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Suzette deVogelaere '69-Mary Kate Fox '19

Suzette deVogelaere

Mary Kate Fox

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Suzette deVogelaere: So, hi Mary ...

Mary Kate Fox: Hi.

SdV: Suzette deVogelaere, class of 1969. And today's June first. And why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself and your class.

MKF: I'm Mary Kate Fox and I'm class of 2019.

SdV: So, we'll start at the beginning. How did you- what made you decide to come to Connecticut?

MKF: Well, so I'm from St. Louis, Missouri originally and then- but my dad's from New Hampshire and my parents met at Dartmouth, and so I spent time, like, going to Dartmouth every summer and I would- I just- and my dad's a college counsellor, so I asked him, or he asked me, like, "What are you looking for?" And I was, like, something not like too much in a city but not so small like Hanover and, basically, something in New England. I wanted to kind of get away from the Midwest. And then he said, "How about- how about Conn?" And so, one summer when I was in New Hampshire we drove down, summer of high school and I visited and I fell in love with it, and, actually, it's the only place I applied.

SdV: I was going to ask ...

MKF: Yeah. It's the only place I applied and I knew it was test optional, so I didn't even take the ACT or SAT, because I was, like, that sure that I wanted to go.

SdV: So early admission?

MKF: Mmmhmmm. Early Decision. And- but my parents, they were like, "But we've got to make sure that you want to go." So then my senior year, I came in February so I could see it when it was cold. Because they were, like, you've got to see it- you can't just visit on a beautiful day in the summer and say you that want to go here.

SdV: From St. Louis.

MKF: Exactly. True.

SdV: So, did anything surprise you when you got here?

MKF: Definitely. I think the people were a big shock coming from the Midwest. I remember, like, talking to people in line in Harris and sometimes a few of them would- they would be, like,

"Why are you talking to me?" I don't know. I felt like it- not in that rude way, but I feel like it's definitely a midwestern thing to chat to the people in line next to you and not necessarily a New England thing. I also, like, didn't know anything about boarding schools or, like, Massachusetts, which is a big- a lot of people are from Massachusetts and boarding school, so I was definitely opened up to a whole new world coming here from St. Louis.

SdV: What about boarding schools surprised you vis-a-vis the students?

MKF: I think that, like, coming to Conn it was like, kind of a boarding- like, it was a similar kind of situation to a boarding school. And I think they would describe their experience and I just ... Like, one of my best friends went to it- to one- went to one and I just remember hearing, like, her high school experience vs. mine and I just didn't even realize that- that was people go to boarding schools in America. You know, I didn't even realize that.

SdV: Anything else? Any other surprise?

MKF: Any other surprises? No. I mean, I think one surprise was that everyone was very, very smart. And that was a big adjustment. Like, I think I went from being, like, a big fish in a small pond to kind of just being a fish in a big pond and everyone was very smart. I remember going to my classes and just, like, being kind of in awe of what other people are saying and, like, learning a lot not just from my professors but from my classmates as well.

SdV: What dorm did you live in?

MKF: I lived in KB my first two years, and Windham, and then Abbey.

SdV: Okay. What was that experience like, first in KB then moving to another dorm, which ...

MKF: I loved KB. I felt very lucky to be on North Campus, like close to Cro and to Harris and just had a really good experience and I don't know if Coffee Grounds was there when you ... I think it was a dining hall or something, right?

SdV: I think we might have had a little, small canteen-type thing, but it was very small.

MKF: Okay, but ...

SdV: The swimming pool was in the basement.

MKF: There was a swimming pool?

SdV: Yeah, you know where the dining- where the big arches are? That was- there was no- there was no health facility down there, so the swimming pool was where that dining room was and I think we probably there was a gym upstairs and the dance studios upstairs.

MKF: Wow. Wow, okay. Definitely different, yes. But, having Coffee Grounds there, I worked there, which was really fun and just ... I was a floor governor there my sophomore year, which was nice. All-girls floor on the fourth floor and that was just a really community to have at KB.

SdV: So freshman year, you were on an all-girls floor?

MKF: No, that was sophomore year. I was the floor governor of that all-girls floor. But freshman year, I was in a triple which, I think the next year was turned into a double because they were like three people is too many in that space. There were only two closets. But, that was definitely an adjustment, living in a forced triple, but ...

SdV: What's a floor governor, because didn't have those.

MKF: Oh, basically like an RA, yeah.

SdV: Yeah, we just had the one RA that was down ...

MKF: The house fellow? There was- but it had that term back then too?

SdV: Yeah, we had ...

MKF: Yeah, so there was ...

SdV: Seniors, there used to be, you know, older women that were- seniors ...

MKF: Oh, okay. The house fellow is, like, the main person in charge of the floor governors and, like, each floor has an RA, basically.

SdV: Anything else about living in the dorm? Or dorms?

MKF: Well, was it- because your year was the first year of co-ed. So did you have co-ed bathrooms?

SdV: We were the last ...

MKF: Last?

SdV: all-female graduating class, yeah.

MKF: Okay, so you never experience men here. Did you?

SdV: No. No.

MKF: Not officially.

SdV: No. No. Not really. Uh-uh.

MKF: Okay, but definitely, like, because sharing the coed bathrooms was a big culture adjustment too. But it was fun, it really makes you feel like family with your floor.

SdV: Were you eating in the KB dining room at the time?

MKF: There was no dining room. It was- it turned into the coffee shop.

SdV: Yeah, right. Oh right, that's right. And what was your major?

MKF: History. History. American history.

SdV: So, any particular memories of classes or professors you had?

MKF: Yeah. I loved Professor Stock. She was- she's American Studies, History. I remember taking this, like, history of the West class with her and learning- learning about the West, like the frontier for the first time and I found that really interesting, having really interesting discussions about, like Disney, and what- where Disney fits into American history. I remember Professor Queen or McQueen, I think. I took some, like, Asian history classes with her. Learned a lot about China, because I had never- just going from a public school in Missouri, there was so much I didn't get to learn in high school and I felt like my mind was just opened up here. Just learning about China, like I didn't even know like the French- I didn't know anything about French colonization until I came to Conn and I remember my freshman year seminar was- with Professor Etoke was, like, France and Africa: An Encounter. That was the name of it and I just remember having my mind blown in that class and, just- I think that was very telling for the rest of my- my academics. I remember taking a queer histories class.

SdV: Wow. What a difference.

MKF: Yeah. All about, just like, yeah, queer history and I just realized like the role queer people have in history and just like there were so many trans men out west because they could, you know start a new life and I just never really- just it opened my eyes to so many things. So, loved my history classes. I do remember I took a math class for my gen ed, but it was, like, the easy math class for not math people and we made all the streets- remade all the streets of New London into one-way streets and, like, tried to make it work out somehow and that was one of the assignments. And I thought that was pretty cool.

SdV: Did you get to implement or try it out? How did it ...

MKF: No. No, it was just, like, planning, like how can you make it work if all the streets are only one way. And I think- I think- I ... I don't know.

SdV: Was that an assignment or something you came up with ...

MKF: It was an assignment, I believe, yeah.

SdV: I was going to ask whether there were any classes outside your major that were particularly interesting to you.

MKF: That math class. I remember, oh I took a painting class. I loved that. I took it my senior year. I can't remember the professor's name, but, yeah I just really, like, learned how to- like, I had never really taken a legit painting class before and I remember thinking that it would be easy, but I ended up putting more work into that class than some of my other classes because you really could tell, like, critiques, like, how many hours you put into that painting. So, I am- I still like to paint now because of that class

SdV: Good. Good. Did they have pass/fail when you ...

MKF: Yes, I think so.

SdV: So you could choose a pass option. Did you go on to study abroad?

MKF: I did. I went to Paris and that was amazing. I was in CISLA too. Which was great.

SdV: But in terms of history did you go on with history in any way or ...

MKF: With my job? Yeah, actually, I am a history teacher. I teach US history to eleventh graders.

SdV: Where is that?

MKF: In Brooklyn.

SdV: Oh my gosh.

MKF: Yeah. Yeah, so I do. I do.

SdV: What's it like teaching kids in Brooklyn in this day and age?

MKF: It's hard. It's hard. It's fun. Definitely different every day, but, yeah, teaching is hard, but it's definitely very rewarding and that's what- what brings me back every day.

SdV: What about your education here prepared you to teach history to eleventh graders in Brooklyn?

MKF: Definitely, I learned, like, strategies from my professors, I think, just- even just teaching strategies, like assigning a text before and then discussing it during class, or something. I don't- I mean that sounds so basic, but I remember I do think of what worked. What did I like in college and, like, I want to implement that in my- in my teaching? But I honestly didn't really do much- didn't take any education classes. I don't even know if Conn has them, but I think just getting myself- teaching me, like, a lot of interesting things about history that I didn't learn in high school and now I can teach my high schoolers that. Because I often say, like, "I didn't get to learn this until college." And I- I think it's very special that I get to teach them that now, when they're younger.

SdV: Are you public school?

MKF: It's a charter school, yeah.

SdV: Alright, what about activities and groups? Were you involved in anything on campus?

MKF: Yes, I was in CISLA, which is- did you have- it's the Center for International Studies and Language Arts, it's like, basically, one of the centers, like the five centers that Conn has. But I had an internship in Paris my- summer after my junior year through that program. I also was involved in the Women's Empowerment Initiative, which was kind of a play off- but like it used to be called the Vagina Monologues, which was like women basically giving monologues on stage about their experience. And the Women's Empowerment Initiative, there were all the monologues were written by women at Conn. And so, it was just women on stage performing monologues, basically, about the women's- woman experience. So that was really fun. What else did I do?

SdV: Who did you perform? Who- who did you perform for?

MKF: The community. We had a show, I think like two shows and it was in Palmer. Yeah, it was fun.

SdV: And then, I interrupted you, so ...

MKF: No, I was trying to think of what else. I played, like, intramural basketball a couple of times. I was a part of the, like, floor governor/RA/housing people. Yeah, worked at Coffee Grounds, the coffee shop. Trying to think of- yeah that was- that was it. I kind of didn't do too much with school government or anything like that.

SdV: What was the climate on the campus when you were here. You know, I was here in the late 60s when we definitely had a climate. So, I'm curious what it was like for you at that time.

MKF: There was definitely- it's interesting because I do think that graduating in 2019 it's kind of at the very end of- I feel like post-2020 America is a like completely different place than 2019. So it's kind of the end of whatever pre-2020 was. The climate- like when you said climate I like

go to political for some reason first. I do remember there was a takeover of Fanning. I can't remember what that was for. I know there were big movements for divestment of money from fossil fuels and for climate change. I remember- but there wasn't like a palpable tension that I feel that there is at some college campuses these days and probably that you can attest to on your campus.

SdV: Right, right. So particularly events or controversies going on at the time?

MKF: Like not? I can't really think of- think of anything because it wasn't- with our old president, like, she was still fine when we were there.

SdV: Who was president at the time?

MKF: Katherine Bergeron. And then- I do remember there was this one sign, like Capitalism: Yes or No? It was, like, this art installation and you had to vote yes or no and then someone, like, stole a lightbulb from that exhibit and that was, like, a big breach of Honor Code. But, like, if anything the tension was just like between, like, just simple Honor Code stuff. I felt like there wasn't- people weren't- maybe that's- this is from my own point of view and I wasn't, like, super involved in stuff outside of Conn. I was in my little bubble, but I don't remember being, yeah, like bringing tensions from the outside world into Conn that much, which is, now that I'm looking back on it, maybe I would be a little bit more aware.

SdV: Say more about the Honor Code, as it existed in 2019, vs. 20-, you know, 40 years earlier.

MKF: Yeah, so, I mean, that was a big thing, like, no one locked their doors. The finals are all- you basically go and say, "I'm taking this final," and then they hand it to you and you can go to any room in Blaustein and take that final and then give it back when you're done. So, it's not like sitting and, like, people proctoring you. Which is a big adjustment. I think that also, just, you know if you lose something on campus, it's going to make its way back to you and my- I think for the most part that really was true, and- but then every so often, you know, something would happen that reminds us that we are living in a human and flawed world, not this perfect bubble.

SdV: How has that either helped you or hurt you in your post-college life, having that as your, you know, ethos.

MKF: Yeah, I think it helps you because you kind of assume the best in everybody instead of, like, assuming the worst. I don't know, because if locking your door every day is, oh, someone might come in, who knows. But, like, leaving your door unlocked, no one's going to do it. I don't know, like, assuming- assuming the best and not assuming that something bad will happen. I think that's kind of how it's affected me.

SdV: Has that come true in your ...

MKF: Yeah. I mean, I live in New York, so I've definitely had to learn things with that. You can't, like, leave your stuff down at a table and then go get your food and, like, come back, yeah.

SdV: So, tell- say a little bit more about your life after Connecticut. You went to Paris and what did you do there.

MKF: Well, so, that was when I was in- at Conn, I studied abroad in Paris. But, actually, after Conn I lived in Korea for a year, which was really fun. I taught English there. And then I moved back and- to New York. I'm only class of 2019 so it's only been five years.

SdV: How did you choose Korea?

MKF: I- well, actually my ex-boyfriend, who's also Conn alum, was adopted from Korea and we were both trying to figure out, like, what we wanted to do after Conn. My cousin had taught in Korea for a year and we were both just kind of like, "Let's do it." And we did it and it was great. It was really, really fun.

SdV: Did you get to travel around Asia?

MKF: Yeah, well, not Asia because we got there February 2020, like right when everything went down. So, we couldn't leave Korea, but we could travel within Korea, which was really amazing. I got to visit so many places I wouldn't have necessarily visited if I could fly to Japan for the weekend.

SdV: Anything else that comes to mind about how your time at Connecticut and your courses have shaped your life after graduation?

MKF: Yeah, I think that the first thing that comes to mind is friendships. Like, the friendships I made here and the community that comes from being at a place like this and- for four years. And I think that my friendships with my Conn friends are very unique and unlike my friendships outside of Conn, where it's like we have, you know, deep and thoughtful conversations about both, like, things happening in the world and our feelings and, like, just very, like, deep and meaningful friendships and not surface-level. And I think that's my biggest, you know, takeaway and I cherish those friends that I have.

[interruption]

SdV: So how do you stay in touch with those classmates?

MKF: Well, it's definitely easier now with, like, social media, where you don't even have to put in any effort but you can still keep up with their lives. But, I do have- I do live in New York, so that's- I have a lot of Conn friends who also live in New York. But I think it's hard to keep in touch, but I think, just, even if you haven't seen them in a couple months, just knowing that- just sending a text I mean, like, "Hey, thinking of you." You know, knowing that nothing has

changed, because we're all- we all went to Conn together. You know, it's like almost a family thing.

SdV: Let's see. This might be hard, because it's only been five years for you, but is there something happening now on campus that you wish you had experienced or is happening ...

MKF: A good question. I'm trying to think. Maybe, like, living in South- living on South Campus. I'm staying in Freeman now. That was the first thing that came to mind. I don't know, really. Yeah. Nothing's coming to mind right now.

SdV: Somebody who's going to start their freshman year right now at Connecticut, what would you say to them?

MKF: Try everything. Try everything, because this is the time in life when you can do it and there's no- not like- not- you know, within reason, try everything. But this is the time in life when you can do it and there's, you know, not too many, like, you're not going that far out on a limb to try new things. And ...

SdV: Give me some examples of ...

MKF: Just like clubs. Clubs. Making new friends. Going out- sitting at that table at the library, like sitting with those people in Harris that you might not want to- that you might be afraid to sit with. Go to the Arbo alone, if you- you're scared of doing that. I mean I'm thinking of, like, a first-year. Go to, you know, talk to that person that you like their sweatshirt. Don't be afraid to just immerse yourself in Conn fully. Because that's- you basically get in- you get out what you put in to Conn. So, if you put in a lot, you're going to have a great experience.

SdV: Just to finish up, what haven't I asked you that you'd like to say about your experience here at Connecticut?

MKF: Well, I think we've covered a lot, but honestly, I- it's a beautiful campus. I think that's one thing we haven't covered, it was just like- how meaningful it is to be in this space and it's a beautiful space. And now that I live in Brooklyn, you know, I'm- it's loud and there's- it's a city and I just miss the opportunity to be able to walk to Caroline Black garden or, just, I don't know. There's something very special about being in this space.

SdV: Have you seen the plans that they're- things they're going to revise what the pedestrian walkway ...

MKF: No.

SdV: Okay, I was going to ask you what you thought about that. So they're changing this road, I guess it's called Cro Street. That's all going to be a pedestrian walkway. They're redoing Cro and redoing the waterfront.

MKF: Oh yes, I knew they were redoing Cro. I was just at the waterfront. That is crazy. I used to love going down there. We- my friends and I were talking about where was our cry spot. And I would just go down to the waterfront and that's where I would cry sometimes, yeah.

SdV: Okay, great.

MKF: Thank you so much.

SdV: Appreciate it, Mary.