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2018

Barbara Chenot '68-Jennifer Schelter '88

Barbara Chenot

Jennifer Schelter

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Recommended Citation

Chenot, Barbara and Schelter, Jennifer, "Barbara Chenot '68-Jennifer Schelter '88" (2018). *Alumni Oral History Project*. 2.

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Barbara Chenot: This is Barbara Chenot today is June 2nd, 2018, and then you can tell who you are and your class.

Jennifer Schelter: My name is Jennifer Schelter I am the class of 1988.

BC: Okay. We're 20 years apart. So let's start with the first one on here. Why did you decide to come to Connecticut College?

JS: I decided to come to Connecticut College first because my mother had been a-, she came to Connecticut College when she was a freshman. She then transferred to University of Pennsylvania. But I remember visiting the campus and I remember thinking, this is a really extraordinary campus. I love the art center. It felt really expansive and beautiful. I didn't have an idea of what I wanted to be when I grew up, but I knew that this seemed like a lovely place. So that's about as deep as it gets. It was the energy of the campus to me felt refreshing and small and I love looking out over the sea, so the- the element of the ocean was here and that was very definitely part of it as well.

BC: Did you live near the ocean at the time? Was this a special ...

JS: No, the only other ocean I ever spent time with is in Cape Cod. My grandmother, Kathleen Converse, has a house, had a house. It's not my mother's, but spending time near the ocean to me was always ... part of an education seems to be that you must get outside in nature. And so I think spending time ... I think that was part of my decision was that it just felt like there's the art center, there's the field, and then there's the ocean.

BC: And I had a similar reaction that I- I needed to be at a school and I did not live near the ocean. And my son had the same reaction about coming here for that reason, that was the final piece. So I wonder how, in all of us grads, I wonder how many people that that was an important piece of being near the ocean. I wonder if anybody had looked into that. That's interesting.

JS: It is interesting because I have to tell you, as a graduate now, coming back after, I mean, this is the first time I've been back for a reunion, the experience of the ocean, the fog, the rain, the being up on a hill and experiencing that for at least for three years, because I was away my junior year. I went to Italy. But it is a fundamental connection. Every time I drive by on 95, I look out and I look towards Connecticut College, but I look to it because of the element of the

ocean. So I do think, you know, today when- when the president read through all the accolades and the money and the accomplishments, and that's all really wonderful and I'm sure there are multiple, you know, in- in a poetic or metaphysical sense, I think it has a lot to do with somebody's life, whether or not they end up, you know, making \$4 million or giving da da da. I think a big legacy of this campus is its natural beauty.

BC: In the first line of the alma mater Alma mater by the sea ...

JS: By the Sea.

BC: Wow. So, while you were here, what, if anything, surprised you about the college during your time here?

JS: Well, during the eighties it was a big- it was more preppy. It was more sort of- it was like the preppy handbook back then. You know what I mean? It was very- it was less diversified, let's just say. There was diversity on campus, but it was not- it was more like a- it was more like a boarding school. But I have to say, I think what I-, what really hit me was the fact that the teachers were so passionate and the professors were so into their topics that- that I remember like, Harville Harville [Barkley] Hendricks, he died this past year, but he was an amazing artist and he was so passionate and he would bring into the studios- he would bring in like all these books and the art history department was exceptional. And ...

BC: Were you an art history major?

JS: Yeah, I was art history major with an art minor. And the- the art- the art training that I received here was very passionate and I- I- I think I did not expect the level that I- that would follow me from when I was here all the way to currently where I've now begun to paint again. But I would say it's because I thought of the freedom and the autonomy that I could experience here at Connecticut College that was very unique in my life trajectory. I think Cummings is a gem.

BC: It wasn't here when I was here. It's beautiful.

JS: Where did you- were there arts here when you were.

BC: Yes, I- I did- wasn't involved with- I was a music major. But not arts, but I think it's always been strong.

JS: I think it's been very strong and I- and I- I think that the arts at Connecticut College, I didn't hear it as influ- as, you know, emphasized in this morning's speech. But- but- but you know, oftentimes when somebody is developing as an artist, they might not have a famous- they might not be famous. There might not be like some huge thing that comes along, but it's someone's ability to experience a process could change their life. And I would say quiet time in Cummings changed my life. That was a very influential experience. I'm not a famous artist. I probably never will be, but the point is not to be famous. The point is to develop a person's process and not all of us are so product driven. Process is a huge part of someone's life. So, I would say the mental health aspect of developing one's process, that became evident for me at Conn.

BC: Do you think it was the rarefied air here special because of the setting or something as well?

JS: Yes, because I think- you know what, I wasn't really into parties as much, and I, at the time, I wasn't as self-aware to say, "Well, I'm- I'm more of an introvert," and to be okay with that. I really didn't know that about myself, but what I loved about it is that I could be alone here and I wasn't alone, alone. But I think that experience of going off and being in the stacks here, or it was quiet and I like quiet. So, it was a good place for that.

BC: So, did you do just- were you involved with any- with any extracurricular sorts of things. Any sports or other things?

JS: Yes, I- I was varsity squash and varsity lacrosse and those were the two main things that I did. And then I did art, so I became- I- I was the captain of the squash team. Yeah. And then played varsity lacrosse all three years. Yeah.

BC: Where did you live on campus?

JS: I lived in the Plex in, I can't remember, Park. Park and then whatever. The furthest one was Larrabee and then I also lived in

BC: In the Plex?

JS: Yes.

BC: Hamilton.

JS: It's now Hamilton, but it used to be, well, the furthest used to be the Plex, right?

BC: Yeah. The Plex. Larrabee was connected- is connected to KB.

JS: Okay. Not Larrabee.

BC: Hamilton. Lambdin.

JS: Lambdin was the furthest one.

BC: Hamilton.

BC: Wright.

JS: It was on the left hand side- side. It's Park. I was in Park freshman year and it ...

BC: Wright, that's down ...

JS: Wright, thank you. It was Wright that one out. That's amazing yeah. Park. Wright. And then Burdock or Burdick?

BC: Burdick's with Plant.

JS: Right here. Yeah. This is- yes. Over here. Yes. That's where I was senior year. That was great.

BC: Did you like being here?

JS: I loved it.

BC: Why?

JS: Yeah, I just, I thought it was kind of romantic to be in the middle of the campus and you didn't have to hike up from that side.

JS: But I've got to tell you, it didn't matter. But looking back, I'm like, it doesn't matter. It just, it was great. Being in the Plex was.

BC: Were, were all your meals taken in the plex?

JS: Yeah. Yeah. That was a great time to be in the- in the dorm- in the- in the- in the Plex. It was just great. Just go in and see people. Yeah. It's just such a fun

environment, a salad bar, it was before food was like food. Food wasn't as specialized at that time. It wasn't like, it was just like, okay, mashed potatoes, salad bar. It wasn't like this was the puttanesca you know? It was like it wasn't as specialized.

BC: Like our lunch, our picnic today,

JS: Like our picnic today was beautiful.

BC: Wonderful, was wonderful. So, you studied art. Do you have any special memories of classes or special professors that stand out?

JS: Like I said, Hendricks. Hendricks, yeah. Hendricks was exceptional and I, I adored him. There was a- there was a woman named Fish, Fishburn, Fish. She- Bev Fish, Bev Fishman. She was an adjunct and she taught us to paint on these giant canvases. She was really interested in four- by six-foot canvases. Loved her, loved her passion. I'd say those two were the ones that stick in my stick with me the most

BC: You still think about them?

JS: Oh yeah, I think about them all the time. Yeah, because they were so alive with their topic and I'm a sensate. I'm not- I'm intellectual, but I- I need silly- I need- I need intensity. That's not necessarily like cut and dry, stay like this. I'm just not like that. So, they spoke to me because it didn't feel like I had to be pretentious. What I would qualify as tighter.

BC: Yeah. Do you want to talk about your life after Conn?

JS: Sure.

BC: When- when you went on, what did you do then? After you ...

JS: I worked at a graphic design firm because it was a family connection and that was really- I'm very grateful that I worked ...

BC: Where was that?

JS: That was in Boston.

BC: Okay.

JS: And I became a photographer's assistant. I also- I'm sort of a free floating type of artistic soul, so I modeled. I worked in front of the camera. I worked behind the camera. I catered. I went to graduate school. I got my master's in theater. I worked on off Broadway for 10 years. I did regional theater. I was in Edward, Albee's three Tall Women. Several times.

BC: Where did you do regional theater?

JS: Um, Denver. I was at the Denver Center Theater Company the year that they won the Emmy Award for Best Regional Theater. I was in several world premieres there and did some play readings and I also worked at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego for many years. So, I had a good run as a professional actress. That was pretty amazing.

BC: Did you do any theater work while you were here?

JS: No, I was too intimidated to try out. I was too scared. So, I remember going to an audition and like standing there thinking, Oh, they're going to reject me. And I-, so silly, sabotage. But it took me a while to actually follow through on those things.

BC: Different stations.

JS: Different stations.

BC: Yeah. So, your experience here, how did that shape your life? You, you said you were an introvert here and you were doing art stuff. What about all of that here led you to end up being on stage? How did, I mean, you're saying you were afraid to audition and then, like, listen to what you just described. Huge.

JS: Yeah.

BC: Yeah.

JS: I think- I think I really didn't know who I was at the- at the time, but I have to say that's okay. Like some people, I guess we technically call some people late bloomers. Yeah. But the point is, it's not to judge whether somebody blooms right out of college or they bloom at college, or they don't ever bloom. It doesn't matter. It- the point is that I feel like Connecticut College's greatness was that it was a nest and it was safe and it was quiet and I was given enough space to test out things that I needed to test out and- and then I- I just think Connecticut College gave me some- gave me some friendships specifically,

Bruce Sutphen who just passed away, but some friendships that followed me from age 19 all the way to 52, and that's one of the greatest gifts is just to meet people that have an intellectual curiosity and kindness, and the kindness and the curiosity is-, that combination I think is invaluable.

BC: Do you keep in touch still with a number of classmates or some classmates?

JS: I do, yeah. And they're really kind, lovely people and they're smart people and I- that's enough for me. That's a good- that's a very- and I think also Connecticut College had a certain standard of excellence that I wouldn't want to go below. Like having standards is important to me and I li- I love that. Maybe it took me a while again to understand that, but at least I understand it now and it doesn't necessarily mean I have to be totally impressed as a business model or as numbers or figures or millions or I'm just saying standard in terms of a person being kind or being in touch or being in communication, that sort of standard of interpersonal skills I really value.

BC: So is there anything from your- your time here that you wish that today's students could experience that? Maybe they're not ...

JS: That's such a great question. One thing is- is that there was no- there were no television screens around campus. And there was no wifi and there was no screens.

BC: Did you have a TV room in the dorm where somebody was always in watching?

JS: Well, I think people watched, like Miami Vice was the big ... Yeah, trying, yeah. There's, you know, there was a tv but we, listen, it wasn't-yeah, it really wasn't the- the mode. And I- I sort of feel like it would be really interesting if Connecticut College had a week of no wifi or a week of no screens or like for instance, when I went in the cafe down there, I was sort of disappointed that there's television screens. I was thinking to myself, God, I don't need any more stimulation. Yeah, so I wish that they, I wish that the students could experience that sense of interconnectedness. I mean, when we went to dinner, you just talked to people. When you walk to class, you just talk to people. When you got a beer, you just talk to people. There was nothing else to look at, except there wasn't that. Yeah, so there was no split screen. There was no split attention. So I- I find that to be something that I really value and I don't feel like I'm complete. I'm competing with media or social media. I feel like, oh my God, such a relief.

BC: Yeah. I'll turn it the other way around. You know, is there anything like that's going on now that you wish had been happening while you were here?

JS: I. That's such a great question too.

BC: the other side of the coin.

JS: Yeah. I wish I had understood. I feel as if women have, and this could just be- I- I haven't actually done the research on this, but I sense that women who are in their late teens, early twenties, they have a bit more sense of themselves, they seem a bit more savvy. I don't know whether that's youth or whether it's actuality, but I- I sort of wish that I could have had just that sense that you don't have to necessarily just go to a party. There seems to be a bit more push towards career and, like, what are you going to do with your life? And I- and I wish I had had that kind of wind behind my sails. I felt like I was here just to do classes, but I had never thought of a career. I never thought like, you've got to-, you're an artist sweetheart you've got to do this. You know what I mean? I- I just was in the dark and I- it- it seems like kids are now- are sort of, okay, let's- let's- let's channel these skills and let's take them somewhere, which I- so great- I wish somebody was looking out for me that way and could have channeled me. I think I spent like maybe 20 minutes in the career office. Like there wasn't a sense of, like, let's get your resume together. Let's go like- like, you're a great painter. Are you going to go to New York and be a painter? Are you going to go- do you know like- there wasn't somebody sitting with me channeling me because I was in the dark. I needed like some guidance. It just seems like there's a bit more of that now. I could have used that. That's my sense. I don't know if that's correct or not.

BC: I don't know. So, is there anything else at all that you- you'd like to just say for the record about your time here or anything big that happened while you were here or anything else that you can think of or ...

JS: I- I- I guess I would just say knowing people that went here, I find that they're very rich people. They're very rich, they're generous and they're rich and I mean that on all levels they seem to give of themselves and they reveal themselves emotionally and in a world that seems progressively pushing towards masking a lot of people's humanity. I really appreciate knowing people. Well, in the friends that I have from Connecticut College are- they will reveal their humanity to me, and that is- that's a huge gift. So guess I don't know if that just would've happened at Connecticut College, but I do feel that I got the sense that a lot of people were able to do what they wanted to do here and I think the freedom to do what you need to do at your own pace is sort of the essence of

education. So, you can't push, you can't make a fish swim faster. It's just got to- it's got to find its own pace and I'd say that that's- that's why I came back to Connecticut College to come to the reunion.

BC: Do you think you'll come again five years?

JS: Yes.

BC: Do you live nearby?

JS: No, I- I-, well, I live in Philadelphia, so it's not too far, but I'll come back and I specifically will come because I- the arts that seem to be blooming here and I- and I'm also extremely interested in the way Connecticut College seems to be cross-pollinating. their education like arts and science and dance and movement. And there seems to be cross pollination of education I think is very important. So it's- you get to think of things in- in multiple ways. I think that is exciting. I mean, I would consider teaching here even. I would like to, because I teach yoga and meditation and writing and- and kind of self-development type of stuff. And I feel like Connecticut College would be a place I would consider teaching because I have the sense of, of being able to track something in a- in a- in a very beautiful way. You get the sense that it could. It's a place where I would want to spend time. There's some places I wouldn't want to spend time, but Connecticut College, I'd say- all I'm going to say is I would take away that it's a place I want to spend time.

BC: So the ties are still very strong.

JS: Yeah.

BC: And resonant

JS: Yeah, yes. And I think it's the people that it attracts that makes it attractive. Cause they're really kind people. And smart people, so yeah.

BC: Beautiful. Anything else?

JS: Um, no. I think it was also really fun to be at Connecticut College when hurricanes came through and there would be this ...

BC: What hurricanes came through when you were ...

JS: God, I think it was like Hurricane Harvey or something, I don't even remember. But I remember we had to tape the windows with black tape so they wouldn't shatter. I remember we went out on Harkness Lawn after ...

BC: Like you had real cour- I'd never experienced a hurricane while I was here. Those four ...

JS: Like real deal.

BC: A real deal. Hurricane.

JS: Yeah. Real deal. Hurricane.

BC: They do hit here.

JS: Yes. And that was really fun to live through and like a bonding experience.

BC: Yes.

JS: And, oh, the other thing I want to say is that I really loved the way Connecticut College did their testing. I don't know if it's still the same, but it was the honor system.

BC: Yes.

JS: And I think that- that- I was like ...

BC: And you wrote the Honor Code, yes, on the book before you- your exam.

JS: Yeah. And that was like exceedingly great ...

BC: Powerful.

JS: Very powerful that you could sit in a room by yourself, you could take it wherever you wanted. You didn't necessarily just have to stay in that space. And that really helped me as a dyslexic. I did not know I was dyslexic until I got to graduate school. So testing for me was always so scary and I feel like it helped me at least calm down, that I could sit for like three hours and take that test and no one was breathing down my throat. It kind of gave me some, like a little bit focus on what I was trying to share rather than involved in the anxiety of ...

BC: Hurry up and get it done.

JS: Hurry up and get it done. Thank you.

BC: A special place?

JS: Yeah.

JS: Thank you for listening.

BC: Well, thank you. This has been remarkable. Remarkable.

JS: What was it like when you were ... Where did you live?

BC: I lived in KB all four years. Can we keep this going?

JS: Sure.

BC: I lived in KB all four years. We could then- loved being,

JS: What was your major?

BC: I was a history of music major.

JS: Oh, that's so great.

BC: And, I loved living right there in the center, right across from Cro, where if I slept through breakfast, I could pick up a lemonade and a grilled cheese sandwich on my way to my ...

JS: That's so great. Yeah, that's great. And so did you get involved in music after you graduated?

BC: No. No, but all that's in another, okay.