

[00:00:00] Bonni Stachowiak: Today on episode number 357 of the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast, Sandie Morgan and Warren Doody join me to talk about Elizabeth Leonard, An Interdisciplinary Legacy.

[00:00:15] Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning, maximizing human potential.

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[00:00:24] Bonni: Welcome to this episode of *Teaching in Higher Ed*. I'm Bonni Stachowiak and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches, so we can have more peace in our lives, and be even more present for our students.

Today, I am joined by two friends and colleagues, Sandie Morgan, who's the Director of Vanguard's Global Center for Women and Justice. She's also an interdisciplinary thinker and professor in her own right, as you'll hear about in this episode, and a dear friend. I'm also joined by Warren Doody, who's an Associate Dean, an English professor and chair, a playwright and author and so many more things, as you'll start to recognize as you hear their stories, and also the story of our former colleague, Dr. Elizabeth Leonard. You'll start to see there's a lot of interdisciplinary stuff happening in their work.

Today is an episode that I've been planning for years now. As will probably become quite obvious, I have shied away from it. It's a very vulnerable topic for all three of

us, a hard story for us to tell. One that we each want to share with you today, because of the way the person we're going to share about has impacted us in our lives and not just our lives, countless, countless number of lives. Sandie, Warren, and I are excited and I would say on my part, a little reluctant, but knowing how important that this episode might be for touching even more lives in the world. We know how important it is to share with you today about Dr. Elizabeth Dermody Leonard.

[00:02:18] Sandie Morgan: This email went out to the entire Vanguard University community, "Dear Vanguard community, it is with a heavy heart that I inform you that beloved Vanguard professor, Dr. Elizabeth Dermody Leonard passed away on Sunday, May 18th, in Ireland, her home since retiring from Vanguard."

[00:02:43] Warren Doody: Elizabeth taught at Vanguard University as a full-time faculty member in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology, serving as an assistant professor of sociology from 1997 to 2002. Then as associate professor of sociology from 2002 to 2007 and finally, as professor of sociology from 2007 to 2011. She delivered an expanded the sociology curriculum to include areas of specialization in gender and crime, sociology of women, corrections, family violence, and juvenile delinquency and played an integral role in helping grow the sociology major to 100 majors.

[00:03:25] Bonni: Elizabeth sustained a robust research agenda during her tenure at Vanguard University, producing the book, *Convicted Survivors: The Imprisonment of Battered Women Who Kill*: State University of New York Press, 2002, four book chapters, and nine articles in peer-reviewed journals. She was widely recognized as an expert on issues related to battered women in prison and domestic violence, and as such, was invited to present research, guest lecture, provide expert witness testimony, and give various public presentations on 70 different occasions and in diverse institutional settings and locales and the United States and Europe.

[00:04:13] Sandie: She's served Vanguard University faithfully by being a tireless leader, and advocate of interdisciplinary collaboration, which included serving as the co-director of Vanguard University's Center for Women's Studies from 2002 to

2005. She advised, counseled, and mentored countless numbers of students who, upon graduating from Vanguard University, followed her example by pursuing vocations that advance the public good.

[00:04:48] Warren: Elizabeth was highly respected, admired, and regarded by the students of Vanguard University, who voted her the faculty member of the Year for 1999/2000 and again, as faculty member of for 2006/2007. Over the years, students have consistently expressed their affection for her and their appreciation of her guidance and support.

[00:05:11] Bonni: Upon her retirement, Dr. Leonard was granted the status of Faculty Emerita. Dr. Leonard was a devoted colleague and friend and will be greatly missed."

That email was sent on Monday, May 19th, 2014, at 2:04 PM and Dr. Leonard has been missed ever since. Each one of us is going to share a little bit about our early memories of Elizabeth.

[00:05:41] Sandie: I still remember the day I met Dr. Leonard, I was referred to her by the president of the University at that time. I was just visiting Vanguard on my way home. I lived in Greece at the time. The President had a little bit of an understanding of what I was going through as the mother of a daughter in a domestic violence situation. He said, "You need to meet Dr. Elizabeth Leonard." I went over to her office. She wasn't there. I left a note and went back to prepare to fly out the next morning.

I hadn't been home more than a few minutes when Dr. Leonard called me and spent the next 45 minutes learning everything she could so that she could walk with me through what she had great expertise in with family violence and that was April 2003. She walked with me, she mentored me, she engaged me, and brought me into the academic community, inviting me to become part of some of the research that she was doing. There are so many memories. I guess, Warren, why don't you tell us some of your memories.

[00:07:02] Warren: I first met Elizabeth Leonard in 2001 early May. I actually remember the date it was May 8th, 2001, and it was at the end of our last faculty meeting of the year. Dr. Leonard wanted to know how I found or how I came up with ideas for writing scripts. I was a playwright at that time. It was in large part the reason that I was hired at Vanguard because I could write plays, and I could teach playwriting.

What I would find out later is that Dr. Leonard had written a dissertation that would become her book, *Convicted Survivors: The Imprisonment of Battered Women Who Kill*, and she was spending her summers in Ireland at that time and had become friends with a well-known Irish poet named Brendan Kennelly. Brendan had read her book where he read the dissertation and then later he read the book. He thought that it was a story that really needed to be told globally, nationally, but that because of its academic format, it might not reach a wide enough audience.

His advice to her was that when she got back to the stage, she should find a playwright who could take her academic book and transform it into a stage play because that would make the words and the play that the book was made up of a lot of monologues of the women that she had written a book about. They were women who had killed their abusive partners. When she got back to the stage, she started asking around. I had just started at Vanguard. I'd been there for a couple of years. Somebody had told her that I was a playwright.

What I found out later, which was curious and really shows the mind she had as well as the heart she had for the women that she got to know, got to interview, and ultimately wrote her book about, she spent a year watching me, covertly asking about me, interviewing people about me because she wanted to make sure that I wasn't somebody who was going to take her work and just exploit it. She wanted to make sure she could trust me with the material. Evidently, I had enough allies on the campus that at the end of that year, she approached me, and she asked me if I was interested in a project that she was willing to hand over to me and I said, "Yes."

We walked down to her office, and she told me about her research. I didn't really know it at the time. She told me about these women that she'd gotten to know and

that she did her dissertation on and the book was forthcoming and wanted to know if I wanted to take that material and turn it into a play. I said, "Yes." I told her right on the spot that I was interested and she said, "You should meet the women." She set up about a week later, a trip to CIW which is the prison, and we drove out there. One of the things that was funny is I remember she was a very aggressive driver and we must have got out to Chino in 35 minutes, at 5:30 in the afternoon on a Monday. We attended the support group meeting that she went to every other Monday, and the support group actually had a name, it was Convicted Women Against Abuse. There were, not only the 42 women but there were a number of other women.

Women started to become attracted to the support group and it was basically a place where women who had experienced any kind of domestic abuse to meet and to provide a therapeutic environment where they could talk about their stories, they could lean on each other, they could talk about the progress, or lack thereof, of their various appeals. I was the only man in there. It was me and maybe 50 women, and they welcomed me with open arms. Elizabeth introduced me to all of them, told me this is just a week later that I was going to be writing a play about all of them. I was already committed, but she made sure that I was committed.

She committed me to the women who would become characters in a sense in the play. I think the thing that was most affecting to me that night was, I had an idea of what a women's prison might be like. What I experienced had nothing to do with this vision that I had, before entering the gates of the prison. It's more like a college campus with the support group was held in a warehouse, this warehouse-like room. The women were very kind. They were very sensitive. They were very warm. They were melancholy, and most of them were middle-aged. Many of them reminded me of my own mother at the time. I remember driving home, and I did not say a word on the drive back. I emailed Elizabeth the next day, and I said, "I'm all in," and I started to do the research for the play.

[00:12:17] Bonni: Sandie, I know that you had a chance to visit the same place and spend some time there. Also, you and Warren are not the only ones. Would you talk

a little bit about your experience and also the experience of students who were invited to engage in this way?

[00:12:31] Sandie: Well, it didn't take very long before Elizabeth became my mentor. I learned so much from how she did her research, how she did her work, how she included so many people like Warren from theater department, from English. I was really impressed that she was working hard to get a family violence class that was cross-listed between sociology and psychology. She developed it, it was her baby and I didn't even understand at the beginning that she was mentoring me teaching me to take over that legacy when she retired and teach that class, which I did for several years.

She wanted it to be cross-listed even in the religion and ministries department. She wanted pastors. She believed that everything should be interdisciplinary, that people experience abuse, in the workplace, in the home, in society and when she was part of developing the women's studies minor, she made sure it reflected that interdisciplinary connectedness and that pulled together experts from across the campus like Warren.

[00:13:54] Bonni: I don't have an exact date or even an exact year of when I met Elizabeth. She was a part of my Vanguard experience that I can remember from my early beginnings there. I hesitate to tell the story I'm about to tell because I never want to be disparaging of the place where I work. I really like where I work. It's also frustrating, but I really do like where I work. It's also gone through changes. I've been there almost 20 years now. Culturally, we have experienced changes.

When I came in, it was not the greatest experience. I have a very early memory of us dividing up into groups and a large faculty meeting and there also were members of our board of directors there for some reason I can't recall. They had us break up into the different groups and we were all going to share and someone was going to dictate what happened. I happened to be in a group with all men. Of course, they all look to me just assuming I was going to be the note taker because after all, I was a woman. There were other frustrating things like that our

institution is from a specific denomination that I didn't know anything about before joining.

There were a lot of cultural differences that it took me a while to get used to. Our students, by the way, we just revamped our first-year course around something called community cultural wealth, and one of the things we're teaching them about our what's called DACA. DACA are all of the unspoken hidden curriculum, all the rules that are out there when they come to college, especially as first-generation students, that unless we can help to strip away some of those things, they aren't ever going to feel welcome.

I didn't always feel welcome at Vanguard. I felt that my own religious space didn't necessarily fit there. I felt insecure. I felt this big divide between those people who had tenure, those of us who did not, and it was something that I both didn't understand. It was difficult for me. It was a really difficult transition. What I can recall about Elizabeth as well, as another former colleague of ours, who unfortunately has also passed away, who was in our library, Mary Wilson, is just the way that they introduced me to books, and names. I just remember her helping me see our culture, the DACA, with a fresh set of eyes, and feel like I belonged there, perhaps even more, because there was some more cultural changes that needed to happen for it to be a more inclusive institution, not just for our students but also for faculty colleagues.

[00:16:37] Sandie: She was very intentional about introducing faculty and colleagues and students, to people from outside that would bring different perspectives, and enlarge our borders, so we could see further. I think we could probably, Warren, start a support group for those of us who rode with her out to the prison. We would spend all of the time just remembering how those visits changed our hearts and minds and attitudes towards people who were in prison for reasons that we had thought were very black and white, and you have your memories they were like the age of your mother.

I remember sitting on the floor talking to a woman, and she was interested in learning more about my goals to become a teacher. She said, "I was a librarian."

Then, a little bit later, when we're going home, Elizabeth told me, she had been sentenced to life without parole. I know those kinds of stories really impacted you.

[00:17:52] Warren: The title of my play, that was an excellent hand-off. The title of my play ended up being *Life Without Parole*. I was able to take that box of materials and the transcripts of the interviews that Elizabeth conducted with the 42 women who made up the support group. When Elizabeth handed off all of this material, she told me, "I won't tell you how to write the play." She goes, "I'm not going to be a critical voice. I will be a fact-checker." She was the best writing partner ever. She corrected facts. She was my biggest fan. Most of the early productions she showed up. She supported-- We did it with a group of Arizona actors. We did it with students at Vanguard.

We went into the prison three times and performed in front of the inmates. All three performances at CIW were memorable. The first one was the most memorable. That was in January 2004. We arrived early during the day. We did a whole tour of the prison. Then Elizabeth introduced us to we performed in front of Convicted Women Against Abuse. One of the inmates had a couple of boxes of Kleenex and she handed it to a friend of hers and they walk up and down the rows of the audience heading out to Kleenex as the reading went on because people were in tears.

Then at the very end of the reading, we took questions. We had a Q&A and one woman stood up right away and said, "This is the first time in my life that I haven't felt ashamed of what I did." It really hit in so many ways. Elizabeth really changed my life. She changed my life as a creative person, as a playwright, and really, you don't meet that many people like her in life who are so dimensional. She was no doormat. I know Sandie and Bonni will agree with me. She could fight if she had to, she could stand her ground if she had to. What was so wonderful about her is she always fought the right fight. Yet at the same time, if you try to go to her office at Vanguard, you needed to--

[00:20:14] Sandie: Make a reservation, right?

[00:20:17] Warren: Weeks in advance. The line of students went out the door, they went down that hallway and out the door. One last comment about her. When she retired, I asked Ed Clarke, who was going to take over as, maybe he was already chair at that point, I asked him about her replacement and he just looked at me and he goes, "Well, you guys, we've got a full professor. We've got a domestic violence expert. We've got a published author. We've got an ordained minister. We've got a surrogate mother and we've got the best person on campus would be hard replacing her at all." She was a one-size-fits-all person. She could do so many different things.

[00:21:02] Sandie: Well, I think that really speaks to her emphasis and commitment to interdisciplinary. She didn't own everything as this is sociology. She pulled in history and law and she partnered with the Anaheim police department, chief of police. She went with me to do community outreach in Greece and speak at universities. She also would be happy to go to the business department and marketing. She had students who followed her that had never intended to study sociology.

I remember when Olivia Klaus began imagining what the play would look like if it became a film. She was still a student at Vanguard when that dream was planted. When Elizabeth planted those seeds. This interdisciplinary piece was huge for her. I've got to tell you one part where she told me when she was teaching me to teach the family violence class and why I couldn't just read sociology books.

I had to read theology and I had to read psychology and all these things she said, you have to read history. She told me, do you know why we say "rule of thumb"? I looked at her and I thought, okay, usually I'm hanging on every word, but not right now. Then she began to cite the law in the UK that was passed to limit the size of the stick that a husband could use to beat his wife and that became rule of thumb. She knew so much from such a broad spectrum of disciplines and she wanted her students to have that kind of competency as well.

[00:23:06] Warren: I'll just piggyback real quick. From an interdisciplinary standpoint, we were able to, especially when the students to Vanguard got involved in and we

went on the road and produced the play, we had English, we had theater, we had sociology. Even beyond that, Elizabeth, she wrote several articles for the American Sociological Association. I didn't realize at the time that the play that I wrote had a genre that I'd never heard of public sociology. She was still teaching me things all the way up to the end.

[00:23:41] Bonni: One memory that I know Sandie and I share about Elizabeth although I suspect Warren you too, is just the way that she would allow any of us to just show up. There was no need to pretend. There was no need to say the fancy words or show up in ways that weren't authentic. We could show up, we could vent. We could be angry. She could hold other people's anger. She could hold other people's fears. She could hold other people's insecurities.

I mean, she allowed you to show up just how you were. I can recall there came a time in any conversation where she would turn it, because just venting, just being angry, just being sad, it loses its possibility. She would remind us to persist. She would remind us to keep going to not give up. That, yes, we could spend those moments in sorrow. We could spend the moments in our anger, that those are important feelings, but then she would always have a part in the conversation where she would say, "Nevertheless."

That was our reminder that the conversation was about to shift, which for me often came in some uncomfortable ways because it meant things were about to get messy because it was going to be, "Okay, so now what?" Didn't try to tell you not to worry, didn't try to tell you not to be sad, but there were those moments, nevertheless. Her voice still echoes in my head. When I feel the rage, when we're going through a global pandemic, we're seeing systemic inequities just persist and be magnified. She would listen to all of that and she'd be joining us. Like you said, Warren, she'd be joining us. Then she would say, "Nevertheless."

Before the three of us get to the recommendations segment and share a few things that we want to recommend to you, I would like to take a moment to thank today's sponsor. That is SaneBox. What SaneBox does is it allows us to deal with the fact that we get so much email, but most of it doesn't need to be read. Especially it doesn't

need to interrupt our days. What happens is you set SaneBox up, you can use Google, Office 365, iCloud, or any email address. It looks at the headers of your emails. It doesn't look at the contents, but it sorts those emails into things that you are likely to want to leave in your inbox or things that should go and get tucked away in a folder such as saneLater.

I should look at that later, not have it clogging up the most pressing items that should be in my inbox, putting it in a folder just for newsletters. SaneBox does nice sorting. It also addresses email in other ways. I can send an email out to someone that I'm expecting a reply from and tell SaneBox if they haven't replied to me in three days, send me a reminder so I can check in with them again. With all of the things that so many of us are dealing with that sense of urgency, I do really get so much benefit out of using SaneBox.

If you head over to sanebox.com/tihe as in Teaching in Higher Ed, you can get a free trial, check it out, see if it works for you, as well as it's been working for me for years now. You'll also get a \$25 credit toward a SaneBox subscription. Again, head on over to sanebox.com/tihe.

This is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. I wanted to recommend formally the documentary that Sandie mentioned a little while ago, and that's called *Sin by Silence*. Elizabeth had Warren write a play, and Elizabeth inspired a student who became an alumni who really transformed a lot of things around these issues as well. The documentary is called *Sin by Silence*. I'm reading the description from the website, which I'll have in the show notes.

"From behind prison walls, *Sin by Silence* reveals the lives of extraordinary women who advocate for a future free from domestic violence." I can recall both watching Warren's play and also watching *Sin by Silence*. I think *Sin by Silence* came first because someone opened up their home to do a pre-screening and I remembered not wanting to go out just thinking, Oh, what a topic, you know?

Of course, knowing that I needed to go and my husband and I went and, and one story that hasn't come out yet. It's come out a little bit, but just most people, well,

you killed someone. Surely you should deserve to be in prison. That's an easy thought to have until understanding these issues. I so vividly remember just the imagery from the movie about there's a little bit more nuance between good and bad, between right and wrong, between who deserves to spend their life in prison. It's a very important piece of work. Warren's play is very important and Elizabeth's work continues to persist today.

Sandie, what do you have to recommend today?

[00:29:07] Sandie: Well, I have two things. First of all, adverse childhood experiences. The research for this was just beginning to be published in the early days when I was working with Elizabeth. Now it is widespread. She would love to know that here in California, we have a website acesaware.com because the roots of so many family violence situations are in a history of child abuse and health issues. ACEs Aware is my tip for you on behalf of Elizabeth.

Also, I was thinking that a lot of what Elizabeth planted in me evolved into a very collaborative approach and now the Center for Women's Studies has grown into the Global Center for Women and Justice. Many of the initiatives that we've started are just continuing the story and the teaching and the study and the research that Elizabeth started. You can see some of the fruit of what she planted at gcwj.org.

[00:30:29] Bonni: Warren, what do you have to recommend for us today?

[00:30:32] Warren: My recommendation is not connected to what we talked about today. Well tangentially connected, I teach a course in the short story. I also write fiction as well as writing plays, and we use two texts in that class. The first one, probably most listeners have heard of, it's called *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott and it's the one that students favor. It's really an excellent text on Creative Writing and how to get started and not just that, she covers almost everything, writing groups, jealousy agents, broccoli, there's a chapter in there on broccoli, I will give it away got to read that one. It's quite riveting.

The other texts that I use is by John Gardner and it's called *The Art of Fiction*. John Gardner, he died at the age of 50 in a motorcycle accident, but before he died,

he wrote a series of books on how to be a writer. Like I said, there was *The Art of Fiction*, there was one called *On Moral Fiction*, he felt that all fiction should be moral, ultimately, and on becoming a novelist, but he is pretty much the foremost expert on how to write creatively.

He was so erudite and he was so learned. The students don't always like that one as much, they prefer Anne Lamott, who, again, is great. My recommendation is *The Art of Fiction*. it's really a treasure.

[00:32:09] Sandie: I want to publicly thank Warren for bringing everything back together again by inviting the Global Center for Women and Justice, something that Elizabeth shaped and help start to partner when you produce *Life Without Parole* a couple of years ago. I have this amazing poster in my office and I can write on my CV because Elizabeth taught me to collaborate with my theater friends. I'm just having good memories about Elizabeth that are related to the relationships that she brought together.

[00:32:53] Warren: I am going to give a shout-out to Sandie on that same note, we ended up producing the play at the Edgemar in Santa Monica in 2016. We were trying to raise the money to pay the actors, to rent the space, and everything else. We tried everything and we kept running into roadblocks and Sandie, and Bonni is the same way, they are people who can get things done. Sandie said, "I'll raise the money." She did it. She pulled it off and we made her producer on the play but I don't know if we would have staged it without her.

[00:33:32] Sandie: Oh my goodness. Well, Elizabeth made us better together. I'd never really gotten to know you with that Elizabeth so I'm grateful. Nevertheless.

[00:33:43] Bonni: Nevertheless

[00:33:43] Warren: Nevertheless. I'm going to add one more anecdote about Bonni I don't even know if she remembers it. It's a little embarrassing. Believe it or not, I get a little embarrassed talking about myself, although you wouldn't see any evidence of that today. I was sitting on the floor in the heath building, and we're waiting for class to ... and for some reason, Bonni was sitting right next to me. I introduced

myself to her and she looked at me, she goes, "Oh, you're Elizabeth's friend." I said yes and she goes, "You're famous."

[laughter]

I'm not, but I so appreciated it at that time.

[00:34:23] Bonni: I have no memory of this but Elizabeth had just the right as Sandie, by the way, just the right mix of helping equip people, but we never sat around feeling 100% confident. I don't really know that anybody does, but it looks a lot of times when you look at other people in life they know exactly what they're doing. I'm just convinced that that's just not true the vast majority of the time and when you meet people like Elizabeth, they can help you see the ways that you can do things in life that you never would have thought were possible.

I know that she mentored you so much, Sandie, before I knew it. I meet Sandie later on and then I'm going to Washington, DC to speak at a research institute. I am like, "what am I doing here?" I think a lot of us have had that experience that's been transformative from Elizabeth's legacy and getting to do things. Interdisciplinary work is really messy and when you get to work with someone else in a field that you don't know anything about, it can really have you feel like I don't know if I can do this. She really did that for us. For so many of us.

[00:35:25] Warren: She knew how to connect people, we're talking about interdisciplinary research and the ways that ... with other disciplines, but she knew how to connect people too.

[00:35:38] Bonni: Thank you so much for joining me for today's conversation. I know I invited you many years ago and finally felt like I could do this and I'm just so glad we could share her story today.

[00:35:48] Warren: Well, thank you for inviting me. Fantastic work. I'm so happy to be a part of this today.

[00:35:54] Sandie: It is wonderful.

[00:35:55] Warren: It is a hard phase.

[00:35:57] Sandie: I can't imagine a better thing to do than sit around and remember such an amazing influence in all of our lives.

[00:36:10] Bonni: Thanks once again to Sandie Morgan, and Warren Doody for joining me for this conversation to celebrate Dr. Elizabeth Leonard. It was Sunday, May 18th in Ireland 2014 that she passed away. We miss you, Elizabeth. We thank you for all of the work that you did over so many years and we thank you for the ways in which we can continue living out your legacy, continuing the kinds of work that you know make a difference in this world for so many. We miss you, Elizabeth. Thank you, Sandie and Warren, for helping me celebrate her, and thanks to all of you for listening. I'll see you next time on *Teaching in Higher Ed*.

[00:37:10] [END OF AUDIO]

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