

Hi, this is Tamar Carroll in Rochester, New York, on November, let's check November 10 already, and the year is 2021, and I am speaking with Cynthia Martin about her time at the Eastman Kodak Corporation and her involvement with the Kodak Lambda Network. And Cynthia, do I have your permission to record this interview for research purposes.

Martin: Yes, absolutely.

Carroll: And is it okay if I donate it to a historical archive in the future.

M: Yes.

C: Thank you so much. So, we were just chatting a little bit, and you mentioned your chapter in this book, out and equal at work. And thank you so much for sharing that that was really helpful. You talked about how you had been at Kodak for over a decade before you did come out at work, and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what it was like for you at Kodak, before you came out.

M: Sure. I started my career there about 1982, I believe, in the customer equipment services division, and came out to family at that time, I think, or thereabouts came out to family. And it was not until 1995 that I actually came out at work so it was just over a decade. And it was a time when I was moving positions every, every couple years so early career to, you know, a number of different positions and it just both. The climate in the, in the United States, I felt as well as you know the company mirrored that. So it just wasn't a comfortable time or place, it seemed to come out and particularly as the company was a large manufacturing arm. Again, it mirrored the country, so it was, it was a challenge, but one that I just kind of accepted because that felt like that was the way it was it was a challenge, particularly as I recall, I was transferred to Atlanta in 1989 and I recall, you know, the dance around. And I had a partner at the time, and how that would work in terms of the move, and she stayed in Rochester, and I lived down there and we kind of commuted back and forth on weekends and of course you're not telling anyone, you know about that so the, the things that that many folks talk about in terms of the stress that goes on by not being able to, you know, be fully authentic and really share what's going on that affects your work and certainly in some ways. One thing that I vividly recall is, you know, when we would go out to dinner or grocery shopping you run into I mean Kodak was a Rochester was a Kodak town and so you, you'd always run into people, and, you know, if it was Valentine's Day and you're out at a restaurant or, you know, even just again grocery shopping it was awkward felt awkward running into people and that was just an everyday, almost everyday occurrence. It was hard, you know, it was stressful, and I, I learned later that during that time, you know, people were kind of talking. I'll say behind my back but there were, you know, people knew, I'm sure people knew at work, but it just wasn't it was like don't ask don't tell, kind of a thing. Although that wasn't an official policy it was. In fact, I think that's what was happening.

C: Do you recall where, would you describe it as like, and were there openly homophobic, you know, remarks made in meetings and things like that or was it more just that I felt like it would be

so wrong or disruptive to come out.

M: Yeah, I don't recall openly homophobic in the circles that I was in, I think gender always felt to me more of an issue than, than being gay or lesbian or LGBTQ it just, there were, there was more sexism, I think. Then, openly homophobic. When I moved to Atlanta. It was a really eye opening experience because there was also a lot of racism not in the, not in the office but with the public who we intersected with and I, you know, just. So, I didn't feel a lot of homophobic behavior, as I recall.

C: But it must have felt. I mean, maybe if you could say a little bit more about what it was like to be a woman in leadership at that time. And maybe that was an additional stress in terms of, you know how you're feeling about coming out in the workplace.

M: Yeah. Gosh, you're pulling a lot of history back. Take me back to that time. I was also, I think, also one of the younger people in some of the positions that I had so it was like being young female. Yeah. And a closeted lesbian, so I think, and I was in a pretty most of my career was in the service equipment service division is what it was called as I was early in my career. And I think because of the way I approach the work, which was pretty objective. I don't know, I think I was able to move through a lot of that. Where it really hit me, I think we're really my memory of most of the challenges were when we hit the 90s and I became responsible for more substantive organizations. And at one point in time. So I'm jumping fast forward to when I was part of the senior management of the company there were just two of us who were women amongst about. I think it must have been 25 or so of the senior most folks in the company.

C: Yeah.

M: And they're, you know, little things I just remember. I remember, I worked out a lot so having and, you know, an event where the muscles in my arms were commented on I wasn't used to having comments made by my body. And I think, well, I'm jumbling a bunch of things together but what I concluded was it was easier to be a senior executive who is female and lesbian than a heterosexual female.

C: Well, that's interesting.

M: It was quite, it felt quite evident to me that I was at a bit of an advantage because the sexual tension that men felt toward heterosexual women, I saw it. I sensed it, but I didn't. Yeah, I think you just.

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C: When you were in the senior management team and what it was like to be, you know, one of only two women.

M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

I, you know, I was thinking as we were offline a little bit, I just, I didn't feel, somehow I think maybe because I was a lesbian, I don't know, I didn't feel, while I witnessed and heard stories about women who, and heard, you know, comments and, you know, jokes and what have you, I felt like my, I was able to move along and kind of work through that in my career, and I don't know if it's, again, if it was the advantage of being a lesbian and not be caught up in that. The biggest challenge was when I had the job in Atlanta, which was a fabulous job, but it was all men, Southern. I was very young for that position. It was, took me across the Southeast. As I said, racism was a significant issue. We covered Mississippi and Alabama and had black managers who we were trying to place in positions there and towns that were historically, you know, very racist. And so that was a bigger issue, a big issue. But I think I really, when I was eventually made the chairman and CEO's chief of staff, I was told by one of the senior managers that when my name had come up in the past for what we call the high potential pool of candidates, there was mention that of some, like an alternative lifestyle or something like that. And he just wanted, this particular manager wanted me to be aware of that, that it was kind of flagged as a possible concern. But beyond that, I don't, I didn't feel personally caught up in the sexism and homophobic stuff that was going on.

C: Yeah, in the out and equal chapter, you describe when you became chief of staff to George Fisher and that he actually asked you to work with Kodak Lambda, and this was before you had come out.

M: Yeah, yeah, that's right. It was, yeah, it was, I mean, it was just weird that it was like my first task in the new job, which was a huge, the position was a huge step kind of up the ladder, but also in terms of company-wide visibility. It was a very, very big deal. And I had no idea there even was a Lambda network or that anything was happening with that. I was very tuned out of that. And yeah, the fellow whose position I was moving into had been helping the Lambda network with its interaction with the senior management team and with George. And so I took that over and was totally freaked out by it, I think. It's like, oh my goodness, but it was really incredible because that's when I started to meet the folks who were part of the Lambda network. And then of course saw how George was, Fisher was supporting the work that they were doing and really modeling what he wanted from the rest of the company.

C: Yeah. Did you know, were you aware at that time of the existence of the Women's Network?

M: I think so. Yeah, I believe so.

C: But you hadn't participated in it.

M: Right. Well, I hadn't participated in the Lambda network. The Women's Network, I can't

remember. I became very active in the Women's Network at some point as well as the African-American Network. But I don't remember exactly when that happened, if that was before I had that job or later.

C: So can you tell me a little bit about your memories of the Kodak Lambda network?

M: Yeah. Well, as I mentioned in that story, they just struck me as they were from all parts of the company, and parts of the company that I was not that familiar with at the time. As I said, I had spent most of my career in the service division, also one of the business units. But these folks were coming from a lot, like Emily from research, Dan manufacturing, and others from manufacturing. So that I felt was, they're coming from these, in some cases, manufacturing in particular fairly broadly, in some cases, manufacturing in particular, fairly blue collar worlds. And I just remember their approach was so professional, objective, very methodical, very thoughtful in terms of their focus on education. And I think bringing awareness and education, I felt was really a high impact because they weren't in the blame game or finger pointing. It was about assuming that the management team just didn't understand or know. And starting there. And I felt that it was really smart and effective.

C: Yeah. In your chapter, you talked about some of the education programs being done in the context of some of the manufacturing lines. And I think you use the word tough. And I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about how you saw social class differences kind of intersecting with the issue of being out at Kodak.

M: Yeah. Well, there were, there's a lot going on during that time, right? When, I'll just give you, I'll just give an example. And I don't know that this directly hits your question, but when there was, when there were, there was downsizing, you know, we started getting into a place where there was downsizing going on, affecting people's, you know, livelihood. There were some concerns with, there was some concerns with health conditions at, in some of the plants, particularly those that did some of the photo finishing stuff. And I remember when we, we first announced domestic partner that we were going to give domestic partner benefits to our employees, receiving a phone call from, I was, I was chief of staff at the time. And so the call came into George's secretary, executive secretary, of course, she patched it over to me and, you know, the person was irate, irate that we would be not providing certain health benefits to people who she felt were deserving, but yet we would, we would do, do this. So it was, it was, I also remember stories about, and, and folks like Dan could probably talk better about this, but many of the environments in manufacturing were, were dark. They would operate 24 hours a day and folks would need to go around with night vision, you know, glasses on because they were photo finishing, you know, manufacturing stuff that couldn't see daylight. And so folks were afraid for their safety in any situation, whether it's female, you know, male race, we just, but certainly for those folks who were coming out in that environment, it was there, there were, there were particular concerns around safety, although I'm not aware that there were any, any acts of, you know, violence during that time. So I don't know, those are

just a couple, couple of examples that I recall.

C: Yeah, no, that's extremely helpful. One thing that I I've noticed is that it seems like there were a lot of women involved at Kodak Lambda in, in terms of leadership of the organization, the network in comparison say to Xerox's galaxy or maybe AT&T's LGBT employee network. And I didn't know if, if you had, if that observation rang true to you, that there were a lot of, you know, that there were women leaders and if you could say what you think about that.

M: Yeah. Yeah. So are you saying the others were made up more of the other companies networks were more predominantly male?

C: Yeah. At least in the leadership.

M: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. It's interesting. I'm thinking through. Yeah. Uh, and I was, I was involved with out and equal or at least, uh, had visibility into out and equal. I'm thinking about, uh, people on the board, et cetera. It's, it's pretty mixed. I don't, uh, I don't, I, I mean, I have, uh, maybe thoughts of, I do have some thoughts about that. I think, I mean, I don't, I don't know. Women for it's, I, I think it's easier for women who are lesbians to take on leadership positions than men who are gay. I think there is, uh, that, the stereotype and, uh, of, uh, you know, men of strength. Right. And I don't, uh, I, I, I, like I said, I felt that it was... At worse, neutral for me to be female and lesbian as a leader there amongst my peers. Now, amongst in terms of the employees who were reporting, but amongst my peers, it felt like it was at worst neutral, if not, you know, perhaps even a positive relative to, to being female. So I don't, I don't, but I don't. So that's, I don't know. That's my only thought.

C: Yeah, Emily said she thought it was harder for men to come out at Kodak that there were fewer, especially in like, as you got to upper middle management and senior leadership, she said there were fewer out men than women. So she, she had a similar thought.

M: Uh huh. Yeah.

C: Um, I'm interested in, in your work with the networks, in general, and, you know, was that part of what George Fisher tasked you with? Or was it something that you embraced? Because you've thought it was an effective way to to change the culture at Kodak.

M: I don't remember being tasked with it. I, I don't remember being tasked with it. I it was just it was because it felt really important to me. And at that, at that, particularly at that, at that time. And I really appreciated I think it was, you know, when I I really appreciated the value that they were bringing to the company.

C: Yeah. What was that value for you?

M: Well, you know, certainly for the Lambda network, that was all about the education and

visibility, and breaking through, allowing people to come out, providing benefits, all that jazz. I think it just, I'm backing up a little bit, but I, I recall, when I became a member of the senior management team, someone, somebody who was a consultant to that, to George, I, I can't remember the details. But at some point in the early 90s, I think they had done an assessment, some kind of attitudinal or some kind of an assessment of the senior management team. And it was basically all older, white men with the exact same, you know, DNA in terms of how they thought was completely monolithic. And so the idea of diversity and bringing in, having people of different perspectives, different histories, different ideas, and all that just seemed, was so powerful. And certainly, George understood that and, and understood the power to the company of having diversity of thought, which, and then as you looked around and looked at the whiteness, the lack of gender diversity amongst management teams, it was, it became evident that, you know, we were, whether it was explicit or implicit, we were being held back by just the way that we were developing people and moving people along. So for me personally, I had never been a big networker. It's probably why I hadn't been aware of the employee networks prior to the chief of staff position, I don't think and I'd never been personally a big networker. But then it kind of opened the door to, for me to get to know and provide support for but even just get to know a lot of people of, you know, who were, who were different than me and or who were just so interesting, and it really opened some some windows to just the world in a broader way.

C: Yeah. It sounds like they were powerful both personally and, you know, in terms of Kodak's history.

M: Yeah, it was, it was very powerful. Yeah. It was very powerful. Still, you know, yeah. I do recall it was, I don't know, this is stuck with me. But I remember, I was a part of the Women's Network before coming out, because I was a very active member of the Women's Network, actually. And because I remember when I came out, one of my, the biggest fears I had was that the women, the people I engaged with in the Women's Network would be disappointed, would be upset, would feel that it, you know, would, and I think it was for a variety of reasons. One, that I had been inauthentic with them up to that point in time. I mean, that's the inauthenticity of being in the closet and not, you know, sharing with people who you share so much other stuff with. That big part of who you are. Yeah, it's hard when you, you come out to acknowledge that you've, you've kept something so significant from them. It's like, you don't trust them. And so there was that and, and just a sense of I was afraid that fearful that they would feel that I was somehow casting a black mark, all my own internalized homophobia, casting a black mark on women in leadership positions. And so I remember sharing that with at least one Candy O'Byrne was a woman who had been Chief of Staff, I think to one of the prior presidents Kay Whitmore and had become the she was the second other woman who was on the senior management team, sharing that with her and she was so good. She was heartbroken that I would have any fear about coming out. And she became a very strong advocate for the the Lambda Network, but she it's, I think shows, well, it was notable to me at the time how that was one of my greatest fears was coming out to the women in the women's network.

C: Yeah.

M: And how they would feel about it. And it was fine.

C: You valued your relationships with them. And the networks are based around identities, right? So it makes sense that it was hard to not have shared that aspect of your identity with them. Do you feel like the networks? Like, how would you compare the women's network? And was it North Star? The African American network at Kodak, I believe?

M: I can't remember the name of it.

C: I think I think it was North Star. But anyway, how would you compare the different networks?

M: I'm not sure, I think, I'm not sure I can. Although I think it seems to me that the women's network focused more on mentoring women mentoring women, and helping them grow, get connected, it was about making connections to other women and other support systems. And, and there was, there were educational things that were done around professional development, I think, as I recall, that's probably the most stark comparison to the Lambda network, which was really focused on helping people understand, you know, education of others.

C: Right.

M: And, creating safe spaces. And there was policy change, a part of that as well, which, so those were probably the two, you know, for good reasons, very different kind of focuses and missions of those two networks. I think the African American network, as I, I think it was more aligned with the women's network in terms of mentoring, professional development. Yeah, as I recall, okay.

C: No, thank you. That is really helpful. So, um, you mentioned the story about the backlash, or at least one, just one telephone call, I don't know if there was a broader backlash to the domestic partner benefits. But I was wondering if you could say anything more about what it was like to, you know, gather evidence for that. And, in the book chapter, you refer to it as making a business case for domestic partner benefits at Kodak.

M: Yeah, yeah. Um, well, this is where the Lambda network really did a really good job. I'm going to put my thinking cap on here for a moment. There's actually a couple of people in human resources as well, who were really good. So it was having that connection in the head of human resources, Mike Morley. He was a really, I think, strong partner. He had signed, there were a few members of his team. Sandy File was one who I'm still in touch with. She was amazing, who was also a strong partner. But I also remember a fellow, who was it? I don't know about Cearly, but it seemed to me to be a big obstacle. And he clearly was, you know, wanting to drag feet, was not supportive, yet, he was part of, he had to be part of putting the business case together and the case. So we had, you know, headwinds and tailwinds. And, and we also

tapped into what other companies had done, as I recall, the Lambda Network did. And, so, you know, put the case together, there was a lot of misinformation at that time about what it was going to cost. And so a lot of the case was around, I think, trying to, you know, demonstrate what the actual costs would be expected to be. And, and then, with, you know, HR and the Comp team there with them, you know, signing off on it, presenting it for decision with the Kodak, what was called the policy council, which was a subset of the senior management team. Yeah, and that was a frightening morning, as I recall, I think I wrote about that in the book. We had this voicemail system that we used more than email. And I remember sending George a voicemail because I sat in on those, I wasn't a decision making member, but I just sat in. Yeah. And I knew that next morning, there would be this group of, I'm going to say older white men sitting there talking about whether, you know, I should have benefits, I, you know, couldn't get married at the time, and whether I should get the same benefits that that that others could, and was just really concerned. I knew there was one of those members of the policy committee who was particularly not, I'm going to say progressive in his thinking. And I just was really concerned about what I might hear. And if the vote was no, just how I was going to respond to that. It just was really hard. And I remember sending him the message, just warning him that I didn't know how I was going to react, if that happened. And I'll never forget getting his voicemail back saying that he felt the same way. You know, that he, he, he too was concerned. And just because he didn't know how he would react, depending on how the conversation went. But as it turns out, he, I don't remember if there was, I don't even remember if there was much discussion or I don't remember, but it was he, he had made clear his position and folks, you know, approved it unanimously. I don't think there were any dissenting views. And it was fabulous.

C: Yeah. So how did that change things for people, you know, lesbian and gay workers at Kodak?

M: Yeah. Yeah, well, it was, it's one thing to say, you know, it's okay to be out and all that. But it's another when it's, it's substantiated by a major policy change like that. And so I think it was a, it was a huge win, both, you know, in terms of a real, real health benefits, which is a very personal and important thing. And, and the sign that it gave, and I, I recall, it probably was after that, because that was a very visible sign across the company that of the type of environment and culture that we wanted that. Again, I remember, and this is other companies have dealt with the same thing. But George received an email from an employee who said, he just was unwilling to feel it was just terrible to force him to work with, you know, gay, LGBTQ people. And, and George had this, he would to get through all his he would never send an email back, it was always he would print them and write on them. And I think it was because he didn't want to get into email, you know, thing with people. And he just, I got a copy of it. I don't remember how I got a copy of it. Why, but he just wrote on it, you know, then you probably need to look for work elsewhere, kind of a thing, very short, just, it's, it's probably time for you to, you know, go somewhere else. And, but it was so it was a visible, huge visible sign to, to everyone that this was really important.

C: Yeah. So was this around the time maybe that Kodak also sponsored the Gay Games, was



one of those sponsors?

M: I don't remember the timing of that. That probably came later. I'm guessing a little bit later. Yeah.

C: Can I've seen some photos, I think you were maybe biking in them. Is that right?

M: Yes, I did bike and mountain bike.

C: Can you say a little bit about, you know, the significance of the Gay Games and what it meant for you to participate and to have Kodak sponsor them? Yeah, yeah. Well, I actually just participated in the ones in Paris a couple years ago. When was that? 2018. I mean, who can resist Paris and I biked but not mountain bike. I did road racing, road biking. Well, what's really neat about the Gay Games is anyone can participate. And it's just this really cool... If you're at all competitive and like sports, whether it's ping pong or swimming or biking, and meet people from all around the world. And, and, yeah, I think, I think for Kodak to sponsor, it was a pretty big deal. We were sponsors of the Olympics at the time, very large sponsors of the Olympics. And, you know, it was during a time and it's not like this, these days are any different. The competition for talent is immense, and it was becoming immense. Back then, that was part of the business case for diversity in general, but we just felt that it would be a really another really important signal that a company wanted really good talented people. And so it was awesome. Amsterdam was, was fun. I didn't, we always, I still laugh, people say- How did you mountain bike in Amsterdam? awfully flat? Well, it was a whole mound. We just kind of rode around the mound a bit.

C: But it seems like it must have built camaraderie for the people participating.

M: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, it was really, really awesome. The one in Paris was to, I don't know, they had one this past summer, I think in Hong Kong, and I have no idea how well that went. It just doesn't sound like the place that you'd want to have a Gay Games, but hopefully, hopefully, it came off okay.

C: Yeah, I hope so too. I don't know anything about it. Um, what are there other things that you would like people to know about the Lambda network?

M: I think I would just want to reinforce a few things. And that, particularly, I guess, for thinking about also how Out and Equal has operated and become so successful. Yeah, it's very, very similar to how Lambda made such an impact early on and Lambda participated, as I recall, in the early Out and Equal events to teach others. So that was just this very significant effort back in the 90s amongst these companies to create networks, to use them to educate and build awareness, and, then learn from each other. So company to company learning since, so, you know, and it, it was extraordinarily powerful, you know, it really, because the other thing I would add is these folks were, as I recall, they were fun, they were

good, nice, professional, people who really opened themselves up to scrutiny. Yeah. And that's a big deal. You know, I remembered, David Cosell, did you, is he around? Did you talk to him? I did. I talked to him on Zoom. You know, just a sweet guy, but these people really, look, I get a little teary because, you know, they really risked a lot.

C: Yeah. So they were willing to be vulnerable, to put themselves in a position of vulnerability.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Because it's a lot to talk about, you know, well, anyway, yeah, I think that was, it was a really, it was significant.

C: He said, in our conversation that for him, it was a really big deal when he could put a photo of his partner on his desk, you know, and I thought that was very poignant because there you know, and I thought that was very poignant because it really captured just something very simple but profound. And how important, you know, what other people had taken for granted for, for so long.

M: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

C: Were there other, do you recall working or learning from anyone particular at other companies on these issues? Like when you were working on the domestic partner benefits case or through Out and Equal, were there particular leaders or groups that you worked with?

M: That's a good question. I don't recall. It seems like IBM was doing a lot during that time and, but I don't recall.

C: Okay. No problem. This was incredibly helpful and I really appreciate you sharing your memories of this time and, and your thoughts about it. And I don't know if there's anything you want to add.

M: I don't think so. Just thank you for doing what you're doing. It's really fantastic and important. So glad that you connected with Emily and.

C: Oh, me too. Thank you for saying that. I'm learning a ton and it's really interesting. And we do have a draft website. I think Emily shared it with you. I can put it in an email to you too, that my student Kate and Benjamin that worked with me this summer to get started on this project. So it's, it's in early stages, but we'll be adding more content to it. And then I also hope to write. So that's like public facing and it will be freely available once we have everyone's permissions. And then I'll be writing a more scholarly companion piece. So, I hope in the next, that'll be out in the next couple of years. So I will send you stuff as we finish it. And if there's anybody else you think I should speak with? Emily has been helping me, but...

M: Is there anything in particular that you, any avenue that you would like to, is there any way I can help you with that? In terms of...

C: She has said she thinks I should really try to speak with George Fisher. I don't know if that might be a possibility for you to introduce me via email to him.

M: I'm not in touch with him. Okay. So I have not been in touch with him for, for a lot, for years.

C: Gotcha. So that's not, that's okay. Yeah. Yeah. I, well, let me, I don't, so I don't have anybody else off the top of my head, but I will reach out if I think of anybody that it might make sense.

M: Let me think about the George connection. I don't know about his health, I don't know. I don't know like his health. He would be older now. Sure. So let me think about that. And if I can wrap my head around it, I'll, I'll loop back with you.

C: Okay. Thank you so much, Cynthia. I really enjoyed talking with you.

M: Nice to meet you and best wishes.

C: All right. Thanks so much. Bye.