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Susan Mabry Gaud '68-Susana Berdeal de Cravino '63

Susan Mabry Gaud

Susana Berdeal

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Susan Mabry Gaud: We're on tape. So let me ask you Where did you come from to come to Connecticut College? Where were you living

Susana Berdeal de Cravino: I came from Buenos Aires, Argentina

SG: Very nice. So what what made you decide to come to Connecticut that,

SB: you know, I was studying at college, Teacher Training College, and I decided to become global. Now, it's the fashion to be global and to become global. But I thought I shouldn't keep to myself and to my country all the time. So I wanted to see the world and study outside meet other people, or the youngsters like myself. I was young once sometimes.

SG: Weren't we all?

SB: So I applied to come here, through the International, ayee, to the National ... I don't remember exactly International College of Education, International Institute of Education, ayee.

SG: So you were already in college, and ...

SB: I was already in college. I was a junior in college was about to graduate. So I came here. I came here, but I didn't choose Connecticut College. That's a funny thing. I was so happy that I had been sent to Connecticut College. But I didn't choose it. I was assigned Connecticut College, through this several people in Argentina, who applied to come to study here, and we were sent to different places. I had the tremendous luck, good fortune of coming here.

SG: So how many years were you here?

SB: Only one year.

SG: You just said one year ...

SB: I was part of a group of international students. They called us special students. I came here with a group of juniors. So it wasn't the third year here. Even if I was advanced in Argentina. We were myself from Argentina, Dominica [i.e. Dominique Raynaud] I know from Paris. Irmela Florig from Germany. I think she was from Heilbronn. Marianne Van der Jagt from Holland. Irmela Florig [i.e. Leena Marjatta Markkula] from Finland. And Nira Gabbay from Israel. So it was a mixed bag ...

SG: and who all came to Connecticut who came to the United States.

SB: We all came to the United States and they were always in Connecticut College. I never knew them before they came here. I met them here.

SG: What a wonderful group. Think that sounds like it was sort of ahead of its time.

SB: Oh yes, we did. We did.

SG: So how did you like it here? I mean ...

SB: I loved it.

SG: So you always ...

SB: liked it. I loved it.

SG: You stayed one year and then did you go back?

SB: Yes. I went back. Now listen. Remember I'm Argentine. We come from a traditional society was always very pampered very much sheltered. I was young at that time, as I told you, I was 19 or 20 something. 19 I believe. And I came here on my own for the first time I have never traveled abroad before.

SG: Wow.

SB: And I managed all right. That's the funny thing of it. Because I was welcome. I made friends, excellent friends here.

SG: You spoke English quite well.

SB: Yes, I did. I did. I'm bilingual ever since I was a little girl.

SG: Well, that's terrific. So where did you live on campus?

SB: Larrabee.

SG: Larrabee.

SB: At that time, Larrabee was a very modern building because it looked very modern. Now it stands out because it looks I mean, the old parts, the 55-year-old part looks old. But it was great.

SG: Well, that's good. Was there some anything that surprised you during your time here? Anything that surprised you when you were during your time?

SB: Yeah. Yeah. I was comparing the freedom the girls my age had here. With the lack of freedom we had at home, you see: dates, going out, everything was so different, so different. I adapted perfectly well.

SG: It's so funny because my generation here, we look upon how constrained we were here because we had to get in at certain times. It's just a different perspective, which is interesting, so ...

SB: Remember, I'm of Spanish descent.

SG: Well, yes. And, so you live in Larrabee and he really was the- How was the community was at that time that you actually ate they had dining room in the dormitory.

SB: In the dorm? Yes, yes. And we did dining duty, which was rather unusual for me. I had never done that before. And- but I loved it. It was fun. It was great.

SG: And so what did you study here?

SB: Mainly English. English. But since I was open to everything, and I saw there were so many possibilities here. I indulged in the things I liked. So like, for example, history of arts, history of the opera. I love classical music and opera. I took Italian, of course, in Italian, because I'm very fond of foreign languages, a course of literature in Italian, excellent, ordered teacher. And don't ask me about the names of the teachers because after 55 years ...

SG: Sorry, I remember ...

SB: being 79 I can't remember the names. You see. I loved my English teacher. He was excellent. He was a man. Can't remember his name.

SG: There was Mr. Bredesen?

SB: No.

SG: But then there was Mr. Baird

SB: Baird?

SG: Tall,

SB: Tall, yes

SG: Nice looking man with glasses.

SB: I think it was ...

SG: Might have been, I don't remember, I don't know.

SB: Okay. And then I took a course on the United Nations. I took, what else did I take? But because I had to study again, take the exams feeling for me, those blue books were a nightmare. A nightmare.

SG: They were for everybody.

SB: What am I going to write here? And the quiz questions on the books I read because I love literature. But those quick quiz questions were rather wicked at times. What was Peter wearing when the tree fell on top of his head or something like that? You see, so that- And it was clever, because in that way the teacher could tell if that the student had read the books, right? You see, I used it afterwards, in my experience teaching, because I'm a teacher.

SG: You are a teacher. I was wondering what you, you ... So you went- now when you went back? Did you have to take another year of school? Or were you finished once ...

SB: Finished. I came in the middle of a term

SG: I see. And then did you have to go? Did you go on to any graduate school? Or did you ...

SB: I took several- after- several graduate courses. Yes, but not an MBA. Several courses on teaching. I have some 40 or something. And degrees and everything.

SG: Were you then teaching English?

SB: Yes, I was teaching English. I started in kindergarten went up to primary. I took also secondary school students, big, big, very large classes, 45 girls. I taught in several schools but mainly in my school, the school where I did my primary and secondary, which was Jesus and Mary school. Then I became head of the school, of the English department. I was the head for many, many years until I retired. And I conducted all the work in the English Department.

SG: Wow, that's a big responsibility.

SB: And I brought- Well, I organized several things like trips abroad. Beginning with my experience, I decided to offer the same opportunity to the girls there in Argentina. So I organized trips abroad to schools of our family meaning the family of Jesus and Mary because Jesus and Mary is based in- was born in- in Lyon, in France, but it's based in Via Nomentana in Rome, and we have schools and universities all over the world. So we sent- I organized a program to take groups of girls from third year which is 15-year-old girls who were doing the- taking the IGCSE exams over to one of our schools in Great Britain to Thornton College in Milton Keynes in England. And several other programs now I- since I retired someone else took over and they kept on organizing. They're taking them to Canada as well. And I'm also working now, in the English Speaking Union. I'm a member of the executive committee. And we deal with- Have you ever heard of the English Speaking Union?

SG: I have, yes I ...

SB: Based in England. The President is Princess Anne. It used to be

SG: That's right.

SB: It used to be the Duke of Edinburgh. But now it's Princess Anne. And the idea is to connect all the speaking people, the English speaking people in the world through trips, trips abroad, exchange trades,

SG: Cultural ...

SB: exchanges, culturally. But not only students of English, not only secondary, primary or university students, also businessmen, there were there are programs ... there were because now they have stopped for a moment ... programs, in Oxford to spend a whole week, I took one of them, it was very interesting to spend a whole week in Magdalene College or some of the others and do an intensive week of exchange, always with my main idea, which is globalization, intercourse with other cultures, other people, other languages, other civilizations. You see, that is rich.

SG: So what did you- when you came here to Connecticut College?

SB: Yes

SG: And you were assigned to Connecticut College?

SB: Yes.

SG: Were others assigned. Were- what did you think about coming to a woman's college?

SB: I thought it was fine. Because I was educated in a woman's ...

SG: So I- yeah, because I wondered what your expectations were you ...

SB: I felt taken care of. All the same. If we wanted to go out we had the Coast Guard. We had Wesleyan, we had Yale and we have brains.

SG: Right. Right. And so so what were you involved in any other groups groups on campus?

SB: I will- I had very, very close friends. Only one of them is here with me today. The others, for one reason or another couldn't come. I'm with Joe Donald at the moment. We both came together. In fact, she she made me come in a way she insisted ...

SG: That you come from Argentina.

SB: Yes, yes, of course.

SG: You came.

SB: So I came from Argentina.

SG: So how long are you going to stay? Are you staying ...

SB: I'm staying until the 17th of June.

SG: So you're taking some time in the United States?

SB: I stay sometimes here because I have two sons living here.

SG: Oh, you do?

SB: Yes, yes. Following my example, after they graduated, and when Osiris graduated from the university, they decided to work abroad. My second son, Nicolas went to England, married and went to England with a baby boy that they had just had. He was three months old, and stayed there for 16 years, and had two more children. They are all British. And last year, they decided to come over here and live here. Oh, so I'm living here in New Jersey. My youngest son got his degree at the University- at the State University in Buenos Aires. He's an economist, and some nine years ago, came here for an MBA at Columbia University, got his degree, and started working, and is now director of Price Waterhouse in New York. He lives in New York. And Nicolas, the one I mentioned before, is the director of a bank, the UBS bank.

SG: So when was- Do you remember what it was like on campus? What was- what was the climate? Where was the- I'm trying to think in 19- ...

SB: I do remember- do remember that. I repeat, don't ask me about names. Because ...

SG: Oh, no, that's fine. I understand.

SB: But I do remember the order, the- I remember and was very surprised at the excellent organization of the student body and the Honor Code. Yes. Which I thought was so wonderful. So wonderful. If you dreamed of doing something against the Honor Code, you couldn't sleep afterwards. I couldn't. I felt so guilty. You see, it was great. It was great. I looked at the girls who were in the Student Government and I saw them so responsible. And being my age, I said, "How come they're so serious and they take it so much to heart." I like that very much.

SG: I know. I was on the Honor Board when ...

SB: you were here? Good for you.

SG: So I enjoyed that.

SB: I don't remember, what. I don't know, things I did here. Like going to study at the beach. We never opened a book. Right. Deliberately went to the beach. I remember giving blood for the Red Cross. Yes. I remember. That was the climax, Junior Show. How much fun I had at Junior Show. I went when they said when they called people who would like to participate. I went and sang and jumped and did everything. So apparently I only qualified for choruses. But I was in chorus and several of the things I sang I- we- we had lots of fun, getting dressed for the show and

everything. And people were I think- I think since I have a strange accent. It's not American. It's not British. I don't know what it is. So they made me a speaker read things aloud in the- in the hall, because they liked the way ...

SG: I hear you.

SB: sounded. And now it reminds me of my eldest grandson, Santiago, with British and his friends say, "Santi, please come, go, go talk to those girls. We like them. And we want you to convince them with your British accent."

SG: Yeah, so can you think of any? Is there anything? You've mentioned a little bit of what you did after you left Connecticut College. But did you- Did you feel there was anything particular about Connecticut that impacted your future experiences? Were there lessons learned that you now, you know, continue to use?

SB: In a way? I can't compare Connecticut with any other college because I only lived here.

SG: Right.

SB: You see, I can't say this was better than that.

SG: No, no, but it's just that were there things that you took from here ...

SB: I had friends that had gone. For example, one of my friends came at the same time. But she went to Barnard. And she said she was very happy and everything. You see? What should I say? What did the school give me? I became very, very self sufficient, I believe. I got used to managing things of my own. I- what we say in Spanish is corte el canal umbilical. I mean, I cut the cord that connected me with my mother and my father.

SG: Were your parents- and were your parents surprised that you left for the United States?

SB: Very much, very surprised. And I don't think they were very happy to have the youngest of the three go out on her own to a foreign country. It was not usual right at that time, you see. It was not common. Now it is

SG: That's true. It is. What do you remember- do you remember- were you at- when you were on campus do you remember or were there any things that did- was anybody- was- excuse me- Were there things that were going on politically in the United States in the world that you were aware of here? Or were you pretty much ...

SB: I was aware of politics? As I told you, I was very interested in the United Nations, that's- so I took that course. I was aware that the students were interested in politics. My friends were- some were Republicans, some were Democrats. Whereas in my country, we were not interested in politics at my age. Later on, at the university, the higher stages of university ...

SG: Yes. Well, that's interesting, because and then I was going to ask you, you do keep in touch with some of your classmates.

SB: I do with some of them. We were a very close group. You know, I'm a Catholic and naturally being from abroad, I believe that those Catholic guys tried to come and and get near me to help me. And it was so nice. I came to love them so much. I was very close to Joe Donald, Barbara Fisher, Elizabeth I can't remember her surname, Sally Brobston. But why because we have that in common. But I was also a very good friend of all the others, my neighbors in Larrabee. So Gordon was an excellent girl I used to go out to go on weekends to her house and everything. There was a girl, a Colombian girl who was a freshman. And who heard that I spoke Spanish and was there and came running and became a very good friend of mine. And she was so nice, though, at that time, she was Jewish, she was so nice, so nice. I love her so much. And she used to cut my hair.

SG: Oh, nice.

SB: She cut everybody's hair.

SG: Well, we found- I found when I was here that I made friends with- my friends tended to be people that were in all different classes, depending upon my major or- I was chemistry, so we were very- we were in the labs all the time. But, but we- we met people in dormitories and through athletics and through clubs that were- and so I've made my friendships have been more in a range of classes than just my own class.

SB: That's it. That's what I noticed and that was, was what was so enriching for me. Because I met all kinds of girls and that was not usual in my country. I was with my class of society with my close friends, with my family, my cousins and that was that. And that openness I enjoyed here. was so so wonderful, so wonderful.

SG: Well, that's yeah, I ...

SB: It prepared you for the world.

SG: It does. Now is there- have you been back to the College?

SB: I came twice. I came some 10 years ago with my husband when we were in New York. We took a train came here because I wanted to take a look around but always on vacation. There was nobody here.

SG: Oh, okay.

SB: So we just took a walk. Because I think it was a dean of admissions had been over in Buenos Aires. I had taken her out and- and when I came here, I came to see her. We talked for a while we took a walk, but there were no classes, no students, nothing, nobody to talk to. And then I came twice again once, two years ago with my son, also on holiday time, so ...

SG: So this is the really first time you've been here where you're learning about all the different things that's going on on the campus.

SB: That's it.

SG: So what do you- is there anything you- you've heard or when since you've been here that you would love to have had going on when you were in college? The school has changed a lot. It's coeducational, that's one thing, but ...

SB: Look, I'm not a fan of coeducation.

SG: I went to all-girls' schools, so ...

SB: You are?

SG: I was, yes.

SB: And I was very happy at being at Connecticut College for Women. There's nothing wrong with coeducation. I don't know, I suppose I could survive it. I could live with it. I would find it wonderful. But I can't tell. I can't tell. Because at my age, I'm not thinking as I thought when I was 20.

SG: I think one of the things that happened at Connecticut, when it did become co educational. They really did improve their- the sciences, the physical sciences, the chemistry and physics really improved significantly compared to when I was in school. And I think there might just either it was a sign of the times that more people were getting involved in science, more women, or that because they had more men on campus that there seemed ...

SB: When were you here?

SG: I graduated in 1968. '64 to '68, which was a tumultuous four years for the United States.

SB: Yes I know. You spent them here. I spent them over there. As soon as I got there, they killed your President.

SG: I know. Yes, that's right. So, so we had quite some times but- but I think that- I think that's my perspective, and although I'm interviewing you, the strength of the sciences is impressive. Sciences has improved dramatically. So it's hard to tell.

SB: I can't tell.

SG: It's hard to tell. I mean ...

SB: At the time, I thought everything was perfect.

SG: Yes, so ...

SB: So what should I say now?

SG: Yeah, I was going to say is there something that is there anything ...

SB: I'm very glad. And yesterday I went to one lecture I like very much about globalization. That's my main idea. You have to go global. You have to know. And that didn't exist at the time. I believe that the students were here at the time, we the foreign group came, learned a little bit from us. I think so. Because I noticed that there was some very stilted or some preconceptions about what we were like.

SG: Well, I knew also- I have great admiration for people who leave their home country and come. And I think people from Latin American, European, Asian companies- countries come to that more easily than Americans going the other direction.

SB: You know why? Because you know that when you speak English, you can be understood anywhere in the world. It's the lingua franca. On the other hand, we Spanish speakers have to learn a foreign language. And we do in Argentina. You know, most of the population is bilingual. There are excellent bilingual schools.

SG: Well, this is- this discussion is really- to archive experiences that people have had at Connecticut College, is there anything that you would like the school to know or remember?

SB: To remember? Well, I said before ...

SG: Yes, we've said a number of ...

SB: that I'm very thankful of having had the opportunity to be here sharing a whole year with such wonderful people in such a great place, and enjoying myself and learning so much, so much. I still remember the lectures I received. My first- my first time listening to Euridice, the Peri, was here. I had never listened to it before. And it's the first opera ever written. And I love opera.

SG: That's wonderful. So you really were exposed to experiences that you've had ...

SB: Besides that, at that time you had means of education, which we didn't have at home. Like, for example, in History of Art chance to have those projections of, of the paintings and everything. We didn't have it at home.

SG: Oh, that's really interesting. Yeah, I took one I Mr.- Mr. Mayhew, I think was an art.

SB: Those classes were excellent.

SG: Well, it was there anything else that you'd like to communicate?

SB: Just thank you.

SG: Oh, thank you. Thank you for taking some time to talk to us.

SB: And I'm sorry, I couldn't come before but life is so complicated.

SG: Definitely.

SB: My husband was sick for many, many years. And we couldn't travel. I wanted to make it for the 50th reunion. And I couldn't do that. He died three years ago.

SG: Oh, dear. Sorry to hear that. Well, we I'm here for my 50th and we we have quite a good group of people here.

SB: Yeah. And they said- they tell me that our 50th was very nice.

SG: I'm sure it was. I think they treat the 50th people very well.

SB: So sad, so sad. And Joe told me please come. I can't.

SG: Well, I'm glad you made it here. A nice time. That's really nice. And, and certainly ...

SB: I'd love to see more of my friends. Sally Brobston couldn't make it because she had a bad knee. Barbara's on a cancer treatment here. Jennifer's husband is not well at all. A pity, but I have Joe. Yes.

SG: Well, I'm certainly glad you came. It's good. So thank you very much. certainly enjoyed talking with you. Nice meeting with you too. Thank you.

SB: Thank you.