Claudia L. Bushman

Claudia L. Bushman

INTERVIEW BY KRISTINE WARDLE FREDERICKSON

CLAUDIA L. BUSHMAN is retired in New York City after some years of teaching American Studies at Columbia University, teaching Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University, and co-teaching Contemporary Mormonism with Richard Bushman back at Columbia. She is interested in women's stories, historical housewifery, material culture, and recording the present for the future. To that end she is writing her autobiography, *I, Claudia*. Published works include *Mormon Sisters, A Good Poor Man's Wife, Contemporary Mormonism*, and *In Old Virginia.* A book based on the Claremont Oral History Project, *Mormon Women Have Their Say,* coedited with Caroline Kline, was published in 2013.

KRISTINE WARDLE FREDERICKSON is an adjunct instructor in the Departments of Religion, History, Women's

Studies, and Honors at Brigham Young University and an adjunct instructor in the Department of History and Political Science at Utah Valley University. She has published pieces in *Mormon Historical Studies, Life Lessons: Mothers of Faith, Pioneer Magazine*, and *Crescat Scientia.* She is author of the upcoming *On to Victory: Women Empowered by the Gospel of Jesus Christ* and authored a series of brief biographies for the upcoming publication *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion.* Kristine writes an online column for *Mormon Times: Deseret News.*

THE INTERVIEW

FREDERICKSON: Let's begin to understand the historian by learning about your childhood and family life. Tell me about your growing up years.

BUSHMAN: I was born in Oakland, California. Both my parents came to Los Angeles as young people before they married, because their families had exhausted their possibilities in Utah. They were not well off, actually marginal. My father could see that his father's farm would never make it. My mother's father just could not find his way in the modern world.

They came to California, met there, and married. My father got a job with a bookkeeping supplies company. He was a very successful salesman. He traveled in Oregon before the company gave him the territory in Oakland, California, where I happened to be born, as was my older sister Georgia. The family then moved across the Bay to San Francisco. So San Francisco is the place where I grew up. The church I knew was the Sunset Ward of the San Francisco Stake, and church was a satisfying experience for all of us. My father was the bishop. He was always the bishop or the stake president or the patriarch and then the sealer and so on.

After meeting in the Masonic Hall, the Church bought a lot to build a new chapel. We bought a nearby lot soon after to build our

house. Our house was just two and a half blocks from the church building, and we were there almost every day for some reason, whether practicing a program, picking up something we had forgotten, or attending a meeting. So the Church was an extension of our home in every way. The Church was very important to us. My father was the ecclesiastical leader. My mother was the cultural leader, and because of her we had many rich and exciting cultural experiences in the Church: speech and dance festivals, three-act plays, and an operetta every summer. I always felt that the Church was my best school. I've given talks on how everything I ever needed to know I learned at church, and I still call on the lessons I learned there every day.

FREDERICKSON: Where's that book?

BUSHMAN: Maybe one day I'll write it. I also think it is significant that I came from a family of four girls. We didn't have the gender tensions that we might have had. My father was always busy elsewhere, and my mother and the girls formed a comfortable, cohesive unit doing together the things we liked. I was aware that tensions existed. When I was still in Primary I asked my mother why the leaders always paid so much more attention to the boys in their programs. My mother said that the boys just needed it more than the girls did. I was aware of that distinction early. I had a very happy growing-up experience. I loved San Francisco. I loved my schools, my school friends, and my Church friends. It was a great time!

FREDERICKSON: What was the cultural life like in San Francisco?

BUSHMAN: We got to go do everything. We started out going to the symphony concerts for young people. We were soon doing grown-up symphonies and operas and plays. We were very close to a place call Sigmund Stern Grove, where there was an outdoor stage and a concert every Sunday afternoon. San Francisco has rich museums that we visited often.

FREDERICKSON: You said you participated in operettas, speech festivals . . .

BUSHMAN: Dance festivals. Yes, all of those things. Not athletics. We were before women did anything athletic. One year my older sister Georgia, who is an excellent pianist, got a scholarship to attend a summer music camp put on by the San Francisco schools. I was a piano dropout, preferring dramatic things, but when she said, "Well, I'm not going by myself. Claudia has to go," my mother asked if I would like to go too. And always looking for adventure, I was glad to sign on. So we went daily to this music camp. There were few resources but lots of talented people, and we had an enlightening experience. Georgia soon had a boyfriend named Tony, who played the trumpet, and I soon had a boyfriend named Ted, who sang tenor. Tony had performed in a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta every year at Mission High School, and he introduced us all to these shows, which he knew by heart. Every day after music classes we would go to our house, Georgia would play, and we would sing *Gilbert and Sullivan*. It was one of the happiest times of my life. My mother, who'd always been very scornful of *Gilbert and Sullivan*, discovered it at this point, and she later produced *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Gondoliers* for our ward groups.

FREDERICKSON: And was the ward growing over time as you were there?

BUSHMAN: It was growing and shrinking. Many of our successful people moved down the peninsula, and new people would move in. We had a group of very congenial people who treated us young people extremely well. I felt like I was a princess in the ward. And everyone was interested in everything we did. We had the "village" needed to bring young people up.

FREDERICKSON: There were so many activities for young people, and you were so often together.

BUSHMAN: Wonderful activities, wonderful cultural activities.

FREDERICKSON: Yes, I agree. I grew up in the Bay Area doing all those things, and I regret that my children didn't have those experiences.

BUSHMAN: I agree. I'm sure that those experiences would have been valuable for them to have had at church. We could star in shows at school because we'd had so much experience. Give a talk? A cinch. Be in a play? Easy. Read music and sing parts? Of course. Other people just didn't have that experience.

FREDERICKSON: As I recall, after high school you went to Wellesley?

BUSHMAN: I did.

FREDERICKSON: Explain why you decided to go all the way across the country to college.

BUSHMAN: It was an accident, as such things are. I was expected to go to BYU, but there were reasons I didn't want to go there. My best friend was going to the University of Utah, and I wanted to go with her. But my father absolutely refused, not wanting to pay out-of-state fees. One day I was visiting my high school counselor, not even with an appointment, and she asked where I was going to college. I said I didn't know and told her the situation. She said I should go either to Stanford or Cal (Berkeley), and that I was to apply to those two. Then she suggested I might be interested in "this" and handed me a flyer that announced the seven-college scholarship to the seven women's colleges.

After World War II, the eastern schools began to extend their reach to the rest of the country, bringing in promising students from all over. So Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley, Radcliffe, and Vassar sponsored a program offering three geographically based scholarships to each college. I looked at the flyer and

thought, "Why not?" Knowing nothing of these schools, I decided that I had to be near the ocean. Mount Holyoke originally interested me the most because my grandmother had considered going there when she was young. She joined the LDS Church instead. But even then I could see that Mount Holyoke was too far inland. When I looked at the map (not a very good map), I could see that Barnard, in New York, was close to the water, but I'd never heard of Barnard. Radcliffe was also close to the ocean, but I'd never heard of that. Wellesley had a familiar name. It was the kind of place that people in novels went to. So I put it down as my first choice. Three choices were required, so I put Wellesley, then Vassar—because I'd heard of the daisy chain—and last, Mount Holyoke. But I was never really serious; I never thought about it much or set my mind on going. It was just something I did.

Meanwhile, I was admitted to Stanford and registered there. I had a roommate assigned and everything. But I'd done all the necessary things for the Seven Colleges: I had done the paperwork, taken the tests, and had an interview. One day late in the process—so other people must have turned the offer down—I received a letter that said, "Congratulations, you've been awarded a scholarship to Wellesley!" I thought, "Isn't that something?!" My father was stupefied that anyone would offer me money—me—to go to school. I was smart enough and somewhat bookish but was interested in many other things. But I had a boyfriend at the time who was very poor, and when he called, I told him, "Alan, guess what! I got a scholarship to Wellesley! Of course, I'm not going to go." He said, "Why not! If I got a scholarship like that, I would certainly go." So I hung up and told the family, "Alan thinks I should go to Wellesley." My mother said, "Well, maybe you should." That's how it happened—a complete accident. But it was a great opportunity, an incomparable adventure. That's a major reason that my advice to my children is to put yourself in a place where good things can happen to you.

FREDERICKSON: Great advice. So were all your friends going off to college, or what kind of career path were other girls following?

BUSHMAN: My high school was not very serious academically. I had a friend or two going to Stanford, more were going to Cal, but most of them were going to San Francisco State, or City College, or a beauty school, or secretarial school, or to work. I had one friend who was going to Cal Tech, also by accident, and one went to MIT, but we were the only ones going away.

FREDERICKSON: But your parents were supportive?

BUSHMAN: They were, but they didn't know what they were getting into. They knew Janeth Cannon, who had been a counselor in the Church Relief Society presidency. She had gone to Wellesley, but she told my mother that while she had enjoyed her time there, she would never send her daughter to Wellesley. For one reason, it was so hard to get to the church that I don't think she ever went. She sang in the Wellesley choir and took part in the regular college church services every week. But by my time it was a little easier to get in to Cambridge. So I always went in to church.

FREDERICKSON: Tell me about your experience at Wellesley.

BUSHMAN: I had planned to major in political science and join the foreign service—all of which I knew nothing about—but I didn't like my first political science class. I did like my English class, so I majored in English, the largest major at Wellesley. Looking back, I think I should have chosen a smaller major to take full advantage of Wellesley's faculty and facilities, but of course I loved it. Literature is the best stuff.

FREDERICKSON: Was it American literature?

BUSHMAN: This was English literature. Only one class, which I took, was available in American literature then. But I

didn't like doing all the work; I was a very lazy student. I would always moan that I would really love Wellesley without the classes and papers.

FREDERICKSON: Sounds like some of my students. What was that environment like?

BUSHMAN: You mean the students? Smart, rich, innocent, hardworking, many already burned-out getting into Wellesley. All were better prepared than I. The teachers included lots of dedicated, sort of desiccated old ladies and some young men in their first jobs. They were all supereducated and very smart. There was absolutely no one like Julia Roberts on the scene, if you've seen the movie *Mona Lisa Smile.* My classmates were scandalized by that film, which they felt was unfair to their intellectual sophistication, but I actually thought the film was not too far off the mark. We did have tea once a week. (I always made hot lemonade.) We always wore skirts to dinner, sat at tables, and had our dinner served. By then we did the cafeteria-style breakfasts and lunches. We always stood for the housemother. Also, there was the assumption that we would marry soon, and very few people thought in terms of careers. Those who did plan to work were going into teaching and library work. A few devout girls were going to be missionaries for their churches. The real glamour jobs of the era were airline stewardesses, guides at the UN, and fact checkers for *Time.*

FREDERICKSON: Was it like the British system, where you eat in college?

BUSHMAN: We ate in our dormitories, which we called houses. I lived in Severance Hall and then Tower Court, very beautiful collegiate Gothic dormitories overlooking the lake and the rolling lawns and very much living up to their names. Wellesley's campus is very, very beautiful.

FREDERICKSON: And formal, prim, proper?

BUSHMAN: The tone was more girly. We sang grace before meals and were always bursting out in our class cheers.

FREDERICKSON: In the movie they were instructing the girls in setting a table, how to entertain.

BUSHMAN: No, we never did anything like that. The Wellesley girls may have worn Bermuda shorts and looked sloppy, but they were socially very sophisticated and certainly knew how to put on parties. I do remember one young male instructor complaining bitterly about being blinded by the huge engagement diamonds that appeared every spring. The students came from a lot of wealth and were marrying into more.

FREDERICKSON: But it was fairly rigorous academically?

BUSHMAN: It was quite serious academically. Much was expected, and we worked hard. I always felt that we did more than the Harvard students did, but somehow they came out better educated than we did. Perhaps they had better dinner-table conversation. Ours was certainly of a high level. But we did have to work, and I worked harder than ever before, although I was a lazy student. I thought I would aim to put in an eight-hour academic day—classes and studying and reading. That was not nearly enough, but that's what I aimed to do.

FREDERICKSON: We need to tell more university students about an eight-hour day. What was it like to leave home?

BUSHMAN: I never was homesick. In those days when you went on an airplane you had on high heels and hats. I wore an orchid corsage. Worried about getting up the airplane steps in my new high heels, I didn't turn around and wave to my family. The scene became a family myth: "She never looked back." But I was fine. I never was homesick; I never had been.

FREDERICKSON: Did you go home in the summers?

BUSHMAN: Yes, I went home in the summers. I also went home at Christmastime. A lot of people stayed on campus all the time; they never got off that privileged island. But I didn't stay there. I was off every weekend two or three times.

FREDERICKSON: And then did you start doing sorties to other parts of the East Coast? Did you have any chances to travel?

BUSHMAN: I went to Washington, DC, my first spring vacation with some friends. Nelson Rockefeller, the father of a classmate, got us rooms. I went to Union City, New Jersey, the next spring vacation. I went to New York City to visit. Then I sang in an octet, the Wellesley Widows, and we traveled off to lots of other colleges to entertain at dances or house parties and to perform in octet festivals. The students who invited us arranged blind dates for us, and we had a lot of fun.

FREDERICKSON: What about Church experiences during those years? You went to what ward?

BUSHMAN: We went into the Cambridge Branch, a long way off. We were then meeting in an old Victorian house that had belonged to the Longfellow family. The mission headquarters was right next door in another Longfellow house. So we had two old Victorian houses. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's primary residence, a yellow frame mansion, was across the street. I called the mission office for directions to get to church, but what did the elders know? It was a complex journey requiring several transfers. I made my way in, changing buses and trains. The final leg of the journey was the trolley car on Mount Auburn Street, after which I had to walk up through little Longfellow Park, which provided a vista of the Charles River from the tall yellow Longfellow house. The park is just a small, landscaped place and was then in very scruffy condition.

I was glad to meet the small group of Saints, and we had a nice meeting. Afterwards when talking with a bunch of the students, I asked imperiously, "Why on earth did the Church ever buy property

in this slum?" Well, of course everyone was completely horrified. The houses fronted on Brattle Street, Cambridge's finest thoroughfare. How could anyone criticize the church's location? But this place was definitely scruffy, and in San Francisco it is important for things to look pretty.

My comment persuaded a young man that he needed to educate me. He was a sophomore at Harvard. His family lived nearby, and he had access to a car. He took me to all the places he thought I should know about and lectured me on the importance and wonders of Boston. He prepared well: "Today we're going to the Cooper-Frost-Austin House. This is important because it's the first house built here." "Today, we're going to the Christian Science Mother Church. This is important because. . . ." "And then we're going out to Mount Auburn Cemetery to see Mary Baker Eddy's grave." "Today we're going to the Saugus Ironworks; this is important because. . . ." I went to places most people that have lived in Boston all their lives have never seen, and we had wonderful times.

It was the best education. He took me to the Red Sox and Celtic games and explained sports strategy. We went to all the Harvard home games. Then after a while I started educating him. I said, "Today, we're going to the Museum of Fine Arts. This is important because. . . . Then we're going to go to a concert at the Busch-Reisinger Museum." We had a successful mutual education project going.

FREDERICKSON: So when did you meet Richard?

BUSHMAN: I met him during my freshman year when he was a missionary. He'd been to Harvard for two years and then was called to the New England States Mission with the headquarters, as I said, right next door to our little house-chapel. He was rather chagrinned by the call because he had told his friends he was going off to some exotic locale, and here he was right back home.

He had a very unusual mission. The mission president's wife always called him Dick because she had known him before, and since

missionaries were few during the Korean War, the president sent him off by himself to supervise the missionaries all over the mission. When he came back to school, we started keeping company a little bit. He was already a fabled person in that ward because he was so intense and strictly devoted to the Church and hardworking in everything that he did. He was one of the several people that I knew by reputation before I met them. As a fun-loving type, I tried to stay out of his way. I was surprised when he started to come out to see me at Wellesley for study dates, a kind of date I never had much interest in. He was very stern, very serious. We could hardly carry on a conversation. After a while he started writing me letters to set me straight on one thing or another, correcting some of my assumptions, trying to improve me. When he actually proposed to me, I was just astonished.

FREDERICKSON: Did that kind of personality put you off? Did it intrigue you?

BUSHMAN: I felt that our relationship was very mannered. I wanted to keep my distance because he was kind of frightening. He seemed harsh. I thought he was coming to see me on assignment from the elders quorum. I knew he didn't have any idea what I was really like. So the proposal was a serious surprise.

FREDERICKSON: You said you were shocked when he proposed?

BUSHMAN: I was surprised. I was astonished. I just couldn't imagine he had any romantic interest in me. There were lots of prettier girls around, and he was regarded as a real catch. I'd been proposed to a few times. I knew what it was like. I wasn't completely naive, but he just had not given me any signs that it was coming. I thought he was doing good, trying to educate me, trying to improve me.

FREDERICKSON: Did you love the idea—were you pleased that he proposed?

BUSHMAN: It was an honor that I had not dreamed of. I couldn't believe that he was serious, but he was serious about everything. It did happen. He turned out to be a very different person than I expected, and we got along fine after a while. That was my junior year, and I think we were engaged in January or February, something like that. Then he decided to come and spend the summer with us in San Francisco, which he did. We were married that summer and then went back to school.

FREDERICKSON: You said you were a junior at this time?

BUSHMAN: I had one year to go, and my family would have been happy if I had just quit school then, seeing that this was a serious financial strain on them, despite scholarships. Also, the college discontinued my scholarship because as a married person living off campus, I would no longer be contributing to the community. But I really did want to finish up, because in our family we have a completion complex. If you start something, you should finish it, so I was determined to graduate.

FREDERICKSON: Richard was at Harvard?

BUSHMAN: Yes. He had graduated the year before, so he was starting his PhD at Harvard. I commuted. We lived in Harvard student housing on a street called Shaler Lane. We had a little one-bedroom apartment, and we were students together.

FREDERICKSON: So you graduated, and Richard was finishing at Harvard. Or what was the sequence?

BUSHMAN: I graduated in maternity clothes, and our first child was born in October 1956. I had always assumed that I would be a wife and mother. That's what I wanted to do and would do and what I was socialized to do. At one of the events before we graduated, the president of our college, Margaret Clapp, gave us a stern lecture. She said she didn't want us all to disappear into suburbia. We were to

make contributions to our communities. I thought that was all right for everybody else, but I was going to be a wife and mother—that's what I was meant to do. I had no intention of ever going back to school, but it wasn't very long before I was hungry to be back in the classroom. Part of it was a quest for significance. When I went to parties with Richard, I became aware of how much I didn't count as a housewife and mother. Nobody wanted to talk to me, maybe because I was just nobody. I didn't factor in how insecure many academics are anyway. Another thing was that even at church I was aware that I had lost status. As a single student, I had had more status than as the wife of a promising and admired young man. I had picked off the best guy around, and yet I had lost status. I thought about that a lot, and I thought that maybe I ought to do something about it.

I had felt that when a girl married she was supposed to give up her life and live her husband's life. But my husband was not interested in sharing all his life with me. He did not want to read novels aloud. He did not want to rehearse his day completely for me. I began to realize that I existed only in his mind, and much of the time he wasn't thinking about me. Where was I, then? I would sit on my front steps with my baby and see other young mothers going off to interesting jobs, going off to school, and working on graduate degrees. And after a while, it seemed to me that's what I might do.

There was an educational foundation in Cambridge called the Lowell Institute, funded by a nineteenth-century capitalist to educate mechanics. The foundation hired professors at nearby colleges to teach their classes for a general audience at Harvard as evening classes. The price was geared to the cost of a sack of grain. Grain was pretty cheap then, just five dollars a bag, so students could enroll for five dollars a class. What a goldmine! Richard was willing to come home and take care of the baby while I went to class if he could then go back to the library afterwards. So I took the modern novel from Albert Guerard. I took French Impressionism, which met at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, from Robert Fowle, and I took the

music of Bach from Allan Sapp. No one ever had such a delightful semester. I had something to think about all day. Before long, I thought I'd like to go back to school for a degree. I continued to take those classes, noting that every year at Harvard commencement people graduated with Harvard degrees from the Lowell Institute.

FREDERICKSON: So from the Lowell Institute you could get a university degree?

BUSHMAN: A student would have to attend for a long time and plan carefully to fill all the groups, because the classes didn't repeat very often, but even a mechanic could earn a Harvard degree. I was ready to go back for a degree, but we could not afford it until Richard got a job. Before that we spent a year in England. Richard was awarded a Shelton Traveling Fellowship. He was always a very promising and successful student. We traveled through Germany and France, but what Richard wanted was to live in England and work at the British Museum. He wrote most of his dissertation on Connecticut in the magnificent, cold, damp British Museum.

Our second child was born in London during the time Richard contracted rheumatic fever and nephritis and spent weeks and weeks in the hospital. I wrecked the car, and there were other problems. I spent my time in England in our little flat and mostly in our warm kitchen, listening to the BBC, knitting, reading novels, and taking care of my two babies. Occasionally I would get out, but not much. When we returned to Cambridge, Richard completed his degree and took his first job at Brigham Young University. I began work on an MA there. By then, from Richard's example, I had learned to work hard. I got a master's degree at BYU in American literature. It took me three years.

FREDERICKSON: How many children at this point?

BUSHMAN: I started with two children and finished with three. I finished up that degree before we left Provo. Then we spent

two years on a postdoctoral fellowship in Providence, Rhode Island. Richard was studying psychohistory and teaching at Brown. I taught freshman English at Rhode Island College. We had our fourth child in Providence.

FREDERICKSON: How did you negotiate graduate school while raising a family?

BUSHMAN: Graduate school is easier than college for a mother because the classes don't meet as often. In Provo I had a neighbor woman who babysat for twenty-five cents an hour, but I was only gone for class time. I went to the library after the children were in bed. But I still finished as quickly as single, unemployed people in my program. I was motivated and disciplined.

We were at BYU for three years, then we went to Providence for two years, then we went back to BYU for three years and had another child. During this time, Richard's first book was published, and he won the Bancroft Prize for one of the three best American history books that year. We went back to Columbia University for the prize event. Columbia's Low Library is an imposing building with a huge rotunda. It never worked well as a library. It is now used for ceremonial events. I later had an office there. At the event, people wore black tie and long gowns. We stood in the receiving line and people kissed my hand, an unbelievable event for the Provo hicks. The three winners gave droll, witty, and charming talks.

We saw a couple of shows in New York, and by the time we were back in Provo, Low Library had been occupied by insurgents. The disrupted sixties had begun. The Bancroft Prize gala was the last event held in the library before the police were called, the administration toppled, and Columbia went into a long decline. We spent the next summer in San Francisco, and Richard, working at University of California, Berkeley, drove through Haight-Ashbury every day.

After that, Richard had a one-year sabbatical in Boston at the Charles Warren Center. During the year, he was heavily recruited

because of his prize, but he said he had to go back to Provo. He owed BYU because it had paid for his sabbatical. Boston University was the most energetic of his suitors, and the history chair finally persuaded him to come and help establish the new American Studies program. BU even bought out his sabbatical. So instead of going back to Provo, we stayed in Boston, living in Arlington, Concord, and Belmont. We were very happy to be back in Boston.

I finally had a chance to work for a doctorate. I could go to Boston University as a faculty wife with money off, though it still cost a lot. And the history chair pressured the English chair to accept me. The chairman of the English department was officious and condescending, as was very common in connection with returning female students: "Now, Mrs. Bushman, why do you really think you should take up a place in our department and study literature? Oh, Mrs. Bushman, why don't you just stay home with your children?"

A person then had to have four languages for a doctorate in literature. I had Old English and French, and I was studying Latin at the time, which was tough sledding, and I still had to do German. I came home one night and wondered what I was doing, what kind of craziness this was. About that time, Richard returned from a meeting of the American Studies group, and he tossed off an incendiary comment. He said the group had discussed how many languages to require for a degree, and as they could find no good rationale for more, they would require one language for a doctorate in American Studies. At that point I became an American Studies graduate student. I've never regretted that snap decision. History and literature are what everyone should study.

FREDERICKSON: I agree. In my PhD program history was my major field and my minor field was British literature. Did you study under your husband?

BUSHMAN: I never took any classes from him, but he was definitely involved in that program.

FREDERICKSON: Was he on your committee?

BUSHMAN: No, he was never on my committee. David Hall directed the program and my dissertation. Richard and I knew many of the same people and all the same students. It was not ideal. There were times when not only was I in his ward and he was the bishop or the stake president, but also when he was a boss in my program, and I wasn't too happy about that. But it was a "grit your teeth and carry on" time.

When I considered what I would study, I decided to do female studies. I'd never heard of anyone else doing it. I decided I would use my own life and those of women I knew as benchmarks and then study the women of the past against them. Several other people in the program were interested in women's topics, and after a while we started teaching summer school classes; the several of us cooperated together. Many students were interested in such classes, but the university had no qualified faculty members. Those are the only women's studies courses I have ever attended—the ones I taught myself.

FREDERICKSON: Why were you drawn to women's history?

BUSHMAN: Well, because I was a woman. Because I was searching for my identity in lots of ways. I was trying to understand my life. I wasn't content with the many things I had to do. Richard could see that I was thrashing around, and he was sympathetic. I did all kinds of things at church and had many opportunities and responsibilities, but it just wasn't enough. I needed something more.

FREDERICKSON: Now, this is the part on which I want to spend a little time—being a historian. Individuals write and study political history, social history, economic history, etc., but what is it that led you to write about the history of women? Lots of people say, "Why do we need women's history?" What is it about women's history that is so important?

BUSHMAN: I'm interested in ordinary people, not the kings, not the prime ministers. I like the people who work and live in little houses and on farms, and more than half of them are women. And their stories are different than the men's stories—personal and detailed and compelling. I read the other day that Leonard Arrington said that if he had a choice between ten men's diaries and one woman's diary, he would take the woman's diary anytime.

FREDERICKSON: Do you find when you are studying or writing women's history that there are points of connection, because of gender, because you are a woman?

BUSHMAN: Oh, yes.

FREDERICKSON: It is educational and enlightening. We women will never have the same experiences as men, because gender distinguishes us, and both genders' experiences need to be illuminated.

BUSHMAN: Could you give me an example of where you see that connection?

FREDERICKSON: In your book *A Good Poor Man's Wife*, Harriet talks about her husband being in dire financial straits for a while. My husband lost his job with the recent banking industry collapse and scrambled to retool and find employment. He did, but it took some time. Now he is back in a related field, but in pinching pennies I related to Harriet's experiences. Her experiences as a woman were very different from her husband's experiences. She couldn't take matters into her own hands and was at the mercy of her husband's ability to get on his feet financially. Women often have less control over income, and it is difficult when you have to rely on someone else. I related to the financial challenges and pressures on Harriet. At other times in her life, I could vicariously experience some of the other things she went through—because they were women's experiences.

BUSHMAN: Yes, that's right.

FREDERICKSON: And women need to make those connections in this day and age—they need to find a context for their lives. In many ways women are less connected to history, to the past, than men are because there is less written history about women. Without women's history, women are left to flounder in an increasingly chaotic contemporary world without any moorings or true sense of self—because you can't really understand the present unless you understand the past.

Let me ask you about your books. Your early books are about early American women. But your last two books are about LDS women in a non-LDS world. Tell me about that trajectory. Also, what took place after you began to teach classes in women's studies?

BUSHMAN: The trajectory was not clear and it was not planned. I don't just do women or Mormons. I do whatever comes to hand. I've done several Delaware projects: edited two volumes of official papers, written a history of the Wilmington library, and done lots of the City of Newark projects. I've written a book about a Virginia antebellum farmer, John Walker—another touchstone for me. My specific interest in Mormon women was fueled by the LDS women's consciousness-raising group that Laurel Thatcher Ulrich began in the seventies. I credit myself for moving us from talk to projects, and we turned out the pink issue of *Dialogue*. I credit Eugene England for giving an untried group of housewives that access to the printing press. And I credit Bob Rees, who succeeded Gene as editor of *Dialogue*, for getting us into the Mormon history business. He questioned whether our "Ladies Home Dialogue" dealt with the real Mormon women's issues, which were patriarchy and polygamy. Those weren't our issues, but they are the historical Mormon women's issues, and they came to be ours as we plumbed the past. Susan Kohler found a bound version of the *Woman's Exponent* in the Harvard Library. We began reading those mind-boggling volumes. A good friend, who was the

LDS Institute director, invited us to prepare lectures and give them as an institute class. Those articles were eventually published as *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*. Our group got a taste for publishing and working together, and we have now turned out forty-plus years of our Mormon feminist newspaper *Exponent II*.

FREDERICKSON: I loved *Mormon Sisters*. When I read it years ago, I thought, "Oh my goodness." Because I connected!

BUSHMAN: Yes. I still think it's a good book.

FREDERICKSON: Their lives were not easy. But that's what you value most, I think, about those women.

BUSHMAN: That group is still alive in various ways.

FREDERICKSON: This leads me to another significant question. How do you negotiate all of these different roles? The one thing I always tell my women students is, "If you make the decision to work, to be a mother, whatever you do, all those decisions are decisions between you and your God. If you marry, it is between you, your husband, and your God. But if you decide to take a full-time job or follow a professional career, too, you have two full-time jobs."

BUSHMAN: At least.

FREDERICKSON: So how did you negotiate all you did? You were up to how many children at this point?

BUSHMAN: I went to school part-time because I could only afford a class or two at a time. And after I started teaching, I saved all of that money to use for tuition the next year. I started my doctorate with five children and finished with six. I was glad to have an excuse to take a semester or two off along the way. When I began that long haul I decided I would give up three things that were important to me—fashion, creative housekeeping, and entertaining. Not that I could ever entirely get rid of any of them, but I had to simplify,

strategize, and cut them back. If I were going to have a party, then I had to have two or three parties and get everything done at once with the same menu. If I were going to make Easter dresses for the little girls, I had to use a pattern I already had and make them very simple, preferably from fabric I already had. Actually cutting back on these activities freed me from the competitive Mormon woman thing. My husband was bishop and stake president all this time, but he promised not to complain when the house wasn't tidy. Not that he'd clean it, but he wouldn't complain. And he was helpful in many ways. He's my great teacher. He was always available for good advice, to tell me how to handle things, to give ideas for paper topics, to criticize and edit my work. It's been a great blessing to my life to have a historian, to have somebody as learned and kindly as he is, around. We've always read each other's work. An in-house editor is a great luxury.

FREDERICKSON: How many years did it take to get your PhD?

BUSHMAN: It took me more than ten years. It took a long time.

FREDERICKSON: Welcome to my world.

BUSHMAN: How long did it take you?

FREDERICKSON: It took me about ten years. I was a teaching assistant. I was doing whatever I could to earn money to pay for school. I taught swim lessons in the summer, and when I started teaching at BYU that was helpful because I used that money to pay the tuition for my PhD program at the University of Utah.

BUSHMAN: That's right. You couldn't do it otherwise.

FREDERICKSON: No, I couldn't have done it otherwise.

BUSHMAN: We're middle class. We have money, but on the other hand, we never have any extra money. Most people don't. We had all these kids and piano lessons, clothes, and class pictures. But I loved being able to switch from one life to another, which is what I

would do. If I had to write a paper, scrubbing the floor was a pleasure. If the children acted neglected, I'd drop work and make cookies or go to the movies. The two lives balanced out. But then, before I finished my dissertation, Richard took another job in Delaware. "I was ripped untimely from my sources."

FREDERICKSON: Yes, and that was another question I had. How did you deal with following your husband's career path? Were you forced to make concessions to one another?

BUSHMAN: I always had to follow him. He was the one that could make money, and I was really just starting out. So I always had to fit what I was doing to his employment. When I went down to Delaware I could no longer teach history, because he was the chairman of the history department. So I taught in ten other different departments, and I never had a secure job. When I did get a good job, which was the director of Delaware Heritage Commission, a job well suited to me, then he decided to come to Columbia, so I left that job. I never could have supported the family.

FREDERICKSON: I think you could have if you had to.

BUSHMAN: Maybe, but I never went on the national market. I was always just kind of doing what I did.

FREDERICKSON: And so you went to Columbia?

BUSHMAN: I taught in the graduate American studies program there. I loved my students, all kinds of students. Some had other serious and demanding careers going, but they wanted to get back in the classroom. Some were just out of school and didn't know what they were going to do next, or they wanted to do liberal arts before they went to medical or law school. Some hadn't done all that well in college and were trying to reposition themselves to do better in graduate school. Some were housewives returning to college, and some were men facing retirement who were looking to do something else. It was a rich mix.

FREDERICKSON: What courses did you teach?

BUSHMAN: I taught the introductory class. I'm very open about American Studies, so I think any subject matter works. I would teach close reading and critical writing, looking at documents of all kinds. After a while, I focused on New York one hundred years ago because so much of that material was still there. I also taught a course on women's autobiographies—the American female experience.

FREDERICKSON: Was there a lot of material for students to use—lots of women's journals?

BUSHMAN: We mostly used published materials.

FREDERICKSON: You and your husband started writing about the LDS Church for the non-LDS community when the two of you wrote *Building the Kingdom: A History of Mormons in America*. Were you invited to write that book by Oxford University Press?

BUSHMAN: Yes, we were asked to write that. Richard didn't want to do it. He was too busy. But I thought we could while we were at the Huntington Library about twelve years ago. He wrote the first half and I wrote the last half, and we traded the halves back and forth. I think it reads as if written by a single author. That is a useful little book. Lots of people have read it. We're glad we did it.

FREDERICKSON: I read it and found it to be a wonderful overview of LDS history from the Church's beginnings until now. So have you moved "away" from American Studies and women's studies?

BUSHMAN: It has always been a parallel move. Richard wrote a lot of Mormon essays while teaching colonial history that were collected and published a few years ago as *Believing History*. We've always gone back and forth, but mostly not seeing ourselves as LDS Church historians. Richard was asked earlier to write *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. He had always thought when he was a graduate student that he would eventually come back and do a biography

of Joseph Smith, which he did in *Rough Stone Rolling.* He's been back and forth more than I have. He is still formally working on a study of colonial farming. I did *Mormon Sisters* early on; then I recently did *Contemporary Mormonism: Latter-day Saints in Modern America*. I was invited to do that, too, and I was glad to have a reason to set out the Church in a way that I recognize it.

After teaching at Delaware for a while, I began teaching a class on women's studies for the honors program. The women's studies program committee decided that they could not allow women's studies to be taught by a Mormon, a person not qualified by definition to teach such a course. It was a horrific moment of truth for me. I was too good a Mormon to teach women's studies, even as various Mormons thought I was too far out and radical a woman to be a Mormon. What to do? I really thought it was the end of the world, and I suffered a lot before I was able to pick up the pieces. I repackaged myself as a local historian and organized the Newark Historical Society in our college town. I did all kinds of projects with that—programs, exhibitions, books—and I taught local history at the university. From there I was drafted to be the director of the Delaware Heritage Commission, a perfect job for me. A group of citizens had been named to celebrate things in the state. It was a very political operation, and we plowed through rough political waters. Then I was very glad that I was not responsible for my children's bread, as I was in frequent danger of being fired. Knowing that the ax could fall any day, our tiny staff organized events associated with the anniversary of the Constitution, which made Delaware the first state, and we did everything we could think of or that was suggested to us. We reenacted riots, colonial balls, and Washington's inauguration. We wrote books and started a publishing company. We worked with dozens of state groups, putting wreaths on the graves of signers with the Daughters of the American Revolution and releasing a million ladybugs, the state insect; with the PTA, we introduced two new postage stamps with the philatelists. We sent our delegates off to the

Annapolis convention in a horse-pulled carriage. We did exhibitions and parties and staged the biggest parade that Delaware has ever seen—and that's just a partial list. I was on the radio and on TV all the time. I testified before Congress and was on CNN. At that hearing I sat next to Bill Bradley, who was in a brown suit with dandruff on the shoulders. Strom Thurmond kissed me at one of our events. It was a great, great time.

It was at that point that I really did think of not following my husband to New York and staying in Delaware. But the call to Columbia meant a great deal to Richard. The university had been searching and interviewing for a long time, and he was the first candidate the committee agreed on. Besides, going to New York meant free tuition to Columbia for our two youngest boys, and free Ivy League tuition was welcome to our educationally impoverished family. I was sorry to leave Delaware, a great state to live in because a small state is so manageable. It doesn't take you long to get to know all the congressmen, the governor, all the people of importance in the state. And I did know them. It was a culture shock to go from a state that had six hundred thousand people to a city that had eight million. But Richard and I had been together a long time, and it did not seem like a good idea to divide up.

FREDERICKSON: So would you say you were making sacrifices all the way along?

BUSHMAN: I was getting benefits all the way along too. I didn't have to support myself. But, yes, I certainly did have to negotiate my life. I had to be flexible. I couldn't be too specific about my ambitions. Otherwise, I could wait forever for something to happen. When I talk to young women these days about what they should do with their lives, I tell them that it doesn't really matter what they do—they just have to do something. Don't search for the right thing to do. Choose something reasonable and make it the right thing. Opportunities sometimes open up in unexpected ways. I feel that very much when I

look at my books. I say that all anybody ever writes is autobiography. Everything I write is autobiography, even though it doesn't seem to be. I found Harriet Hanson Robinson when I was studying girls working in mills. Robinson's book *Loom and Spindle* opened up a world to me. And then I found her papers were at the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe, just ten minutes away from my house. I knew that I had found my topic. Harriet has been a guide for me my whole adult life. I love her writings, although I am tough on her the way she is tough on others. When I was working on my dissertation, I would take my youngest over to nursery school for two hours, catch the bus in, work for an hour and a half, catch the bus back to the nursery school, and go home. Two hours a day was enough to push that dissertation along.

My Columbus book, *America Discovers Columbus: How an Italian Explorer Became an American Hero*, was a direct result of being with the Delaware Heritage Commission. Just before I left, I set up the committee to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of Columbus's discovery of America. One day in New York, already at Columbia University, I was walking down Columbus Avenue. As I walked by the New York Historical Society, I wondered how New York had celebrated Columbus in the past. I went in and poked around and found some books and a very good story I thought I could use for a talk. Then I thought I might write an article. Another visit to the library and I could see that there was a book there. So I wrote the book.

FREDERICKSON: As a historian you seem to have been impelled to write out of curiosity, and you've been a prolific writer. You have published eleven books?

BUSHMAN: Something like that. They are an eclectic bunch. I do what comes to hand.

FREDERICKSON: And obviously you do it well.

BUSHMAN: I do things to get them done. It's the completion complex. Even if you are not a genius, you can write a pretty good

book. I think it's a mistake to spend your life on one project. It gets stale. Finish each one up and move on.

FREDERICKSON: You have discussed a bit about being LDS in academia. What is that like?

BUSHMAN: People will always know you are a Mormon. It goes before you; it precedes you. People are suspicious of you and doubt that you can be trusted. They think you are a different kind of person. The situation gives you an incentive to be your charming best. You do what you can do. When Richard got his Delaware job he was taken out to lunch by someone on the search committee, and he mentioned in conversation that he was working on a book about Joseph Smith. The man turned to him and said, "Dick, we considered all of that, and we decided it just didn't matter." So you just have to rise above the suspicion. You don't have any choice. Leaving the Church doesn't bring any more legitimacy. We are members of the tribe, for better or worse. We can't throw over our past. We can't throw over our people.

FREDERICKSON: And you can't throw over who you are and what you believe.

BUSHMAN: It's a very important part of your life. When I went to Claremont last fall I taught a course called "Mormonism through Women's Eyes." Unbelievable! I'm teaching the LDS Church through women's eyes. Who would ever think that such an opportunity would ever come my way? I had half Mormons and half others and taught Mormon materials with a wide academic approach.

FREDERICKSON: How long will you be at Claremont?

BUSHMAN: We'll stay as long as we're needed. The future is still opaque. But the Howard W. Hunter Chair in Mormon Studies at Claremont Graduate University, now established and fully endowed, has already had an impressive beginning of classes, public lectures,

and student activities. Now if the LDS Council that sponsored the chair can gather in some scholarship money to help our students with the horrendous tuition, I will be very happy.

FREDERICKSON: What advice would you give to aspiring women historians or scholars in the Church today?

BUSHMAN: Good luck! Circumstances will be both easier and harder for you than they were for me. My great advantage was that no one ever expected much from me. From you, much will be expected. Study anything, but not just Mormon topics. Think more broadly than that. A degree in Mormon Studies probably won't get you very far—it's too parochial for comparative work. I'd argue against an LDS dissertation, too. Think of fitting your interests into traditional academic disciplines. Think in terms of subjects that you can and would like to teach. Don't decide too soon what you will do. Take the opportunities as they come and make the most of them. Be sure to marry a cooperative man, preferably one with a good income. Be ambitious, but on the other hand, be flexible. Have a plan for life, but be ready to switch gears whenever better opportunities come along or doors close, because they will. Be ready to negotiate setbacks. People feel like they're stuck, like they can't do another thing, but there is always something you can do—always something. Do some volunteer work, send out a couple of letters, write a book proposal, subscribe to a magazine, whatever.

FREDERICKSON: Wonderful, valuable advice. Here's a somewhat serendipitous digression, but let me ask—and distinguish between the two—what is the favorite thing you have done in your career, and what is the most rewarding thing you've done?

BUSHMAN: Oh dear, favorite thing. I'd have to say my children are still my favorite thing. They are also the most rewarding. And I've given them short shrift here. I think it probably gives a false impression of how I've spent my life if we just talk about these

professional things. I have six children, and I have twenty grandchildren—more descendants than anyone else in my Wellesley class. If I had been twenty years younger, I probably would not have had so many of them, and I am glad I did not think in terms of limitation. Keeping up with them is a constant challenge, and I don't think I do it as well as I should. But I am always interested in them and proud of them and realize that my family is my greatest gift. They are the real creativity, always developing in new and unexpected ways. A book just sits on the table, never improving by itself at all.

But in the spirit of this interview, I'd say that my favorite thing is that I've been able to do things that have fed my inner discontents and demons. I've been able to hang on to academia by my fingernails until I have dropped off a few times, but I've been able to recover and do more. I am delighted that I've been able to get into the game and stay in the game and that at my advanced age people still seem to take me seriously. It could certainly be otherwise.

As for the most rewarding thing, I would have to say that it has been working so closely with my husband. We are fortunate to have overlapping interests and to be able to help each other. Our mutual in-house criticism has benefited all our work. I say that he doesn't like my ideas, and I don't like his style. So we tear into each other's manuscripts. We don't just compliment each other. Our work has been better for having another set of eyes looking it over. We have a book in mind to do together one day. It's been on the list for a long time. I hope we live to get to do it.

FREDERICKSON: What have you not done that you would like to do?

BUSHMAN: I never was chosen to be Miss America. I was never a rich man's pampered darling. I can't play the piano the way I'd like. I never have seen Carcassonne, but I've seen plenty of other faraway places. I hope to see my grandchildren grow up. I have three books on my list left to write, and I might add more. I would like to

come out even—to finish my work, whatever it is—before I depart. I have a few germs of other good projects in mind, but I do not want to commit them to print. Then I would have to do them, and I'm not sure I have time.

At this point I am quite content with my life. But I will soon be driven to do something else. Such projects are daunting at first, but the terror soon passes. I tell people who are writing books that they don't have to write all day, but they do have to come back to the writing every day. Come back and keep working. It breaks my heart to see so many of our scholars in the Church have such serious financial obligations from graduate school that their dissertations become their lifelong work. The albatross just hovers there. They finally finish up—or they don't. But the dissertation should just be the beginning. A scholar should go on from there and do other things.

My youngest son invited me to speak to a group of young people in his ward this month to give them some good advice. One of the valuable things I told them was if they were going to be Mormons, they should be good Mormons. I think that's useful advice in many ways, but one that is applicable here is that it spreads out the time for learning and accomplishment so dramatically. Should we ever look over our lives and question our success, we can say that the results are not yet in.