AH: Can I just get you to describe yourself?

JC: Do you want my life history, or just something about who I am?

AH: I guess just what you'd like people to know about you.

JC: Well, if I were to describe the work I do, I would say that I'm currently teaching at the University of British Columbia and that my research continues to build on work I have done for a long time in the Yukon Territory. Because you are from a Heiltsuk community and we've talked in class about my work in First Nations communities, we could perhaps talk about that?

AH: I guess I'd like to know about the work you're doing. My other question is, "How would you describe your career to this point in time?"

JC: Actually, I would never have described it as a "career" at one point. It's only in retrospect that I suppose it looks that way. Very briefly, when I graduated from the University of Toronto thirty-something years ago, like other students I was looking for a job. I found work briefly with the federal government in Toronto but very rapidly decided that this was not the way I wanted to live my life. Through a variety of lucky circumstances, I found a small research centre in another city where other people seemed to be doing exciting work on northern Canada. The director there, Jim Lotz, got some funding from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967 to do a small research project in the Yukon Territory and he sent me there. Looking back, I see that as was one of the key turning points in my life.

I spent three months in the Yukon during spring 1968 and enjoyed being there so much that I decided I wanted to go back to live in the north. Initially, I decided that I should get a master's degree because maybe that might make me more employable. I did that at UBC in 1968-69 and then was offered a year on a project on rural economies at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks – again, an eye-opening year. My main objective was always to get back to the Canadian north to work with the women I had originally met in the Yukon. How much should I go into that?

AH: As much as you'd like to.

JC: All right. I returned to the Yukon in summer, 1970, even more interested in the political issues that were emerging then in northern Canada. Looking back, I know that this was very much influenced by my experiences as a student during the '60s. I was determined to do work that was considered "relevant" by local communities. The Yukon seemed to provide a place where it might be possible to do research that had some local impact. The Aboriginal women I met and became friends with were my own age and

were very involved in the political activities surrounding land claims that were just beginning in the north during the late '60s and early '70s. They were more than willing to make use of a student who had some background in anthropology to do research they considered useful. These young women were very energetic and were actually forging the organizations that later went on to create the land claims settlement. They suggested that I work with women a generation or two older - their mothers, aunties and grandmothers – usually recording life stories. We all felt that there was a lot of information in the stories about land use and occupancy, history, cultural change and very little about women's experiences in the written record.

So this became the core of my work during the next fifteen years recording life stories – trying to understand something about the complex lives that indigenous women had experienced during this period of history. Many of the women had seen the effects of bureaucratic changes and policies that increasingly regulated women's lives. Their stories included topics ranging from ancient history to contemporary struggles. They reflected the day-to-day problems women encountered with government agencies that began to shape their lives after the Alaska Highway went through. So I listened *for* stories as well as *to* stories – you and I have talked about this other times. I was surprised all the time by the directions women wanted to take our life history projects. I wasn't prepared for the range and the breadth of topics that they wanted to discuss. We produced lots of booklets, maps, genealogies, tapes – even films. It was the kind of thing that started as a small project, and then became a life's work – largely because some of these women were so very interested in being teachers and saw this as one way to transmit their ideas. The book that three elders co-authored with me in 1990, *Life Lived Like a Story,* really had its roots in work we began in the early 1970s.

AH: Did you encouonter problems doing this research?

JC: I think it was in the mid-1980s, as the political and economic landscape began to change, I began to have second thoughts about whether somebody from outside the community was really the best person to be doing this kind of work. By then, a number of younger people were interested in recording and working with their own grandparents. A lot of things were happening in my own life at that time and I began to consider going back to school to get some larger perspective, to learn more about how these issues were being looked at in other parts of the world. So I returned to university – not an unusual decision for women of my generation in mid-life - and came back here to a PhD program at UBC in 1984. And that process allowed me to continue working with those women during the rest of their lives. I was always able to return to the Yukon during summer, and they were equally interested in how we could expand their work to reach broader audiences. I finished that degree in 1987. Then I did some sessional teaching for a few years. Then, in 1990, I applied for and was offered a joint position with the Department of Anthropology and Sociology and the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, and I have been here since then.

In a way, I see working at UBC as an ongoing connection with my life in the north. For instance, UBC has been a destination for a number of Aboriginal students from the Yukon who have come here to do undergraduate and graduate degrees and then returned to their communities to work. At least three women from Yukon First Nations

have Masters degrees from here and are very much involved in local oral history research and it is exciting to see those connections.

So now I'm here at UBC, but I still really feel very much rooted in the Yukon in terms of my training. And I know that the research questions I ask still come from rethinking stories I heard there.

AH: So, do you consider your work to be feminist?

JC: I do. I do, but in a really broad sense. Definitions of feminism are, of course, constantly changing. The feminism that I remember from the 1960s and 70s had a great deal to do with notions of women's "voicelessness." And that was certainly what I was thinking too, when I began this work – that these were women whose voices had been excluded from history and it was really important that they be included. But they turned that formulation around for me. I very quickly learned that these women had strong voices in their own communities, that older women especially could talk about how they came to hold positions of real local influence during the course of their lives. But institutions and bureaucracies beyond their own communities pretty much ignored their voices. So my sense of feminism emerges more from what they taught me than from the kinds of feminism that I encountered and participated in at university during the 1960s. The women I worked with in the north made feminism more interesting and made me more cautious about orthodoxy.

AH: What are some of the issues that you are concerned with in doing your research?

JC: One issue that has always concerned me surrounds representation, voice, who's speaking for whom, who's doing interpretation - all those sorts of things – as well as whether and how someone like myself from 'outside' can be involved in that process. What struck me all through the 1990s as I listened to these debates about representation at UBC was that those questions were being discussed in communities almost thirty years earlier when I first visited in 1968. And solutions were being really worked out in communities: how insiders/ outsiders should frame their projects, how they should work together, what processes should be in place. I think that women in the north had long experience of a kind of a double jeopardy in a way. They were "othered" as both indigenous women and as northerners, and there were already prickly responses to "outside researchers." That was already a huge issue in the 1960s and '70s. So, this was much in the air and young women were talking about it and were very clear about rules of engagement for researchers. So those issues have always concerned me.

I've recently thought about how discussions of voice and representation were carried out in the north decades before they were addressed in urban academic institutions. When we work in urban metropolitan institutions like this, we sometimes behave as though we're at the forefront of debates that actually have complicated histories in other places. It's part of the gap between academy and community that I still find very jarring. In oral history work, for example, we had lengthy discussions in small communities about writing down orally narrated stories – whether they should be written, how they should be written, why they should be written, and so on. Responses to these questions are always changing and never resolved for more than just a short time, but the

debates certainly are not new.

AH: Another question that I was going to ask is related to issues around research. Working for an academic institution...do you have any concerns with that?

JC: When I think of the institution, I find it hard to separate research from teaching. I work in the north and I bring that experience to teaching classes. When I am doing research in the Yukon, I know that my experience there predates my university connection so I don't particularly feel that I am representing the university when I'm there. One awkwardness I sometimes experience is the university ethical review process – very worthy goals, but I frequently find the process works backwards or upside down. It seems to me that the communities should be involved in the review process, not just the distant university review committee. For instance, I once had an oral history project rejected by the review committee because I had not said that I would destroy the tapes. In order to get approval, I had to point out (backed up by letters from the Yukon) that no one would participate in an oral history project where the tapes were destroyed – the point is to make good recordings that can remain with participants after they are transcribed. When I am working on a project, there is a local review process there that everyone understands – and it is often negotiated and modified. The university arrangement sometimes seems very detached and very abrupt. That's one minor example of the institutional constraints, but we work around it.

On the other hand, connection with a university sometimes makes it possible to respond directly to requests from communities in ways that benefit local people. I've been able to hire students from communities on different occasions and that can contribute to local goals of student training. And Aboriginal students have come here to get degrees .

AH: You've talked about relationships with the community, and what relationship do you have with the community where you're working?

JC: It really varies, as you know yourself. Because for one thing there is never a single 'community' even though official jargon always essentializes the idea of community. Within any groups of people living together, issues are always contested. Officials may see things from a different perspective from those who are not in power – that's not surprising. Oral history work is often very personal, so I tend to have relationships with individuals who are directly involved in a project rather than with an abstract community.

AH: Do you feel that your research contributes to the community, or rather communities with which you work?

JC: I hope so. My sense is that families have taken ownership of the oral histories we've recorded and use them in different ways – from commemorative memorials, to school curriculum projects, to public presentations. But this leads back to an earlier question you asked, the one about issues that concern me with research. I started to say then that I've been concerned about the problem of writing down orally spoken words – turning talk into written words on a page. For a long time I worried that this can become a kind of

freeze-dried history. But my sense is that this is not what happens. As family members talk about these accounts and continue to reflect on and develop them, these written accounts continue to have a life. For women who did this work and for their family members, writing is just one more method to talk about their lives, one way among many to communicate. What interests me most now is the social life these stories gain as they move on and gain new lives independently of earlier tellings, and I am pretty sure that the women who recorded those stories would be delighted to see the range of ways that their work continues to be used. I'm sometimes surprised by the very rich range of ways that people do this, but that is also what's most interesting. It shows the work that stories can do. I wrote about this in my book *The Social Life of Stories*.

AH: Do you think about strengths and weaknesses in your own research?

JC: Yes...I think about this all the time. And the answer is probably the same for both. The strength *and* the weakness is the eternal incompleteness. Every time you get to a point where you think you understand something, new uses and meanings of stories pop up. There is always something more to think about, so it is never really complete.

AH: So, about strengths and weaknesses?

JC: Strengths and weaknesses: what may appear as strength at one point might be a weakness at another. Do you want me to give you an example?

AH: Sure.

JC: It seems to me that when we started this work in the Yukon 30 years ago, part of the objective was to recognize the plurality of voices, and the fact that voices are contested. And so I was hoping that working with different women would mean hearing different perspectives on any given topic – essentially broadening and complicating our interpretation of events we think we understand. Now, thirty years later, First Nations negotiating land claims in the Yukon need to present a unified front both to courts and to land claims negotiators. So, there are cases in which the idea of multiple voices is definitely not very helpful. In fact, it could be interpreted as harmful. Here's the example. I was speaking with a woman who is now an elder but was not when we began this work. She expressed real reservations about publicly presenting different versions of events (as told by these women) as equally valuable. Her point was, basically, that if I had tried harder I might have been able to get the 'true' or 'correct' story. Initially I responded by suggesting that there might be no 'true' agreed-upon version of an event because women might have experience these events differently from men, or old people might have a different perspective from young people. But she pointed out that in a framework like land claims where there are clearly established criteria for 'truth' this is not helpful. So our perspectives on truth don't really line up. Again, this reminded me that we have to question our feminist theories and how scholarly theories, too, develop in a specific context that does not always fit comfortably with people's daily struggles. I am not suggesting that I would have done this work differently, just that we need to remember that our research always occurs in one context and that we can't predict how it

will be interpreted when that context changes. Fifty years from now, all our work will be viewed differently. What appears to be a strength at one time may be interpreted as a weakness later.

AH: What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of doing academic research?

JC: This gets back to your earlier question about working in the university. I do think it gives us a privileged position because it does allow us to be self-critical. When I was much younger, I thought it was really important to do work always that had real practical implications and benefits. Now, I would say is "yes but..." probably the important work we do is to think. As soon as we stop questioning our assumptions we run the risk of becoming engulfed in ideological streams that can result in simple hubris...or much worse. So that is the advantage of working in a university and if we stop being critical of what we see and hear, and of our own favorite theories, then we aren't doing our job.

AH: Have you run into funding problems with the university though?

JC: We all apply for funding and everybody knows that there are more good applications than there is money. So every year people are really distressed when they don't get funding for projects that they think are good. I've been fortunate and have received funding for projects I've applied for, but my work does not require huge amounts of finding. Even if I didn't have research money I would still go to the Yukon and work on a project every summer.

AH: So, do you have any aspirations for present and future research projects?

JC: My current funding application is quite different. Do you want to hear about it?

AH: Yes.

JC: I am quite intrigued by issues surrounding scientific research in northern Canada, especially the relationships that scientists have historically had with indigenous peoples. One current concern in the north is potential consequences of climate change. Scientists don't seem to agree on what the changes will be, but they do all agree that whatever they are, they will be especially extensive north of the sixtieth parallel. In the Yukon, scientists have worked for decades collecting data in fields like paleontology, glaciology, geophysics, end so on. They believe that they have a unique record of climate change for this particular area. First Nations communities in this region also have very real concerns about climate change, particularly because recent claims settlements are based on projections about forestry, fisheries, animals that may now prove to be incomplete. So I want to spend some time following some of these debates. I'm particularly interested in the narratives that women told me about nearby glaciers and glacier movements and how their knowledge is similar to or different from that of scientists, especially in regions like Kluane National Park where the Little Ice Age is well remembered in oral histories.

AH: And you've done work in the Sakha. I know that from taking your classes, so can

you tell me just a little bit about that?

JC: Sure. In fact I'm actually just leaving in a couple of days to finish a paper with a Sakha colleague, Tanya Argounova, in Cambridge. A couple of years ago, when I was on sabbatical, I met Tanya, a young woman from the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) who is an indigenous scholar working on her PhD thesis at University of Cambridge. We became good friends, and she invited me to visit her home during summer of 1996.. We carried out this small research project, an oral history project in the villages where her family originated a couple of hundred kilometres from Yakutsk. People there were very interested in offering their perspectives on what it means to be an indigenous person in Russia after the dissolution of the USSR at a time when everything is changing so dramatically. They asked us to record stories about the storytellers who were prominent in their region, an area called Taata. Taata was the home of famous epic singers and writers who suffered tremendously under Stalin's rule and were punished and sometimes executed during the 1950s for the crime of "bourgeois nationalism." They saw their region as a centre of tremendous creativity where storytelling traditions were suppressed because they were viewed as dangerous and powerful. And they wanted to document the history of that suppression of storytelling. If you think about storytelling as grounded in real, material conditions of life, this region provides very strong evidence. You can see the impact that storytelling had and the price people paid for publicly being storytellers, or poets, or writers, sometimes with their lives.

The larger interest I have is comparative. In North America, we seem to hold an expectation that everyone wants to tell his or her own story. In some places – and Siberia is a good example – telling one's own story has sometimes historically been punishable by death. So before we publish any of the accounts people told us we are taking a lot of time to get their responses to what we've written. They have been reviewing our transcripts in Taata and have sent comments back via Tanya's mother. On one hand, we know we have an obligation to publish what they told us because they want to make their situation known outside Russia. They expect us to complete this project and make it public. And that's why they did the work. On the other hand, we want to make sure that people are not endangered by what we write.

AH: Have you thought about this work as a parallel to the Yukon?

JC: The work I think is parallel. I brought Tanya to the Yukon for the summer the year after we were in Sakha and we spent time talking with Yukon First Nations about these same questions. One parallel that impressed us both is the way people use narrative storytelling to critique different state interventions – I think it is oversimplifying to call it resistance, but it is definitely a way of shaking up commonsense assumptions. In the Yukon, one current example is the Yukon International Storytelling Festival where the stories people tell convey complicated messages about difficult political issues to large audiences. In both Siberia and the Yukon, storytelling has had a major role in cultural continuity.[1] Tanya and I are both interested in continuity and persistence in oral traditions and their importance in political, social and cultural life. And we question whether for

Aboriginal people the distinctions between what we call liberal democracy and what we call totalitarian societies are as great as official histories suggest…

AH: Do you have any aspirations for future research?

JC: I know that I will keep working in northern Canada and I would like to return to Sakha Republic with Tanya sometime. I want to continue to view issues in northern Canada within a broader circumpolar framework. But the Yukon is really my intellectual home, you know. That's where I really have to come to grips with day-to-day issues that are part of my friends' daily lives. Being there gives me a perspective that I sometimes find missing in the university.

AH: Do you have any final comments to add before we end?

JC: I think that's probably enough! Is there anything you think I've left out?

[Both Chuckling]

AH: Thanks. And I know that you're really busy so, I'd just like to thank you for your time.

JC: I thank you for coming in. I know that you're really busy too right in the middle of the term.

[1] See for example, Julie Cruikshank, "Negotiating with Narrative: Establishing Cultural Identity at the Yukon International Storytelling Festival. " *American Anthropologist*, 99 (1) 1997: 56-69; Julie Cruikshank and Tatiana Argounova, "Reinscribing Meaning: Memory and Indigenous Identity in Sakha Republic, Yakutia," *Arctic Anthropology*, 37(1) 2000: 96-119.