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Margo Hardenbergh '68-Barbara Chenot '68

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Barbara Chenot

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Margo Hardenbergh: Starting to record. So I want to make sure I answer all the quest- first of all, I'm Margo Hardenberg. And this is Saturday, June 2, 2018. And would you please introduce yourself and your class here?

Barbara Chenot: I am Barbara Chenot, maiden name Brinton, class of 1968.

MH: Just as I am. '68. Exactly. So all right, let me start off. Why did you come to Connecticut College? That was back in sixty-three or two, you were thinking about college,

BC: I had a high school friend, who had just moved to town and his older sister went to this school in Connecticut. I grew up in Pennsylvania. And I thought that was interesting. And I was quite infatuated with him and got interested with well, what is this place? And found out a little bit about it. And he moved away and ...

MH: Oh, you're kidding?

BC: No, which is fine.

MH: Okay

BC: But I was still very- really interested in this school. And so that was my sophomore year in high school. And then junior year, I started looking at colleges. And I was thinking I wanted to go to New England and I kind of liked the idea of a girls' school, having come from a rural country-ish sort-of regional high school, small high school in Pennsylvania. And I started looking at schools, and we're ordering up the books from all the different places. And this place really stuck out. There were no sororities. It wasn't fussy. It had a larger circulating library than the Seven Sisters schools.

MH: That's doing your research.

BC: Yeah, and academically was highly thought of. And you can see the ocean. And so I applied early decision.

MH: Wow.

BC: So I knew at Thanksgiving of my senior year I was coming here.

MH: That's great.

BC: And just was very glad that I did.

MH: Did you visit it before?

BC: I visited it during the summer after I had already put in my application.

MH: But not before- not after you accepted- before you accepted it.

BC: Yeah, I already put in my application because I just kind of like this is where I want to go. I, you know, the other the boyfriend and his sister were long gone.

MH: Yeah.

BC: Although she was a senior when I was a freshman here and we saw each other, so it was nice. But it- yeah- so I interviewed I think in like July, came and interviewed and just really, like, yeah.

MH: Do you remember who you interviewed?

BC: No, no, I mean, it was long ...

MH: I do remember mine. That's why I ...

BC: I don't remember.

MH: Okay.

BC: I remember I was very, very nervous. And this campus, in the middle of summer was just stunning and it was a beautiful day and you could look out and there was Long Island Sound. And Long- and it was like, "Oh my gosh." And they called my bluff and accepted me.

MH: Yes. So- so what did you study when you're here?

BC: I thought I was going to be a chemistry major. Loved chemistry. And I took chemistry my freshman year. I did fine in it. But I had to fulfill all these- we had all those other requirements.

MH: Yes.

BC: And so I had to fill all this other- these things and so I had an arts requirement that I had to fulfill. And so spring semester, freshman year, I need to take something. Well, I don't- I'm not an art person. I couldn't- I can't draw anything and I thought, "Music. I'll take the music course with Mr. Armstrong." It was Music 109, but I'm not positive. And I fell in love.

MH: Wow.

BC: And I thought, "Oh my gosh." And it was toward about two thirds of the way through or almost toward the end of the course when we are analyzing some piece of music and by-, you know, on graph paper, I was like, "Oh, this is my major."

MH: Is that right? S

BC: Yeah, this is this- is where I really need to be doing- listening to music and analyzing music, not in the chem lab.

MH: You had had your chemistry. That was wonderful.

BC: Yeah, I had the a year- a year of chemistry. Yeah, and did fine in it. But it was like, you know what? I think my real love is history of music. So that's what I did. And people would ask me, "Well, what are you- what are you what are you going to do with that? What's that for?" And I'd say "For me." Right? So I it was that was down in Holmes Hall. I don't know if you

MH: No, I don't remember Holmes Hall

BC: What was your major?

MH: It was Greek and Latin.

BC: Okay, Holmes Hall, you had to go down and across Mohegan Avenue and then down past behind ...

MH: Okay, well where the pianos were.

BC: Yes. All- and the little path through the woods, and all ... I bet it was half a mile

MH: Right.

BC: So you got down there and that's where I spent the next three years.

MH: That's fabulous. All right, so any other- yeah, so professors that stand out, courses that stand out?

BC: Mr. Armstrong was just phenomenal. Part of being a music history major was that you had to do one year of applied, and you had to audition in to be able to take it for credit, which is what it needed to be for the major. So I brushed up my piano skills, and auditioned and took a year of piano with Mr. Dale, sophomore year

MH: Mr. Dale, I remember that name.

BC: Soft-spoken gentleman.

MH: Yes.

BC: And I only did that one year of applied. And then, you know, took all different courses. I was really fascinated with 20th-century music, and especially the music of Aaron Copeland and I did my independent study, senior year. That was one of the requirements for that major was that you did an independent study. And I did that and it was Mr. Shephard.

MH: Oh my goodness, my choral director.

BC: And I ...

MH: Mr. Shackford was the choral director.

BC: Okay, he was also the 20th century specialist. So depending on what your independent study was going to be, you got assigned one of the ...

MH: How was he to work with?

BC: He was good. He was fun. We saw every- once a week, I had an appointment with him, senior year. And we would just talk about Copeland and what I was looking at in the music and everything. It was- we really got to know each other. And toward the very end when I was finishing things up, which was about the essence of the melodic line in Copeland's music. And I mean, I'd listen to those pieces. And he said to me, toward the very end, when things were almost all done, he said, "Well, how has Copeland weathered? Are you ready to spend the summer continuing to listen to it? Does it need a break?" And I hadn't thought about that. I thought, "It needs a break." And I wonder if the reaction would have been the same had it been Chopin.

MH: I see.

BC: Or Bach, or- or Rachmaninoff? I wonder. You know, I didn't go on with it at all. But I wonder you know, Copeland, okay. I still love Copeland. I can hear a piece of music, even if something that I don't recognize immediately what it is, but I'll know it's Copeland.

MH: So that's wonderful.

BC: Yeah, but that was just what I did then. And then I moved on and did other things.

MH: What did you go do?

BC: I went on and got an MAT a Master of Arts in Teaching, the next year. It's up at Simmons with a specialization in elementary school science.

MH: Really, after all that?

BC: Because I loved science, and became an elementary school science specialist.

MH: So how would you say Connecticut prepared you for all that? Or not?

BC: I've heard it said several times this weekend already, there is nothing like a good liberal arts education and learning how to think and I was very unprepared for that when I arrived here. I had, you know, best that they could do, but it was a little rural high school.

MH: How large in fact was the ...

BC: My class was 110 graduating seniors from high school that covered five different townships.

MH: Yes, so when you came that first day you must have been amazed about ...

BC: and I didn't know how to write a paper. I mean, I breezed through high school. I was the top- but I got here and it was like, you know, I didn't have the preparation.

MH: Right.

BC: And I caught up. I kind of- I was always kind of scared though, when I was- I was always kind of scared, like, oh dear,

MH: Right. Now there are other things that you remember great friendships, the dorm life. What was the dorm?

BC: I lived in KB all four years. Loved KB.

MH: Was it a single room all the time?

BC: No. A roommate freshman year and then adjoining singles. With a good friend, sophomore year. Junior year a single. Senior year a single up on the fourth floor, which was kind of the senior ghetto, you know, and that was, yeah.

MH: Is there anything that you remember about dorm life in particular that's sort of precious or- or not, right?

BC: Yes. The- the house fellow, Mrs. Geer, who was quite strict, and- and we were entering for dinner, we had to put on our skirts. And we wouldn't- that was when the- we had the dining room right there ...

MH: Yes, exactly.

BC: in the dorm. And we'd walk in for dinner and you had to be on time. And you would stand behind your chair. And when everybody was in, I mean, the doors would open and they would all walk in.

MH: Yeah. You had to stand in line ...

BC: Yeah. And then you'd get in, and you'd stand there. And when everyone was in, Mrs. Geer would look around, and sit her- seat herself down. And then we were all allowed to sit down. And if you were late, you had to go in and apologize to her. So on the couple of times that I was late. I just skipped dinner because I was afraid. I was afraid I couldn't ...

MH: Did you have any kitchenettes on your floors or anything? I mean, I wonder what you did when you ...

BC: You didn't really. Well, we were- we were overenrolled, remember? We ...

MH: I do remember that.

BC: Yes. And so there were people living in the commons room. And where normally there would have been, like, there weren't microwaves and things back then. But normally you would have ...

MH: Well, I don't remember having it in Lambdin. We didn't have any cooking ...

BC: No ...

MH: It wasn't.

BC: I don't think there was any cooking availability.

MH: Is KB- is that the one attached to Larrabee?

BC: Yes.

MH: Okay, because Larrabee did have hot plates on each floor. But I don't think an icebox, which is interesting. But anyway,

BC: I don't think so. I don't know. I don't remember.

MH: So basic, how about the phone calls? Remember the phone?

BC: Oh, you had to go down the hall to the phone. And yeah, for phone calls. And then did- you had wanted to make an outgoing call, you had to go downstairs into the stairwell that went down kind of the basement, in this old phone booth, the old-fashioned phone booth. But then Nancy Finn was remembering she and I were both involved with the newspaper, ConnCensus, she and I were co-editors our senior year, and she was remembering that we had somehow convinced the administration that there were five of us, key people on campus, who really should have phone access, because things were going on after the 11 o'clock curfew that we needed to be in touch with each other about. So and- and Nancy reminded me of this. Nancy and I as co-editors, Jane Fankhanel, probably the honor court person whose name I can't pull up. And there were five of us who were given telephones.

MH: Wow. That was just senior year though?

BC: Just senior year because of, yeah.

MH: And did you use it for any other ...

BC: We- I don't- probably. I think you could, you know, dial nine get an outside line. And that, you know ...

MH: Well, being ...

BC: and make a collect call. I don't know. You know, you couldn't just make, you know, pay calls.

MH: Yeah, right. Being the editor of the newspaper, that was heavy duty. So did you start right at freshman year getting involved with the reporting, and ...

BC: Yes, I was heavily involved with my high school newspaper and loved journalism, and knew what a black hole it was, and promised myself I wasn't going to get- to have that happen in college. And I lasted one semester. And so beginning of second semester, I found myself over at the ConnCensus office. And, you know, was there ever since

MH: So what are some of the stories you remember?

BC: A terrible tragedy that I remember is that a student was hit by a car walking on Mohegan Avenue and she was an exchange student from somewhere abroad.

MH: Turkey.

BC: Was it Turkey? And we found out about it. It- right- right after it had happened. In the- it was a night that we were- we were in the office, and I remember Ray Downes, who was such a newsbug, she called the hospital to see how this person was doing ...

MH: Because she was a year ahead of us, right?

BC: And she was, yeah, she was the editor the year before Nancy and I assumed that co-editorship. And Ray called the hos- the hospital and just went stone silent. And back then, you know, there wasn't the HIPAA stuff. And she got off the phone and she said, DOA. And I'll never forget that. We didn't have any other information at that point, but just that there was this ...

MH: Did you write it up?

BC: I think Ray probably ...

MH: I mean that paper only came out weekly, didn't it?

BC: Weekly.

MH: Did you have any problems with the- with the administration in covering anything bad or anything?

BC: I don't think so. I remember that senior year, on a weekly basis, Nancy met with Dean Noyes and I met with Charlie Shain as just a- just anything you ever- it's kind of like an information beat kind of thing. And, yeah, it was a tumultuous time that- that- and so there were times when you're like, "Okay, let's be careful now. What are we gonna print?" Just- Just ...

MH: There were serious- I mean, I remember ...

BC: Let's be sure we've got the facts right here. Let's be sure the facts are right.

MH: There were professors who were, you know, demonstrating. There were sit ins. There were teach ins. Yeah. Were you keeping on top of that informing us or not?

BC: Somewhat, yeah. And then were- yeah, there were, yeah. It was- so that became my life that and my music stuff. And I kind of floundered through all the rest of my requirements, squeaking by because most things, just didn't seem as important.

MH: Yes, right.

BC: So my, my academic record was very spiky, you know, because, okay, I'll do what I have to do.

MH: Well, so what beats did you like to, you know ...

BC: Well, you know, we just kind of kept that summer a lot of- a lot of the stuff and one of the big ones was our senior year when JA caught fire. And it was- I somehow got wind of it, because I don't know if I was walking back from Holmes Hall, I don't remember. Nancy and I were just talking about this. But I was aware that JA is on fire, and I got to a phone and I called Nancy. Unfortunately- she must have been in her room. And I said, Finny JA's burning. And so she got-, you know, we- and we covered it. Like real newspeople, you know. Oh my gosh, it's real-time news. We jumped right in and interviewed people and right there and watched it burn and interviewing people and setting things up.

MH: Was there a photographer?

BC: Yeah, Ron Biscuti [i.e. Phil Biscuti].

MH: No, I know. But no student photographer.

BC: Yeah, probably. But I remember it was mostly Ron Biscuti.

MH: Yeah. I just saw it. Right.

BC: He was wonderful. And he shot lots of- lots of shots.

MH: And you were able to use those photos.

BC: And he shot a lot of things that we used anyway.

MH: Do we remember why it was caused- how it was caused?

BC: I don't know.

MH: Was it wiring or something?

BC: I don't know if we found out exactly. I don't know. I don't know. This college was really [unclear]. You know, people needed to be housed and we- clothing gotten for people and somebody's hamster had died. And that was ...

MH: Okay.

BC: We've gotten off track here.

MH: No, I don't think so. Because, well, you know, the theme of our reunion is 1968 and it was a very hect-, so you were the editor during a very hectic year or co-editor.

BC: Right. And Nancy assumed a heavier role of writing because she- she is just an incredible writer, and far better writer than I.

MH: She did a wonderful job with our book.

BC: Yeah. And, and so I was kind of the behind the scenes newsperson and Nancy kind of assumed a lot of the writing, even that year. You- which- and she's just- has gone on to her career is really great. She's just a phenomenal writer.

MH: Now, is there any of the things that you remember I was referring briefly to the whole idea of we had comprehensive exams? Was there anything like that, the whole studying ...

BC: I remember studying for comps on the sunroof of KB.

MH: Now, did you put- use tin foil and

BC: Well, not while we were studying for comps? But, we did we use tin foil but you know we had tin foil. Absolutely. Yeah, aluminum foil. And we all did and seeing the ...

MH: gets sun a lot. And now we're paying the cost- paying the price of ...

BC: Yes. But I remember a good friend Barbara Medeski, who was in my dorm also was also a history of music major. And so she and I sat on the deck for a couple of weeks. And just went through the whole course of the history of music, you know the chronology ...

MH: Memorizing everything ...

BC: Well, and just walking through the stories, you know, all the stories. No, like, okay, you know, all the- all the different composers the different eras, you know, just, you know, filling it all in from all of our coursework, you know, so that ... And that- and I think maybe that's really the purpose of comps. So that consolidation during the- the studying and the assimilating, and all. You've taken all this stuff, but then "Okay, put it together." And it was so great to have a good friend. That shows that she had [unclear] and we went off and took them and then the bells did not ring for us, our class. Somebody had not, remember? And we were like ...

MH: So the bells are supposed to ring?

BC: Everybody had passed. So I remember going down to the post office, all of us.

MH: So all of us were freaked out.

BC: Yeah.

MH: Because you couldn't tell something may have gone wrong.

BC: I know, But yeah, comps- I think they don't have comps anymore, I don't think. Do they?

MH: No, I don't think so either. So okay, so is- have you been back for many reunions?

BC: I was back each of the five year ones up through the 30th. I was reunion chair for 15. And that was fun. But I've been back and then I had different things come up and I didn't get back until now.

MH: Do you recommend this college for others and do you ...

BC: Oh, absolutely. Even moreso after being here for this ...

MH: Reunion?

BC: Yeah. And hearing- hearing people talk and hearing you know about the school and ...

MH: do you wish there had been boys here when we were here?

BC: I don't know. My son went here, graduated in 2000, so I've been back. I was back- he was a theater major- had been back for performances. He sang with Co Co Beaux. So I've been back on campus, for him, for theater. And so I've seen it with men. The living rooms are not as nice.

MH: Right?

BC: Little things like that. But maybe it's more of a place that's more realistic.

MH: So probably most of your time was taking up with either study or the journalism not much community, you know, sitting and watching Jeopardy ...

BC: Oh, never.

MH: or going to the- how about going to the events. You know, they kept on bringing things on campus ...

BC: But not I- not that much.

MH: And you probably didn't audit any classes.

BC: I audited at a couple of music classes that I couldn't fit in. You know, so I remember I audited Baroque music because I couldn't- I couldn't put it in. It was going to be too big an overload, but I was able to audit, so that's one thing. And I remember, I was in our senior year that they initiated a pass-fail initiative that you could take one course, not in your major, pass-fail. What would you take? And we had something where we all dressed up as the course that we would take. And I remember I dressed up as astronomy, because I would have taken an astronomy course.

MH: Oh, but you didn't take it?

BC: No, I couldn't fit it in and you- it would be a very intensive science course.

MH: This was our senior year.

BC: No, but this was like, "Well, if you could." At that point, it was like, yeah, but you know, I think it came in for the next- I don't know, did we- Were we able to take advantage of a pass fail- thing our senior year? I'm not sure we could.

MH: I'm not sure we could.

BC: I think the next year. I thought that was a nice initiative, you know? What would you take? That's just like totally ...

MH: So any other things like did you ever do the mixers or ...

BC: Yes, some I, you know, I here and there. I dated a Coastie for a while I dated a Sub Base guy, senior year.

MH: That was fun.

BC: Yeah. Yeah, it was fun.

MH: Do you remember going into New London for anything?

BC: To Gorra's to go shopping.

MH: Yep. Exactly.

BC: Getting the bus over to Ocean Beach in the spring. Going- getting to change buses to get to Ocean Beach.

MH: That was pretty cool.

BC: Yeah, but-, you know, but we didn't really go into- I didn't go to New London much.

MH: Yeah, right. No, yeah.

BC: I just lived up here.

MH: So do you keep in touch with other, like, classmates?

BC: Some. Christmas cards. Some of them are not here. The person that I moved to Boston with doing our masters, Pauline Noznick, is here and she came. And she said "I came because I wanted to see you," and it has just been so great having time to just sit and talk having lived together- next to- you're being good friends and then going off to grad school and sharing an apartment for a year. That's- I was friends with a number of people in the year behind us, the class of '69 And I'm still in touch with some of them.

MH: You are that's what I find difficult to be- keep in touch with the other class with ...

BC: I'm still in touch with them with Christmas cards. A close friend now is actually the president of that class. And she and I became very- we lived together Cambridge. She needed a roommate. Pauline moved back to Chicago. And we've become very close friends.

MH: So actually, where do you live now?

BC: I live in Princeton, Massachusetts.

MH: Oh my goodness.

BC: You ever heard of it?

MH: I have. My college roommate came from there. Jeanne Connor.

BC: Well, now, somebody just said at lunch today, was- it wasn't you because I wasn't- it was Mary Clarkson said Jeanne Connor went ...

MH: She was my roommate and ...

BC: Because Princeton has about 3000 people.

MH: I know. So I wish you would follow up on her.

BC: Jeanne Connor, did she finish?

MH: Nope. She left, I think after her sophomore year or maybe midway in her sophomore year.

BC: C-O-N-N-E-R?

MH: Or O-R, I'm not sure.

BC: Because Connor is a- there's a- there's a Connor family.

MH: Yeah.

BC: And Jean, J-E-A-N?

MH: Yes.

BC: Are you ...

MH: No, J-E-A-N-N-E

BC: Okay, Jeanne.

MH: I'm out of contact with her. Yes.

BC: Jeanne Connor.

MH: Yes. I think she worked in a museum for a bit. I don't know what she did for school. So please, that would be great. So you live in Princeton? So beautiful!

BC: I've lived in Princeton since 73.

MH: It's so beautiful.

BC: Yes. It's it's a lovely little ... It's like the cover of Yankee Magazine.

MH: Yeah, exactly. Alright, that is really fun. I'm so.

BC: Jeanne Connor.

MH: Yeah. So I think we've covered most things. I don't know if there's something you would like to share. Do you think the students today are missing something that we had? I mean, it's pretty hard to tell.

BC: It's very hard to tell. You know, we had pretty intense friendships, but I think they do now too.

MH: Yes. How about the having a victory song?

BC: That was different.

MH: Now there's a, yeah, a fight song.

BC: A fight song and just, you know, camels? You know? And of course, I had that info because of my son. And his wife went here also.

MH: Oh, wonderful.

BC: She was a year ahead of- and they knew each other in college. And then ...

MH: When otherwise ...

BC: Yes, yes. A year later, you know, found- there was a reunion of acapella groups and she sang in a different acapella group. And so they kind of looked each other and went, "Oh."

MH: Isn't that fun?

BC: That was in 2001.

MH: That's wonderful.

BC: Yeah. And so you know, I have an eye into the college through them and, you know, and ...

MH: Okay. Yeah, very good. I appreciate it. Anything else you'd like to say?

BC: I'm glad to be an ex Conn.

MH: Touché. Very good.