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### Deborah Kloiber-Mary Kroul McAlpin '69

Deborah Kloiber

Mary McAlpin

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**Deborah Kloiber:** So, today is March 31st, 2019.

**Mary McAlpin:** May 31st.

**DK:** Yes, you're right. It's May. Those M months.

**MM:** The M months.

**DK:** May 31st, 2019. This is Deborah Kloiber, the archivist at Connecticut College and we're sitting in the Shain Library and would you introduce yourself and state your class year.

**MM:** I'm Mary Kroul McAlpin and I graduated in 1969.

**DK:** Okay, so you're here for your 50th reunion. So, why did you decide to come to Conn College?

**MM:** I was using schools as a way of exploring the world. I grew up, my par- my mother- my parents were first-generation American. My father had come in his early 20s from Poland because of- it was a messy family. My mother was- my parents- I'm of Jewish extraction, but my mother was born- was born in 1914, became an early Hitler opponent and in 1933 just after Hitler took over, they opened Dachau for the men and they arrested my mother in her small town in Westphalia as the heart of the Communist party, which was ridiculous, but sent her off to jail. So she at that point, she had to leave Germany. And anyway, I was raised as the daughter- the only child of European intellectuals in Morningside Heights in New York City and first they sent me to the Lincoln School, which was a progressive school. It no longer exists. It had devolved out of Horace Mann, actually. And I got to eighth grade and got really restless, and so one day the teacher said, "Oh, next Friday, if you want, there's going to be the test for Bronx High School of Science. If you want- anyone who wants to take the test, raise your hand." So, I'm a quick study. I didn't have much discipline, but I raised my hand and took tests well, so I got the day off and got into Science. And I really wanted to go to Science bec-, well, no, I wanted to go to public school, because I was tired of private school. I had friends, we'd go to the country and they had- they didn't have to work very hard, but they made honor roll, they got to go to ball games and be in marching band and it sounded really neat. I got to Science and it wasn't anything like that and it was a big factory and very institutionalized and they were not very ni- they didn't trust us, which was weird because we were docile kids. So, after four years of- of Science, I was sort of down on public education but I stuck it out, every once [unclear]. So, my

mother wanted me to go to Vassar and I had no, you know, okay [unclear]. But I didn't get into Vassar, but we- we had a- my parents had a friend who was an English professor who was advising them and me on where I should apply, because Science's guidance department was sort of useless. And so he said, "Oh, Connecticut College is another fine school. They've got a good English department, because I was good in English." And at that point I was getting interested in linguistics because where my parents' country place was—there's such a thing as- called a linguistic isogloss, where dialects come together, it's like a- it looks like a weather map, but it has to do with language—this area had- had really different dialects. So, I thought that was sort of- sort of neat. So, okay, there was someone named Hamilton Smyser here, taught in the English department. He was a philologist, Chaucerian. So, I applied to Conn, got in, and then senior year I had senioritis at- at Science and we were in gym and waiting and you had to wait in these interminable lines before you did a something and then you had to go back and wait in line. And so waiting in line there was one of these gymnastics horses with cast iron things and sort of fooling around, I just leaned over it and hit my head and had got a concussion and no one- they didn't take it seriously although I wound up in the hospital for two weeks. But my English teacher who thought I was goofing off and perhaps I- I was, wrote a letter to Conn saying I should be denied admission. So, in June I came home one day and this letter from Conn comes and between my having been out with- with a head injury, which had people very worried and this- this letter of non recommendation, which of course couldn't happen now under freedom of information—and I found out later she gave it to two other people: a girl who was going to Smith and a guy who was going to Dartmouth—so, I had been an- kind of an arrogant kid and they at Science said you may- you may apply to three schools only and then one mandatory application to something at City University of New York. So, I said, "Okay, I- I'm leaving this town. I'm never going to live at home again." And so, it's- it's silly, but, okay, Staten Island Community College. So that was my City University fallback and then when that was reality, this cannot- cannot be. So I went scrambling to Hunter College because I didn't want to see all the kids who were going to City College. And went to Hunter for a year, aced it, and at that point I just wanted to go to Conn. So, I reapplied to Conn and one of the things I really liked about Conn was where we were going on weekends—this is where we- where my husband and I, now we've taken over the place—it's in this mountain range called the Shawangunks, halfway between Albany and New York City. Do you know where Mohawk is? It's very interesting, botanically.

**DK:** Okay. I'm fairly new to this area myself.

**MM:** Okay. Where?

**DK:** I moved here from Minnesota.

**MM:** Okay. One of- that was another reason that I was interested in Conn College. Okay, I had been to a private, progressive school in Manhattan right in New York. Then I had been to this

polyglot working-class high school, but full of strivers. But the- my mother had done scholarly books for Barnes and Noble, and her- when she- she stopped working part time, went full time, they didn't know what to do with me for a summer. So they packed me off to my- good friend of my father's who had moved to [unclear] to Owens Point and he had six kids, a big house, and that's where I saw suburbia, so I thought, one of the things about Conn, besides field botany, Greek, horseback riding, and a good English department—those were my criteria—oh, and I was mathphobic because one of my math teachers groped kids in high school, so I never wanted anything to do with math and you could take Aristotelian logic instead of math, that was just a permitted substitute—so, and it's suburban, so I can see what the suburbs are like. So that's- that's why I went to Conn.

**DK:** Okay. So, while you were here, okay, it checks off everything, was- was there anything that surprised you about the College while you were here?

**MM:** No, it was what I wanted. I wanted decorum. I wanted to learn about that side of life, which was still in- in the air, that a- that a women's college would provide a certain way that you would conduct yourself and I wanted to learn about that.

**DK:** Different- different from what you had had in the pre-

**MM:** In other schools, yes. And no, it wasn't surprising, it was- it was interesting, but I was open to it.

**DK:** Okay, so I- I guess in a way, thinking, you talking about women and de- decorum, so what do you remember of, because it was right after you graduated, that it started admit- admitting men, do you remember any of the conversations leading up to that while you were here?

**MM:** I was in Jane Addams and we- the second semester of my senior year was the start of Connecticut College for men. And there were two guys from Wesleyan, who came as exchange students and they lived in the basement of Wesleyan. So, we would all observe them. One was Harvey and had unruly hair and I forget the other guy's name. We- we would watch them as they walked out. It was just something to do.

**DK:** Watch the guys go by?

**MM:** Watch the guys go by. I don't know. It was- we recognized that things were changing. I think- I don't know if I felt really pro or really con or just- okay, it's going to happen. I know there were kids who were upset about the idea. They felt Conn should stay a women's school. And I certainly liked it being a women's school, that you didn't have to worry about what you

wore during the week. We might get dressed up on weekends or you- and- and go away, but in the weekday ... In fact, I was in JA when the fire happened and I had been in my- my logic class, so that was—next to Plant, next to New London Hall, maybe? It's the squarish building next to—between Cummings and New London. It's ...

**DK:** That's Fanning?

**MM:** No, next to Fanning. Anyway, it's it's it was built in the 30s, sort of a blocky looking ... Anyway ...

**DK:** Palmer? Palmer.

**MM:** No, that's the auditorium. It doesn't matter. The class was like 1:20- 1:20 to 2:10. I came out of class and my dorm was on fire and it was in February and I was wearing wheat jeans and as they- as they wore out—and I really wore them out—so I would go to Woolworth's and buy these press-on patches and because my sense of humor runs in that direction, on the top I had used a red patch, so they were really obscene pants. And I- I was just wearing crummy clothing and a coat I'd hated that had lost all of its buttons and all this kind of thing. So, all of a sudden I'm homeless and wearing my absolute worst clothing. I don't know why I- I don't know why I digressed here, but it ...

**DK:** Talk- talking about not having men on campus and being able to wear ...

**MM:** So, yeah.

**DK:** Wearing those jeans might have been different then.

**MM:** Wearing, yes.

**DK:** So, you talked about living in JA. What- what was your residential experience like or your sense of community being here?

**MM:** It was- it was very pleasant. It was- I made friends. We all wound up living next to one other on the hall so it was a lot of in and out in each others' room. In fact now, about five years ago my husband and I bought a condo in Florida and it's replicating that experience, which I find really fun but without finals, without having to study, but- and it's mostly couples, but, you know, you go back and forth, you knock on people's doors, "Hey, you want to go out to dinner? You want to go somewhere and go up take a walk at the Arboretum?" There are, you know, all-

all- all this kind of stuff. So it's it's that same informal friendships that we had, which I did not expect.

**DK:** That's certainly interesting, that sort of hearken back to college. So, where- where else did you live?

**MM:** Oh, gosh. I spent two summers after my sophomore and junior years working in the Columbia University library systems office where they were putting the circulation system on computer-based system. It was second after Library of Congress. So things were really in their infancy. It was very worthwhile and pretty boring and we- they didn't- Butler Library wasn't air-conditioned, so if the temperature-humidity index got to be 94 then we were let off early, so it was hot and sticky and miserable and I was, you know, living in my parents' place and I felt- I felt someone was watching me, and I- even though my parents were pretty decent.

**DK:** Just the idea. At this point, you're- you're in college and ...

**MM:** So my last day at work I came home and said, "Okay, next year I'm going to get a job in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan," and my mother said, "Why?" and I said, "Well, I'd go to Alaska, but that's pretty far," and my mother said, "Well, that kind of thing hasn't stopped you before." So, okay, I had a \$250 savings bond in the- in the vault, in the bank and I thought, okay that could be seed money. And of course in those days, you could fly anywhere in the United States for \$50 on student standby. So, I came back to school and my friends were assembled and we were all hanging around in somebody's room and I said, "Okay, next year I'm going to Fairbanks, Alaska." And one of my friends who was in her junior year said, "Okay, I'll go with you." So, we then kind of geared our sights on that and actually got an illegal off-campus job on Bank Street Saturday nights at Lamperelli's Seven Brothers Bar, which was this huge barn where submarine fam- the women would come when the men were out to sea and the men would come when the women were out to sea and it was a very strange dive bar, but we made good money, or decent money. And another ...

**DK:** And you couldn't have campus jobs at this- or off-campus jobs at this time?

**MM:** No, you were not allowed to, and especially [unclear]. So, one woman had a car and we would meet, kind of- meet at the Lyman Allyn Museum and get in-she had a Mustang, I think-she would drive us there and we'd sneak back, we'd stick a little wedge in the dorm door and go back inside. No one ever [unclear]. So after graduation, another friend of mine got married on June 10th, so I had to hang out for that and we had found a drive-away VW Bug that someone- a class- someone who had graduated a couple years before was sending from Groton or something to San Francisco. So, we drove that across country and then we went up to Alaska and we hadn't realized that the pipeline activity-they hadn't started work on the pipeline-but people were

coming up there to get jobs so it was crawling with people looking for work and, you know, Conn College girls, we thought, “We’ll go to university and get jobs as secretaries.” And so we went there [unclear]. So someone said, “Well, if you are a go-go dancer they give you free housing.” So, okay, cocktail waitress. So we walked in to ...

**DK:** So, this is between your sophomore and your junior year?

**MM:** No, this was- I had just graduated. My friend was- Lisa was going into her senior year.

**DK:** Into her senior year, okay.

**MM:** We were both 21 and they gave us jobs as go-go dancers. It was something out of *Gunsmoke* with this sort of rowdy bar, but you would go up and dance on a table, you’d dance a set of three dances and then you would sit down, sit by a guy there, and say, “Buy me a drink?” And they were supposed to buy you champagne, which was mostly ginger ale and a- a glass was-I don’t know, you got a cut of half-a little bottle was like \$20 and then a full-sized bottle was \$50. There was sawdust on the floor so you could dump it on the floor. You made great money. And then- and I- I just liked the whole spirit of the thing, but, you know, all the me-too junk that’s around in men was around in men I encountered. Never there that our bosses really respected us as employees and as young ladies. There was no shenanigans. No one made a pass. And guys might say something to us like, “Hon, you want to come home? I’ll pay you \$100,” and you’d say, “Well, you know, my education just cost \$10,000. I’ll do it for that.” You know, kind of, you could just- and because in fact we could wear leotards with these mesh tights, you didn’t have to bare yourself very much. It was very chaste. But then I started graduate school at the University of Wisconsin and I was not prepared after Conn for a campus of 30,000 people, plus it was the most- the ‘69-’70 was a really scary year. And in the fall there were candlelight vigils where you march-and everything was kind of decorous the way we didn’t here-against the war in Vietnam. But come spring, there was Kent State and the SDS was very active in Madison and kids would-there were cobblestone streets in the main drag-near the ...

**DK:** This is Madison?

**MM:** This is University Avenue, which had cobblestones around the trees and the State Street is-I don’t know if you’ve ...

**DK:** I’ve been to Madison.

**MM:** So, State Street was all these mom and pop shops. And the SDS people were say- talking about the ontological necessity of trashing and they would take cobblestones and throw them in

the windows of the- of the State Street shops, which were owned by mom and pop ... This- this is not- this doesn't compute. Violence will not cure violence. Plus they brought the National Guard on campus, which was scary as all get out. And they would tell us, if you soak a handkerchief in water and wrap it in Saran Wrap, if you get caught in tear gas that'll protect you. So we did that and these deuce and a half trucks would rumble on campus and, you know, my knees would go weak. And once I almost fell down the stairs, because it was just so unnerving. And ...

**DK:** And different from what you had ...

**MM:** Different from Conn, where everything was kind of rational and decorous and we wouldn't talk about destruction as being a- a cure for- for evil. [unclear] Rosa Luxemburg. So, then I went to Boston because my friend was working there, okay, and I was a secretary at MIT and in the suite of offices where I worked—I had- I've looked up the guy's name, it comes no longer to me—he- he's disappeared, but William Rathjens who was instrumental in the SALT talks, William Bundy—does that name ring a bell?—and Tom Lehrer were other people there. Anyway, I didn't like Cambridge, and so Lisa and I went back—oh, then the bombing in the physics building happened in Madison and said, “No, I'm not going back next year. I can't handle it. I'm dropping out.” So, went back to Fairbanks, but I- I then was hooked on the place and wanted a tour in Athabascan linguistics and thought this would be my field. So, worked for another year in the bar, then I went back to Madison, and between going back did my field work down the Yukon River, about 350 miles. When I finished my degree, I got a job with the University of Alaska teaching, but also working on the—in order for the pipeline to be built, they had to do a survey of- of the, well, the Alaskan Native Land Claims settlement and the lands that were disputed, all- none of which had been apportioned yet, had to be apportioned among the different native groups and the corporations that had been formed as a result of ANCSA and I was to research cemetery and historic sites so I did that mostly in the Kotzebue area but also in the area where I had done my fieldwork, the Athabasca area in the interior and then I was at a linguistic society meeting and met this guy who had gone to the University of Wisconsin in linguistics and we just couldn't stop talking and so, he was teaching at Penn, so I moved down to Philadelphia and taught there. He didn't get tenure and went to Wharton. Wanted kids. Couldn't find childcare that pleased me so and realized that not being a person of wealth, I couldn't do- have kids and do fieldwork 3,000 miles away, 5,000 miles I guess, so I went into editing and then eventually went into medical writing. [unclear] I went- we went- we lived in Rochester, New York after Philadelphia, St. Louis, Missouri, which I utterly hated, and then my husband was downsized from Citicorp and we took over what had been my parents' country house in the mountains, and so we wound up in the Hudson Valley.

**DK:** So, getting back to Conn, what- what kinds of activities did you do here?



Good question. I was in orchestra, played violin. I was in- I was in Outing Club. There was a- an Outing Club. I showed up for a meeting and the woman who was a graduating senior said, “Oh, good, you’ll be president next year.” And also, I don’t know how they do it now, but at Conn they had legacy graduation robes, so you- a graduating senior would will someone, so a junior was getting the robe and then I was to get the robe and so I passed the robe down. I know two more people who got it after me and it was pretty rusty-looking by the time I wore it, but who knows if it’s still going it or not. But, I got that through Outing Club and yeah, we went- we went on trips, Lake George and I was talking with another- to another woman about caving in Philadelphia and we- we would go interesting places. And other schools would come together up to Dartmouth. We did the head of Outing Club up there for a while. And they had this huge—that was a rich establishment. They had a budget of hundreds of thousands a year and we’d get \$100, enough to rent a car.

**DK:** So, you- you would travel ...

**MM:** Yeah, on weekends.

**DK:** On weekends to other places. Is that like the beginning of your fieldwork?

**MM:** Oh, sure. Yeah, there were other girls who would check out the different men’s schools, you know, “What are they like?” It was a suitcase school.

**DK:** Where are we on time? We have- we have a little more time. I’m- I’m trying to think ...

**MM:** We ventured a lot. A lot of time was spent trying to analyze who we were and what the world was like, these intense conversations in the rooms with—I didn’t have a record player until senior year, but, you know, other people did. Bob Dylan on the record player or just [unclear]. What is this world like and then one of my friends had gotten a little bit of hash from a boyfriend and this was very, very special. We would take it out and put it on top of a cigarette and ignite it and I- I don’t think it- it could have been gum resin for all I know. It didn’t- it didn’t seem very potent, but- and I found I really didn’t like pot, but, you know, we would sit and just try to figure out what the world was and get in these sophomoric discussions of ...

**DK:** Right, right. So did you come up with answers?

**MM:** Sometimes. In fact, I was- we had, end of sophomore year, we came to this epiphany: You know how you can tell a senior? They have dark circles under their eyes. We didn’t- we were ... This was the kind of depth and insight. Some of it was more profound than that, but it was pretty ...

**DK:** Okay. Do you- do you still keep in touch with your classmates?

**MM:** A couple. I know the one who got married on June 10th lives in Wichita, Kansas and tomorrow her—she married a minister—and tomorrow their church is having a big celebration for their 50th anniversary, so she didn't come. The other visits me down in Florida, because it's sunny. You can really walk around. Yeah.

**DK:** Have you kept in touch with, you know, what Conn is like and sort of what are your impressions of the College today?

**MM:** Okay, I- I went to the 30th reunion and then I'm here now. I'm impressed. It seems like a less rigid place, but the- the level of discourse is- is impressive. I'm impressed with my classmates more so now than I might have been then, but, you know, they're- they're smart, interesting women, kind of uniformly. I haven't talked to any young- a couple of the undergrads, but not really. And, I ...

**DK:** So almost, like a time to come back and ...

**MM:** I'd go again, or look at it if I were applying to schools if I were applying to schools today

**DK:** Less- less rigid in what way, do you think?

**MM:** The rules.

**DK:** Okay. Academic and personal?

**MM:** I don't know about academic. Well, there- of course we- we had a core curriculum and- and it was very much a Chinese menu of classes you had to take. Sometimes, I think that's very helpful. It's- it's good to have certain basics that- that provide a cultural groundwork, but they're trying obviously trying to adapt in terms of, you know, we had rules. If you had a man in your room, the door had to be that much ajar and three feet out of four had to be on the floor or one foot, so things like that. When you went upstairs, you had to call, "Man on the floor!" So, that's very different. You had to sign in and out. My first year here, when you went off campus, you were supposed to wear a skirt. And, I can remember standing on Williams Street and hitchhiking downtown wearing a skirt. And you had to be properly- you couldn't go to breakfast in a bathrobe, so people had all these work-arounds, like you could wear a raincoat or a wrap-around skirt. And, in fact in Florida, we used to have a dog, who died a year ago, and sometimes when I had to walk him early in the morning and didn't want to get dressed, I'd put on my raincoat and go out.

**DK:** So, again, Florida is a flashback to what it was like in college.

**MM:** No, really. Where we live in Cragmoor, so I could run out naked and it doesn't matter.

**DK:** But you would still put a bathrobe or a raincoat on.

**MM:** In Cragmoor? No, not necessarily. No one can see me. So, if no one's there, I'll just ...  
But in Florida, of course.

**DK:** I'm trying to think ... probably ... yeah. We're at time, but it's been lovely talking to you.

**MM:** I've enjoyed it. Thank you so much.

**DK:** Yeah, thank you.