



**Leslie Aiello**

The Leakey Foundation Oral History of Human Origins Research

Interview conducted by  
Bernard Wood  
In 2024

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Interview: 04/17/2024

**Bernard Wood (00:00:04):**

Okay, Leslie, thank you very much for doing this. As Alexis was explaining there will be an introduction, a one-page introduction, which I will write and then send to you to make sure that you are happy with it. And then the video will be available, the audio will be available, and the transcript will be available.

**Leslie Aiello (00:00:32):**

Okay. Do you want a CV or anything like that?

**Bernard Wood (00:00:37):**

I'm looking at one.

**Leslie Aiello (00:00:38):**

Oh, okay.

**Bernard Wood (00:00:40):**

Okay. It's not particularly up to date but I think it will do the job.

**Leslie Aiello (00:00:45):**

Okay.

**Bernard Wood (00:00:45):**

And if I sit here as if I am in supplication, then it gets rid of some of the shirt.

**Bernard Wood (00:00:52):**

Okay. And we are also going to have to pretend that we don't know as much about each other as I think we do. So...

**Leslie Aiello (00:01:06):**

I mean, do you want to do that or do you just want to let it flow? Because-

**Bernard Wood (00:01:10):**

I think-

**Leslie Aiello (00:01:11):**

... there's some much of our history that's intertwined.

**Bernard Wood (00:01:15):**

Yes. I think we should not conceal that. And I think Alexis's point is that the ones of these that have worked best have really been a conversation. And that conversation...

**Bernard Wood** (00:01:30):

I mean obviously a conversation with David Pilbeam that tried to pretend that we don't know each other would have been crazy. Whereas the conversation with Maxine Kleindienst, who I had never seen or heard of before, was a different animal.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:01:52):

Okay. Well, I'll take your lead.

**Bernard Wood** (00:01:54):

Okay. So if you could just, for the record, if you could let us know your name, your full name. And if you could tell me where the Crum comes from, that would be interesting, and where you worked last, just for the record.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:02:15):

Okay. My full name is Leslie Crum Aiello, and the Crum is actually my maiden name, and the Aiello is the name of my first husband.

**Bernard Wood** (00:02:28):

I didn't know that.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:02:33):

And I always took a lot of stick for Crum when I was a kid, so I wasn't too eager to maintain my maiden name. But this upset my parents, and so I've always used it as my middle name.

**Bernard Wood** (00:02:50):

Okay. Well, that's something I didn't know.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:02:50):

Okay.

**Bernard Wood** (00:02:53):

If you could just remind us where you worked until you retired, and when you retired.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:02:58):

Okay. Well, I've actually retired twice.

**Bernard Wood** (00:03:01):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:03:02):

So I first retired in 2005 from University College London, and I was Professor of Biological Anthropology there. I had also been Head of Department and Head of the Graduate School.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:03:16):

And then after I left UCL, I came to New York and I became president of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. And I retired from there in 2016.

**Bernard Wood** (00:03:29):

Okay. Thank you very much. And I must try and avoid saying okay as much.

**Bernard Wood** (00:03:33):

Could you let us know a little about your family background? As you know I used to be a clinician, and so I find it very, very difficult not to take a family history. So could you tell us a little about your family?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:03:50):

Okay. Well, it was a very normal American family. I was born in Pasadena, California. My father had been in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War, and he fell in love with California.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:04:06):

And so after the Second World War he went to Caltech to study mechanical or aeronautical engineering, and I was born while he was a student there. And then we just stayed on in Southern California, in Los Angeles, and that's where I grew up. And I went to university at UCLA, University of California, Los Angeles.

**Bernard Wood** (00:04:32):

And your mother? Tell us about your mother.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:04:35):

My mother was a homemaker.

**Bernard Wood** (00:04:37):

Okay. Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:04:38):

And in fact she was a dedicated homemaker. I ask her once... She had a very good eye and was very interested in antiques, and I ask her, well, why doesn't she get a job in an antique store? I mean, she would enjoy it and she had a lot of expertise. And she turned to me without missing a step, and she said, "What would the neighbors think?"

**Bernard Wood** (00:05:01):

How interesting.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:05:03):

Yeah. She was very much of a woman of her time, who felt that volunteer work was wonderful but paid work would indicate a deficiency in my father.

**Bernard Wood** (00:05:17):

Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:05:18):

I had one brother who was five years younger than I. And I think that I was a little bit of a problem for him because he wasn't academically inclined, and my parents were quite hard on him. But he lived a very happy life. He ended up as a... he repaired fruit-sorting machines for packing houses.

**Bernard Wood** (00:05:49):

And there's a lot of fruit in that part of the world, as I discovered.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:05:53):

Yes, and it comes to you at 50 miles an hour in the packing houses. So it's really quite something. It was a whole different world. And he ended up having a small farm in the Central Valley.

**Bernard Wood** (00:06:06):

And were you relatively close or...

**Leslie Aiello** (00:06:10):

Well, we weren't that close. We were five years apart.

**Bernard Wood** (00:06:14):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:06:15):

And because of our total difference in interests and all, we didn't get close until well into our adult years.

**Bernard Wood** (00:06:25):

Okay. Okay. Okay. Well, I guess it's pretty obvious, but you went to a local university. Did you ever think about going to another university in the California system or...

**Leslie Aiello** (00:06:43):

Oh, yes.

**Bernard Wood** (00:06:44):

... outside of California?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:06:45):

No. I always wanted to go to Stanford.

**Bernard Wood** (00:06:47):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:06:49):

But being one of the original baby boomers, the school system in California was having a hard time coping with it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:07:00):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:07:00):

So rather than going to school on the normal academic year of starting in the fall and then finishing your year in May or June or whenever it might be, my cohort started in January. So I went, throughout my grammar school and all the way through high school, on a January to January scale.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:07:25):

So when I was ready to go to university my parents said, "Well, why don't you just go to UCLA for a term, and then if you want to transfer, you can transfer." And I think they breathed a huge sigh of relief, because even at that time Stanford was considerably more expensive than the state colleges. And my tuition at UCLA, it was 1963 I started, was \$75 a year.

**Bernard Wood** (00:08:00):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:08:01):

No, I have to correct myself. It was \$75 a term, so \$75 twice a year.

**Bernard Wood** (00:08:08):

Okay. Okay. But still a pretty good deal.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:08:10):

Very cheap at the price. But this was the real heyday of California education, where they had a very good system of junior colleges, state colleges and universities.

**Bernard Wood** (00:08:24):

And so why did you choose... Did you know what your major was going to be when you went to university or did that emerge once you were there?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:08:33):

Oh, I absolutely didn't know. I mean I was always interested in biology. And I started out that January as a double major in geology and biology.

**Bernard Wood** (00:08:46):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:08:46):

But what happened is I had an opportunity to go do an archeological field school that first summer, and this was in Cedar City, Utah, and it was fantastic. It was a Basketmaker site, and I'd never had an experience like that, where it was discovery, it was excitement.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:09:10):

And I came back, and I remember sitting in an introductory to anthropology course thinking, "Well, I'm never going to have to support myself. I'm going to have a husband who can do that. Why don't I just indulge myself and change my major to anthropology?" And that's what happened. I changed my major to anthropology.

**Bernard Wood** (00:09:33):

And why eventually biological anthropology? Who were your teachers? Is there anybody we would recognize?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:09:40):

Oh, yes. Yes. It was a very exciting time at UCLA at that time. And in terms of biological anthropology, my mentor, as an undergraduate, was Joe Birdsell who was very well-known. He had done his field work in Australia and he was an extremely talented communicator and teacher.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:10:08):

And I remember he'd come into these big introductory lectures of 500 people. He had his tie tucked into his shirt and he would ask the person in the front row where he left off, and then just flow. No visual aids or anything like that.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:10:27):

And in fact when I got into graduate school I was a teaching assistant for him, and I sat through those courses four or five times, and he never gave the same lectures twice. He always tied it into what was published in American Scientist or any of the more popular journals, and always made it totally fascinating.

**Bernard Wood** (00:10:53):

Wow, that's a big act to follow.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:11:01):

I once asked him how he did it, and he said... He said, "My dear," he said, "if you've done it for 50 years, you could do it too." And it's true.

**Bernard Wood** (00:11:13):

So what was his background? How did he end up at UCLA?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:11:19):

I have no idea. But he wasn't the only one at that time because... He was very influential, both when I was in undergraduate's there and when I was doing my master's. But I think that most of the influence came when I was doing my master's degree, because it was a very exciting time at UCLA because both Sally and Lew Binford were there. And this was the time of the new archaeology.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:11:50):

And at that period, I was working with Jim Sackett who had been a Hallam Movius student and was interested in the Upper Paleolithic in France. And in 1968 and then again in 1972 or 3, I went into the field with him in the South of France. And that was tremendously informative for me, particularly the 1968 excavations.

**Bernard Wood** (00:12:23):

Okay. So that makes it to my mind even more remarkable that you did your PhD in a medical school in England with Michael Day, who was not an archeologist and wasn't really a biological anthropologist. So how did you get from UCLA to London?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:12:53):

I'll give you the true story. And the true story is that I was dumped by my first husband. And I've always liked the phrase that you're redundant to requirements, and he let me know in no uncertain terms I was redundant to his requirements.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:13:16):

And at that time... You have to remember this was during the late 1960s in California, so it was a very heady time. You had all the Vietnam War protests, you had all the counterculture happening.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:13:33):

And I'd finished my master's degree and took a few years off. And I was doing adjunct teaching and part-time teaching in some of the California junior colleges and state colleges. And I would have been very happy with a career like that. I enjoyed teaching, I enjoyed communication. And even though I'd been exposed to the Binford's and Sackett and Birdsall and all of the others there, I wasn't that oriented towards research. It was the teaching and communication that I wanted. And so I took a few years off, and that's when this situation with my ex-husband happened.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:14:27):

And at that point, I was teaching at Cal State, Northridge, which is one of the California state college campuses in Southern California. And Gail Kennedy was teaching there. And Gail Kennedy of course had done her PhD with Michael Day. And she looked at me and she said, "Leslie," she says, "you're in about the same shape I was after my husband died." And that was why I went to the UK. And she said, "Why don't you go to the UK and finish your PhD?"

**Leslie Aiello** (00:15:05):

Now at this point I'd already started my PhD back at UCLA. Bernard Campbell was there at that point.

**Bernard Wood** (00:15:16):

Right. Right, right, right. Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:15:20):

But Bernard, after I'd started my PhD, he was only there for maybe six months to a year, and then went back permanently to the UK. And this was because of exchange control issues at that time. And he owned a large estate in Norfolk.

**Bernard Wood** (00:15:40):

Yes. We should explain that Bernard Campbell is the same family as Campbell's Soups. And Bernard, when I met him, was living in Norfolk, in that-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:15:58):

At Sedgeford Hall.

**Bernard Wood** (00:16:00):

At Sedgeford Hall. Okay. So you started a PhD with Bernard Campbell, and what was your intention, what were you going to work on?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:16:09):

I was interested vaguely in human evolution at that point. So what the sequence was, is during my master's degree I'd had the field experiences in the South of France. I actually got turned off with the archaeology, and this all had to do with De Sonneville-Bordes, who was Francois Bordes' wife

**Leslie Aiello** (00:16:29):

And De Sonneville-Bordes came through the site once and said, "Oh, you have Magdalenian Zero here. This is wonderful." And we all looked around and no one had a clue what Magdalenian Zero was. And at that point I decided that rather than being interested in tool typology, which was one of the main things that was going on in French Paleolithic Archaeology at the time, that I was much more interested in the people who actually made these tools rather than the tools themselves.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:17:06):

So that was the transition into the humans or the hominids rather than the stones. But then-

**Bernard Wood** (00:17:16):

Um-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:17:17):

Yeah?

**Bernard Wood** (00:17:18):

And when you were a graduate student of Bernard's, were there other graduate students of his at that time?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:17:26):

As I remember... It was very much different in the California system than it is in the UK system, because you don't really have a close connection with your advisor until you finish your qualifying exams. So I was doing coursework at the time.

**Bernard Wood** (00:17:46):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:17:47):

So I was TAing for Bernard and that type of thing, but I hadn't gotten to the point of actually developing a project with him yet.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:17:55):

But when he went back to the UK, I was left with no one who was interested in human evolution there. And it was before then, Gail Kennedy had moved into his position at UCLA. And so Gail was still teaching at the State College.

**Bernard Wood** (00:18:17):

At Northridge?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:18:17):

I was the part-time teacher in there. And that's when she said, "Well, why don't you go to the UK?" And she helped me arrange it with Michael. And I arrived in the UK on January 1st, 1975.

**Bernard Wood** (00:18:33):

Oh, right. Okay. And give me a two-minute, your version of Bernard Campbell.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:18:51):

That's a bit of a hard one because I didn't know any Englishmen at that point except for Bernard. And Bernard was very taken up by the counterculture of California.

**Bernard Wood** (00:19:08):

Right. So I gather.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:19:10):

In fact he lived with Sally Binford for a while on the beach at Malibu.

**Bernard Wood** (00:19:17):

So I gather, yes.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:19:18):

And so I was involved through that whole period.

**Bernard Wood** (00:19:21):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:19:22):

So I didn't have any sense of him as a scientist or a paleoanthropologist other than I knew that he had done his thesis in this area and all. But he actually told me that his first thesis was declined at Cambridge and he had to do a second thesis.

**Bernard Wood** (00:19:42):

Right. Those were different times.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:19:47):

Yeah, but he was extremely successful writing his textbooks.

**Bernard Wood** (00:19:52):

Sure, sure.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:19:54):

And as we all, we all have various strengths and weaknesses.

**Bernard Wood** (00:20:01):

Right. Okay. So you arrive in London in January 1975. Had you met Michael before?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:20:10):

No.

**Bernard Wood** (00:20:10):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:20:12):

No, I'd corresponded with him a bit and I think he was short of PhD students. Because you were still there at the time. I think you were finishing up or you were in the middle?

**Bernard Wood** (00:20:25):

I finished my PhD in 1975, yeah.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:20:29):

And so-

**Bernard Wood** (00:20:30):

And we should explain, as you have already hinted at, that in the UK there was no coursework. You had an advisor, normally the advisor would get a grant for a PhD student, and they would advertise for a student in a particular topic that they had got support for, and you just got on and did your thesis.

**Bernard Wood** (00:20:59):

Okay. So let's jump to your experience as a graduate student with Michael, because some of the questions involve mentoring style and how were you mentored and that sort of thing. Would you like to paint a picture in words of what it was like to be a graduate student, a PhD student, of Michael's at that time in London?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:21:41):

Well, the first year was the most miserable year in my life.

**Bernard Wood** (00:21:46):

Okay. You've already told us that the preceding years have been pretty...

**Leslie Aiello** (00:21:53):

Well, I mean, I was trying to find myself and establish what I really wanted to do in life, and rebuild after five years of marriage. And I was really trying to decide who I was and where I wanted to go.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:22:14):

And I think the problem I had the first year in London is I was terribly lonely because at that point there wasn't the same cohort of graduate students that I had experienced in California. I was a more mature student. Because probably what we should say also, that Michael Day was the Professor of Anatomy at St. Thomas's Hospital and medical degrees in the UK or undergraduate degrees.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:22:46):

So I was older than the medical students and there were only a handful of other research students who were in various departments or various areas of the anatomy department. So-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:23:03):

It was hard for me to find a cohort that I felt that would support me. But what really saved me was the fact that both Peter Andrews and Chris Stringer were at the Natural History Museum. They had just arrived as young professionals. It was really the two of them that kept encouraging me and kept telling me I had interesting ideas and to keep going and to forge on and all. Then, after a year, and this would be September 1976, I got a temporary job teaching at UCL. UCL is University College London. Even though I was still doing my research, I had landed back into a situation that I felt totally comfortable with because I'd already, at that point, had five years or so of teaching under my belt. I felt very comfortable with teaching undergraduate students. It was much more of a university atmosphere than I had at the medical school, which, at that point, was strictly a medical school at the time.

**Bernard Wood** (00:24:27):

Can you remind us who was at UCL and how did you get a job? Because in those days, jobs... Well, certainly, in medical schools, it would be difficult to give somebody from another country a job who didn't obviously have... You had experience. But how did that work? How did you get introduced to UCL, and who was there?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:25:02):

Well, I think I got the job because they were desperate.

**Bernard Wood** (00:25:04):

Okay. It's always a good-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:25:08):

What happened? I mean, UCL, at that point, was the only American-style anthropology department in all of the UK. What I mean by American style... That it would have social anthropology and biological anthropology in it. There were four biological anthropologists at the time. What had happened is Nigel Barnicot had been the professor of biological anthropology. He unexpectedly passed away. As the story goes, he couldn't stand the professor of social anthropology, who was M.G. Smith at that point. They used to take their disputes directly to the provost. Everyone suspected that the provost took Barnicot's death as a sign from God that he could get rid of biological anthropology.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:26:14):

At that point, the other three people in the department didn't have PhDs, and only one of them had a permanent job. I was brought in to help cover the teaching, just until they decided what they were going to do with biological anthropology. In fact, as I remember, there were only four people who applied for this temporary position. I was the only one that had any teaching experience that was halfway relevant to the curriculum that they

were looking to cover. That's why I got hired. But I had to interview for that job every year for the next four or five years.

**Bernard Wood** (00:27:03):

Okay. Because it was an annual... It was a-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:27:07):

An annual temporary position. But what it did is it gave me an environment I was much more comfortable with. It gave me the type of colleagues that I'd had in the States before I went. That actually helped lift my spirits and moved me on.

**Bernard Wood** (00:27:34):

Okay. Okay. How did you come upon the topic of your thesis? How did that emerge? That really brings me to the question of what stage did you make a decision about what you thought your research interest was going to be.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:27:56):

Well, we have to step back a few paces because Michael Day, at that time, as you know very well, was interested in post-cranial evolution from the neck down. At that point, the majority of the people in the field were interested in teeth and jaws and all. Michael was one of the only people who was interested in bipedal walking or, basically, what was going on in the rest of the body. I went knowing that this was the type of area that I would probably end up working on. But what was very disturbing to me... I know that you had a very different experience with Michael than I did, but I don't think I ever had an intellectual conversation with Michael.

**Bernard Wood** (00:28:55):

I don't think our experiences were very different.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:29:00):

Because, at one point, I went in to talk with him about what I thought was an academic problem. He looked at me, and he said, "Leslie." He said, "Are you a depressive?" I was pretty much on my own in terms of designing the project. Also, in that first year, I was a bit disappointed because one of the reasons I had come was I was interested in fieldwork. Of course, I had this background in archeology. I enjoyed the discovery parts of things very much. I thought that, as you were able to do, to go out to Koobi Fora and all... I know that Gail Kennedy also had the opportunity of going out. But by the time I arrived... You probably know the story much better than I do. But Michael had stopped going into the field and stopped going to Kenya. That aspect, where I thought that I was going to be working with original fossils and all, didn't really materialize.

**Bernard Wood** (00:30:14):

Well, to be honest, Michael never went into the field. He went to Kenya. He had a Land Rover that had the St. Thomas' crest on the side. Richard used to make comments about how clean the Land Rover was.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:30:40):

In any case, I'd had expectations that didn't bear out. But with that said, I mean, he never stood in my way.

**Bernard Wood** (00:30:50):

No, no. In a sense, being with Michael gave you the opportunity to be in London. You took advantage of that opportunity. I know you eventually went to the field in Turkey at Pasalar. Is that right?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:31:10):

Right. Yes, that's right.

**Bernard Wood** (00:31:13):

Everything worked out play in the end. You did your PhD, I think, on limb proportions.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:31:25):

Yeah. I started out being very interested in bone strength from the point of biomechanics and all of this. I started working at Imperial College on bending and strength of bones. But I realized that was very much out of my element. At that point, I decided, well, if I'm going to get my PhD, I'm going to have to do something that I can do myself. Allometry was a very big thing at the time. I decided, "Okay. I've always liked mathematics. Why didn't I do this?" What my PhD was on was the allometry of the postcranial skeleton, and whether your hind limbs got long, your forelimbs got short, all of the scale relationships that happen.

**Bernard Wood** (00:32:34):

That was using allometry in the Gouldian sense as a criterion of subtraction, in other words. What would've happened if nothing happened other than you changed in size?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:32:46):

Exactly. Do we look at humans with long legs just because we're largely in body size? Of course, this was shortly after Lucy had been found. Everybody was interested in what Lucy's proportions actually met. She figured quite strongly in my thesis.

**Bernard Wood** (00:33:13):

It's really interesting that actually... I hadn't realized until I looked at your CV that you worked on Allometry. I worked on Allometry. I'm completely convinced that Michael went to his grave not understanding Allometry.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:33:31):

Yeah. I think he also didn't understand multivariate statistics. But he was a fine anatomist.

**Bernard Wood** (00:33:41):

Oh, no. Oh, no. Sure. Sure. I mean, I got most of my advice from my PhD by going to Birmingham. But I couldn't let Michael know that because he was at war with the people in Birmingham. I used to go up there and not let him know that I've been to Birmingham.

**Bernard Wood** (00:34:04):

Okay. Now, you have always been a quantitative person. Was that something that you were good at math at school? I mean, it's always come second nature to you. That's my impression.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:34:22):

Well, I've always liked math. That was my fallback. If I didn't make it in anthropology, I was going to become a CPA or certified public accountant, or whatever, or a statistician. I was one of the women in... When would this be? This would've been the very late '50s or early '60s, who excelled in math and school and was given no encouragement whatsoever. I remember in a calculus class, there was me and another woman in the class. The rest were men. The teacher just ignored both of us. She ended up getting her PhD in statistics. I went into anthropology.

**Bernard Wood** (00:35:23):

Let's go back to 1981. You were awarded your thesis. Who was the examiner?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:35:29):

It was Michael and Eric Ashton.

**Bernard Wood** (00:35:32):

Eric was my examiner, too.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:35:35):

But, in fact, it was one of the experiences that frame my philosophy in teaching my own graduate students because my viva/my PhD exam was totally underwhelming. I mean, I don't think Michael ever read my thesis. He asked me shortly before the viva whether I said anything in my thesis that I hadn't already given in a paper somewhere. I don't think Eric Ashton had read more than he did on the train coming down to London.

**Bernard Wood** (00:36:18):

We should say that Birmingham is probably, in those days, less than a two-hour rail journey from London. That doesn't allow a lot of time to read a thesis.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:36:30):

Yeah. The actual viva only lasted about 20 minutes. It didn't get past, "How was your vacation in Kenya?" because after I had finished my thesis, I decided that since I didn't make it there for any type of fieldwork, I would go and just meet people and see what it was like and all. I'd spent six weeks in Kenya. The viva never got past that. When you've

worked on something for as long as it takes to do a PhD, you would actually like to talk with people who should be interested in what you said.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:37:17):

I remember, all of a sudden, after 20 minutes or 30 at the most, they both got up and said, "Well, fine, thank you very much," and walked out of the room. I had no idea what was happening. I told the fellow who was one of the technicians in the anatomy department that I thought it was over and I was leaving. That was it.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:37:52):

The only thing that I remember from that day, other than this bad experience at the [inaudible 00:37:59], was, when I got back to UCL, one of my colleagues had put a new sign on my door that said, "Dr. Aiello." That just actually made me cry, really. But there was no feeling that either Michael or Eric were going to consider me a colleague or were halfway interested in the work that I'd done. But the story actually has a reasonably happy ending, at least from Michael's point of view, because when I saw Michael a few years before he died, he came to Washington D.C. for the footnote. I came down, and he actually said, "Well, Leslie." He said, "I don't think I treated you very well as a PhD student." He said, "But I've been very proud of you." I thought that was extremely nice.

**Bernard Wood** (00:39:01):

Well, I think we all do what we can do within the limits of our experience and so on. How did you keep bread on the table? Where was your first job, so to speak, other than at UC? Or did you just stay at UC but not on an annual contract?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:39:25):

Well, I stayed at UCL basically because I was... I'd have to actually go back, in fact. Read my CV. It was four or five years. I was there on a part-time contract. During that time, they actually decided to retain biological anthropology in the department. But at that point, Bob Martin had come as the reader. Bob had another candidate for the permanent job that he desperately wanted. I interviewed again for my position that I'd had along with the candidate that Bob Martin was supporting. The department very much came down on my side. I think the reason was... I mean, the person who was the other candidate is a fantastic guy, but he was interested in [inaudible 00:40:34]. I think that the anthropology department wanted to keep the focus of the department on humans rather than non-primate evolution. That was the point where I got the permanent job at UCL. Throughout my whole 29 or 30-year career at UC in London, it was all at UCL.

**Bernard Wood** (00:41:01):

What was your impression of UCL? Did it change in the 29 years?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:41:09):

Oh, unrecognizable because when I started there, UCL, as an institution... I think it only had 6,000 students. Now, it's this behemoth/this huge thing that's taken over a lot of the small colleges in the London area. It's just unrecognizable.

**Bernard Wood** (00:41:37):

Well, it took over the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, which is where I was. I mean, that was incorporated into UCL. In terms of research interest, if I had to choose one word that would describe your research interest, well, and you, it would be the word energy. How did that come about?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:42:15):

Which? The career trajectory?

**Bernard Wood** (00:42:19):

Well, no. You became interested in energy. You became interested in-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:42:26):

Oh, energy from the point of view of energetics.

**Bernard Wood** (00:42:30):

Yes.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:42:32):

Okay. That was entirely accidental.

**Bernard Wood** (00:42:35):

Really?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:42:36):

Yeah. It was really based on my mathematical and allometric background. What happened? Bob Martin and David Pilbeam were doing the Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution. They were short of somebody to write the little two pages on primate energetics. He turned to me. He said, "Leslie, why don't you do it?" It wasn't so off the mark because most of the energetics at that time were locomotor energetics. Since I was interested in locomotion and then the post-cranial skeleton, it was a fairly good fit. But while I was doing that little encyclopedia entry, I realized that there was this major question of where the energy came from to fuel the large brain that we have. It was a question that no one had been able to answer.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:43:40):

Being quite naive in what went on with energetics, I thought, "Okay. Your basal metabolic rate... Various organs in your body take more or less energy. Why don't I just do the allometry of this?" If we blew up a monkey to human body size, what would the size of the organs be? What would be the energetic cost of those organs? It came out almost too good to be true. In fact, it was scarily good because everything was as you would expect it, except, of course, the brain in humans was bigger. But it was the guts that were small. It was almost the perfect payoff. That's where brains and guts in human evolution came from.

**Bernard Wood** (00:44:39):

How did you start your intellectual relationship with your colleague who was at Liverpool at that time?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:44:48):

With Peter Wheeler?

**Bernard Wood** (00:44:51):

Yeah.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:44:51):

In a panic, basically, because I realized that this relationship was there. I could see it by manipulating the statistics. But I didn't have the energetic expertise to explain it, or I just didn't have that knowledge. I think, at that point, Peter was doing the Stand Tall and Stay Cool-

**Bernard Wood** (00:45:22):

Yes. Yes. It was a whole series of papers in JHE.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:45:27):

Yeah. It also hit the popular press and all. I forget, really, how I actually contacted him, whether I just cold-called him or whether there was an intermediary. But he got very interested in this brain-gut trade-off. That's how the collaboration happened.

**Bernard Wood** (00:45:52):

I wondered. Were you ever involved in the Society for the Study of Human Biology?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:45:58):

Yes. Yes.

**Bernard Wood** (00:45:59):

I wonder whether that was where you might have met.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:46:01):

I actually...

**Bernard Wood** (00:46:01):

I wonder whether that was where you might have met?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:46:03):

I actually don't think that I'd met him personally before then, but that part of history faded.

**Bernard Wood** (00:46:14):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:46:14):

But we had a very good time putting together the paper that was ultimately published in Current Anthropology.

**Bernard Wood** (00:46:23):

And why did your partnership with Peter work so well?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:46:31):

We were both fascinated by the topic.

**Bernard Wood** (00:46:34):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:46:37):

And it was something when somebody comes to you with an idea and you have some expertise that you can feed into it. We just worked together very, very well. And I really liked his mind, his very creative mind.

**Bernard Wood** (00:47:46):

Okay, so then you were at UC, you were doing well academically, your research was going well. Why did you get involved in the graduate school and things like that? What made you move into administration?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:48:07):

Well, we need to backtrack a bit.

**Bernard Wood** (00:48:10):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:48:12):

Because you've left out the anatomy book.

**Bernard Wood** (00:48:15):

Oh, well, I was going to come to the anatomy book, but let's deal with the anatomy book now. So we need to explain to people that the anatomy book was a joint effort between you and Christopher Dean.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:48:34):

Well, it actually started with me and it started with Lucy.

**Bernard Wood** (00:48:40):

Oh, this is the impact of Lucy that I should have talked about when I was in Tempe last week.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:48:48):

Well, it was also why they should have invited me to come and talk in Tempe last week, because what happened... And the anatomy book predates the Brains and Guts hypothesis is, again, I have always had this interest in teaching and communication and all. And when the descriptions of Lucy came out and there was that beautiful big monographic edition of American Journal of Physical Anthropology that described everything, even though I had a PhD in anatomy, didn't really know what they were talking about. I just didn't understand the anatomical jargon. And I thought, "Well, if I don't understand this, there's a lot of anthropologists out there that are going to be struggling the same way that I did."

**Bernard Wood** (00:49:47):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:49:47):

So what I did was one weekend I sat down and wrote a book proposal, but I was trying to-

**Bernard Wood** (00:49:55):

The book was called eventually an Introduction to Human-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:49:59):

Evolutionary Anatomy.

**Bernard Wood** (00:50:00):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:50:01):

And so I zipped off this book proposal. I remember putting it in the post box on Sunday afternoon. And on Monday I got a call from Academic Press. And my first response was, "Gee, I'm impressed with the postal service." And then they were terribly interested in it, because at that point, unbeknownst to me, they were interested in developing a series of handbooks.

**Bernard Wood** (00:50:38):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:50:38):

And I think the initial working title was The Handbook of Human Evolutionary Anatomy. And then after I had a talk with Andrew Richford, who was the editor at that point, I began to panic about what I'd gotten myself into, because this was a huge undertaking. And Christopher Dean was one of my colleagues at UCL by that time. And I was talking with him

about it and it just happened to hit both of our careers at the time when we thought it was a good idea. So he'd said he'd come in and do everything from the neck up, and I did everything from the neck down. And that's why there's a lot on the neck in the book, because we got it from both directions.

**Bernard Wood** (00:51:37):

A double... Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:51:38):

Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (00:51:39):

But I think we need to explain to people that there is the anatomy of modern humans, and then there is anatomy, which is peculiar to hominins.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:51:55):

Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (00:51:56):

If you just use the anatomy of modern humans, there's a lot of terminology which we use in paleoanthropology, which would not be used by a human anatomist. And there's a lot of morphology. I mean, something like *Paranthropus boisei* looks as if it's come from Mars. And most of the way that you would describe a modern human skull or cranium just wouldn't work for that.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:52:27):

Mm-hmm.

**Bernard Wood** (00:52:29):

So this was an absolutely amazingly brilliant idea. What stage in your career were you when you did this?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:52:40):

Well, many people thought I was much too young.

**Bernard Wood** (00:52:45):

This is a polite way of me introducing this, because whether they thought you were much too young or not, it was an amazing book that I..

**Leslie Aiello** (00:52:57):

Well, I mean, to put it into perspective, and again, I don't want a Michael Day bash, but I have a letter of reference that he had done for the publisher about the book saying I wasn't capable of doing it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:53:12):

Oh, okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:53:17):

And it wasn't sent to me with his name on it, but there was enough identifying information in there, I know who it came from. And admittedly, I probably wasn't qualified for doing it, but I had a very strong feeling that it was needed in the field. There was a hole in the field for it. There was nothing else like it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:53:45):

Sure. Yeah, but the book is more than a textbook. I mean, the book is cited quite often in research papers because there is information in the book, which is research level information. It's not just an anatomy book, it's about the science underlying that.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:54:14):

Well, Chris and I tried. And before we go any further, we should probably let everybody know that you were a huge help in this and you proofread the whole thing for us.

**Bernard Wood** (00:54:26):

Really? Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:54:27):

Yeah, you may have forgotten this, but both Chris and I were terribly thankful to you for helping us out with it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:54:36):

Wow, okay. Well, I remember seeing the book and it's one of these things, "Why the hell didn't I think of that myself?"

**Leslie Aiello** (00:54:47):

Yeah, I remember you saying that probably Chris and I would have less gray hair if the three of us had done it rather than just the two of us.

**Bernard Wood** (00:54:58):

No, no, I think it's absolutely brilliant. And I don't know what the situation is now, I mean, I certainly recommend it to students, but that became the Bible not for... Because most books about human evolution, they focused on systematics. And that book didn't really focus on systematics, it was a-

**Leslie Aiello** (00:55:26):

Well, I mean, Chris and I took a very definite decision about that before we started writing it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:55:34):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:55:35):

And one of the models for it was the Napier & Napier Handbook of Living Primates. And that's actually why we went to Academic Press.

**Bernard Wood** (00:55:46):

Oh, that's interesting. And of course, John Napier was in London and Pru worked at the National History...

**Leslie Aiello** (00:55:54):

And Pru was at the museum, yeah. And what I felt, the reason I sent my proposal to Academic Press was I thought any press that could keep a book in print for 20 years was somebody I wanted to work with.

**Bernard Wood** (00:56:08):

Very sensible choice.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:56:11):

Yeah, but the staying power of The Handbook of Living Primates was, it was descriptive. They didn't take an interpretation angle on it. And Chris and I decided at the outset that we didn't want to age the book by taking any type of a theoretical stance in it. So it was entirely descriptive. But then Chris, of course, was doing all his research in perikymata and the dentition at the time, and there's a lot of my allometry in it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:56:51):

We should explain that Chris was in the anatomy department of University College Hospital Medical School.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:56:58):

UCL, yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (00:56:59):

And he was across the road, but nonetheless, he was in the same institution.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:57:05):

And we had similar research interests. So we had a nice supportive group of people at the time. And we used to have breakfast every morning together in the nurse's dining room. And sometimes we talked about the book, sometimes we didn't. But it actually kept us both active and going with it. But both of us look back at it now and wonder how we ever wrote the thing.

**Bernard Wood** (00:57:31):

I mean, I still look at my copy thinking, "How the hell did they put this together?" The really important decision that you made was just to have you and Chris. And so in other words, you didn't have to please anybody else other than each other.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:57:51):

Yeah. And it was one of those very happy working relationships. We never argued or whatever. But the book took four years, and the fourth year was the illustrations. Because the publisher didn't want to put money into the illustrations until they were sure we were going to produce the text. But it was a very happy time for both of us. But neither of us wanted to do a revision. No, we kept saying that if we did do a revision, it was going to be in the South of France and Academic Press wasn't willing to put up the money. In fact, the last serious conversation we had with them about it, we said if they would buy out our teaching for six months, six months each, we would do a revision. And they weren't willing to put that amount of money into it.

**Bernard Wood** (00:58:49):

Okay, okay. Well, they're lost, but there we are.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:58:53):

Well, what we decided is it has its place in history.

**Bernard Wood** (00:58:57):

Sure.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:58:58):

And it's up to some of our younger colleagues to do something similar or not as the case may be.

**Bernard Wood** (00:59:06):

Okay. So just remind me when it was published.

**Leslie Aiello** (00:59:16):

The handbook was published in 1990, I think.

**Bernard Wood** (00:59:20):

And so you were still at University College in 2005?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:59:25):

Right.

**Bernard Wood** (00:59:26):

And so the 15 years between the publication of The Introduction to Human Evolutionary Anatomy in 2005, can we go back to my question about what did that 15 years look like and what was the decision to move into administration?

**Leslie Aiello** (00:59:50):

Okay. Well, there were a number of interacting things. And we'll start off with the dire accommodation that UCL Anthropology was in. And the Anthropology Department had been on the Head of Department rota. Because traditionally the Head of Department had been the Professor of Social Anthropology. And they got to a point where nobody wanted to become professor and Head of Department in perpetuity. So they put the headship on a three-year rota and this was a total disaster.

**Bernard Wood** (01:00:31):

Which was unusual in the UK. I mean, if you were the Head of Department, you were the Head of Department.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:00:37):

Yeah. I mean, it was your little fiefdom.

**Bernard Wood** (01:00:39):

Sure, of course.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:00:40):

Yeah, and so we were on this rota and it rotated through the majority of my male colleagues. And at the time we were coming up to, when I took it over, it was supposed to go to Robin Dunbar, which was one of my biological anthropology colleagues. And the guy turned around and resigned.

**Bernard Wood** (01:01:07):

Robin went to Oxford. Is that when Robin went to...

**Leslie Aiello** (01:01:10):

Well, he first went to Liverpool.

**Bernard Wood** (01:01:13):

And then to Oxford?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:01:16):

And then he went to Oxford. And so they wanted a biological anthropologist to do it and yours truly was next up. Now, at the time I took it over, which was I think was about 1996, 1995, somewhere around there, UCL Anthropology was the worst-housed department in the entire university, 72 departments by any metric you wanted to use. Square meter per student, per research pound, whatever it might be, we were always at the bottom. But we also didn't generate the big bucks for the university through huge research grants.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:02:02):

And I remember one of the last provosts said, "Leslie, take the new guy on your deluxe tour of the department and see what you can do." Well, the long and the short of it, I was able to

get a new building for anthropology. And during the whole time I'd been at UCL from 1975 all the way up to 2005, I never had a lab. There was just no space. I mean, space was not negotiable. And I just felt if I was going to have to become Head of the Department, I wanted to do something for the department. It took a lot of work, but I actually enjoyed learning how the system worked.

**Bernard Wood** (01:03:00):

That's my impression, that one of the many reasons for your success is that you do your research on the system. And presumably the business about the headship rotating, that didn't happen anymore?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:03:23):

Oh no, it still happens. But what happened is it was on a three-year rota and people would come in, it takes a year as you well know from your own experience to get up to scratch. And then all they could think about was getting out and there was no real altruism. And by the time I took it over, it was dire. And so I had the headship, I think for five years, maybe sliding into six. And that gave me the time to really put the new building in process.

**Bernard Wood** (01:04:10):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:04:10):

And as I said, I liked that. And then it was also the problem of staffing. And this is why I moved into the graduate school, because I was interested in getting job lines for more people interested in biological anthropology and human evolution. And by becoming head of the graduate school, I went on a part-time contract in anthropology, and that opened up another job line for a junior college.

**Bernard Wood** (01:04:54):

Okay. And my guess is that if you managed to wrangle a new building out of the administration, they must have developed some respect for your administrative capabilities.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:05:10):

I think it was a love-hate relationship. I think that they were, in a way, a bit worried about me.

**Bernard Wood** (01:05:24):

So it's better to have you pissing on the inside of the tent than from the outside in.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:05:31):

Well, and also at that point, nobody was taking the graduate school seriously at all.

**Bernard Wood** (01:05:37):

And how many women were in senior administrative roles, academic roles at UC?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:05:50):

At that point, I actually don't have the figures, but you knew the financial officer.

**Bernard Wood** (01:06:01):

Yeah.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:06:02):

Her name's escaped me.

**Bernard Wood** (01:06:03):

Yes, I know. Extremely smart and good.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:06:07):

Yeah. And she was the one when I took over as Head of Department said, "Leslie, my one advice to you is to understand the budget." And I actually did, and I was able to get some gains for the department because of it. But at that point, anthropology was notorious in the university, because we always had about a fifty-fifty sex ratio, gender ratio. And it was because of the nature of anthropology, that's always welcomed female researchers. But we stood out in the university of having such a robust female staff. And there weren't that many other females who were either heads of department or deans or whatever it might be.

**Bernard Wood** (01:07:02):

And we should probably move on to the post-UCL part of your career. But is there anything else? I mean, there are some questions I'd like to ask you at the end. But is there anything about your time at UCL that you think we haven't covered?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:07:22):

Just that it was an extremely positive experience for me.

**Bernard Wood** (01:07:25):

Right, yeah.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:07:26):

And I can't think of anything anywhere during those years that was more stimulating academically. I mean, you remember from the mid-seventies when we were all young and you were there, and Chris Stringer, Peter Andrews, John Napier was still there, Michael Day. And there was a real sense that we were all working together. And a lot of my female colleagues in this country ask me, "Well, what about harassment and all of this?" And I don't think that really entered our existence there. And whether it was because we were all young at the same time, or whether... I always felt we all realized we all had our strong points and weak points and we accepted them. And we worked together and we weren't in direct competition.

**Bernard Wood** (01:08:29):

Sure, yeah.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:08:30):

So it was a very positive experience from my point of view.

**Bernard Wood** (01:08:33):

I think there was a sense in which there was enough for everybody.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:08:37):

Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (01:08:37):

And it wasn't a zero-sum game that, "In order for me to succeed, she mustn't or he mustn't." I mean, there was no sense of that.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:08:47):

No, no. And we were spread out. I mean, Chris Stringer with Neanderthals and Christopher Dean with his teeth. And then when Fred Spore came along with his inner ears and we all slotted together very well and-

**Leslie Aiello** (01:09:03):

We all sort of slotted together very well, and we haven't mentioned the people at the Institute of Archaeology, Simon Hillson, and Andy Garrard and all of these people.

**Bernard Wood** (01:09:11):

Okay. So now let's move to New York. Was the offer to become the president of the Wenner-Gren, did that come after your decision to leave UC or were they linked?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:09:29):

No, it was the reason I left.

**Bernard Wood** (01:09:32):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:09:32):

Yeah. But at that time, I sort of felt that I'd probably gone as far as I could at UCL because I'd been head of department. I'd been head of the graduate school. I could have worked out my career very happily there. But there was the issue that this was before the European research grants. It was at the time that the Leverhulme was funding the Leverhulme Center in Cambridge. So that is a major source of money for us was disappearing for most of us.

**Bernard Wood** (01:10:09):

Sure.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:10:10):

The Wellcome Trust, as you well know, who had had funded human evolution for 10 years was stopping that program.

**Bernard Wood** (01:10:20):

Well, that was really the initiative of the professor at Cambridge. And as soon as he was no longer involved, that...

**Leslie Aiello** (01:10:29):

Yeah, and so I'm...

**Bernard Wood** (01:10:29):

Sorry, at Oxford. Not at Cambridge,

**Leslie Aiello** (01:10:34):

Yeah. Oh, that was Jeffrey Harrison?

**Bernard Wood** (01:10:37):

No, it was the guy who was the professor of medicine.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:10:40):

Oh, okay. Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (01:10:42):

Whose name I'm afraid I can't remember. He was the Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford, and he had been the Professor of Medicine at Liverpool, and he was really interested in human biology. And so it was his initiative that there was the Wellcome Trust, got interested in, I think it was called the Scientific Basis of Archaeology.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:11:13):

Yeah. It was something like that. And I had a number of doctoral students funded through them, and we all did. And when that dried up, I realized that I was going to have a horrible time funding my research if I stayed there, that there wasn't... And what my strategy would've been at that time, if I hadn't moved to the States, was to get a joint appointment with the Institute of Archaeology, because at that point, the Arts and Humanities Research Council would fund the type of research we do in human evolution as long as it wasn't done in an anthropology department.

**Bernard Wood** (01:11:56):

Right.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:11:57):

And so my last few students were all registered in the Institute of Archaeology so they could get sources of funding.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:12:07):

So I had a feeling maybe I needed to think something new. And what happened was there was just an email that came around saying there was this position at the Wenner-Gren Foundation. So I looked it up and figured I could check most of the boxes of what they were looking for. And my husband, Richard Bruce and I, we both decided we had a new adventure left in this. Lo and behold, they gave me the job. I wasn't headhunted for it. I actually applied for it.

**Bernard Wood** (01:12:52):

But we should, well, you are much better equipped to do this than me, but we should sort of point out that the Wenner-Gren Foundation, you can say something about it, but for one reason or another it has become extremely influential in convening conferences. And there are a whole series of conferences that were convened that resulted in very influential publications. That's about all I knew about the Wenner-Gren Foundation from this side of the Atlantic. But what did you know?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:13:34):

Well, my first introduction to the Wenner-Gren Foundation was way back when I was a student at UCLA. And they began their casting program, and they were the ones that made the first high quality casts of hominid fossils. And they used to come in little purple velvet bags.

**Bernard Wood** (01:13:56):

I've still got some of those.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:13:58):

And they were really a revolution for the field. And then it was actually through the Binfords that I realized that they organized these conferences at the castle they owned in Austria called Burg Wartenstein. And you were nobody if your advisors hadn't been invited to Burg Wartenstein. I mean, it was quite the thing for anthropology in general because the foundation funds across the broad spectrum of anthropology.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:14:31):

But in the earlier days, they had a tremendous hand in helping human evolution. There was a series of very high profile meetings and edited volumes that came out of it that were very influential through the late fifties, sixties and into the early seventies. But I think today the foundation is really most noted because it's a serious funder for anthropology, we put in about 6 million US dollars a year, and a good majority of that money goes to doctoral students. So the two main programs are relatively small research grants, 25,000 for a project, and it funds internationally. And it's surprising how many people will come up to

you and say, "Wenner grants started my career." The first ever grant that was given was the [inaudible 01:15:43].

**Bernard Wood** (01:15:44):

Really?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:15:45):

Yeah. He was a student.

**Bernard Wood** (01:15:48):

I didn't realize that. Which would explain his closeness with Lita Osmundsen and so on, because she was a very powerful figure in, she knew the human evolution community. She knew the people who were the real players in the community. And I hadn't realized that Clark was...

**Leslie Aiello** (01:16:21):

Oh, yeah. He was very much the golden boy. But we also should mention that Lita Osmundsen had been the wife of the original person who ran the foundation, Paul Fejos. And then when he died in the early sixties, she took over the foundation and ran it for over 20 years. And she was very powerful in anthropology.

**Bernard Wood** (01:16:52):

Yes, yes, yes. I mean, I never went to the castle, so I'm very much in the second tier. But I remember going to meetings at the headquarters of the Wenner-Gren, which was I think on, I don't know on the west side...

**Leslie Aiello** (01:17:07):

71st Street. Yeah, it said 71st Street, right by Central Park.

**Bernard Wood** (01:17:13):

Yeah. And she would make these diagrams of who was contributing.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:17:21):

Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (01:17:22):

She wasn't just listening to what was going on, she was actually drawing diagrams. She knew where you were on the, and she had some very well-developed ideas about which were the important parts of the table to be at if there was a meeting around the table.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:17:39):

Oh, yeah. And she'd move people around if she didn't like the dynamics that was going on. Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (01:17:44):

Sure, sure.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:17:45):

Yeah.

**Bernard Wood** (01:17:45):

Sure. You were told to move. So let's get back to your career as a whole. And let me ask you the equivalent of sort of desert island questions. If you could take only one publication, if there was a fire and you could only rescue one publication, which would it be?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:18:10):

Well, I have two hands, and one hand would have the Anatomy Book and the other would have the Brains and Guts paper, the Expensive Tissue Hypothesis.

**Bernard Wood** (01:18:19):

Okay, okay.

**Bernard Wood** (01:18:26):

Is there a paper that somebody else wrote that you wished you had written?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:18:34):

Not so much a single paper, but I've been very impressed with where the expensive tissue hypothesis has gone, and particularly the work of people like Herman Pontzer, who are doing serious work in human and primate energetics that's built on it so much. And then also, I was so impressed with the work of Karen Isler who had been at Zurich, who did very exciting stuff in the field again, of energetics. And I mean, she didn't like brains and guts at all, but we ended up becoming quite good friends. And it's just unfortunate that she's had to leave the field.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:19:25):

And so what I wish that I had been able to do, I wish I had the expertise at the time to carry it much further than I did. And I'm so pleased to see some of the exciting research that's coming out now, looking at energy balances and the importance of energy in human evolution. It's sort of moving beyond the bones and stones.

**Bernard Wood** (01:19:55):

Right, right. Because unless you think about these organisms in terms of living and breathing organisms, how do you get the energy you need? What do you do with the energy you've acquired? It seems to me that you are missing a lot, but that is not a usual attitude I think.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:20:23):

It just sort of shows what research from other disciplines can, its value in informing what we do and what we're trying to determine in terms of the course of human evolution. So you have the discoveries on the one hand, which are tremendously important, but it's the new research lines, and you just think of the evolution or the revolution of DNA and genetics and what that's telling us now about more recent phases of human evolution. And things like zooms and the isotopic work and all of this stuff that we would've never thought of 40 or 50 years ago.

**Bernard Wood** (01:21:13):

Sure. Is there anything, one of the questions is, and I think you've already answered it, that if you hadn't gone into biological anthropology, what would you have done? And I'm not sure I can see you as a CPA, but I'm sure you would've been a very successful CPA.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:21:35):

Well, what I'm doing now is botanic art.

**Bernard Wood** (01:21:39):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:21:40):

And in fact, next month I'm going to become a certified botanic artist.

**Bernard Wood** (01:21:46):

Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:21:49):

I've been doing the last few years courses through the New York Botanic Garden, and I graduate next month.

**Bernard Wood** (01:21:55):

Okay. And is art something you have always been, or is this...?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:22:04):

I always enjoyed it when I was much younger and then I got sidelined, but I've done a lot of the diagrams for publications I've done over the years. And what the botanic art is, it's basically scientific illustration. And so you need to really focus on the details. And it is almost a form of meditation, and it's a cliché, but it does make you see things differently.

**Bernard Wood** (01:22:35):

And to go back to the illustrations in the introduction to human evolutionary anatomy, are some of those yours or you just sort of did drafts for the medical artist, or?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:22:48):

No, there's nothing... I think the only thing that I did was the timeline in the first chapter, but all of the art was done by Joanna Cameron, who was the artist that academic press and employed. So what Chris and I would do is do a mock-up, she'd do a drawing and then we'd go back and forth over it, and there's 600 drawings in the anatomy book.

**Bernard Wood** (01:23:19):

It's a lot of work.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:23:20):

It was. We got to be very close friends with the artists, which...

**Bernard Wood** (01:23:27):

And the fairy godfather or godmother question. If there was one question in human evolution that you could ask and it would be answered, what would that be?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:23:42):

Well, that's a real hard one. And Nature actually asked me that in 2010. They were doing a perspectives thing of what is the next decade going to be? And they had approached me to do it, and I had no idea I was going to be the only paleoanthropologist. So I didn't say anything about genetics or anything like that. I said, "I want to know what's happening in East Asia." And of course, that's happening now.

**Bernard Wood** (01:24:15):

Yes.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:24:16):

And there's some very exciting work kept coming out of China and Southeast Asia. And it's filling this big hole in our knowledge of human dispersals. And right now, I think the, well, there's two holes, but one of course is India and what's going on there, because the hominids would've had to have gone back and forth across India.

**Bernard Wood** (01:24:44):

There is hardly any, well, there is a little sort of recently, but there is surprisingly little attention to India.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:24:52):

Yeah. And I'd definitely like to see what's going on there. But I went to a workshop last year on the Mid-Pleistocene, and it became very apparent to me that we don't know what's going on in Africa, and where did anatomically modern humans come from? Did they come from things like a broken hill with a big face, or are there other things going on? And I'm

really surprised that there's not more research going on in the Mid-Pleistocene of Africa, and I'd like to see that too happen.

**Bernard Wood** (01:25:30):

And lastly, is there a topic that you would like to touch on that we haven't brought up?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:25:38):

Yes. And that goes way back. Because what sort of shaped my own career is when I was a child, I had a very bad speech impediment. And it was a real uphill fight for me to go into a teaching profession. And it was something that I think that really molded my career choices. In fact, when I first went for my junior college teaching credential way back during the sixties when I was trying to support myself, I was actually turned down because I stuttered.

**Bernard Wood** (01:26:23):

Yeah. Well, that makes two of us.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:26:27):

Yeah. And it was just, I don't know whether I grew out of it. I mean, you still can tell when I'm nervous I'm still stuttering.

**Bernard Wood** (01:26:38):

I'm saying absolutely because I'm agreeing because I can cope mostly. But if I'm tired, I'm anxious, and I can't choose the words. And what was the big thing for me was, and now we're talking about me and not you, but I'm doing this for a reason. When I became the dean of the medical school in Liverpool, you had to read out the names of the graduates. You can't change their names just because it makes it easier for you. So my secretary sent me to a sort of night class for people who stammered. They were enormously helpful. I mean, my problem was minor compared to most of their problems. They were extremely helpful. So why did we both go into professions that mean we have to speak for our living?

**Leslie Aiello** (01:27:50):

Maybe it was a challenge.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:27:53):

And one thing that stands out to me, I mean, well, you probably had in the UK, you'd frequently get calls from the BBC or ITV to give TV or radio chats about fossils that were found and all. And I always used to turn these things down, and I just said, in fact, I still never listened to myself talk. But what changed things was Steve Jones, who is a geneticist at UCL. And when he got his chair, he invited me to his gala dinner after his inaugural lecture.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:28:39):

And I happened to sit next to a woman producer from the BBC. And she sort of turned to me and she said, "Well, can I contact you to come and talk about human evolution on the

BBC?" And I said, "No, absolutely not." And I explained to her my reticence of speaking publicly, and she said, "Well, don't worry." She said, "Come and we'll do a radio bit for you, and if you stammer, we can always cut it out and all of that." And so I decided, okay, well, why not? And apparently I did okay, because they kept asking me back.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:29:22):

But it's sort for me, it was overcoming something and helping to build confidence. But the first years I was teaching in California, I used to come home in tears. You know, I never thought, it wasn't possible to give a mediocre lecture. You either give a very good one or you give a lousy one. And I found it extremely stressful.

**Bernard Wood** (01:29:50):

Right. Well, as they say, you've come a long way [inaudible 01:29:52].

**Leslie Aiello** (01:29:52):

Well, we all have these, how long have we known each other? We've known each other since '75 haven't we? How long that is? That's 50 years.

**Bernard Wood** (01:30:06):

Okay. So there are these two white-haired people having a conversation. And we do go back half a century, but I just want to thank you. I think this will be very helpful to young people to understand how careers that sort of look inevitable, but how they are contingent on a whole lot of things.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:30:33):

Yeah. And they're basically chance decisions you make along the way. And if I hadn't decided to come to the UK, I probably would've had a happy life in the States, but it would've been entirely different.

**Bernard Wood** (01:30:50):

Well, many thanks for your time, and I much appreciate it.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:30:53):

Well, it is been fun.

**Bernard Wood** (01:30:54):

Okay. Okay.

**Leslie Aiello** (01:30:54):

Bye.

**Bernard Wood** (01:30:54):

Okay. Bye-Bye.