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Pauline Noznick '68-David Clark '73

Pauline Noznick

David Clark

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Pauline Noznick: Today is June 2, 2018 and I am going to be interviewing David Clark who is in the class of '73 and I am Pauline Noznick Gerstein, class of 1968. Okay. Bill, excuse me, David, why did you decide to come to Conn, particularly since you were in the first class- I was in the last class of all women and you were one of the first men ...

David Clark: Yes, I was

PN: to matriculate.

DC: Yes, I was. I was in a study hall in Wellesley High School on January 16th, 1969 and I read the very short, two-column, big story in the New York Times that Connecticut College had decided to admit men. That afternoon I called the College and made a request for an interview. I had heard of the College through several classmates who had interviewed here and were applying.

PN: Excuse me, were these men or women?

DC: Women at that point. It was literally the first day that the news had hit the New York Times. So, I called up and had my interview with a lady named Jane Bredesen who was later secretary of the College but at the time was in the admissions team. And that interview happened on January 24, 1969. It was a very dreary New London fog-type day and it was also intersession. The women were not here, so the campus was empty and foggy but I still liked the campus and I think Jane Bredesen and I both knew within about 5 to 10 minutes after that interview started that there was a very good chance that I was going to come to college here. I applied to six colleges and got into 4, so when April came and it was time to make a decision about where to go, I ultimately had to decide between here and the University of Michigan. And we came down here on a very nice April day and all of a sudden there were 1400 young women running around in shorts because it was a very warm day and I said to my dad and my sister who had accompanied me on that trip, "I think this is where I'm coming to go to college." And so, yes, I was one of the very first men to come here. I'm- my class, 1973, is the first class that has men that started as freshmen and went all the way through. My first year, there were 28 men plus a housefellow couple who lived in Larrabee in the first floor in the basement. That was the only coed combination anywhere on campus and there were about 1400 women here on campus at the time.

PN: Okay. And alright- next thing is what surprised you about Conn when you were here?

DC: I think an overwhelming thing was something that I was slightly prepared for but not really to the degree that it really happened and that was finding out how much smarter women are than men. And when I think about the experience here, so much of the discussions we had in the dormitories and the classes involved the relatively small number of men, especially my first year, and the fact that most of the women were upper class-, I wanted to say upperclassmen, upper classwomen at the time because they were of course smarter than we were only because they

were sophomores and juniors and seniors. But certainly the great lessons about equality between the sexes and learning the importance of the role of women in family and society and business and church and economics and so forth was certainly something that came home. I think it's always an important thing in someone's life, no matter what their race or gender or nationality, if you can be part of a minority during part of your upbringing or part of your education, that is a valuable experience because it teaches you certain things about majority rule and minority segments of populations and that type of things are all good life lessons to learn. So, while that wasn't a big surprise, it certainly- the fact that it was more important in the world to learn about equality between the sexes was probably the thing that surprised me the most. And my reaction to it and how quickly sometimes and how slowly sometimes I learned from it.

PN: Average. Okay. Now, what dorm did you live in?

DC: As I mentioned the first year Larrabee was the only coed dorm. After the- as we were talking about housing for the next year, D. Margaret Watson who was dean of the student activities at the time, later dean of housing, said to us in Larrabee, "I would like to have four coed dorms next year and as a consequence- Larrabee will be one of them and some of you can stay but I really need some of you to move to the other dorms to have some presence of," at that point, "sophomore men in the dorms." And so, the other three dorms that went coed that year were Harkness and Hamilton and Wright and about six of us chose Wright House and we moved there. And I stayed there for my junior year. And then my senior year I was housefellow of- one of the first solo male housefellows, because up to that time all of the housefellows had all been women or married couples and finally we got to the point where my class we had men who would qualify to be housefellows. I was housefellow in Morrisson House my last year. I had also been a Morrisson intern in summer of 1972 and worked for the League of Women Voters in Washington, DC and Marg Watson thought it might be appropriate since she knew I was going to be a Morrisson intern she said, "Why don't you take Morrisson House for a housefellowship," which was a great experience although it was a- it was made more difficult by the fact that again, as we were trying to get closer to some kind of equality between men and women, Morrisson House- and the year I was housefellow, '72-'73, there were 60 women all the way from freshmen to seniors. Amongst the men, I was the only senior, there was 1 junior, 2 sophomores, and there were 26 freshmen boys and I do use the term boys advisedly, and the women, the young women, upstairs. And the other thing that occurred during my tenure as housefellow, on October 1 of 1972 the age of majority in the state of Connecticut went from 21 to 18. And what that meant is that students could sign student loans by themselves, they could enter into contracts by themselves, they could rent apartments on their own signature, and, most importantly to some of these boys especially, they could start to buy liquor legally at the age of 18, which meant that virtually everyone on campus could by their own liquor, whereas before it was necessary to find a sympathetic senior who was 21 years or older to go buy what you wanted. Now everyone could run down to the Yellow Front and buy their own. And, as a consequence, there were issues of maturity as we all sort of dealt with the new law from the state of Connecticut.

PN: So how did that effect you as a housefellow? Anything specific? Did it put you in any uncomfortable or ...

DC: As housefellows we were told that because the laws had changed and the laws in many cases trumped what the College might have wanted for behavior or wanted for regulations and especially the ability to serve drinks at all kinds of college functions changed dramatically. It didn't put- I don't think it put us in a particularly worse position. All we could say is "that's the state law now," and people had to be more responsible for their own actions. That doesn't mean we couldn't, as role models, try to show the students ways to behave if they misbehaved. It was something the college campus as a whole had to deal with.

PN: Now as a housefellow did you have any- I hate to use the word "power" but did you have- were you able to recommend students see somebody or talk to somebody about issues they might have?

DC: That was certainly one law that we had, trying to keep peace and quiet, trying to organize events. We wanted to have parties, but we wanted to have them at certain times. And we wanted to have all-campus parties so we would keep the students on campus rather than have them out in the bars of New London. But the College at the time really did not have a lot of good gathering spaces. And so, we had the parties in the dorm living rooms, which at the Complex were far, far bigger than what we see today. The Complex has been much revised since then. In those days, each dorm in the complex had a large living room, which meant that you could put in a band and you could probably squeeze in about 200 people and have everybody dancing to the band and have six kegs of beer and- six kegs of beer in those days cost about 120 bucks and the band usually cost about 120 bucks and if you could have 300 people come in and each pay a quarter, you could basically break even or even make a few dollars.

PN: Okay.

DC: But the other thing housefellows did- obviously we would try if people were having roommate problems, we would help solve those. Occasionally, we would have people bring in pets that weren't allowed ...

PN: Dogs?

DC: Dogs and cats and various other things. That was something that we- we might be the first line of defense in terms of enforcing that. Mostly I tried to encourage the students in our dorm to respect each other, respect some privacy, and try to realize they were here to study more than party. But that was a challenge.

PN: Unfortunately, what you see in the media, I think most students feel that they're here to party, particularly freshmen. And that's probably- was that where you had most of your ...

DC: That's where I had most of my, let's call it, maturity issues with the freshmen.

PN: Yeah, that's what I thought. Okay, now let's see [break in the recording]

DC: It's starting again now. I don't know when. I wasn't watching.

PN: I hope it- because neither one of us touched the thing. Okay, so here ...

DC: If they need to reconstruct it, they can call me on the phone.

PN: Okay. Is there anything from your experience that students- that you wish students today could have. Now that's something that you could talk about for a long time. Particularly with all these kind of things, isolated or whatever. I don't know. What do you think about that?

DC: I think what I- what the students are probably missing today is spending more time as friends and less time as techies, looking at their phones. And having better dialogue and learning from their friends and learning from their professors in 1 on 1 conversations. And the other part of the question, is there something which I wish I could have experienced? I wish I could have had word processing. When I was here- because we typed most everything on electric typewriters ...

PN: We didn't even have those, it was all manual.

DC: Right and to be able to process a paper in these days under these circumstances is so much better than, you know, for students to be able to study, and there's more ways to do research on the internet and so forth.

PN: Yeah that is true. It really is open. I used to teach in the community college and did not teach high-achieving students. I taught the lower end. And they- I said, "Take out that dictionary in your pocket. Take out that encyclopedia in your pocket," you know "and start using that darn thing for something else and just, you know, writing stupid things for your friends in texts. So, and actually, it worked pretty good. Take out the calculator. They couldn't figure out percentages. I was teaching reading. They couldn't figure out how to- figure out their reading rates. I had to show them how to do it.

DC: And so, the other thing that I would love to see the College do more is not just Economics 101-102, but real business experience. And that's one thing when I come back, I mentor students and I interview students, do some resume and interview workshops. And sometimes we have what we call speed dating where we have 5-minute interviews. And we have more extensive "business hours discussions," as we call them, here in the library, you know, so that students can talk to people with real-work experience, like my experience at Bain's, my experience in the town of Falmouth in the government of Maine. Learning first hand and getting some first-hand contexts will help them in the business world and that's another thing I do when I come back here. And I've been back every year for all fifty years ...

PN: Fabulous.

DC: I first set foot on this campus in 1969 and it's now 2018 so that's 50 years that I've ...

PN: You've been back

DC: been on this campus.

PN: There's something, and you've kind of like, talked a little bit around it, but something that I've always- because I used to teach in junior high and one thing that students, I would talk, is rights and responsibilities. And everybody is so concerned about their rights, they're not very concerned about their responsibilities. And I think that you're a good example of somebody who learned about your responsibilities here and you brought it into your life, you know, responsibilities of helping your community. And I don't know how you exactly teach that because, you know, you ask people about voting "I don't have time," or they say it's that "I don't have time to vote," or "It doesn't matter. These guys are all crooks," or, you know, "What I say, who cares, what I say doesn't count," or "My vote doesn't matter, so I'm just not going to bother." And as a government major do you have any insight on something like that?

DC: I think one of the things that happened while we were here, of course, the 26th Amendment went into effect in 1971, so while many of us could not vote when we arrived, we could vote and did vote in the 1972 general election. I was chatting with a lady from the class of 93 and she said- I asked her about the '92 election and she said just about everybody she knew did vote. And I don't think that was the case in, say 1972. As people sort of struggled with, "Alright, students, where should they be voting? Should they vote here in New London?" And there are some classic cases of New London saying, "We don't want to register Conn College students to vote. They need to vote where their parents live." And it was quite controversial. And we correctly as students had some run-ins with the local, both Democratic and Republican, leaders of the city of New London, not- you know it was not unique to New London. It was certainly an issue across the country. Well, I try to stress when I'm talking with students that this is a participatory democracy and I talk about my time on the town council in Falmouth and say, "It's- these are term-limited to three or six years. It's always going to be somebody's turn. All the power in that kind of government is pretty temporary and it's going to be your turn in a few years to think about do you want to be active in your town or your community. And it doesn't mean that you have to run for election. There are plenty of things that people can do in their individual communities, such as the, you know, the ecology committee or the lake committee or the recreation committee. You don't have to run for school committee to help in the schools." There's many things that we as individuals can do, and this is what I try to stress with Connecticut College students, I say, "It's going to be your turn some time to do something for your community and give back to it." It doesn't mean you have to run for office, but you should be involved. You should know how your town government works. You should know how your school committee works. You should know things like, within your community or however, whether it's a countywide, or a citywide, or a townwide, what percentage of your tax bill goes to the schools. And I ask that question a lot and I get answers of anything from 2% to 98%. Typically, in most communities it runs around 60%-65%

PN: Usually, the largest single thing is education

DC: It's usually the single biggest thing in a municipal budget and exactly how well do you want the schools to be run? How well do you want the schools to be administered? All of these things are things that you should be thinking about as part of a good community. And the skills that you can pick up here, whether it's in clubs, writing for the newspaper, being in student government, those are skills that you can take with you out in the real world. You need to use them.

PN: I think we might be done.

DC: Okay, I think there's some of this that might be missing.