**Albert Nerken School of Engineering**

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Town Hall**

**December 17, 2020 5pm-6pm EDT**

Questions for Lynn Conway**\***

1. How close did you come to identifying a specific moment when you were erased, or was it more diffuse process? **LC ANSWERED LIVE**
2. In the Isaacson biography of Leonardo da Vinci, the author makes the argument early in the book that many of the innovations and radical ideas that da Vinci had were due to his “perfect brew” of being different – homosexual, illegitimate, and left-handed! I wonder if you would agree with this statement, and what your thoughts are on how we can encourage innovation… rather than thinking of “people like us” and “people not like us” we just get ideas from people, period? **LC ANSWERED LIVE**
3. So many of us are othered and for our students, the classroom and labs can be place of profound acceptance – professionally and personally or it can be a place where they start to feel erased and disconnected. Do you have any suggestions on how we can help make their classrooms spaces for social change and belonging for students? **LC ANSWERED LIVE**
4. The landscape for trans / non-binary people (and all marginalized people) has changed a lot since you came out; as you look at the state of the field today, what are your hopes for inclusion and how do you see us evolving?
5. Did you have any people pushback against your story? (trying to diminish it, post 2020).
6. What things or people contributed to you getting your story out in a positive way? (I’m interested in how people get quieted or encouraged).
7. If, at the time you were developing the VLSI technology, you knew what you know now, what (if anything) would you have done differently?

Other comments:

Student Chris Mignano: Not a question, but thank you so much this has been incredible and inspiring!

Chief Talent Officer Natalie Brooks: This is so inspiring for our students and the rest of our Cooper Community. Never allow yourself to be pushed aside. Always believe in who you are and find champions who will provide encouragement and opportunities and recognize your contributions. Leave those who want to marginalize you behind.

Student Edward Zlotskiy: Thank you so much for the presentation! I appreciate your time spent talking to the Cooper community and teaching us your perspective and story.

President Laura Sparks: You have such grace and generosity in your perspective. Thank you for sharing that with us and for sharing your story and accomplishments and perspectives on how to help people rethink long-held perspectives and approaches.

**Lynn’s Answers to Questions 4-7:**

Q4: The landscape for trans / non-binary people (and all marginalized people) has changed a lot since you came out; as you look at the state of the field today, what are your hopes for inclusion and how do you see us evolving?

**A4: More and more young people are catching onto the reality that we’re all leaving tracks in cyberspace of “who we are and what we can do”. Those tracks will help cool teams spot us and recruit us into their adventures. The doers, makers and social leaders among us will have many opportunities to join such teams and surf the waves of “what it’s possible to do”.**

**Such opportunities will increasingly bypass prior marginalization, opening doors for all. So, to be “included” don’t wait for “THEM to Let You In.” Instead build yourself into an adventurous learner and doer of exciting new things. Exciting teams out there will spot your tracks, and “THEY’LL Come Looking for You!”**

[**Eric Hoffer**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Hoffer) **really captured this spirit when he said: "*In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists*"**

Q5: Did you have any people pushback against your story? (trying to diminish it, post 2020).

**A5: I really worried that people would think of the story as self-serving or notoriety-seeking (which is how the media often implicitly/accidentally frames “trans stories”). If so, it would become just another one of “those” stories. That’s why I’ve worked hard to unfold it in a “**[**Sergeant Joe Friday**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Friday)**” matter-of-fact way, without judgementalism, embellishment or editorializing.**

**What’s amazing is that there’s been no pushback whatsoever. Instead, I’ve been deluged with reports from other folks who have been similarly “disappeared”!**

Q6. What things or people contributed to you getting your story out in a positive way? (I’m interested in how people get quieted or encouraged).

**A6: Perhaps the most important break happened in 2011, and by accident.** [**Emeritus Prof. Dave Hodges**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_A._Hodges) **(of U. C. Berkeley) reached out to Carver Mead and asked if he would write a memoir about the VLSI revolution for publication in a special issue of the *IEEE Solid State Circuits Magazine*. Mead declined.**

**Dave then asked me if I’d do it, and I seized the moment. It all came together ever-so-cooly with Dave’s eager support. My colleague,** [**Prof. Ken Shepard of Columbia University**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenneth_L_Shepard)**,** [**wrote a particularly powerful thought piece**](https://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/VLSI/Commentaries/Covering_by_Ken_Shepard.pdf) **that was published alongside my memoir – placing it in a very illuminating perspective.**

**So, it was Dave Hodges and Ken Shepard who actively helped publicly-reveal my “disappearance”, thereby triggering my “reappearance”.**

Q7. If, at the time you were developing the VLSI technology, you knew what you know now, what (if anything) would you have done differently?

**A7: There’s a great challenge facing explorers and doers of new things. Even with best of intentions, humans have limited ability to envision the full future impact of their actions. Plus, we can’t go back and change what we did . . .**

**In this story, I could envision the possibility of a huge breakout. What I couldn’t envision was the resulting acceleration of techno-social change. In 2000, I found myself applying tech from the ‘VLSI revolution’ to help amp-up the worldwide ‘transgender revolution’. Like, how could this be possible? Only 20 years later?**

**I began wondering whether such an acceleration of social change was “good.” After all, folks now must to adjust to many waves of social changes during their lifetimes, some involving very scary and challenging “transitions.”**

**But then I saw the bright side of it all: “*We now get to live far-further into the unfolding techno-social future that we ever dared dream*!” – LC**