Helen Ramirez.

For 20 years Helen has taught at Laurier in Women and Gender Studies. She has fought for the right for her own program to exist, she has instructed students throughout this time in the skills needed to see and respond to racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, ageism, ableism. She has served on the executive of WLUFA and brought the voice of CF to every conversation, every decision on WLUFA, and on the coordinating committee for her program. She has brought the same voice and the same attentiveness to injustice to students, and to her community.

Helen speaks up about injustice wherever she can see it and in all the forms it takes. She asks the uncomfortable questions to uncover the shape, contours and reasons for what is clearly unjust. She looks at systems of power and all of our actions that too often comply with those practices.

She understands the need for all kinds of activism – the public obvious kind, the more subtle shifting of attitudes and beliefs, and the individual accountability factor attached with the way in which we learn how to resist in our own lives and how to make decisions about what we can change and what we can’t.

She finds the hardest in seeing well meaning people inside our important institutions becoming party to their bureaucratic systems that too often do the most harm to those with no economic or institutional security.

 She has stood as an ally to others who are fighting for change.

She serves as a delegate on Waterloo Regional labour council connecting our work as a union to the work that is being done by unions across the region.

She supports students as they raise their voices inside the university and in their communities.

She spent years fighting for the university to attend to rape culture on campus. It was her students in a course on violence against women that produced a letter that would go to the president..other VPs and deans and finally to The Toronto Star who would then interview a group of students who had all experienced violence on campus – a part of the investigative process that would reveal that few universities across the country had a policy or procedures to deal with gendered violence. The university would begin this process even before the province legislated it.

It was also in her living room where Kimberley Ellis Hale and Helen were interviewed for a piece that would be used on Sunday Edition to detail the exploitation of contract faculty – a piece that is still aired regularly with Kimberley’s acute analysis being used to remind us about how important it is we pay attention to how our education system is threatened.

What these examples show is how important it is to find ways to work together and understand the skills and knowledge we each bring – Helen’s work inside the classroom and outside is about drawing people together, bringing those conversations together at unexpected times and in unexpected ways.

Her work on trauma and the documentary she’s working on with the filmmaker Duncan Finnigan is all about how we need to step outside our roles and see each other – build relationships in a way that acknowledges that only way in which we can actually build solidarity is through these relationships.