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Benjamin Panciera-Lucy Separk '59-Lynn Hand '67

Benjamin Panciera

Lucy Separk

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Benjamin Panciera: I will say my name- my name is Benjamin Panciera. I am director of special collections and today is May 31st, 2019 and you are

Lucy Separk: I am Lucy Separk, class of '59

BP: Class of '59.

Lynn Hand: I'm Lynn Hand and class of '67.

BP: Okay. So, I think what we'll do is I'll ask questions of Lucy and then, Lynn, that will give you some time to think about ...

LS: Cheating, cheating, cheating.

BP: So- so why did you decide to come to Connecticut College?

LS: Well, I had been accepted at Cornell and I had been accepted here and my parents both went to Cornell, so I thought Cornell was going to win there, but it didn't, anyway so I ended up here. I was never sorry really.

BP: Had you visited beforehand?

LS: Pardon me?

BP: Had you visited beforehand?

LS: Yeah, yeah.

LH: Well, my mother and my grandmother went to Wellesley and they expected me to go. I applied but I got on the waiting list but I got into Connecticut College and I wanted to go because they wanted me here. I had a dear friend who- named Burnet Sumner who- she would have been in the class of '65. I don't know if she's still alive or not, but she was here. So when I came here I was her little sister, so it was nice knowing that I would be here with a friend.

BP: What, if anything, surprised you about the College when you were here?

LS: It's hard to remember that long ago, but, I don't know. It's a great campus, it's on the bus line or train line at that time. I have two nieces that are now- that's not 20 years ago or 50 years ago or whatever it was, 60 years ago, but anyway, I have two- two relatives of my sister, two of her kids are coming to Connecticut now. One's a sophomore, one's going to be a freshman.

LH: What surprised me was the freedom. When I was in high school, we curled our hair and dressed up and here, I didn't have to worry about putting on makeup, I didn't have to curl my hair, I could wear [unclear], I could wear [unclear] Bermudas and a shirt. I felt so free. And I didn't have to worry about what people thought and I could say what I wanted to say in class and people valued my opinion, in a way nobody ever did when I was in a public high school in Ohio.

BP: So you originally came from Ohio? Where were you from?

LS: I was from New Jersey.

BP: From New Jersey, yeah. What was residential life like? What- where did you live?

LS: I was in Winthrop the first year, when that was a dorm.

BP: And what ...

LS: I remember coming back to campus and couldn't even find Winthrop practically. I get back here. I'd been living in Connecticut and nearby, close enough, anyway.

BP: Was- was it- was it a close-knit group or was it ...

LS: Yeah, we had a good- good dorm there, but you know, we're totally [unclear], you know. Some of them are still my friends, so ...

LH: Well, I was in Marshall House and I really wasn't prepared to live in a cinder block cell, kind of weird. I had friends all the way up and down the corridor. Some of my best friends lived in a double at the end and I thought I should have had a roommate because I had a big room.

BP: Yeah, you were- you were in single occupancy the whole time?

LH: Single, and we were a great big group and we tried to move together into another dorm as sophomores but there were too many of us, so we- we ended up back in Marshall.

LS: Oh no, really?

BP: How big a group was it?

LH: Like ten girls. Ten of us wanted to move together. And then I wanted to go to Blackstone because I had friends over there and I wanted something that was more historic looking and not so modern. When I finally got in there I was a junior and a senior.

BP: What were the- what were the- what were the high-value- what were the houses that everyone wanted to be in? Was it the original quad. Was it Blackstone, Plant, Branford?

LS: I would say Plant.

LH: I would say the original quad, because I had a lot of friends who wanted to be there. It took us two years to get there. And we had- our group had to break up in order to get anywhere and so they all ended up being around that area, but none of us all in the same dorm ever again.

BP: Yeah. Do you- do you stay in close contact with the- with the people you were with?

LS: The two that were here—well, one of them I didn't know real well, but she was- she played the piano in the chapel and that kind of thing and I was in choir, whatever. But she- she remembered me today, which I was, you know, sort of "Who's that?" But anyway, she's a nice, nice gal.

LH: I do. This is not my reunion year, I wanted to come back for the Sykes Society and I ran into two people that I sort of knew. They were from the class of '66 and we decided next year we would try to get as many people from '67 and '66 together so we could fill a table.

BP: Did you manage to pull that off?

LH: Well, we're going to have to do some research. I was on the reunion committee for '67 for our 50th and so I have a lot of names, you know, names and addresses. So, I'm going to work on that. I'm going to share that information with the two girls from '66.

BP: Yeah. What did you guys study when you were here?

LS: I majored in Math, but there was Education too, but you couldn't major in Education very well, but I did a lot of practice teaching in New London and that kind of stuff. Dating a cadet that was local, for a while.

LH: I majored in Art and Art History. Originally, I was a Psychology major but I found that I was getting better grades in Art than anything else, so I decided I would just do that.

BP: Yeah. Were there- are there particular professors who stood out to you, either in your major or just in general?

LH: Yeah.

BP: What were some of your best- favorite classroom experiences?

LS: I liked Mrs. somebody, but I can't remember her name. Oh, let's see.

LH: Mr. Mayhew for Art History.

LS: Yeah, Mayhew. I like Mayhew.

LH: He was great. Mr. Smalley, Mr. McCoy, most of my professors and Mr. Lukosius.

LS: A Biology teacher. Oh gosh, I can't think of the names.

BP: What extracurricular stuff were you involved in when you were here? What groups or other- other kind of non-academic pursuits did you ...

LS: I was big on sports, hockey and playing stuff on the Green, until I got hit by the hockey puck here in my fore- right here in my forehead into the- into- the what's the place name?

LH: The hospital ...

LS: Not the hospital.

BP: The infirmary, yeah.

LS: Whatever, spent the night or something there.

BP: Was it- a bunch of people have mentioned sports. Was sports a- a fairly big part of campus culture, or ...

LS: Basically, yes. Yeah, I'd been a bit, well, teaching swimming a long time. I mean, we had swim- I mean, the Coast Guard Academy, there was no pool here. Things were very different, although I actually swam at WPI too in Worcester. You couldn't go into their pool, but anyway. We got our degrees- our teaching degrees- math degrees, our teaching swimming, you know, lifeguarding and that kind of stuff. So, I sort of had a mixed background there, but that was- that was a long time- a long time after we moved to Worcester, so- or I moved to Worcester.

LH: Well, I- I- I played tennis I like modern dance. I did synchronized swimming.

LS: Oh, maybe- maybe you had a pool somewhere.

LH: I loved it. The pool was great.

LS: Yeah, we got the first swim that year.

LH: And it was- I was a member of the social committee, mixers and whatnot. I was very social at that point. Anything related to art.

BP: Yeah, yeah. What was campus climate like at that point. Do you remember any particular debates or controversies. What was- what got people active or motivated.

LH: I think racial issues got to be an issue about that ...

BP: Yeah, even- even in your- your class, '59, yeah?

LS: Yeah, I was telling her the only person I remember coming on campus was Eleanor Roosevelt. And that was, you know- I mean, I didn't- I didn't even know who she was practically then=. But then when I moved to- up to Maine, you know, interesting, "She came to Connecticut. It must have been a big deal that I didn't know about." You know, I don't think I was too much into politics.

LH: I became much more liberal. My whole family were Republicans and I became a Democrat. I had a lot of friends from New York. We dealt with busing. I- I remember this. Mardi- Mardi Walker and Mardi- the two Mardis. Their fathers were attorneys did Freedom Rides. And I wanted more than anything to go on a Freedom Ride and of course the newspaper was sent back home to my grandparents and parents and they were really upset. They said, "If you do that, you end up in jail. We can't help you." I said, "I- I just don't think I can handle this." I decided I wasn't going to do that. I was going to become more active with my viewpoints and speak out and write.

BP: Yeah. Do you think that was- do you think that was a fairly typical experience among your class?

LH: Maybe, I don't know. Some people were, some people weren't. I was just did like that because I was into civil rights and human beings. And I remember my parents had maids—black maids—who they gave eight dollars a day to and I thought this was ridiculous.

BP: Yeah, no, because we- because we noticed that a lot that just like looking at, whether it was the yearbooks or the campus newspapers or whatever, there seems to such a sea change from 1963 to 1967.

LH: Huge was a huge sea change. We were on the crest of it all. And then when I graduated everything just seemed to explode and I felt so out of it. I just thought this world is just going crazy.

BP: Yeah, and do- was it- were- was it fairly uniform opinion on campus or was there active debates and controversies or were people all kind of moving in the same direction?

LH: Well, we had a lot of debates.

LS: We had people come to campus and you know, be a speaker or something.

LH: Yeah, we had tons of debates.

LS: They could- especially the history and social, you know, social studies-type stuff, but ...

BP: Can you- can you both talk a little bit about your life since graduation and what impact do you think Conn had on your- on your post-graduate lives?

LS: Well, I like the area here.

BP: Yeah, did you stay- stay in the area?

LS: I lived in New Jersey and then my parents got divorced, and whatever. Anyway, that's immaterial, but most of it I was away, like working and during the summer. But anyway, then I went to New York after I graduated and got a job at Metropolitan Life and was there until I got married, whatever. So that was a little bit of a change, but I think things today are so different. Do you think so?

LH: I agree, I agree they really are.

LS: I think the world is all upside down.

LH: I think it's upside down now. I mean, we read *The Feminine Mystique* as our summer reading and I thought about my mother who went to Wellesley who has a housewife, who just buried herself, you know, in her housework and garden club and all that. And she was brilliant.

LS: And that was my sister. She was Wellesley too, yeah.

LH: I was like, "God, you must be so frustrated." You know, I think I just got more outspoken. But then when I went into work—I- I went into teaching; I went to Southern Connecticut State, you know, to get a master's in teaching—you know, everybody was just very- they- a lot of them were really conformist and nobody questioned anything where I always questioned everything. You know, I just- and then I remember Bobby Seale and I remember Blacks being shot and I remember being on the green in New Haven in 1969 or 70 and then looking up on the top of buildings and seeing people with rifles and I can't deal with it. So, I just left- I just can't deal with it so I'm going- I'm going to speak out rather than act out.

LS: I think all racial things were a lot different then than what they are today, I mean. It's like the kids with their cell phones and their, you know ... There's no, "Somebody called me on the phone! Alright!" down in the lobby and everybody, the campus would know, well, not quite.

LH: What- what I thought was really strange is the only Black people there when I was there were from Africa. We didn't have any Black people from the United States. And I thought this- this is not right. We didn't have poor people. We didn't have immigrants. We didn't have people that weren't white upper-middle class, you know, or on the verge of that. We were all very homogeneous, is the right word for this.

BP: This is about the time that Conn was participating in an Upward Bound-style program in the summer. Did that have no real spillover to campus life? Was that completely kind of walled off and its own thing?

LH: Well I wasn't ... that was when I was working elsewhere.

LS: Was that successful?

BP: They- they- they- they kept it up for about eight or nine years. I'm not quite sure what- I don't know how successful it was in terms of how many of those students then went on to

college or things like that but it was a- for the- for the eight or nine years they were running it, it was a fairly vibrant program. What its outcomes were, I don't know. But I just wondered if that- if that penetrated the consciousness of students here at that time.

LH: I didn't know much about it at the time because I left college, I left campus, and then I was expected to work.

LS: Too busy writing papers, right?

LH: I had to work. I had to- to find a job in order to afford things when I went back to college.

LS: Other than [unclear].

Yes, other than [unclear].

BP: Have you kept up with classmates since leaving?

LS: I have because of being the- the treasurer of my class there for a number of years then I gave up the books last reunion.

LH: Well I have. I- I was on the reunion committee. I want to do that again, because I thought that was exciting to do, net work with people. Yeah, I do have friends from college that I still speak to.

BP: Thinking about the experience of college students today. What do you think you had that they're missing out on?

LS: That's a good question.

LH: That is a good question.

LS: I mean, we had a personal advisor. You had an advisor or something or somebody in your major or whatever. That person was close. You never got really close to one of the professors that much. I was too busy writing papers.

LH: Yeah, we were writing papers. Yeah, very intellectual experience and we had to be on campus. We weren't allowed off campus. There were a lot of rules. Now I see kids, I've taught as an adjunct in different colleges in New Hampshire. Of course, they're colleges for their

returning students and it's more free. I mean, people come and go. There are cellphones. There are more nontraditional students that I've worked with.

BP: What do you- what- what- what- are there things that students today experience that you think would have enriched your own experience in college?

LH: Yeah, a little more freedom. I felt like I couldn't leave campus. You know, being a freshman, that we were really closely watched.

LS: I didn't go downtown without signing out.

LH: I felt very insecure. I- I started to question my ability, you know, to be independent and then all of a sudden I was independent and it was terrifying to be independent without any boundaries. You know, I felt like a bird let out of a cage into the forest or the jungle. You know, but then finally I figured out where the boundaries were. And then there was- I always felt safe having boundaries, which the College provided. But I find that a lot of kids don't have any boundaries now. They do whatever. Yeah, it's a problem, get into a lot of trouble. But education came first before everything else and we were very focused. Without boundaries you could just go off into the blue yonder and get totally lost.

BP: Was there- was there some sort of happy medium that the College could have reached? More freedom but with boundaries or do you think it was bound to rub up against them, one way or the other?

LH: Well, I think, juniors and seniors definitely had more freedom. Sophomores maybe-I was on academic probation, you know, which was a real hassle because I was always an A student in my high school and all of a sudden I wasn't and then I had to work really hard for a year and a half, and so I didn't go out. I didn't do a lot of stuff. I wanted to stay here more than anything. So, it didn't really matter.

LS: Do they still give them comps?

BP: No.

LS: No?

BP: No.

LS: Well, there's a change right there.

LH: I just- I just felt like, I came back as a sophomore and they were like, “Oh, you’re back? I’m surprised to see you.” And I said, “Yes, I’m back.”

BP: Well, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me today. It’s been a lot of fun.