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Cindy Lembcke Kamler:

Cindy Kamler: Student Activism in SLATE

The SLATE Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2018

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Cindy Kamler was a student leader of the campus political organization SLATE in the 1950s. In this interview, Kamler discusses: her family background, upbringing, and education; enrollment at UC Berkeley in fall 1957; introduction to SLATE and running for student government; election as co-chair of SLATE; post-college career in the performing arts.

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Interview 1: March 22, 2018

Meeker: Okay. Today is Thursday, the 22nd of March, 2018. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Cindy Kamler, in Bishop, California. This is the SLATE Oral History Project, and this is interview session number one. We begin these interviews the same for everyone. And that is, tell me your name and your date and place of birth.

01-00:00:31

Kamler: My name is Cindy Kamler. If you want to get the whole thing, it's Lucinda Ann Mary Lembcke Kamler.

Meeker: Great. And when were you born?

01-00:00:42

Kamler: April 27, 1939.

Meeker: In what location?

01-00:00:46

Kamler: In Rochester, New York.

Meeker: Tell me about Rochester. Was that where you were raised?

01-00:00:52

Kamler: I lived there till I was about twelve. I finished through the sixth grade, and then we moved to Baltimore. Yeah, I was very fortunate; I got to go to—. It was a private cooperative school called the Harley School, which is still there and still operating. It was out in the country. The two buildings they had when I started there were an old barn that had been turned into a gym and the dining area and so on, and another building, which was a farmhouse at one time. That was it, basically. The school went from nursery school through high school. We had about a total of about 200 kids.

Meeker: You said it was a cooperative school. Does that make it unique in some ways?

01-00:01:42

Kamler: Well, in day-to-day, except when you were really little—. I started at two and a half, in nursery school. After the first grade, everybody ate, the rest of the school, ate lunch together in the gym. Kids were assigned to setting tables up, chairs, setting places, working in the kitchen; for the little kids, older students brought their lunches to their classrooms. Then periodically during the year, the whole school—all the kids, parents, teachers—came out on a weekend and painted things and fixed things and put in new swings or whatever had to be done, that kind of thing. Yeah, so it was a very—. Even though it was twelve grades plus preschool, you knew almost everybody in the school, and they knew you and it was very intimate. We went from eight in the morning till four in the afternoon, so we had a long day. I loved every minute of it. I credit Harley School to much of who I am and my life as it evolved.

Meeker: Well, so did this cooperative spirit then extend to what was taught in the classroom, as well?

01-00:03:07

Kamler: Oh, yeah. Classes were so small. Between nursery school and sixth grade, after I left, I think the largest class I might've had—. Maybe nursery school, there might've been fifteen kids. Sixth grade, I think we had twelve. But one year we had seven kids in the class. So there wasn't any cliques, there wasn't anybody, this is this person's part or—. If you wanted to do something, everybody had to get involved, and the classrooms were very—. I don't know, it was a very flexible place. I remember I always tended to be kind of a leader. It was some rainy day—it was Valentine's Day, I think—and I invented some play about hearts, and we had paper hearts and we changed hearts. That was fifth grade. Then the teacher just contacted the rest of the school and we took our little play around to the different classrooms. And then we had wonderful ceremonies. Every class had a banner, and you went into assembly, which is all in the gym, you marched in with your banner. The graduating class would hand off their banner to somebody in the first grade. There was commencement, there were Christmas things; there were a lot of wonderful sort of ceremonial, fun things that [we] did and everybody did and was part of. That's a lot of who I am.

Meeker: Well, when you say that, I'm curious. Were there particular values that were taught in the school that were influential to you and you adopted yourself?

01-00:04:52

Kamler: Yeah. Some of the things that I remember, a couple things kind of randomly here. For instance, in some of the classes, when—. I was smart. We'd have an exercise to do in the workbook or whatever. I would finish, and then sometimes the teacher would have me help another student that was slow with something. So helping each other and—. The school is a private school, but it was relatively inexpensive, and they had scholarships. I went there on a scholarship, because we were smart and because my mom volunteered in the nursery school, that kind of thing. We had a boy in my class who came from a farm family. So we went out, we visited his farm and he got to show us his life, that kind of thing, which I thought was very special. So he had value, even though he was in the minority, in terms of everything else was going on, other people there. What else? At the same time, there were times when—. The flexibility, I guess, of it. So at times, if I finished my work ahead of time, I could just go outside and play and do whatever I wanted to do. We were in the country. There was a creek; we'd go catch polliwogs, and it would freeze in the winter and we'd ice skate and climb trees and all that kind of thing. A lot of running around outdoors, a lot of physical exercise, too. So yeah. And we did things. We went to the little woods across the creek and looked at nature. School was always fun. It was always interesting, and you felt part of a whole. Yeah. They had made a point of making sure that they had a variety of people from backgrounds. This would've been in, whatever, the forties. We

had a couple black students. We had a couple handicapped students. There was a woman who was deaf; there was somebody, I think, in a wheelchair. So we got a lot of variety of people, too. It was very much a liberal—. I guess you would call it liberal, politically liberal, even though it wasn't very political.

Meeker: It sounds like a Waldorf School.

01-00:07:41

Kamler: Well, it might be, but it of course, predated that, I think, by quite a lot. As I say, it's still going on. It's still there.

Meeker: Cool. Tell me about your family.

01-00:07:56

Kamler: Mom, Dad, and three kids, all girls. I was the middle. Both my parents grew up in Rochester. My dad's family, on his dad's side, they came from Germany. I think his father's father was the immigrant. I'm not sure about the other part of the family there. But I know it was talked about, but never really definitive, that possibly he was Jewish. My dad speculated in later years that maybe that was part of the reason that they came, even though it was well before the Second World War. Then his mom came from a family out in the country. So on his dad's side, it was pretty much German, German-Danish. Then on his mom's, my grandma's side, it was mostly English, Scottish. There were some relatives somewhere that go back to the American Revolution and this kind of thing. My mom's dad was part Native American, from Canada, up in the Quebec area; and was also connected to a famous Bishop of Quebec named Papineau. There's a Papineau Society and all this stuff, which I know nothing about. My mom was one of five or six kids, the youngest. My dad had a sister; it was the two of them. They both went to school. My mom was Catholic; my dad was not. They were Presbyterian, and in later years, he considered himself an agnostic. I was raised Catholic, but it wasn't a Catholic household because my dad wasn't into it. I went to catechism class and we went to church and that kind of thing. Anyway, so German, Irish, Danish, a little French in there somewhere. Anyway, a pretty good mix. And some Native American back in that area somewhere. My dad was a medical doctor. Having a blank where he went to medical school. He did get a master's in public health in Baltimore, at Johns Hopkins. My mom was really, really a smart woman, but it was the Depression times and she had to work. So she worked as a secretary. They had a ten-year engagement or something, before they finally got married. Once he was out of medical school, I think, then they got married and my older sister was born. I was born in '39, so it would've been the mid-thirties or whatever. We always lived in Rochester. I'm trying to think. So 1939, my early days that I can remember, was the war. We would have air raid drills, have blackouts and have to do that kind of thing. In school, we knitted little washcloths for the soldiers and put these care packages together, with soap and this and that and the other thing.

So that kind of thing. I remember when—and probably it was VE Day, not VJ Day, but I'm not sure—but I can remember taking dishpans and things and marching down the street and celebrating. And I remember Pearl Harbor. My mom, it was funny because I said to her, "I can remember that." She said, "No way. You couldn't remember that." But it was a Sunday and we always had Sunday dinner at midday. The rest of the time, dinner was in the evening. I was still in a highchair.. Our neighbor came in. It was December; he had the topcoat and hat, like the guys did in those days. He came in while we were eating and talked to my parents. I knew something had happened. I knew there was something really, really serious that happened. Sure enough, that's how they learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, their neighbor had come over to say he had just heard it on the radio. So I actually remember that part.

Meeker: When we spoke on the phone a couple days ago, you mentioned that there was a year that your family traveled around the world for your father's work. Can you tell me why that happened and a little bit about that?

01-00:13:41

Kamler: Okay. Okay, so really quickly. Initially, when I was younger, he worked for the—let's see—the state public health department. At one point during the war—and I never really got it very clear—but he was made a lieutenant or something in the Navy, and was sent to Central America. I think it had something to do with some kind of disease studies. So he had traveled then. Then he had a run-in with Thomas Dewey when he was running for president and he was governor of New York. He wanted my dad's budget to be different than what he had asked, and he said no, so he was accused of being a commie.

Meeker: Oh, wow.

01-00:14:31

Kamler: Yeah. Anyway, so not long after that, my dad left the state public health department and was on faculty at Johns Hopkins. That's why we moved to Baltimore. So during my high school years—well, the years we were in Baltimore—he taught at Hopkins. But he was a pioneer in the field of—evaluation of medical care. He did studies. Originally, a big study in Kansas City, for a hospital, and some other places in the US. Then he also went to Europe a number of times. He went to Sweden and England. Anyway, he did studies over there, related to that. So he was traveling quite a bit. As I said, at some point when he was in the Navy, he went to Central America. In the meantime, so we moved—. I'm trying to get back, I guess, to traveling always. One, we moved, which people didn't do that much, from Rochester to Baltimore. But also my dad had a serious heart attack when I was about eight. So we had family friends who had a place up in Maine that they went to, so from eight to twelve or whatever, I would spend the summers in Maine. We would drive up to Maine. They had a place inland, and also a place at the coast. Anyway, so we moved quite a bit. The year before we moved, that summer my dad had some special study in Denver, and we drove across

country and traveled up into Yellowstone and all that kind of stuff. So we'd done a fair amount of traveling. Then it would've been my junior year of high school, was my dad's sabbatical year. He got a job with the World Health Organization for that year, in the Philippines. So that was my first big trip. So we went across the US by train, and took a ship—because you couldn't fly all the way across the Pacific in those days—and took a big passenger ship from San Francisco. We stopped in Japan. Well, Hawaii, Japan, and then we were in the Philippines for about ten months. I never really knew exactly what he was doing there. But anyway. But he was out in the remote different part[s] of the islands. I went to the American School there, and had a great time. I loved it there. I had a lot of fun.

01-00:17:39

Then we left there and we just kept going west. So from there we went to Hong Kong, we went to Saigon—. This is before Vietnam, but not much; it would've been 1956. But we went to Angkor Wat, in Cambodia; we went to Burma. Oh, gosh. We went to India, saw the Taj Mahal, and then we went through the Middle East. In those days, you couldn't go to Israel and go to the other Middle Eastern countries. So my dad was not totally happy about it, but we went to the other countries. We went to Egypt and Syria and Turkey and whatever—all those different other places—and then up through Turkey and Greece and Italy and to just about every European—. There was an Iron Curtain then, so obviously, you didn't go into any of those countries. We didn't get to Spain and Portugal or Finland, but we went to Germany, Austria, Italy, France, England, Scotland.

Meeker: Well, so after all these travels and you return, I think you return to Los Angeles or California, right?

01-00:19:05

Kamler: Let's see. No, I went back to Baltimore after that trip and finished my last year of high school.

Meeker: Did you feel like you were more worldly, coming back to high school? Did you feel like that year away had changed you, apart from your fellow students?

01-00:19:24

Kamler: Well, yes. Definitely. Again, I have had such a checkered career. So when we went to Baltimore, I started at the Friends School, Quaker school. I was there three years. Then something happened. Anyway, my dad couldn't afford for me to keep going there. So in tenth grade, I switched to public high school, Western Public High School. In those days in Baltimore, public high schools were segregated by sex. They were sort of somewhat segregated by race, but actually, while I was at Western or Eastern High School is when they integrated the public school system, which went very smoothly. Much more smoothly there, I think, because the schools were all girls and all boys.

Meeker: Interesting.

01-00:20:15

Kamler: So it might've had something to do with the fact that there wasn't any big deal about it. And then we went to the Philippines for my junior year. So when I got back and I was going to Eastern—. Tell me if I'm going into too much detail. Western High School had an accelerated program—it was one of the first in the country—where I would do four years of high school and then go into my sophomore year of college. But then since I missed the junior year, that program, I couldn't qualify anymore. So then I switched to Eastern High School which was in a different part of town, closer to home. So I went to basically four high schools in four years. So I also was kind of disconnected and different, just for those reasons. I never had that all-American high school *Happy Days* or whatever kind of teenage years. Although some of the friends, like the family that I went to Maine with and stuff, they also had that kind of background. But mostly, yeah, it was different. I was different, yeah.

Meeker: Well, tell me how you ended up at Berkeley then. In the fall of '57, so this is just a little bit after—.

01-00:21:39

Kamler: Right. So my senior year in high school at Eastern High School, all-girls high school, I did all the applying for colleges, in places like Swarthmore. Anyway, the sort of Eastern, New England-type schools. I think I'd been accepted at a couple of them. But then my dad left Johns Hopkins and started teaching at UCLA School of Public Health. Anyway, that was in the works. So it was kind of a fairly last-minute thing. So suddenly I was going to be in California, so I guess we applied for the University of California. I'm pretty sure I wanted to go away from home. My family was in Pacific Palisades, but I never really—. They moved as I started college, so I was, at that time, going home for breaks and vacations, but not really living there. So I started at Berkeley in 1957 and there I was.

Meeker: What did you know about Berkeley before going there?

01-00:23:03

Kamler: Nothing. Nothing whatsoever. Again, late start. I think at the time, anyway, the dorms weren't big enough for—. Again, all girls had to be in approved housing. They used to have all these little boardinghouses in Berkeley. Old houses and you shared a bedroom with two or three girls and had dinner. What do you call that, when you have to be in by a certain time?

Meeker: Oh, curfew?

01-00:23:38

Kamler: Curfews, right. We had to be in by seven-thirty. We could sign out to the library or something appropriate, like a concert or something, but yeah. My first semester was in a boardinghouse, yeah. Kind of what happened—. I had

determined I was going to be a doctor like my dad, and so—. I guess we even declared majors right then, so I think I was technically premed. My first semester of Chem 1A and stuff was sort of like—[she makes snoring sounds]. I wasn't too thrilled by it. One of the required classes you had to do as a freshman at Berkeley was Poli Sci 1A or something like that.

Meeker: Speech 1A. Was it Speech 1A?

01-00:24:45

Kamler:

No, it was political science. I think his name was Peter Odegard. Anyway, he was the professor. He was a fantastic lecturer. So I remember I had an American history class, and then one was Poli Sci 1A, 1B, whatever that was; those were required classes. The teachers in both of them were just dynamite. I can't remember the history guy right now, but he was a really good teacher, too. So I found all that Poli Sci stuff really interesting. Partly because of his run-in with Dewey, partly because public health, at one time, was considered socialist, socialized medicine, so he was brought up against a lot of kind of discrimination on that part. Definitely, my family was liberal Democratic. The idea of discrimination for race and everything wasn't really something that we even kind of knew it existed, kind of, till we went to Baltimore a little bit and got a little more aware of that kind of thing. Then when he wanted to do his thing with the World Health Organization, he had to have a security clearance, because he was going to be teaching at the university there. He got held up quite a bit by the—well, whatever; the Un-American Activities [House Un-American Activities Committee] kind of—. That whole thing. So that we used to joke at the table that—. We would talk about something liberal and then we would say, "Oh, quiet. They can hear us," kind of thing. Because they were interviewing his, not nursery school but grade school teachers to see whether he was a security risk. It was really absurd. So that was definitely something that woke me up to sort of that idea of the world and, I don't know, some more of a political point of view than I think maybe most kids my age in those times were particularly interested in.

Meeker: Well, the Army-McCarthy hearings were just a few years earlier.

01-00:27:10

Kamler:

Yes. Yes.

Meeker: Did you pay attention to those? I think you probably would've been early in high school.

01-00:27:13

Kamler:

Yeah, I think that was part of it. I think that was part of the jokes about somebody listening in. Yeah, definitely. We didn't have television. My family never had TV in the house till after I left home. But I'm sure my parents listened to the news and stuff like that. So anyway, so I got very turned on by these two classes that I had, and turned off pretty much by the science side of being a doctor. So in my spring semester, I took some other—. Whatever

electives or whatever that were—. At one point, Eugene Burdick—. Do you remember him? He wrote *The Ugly American* book.

Meeker: Oh, okay. Yeah.

01-00:28:09

Kamler: So he was an instructor that I had, professor. I had him for a section, and that was very stimulating, to say the least. He was really an amazing guy. Then I just was walking by Sather Gate and there's Mike Miller and Butch Hallinan talking. I listened and it was like, oh, well, freedom of speech? Oh, yeah. Well, you shouldn't discriminate against people? Oh, yeah, of course. Of course. I'm sure they asked for volunteers or something. Or maybe I just went up and spoke to them; I don't really remember. I actually was, and still am on some level, kind of shy with people. But when I do things, I do things. I'm just kind of weird that way.

Meeker: Do you recall if this was fall or spring?

01-00:29:09

Kamler: Spring. It was spring.

Meeker: This was spring, okay.

01-00:29:12

Kamler: Because the next thing I know, they decided that I would be running for second vice president.

Meeker: So how did you get involved? After seeing them speak on the hatchback of a station wagon, I guess, how did you get involved after that?

01-00:29:34

Kamler: I can't really have a recollection of that. I was trying to think about it because okay, Berkeley—. Where I was living, I was still in that boardinghouse, so it was close to campus. Telegraph Avenue and Sather Gate was like—. Everything was happening right there. You're walking everywhere and you didn't use a phone. I was trying to think; how did we come together with each other, when—? Some of it was just maybe bumping into each other on campus, but they must have been holding—. I think some of that paper stuff that I brought I think talks about some of that, where SLATE was still—. They'd just started out. As you know, it started out as just being SLATE because they had a slate of candidates. It didn't have any meaning; it wasn't standing for student la-la-la or something. So I know that there were groups getting together and talking about all that stuff, and I must've gone to them when I could or whatever, if I knew about it. Then my memory is just sort of that they were picking the slate of candidates for that election in the spring and I believe—I don't think it was my idea, because I didn't know anything; I hadn't been on campus long enough to even know anything about EXCOM the Executive Committee or the Student Union or any of that stuff, really—

that since the second vice president had to be a woman, they decided I would be a candidate.

Meeker: Well, let me pause there. So this would've been spring of '58, where you're first getting involved with—.

01-00:31:29

Kamler: Yes. Yeah.

Meeker: In that February, that was when SLATE the organization officially organizes, and they host an organizing convention, where they sort of hash out all rules and everything. Do you recall being involved in any of that?

01-00:31:45

Kamler: I don't think so. My memory is that that was already happening. But I think that we just looked at that photo. It said Hallinan and Miller being elected to chairperson and whatever. I think that was later in the spring. But I think the preliminary stuff, I don't think it was till they kind of went public. Maybe their first public time they spoke at Sather Gate was when I saw them. I don't know exactly what time of year that was, but it was definitely the spring semester. I just sort of remember it being warm, so I don't think it was like February. I don't think they were going quite public then yet, but I don't really know. And then people like Fritjof Thygeson and those guys were really much more around in those days; a lot of older guys, graduate students and stuff, that for me as a freshman, were far away. But at some point, I decided I was going to be this candidate.

Meeker: So that was a candidate for—?

01-00:32:57

Kamler: Second vice president.

Meeker: Of SLATE or—?

01-00:33:00

Kamler: No, of the university associated whatever—.

Meeker: ASUC?

01-00:33:06

Kamler: ASUC, yeah.

Meeker: Associated Students of the University of California, I guess.

01-00:33:08

Kamler: Right, yeah.

Meeker: Okay. I think that it was maybe a year later. I think that was May of '59, no?

01-00:33:24

Kamler: No.

Meeker: Okay. So it wasn't the same year that Dave [David] Armor was elected.

01-00:33:28

Kamler: Yeah, it was.

Meeker: Oh, okay. That was a year later.

01-00:33:30

Kamler: But that wasn't that year.

Meeker: No? Okay.

01-00:33:32

Kamler: No, then the next year is when I ran for rep at large, and Dave ran.

Meeker: Well, there was also the year where you went to UCLA again.

01-00:33:41

Kamler: Well, that was one semester.

Meeker: One semester.

01-00:33:43

Kamler: It was the fall semester. So in spring, I ran for student government, as the second vice president, and didn't win. Then the following semester, I was at UCLA.

Meeker: Oh, okay, so you actually ran for ASUC twice; you won once.

01-00:33:58

Kamler: Yes. But that's why I can't remember why that little piece of paper says Lembcke for NSA rep. Unless the last semester before I dropped out and got married—. I don't have any memory of running for any office.

Meeker: Well, let's talk about the first time that you ran, which was in spring of '58.

01-00:34:24

Kamler: Sure.

Meeker: Was there a platform you were running on? Were there particular issues that were particularly important to you?

01-00:34:33

Kamler: Sometimes I just don't know why I did things that I did. Again, I was looking at some of this to refresh my memory. My memory is primarily, one of the things we talked about was discrimination, in primarily fraternities and sororities. At that point in time, my understanding was, anyway, from the

other people that I was hanging out with at SLATE, was that pretty much the fraternities and sororities had dominated the student government for quite a while, except for a period right after the Korean War. I think there was some liberal action going on. Anyway, so talking about discrimination—I can't remember all the complexities, but there were certain rules and regs about the student government, things that you could talk about, in terms of real freedom of speech, really, basically. So my memory is those two things. My memory is going to fraternities and sororities at dinner time and speaking to discrimination in fraternities and sororities, as well as freedom of speech, whatever. You went in there for five minutes or whatever, so it wasn't a very lengthy speech. And just being totally freaked out and scared to death, but doing it.

Meeker: How did they respond?

01-00:36:24

Kamler: They were pretty polite. Nobody was applauding or thinking, oh, this is great. I don't think I won anybody over or anything. I was young, I was cute. I think that helped a lot. Which is probably what people like Mike had in mind, that I wasn't threatening, as a woman. I don't know. Again, my background with Harley School and the Friends School and just my life, and then having no boys in the family, it just never occurred to me that because I was a girl, I couldn't do certain things or I had to be a certain way. I was a sort of natural leader, so I never thought about those kinds of things.

Meeker: Yeah, right. So when Mike asks you to run—

01-00:37:31

Kamler: Well, they knew they had to have a girl, so that was it. But why they picked me instead of somebody else that was hanging around, I don't know. No idea.

Meeker: When you first got involved, were there many other women involved?

01-00:37:47

Kamler: A few. Again, I'm remembering Hank di Suvero was involved at that time. Somewhere, he disappeared; he wasn't around for the whole SLATE thing, that I remember. But he was a graduate student, I think, maybe. His girlfriend, Gloria Sparrow, Gloria Martocchia, I remember her being around. She was very intimidating to me. Well, kind of intimidating. I say very intimidating, but she was a mature woman. I think they were living together or something like that, which was a pretty big deal in those days. So there were some women around, but not a lot. I just have a vague memory of these sort of like—. Must've been sort of strategy meetings or something, not like public group kind of people coming together with Mike and whoever the powers that be were—Butch and those people—having these discussions. Probably like, will you run for second vice president? I don't know.

Meeker: In those smaller group meetings, would you typically have been the only woman?

01-00:39:11

Kamler: Maybe, yeah. Yeah, see, I wouldn't have paid attention. I wouldn't have thought about it, because I didn't ever think that way. So I'm not sure. But like I say, I don't really have much memory of other women being—. Interacting with them, in terms of SLATE. Well, none really, other than there were a few around. But whenever talking about strategy or discussing this or that, I don't remember anybody being around.

Meeker: Did you have close girlfriends on campus?

01-00:39:43

Kamler: Not really. I had one at my first place I lived, and she dropped out. Then of course, after that, that semester at UCLA, most of the girls that I had met my freshman year were—. Who knows where they were on campus when I got back? That semester, I was in a dorm. But I never spent any time there, except when I had to sleep, I guess. So I didn't really make any close friends either, no. I didn't really have any close girlfriends except my friend my freshman year. A couple of them, yeah.

Meeker: What was the outcome of this first election?

01-00:40:26

Kamler: Nobody from SLATE was elected. I can't remember. I guess Mike and Butch might've been candidates, I think. Although I remember all kinds of stuff about his dad, and talking about all that stuff and the longshoremen and—. I was getting a political education about—. Anyway, I was getting a political education a little bit about the Bay Area and things that I didn't know anything about. Having been new to California, I didn't know any of these figures that were well known.

Meeker: Well, that was what I was going to ask about next. That is, when I've spoken with Mike and some other folks about what SLATE meant and what it represented, they would always talk about kind of what came before or what was happening outside of SLATE, particularly amongst people interested in progressive or left politics. They would talk about, "Well, you had the Shachtmanites over here and the utopian socialists over here and the communists over here." There was all this kind of factional debate and battling, and not really a place for people of sort of progressive sensibilities and commitments to get together. Mike likes to talk about SLATE being that place where I guess you could have the lowest significant common denominator. Were you aware of that phrase at the time?

01-00:42:03

Kamler: Probably not. I've never been a jargon person. I'm not very good at that kind of stuff. But yeah, that's kind of my—. Now that I think about it, it was just

sort of a vague impression of these sort of older guys with all this stuff. Some of it was connection with whatever it was. What was it, Young People's—? What was the socialist—?

Meeker: Young People's Party or something like that.

01-00:42:33

Kamler: Yeah, something like that. There was that kind of stuff and this and that.

Meeker: Or Young People's Socialist League. YPSL.

01-00:42:38

Kamler: Something like that, yeah. There were sort of some people from that. I just didn't tune into any of that stuff. I think now that we're talking, I'm thinking that when I came back after that semester away—. Which was when maybe a lot of that stuff was going on. It seems to me that that's when they were having their bylaws and all that stuff. I don't think I was around for all that stuff. Then I'm coming back and I just have some sort of meeting, having a general meeting. We were in some room like a lecture hall, quite a few people there. Obviously, people were at odds. And I'm thinking back. My Harley School experience of everybody coming together and different people, different values and whatever, coming together. I got up and made some kind of speech somehow about, let's rise above all that and come together with what we can and do what we can or something. That's when I got elected chairperson.

Meeker: Ah! Okay. So it was really appealing to this sense of unity.

01-00:43:56

Kamler: Yeah. That's as I remember it. That's kind of who I am, so I'm sure that's what it was, yeah, because—. Yeah, I've never really been interested in politics. I'll tell you a story in a little bit—.

Meeker: Well, SLATE was a political organization.

01-00:44:13

Kamler: Yeah, but to me, it was just—. Well, I'll go tell you now.

Meeker: Okay, tell me now.

01-00:44:22

Kamler: So I got elected to representative-at-large, started serving on the EXCOM, doing the things. I went home at Thanksgiving, to my house, and I remember sitting at the table, and my dad asked me, "Well, how do you like being on EXCOM?" I burst into tears. I realized that I hated it. I was very idealistic, obviously, and I just really thought that if you just explained what was right to people, they would see it. What I'd just experienced on EXCOM was like the fraternities—. Well, everybody. I mean, Dave was there, and he couldn't vote. I think Dan Greenson was the NSA rep, maybe; but he couldn't vote either. So

most of the time, it was me speaking to whatever it was, whatever we were pushing or asking for, by myself. Just seeing that these other people had their agendas that had nothing to do with what was good and right; it was more about self-interest. I remember one fraternity guy saying, “Well, yeah, this is the right thing to do, but I’m still voting for my interest, the fraternity interest,” and just being totally disillusioned. So I finished my year as a rep at large, but that experience told me I didn’t ever want to be involved in politics again. And I never did. If I could do something, I could go stand in front of the prison or I can march in a demonstration or sign a petition or any number of things that I could do. But the political process, all the in and out and back and forth and talk and talk and talk and all that terminology and stuff, not me. So that’s partly why I think at the end of that year is when I wound up dropping out and getting married, and I didn’t miss that part of it. I can remember I went to demonstrations or whatever. I went to San Quentin quite a lot at times, for capital punishment, and I think that there were probably some demonstrations or things on campus that I went to and stuff. But getting down into the backrooms and all that stuff, that was the end of my life, really. I’m just not interested in that.

Meeker: Well, I can imagine how disillusioning it would be. The way that you’re describing it, you were kind of, it seems to me, an idealistic young woman.

01-00:47:40

Kamler: Very much so.

Meeker: Then you have this person saying out loud, “Well, I know that’s the right thing to do, but I’m not going to do it.”

01-00:47:48

Kamler: Yeah. I just couldn’t get it. I didn’t realize how deeply distressing it was till I went home. I was crying. Because I’m just somebody, I make a step forward; this is what I’m doing, and I do it. I don’t do a lot of pondering and self-analysis about it—which maybe sometimes I should have. But I didn’t. Yeah, so really, I don’t know. One of my biggest learnings from SLATE was that I did not care for the political process.

Meeker: Do you recall how your parents responded when you had that momentary breakdown?

01-00:48:40

Kamler: Well, my dad, I’m sure he was quite surprised because he was so proud and stuff. Although the truth is, too, when I think back about his career and the fact that politics affected his career, with his being sort of threatened-that-he-might-be-a-commie kind of thing, he wasn’t just an untouched person about politics. But he’s still a guy. Kind of a guy thing. Again, even though I didn’t consciously think about it, the fact was—. Well, I guess actually, take that back. There was another woman on the EXCOM when I was actually on there. I can’t remember if she was a rep-at-large or if she was a second vice

president. She was a sorority girl, Joanne somebody. But basically, much of the stuff that I was doing, I was pretty much the only woman. I remember that semester—it must've been the semester that I got elected, because—. I hadn't remembered till I looked at some of the paperwork, that Aryay [Lenske Kalaki] ran for rep-at-large at the same time. I remember lots of times hanging out with him and his friend Mike Myerson and Dan Greenson. They were like a trio, and we hung out together quite a lot. But I really don't have any memories of hanging out with any women. Then on the EXCOM, I was the only SLATE person that could really speak up. So again, some of the news articles, well, Cindy Lembcke contacted the ACLU; Cindy Lembcke contacted Dean Stone or whatever it was. So I was out there on the front in a lot of stuff, and just was constantly feeling like it was a battle all the time, instead of just coming together. My background, coming together to achieve a goal. It was all fighting and whatever, and I didn't like it.

Meeker: In addition to being kind of a place of unity, people have talked about the reason for SLATE existing was to—. I think it was a term that Fritjof Thygeson came up with, which was, get out of the sandbox.

01-00:51:42

Kamler: Yeah, I remember that. I can remember that, yeah.

Meeker: So yeah, ASUC was just what they called sandbox politics.

01-00:51:49

Kamler: Right.

Meeker: But they wanted to bring real-world politics into that.

01-00:51:52

Kamler: Yes. That seemed to me totally right. That seemed quite obvious. That probably had a lot to do with my world travels and also going to a number of different schools—public high schools, Quaker school, private schools, American School in the Philippines. Just seeing that there's a big world out there and stuff. So I think yeah, probably that seemed comfortable to me, the idea that of course, we should do this. Yeah. I don't know.

Meeker: Were you exposed to inequality and poverty and those kinds of things during your travels, so that you would've brought those concerns back home more?

01-00:52:49

Kamler: Yes. I would say yes, in a way. Obviously, when I was in the Philippines and going to school there, I went to the American School. But unlike some of the other—. There were like thirty different nationalities of different kids in the school, so there was all that kind of stuff going on, too. Everybody had to get along with everybody, no matter who they were or where they were from, what their background was or anything. Half the time, you didn't even know what their story was or where they came from. They weren't all Americans,

by any means. It just meant it was an American-style school, with American semesters and class system. But it was all kinds of kids. But my sister and I rode public transportation. We lived at the University of the Philippines campus, which is outside of Manila, or was at the time, and we took the local buses and rode with the locals—. Which most people like us didn't do; they had a chauffeur, and we didn't. My dad eventually had a driver, but we weren't living luxuriously at all. Then I just know that that whole experience of that trip, not just the Philippines, but all the different—. I kept learning from it my whole life, practically. Just things that I would look back and try to change how I saw a lot of different things in the world. So that trip certainly had a lot to do with it. Yeah.

Meeker: Can you remind me why you ended up spending a semester at UCLA instead of continuing at Berkeley?

01-00:54:42

Kamler: Yeah. Let's see; I'm trying to remember. So I was in this boardinghouse. Somehow, either that one shut down or something. They thought I would have a space—. I think I would be going back to that boardinghouse. Anyway, it didn't happen and I couldn't get in any other places. There were no openings in the dorm or the boardinghouses. My parents weren't prepared to put me in an apartment, which was the only other option. You could live in an apartment, with your parents' approval, but that didn't come up, as far as I remember, for consideration.

Meeker: Was it just too expensive or—?

01-00:55:43

Kamler: It just probably was I was still young and in that time and place, to be living alone, by myself—. But it wasn't like I had a girlfriend or something that, oh, we'll get an apartment together. I didn't have a situation like that. So I was pretty unhappy about it. Also, at the same time that I got involved with SLATE, at the very beginning, I met Richard Kamler. In fact, I met him at this SLATE rally, if I remember correctly. So I was having this sort of romance with him that was going on, and wasn't going well.

Meeker: What do you mean? Just a tumultuous affair or—?

01-00:56:31

Kamler: Well, it just wasn't like a happy-ever-after kind of thing. He wanted to have a relationship, but he didn't really want to have a relationship. That kind of thing. So in some ways, when I had to go to UCLA, that put a distance between that whole thing. I was pretty miserable that whole semester. I wanted to be at Berkeley and I wanted to have that relationship, and I didn't have either. I really was pretty horribly miserable, actually, and didn't get involved in anything or do anything. I lived at my family's home and commuted and all that stuff. I just got through it and got back to Berkeley, and

then picked it all up again. So it was kind of a weird kind of interim thing. And then the relationship, at some point, picked back up, too.

Meeker: And you were elected as chair of SLATE.

01-00:57:36

Kamler: Yes. Yeah.

Meeker: How did that happen? Was it something you wanted?

01-00:57:41

Kamler: No. Like I said, my memory is just going to this sort of general meeting and talking about having everybody come together, and somebody putting my name up and getting voted in, right then and there. No, I hadn't even been around for a whole semester. There were people in SLATE that had some weight, that I'd never even seen before. So I don't know. It was just kind of like *deus ex machina*. Suddenly I show up from elsewhere and there I am, I'm the chairperson. I really never knew why that happened, but it did.

Meeker: So I guess you were elected early that semester, and then you served for that semester? Is that how it worked?

01-00:58:33

Kamler: Well, that's my memory. Because I was at UCLA for the fall semester, so I must've come back in February or January, whenever the new semester started, and went to the SLATE general assembly or whatever it was. It's really kind of strange, since I hadn't even been around for a whole semester. But that's what happened.

Meeker: Tell me, do you recall much of what you did as chair? I assume you would've presided over meetings and that kind of thing.

01-00:59:09

Kamler: I don't have a whole lot of memories of that.

Meeker: Okay.

01-00:59:11

Kamler: No. No, not really.

Meeker: Certainly, if you had memories of the specific work that you were doing, I would've liked to hear about that. There's the way in which women who had been active in these early student movements later looked back on their work in the student movement and said, yeah, we were basically just asked to make coffee and pick up sandwiches. Do you have memories along those lines, about if you were chair, were you actually doing chair activities? Or were the guys asking you to do more menial activities?

01-01:00:00

Kamler: Oh, no, I never made coffee or any of that stuff.

Meeker: Okay.

01-01:00:04

Kamler: No. No. But one of the big learnings of my life really was at the reunion. Because the first meeting, everybody came together there, and suddenly—. I don't know, probably Mike Miller was down there talking, and Peter, probably were the guys up onstage. I was trying to remember. So at that time, I was kind of in a lot of flux, I think, in my life. I had closed my theater and I'd been in L.A. for a while and I worked with the NFL Players Association and I was doing some theater stuff, and all kinds of mixed bag of stuff. But anyway, so I don't think I had really much contact with any SLATE people prior to that or in preparation for that. It was just sort of something that sort of, okay, I'm going to go. I guess I'll go. Then it's one of the women speaking up at that meeting, going, "Well, we women were basically discriminated against and this is all we got to do, was run off dittos and make coffee." I was just sitting there stunned. I didn't do any of that stuff. I ran for office, I got elected, I was chairperson. I don't know, I just never really got the message that so many—. And I've talked to other women since then, my age, about growing up and stuff. But I just never had the message that because I was a girl—a woman, whatever—that there were things that weren't appropriate or I couldn't do or anything. So I didn't even think about it. It never occurred to me. Obviously, I knew I was a girl, but especially with this second vice president—. At Harley School, especially, I was sort of a leader; but I was sort of a, get everybody together and do stuff. It was more always kind of a community kind of thing, rather than structural, I'm this and we've got this—. That's never really worked for me very well. I'm not very good at that kind of thing. But yeah. So yeah, I was just shocked. Even when I got into improvisational theater and I started directing the company and stuff, and the workshops, I remember somebody asking me, "Well, don't you think maybe the guys have trouble taking direction from you because you're a woman?" I was like, "Oh, I don't know. I never thought about it that way." I never thought about that. So obviously, somehow I was lucky enough not to have that message when I grew up, that because I was a girl, I couldn't do stuff.

Meeker: Interesting. So shortly after, or a few months, I guess, after you were elected chair of SLATE, what was when you run with this group of other SLATE candidates—

01-01:03:48

Kamler: Right.

Meeker: —including Dave Armor, who's elected student body president. What do you remember about Dave Armor?

01-01:03:59

Kamler:

I remember he was a really nice guy. Sort of very clean-cut, all-American kind of guy, blue eyes and freckles. He came from somewhere—somewhere sort of mid-California, like farmland area or some—. He wasn't from a city. I just remember that overall feeling. I don't remember him being particularly dominating, in the sense of speaking strongly about issues and stuff like that. But again, I'm sure it was people like Mike and Butch and those other people, and Aryay and whoever else was—. They did a lot of this, I think, backroom stuff that I probably wasn't involved with. Or probably some of the conversations, I were. We probably talked about Dave, whether we were going to put him on the slate or whatever, or are you going to run—whatever it was. So I think probably he was picked because— I don't know, I don't remember if he was involved in anything on campus that he would have been known for. He wasn't an athlete. I don't know if there was anything else that he was known for, that I am aware of, that comes to mind. But he was this really nice guy and he spoke well. Again, yeah. So I'm not sure how and why he got picked. Maybe again, because he was sort of more like I was. I was more of a unifying force for the SLATE, and he was, than some of these people who were more oriented towards their terminology. So I don't know. He and I, we worked together well. It was never, never a problem working together. I think he wasn't terribly happy with being a president, either. I don't think he had a really great time, either.

Meeker:

For the same reasons you expressed, do you think?

01-01:06:32

Kamler:

I don't know. We didn't talk about it. But I'm trying to remember what happened after that year. He maybe got married or something. But again, I don't think he was very involved much. Maybe for another year or so, but I don't think he really stayed that involved in anything political, either. You might know better than I do.

Meeker:

Well, we'll talk to him.

01-01:07:01

Kamler:

Oh, you haven't talked to him yet?

Meeker:

No, no.

01-01:07:03

Kamler:

Oh, okay. It'll be interesting to see what he has to say.

Meeker:

It's a little tricky because he lives back on the East Coast.

01-01:07:07

Kamler:

Oh, is he on the East Coast now?

Meeker:

Yeah. I'm not actually going to get to do the interview; one of my colleagues will be doing it, who's going to be traveling back for that. But I'll prepare him

well. Feel free to disagree with this, but it feels a little like there was this group of maybe sort of political wonks and policy makers that were the core of SLATE. The Mike Millers and the Butch Hallinans and the Aryay Lenskes, et cetera. Then there were sort of people who were put forward who were maybe deemed more palatable to the broader student population?

01-01:07:47

Kamler:

Well, maybe, yeah. I wouldn't be surprised, yeah. Yeah. Also it may have had something to do with—. Because I think that very first year, I'm pretty sure Mike and Peter were either seniors or even graduate students. Academically, a lot of those guys were moving forward, in terms of their education and stuff, whereas I was a freshman, so I was going to be around. I could carry through from semester to semester. I'm sure they had demands on themselves in whatever they were doing in academia, getting their diplomas or their master's degrees or whatever they were doing. That affected them, too, in terms of time involved and whatever. Well, the Hallinans, of course, did have a reputation, in the Bay Area, especially. Mike, I don't know what had gone down at Berkeley before I went there, in terms of political stuff. So I have no idea.

Meeker:

Well, and he had graduated already anyway. He was off campus, I think at the end of '58.

01-01:09:12

Kamler:

Oh, okay. See, I didn't even really know that kind of stuff. So yeah, there was definitely this background, a lot of graduate student type people that obviously had been considering a lot of this idea, the things that led to SLATE, long before I came on the scene. I never felt of myself as a policy maker or something, particularly. I saw myself more as seeing sort of the—. I like always to look at the fundamental things, like the bottom line of what's really going on, and focus on that. So to me, what I got from the beginning was just some simple things, like simple parts of our constitution—freedom of speech and da-da-da. So I see myself as just working with that, not getting caught up in the details about, well, this policy says this and this. Yeah, you had to deal with it sometimes that way, but to me, it was just underlying moving toward a certain goal, sort of [a] philosophical goal or not really political. I wasn't a politician, whatever that is exactly. It just wasn't my thing.

Meeker:

Well, but you're kind of answering my next question already, I think, which is about the [Chancellor Clark] Kerr directives that first come down in October of '59.

01-01:10:46

Kamler:

Yeah, I couldn't remember too much about that.

Meeker:

Well, in some ways, it opened up who could speak on campus; but then it closed down some other routes. So it is certainly not appropriate to permit student government to speak either for the university or for the student body,

with reference to off-campus political, religious, economic, international, or other issues.

01-01:11:29

Kamler: Right, okay. Yeah, now it's all coming back. I remember all that stuff. Of course, I totally agreed with that. I didn't get it. We should be able to do it.

Meeker: Well, you agreed with the critique of it, I guess.

01-01:11:42

Kamler: Yeah. Philosophically, yeah. I believed we should be able to speak out. Yeah, definitely.

Meeker: But it's interesting because these are policies that are coming down from, I guess, Clark Kerr and others, getting in the way of you being able to do what you want to do, which is these basic issues around equality and free speech.

01-01:12:13

Kamler: Yeah. Again, a lot of the articles that I brought are about that situation. I think we were mentioning, before I think we were on camera, about whatever—. Oh, the ACLU. One of the articles quotes me having talked to Dean Stone about this and whatever, and talking to somebody from the ACLU and that kind of thing. So yeah, I was definitely in there, working on that part of it, yeah, speaking for SLATE. Yeah. I think that might've been the year I was on the EXCOM, I think. So I was also on the student government, yeah.

Meeker: Historians sometimes ask something which is called the counterfactual.

01-01:13:07

Kamler: The what?

Meeker: The counterfactual.

01-01:13:08

Kamler: Counterfactual, okay.

Meeker: Which is imagining a different string of events, something that didn't happen. So how would you have liked your year on ASUC to have been? What do you think could've happened that would've made you look back upon it as a positive rather than negative experience? What were you hoping for?

01-01:13:43

Kamler: Well, I think I just thought if people really thought about discrimination, they would just realize that it just wasn't right, and then people would work toward resolving things. When the Civil Rights Movement started up, to me, I didn't have any philosophical questions or anything. Well, yeah. Maybe I wasn't aware of the depth of discrimination that they had to face, especially in the South, that kind of thing. I had maybe little hints of it, but not much. Because as I said, when I was in public school in Baltimore, we integrated. That was

the all-girls high school. I remember we only had, I think, one black student that I remember. Or maybe in my class. There were 3,000 kids in the school. But I remember sitting in assembly next to the black girl, and to me, it was just like whatever; she was just new in the school. There wasn't a big stink, as far as I know, publicly in Baltimore. So again, I didn't have a lot of first-hand experience with that. So those were just things that seemed to me, from my experience and whatever I heard around the house or whatever. So if fraternities and sororities really thought about it, they would stop doing that. And they didn't.

Meeker: Do you suppose, then, one of the reasons that SLATE existed was an attempt to try to awaken a generation of students?

01-01:15:43

Kamler: I think the guys all had thoughts like that. I think again, this is just guesswork, I guess, really. So people like Mike and Peter were five years or something ahead of me or older than me. So let's see. I started in '57, so they would've started there in '52, something like that.

Meeker: '53 or '54, I think.

01-01:16:10

Kamler: The Korean War was going on. There was mention about veterans coming back and having slightly different perspectives on things than the old fraternity, sorority kind of thing. So they'd been exposed to that, and I'm sure—. So they were moving, thinking ahead, long before I was. I was just going through my high school life and naïvely just thinking that everybody would do the right thing, if you just explained it to them.

Meeker: Right.

01-01:16:55

Kamler: So yeah. So I think a lot of that was the older generation that was in SLATE. Again, unfortunately for this story anyway, as more people, younger people came into SLATE, and then there started to be awakenings of civil rights stuff and just—. Things started just—. Other campuses. We had freedom of speech, they were going to have freedom of speech, whatever it was. It was starting to become spread around. We were in contact with some other campuses and stuff like that, is when I basically left. So I wasn't there any further. So I don't know exactly the political evolution of SLATE as a group after that. I don't have any first-hand experience of it.

Meeker: Do you have any recollection of when these next generation of students are starting to come in, when you're in a leadership position, were there many young women who were coming in?

01-01:18:13

Kamler:

Yeah, I think there were more women involved, and younger people. One of the articles has a picture of a woman named Kate Coleman, along with, I think, Mike Myerson and Kate Coleman. I think it's referring back from the reunion days. I don't know who she was. I never heard of her, that I can remember. But again, so 1960 was when I dropped out, right?

Meeker:

Right.

01-01:18:43

Kamler:

Yeah. But there were people like Aryay and Dan and Mike and some other people, and there were more women, I think, around during the—. But that last year, I was on EXCOM, so that ate a lot of time and energy away from as much interaction with SLATE, except at the sort of strategy level, I guess, really.

Meeker:

Were these young women looking to you as a leader or to be a mentor?

01-01:19:19

Kamler:

Not that I'm aware of. I don't think so. I don't have any memory of that. Yeah.

Meeker:

Where did you live after you came back? After UCLA.

01-01:19:35

Kamler:

One semester I was in the dorm, the semester that I got elected in, and then I got an apartment the last year I was there. So the year I was on EXCOM, I had an apartment off campus.

Meeker:

That was the year that your relationship with Kamler becomes more serious.

01-01:19:52

Kamler:

Yes.

Meeker:

Yeah. Did you mostly just hang out with him, or did you socialize with other—?

01-01:19:59

Kamler:

No, I think mostly socialized with SLATE. I can remember going to people's homes and—. Music was changing, as I remember. I was being introduced to folk music and sort of Pete Seeger and, I don't know—.

Meeker:

Did you go see any performers?

01-01:20:21

Kamler:

I don't think so, at that time. I just was too busy. People didn't have cars very much and BART wasn't there, and so getting around, getting to San Francisco, going somewhere to do a thing wasn't that simple. My freshman year, I can remember going to San Francisco, my first semester. Especially

going to some of the Beat clubs and hearing some of the Beat poets and all that stuff.

Meeker: Oh, really?

01-01:20:53

Kamler: I remember I had my black stockings and—. My freshman year.

Meeker: So you went to some of the poetry readings?

01-01:21:03

Kamler: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [Allen] Ginsberg and [Jack] Kerouac and some of those guys. Yeah.

Meeker: Wow. You didn't happen to go to that Six Gallery, the famous Six Gallery reading, did you?

01-01:21:15

Kamler: I think so.

Meeker: The one where Ginsberg read *Howl*?

01-01:21:19

Kamler: I think so.

Meeker: No kidding.

01-01:21:20

Kamler: Well, I remember going to some little, dark, dim place with Ginsberg reading. I don't know if it was *the* moment, but I do remember that.

Meeker: What was that like?

01-01:21:34

Kamler: All that, sort of the bit of exposure I had to the sort of beatnik, was stimulating. Fun, stimulating, exciting, yeah. There wasn't, at the time anyway, that much philosophical behind it. It was just sort of people getting up there and really talking about feelings, and with emotion and stuff. Probably before that, I'd never even heard anybody read poetry, except in English class or something. So it was all very exciting. At that time, there were several women that I lived with at the boardinghouse, and we'd get our black tights on and get on the streetcar or whatever and go to San Francisco, to North Beach and stuff. Yeah.

Meeker: Did what they were talking about resonate with you?

01-01:22:41

Kamler: Boy, this is something I haven't really thought about for a long time. I think in some level, just because I'd had quite a varied life experience in traveling and stuff, that I think this sort of what I could call sort of a more dramatic view of

life and a more emotional and whatever thing, I think yeah. Having been through a lot of changes and experiences, just with all that I did, I think that was something that—. I didn't find it shocking or weird or anything. It just seemed sort of comfortable, really. Challenging, exciting, but not something that was hard to accept or anything.

Meeker: What was *it*?

01-01:23:49

Kamler: What was *it*?

Meeker: Yeah. What was the message you were hearing?

01-01:23:59

Kamler: I think part of it was basically, first of all, about self-examination, to a certain extent. Looking at your life and talking about it and seeing how things impact you. Which I was always a very internal person, in a lot of ways, growing up, and did a lot of thinking about why was I there, what was I supposed to do with my life and stuff like that. So I think people kind of talking about that and getting out—. Well, *On the Road*. Getting out there, moving around, seeing different places—all that kind of thing, I think, resonated to me. I certainly have had a extremely unconventional life myself, so yeah. Somebody that worked the same job for forty years, I just can't relate to it.

Meeker: I'm sorry, Kamler's first name was?

01-01:25:10

Kamler: Rich, Richard.

Meeker: Rich, Richard. Did he ask you to marry him?

01-01:25:16

Kamler: Yes, yeah. That would've been probably right after that year where I was on the Executive Committee.

Meeker: Okay. So when did you get married?

01-01:25:31

Kamler: Gosh. Well, it must've been—. Isn't that funny? I can't recall. I think it was right at the end of that school semester. Yeah, I think it was right at the end of the semester, pretty much. For some reason, we sort of eloped. We didn't exactly elope. His mother gave us a shower or two, but my parents didn't know much about it. He had visited one time and he wasn't a big hit, so I felt my parents didn't approve of him. So we got married at city hall. Which was fine, too.

Meeker: What city hall, Berkeley or San Francisco?

01-01:26:25

Kamler: I think it was San Francisco.

Meeker:

Which not too long before then was the site of this famous protest.

01-01:26:31

Kamler: Right, right. Yeah.

Meeker:

Well, on the phone, you had mentioned that you had gone out to San Quentin to protest capital punishment. How did you become involved in that issue, do you recall?

01-01:26:46

Kamler: It was the Caryl Chessman case, certainly. The source of whatever information, I'm not sure. The different people, SLATE people and other people, were probably talking about that case. Again, it's not clear to me how a lot of information moved around in those days, because I didn't have television, I didn't listen to the radio, we didn't use a phone very—. I guess it's just probably bumping into people, talking about it. Certainly, I'm sure some of the SLATE people were also involved. Then there had been a big, big demonstration when Chessman was executed, that I didn't go to because I was still thinking about it. Then after that execution is when I finally decided that it was wrong, capital punishment was wrong, and that I really wanted to put myself in that place. So most people stopped going—. It was all a big thing for Chessman, but after that, there would be some people there at demonstrations. We'd go out there at night and—. But there weren't any great big demonstrations like Chessman had. Yeah.

Meeker:

Was that the first protest you went to or where there others before that?

01-01:28:21

Kamler: Yeah, probably, yeah. I don't think any of the peace demonstrations and stuff like that; they were later. Yeah.

Meeker:

Well, let me ask about the protest at city hall, against HUAC. I know that you weren't here. Do you recall hearing anything about it in advance, to the degree that there was planning by SLATE members for it?

01-01:29:02

Kamler: Oh, yeah. Yeah, there was a lot of talk about people going and stuff. I don't think anybody anticipated anything—. But yeah. I was just, again, not always marching to the same drummer, so I didn't go. See, I have a memory of being outside before—. Well, it was more than one day, wasn't it? Was it only day?

Meeker:

I think it was a couple of days, you're right. You're right. I think it was a Friday and a Saturday or a Thursday and a Friday.

01-01:29:37

Kamler:

Yeah. So maybe it was the first day. I dropped people off or—. I can just remember being outside city hall and seeing the cops on their horses, and there were some people with signs and stuff like that. And maybe even walking in and up the steps and stuff, but not staying. Well, by that time, of course, people—. They wouldn't be able to get in the room. But I didn't stick around. Then my next memory is—. Because I have this daylight image, and then my next memory is in the dark, driving into San Francisco and getting people as they came out of jail. No. Just people in general. Probably mostly SLATE people, but just everybody that I was around was talking about it, and a lot of them were there. Yeah.

Meeker:

Well, since that time, a lot of people who were there and who were arrested describe it as a pivotal moment, an inflection moment in their lives, where they really kind of recognized, I guess, what they were up against and kind of committed to fighting. It sounds like it didn't have that kind of impact for you.

01-01:31:11

Kamler:

To me, it was shocking, on one level; but I think to me, it wasn't that—. No. I think partly because it was connected with the Un-American Activities Committee, and because of my dad's experience with being threatened as a commie and having security clearances and having some experience with that weird stuff going on, probably maybe paying more attention to some of the Senator Joseph McCarthy stuff than I might've otherwise at my age and stuff, it wasn't that shocking that—. It just affirmed that kind of rabid behavior, that kind of horrible thing that these people do. So yeah. But personally, I wasn't physically—. Being rounded up and put in a paddy wagon and taken off to jail would've definitely been a lot more effective, in the sense of strong effect, yeah.

Meeker:

So you decided to leave Berkeley, or not return, after spring 1960.

01-01:32:38

Kamler:

Yeah. Yeah, I got married. I was in Berkeley, but I got a job at the math department and was married. Like I say, I can't remember too much about—. I know I still went to San Quentin and did those demonstrations, but I don't—. There might've been, I'm sure there was, occasional things on campus that I went to, because I lived like five blocks away. So I'm sure there are things that I did. But I wasn't interacting much with any of the actual SLATE people or anything, going to meetings or hanging out with them or anything.

Meeker:

Well, it sounds like, the way that you described it, SLATE was a social, a friendship group, in addition to being a political group.

01-01:33:32

Kamler:

There was aspects of it, yeah.

Meeker:

But that didn't continue after you got married?

01-01:33:36

Kamler: I don't know. Not for me, no.

Meeker: Not for you.

01-01:33:38

Kamler: No. No, Richard started over in architecture school. He was working a lot, and I was working full-time. That's actually part of the shift, because I wasn't happy just doing that. So I signed up for a course at UC Extension in San Francisco, in the [Konstantin] Stanislavski method of acting, which [Marlon] Brando was, of course, the big example of.

Meeker: That's kind of an immersive approach, right?

01-01:34:15

Kamler: His concept was more utilizing your own personal experience and feelings into the role, finding them and fitting them into the role, which was not a classic theater approach. It was a different approach, using sense memories and all kinds of stuff that he did. Brando, Montgomery Clift. Oh, who were some of the great, famous actors that worked with him? But anyway. The whole Actors Studio thing, way back in the thirties, was all kind of spun off Stanislavski's work in Russia.

Meeker: Your interest in drama and the stage, was that something that preceded or emerged at Berkeley?

01-01:35:13

Kamler: Well, as a kid at Harley School, as part of the regular thing, in the first grade, you did a puppet show; in the second grade we did—God forbid—a minstrel show.

Meeker: Oh, God.

01-01:35:28

Kamler: Ah! That didn't last very long. I think that got disappeared by the time I was in fourth grade or anything. But anyway. And I wrote plays. I just liked plays, I guess. I liked that. And our little skit with the hearts and whatever. I took ballet lessons and our seven kids in our class staged a Romeo and Juliet ballet. So I was always kind of interested in theater. I enjoyed it and stuff, and read plays and stuff like that. So I guess I was just looking for something that I could take at night that was interesting, and I decided to take that. I was a Brando fan. Yeah.

Meeker: Did you ever see him perform onstage?

01-01:36:18

Kamler: No.

Meeker: Where did you take that?

01-01:36:24

Kamler:

Oh, gosh. That's my next incarnation, is the theater thing.

Meeker:

Well, tell me a little bit about that. I'm curious.

01-01:36:34

Kamler:

Okay. Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah. So I'll try to be really brief. So I took that class. The time is a little scrambled, but anyway. So Rich was studying architecture, so a couple of summers while we were still married, he got sort of an apprenticeship or internship or whatever they called it, in New York City, with a well-known architect whose name is not coming to me. Kind of an avant-garde architect. Anyway, so we spent our summers in New York a couple times. He went and did that and I took acting lessons at the Actors Studio and stuff like that. So I was doing acting lessons and working as a Kelly Girl, temp agencies, and supporting us and stuff like that. So [in] those acting classes, I met a few people, a few aspiring actors and that kind of thing. When I went back to San Francisco—. So we separated, actually, when we moved to New York, after he graduated his school. So I was on my own in New York after that, and that was hippie time and—. Well, anyway, that was a whole—. I've been through a lot of different eras, as you could see.

Meeker:

Did you get involved in that?

01-01:38:04

Kamler:

Well, we smoked pot and took mushrooms and mescaline a couple times. I was never—. I was pretty much the one of the group that still went to work and paid the rent and the others hung out and were cool. But yeah, we went to Europe with no money and that kind of stupid thing, and stuff like that. That was a couple years, so kind of—. I always felt I was part of it, but not really totally into the hippie thing, because I was always being responsible and working and doing other things. I didn't just hang out. And I didn't like to get really stoned. I didn't mind getting a little high, but whacked was not my cup of tea. But I experimented. By that time, the Beatles were happening and—. I worked at a Mexican restaurant in the Village, Tortilla Flat. The two guys that owned it were actors. It was, "baby, the rain must fall," on the jukebox when I was working, and all the music was coming and all that stuff was going on. And I worked in a box office at Second City in New York. They had a Second City in New York, and I hung out and met some of those people. Alan Arkin and whoever it was in those days. Peter Bonners was there and whatever. So when I moved back to San Francisco in the end of '66, I was going to finish—. Because I'd dropped out, so I never had a degree, right? So I was going to go back to San Francisco State and finally get my college degree. So I start back at San Francisco State and I majored in film. I think I snuck in something else because to finish my degree, I had to do something, sociology or whatever it was. But I was doing filmmaking and stuff, and got involved with a teacher in Oakland, at the community college there, who went back to the Actors Studio days. We did improv and mime and all kinds of stuff. Then The Committee

opened in San Francisco. Alan Myerson started having some workshops, and I went to them.

Meeker: What was The Committee? I don't know this. You said something opened in San Francisco, The Committee?

01-01:40:41

Kamler: The Committee. You don't remember The Committee?

Meeker: No, I don't know The Committee.

01-01:40:43

Kamler: Oh, my gosh. Well, they were like the California version of Second City. So a lot of the people who started it had worked at Second City in Chicago. So the Second City was like the whole beginning of the whole so-called improv movement. Then Alan Myerson, who was the brother of my friend Mike Myerson, who was involved with me in SLATE at Berkeley. So there was kind of a connection there. So I started going to his workshops. Then at some point, he stopped doing them and Del Close took over—this is all new; this is the improv world—who's a famous improv person. Anyway, he was my mentor. I didn't do very good at finishing my degree, but I started going to these workshops and getting more involved. It was all experimental stuff. I wound up eventually taking over the direction of the workshop from Del, and that took me into becoming The Committee workshop and The Wing and thirty or whatever years of improv theater.

Meeker: You said that you did some work with the NFL?

01-01:41:56

Kamler: Yes. The last formal thing I did in San Francisco, I had a theater in San Francisco called Improvisation Incorporated, down on Powell Street, upstairs above Walgreens, for several years. Then we finally had to close it down. So Hal Taylor was my partner at the time, and we went and stayed in L.A. with my mom. Anyway, and I did some theater stuff down there, and then wanted to come back to the Bay Area. Somehow I found out about there was this job. The NFL Players Association had a CETA grant to have these youth programs. So it was a camp program. 150 kids would come for eleven days, live there. We had a camp government, a camp store, a bank, newspapers. It was a great program. They had written their proposal and they were all set to go, out at Yosemite Institute, out at the Marin Headlands, kind of. They didn't write anybody into the grant to set up an office and get supplies and files and anything, so all of a sudden I got hired to do that, like a week before the kids showed up.

Meeker: Oh, wow.

01-01:43:29

Kamler:

So I worked that camp program, and then I worked two others. It was summer programs with the NFL. Met all kinds of Olympic athletes and professional athletes and all kinds of—. Another little chunk of history. Did that, and then in between, improv. What else? I don't know. Just kept going. Then the SLATE reunion came around.

Meeker:

Well, let me ask you about the SLATE reunion. Were you in contact with people, or did this kind of come out of the blue?

01-01:44:08

Kamler:

I think it came out of the blue, if I remember, yeah. I just got something in the mail or something, probably. Or maybe a phone call from somebody. But yeah, it was pretty much out of the blue. Yeah, I'd been just doing improv, improv, improv, and then I was in L.A. and then came back. Somewhere in here, I started working—. I had a lot of different jobs for a while here and there and around, and then I came back. Then I worked for the Oakland Teachers Association for about two years or three years. Yeah, so anyway, somewhere in there, was this NFL camp. So somewhere in there, yeah, the SLATE reunion showed up.

Meeker:

So you were living in the Bay Area at the time of the reunion?

01-01:44:52

Kamler:

I was living, I believe, in El Cerrito by that time, yeah. Was I in El Cerrito? Anyway. Yeah, I was in living in the Bay Area, anyway.

Meeker:

So this was 1984, this reunion happened. An interesting time because of course, '84 was the year that [Ronald] Reagan was reelected in a major landslide, for the presidency. Do you recall what it felt like to be back in a room again with all of these people from twenty-five years before?

01-01:45:32

Kamler:

I felt a little bit out of—. I could see or pick up that some of the people had been much more in contact with each other over the years. I hadn't really had any connection with anybody from that time. Well, I ran into Aryay once somewhere, and Mike Myerson once or twice; but basically, I had no contact with any of that stuff, or any real political stuff, other than peace demonstrations and stuff like that, but not political stuff like backroom or policy or anything like that. No action, just putting my body out there whenever. So anyway, I remember just sort of sitting up in sort of [the] back and feeling a little disconnected. Yeah. But as the meeting went on, kind of reawakened or reformed some connections with some people. I was remembering, which I had forgotten, that after that reunion, there was a women's group that started meeting. I had forgotten that that women's group originated from the reunion, because from then until I moved to Bishop in '95, there were three or four of us that still met, got together. But it had nothing to do with SLATE or political, it was just a women's—. Just a handful of us. I'd

forgotten that Judy Bertelson and Gloria Sparrow and Kay White all came from SLATE. I'd forgotten all that.

Meeker: So when you met, SLATE wasn't really a topic of conversation?

01-01:47:36

Kamler: Oh, probably. When the group started, yes, I'm sure it was, and we probably talked—. I think it was more—. Yeah. But then it just wound up being just talking about our lives and stuff like that, pretty much. Nobody was politically involved at that point, doing anything particularly political. So we probably talked about whatever was going on in the world, too, whatever that might've been. But it was long enough past the reunion that I'd totally forgotten till just recently, that—. "Wait a minute. Where's Judy?" I still get postcards from Judy and hear from Kay. But I'd totally forgotten that it went all the way back to SLATE.

Meeker: Wow. So I don't know the last time you went on campus, but—.

01-01:48:27

Kamler: Long time, yeah.

Meeker: The Free Speech Movement is pretty widely and well known. It's institutionalized on campus, in the sense that there's a café in Moffitt Library called the Free Speech Movement Café.

01-01:48:42

Kamler: Oh, okay.

Meeker: There are posters of all the events and there's a timeline. I venture to say that very few students would graduate Berkeley without having some general idea of what the Free Speech Movement was. I would also venture to say that very few have an idea of what SLATE was.

01-01:49:04

Kamler: About SLATE, right.

Meeker: What would you like students at Berkeley to know about SLATE?

01-01:49:17

Kamler: Well, I think I'd just like [them] to know that we were there and what we did. I really feel that SLATE really, if not *the*, it was one of the major stimuli that eventually did lead to the Free Speech Movement. The Free Speech Movement really pretty much started at Berkeley, and SLATE was pretty much the first campus group—at least that anybody really knew about, that got press or anybody knew—that started talking about off-campus issues and actually sort of political action kinds of stuff, besides the sandbox. So yeah. So we were definitely pivotal in there, and I think it should be known, really. In [the] improvisational theater world, the work that I did with Del Close at The Committee—I won't get into all of that, but anyway—that I did, and I did

with my theater companies for the next ten, fifteen years, whatever it was, again, it was seminal work in improvisational theater. There's just a book out called *Improv Nation* or something like that, and I'm not in that book. And yet there's this whole section of time when improvisation was changing, that I was really primarily *the* person that was making a change. But just like SLATE, it kind of—. The history has skipped that part of improvisational history. So I kind of feel like, well, they did it in SLATE, too, and now they're doing it in improv. So anyway. I don't know why. I guess I tend to kind of—. I've been on kind of a ground floor. Even in wildlife rehab, to a large extent, because it's a national thing. But when I first started volunteering in Marin County, the organization there had been like a little natural history museum. Then rehabilitating wildlife sort of evolved, and I was pretty early on in that whole thing about—. I helped produce manuals and educate people. I did all kinds of formative stuff there, anyway. So anyway.

Meeker: The way that you described it, your experience in SLATE, in some ways, turned you off from politics, rather than turning you on. With that in mind, are there any lessons that you think students should learn from—? Let's say they did learn about SLATE, that they knew it existed. Are there any lessons you'd like them to be able to take away from the experience of SLATE?

01-01:52:36

Kamler: Well, I guess it's kind of general, but SLATE certainly was probably the—. Other than at Harley School when I was a kid—. The fact that for things that you do feel strongly about or you care about, that I think it's important to do something. To do. It doesn't have to be a political movement. It could be other things. I have quite a few heroes in different fields that just created a field. Jane Goodall just went in and did something that wasn't supposed to be done, and she's changed the world in many ways. For me, the positive side of sort of disillusionment with politics was that my life choices tend to be from something that I can do now. So like in improvisational theater, many, many, many people that worked with me, their lives changed through that process. But it wasn't really a political process. But there's other ways to affect change besides politics. If it's not your bag, like me—. The underlying goals were totally part of me, but the political process was not. But I feel that I've lived, in a certain extent, for those goals, as a part of who I am. So you don't have to be a politician in order to affect our social world, our culture, who we are as a people, as a nation. We can do it smaller. And for me, that's what works for me, on a more intimate level. And I'm good at it, I think, so—. Yeah.

Meeker: Well, that's great. That's, I think, a great spot to end.

01-01:55:00

Kamler: Thank you.

Meeker: Thank you for your time. I appreciate it.

01-01:55:02

Kamler: Oh, you're welcome.

[End of Interview]