture started. It was fun I just have to say going from California

teaching to Hawaii teaching then to Ricks College it was fun, and I still enjoy it and I go up on campus and even the male teachers, "Well don't I get my hug today?" They pin that on me because I learned that in Hawaii and brought that to Ricks College. And if I don't give my hug and my kiss you'd a thought I'd slapped their face so that's something that I brought to Ricks college. And it's ok, there is a lot of places in the Church where they won't allow that. The mission field, the mission. The mission mother is not supposed to hug the elders. We were there one month I was out of Hawaii and Ricks College so I'd made a little transition. The baptisms in our mission went up when I abandoned that rule and I got told about it, but that it wasn't me, to slip my arms around their waist and give them a hug made all the difference in the world. You become just like their mom. And I told Brother Perry, L. Tom Perry was our stake president out in the mission field and I said, "I cannot do that and you'll have to report me and send me home if I have to quit doing that." He never said another word to me. So you kinda, what, I have seen in the Church so many women who were called to places of priority and prestige they just lose this factor of hugging. If I go down to conference it's kind of fun because there will be L. Tom Perry, we were very good friends in Boston, there will be Elder Hafen, Bruce Hafen and Joe Christiansen, some that have been president up here. And the minute they see me they come with their arms out and I do the same. So you have to live your personality so part of being a woman in today's world is learning what you can do and can't do. I'll never forget I went to stake conference up here and L. Tom Perry was there and he'd been in, and Eyring, well L. Tom threw his arms around me, Steve Bennion threw his arms around me and what's his name?

KK: Eyring.

LC: I've forgotten it now. Not Hafen, the third one.

KK: Eyring.

LC: He stood there and he looked at me. I'd never been able to hug him because he's kinda hands off. And he said "Well if you guys can give her a hug I guess I can too." So he gave me a hug but he'd never been warm and open with me before.

KK: So live your personality is that something you'd want, if you could tell the women up at Ricks College or BYU-Idaho or anywhere what would you tell them? What advice would you give?

LC: I'd tell them be yourself, be yourself. Don't put on pretenses, I've seen a lot of women do that they, what do the girls call it--"Kiss up"--don't do that. Even when I was up there as John L. Clark's wife, I would have other women, and deep down inside I'd resent it who would kiss up to me, because I was who I was. I don't like that, I want you to be genuine and pure. And do your own personality. I had kids up here even from clear across campus, "Sister Clark! Sister Clark! I want to give you a hug, wait a minute!" Students. And the fellow men faculty looking at me ascant [?] because I put my arms out and here they come. Some of them wonder about me, hon. But that's my counsel and advice. And be genuine friends to your friends and don't be pretentious.

KK: Well that is great, that is great, well, let me spell your name or just spell for me.

LC: I go by LaRae that's what people know me as. Now the other sister Clark is Sue! She's the president's wife the now president's wife, that's why I got to thinking maybe you thought you were talking to Sue.

KK: Oh no I knew it was you. When is your birthday?

LC: February 22, 1929. I'm 76. I have been retired ten years; I don't like retirement, I'd rather be up there with the kids.