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Sammi Shay '13-Margot Hardenbergh '68

Sammi Shay

Margaret Hardenbergh

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Sammi Shay: So why did you decide to come to Connecticut College.

Margot Hardenbergh: Well, it was very interesting. I was really- had my heart set on Vassar. And I went and interviewed Vassar College. And they told me- oh, why did I like Vassar? My cousin had gone or something to that effect, you know. Well, just sort of, I had no idea what Vassar was really like. It just had this name. My interview at Vassar they asked me what I was interested in studying and I said I was studying- interested in studying the classics, Greek and Latin and they said I should go to Connecticut College, that's where all the people are. So I went to Connecticut College, had my interview with Miss Hershey who was this friendly and wonderful and pleasant ... Of course, I was really nervous about my interview. Now, someone said I should go here and she said, "Yeah, this is a perfect match for you." My mom was thinking maybe I should go look down south. We looked at places down south. But I decided on Connecticut and I was very happy.

SS: Good. What, if anything, surprised you about the College during your time here.

MH: Size. Okay, I came from a high school, it was a private day school and in my class there was 16 students. So when I got here to the, you know, opening day and all 400 students or over 400 students, I was just overwhelmed. And then it turned out my education was pretty good, so I tested out of a lot of courses, so I was put into a class with Professor F. Edward Cranz, who was a marvelous professor. He taught ancient history. It was- it seemed as if only juniors and seniors were there, but I wanted it because of my classics. And, boy was that scary. That was very scary. There were some people who would raise their hands and ask questions, but if I ever did, it shook the bejesus out of everybody. You know, so, no, so that was pretty cute.

SS: Yeah, so in addition to meeting the 400 freshmen, you were getting to know juniors and seniors too.

MH: Yeah, exactly. Or taking work that was very demanding. So that was good.

SS: Yeah, oh wow. Where did you live on campus.

MH: So, the first semester, first year I lived in Lambdin on the fourth floor in the common room and I shared it with another student. They were overbooked and the common room was the place where you, you know, where everybody on the floor would come and meet and socialize and do their wash, do their washing. And I can't remember if we had a stove or anything, I don't remember that we did. So, that was rather awkward, because the doors would not close. You all had locked doors, we never had locked doors anyway, but these didn't close, you just would push them open or closed. They were folding doors. So, I don't think we were the only ones to have this opportunity, but we separated the beds into two, you know, so they were the same level, we didn't keep them as bunkbeds and that made much pleasanter and everybody on the floor was

very nice. But that was quite amazing. And we were mixed in with other classes and that was really nice for me because one of the students who was about two years ahead of me, she befriended me for some reason, so that was really nice. And she spotted me as somebody who would appreciate her campus job that she had and that was something you don't understand, but sitting in the reserve room of the library so that you would give out- hand out books for two hours. The books would be on reserve, or the readings would be on reserve, if we didn't xerox things and it wasn't online. And the value in that was- it meant I always was able to get my readings. So that was really nice.

SS: That was a good job to have on campus.

MH: It was, it was very nice.

SS: What did you study? What was your major?

MH: Greek and Latin. It was Greek and Latin. I got to study Greek and Latin. However, I appreciated Professor Craz so much that I wanted to take his seminar in medieval history and you could only take it if you were a major. So I crushed the Classics department because there were only a few of us majoring in the Classics and I had to go to Miss Evans and said, "I'm sorry, I want to go and major in history." She said, "Are you sure you want to major in history, Margot? Really?" So, I didn't tell her my secret reason and I went and majored and got to take that seminar and then I switched it back. Sneaky.

SS: Sneaky. That's pretty smart.

MH: Yeah, I don't know how I figured that out or had the courage, had the courage. Because it was really quite- it's you know a little bit scary. For some reason the- for some reason the professor's office that you have to go and meet is always down a long, dark, long hall, right? And you get all the way down there and knock on the door and will she see you?

SS: Yeah, so then you had to go through the process of switching your major and switching it back.

MH: She was glad to welcome me back.

SS: That's good. Do you have any other memories of favorite professors or favorite classes that you took.

MH: Well, Craz I really do remember really enjoying, his readings that he assigned I just adored. I got to share them with my mom, I got to- it was just really im- rewarding. I enjoyed my- I was not very good in philosophy but I was very interested, so I audited a course with professor Woody and that was very nice that he agreed to do it with me. I took a course with

Professor Hafkesbrink, I'm not sure how to pronounce it and she was fabulous, had a very good reputation.

SS: What did she teach?

MH: She- she had taught German literature. That was in translation, so that was good. And then I had chorus. I took chorus with Mr. Shackford, I think that's his name, was his name. And he was very welcoming and he took us on trips to, you know, churches in the city. So we went to, not- I don't think we went to Trinity, but we went to St.- we went to St. Thomas's, which is right up 53rd and 5th. We went to a church in the Bronx, a- a very famous AME Zion church. We got to sing there and it was very rewarding. It was fabulous.

SS: That sounds amazing.

MH: Yeah, he was very welcoming.

SS: Yeah, were there other clubs or activities you were involved with on campus?

MH: No, but you know we had to take sports?

SS: Oh, really?

MH: We had to take- yeah, we had to take physical exercise. You had to pass the swimming test. We were all a little nervous about whether we would pass the swimming test. And I did not really want to take swimming because then you had to change and all that. So- but the courses I enjoyed taking were pre-ski. Pre-ski was jogging through the Arboretum.

SS: Why was it called pre-ski?

MH: I guess it was getting you ready to be able to go skiing. Wasn't that cute?

SS: Yeah, that's fun. And the Arboretum is so beautiful.

MH: Oh my gosh, what a treat.

SS: And you get course credit,

MH: And I love jogging, you know, so that was wonderful. And I don't think it was very popular then, the way everybody jogs now, back then was not the case. So, I took golf, you know things like that. But that was pretty interesting. Yeah, you had to do that.

SS: Did you have to do it every year? Every ...

MH: I think you had to fulfill so many quarters.

SS: Sure, well that's different than it is now.

MH: Pretty much, pretty much, right?

SS: Yeah, so what was the campus climate like when you were here in the 60s? Were there any big controversial events or any public happenings?

MH: Oh, yes. As much as I spent a lot of time in the library, I also made sure I went to people coming to speak on campus and concerts. But, of course, during the 67 and 68- 66, 67, and 68, we had a lot of teach-ins and sit-ins and demonstrations and they were easy to participate in. It wasn't as if you were taking a big stand. You would just go and sit on- at the sit-in or the teach-in and you would learn a lot about what was happening in Vietnam. I also had a classics professor who was very, very concerned, Mrs. Perry was very concerned about agent orange. She wouldn't talk about it in class. She made a point of not talking about it in class, but before and after class she was harping about that, which I in hindsight really appreciate. And- and we had professors who took stands and we would go and support them. So- so, I did take activity that way, although I would say it's really easy. Sometimes, like today it feels harder to take a stand, as if you will be really marked and some people talk to you and others won't. I didn't have that feeling.

SS: Yeah, so did a- did a lot of students on campus participate in those or not everybody?

MH: No, not everybody, but ...

SS: You were definitely paving a road there.

MH: No, I was. I was trying to.

SS: Wow, interesting. So what was life like after Conn? What did you do after graduating and how did your education here shape your life.

MH: Oh, actually an interesting stories about dorm life, etc. So I'm sitting- first of all my dorm room was a hallowed room, I felt, because the woman who had my room beforehand was Cecilia Holland and she had written a book that was very successful and she was a medieval historian and she had written a popular book, I mean just two years before. She had written it during her time she was there and it was a very successful book. So, oh my gosh, this was great. And then I was sitting there translating my Greek, you know, literature and reading about the Forum and the importance of the Forum and I was listening on public radio when they were having discussions of the funding of public broadcasting. Should the US government get involved in funding at all? And down the hall was a- a- a classmate whose boyfriend was going to go study communications at the Annenberg School of Communication and she said he was so excited about that and my

hearing about that opened up the doors for me and I decided I wanted to go work in television. So, I went and got a master's in television and worked in television.

SS: Where did you live after Conn?

MH: So I went to- I worked in the summer in New York City. And then I went down to DC to American University and studied broadcasting. Before I finished, I went and got a job at the public broadcasting station in Dallas, which was a very exciting station because that's when Newsroom started with Jim Lehrer and the children's Sesame Street was coming there so it was a very exciting station. And I got the job because I went to visit my brother who said you ought to come and work here and I said the only place I will work will be the public broadcasting station so he dropped me off at the public broadcasting station and I walked in the door and I got this job and it was because, wait a second, it gets better, the general manager who interviewed me, his wife had graduated from Connecticut.

SS: Oh, my goodness! Yeah, they talk about those alumni connections.

MH: So that was very crucial for me, to get my first real job in the field that I really wanted to be in.

SS: It must have been exciting to get to, you said Houston, right?

MH: Dallas.

SS: To get to Dallas and find another Conn alum down there too. That's so cool. So, do you keep in touch with some of your classmates?

MH: I do. We have fun. Not all of them are in my particular class. Not all of them will come to reunions. But there are about three of us that make a point of seeing each other pretty regularly.

SS: Great. Are any of them here today?

MH: Yes, one is here today, yes. And another one whom I see quite often, I mean over the decades.

SS: Yeah, do you recognize most of the faces from your class.

MH: No, I interviewed somebody that was- she and I don't remember connecting at all.

SS: Yeah, that's funny how that happens. This is my first reunion and I'm meeting people in my class that I don't recognize.

MH: And it's only five years.

SS: Yeah, exactly, you keep making friends every time you come back.

MH: Yeah, it's really fun. It's really fun.

SS: So, in being here this weekend and thinking about the College today is there anything that you wish that you could have had that we have now that you could have had at the time.

MH: I think- I think Connecticut did well and I'm very pleased to see how it's growing and I do think the global aspect is really important. And the- also I appreciate the intersection of racism and other issues becoming integrated into the curriculum. It's fabulous. It's really good.

SS: Yeah, that's wonderful. Yeah, some of these buildings must be new to you.

MH: Oh yes, and they're redone and and they're refashioned. It's so fascinating you know. You don't need the big tv rooms any more the way we used to sit after dinner and watch Jeopardy, something like that, for fun.

SS: Yeah, no, everyone has their own tv. Are the common rooms that we have now, are they pretty similar to how ...

MH: I guess they are. I- I don't get a sense of it.

SS: Yeah, I'm sure it's so different.

MH: And the Harris Refectory is very different. You know we used to have just one, you know, about a choice of one thing to eat. One of the meals was mystery meat. They actually called it mystery meat.

SS: Did you ever find out what the mystery was?

MH: No, and you didn't want to know, I'm sure.

SS: Sure. Yeah, and now we have all these different options, so that must be different. And all the coffee shops too. Did you have a coffee shop on campus?

MH: No. Crozier. And I would never participate in something like that. I didn't have the money. I mean, you have to pay for the coffee, right?

SS: Yeah, yeah. Not in Harris, not in the dining hall.

MH: Yeah, and there's the lattes and ...

SS: Yeah, the fancy lattes. We would get, when I was a student, we would get a certain number of points on our card that we could use for free at the snack shop, at the coffee shop, and then after that you would have to pay.

MH: Yes, that was a good idea. Use it sometimes.

SS: Yeah, kind of save it up for when you're studying for a late at night test or something. Well, is there anything else that you want to share that you remember from ...

MH: No, I'm also lucky that I get to see some professors that I had in- because I live outside New Haven, Connecticut, so they live close by, so I get to see Professor Woody and I get to see Professor Willauer and that's really fun for me.

SS: Oh, that's lovely.

MH: And, yeah, so that's really fun. I'm very glad sometimes I hear about concerts and other events that are in the performing art center. So that's fun.

SS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's a lot going on at the- Cummings, is that right? Yeah, so much going on there. Did you guys have a spring concert when you were students. When I was in college we had this thing called Floralia that would happen every spring and it was a big outdoor concert behind the library. That didn't happen?

MH: You know, I think going coed changed everything a lot. We did things like go on mixers at Yale that was torture. It was torture.

SS: Really?

MH: Oh, we would take a bus and you'd be you know, we were just like cattle. It was pretty bad.

SS: What about the Coast Guard Academy?

MH: I never somehow went down to an event at the Coast Guard. I don't know why that didn't happen. Because I would have liked those white uniforms.

SS: Yeah, oh wow. So yeah it must be very different coming back and having it be coed and having all of these other changes.

MH: Yes, exactly.

SS: But you're having a good time.

MH: Very nice. Yes, it's good. Yeah, so, I'm very- how did you decide to participate?

SS: I- so they sent an email out a couple weeks ago just asking for people who were interested.

MH: Like, everybody who's coming, I suppose.

SS: Yeah, I thought it would be a great opportunity to meet- I was hoping to get to meet people from different classes other than my own and hear about what Conn was like in a different generation.

MH: What was- what was your major?

SS: I double-majored in American Studies and Dance.

MH: Fabulous,

SS: Yeah, and the Dance department here ...

MH: It's always been well known.

SS: Yeah, and I know the American Dance Festival used to come here in the summertime, so there's kind of been this really special legacy in the dance program here, so that's why I decided to come. And then I wanted to also study something a little more academic so I did American Studies.

MH: So, what are you doing now?

SS: So, I live in Chicago and I work for a nonprofit right now. It's a dance and music theater, a music center, kind of a mix of both, so I do event planning for that.

MH: Oh, wonderful.

SS: Yeah, but I'm going back to school in the fall to get a master's in social work.

MH: Congratulations.

SS: Thank you. Yeah, so, it's exciting to be thinking after five years about going back to school.

MH: Yes, where are you going to go?

SS: Loyola University in Chicago.

MH: Chicago, wonderful.

SS: Yeah, I'm excited.

MH: That's wonderful. I don't know if there's good- I just returned from teaching at Fordham, so ...

SS: Yeah, well they have such a great dance program too. That's how I know about Fordham. Yeah, oh wow. So are you living in- around, oh, you said you are living in New Haven.

MH: So I commuted. I would not do that any more.

SS: Yeah, I'm sure. Well it was such a pleasure getting to connect with you and hear a little bit ...

MH: It was very nice. Thank you very much to agree to do it.

SS: Oh my gosh, my pleasure. This was really, really fun. I decided to take a break. It's so fun to be with all of the students from my class, but I wanted to take a break and get to do something a little bit different.

MH: Yes, it is fun.

SS: Remember why we are all here and about the history of the school.

MH: I think about the new president, she's fabulous.

SS: I haven't gotten to meet her yet because she started the fall after ...

MH: You haven't heard her sing?

SS: Not yet, but I've heard. The concert- the CoCoBeaux concert tonight. I've heard she makes an appearance. I don't know if she will tonight, but I have heard that that's happened in the past couple of years. Did you guys have the CoCoBeaux when you were a student? No, because you were all female. Of course.

MH: We had the madrigal singers and we had the chorus and we had ...

SS: Yeah, oh my goodness, are you going to go to the concert this evening?

MH: I don't know, we'll see.

SS: There's a lot going on.

MH: Yes, exactly. Oh, you mean the one after the CoCoBeaux.

SS: No, the- I was thinking the CoCoBeaux, but there's also another concert after, right? Oh my goodness, yeah. There's a lot, a lot to do and just to catch up with everyone.

MH: Exactly, Exactly.

SS: Well, you enjoy the rest of your time.

MH: Thank you very much.

SS: Yeah, thank you.