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### Ryan Rivera '25-Ruth Kunststadt Culp '69

Ryan Rivera

Ruth Kunststadt Culp

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**Ryan Rivera:** Hi, I'm Ryan Rivera, I'm class of '25. Today is June first and I'll be interviewing ... say your name.

**Ruth Culp:** Ruth Culp. Ruth Kunststadt Culp.

**RR:** And what year are you?

**RC:** 1969.

**RR:** Alright. So, my first question for you will be, to start off, why did you decide to come to Connecticut College?

**RC:** Well, I'm from Connecticut, originally and I needed financial help, but what made me want to come to Conn is when I came here for the first time, you know, for an interview and to see the campus and it was springtime, it was gorgeous, the tulip trees were blooming and I thought, this is what I always pictured college to be like, to look like. And then it helped when I got a full scholarship, so- but I never regretted that- a minute of it.

**RR:** I can relate, I also got a scholarship, so ... Same page, so then what if, or if, wait, what if anything about the College surprised you during your time here?

**RC:** Surprised me? Hmm. Well, in some respects, you know, we were the change generation, so when we came in 1965 it was sort of still like, maybe not quite the 50s, but I came from a public high school and I had, you know, a fair amount of freedom for the time and all that. It almost seemed like there were- it was more restrictive here. You couldn't wear pants off campus and, you know ...

**RR:** I heard about that, yeah.

**RC:** I used to wear, obviously, pants wherever, going to my friends' or whatever we were doing. You couldn't in school, it was true, like, when I was in high school, you- girls, couldn't wear pants, but everywhere else we did. And here it was kind of the reverse. You could wear pants on campus but you couldn't wear them off campus. I know. And so it's- and we had a curfew and we only got ten overnights away.

**RR:** Like you going- like you going off campus?

**RC:** Well not just- like away for the night or the weekend. You got ten a semester.

**RR:** Did they- like, how did they keep count if you were off site?

**RC:** You had to- well, we didn't have keys or anything

**RR:** Wait, so how did you get into the buildings? Like- like your room or ...

**RC:** Well, during the day the rooms were open. But at night, when the bell- okay, so I lived in KB, so I'm not sure how the Plex- how the Complex worked. I mean, I'm sure it was the same, but, we all had little jobs in the dorm, so, we had our own dining room ...

**RR:** In KB?

**RC:** In KB, which I- you know at the end of- on the first floor on the, I think it's a-

**RR:** Now it's Coffee Grounds, right?

**RC:** So that was the dining room and we had people cooking, you know, but we had to- we had to take turns waiting on the tables, clearing them.

**RR:** So you worked at the kitchen, like ...

**RC:** We didn't get paid. This was everybody, every student had a job. So- and you'd rotate. It wasn't for that- it was every day kind of thing. So, some- there was always a student -- we called them bell girls -- who, after, you know, once the doors were locked, but it was before curfew, we had a curfew ...

**RR:** What was the curfew? What time?

**RC:** Okay, you know during the week, I don't even remember, maybe it was ten? And on the weekends, maybe twelve? I mean, yeah, but you couldn't get in. You had to ring- the door would be locked and, you know, then they would let you in. For example, we didn't have keys until I was a senior. So, my junior year, I met my now husband, right, and we'd been out on a date -- who knows what we were doing -- but- and my best friend was the bell girl that night -- I have not forgiven her yet -- anyway, I was like five minutes late. The door's locked. So, and I guess when it was, like, curfew time, that was it. Like, she went up to bed, you know. So what I have happen is, my date had to drive me to the little gate, you know, right in front of Fanning Hall? The little Gatehouse?

**RR:** The Gatehouse, yeah.

**RC:** My date leaves. I have to wait for the one security car that's driving around campus to come and let me in my dorm. I mean, nothing happened to you. It was just a pain the neck, you know? I mean, it's not like the Honor Court did anything.

**RR:** Okay, no, because the way people describe it was like you went past curfew, like, were there consequences, or not really?

**RC:** Not really. I mean, maybe if you did something, like, were gone for two days without telling anybody. The attitude at that time at the College -- I don't know what it is like now -- was that they were in place of the parent. That's why we had to -- in parento locus, I think is what, you know, they called it -- they were responsible for us, so ... Hence, all of the- in fact, freshman year we had a house mother. Not an RA, an old lady who lived in the dorm, you know. We had to wear skirts to dinner. We had a tea one afternoon a week. So, this is like- sounds like ancient history to you

**RR:** It's just very traditional. That's what it sounds like.

**RC:** But, so we had all those kind of, you know, old-fashioned stuff, but on the other hand, there was such freedom on campus in terms of your education and I have to say. I'm probably going on and on and you have all these questions, but ...

**RR:** Take your time.

**RC:** You know, the College went co-ed the year after I graduated and I predicted that initially, not forever, but initially when that happened and guys came on campus, even if there were just ten of them -- which was sort of like what it was, I mean it was very few males that, you know, it took a while for them to build up and it's probably fairly even now -- and I said, you watch, the editor of the paper's going to be a guy, the head of the Honor Court's going to be a guy, the president of the class is- because it was still traditional for- and, when we were here, we did all that stuff. Now, you know obviously, eventually that, you know, all evened out, but I knew that was going to happen, because it was still a traditional enough place that, women, girls tended to defer, you know. And that was what was great about this school, because we were here, we were in charge, you know, we could do what- go as far as we wanted to.

**RR:** So was Conn kind of like an escape from, I guess, the more traditional world, because, like, you know, in, like, outside of Conn in the government the president is usually a male, or like usually men are in the higher power, so was Conn, like, since it was all-women was it a sense of escape, like, "Wow, women we could really, like, be president, we could do this ..."

**RC:** Well, I think, you know, a little bit. I- I wasn't very intimidated because I went to a public high school and I competed with guys, you know, for academically and all that. So, I- a lot of the- a lot of the girls that were here then -- I don't know the percentage -- but, seemed to me -- I don't have any numbers -- that a lot of them came from private schools, like all-girl private schools. Again, you know academically, they were great, but maybe not as socially, you know, adept because I at least had gone to school with guys and so ... Anyway, the school encouraged, you know, you to strive.

**RR:** Okay. And then could you talk about, like what your major was and what you studied in?

**RC:** European history was my major, so that was- well, and I also did enough to- student- you know, to get my teaching certificate. It wasn't really a minor. They didn't call it that, but you did student teaching, you did certain things that would get you the ...

**RR:** So did you get a teaching certification from Conn?

**RC:** Yeah.

**RR:** Oh, okay. Because I don't think they do programs like that any more, so, yeah.

**RC:** Right. Not that I ever taught.

**RR:** I mean, it's good to have though. Could you talk about your work at Unity House?

**RC:** I wasn't at Unity House.

**RR:** I don't know why. Oh, I think it was a different person, though, sorry. Well, going off of, like, involvement, were you involved in any groups or activities at Conn, at your time here?

**RC:** Part of- well, part of the financial aid was that I had a job on campus for like ten hours a week, but I worked in the publicity department, which was awesome. And, you know, I arranged for the photographer if they needed it, I interviewed foreign students, you know, so I really- I really loved that and considered even possibly journalism. You have to understand in those days certain things just were really ...

**RR:** Like, popular?

**RC:** No, they were kind of not as accessible to women, you know? Hence, the teaching certificate. There were certain professions that were, typical.

**RR:** It was like- it was like geared in a certain way because of how the standards were?

**RC:** Not- not by the school. By society ...

**RR:** By society in general. That's what I was trying to get at.

**RC:** So I- so I did that and then- I guess the biggest thing was -- I don't even know if you have this any more -- but, being a girls' school, they used to have fathers' weekend. Not that mothers couldn't come. Instead of parents' weekend, it was called fathers' weekend. And the junior class every year, whoever, you know, that year's junior class, put on an original musical. So, all that first semester -- I was the assistant to the director. So, first I worked with the writing staff, you know, we wrote the play and I'm writing notes and all that and then and we had, you know, wrote songs -- I didn't do the writing, but -- then once we were in production, I had to reserve all the rehearsal space and, anyway, that just occupied my whole semester, you know, doing the

nuts and bolts of getting the show on the road, so to speak. And- and I was on the newspaper, the campus newspaper.

**RR:** Oh, nice. Was it called the College Voice back then or what was the name of it?

**RC:** I can't remember. I can't remember.

**RR:** That's good. No, that's cool. So then, I guess we were kind of getting into it, but what was the general, like, campus climate when you were here. Like, were there any particular controversies when you went to Conn that happened or ...

**RC:** Between the students or because of what was going on in the world? I mean ...

**RR:** We can talk about both, because both are true statements in a sense.

**RC:** Well, Civil Rights. Big deal and we had marches on campus, you know, for Civil Rights. But pretty much everybody was on one side of that issue here. And, not really, I mean, I at least- you know I was- I had graduated before sit-ins and that type of thing. We didn't do that. There might have been- there was a small one, because I think my senior year, the CIA came to inter- came to interview and also I think a couple of the services. And I think- I think there was a small protest about that.

**RR:** And then my next question could be, like, what happened after Conn? What did you do postgrad?

**RC:** Well, I went to graduate school in Boston and then I got married. So, that kind of, you know, took over my life for a long time. And do you still keep in touch, like, with classmates that you went to Conn with?

**RR:** I do. I mean, you know, several of them and, not- not the daily kind of- a few of them I would see once a year and we lived all over the place, but yeah, so a few of them I keep in touch with.

**RC:** Alright. And then my last question, in thinking about college today is there something from your experience that you wish students today could have? Is there something happening on campus now that you wish you had experienced?

**RR:** Well, I, as I said, not initially what happened when the school went coed- no, I can't say that. I'm really glad I went to a single- female college, because I just think it really- for women at that time, not- -- maybe men didn't need it so much, but for women -- it really, really made you see the possibilities and made- that you- that you could aspire to and you didn't have to think about -- during the week anyway -- looking good, you know, and see today that doesn't exist, because, at least from what I can see with my daughters and things like that, it's just a total different relationship between guys and girls. So, you don't have- but when I was that age it

wasn't, you know, and girls would put on makeup, you know, to go to class, but not here they didn't. In fact, a funny story and I know you've got to go ...

**RR:** No, take your time.

**RC:** I had a couple- coming from Hartford, I had a couple of friends, guy friends from high school who went to Trinity College, you know? And they would come up here. So, during exam week, you just wouldn't want to see somebody in the middle of the week, you know, because no- not looking good from the weekend before, not getting ready for the weekend coming up, right? So, anyway, one of my friends happened to come on campus and kind of saw him, whatever. And then, like, the next week I saw another friend and he said, "Oh, so-and-so said he saw you on campus last week." I said, Oh, yeah and then in the next sentence, he said, "'Yeah,' he said 'boy, you should see those girls in the middle of the week.'" I mean, I wasn't insulted, but the point was, we didn't have to do it, you know, we didn't have to make sure ... And I don't think girls have to do it now, but that was- it was different then.

**RR:** Like, does the different societal standards of the time and just yeah ...

**RC:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I had friends who, you know, girlfriend who went to BU. She put on makeup to go to class, routinely, every day, because, you know, they were mixed classes and that's what girls did. But I didn't have to do that. I just had a, you know, enjoy my classes and not think about- not that I looked bad, but you know what I mean. Like, just, you had different priorities going into class and just, yeah.

**RR:** Alright. Well, thank you for letting me, like, sit in on this interview.