

1 Candida de Luise, interviewed by Carol Quirke at Planting Fields, Oyster Bay, New York on
2 May 28, 2011.

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4 Carol Quirke: I'm wondering if you can tell us what your name is, where you came from,
5 both geographically and what high school you came from, and how you got recruited or
6 decided to come to Old Westbury?

7 Candida De Luise: Okay, I'm Candida De Luise and I grew up in Brooklyn, New York, the
8 first of an Italian-American family. My mom was an immigrant she came from Italy; my
9 dad's parents were from Italy. They grew up in New York but none of them had gone to
10 college and so I was the first one in the family to go to college, but I was looking. I don't
11 know how I heard about Old Westbury but when I read about it or read an article or
12 something about the experimental idea and how they were going to do things differently it
13 was so reflective of the sixties and that time of just questioning everything and I was very
14 much interested. But I had gone to all Catholic schools, and my parents thought I was
15 crazy, because you know it was very different from what I had been brought up on, or as.
16 Now my family is in the suburbs of Long Island but my formative experience was in
17 Brooklyn.

18 Carol: What part of Brooklyn are you from?

19 Candida: From Bayridge, Bensonhurst. I didn't really know anybody who wasn't Italian
20 until I was ten.

21 Carol: One of the things that I'm very curious about, one of the reasons why I wanted to ask
22 you about this, there has been a lot of discussion of race. There's been the assumption that

23 the white people at Old Westbury, the white students, were middle class. I was interested
24 in, what was it like for you, were you conscious of being from a different class than other
25 people, specifically other white folks?

26 Candida: Kind of, I mean I think I was. I did have an awareness that I didn't have [the]
27 privileges and affluence of other families. A lot of the white kids at Westbury did seem to
28 have much more broad expansive experience in the world than I did. When I met some of
29 the other Puerto Rican kids, I related to them, because I grew up in the city and they did.
30 There just was a sort of commonality I felt. But I didn't feel alienated from the affluent kids
31 because we eventually moved to the suburbs. So it was sort of like having a foot in both
32 worlds I guess.

33 Quirke: Can you tell me, were there either any faculty, any courses, any activities that
34 really stood out to you from your time at Old Westbury?

35 Candida: Art Alderstein, I took my first psych class with him. He was just a marvelous
36 teacher and very genuine and approachable. I still remember the very first—I think it was
37 one of the first nights that the whole group of freshmen—all the new students came to
38 Westbury and Art did like this group experience with us where everybody was meeting
39 each other. He gave out all these noisemakers and he sort of conducted a symphony, just
40 sort of an improv thing where, like he would conduct us. It was so, like, magical and
41 liberating and you got to sort of meet people and break the ice. I really felt that Art was an
42 important person in my life, and now I'm a therapist so that was my first psychology class.

43 Carlos Russell, I took his Black Experience Seminar and he was super, like, just
44 genuine and direct about opening our minds, and you know sort of I haven't really thought

45 about, just articulating the black experience and what it's like to grow up in this country as
46 a minority. It was a really wonderful eye opener I thought. I mean, I had already been
47 somewhat involved in the civil rights movements in high school, and I belonged to this
48 interracial club.

49 Let me see any other? Cesare Massarenti, he was our film guy. Cesare is this
50 amazing Italian professor. He is teaching in Milan right now [Professor of Sociology and
51 Social Research, University of Milan-Bicocca] and we've all been in touch with him on
52 Facebook. When he came to Westbury he said he was the only White Panther. He had
53 come from Berkeley and he knew Eldridge Cleaver and he hung out with all these Black
54 Panthers in Oakland. He was a totally radical and mind-blowing kind of guy. He turned me
55 on to jazz, and Ornette Coleman, and the New Wave, and all the French movies like Jean-
56 Luc Godard. Actually he made a film of us too in East Harlem, which I would love to see
57 that film. I don't know if it still exists, you know the 35-millimeter.

58 Carol: Did it have a title?

59 Candida: I don't know. I don't remember. I should ask some of the other students that
60 studied with him.

61 Carol: You are the first one who mentioned it. That's why it's interesting.

62 Candida: Because I was in the movie with these Puerto Rican kids that I was working with
63 in my field experience in Spanish Harlem. So it was fun to do.

64 Carol: Tell me what you think, I mean there is discussion of the vision being betrayed.

65 Other people seem to discuss very fondly what happened here, other people still seem very

66 angry and upset about what happened. What is your sense about what transpired at Old
67 Westbury? Did it seem to you to be a betrayal of the image, or not the image but the plans
68 for the college?

69 Candida: Betrayal of the original vision, I can't speak to that because I was only on this
70 campus from 1968 to '69. In my spring semester I was in East Harlem working with the
71 Puerto Rican neighborhood community as my field experience. I got so involved in, with
72 the Young Lords and working in the ghetto. And doing really what I felt was very
73 important stuff that I didn't want to go back to the suburbs.

74 Plus whenever I would come back here everything would be shut down. People
75 were protesting and we couldn't have class because everybody was on strike. I dropped
76 out of Westbury and then I took some classes in the city.

77 I ended up working in a drug treatment program in Greenwich Village, like '69 to
78 1971 and it was an amazing experience. And then later I got my BA from the University of
79 Colorado. I never felt—I just think it was a very transformative time for the group that was
80 here. I kind of feel like we were self-selected in some way, I think everybody that came
81 here had that vision of wanting to do something that was not traditional. They really—to
82 me I felt I did get that, and just being able to go and to live in a different cultural context, I
83 really valued that. It was important. I think it really did change my life and the way that I
84 approached my life.

85 Carol: Can I ask, the college was described as experimental but what's clear is that people
86 really had political commitments. That initial description of experimental, did that include

87 a kind of political engagement in your mind when you were first considering Old
88 Westbury?

89 Candida: To be honest, I don't think I was that focused on that, when I was in high school. I
90 knew that there would be a piece about community service but I think the experimental
91 part seemed like, everything I read about college seemed like it was so rigid and like a
92 prescription of what you were supposed to do and that kind of turned me off.

93 In high school I had this amazing teacher that let me do independent study and I
94 learned so much more in that way so I think I was drawn to this idea of independent study
95 and creating your own curriculum.

96 And we did have some seminars on the Great Books and one time we did a
97 symposium—Plato had a symposium about love—and Harris and some faculty members
98 and students, we all went to my parents' house to have this symposium. Harris was trying
99 to be relevant, to meet the families of the students and stuff and it was great. It was
100 interesting for my family to meet people like George Robinson who was in the seminar. He
101 was like an older Black guy from Chicago that I think probably had been an ex-con or
102 something and he was a really interesting, smart guy and Harris was there. It was like a
103 super diverse group of people and my mom and dad were like —really it was wonderful,
104 we had a really good exchange— my dad kissed and hugged everyone goodbye because he
105 was Italian, and they were all like, "What?" It was fun.

106 Carol: What did you think about the change in the mission of the college? The fact that it
107 closed down, did you stay for any of that?

108 Candida: [10:59] By that time I was long gone. At that point I was involved in working at
109 this center in the Village and I got involved in the union—1199—and so at that point I
110 didn't really care that they weren't meeting their mission. I was just young and involved in
111 my own politics and scene.

112 Carol: Can I ask you, it seems that there is some division around the question of the sort of
113 politicization of race in this time period. I'm curious how you've discussed the fact that you
114 learned a lot as a result of being a part of the College, and became politicized as a result of
115 it. Were there tensions there? How did you perceive those tensions, if they were there?

116 Candida: I think there were—the politicization of race—I think we were all learning like
117 the black kids, and the white kids, and the Puerto Rican kids were—I think we kind of
118 bonded over not trusting the establishment and wanting something different in our
119 education and in our lives. I ended up dating a black Puerto Rican guy who was in the
120 Young Lords. Then again, in that period some of the white students got involved in the
121 church that the Young Lords took over and there was a whole children's breakfast program.
122 Okay I'm getting off the topic of the racism, but I think, I feel like we —on a really personal
123 level, back then interracial couples would get stared at and people had a lot of problems
124 with interracial couples. That would be like 1969, 1970. And now my daughter is married
125 to a man from South Africa. It is such a different world right now.

126 In some sense the women's movement and the civil rights movement; they all really
127 impacted our culture. It's a very different world now there are tons of bi-racial kids and
128 they're much more integrated into the culture it's not the same kind of stigma it was in the
129 sixties— in the early sixties.

130 Carol: May I ask you and I'm totally switching directions, were you at all active in the
131 women's stuff, and do you mind describing that?

132 Candida: Oh, I was, and it was so wonderful. We had a consciousness-raising group and
133 I'm trying to remember who was in it. We had at least five or six women, some of whom
134 were from Old Westbury. And it was, you know, one of the first consciousness-raising
135 groups. I had never even heard of such a thing. It was really powerful. We really talked a
136 lot about our own growth and development and what we wanted and sort of empowering
137 each other to follow our vision. There were wonderful theater events for women and
138 women's groups.

139 We had a group called It's All Right To Be Women Theater. And I remember we had
140 this wonderful snake dance all through the streets in New York. That was also in the era of
141 the Bread and Puppet Theater. That kind of activist theater enlivened the women's groups
142 and personally I felt like the other women—like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, and some of the
143 health collectives that women were doing—were incredibly powerful and helped women
144 take responsibility for their own health and bodies and careers.

145 Carol: Can you say just a little bit more, I'm going to ask you if there is anything else you
146 want to say about Old Westbury, can you tell us, you said you got your BA afterwards, what
147 did you go on to do, and in what ways did Old Westbury perhaps infuse your future
148 choices?

149 Candida: [15:15] I went to the University of Colorado and I got a BA in Urban Studies and I
150 minored in Psych. That was influenced by Old Westbury, because I was like I want to
151 design my own major and they were like, "Okay, well how do you do that?" But they were

152 open to it. So that was a direct result from my experience here. I didn't have— I couldn't
153 get like a regular job. I was trying to get a counseling job in Denver. I just happened to
154 walk into this vintage clothing shop, this lady was leaving and I thought, "Oh, this will be
155 fun." And it was like the seventies in Colorado and I ran a little vintage clothing shop with
156 some friends for my livelihood.

157 I did travel to Mexico and a lot of us have been in Cuernavaca, so I did the same
158 thing. I studied Spanish in Cuernavaca and that's where I met my future husband. And I
159 also lived in San Cristobal de Las Casas, for a couple of months and it was amazing. Then
160 we got together and that's how I ended up finishing in Colorado.

161 Then my husband moved, he had a graduate program at Georgetown and then we
162 moved. And after we had children I went back to school and that was for clinical social
163 work. So I have a Master's degree and I've been a therapist in a private practice for twenty
164 years. But I do feel like I incorporate a lot of alternative ideas and I'm open. It is very much
165 not a traditional psychotherapy so that would also relate to some of what I think the
166 environment and the whole vibe of Old Westbury, it relates to how I do my work too.

167 Carol: Is there anything else you want to say to us?

168 Candida: I just think that there is just a heart connection we all have, and we haven't really
169 talked about the spiritual piece very much but somehow to me there is some kind of
170 common spirituality. I know a lot of us got into meditation, I think. And obviously Don
171 Bluestone has a Hindu name, I would love to see him I don't know if he's coming. I have
172 studied in India, in other spiritual traditions and somehow I think that that also impacts
173 this particular group. I think some of us had had that, like from "sex, drugs and rock n' roll,"

174 like they got into higher states and altered states. And to me that sort of launched a lot of
175 people discovering Eastern mysticism. That was just another little trend, I don't know if it's
176 true. I would love to, if you guys do a documentary —if there's any filmmakers in this
177 group— I would love to be involved in learning more about that.

178 Quirke: Thank you.