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Kathleen Jordan '68-Nate Heller '98-Eden Savino '98

Kathleen Jordan

Nate Heller

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Kathleen Jordan: This is Kathleen Jordan. I'm in the class of 1968 at Connecticut College and I'm doing an interview for the oral history with Eden Savino, the class of 98, and Nate Heller, class of 98. And if you two would introduce yourselves, please.

Nate Heller: Yes Hi, I'm Nate Heller, class of 98.

Eden Savino: Hi, I'm Eden Savino, class of 98.

KJ: Well thank you very much for participating in this- in this study and joining me this afternoon to talk about your experiences, how you chose Connecticut, how you came to Connecticut College, what your life here was like in terms of learning and studying. And then how you formed your direction and where you went after Connecticut College. And how you feel your education has, you know, either has been effective for you, or not, but, you know, what was it- what was it that

ES: How did you get to Connecticut College?

NH: I had a- for some- it's strange, like when I think about my overall experience at Connecticut College, this is a little bit of a tangent but it's kind of a general thing, like, I definitely, not too far into my 20s I had lots of experiences and I did lots of things and I grew and changed as a person and in some way felt like, wow, the person that I am now probably would not have been interested, you know, would not have ended up going to Connecticut College because, it's a- I mean it's a wonderful place, but, you know, it's a small liberal arts college. I really wanted that when I was 17, 18. I wanted to go to, like, a place exactly like this. And then, later, I started seeing more things and I was very interested in, you know, big cities and different kinds of experiences and yet, when I think back, I think it's my experience at Connecticut College that grew me into the person that was feeling that way. And so, I really got a lot out of being here, which changed me a lot.

KJ: And that is not a tangent, that is exactly what we're here to talk about.

ES: Yeah, at first I thought, "Oh God where's he going to go with it," but yeah.

NH: But so yeah, when I was- I grew up in Washington, DC. I went to, basically prep school type of place. I did ok, but not fantastic there. I was one of those kids with really good SAT scores and so-so grades and there was a friend of my father who had a son who had sort of a similar experience in high school and had come here and really loved it. And I was just looking around and wanted to go to a liberal arts place and my dad- we were driving around visiting places and he said "Why don't we stop through there and check it out," and I just somehow was like, wow there's just a really nice feeling on this place and people are friendly and it just feels exactly like what I want. And yeah, I remember enjoying my interview.

KJ: Who interviewed you?

NH: What was his name? He was a younger guy. I- If it comes to me, I'll remember. I remember making a really stupid joke in the interview and he thought it was funny and I felt more at ease than I had in most interviews. He asked about the swim team. We didn't have a swimming pool in my high school and he was how did you and I was like, "Oh no we just lie on the floor of the gym and go like this," and he was like, "Really?" And somehow, yeah, I don't know, I just had this nice vibe from here and I was a Williams scholar, they offered me-, yeah, anyway. It was a- just felt nice and felt like what I wanted. Yeah.

KJ: So, when you got here and you chose your freshman year courses and all, how did it start for you? Did it start well? Did you feel like, yeah this is what I want to do?

NH: Yeah. Well, I wound up in Windham and ...

ES: living and learning

NH: Yeah, there was this living and learning seminar where you lived in a dorm with a bunch of people who were in one class together, so you had one of your classes was all these people that you lived with so you could talk about the class outside. And I had a crazy roommate who was a nice guy but we didn't super connect exactly in a way that I felt like he was going to be my tight, tight friend. But in the basement, it was all women. I was on the first floor. It was me and my roommate and another two guys, but in the basement it was all women. And I ended up spending a lot of time hanging out in the basement with all of these women. And Eden was one of them.

ES: You were part of, like, the Windham basement women.

NH: Yeah, I didn't live in my dorm room, I lived on the couch in the basement. It's gone now.

ES: Right, so I go in an Nate's still out there ...

KJ: So, Eden, did you- tell us a little bit about how it felt for you then.

ES: Oh, sure. Well I went to a girls school from fifth through 12th grade and I thought I was going to go to a women's college, you know. I was really- had gone to Bryn Mawr and went down through all this, but Connecticut College just gave me so much money and when my parents saw the financial aid package- at first my parents like you know, my dad was like, "Get in the car some Saturday morning, "We're going to drive up and see this place." And it was just madness, but yeah we just showed up, but I wanted to- having been to a girls school for so long I wanted to live only with women at the dorm. I thought coed living was a little like, let's not jump into the deep end. But it was like- so Nate was like, not just one of the first people I met there, but the first male col-, right like in class- remember fourth grade was the last time that I

had been in class with a guy and he sort of woke me up to like, yeah, guys can be really smart too.

KJ: Since I've got you both here and you know each other so well, talk to me about the dynamic in the classroom. You've probably read the studies, you know, women tend to be quiet, men tend to raise their hands and speak whether they know what they are talking about or not.

ES: I'll be here later.

NH: Men tend to not notice when that's happening. Because it's weird, like I don't remember feeling that way. I remember feeling like women talked and argued just as much as men do but I also think in the studies men to think that and women say the opposite.

ES: Well you were also often surrounded by a lot of women

NH: You talk ...

ES: Like me, Jen, it's not like any of us were going to let you talk.

KJ: So the women in your class that came here tended to already be confident enough to speak in class and ...

ES: Well we had also heard that because it had been a women's college to keep the ratio, right, they said magically once you tip 60-40 ...

NH: There were always more women than men here.

ES: Right, and people would sort of say they actually had a lower entry point for the men, so I thought there was some, like whatever. We got in, but you ... Oh that poor guy from Boston when I had never heard a Boston accent ... But yeah, no, I felt like it was slight- 55 ...

NH: Yeah, slightly more women, but I don't know. Yeah, I don't remember that sense here. It felt like it was a very, like, I wouldn't say female dominated, but not male dominated way things were.

KJ: In the classes?

NH: Yeah.

ES: Everywhere. It's just a very comfortable campus. You know, you never felt- you just felt like, yeah ...

KJ: The faculty are accessible.

ES: Oh yeah

NH: Yeah, it was a really ...

KJ: That makes a big difference, I think.

NH: Yeah, people were super easy to talk to.

ES: Dirk.

NH: Yeah, Dirk. Dirk Held. He was a Classics professor. He was pretty fantastic.

ES: I had him for Latin and you had him for philosophy?

NH: Yeah. I was a philosophy major. I had Kristin Pfefferkorn Vorbath, freshman year in Philosophy 101 and I was just- thought it was so cool. And didn't know what I- I knew- I decided when I was like 14 I was going to do Peace Corps and somehow I thought that that meant I really didn't have to figure out what to do with my life, which you know, you don't really know anyway. So I was like, eh, it doesn't really matter what I major in because I'm not sure what I want to do so I just want to do something that interests me and I loved that philosophy class and I ended up being a philosophy major.

KJ: Okay. So that's, yeah. How about you?

ES: Oh, well, Dorothy James was a great voice, Dorothy James. We used to do college radio together, the news show and we'd get Dorothy James on and Gwen Ifill's brother, who ...

NH: Oh yeah?

ES: Yeah, remember he ... What is his first name? He taught government here. So I majored in government, minored in Latin, because ... But, no, I mean Dorothy was awesome, you know. I did my senior paper with her. You did a senior paper too.

NH: Larry Vogel. So, I because I wanted to do Peace Corps and I had taken French in high school, but I thought I never was going to take a language ever again. Like, I was not very good in French in high school. And somehow I was like, "Oh, I'm going to do Peace Corps but I'm not really going to worry about the language thing." Although plenty of people do show up in Peace Corps without a language. But- and then my friends freshman year were going to this meeting about CISLA and I had never heard about CISLA, but it sounded kind of cool and prestigious and I was looking for something that was like, you know, an ambitious thing to do. And I went to this meeting and all of like, well you didn't do it, but half of our good friends from our dorm were like "Oh, we're going to go to this CISLA thing, okay," and it's, you know, you take some great classes, you get this certificate, you know it's a competitive, hard thing to get into and

there really is an elite whatever, and you go get money to go spend the summer in a foreign language country. And I got incredibly excited about that and I ended up being the only, and maybe they took me because of this, I was the only philosophy major to ever do CISLA, at least at that point, because what does philosophy really have to do with CISLA?

KJ: Everything, it would seem to me, however ...

NH: And I mean honestly like I was trying what I was going to- I knew I wanted to go to Africa and I knew I spoke French, so it was, okay, wouldn't it probably be West Africa. I went on there- there wasn't a real internet at the point, so I went on the Microsoft Encarta CD-ROM and put in, you know, philosophy, Africa, and Francophone, and the Negritude movement of Leopold Sedar Senghor in Senegal popped out. Okay. And I wrote a proposal in one night and somehow they took me and I ended up going to Dakar and working for Amnesty International and ended up writing a philosophy thesis about the Negritude movement, which was kind of a disaster, but then I felt like a couple years after in thinking about it in light of all my other experiences, I really learned a lot from and came to a completely different conclusion than I had been trying to fight for in the paper, which is why it was kind of a disaster. So, it was a weird, interesting experience, but it definitely gave me all this great experience, which was then really useful when I did go into the Peace Corps and ended up going back to Senegal.

KJ: Yes, okay, yeah. Thank you for pulling that all together.

ES: That's a full narrative arc.

KJ: Really. How about you, Eden?

ES: Because I minored in Latin, I remember going, again, the women in the basement, they were all going to a meeting about the Watson Fellowship thing. Yeah, I had applied to get a Watson, a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, they give you money to travel. The only rule is that you can't return home for the year and I followed the path of Aeneas. But it was like the same sort of thing, where, like Connecticut College. So Dirk eld was like "Yeah, hell, you should apply for this. Let me help you review this," and ... he did religious stuff.

NH: Gallagher?

ES: Yeah.

NH: Gene Gallagher.

ES: He helped review it. People I barely even knew- like, helped review it through the process.

NH: Just kind of this great nurturing place with all these smart people trying to help you find opportunities and you know, giving you ideas of things that you wouldn't have thought of trying

to do and you're kind of amazed when you come out of it, like, all the different great things you got to experience.

ES: Yeah, I do- I did- I haven't totally, like your girlfriend going to McGill, like why didn't I go? It would have been cheaper in some ways, like the Canadian dollar at the time and all that and it's like, but no

NH: She talks about it being this really big, McGill in Canada, like this really big impersonal place where nobody really cared about you very much. This was not like that at all.

ES: Yeah, yeah. I come- I wanted a campus, I wanted a small thing, because I had come from a big city. I want to know who I am going to school with. And then yeah, you do sort of think, why didn't I go to University of Paris, you know?

KJ: Our last- we've got two- three minutes left. Is there anything, you know, you can tell me about this, you know, anything else that comes to you that you don't want to miss letting us know about?

ES: You know the answer to this question ...

KJ: I've left enough time. Take your time.

NH: I also- you've got another person coming ... I don't know, it definitely really shaped me in a lot of ways and I have a pretty great life now and I feel like a lot of it came out of the things that I learned here and the things that it taught me to explore. And I became a much more confident person from my time here and I learned a lot of things that I didn't figure out I had learned until a couple years after that and I studied abroad in Paris and fell in love with the French language and the ability to kind of operate in different cultures. And, yeah, it was- it was great.

ES: But I think the shared- the shared experience, like, I mean, to live and learn or whatever we called, living together on campus, I really- we come back every year for this, we've shown up at each others' places all over the country and world and other people don't have college friendships like this.

NH: Yeah, and like there's this really small number of people that when I come back to the US I really make an effort to see whenever I am in DC. And like, she's like the only person other than my parents I really make an ...

ES: I would berate you if you didn't show up.

NH: effort to see like every time I come home. And, yeah, you know, it's been 20 years.

KJ: This is just wonderful. Thank you so much. I think that ...

ES: Very nice, thank you. Thank you for letting me take time out of your interview.

KJ: And I think having you both speak together really enriched the interview information to let it bounce off each other a little bit and because you were so important in each others' experience here, I get a much better impression of what life was like for your cohort. Very different from mine. So thank you very much.

ES: Kathleen, thank you so much. This was such a pleasure. This is so nice.