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John Tarbox '74-Lois Mendez Catlin '80-Denise Wheeless '80

John Tarbox

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John Tarbox: Okay. My name is John Tarbox. I'm the interviewer. I'm a Conn class of '74 and today is June 1st. So, you want to give me your name, class, and today's date?

Lois Mendez Catlin: Hi, my name is Dr. Lois Mendez Catlin I'm from the fantastic class of 1980 and today's date is June 1st.

Denise Wheelless: Hi, and I'm Denise Wheelless class of 1980 also and today's date is June 1st.

JT: Great. So, you- we can just go back and forth on the questions. Why did you decide to come to Conn College?

LC: We can't argue together?

JT: Sure. Go back and forth, whatever you want.

LC: We've been running buddies since college, since freshman year of this wonderful school. So why did I decide to come to Connecticut College? It's a very sort of convoluted answer I didn't actually decide to come to Conn College. Conn College decided on me. I wanted to go somewhere else.

JT: Didn't we all?

LC: But I'm very happy that I came here to be honest. It was a wonderful decision. I applied here in August right before classes started and it was one of those deals where I was from New York and my grandmother made the appointment brought me up here to see the campus because she knew I was sitting at a point where I needed to figure out where I wanted to go. But, we fell in love with the campus. She- we met the director of admissions. He toured us around. I already filled out my application, but pretty much on that day is when they said, "Sure, fine, you can come." And one of the major reasons why I came to Connecticut College was that I had funding. They paid for my way to come here and, as an inner-city, relatively frugally challenged person, that was a major decision for me to be here and I felt like once I was on the campus I felt sort of home and so, that's why.

DW: Okay, my superficial answer is a cute boy, but my real in-depth answer is that I had gone- I grew up in New York, I went to a large high school, and I really wanted a smaller learning

experience. I really wanted to go somewhere where people would know my name as opposed to what's your social security number- you know, that sort of thing. So, I wanted a smaller pond sort of experience, so I came here.

JT: Now, were- did- had your parents go to college?

LC: No, I was a first-generation college student

DW: The same here

JT: Same. So, obviously there was something your mom wanted you to go to college, so there was ...

LC: Well, my grandmother. I wasn't with my parents at that time, but my grandmother really stressed education for women and so she was very adamant that I wasn't closer to home the whole time, doing nothing. "You need to get out there and get an education."

JT: Which was great, right?

LC: Yes, it was excellent. As I said, she made the appointment, so she called up ...

JT: So, your, like, classmates in high school to where most of them going to college or ...

LC: No, some were from an inner-city school in Brooklyn too, from New York, and a lot of them- I think high school was going to be it. We were a select group that were at the top of the class and, so I think all of that group and there might have been 15 of us ...

JT: Were you together in high school?

DW: No, we met here.

JT: But you're both New York City.

DW/LC: Yes

JT: Brooklyn?

LC: Queens, technically Queens, yes.

JT: Yeah, and how about you, had your- were your parents pushing you to go to college?

DW: They weren't pushing me, but I was always a good student, so I think the expectation was that I would go to college. And I had gone to Stuyvesant High School, which is a specialized high school in the city and so it was sort of like- I think maybe- I'm the youngest of three and I think maybe for me it was sort of- they just- it was always an expectation. So ...

JT: And it worked out? Cool.

LC: Then we met each other

JT: Okay, next question, did you have any more you wanted to talk about that? Okay, what if anything surprised you about the College during your time here?

LC: I have a long list

DW: I'll go first. I don't know that it was- I think just as a student of color having gone to a high school beforehand where I, you know, it was predominantly white, so I had an introduction to that kind of environment. So, it was sort of like where I spent my summers in North Carolina with relatives, other people went to Europe and had different kinds of experiences, but I think I had already sort of adjusted to that sort of view by the time I got here and ... So, I'm not sure that anything really surprised me in that sense. But the whole experience was something new because I guess my parents didn't go to college, so I didn't really have a frame of reference for, you know, what it was supposed to be or you know, because, as I say, I'm on the Alumni Board now and I tell people, like, when I graduated from here I had no concept of whether I was an alum or a continuing relationship with the College, because I didn't have anybody that had had that experience in my life, so it was a whole world that I was introduced in that sense

LC: Well, one of my first surprises really was the opposite of Denise, so even though we were in the inner city together, my school was predominantly Black. There was maybe one white student and she and I and a few others were at the top of the class, so that's how I knew her. So, when I came here this school was the complete opposite. So, I felt very- it was surprising but I don't really know if it was challenging because I- I'm like this all the time, so I tend to fit in. But it was surprising, so I went from Brooklyn, highly cultural neighborhood. I came to Connecticut College, definitely not. So that was one of my first surprises. My second one that I- I was free and the amount of freedom that exists on this campus did not exist in my life. And from a heavily Hispanic Caribbean sort of background, there are rules for everything, okay, and

I came here and it was like, there's no rules. There's no one telling me what to do in terms of when to go to bed, when not to go to bed, what to put on, what to do. There was none of that. I was on my own. So, for me, that was a surprise. So, I came here thinking, so home was going to be transported here and there would be somebody like the house fellow or somebody who was going to be keeping track of me and making sure I did what I was supposed to do, go where I wanted to go. So, freedom came ...

DW: You thought you were coming to the 1960 version.

LC: I sure did, but eventually it worked out so my freshman year I spent it being wild and crazy and just like, well freedom I could go where I want and then I said, You know, you came here to study. You might want to do that.

JT: Let me pause this for a minute Okay, we're recording again. So the question was what if anything surprised you about the College during your time here. And, let's see, I mentioned I was one of the first men here. And when men first came, a lot of the alums were upset that they were no longer a traditional all-women's college and- so, I- you know, if we think of the traditional Conn student in 1911 when it started, you know, it was probably all white women from a certain social economic class and there were a lot of- now we have a lot more diversity on campus and I was curious if you had any thoughts about that or what it was like. It's yeah- it's probably different today than when you came here and we're sort of pioneers.

LC: It's somebody the same to be honest in terms of numbers of people that are on campus. Now, the type of diversity has changed. So, there are many varied groups before when I came it was Blacks and Hispanics. Now we've got Asians, we've got Southeast Asians, we've got some international students. That's been a growing population since I've been here, but I think for me other than just- I came from the city, so when I came up here, it was one of those- I was an English major and I- I guess I was young and I wasn't looking for racism and so many times I didn't see it or I didn't spot it as that and since I've left as an adult when you look back on your experiences you go That was a little racist when they said that in class about my not being able to write and definitely making it look like it was because I was black and so therefore I wasn't, you know up to snuff with the rest of the standards. While I was here, I had people asked to touch and feel my hair. See? Is it the same? So, I had experiences like that when I was here, but it was never done in a hostile or aggressive manner. And I mentioned not knowing or being aware only because I brought my yearbook here for this year and in going through my yearbook, I was looking through and said I didn't notice that I was on campus there's a giant Confederate flag flying- flying off the balcony of ...

JT: Really?

LC: Yeah, it's either Lambdin or one of the- you know, Harkness, what's next to Harkness right here? There's a whole- well, they took a picture of it and it is someone thought it was a good idea to put this picture in the yearbook apparently for 1980 and I was like That happened while I was here. Did I not notice that what was wrong with me?

DW: And that's interesting because I didn't see that and had no, you know I don't even think I remember seeing it in the yearbook, but when I came back here within the first, I guess, 10 years of graduating I could see through a dorm window there was a Confederate flag and I don't remember there being anything that overt when I was here. You know, I think that the racism that existed was sort of subtle. I don't think it was racism. I think there's a lot of, like indifference, like, we don't, you know, you're different, but we don't really know what to do with you and we don't know how to approach you, but I think that people who were probably if there was you know, extreme racism, you know, they could just avoid you. They just didn't- you just didn't interact because it wasn't the kind of thing where you had to interact with anybody. You really didn't- I suppose if you were doing like lab work or something with everybody, but it wasn't really something that- I just felt more I guess culture shock in the sense that, you know, it's not what you're used to. It's people that you're not used to being around. You're trying to figure out -- and some of that just comes with being 18, 22 -- you're trying to figure out who you are and you know, sort of what is the authentic you and so you're trying to work that out and you know, you don't want to be on high- I wasn't sort of one high alert for racism and I will say the only sort of racism or gender thing was from a professor, who, you know, I had a theory that you know, the southern accent came from Africans learning- teaching- speaking English. But I didn't understand how he could make that premise when we learned English from- African enslaved people learned English from white southerners. And then we had a gender thing, because it was a journalism class and I wrote something that said- it was about a wedding announcement, but I used Ms. instead of Miss in my essay and he's like, "Well, that's totally ridiculous, it's about a wedding. So, everybody knows that." He was like totally ...

JT: In 1980? Yeah, Ms. was accepted by the ...

DW: Right, you know, I mean, it might have been early like the, you know, early, you know ...

LC: late 70s

DW: '76, so, you know, it might have been a little earlier than that, but he was an older professor and he just thought that whole thing was, you know, ridiculous and was very

dismissive of it and we had had a discussion before I wrote it that, you know, he had said, you know, "I think it's ridiculous, but it was okay to use," but still when I read my article in class, he you know ,took umbrage at it. So, you know, so and you know, but again it, you know, it sort of taught me to stand up for myself and to, you know, and you feel like I was the only you know person of color in the class, so you feel all eyes on you as the other students are sitting there like ,they don't want to get involved, they don't know what's going to happen. They don't know what you know what to say. Everybody's ...

JT: It's a live time bomb.

DW: watching for your reaction and I think I, you know, like I said, I learned to speak up for myself and to sort of, you know, articulate it in a way that, you know, you don't come across as the angry person ...

LC: Confrontational,

DW: you know, confrontational or whatever, because my position was it's, you know, it's in use now and you previously said we could use it, so I don't really understand why it's an issue.

JT: No, like one of the things when I came here, like I remember I had a particular classmate or a woman who had horses say they bring like some \$10,000 horse with ...

LC: To campus?

JT: To campus because ...

LC: Wow, I didn't know that. There was a stable?

JT: They did not have horseback riding when you were? Oh, yeah, and they bring their, like, \$10,000 horse and keep it in the stable and, like, I didn't have any \$10,000 horse. It's like, you know, and this was their- their frame of reference in the way they've grown up and there cultural thing was just like totally different, you know.

DW: And I'm going to say a lot of times what you think may be race is really class and it's sort of like ...

JT: It's sort of like or just any kind of difference.

DW: Yeah, because you know, I had friends who went to let's say Howard University where it's predominantly Black and they had- you know, it was really along socio-economic lines because there were people at Howard who were driving up to- in school in Mercedes-Benz, you know. We had so- you know, it's not always- it's sometimes it's hard to judge when you're there.

JT: You didn't have a Mercedes?

LC: No, didn't have a car

DW: That sort of thing. Growing up, my dad had a good friend, his wife was a rich woman from New York City and she had, like, her cousin up visiting one summer reading New York Times and "It says- it says in the Times there's a water shortage in New York City, and I can't understand it because in my apartment every time I turn on the tap there's plenty of water. You know, it's like a- really insensitivity, right?

LC: It's more than that. It's like an ignorance not as in being stupid but just being totally unaware of what's going away because you're very self-centered and so therefore you- you're

JT: You're not stupid. Yeah, it's outside their realm of thought. Yes. So, anyway, so net-net did that help you or hurt you here Conn? I mean, did you learn from that and turn it to a positive?

DW: I think I learned from it because like I said, I mean, I spoke up for myself in class and you know sort of, you know, stood my ground and it's sort of taught me not to be intimidated by- you know, in that situation, even if it's somebody who has some sort of authority. You know, because it's a professor it can affect your grade. But I learned that, you know, it was important for me to develop that skill because, you know, in- in real life I've been- since high school, I've been in predominantly white environments, either school or work, and you have to navigate those. I mean, I think one of my, you know, first summer jobs at a firm out of- you know, when I was in law school, someone you know would come up and I was the only Black summer associate and he told me Jesse Jackson jokes all the time, every time he saw me. That was his only way of relating to me and so you can learn how to handle those situations somewhat diplomatically.

LC: Tactfully?

DW: Yeah, yeah. Somewhat diplomatically, but to sort of like, you know- so I think there is a you know a lot to be gained from that because the world is- you know, the world is the world

and you can't live in a cocoon and you can't be sort of sheltered from, you know, a lot of situations. I- I think now in some sense we try to childproof the world for kids ...

JT: Also, the challenge of being a woman ...

LC: Well, yes.

JT: and I thought- who was the Supreme Court justice woman who graduated from like Stanford in the early 60s, she was first in her class and she could not get a job as a lawyer.

DW: Was that- it had to be O'Connor or Ruth Ginsberg.

JT: No, it wasn't Ginsburg.

DW: Might have been O'Connor.

JT: So you're- you're going- you know, had you been 10 years earlier, you would have much- but certainly being a woman in the- still women are underpaid and you so you had multiple challenges.

DW: Oh, definitely.

JT: And I'm sure it's hard to know, you know if you're being treated a certain way is it because you're a woman or ...

LC: because you're Black.

DW: Well, it's funny because I went there was a debate ironically at Unity House about an issue and I went sort of toe-to-toe with this guy on, you know, my point of view and I must say I mean, I have two older brothers and a father and I always debated stuff with them. So, I never- I never felt sort of shrinking as a woman or a girl because in male environments I've been encouraged to speak my mind and then- but it was here that I realized that that's not always appreciated or expected, you know? It's sort of- which I think is really ironic. You're in a college. It's you know, it's going to be educated people and so for someone to think because of your gender, you're not ...

LC: not supposed to speak. Especially when it was a women's college. That's the part that always amazes me. This was a woman's college. What do you mean that we're supposed to be feeling inferior? It was ours!

DW: I think that some people who came here didn't fully realize that or whatever.

LC: But, culturally, I sort of come at it a little differently only because I come from a very heavy Caribbean Hispanic background and so women really were technically supposed to be sort of subservient, very quiet, very stay in the background, knowing full well in many of our lives that the women were the ones that ran the household, but we supposed to do it quietly because the men had to take the credit. So, when I came here, I feel like I- that part of me that was deep down -- I've always been a rabble-rouser -- that part of me that was deep down got the opportunity to come up. So, I'm always telling people I found my voice here, because this was the place where I could indeed say what I was thinking and wasn't able to say before and there wasn't going to be any fallout to that. I did learn that I needed to do it tactfully so I couldn't be the bull in the china shop, so I really had to figure out a way to say it so that it was receptive to other people and I learned that here also. So, I was the only Black dean at Bryn Mawr College for eight years and there were many situations where I would be treated extremely differently, but I had to be able to let the other person know, I see you and I see what you're doing and this is how it looks to me. I was in a meeting once and they went around the table and introduced everybody: Dr. So-and-so, Dr. So-and-so, Dr. So-and-so, Dr. So-and-so, Ms. Sadami, Professor this, Professor that, got to me and called me Lois. And I was like, really?

JT: Yeah, go get us some coffee

LC: Yeah

JT: Go get coffee, yeah

LC: I was like, oh no, I'm Dr. Catlin, thank you. It's not the same. So, Conn prepared me to be able to say that in a room full of people and not really be a shrinking violet and just go, Oh okay, I'll just let that pass.

DW: And I tell that to, you know, particularly to students of color here, that whatever your experience is, that it's all learning, it's all stuff that will be of use to you going forward in terms of, you know, my first legal job walking into the law firm's cafeteria and there's like this sea of white men and I'm standing there with my little tray and I'm like- and then it's like, you know, what do I do? And then one of the partners was like, "Come sit down, Denise" or whatever, but,

you know, even though you're, you know, you're an attorney and you're an employee and whatever and you should -you know, it's like, you have those moments still in life where you're like, okay, do I run?

DW: Where do I take cover?

LC: Exactly, where you just sort of have to, you know- and also it's a good thing to learn how- because we talk a lot about being people of color but that's not all we are, right? So, there are other facets to our personalities, so you learn how to be the most of yourself in any situation. Now, you can't, you know- you're not going to necessarily talk to your friends the way you talk to your coworkers or whatever, but there is something to learning how to represent who you are fully in an environment and I think that this- Connecticut College was one of the places that I started to do that.

JT: Cool. Okay, the next question, where did you guys live? Which dorms?

LC: Oh, we lived together freshman year down in the Complex.

DW: Was that Park?

LC: Whatever the first building was on the left, I don't even remember, Hamilton? No

DW: I don't know

JT: Then in the Complex. So it had these ...

LC: Two years, I had two years in the Complex.

JT: So, you had a double?

LC: No, we weren't together. I was down the hall from her

JT: And did you have the cinder block wall?

LC: Yes

JT: Yeah, yeah, that's what I had freshman for a single So that was nice having a single, wasn't it?

LC: It was.

DW: I had a single. She had a roommate

LC: Well, I did, we got divorced. I had a roommate, we got divorced.

DW: That's how we became friends because her roommate didn't get along.

LC: So, I was always in their room because they were down the hall.

DW: But I lived in the Plex for three years. My junior year I was in Windham and then my senior year I was the house fellow in Hamilton.

JT: So, you were in the quad all the time?

LC: Three years.

DW: Three years, yeah. The only time I was out was my junior year.

LC: No, I did two years out. I was in Harkness and Blackstone.

DW: Yeah. I lived in Windham my junior year but that was the only time.

JT: So, the- the older dorms were nicer, no?

LC: Yes.

DW: Yeah

LC: They were. I was on the fourth floor of Harkness with the room that had these nice eaves, looked out across the grass. I had plants hanging.

JT: And you had, you still had ...

LC: I could actually run up to the fourth floor, can you imagine?

JT: So, you actually- you still had food in your dorm at that point?

LC: Harkness didn't, we did, but Harkness didn't have a cafeteria.

JT: Right, because now everybody has to go

DW: Everybody has to go to Harris. Yeah, when we were here ...

LC: No, there was one here, what's it, what's the middle one? Windham?

DW: Smith-Burdick or whatever it may have been?

LC: Smith-Burdick, it's in the middle of campus., but one of these three dorms over there by Harkness, the middle one had food.

DW: And it was, yeah- there was- and then everybody only ate in Harris on the weekend during the week we had dinner in ...

LC: in your dorm.

JT: Yeah, yeah. Well, that had changed back in the 60s, they used to have formal dinners where you had to wear a skirt and dress.

DW: Thank goodness they changed that.

JT: Yeah, well a lot of things change over time, I would say. So, anything else you want to say about your residential experience, house, community, what it was like?

LC: I loved my residential experience. I really did enjoy having singles every single year that I was here. I hear that's not exactly the way it is anymore, but it was nice.

JT: When I was here it used to be 80% of the rooms were singles, which was nice.

LC: Yeah, it was, you know, I guess a selling point to people who were coming in after me. It's like, yeah, you get a single, you have a single, you don't have to worry about a roommate and all the things that come with them.

DW: Although I thought it was good to have a roommate the first year. Well, I had a really good roommate. I mean, my roommate and I got along, I guess.

JT: If you had a bad roommate.

LC: Like my roommate, we got divorced.

DW: Yeah, so I thought it was a good way to sort of be, you know, get adjusted to- because you had somebody built in, if you got along with them, you know, to partner with. And then it was nice, you know, going forward to have your own room and I was happy that they got rid of the center blocks when they renovated the Harris.

LC: That, it was like a prison cell. It was an icer. I think in the residential experience-wise. We used to have cheese and crackers, I guess I'd say with the faculty in the dining- in the living rooms all the time and it was such a social event for me. It was wonderful. So, I couldn't really be trapped in my room all my time, sulking, so I would get out, I'd go down, wine and cheese. That's what it was.

DW: I remember the afternoon tea, like Wednesday afternoon.

JT: I never went to the afternoon teas. People keep telling me about it now. I learn about the stuff I never know about.

LC: See, she remembered the tea. I remember there was wine and cheese there.

DW: Yeah, I just remember that, because, you know, one of the things I think that, you know, was sad in the last few years is that because they had so many students, they got rid of common spaces, you know, for people, and that's like part of ...

LC: That was where you gathered.

JT: I remember when I was here, they- the fact- was the fact that they would serve sherry.

LC: They'd buy wine and cheese

JT: Well, yeah, not just wine, they'd serve sherry. They must have had a holdover from when there was a women's college,

DW: So, when you were here, were there, like, all-male dorms?

JT: No. In other words-

DW: They went fully co-ed?

JT: Fully co-ed. The bathrooms were co-ed. The showers, no, all that was co-ed.

LC: No, we had floors, so the bathrooms ...

JT: We had floors, yeah, but still, you'd end up with people on the other floor, yeah.

DW: Well, the middle floor was always co-ed, because I was staying on that floor, but my father was highly upset that they were co-ed bathrooms.

JT: Oh, I'm sure, I'm sure, yeah. Some of these traditional, you know- like, yeah, like I said, there were many alums that didn't want the guys here. Let's see, what did you study, your major and do you have memories of classes or professors that stand out?

LC: I did English, and I was certified to teach. Certification in education was not a major, it wasn't even a minor at the time

JT: Did you have to student teach?

LC: I did.

JT: And so, you got certified in Connecticut then?

LC: I did.

JT: And was that transferable?

LC: It was, but I never used it.

JT: Did many people actually get certified?

LC: There was enough people in the whole- the group that I was in that was getting certified at that time.

JT: And where did you student teach?

LC: New London High School.

JT: New London High School.

LC: It taught me that I did not want to teach high school students, so that's- so when I left, I went to grad school and got my degrees in teaching college students. I was like, they seem to have their act together. So, that's what I did, so I never really used the teaching part of that, but the English part I use to this day

JT: When did you decide you wanted to be an English major? Did you know that when you came here?

LC: No, I don't think I would know what I wanted to do in life when I came here. I think I decided while here on campus, but I think it was also because I am good at writing and so I found something that I was good at, I could express myself well and it was fun. Now, I wasn't really into English lit, which is what they made us do at the time, but I'm more on the sort of creative writing, poetry writing sort of side, but that was a decision I made here.

JT: So, when did you make it, like sophomore year?

LC: Sophomore, probably, freshman year was sort of like a let me explore my world and all my freedom.

DW: I think I chose government because I was- I think I had it in the back of my mind that I was going to go to law school and that seems like always, you know, the most obvious choice. And also, I was, you know, if I probably- I think my choice was going to be either government, English or history, because those were the three things that really to this day I'm still interested in, but I also always had interest in government and how things worked in that respect. And I had it in the back of my mind that I was eventually going to go to law school, so ...

JT: And did you go to law school as soon as you graduated?

DW: No, I actually took a year or two off and I worked, because I really, -I knew I wanted to go to law school, but I really wanted to get in the real world as it were and so I worked as an assistant buyer right after college for a department store.

JT: A lot of, in my class, a lot of the women would go be buyers for federated department stores, it seemed to be a common. So where did you go to law school?

DW: Columbia

JT: Okay, and Conn obviously helped you get in there?

DW: Yeah, yeah.

JT: I mean, Columbia is an excellent law school, you don't just go knock on the door.

DW: No, I think it helped me greatly because I got into every law school that I applied to. And I didn't get in every college I applied to.

JT: So, you chose Columbia?

DW: I chose Columbia because, I had- you know, it was very important to me when I chose Connecticut College, I wanted- I knew I wanted to go away to school. I didn't want to stay in New York. I wanted to have the experience of living on campus and so, by the time I went to law school, in terms of money or whatever, I already had an apartment in New York and I, you know- so I wanted that experience of, you know, being a student in the city, which I hadn't been since I was in high school, so ...

JT: Now at that time, was law school gone to three years or was it still two?

DW: It was three years.

LC: Yeah, three years.

JT: Because back in the 60s, law school used to be two years.

LC: Just two?

DW: I don't think I knew that and it really should be. I would say it should be two years and then the third year should be all practical. You should just work for ... Because I don't think you're learning anything new in the third year and I think a lot of what you learn in law school if you're not using it in practice doesn't really mean anything to you. You don't really see how it

fits in. So, I think two years with a three year sort of as a practical thing would make more sense.

JT: And when did you go to grad school?

LC: Immediately after.

JT: Immediately. And where did you go again?

LC: Columbia.

JT: So, you both- okay, yeah ...

LC: Teacher's College

JT: So, she was in Columbia and you were in New York, so I wanted to get together with my friend and it was ...

LC: Yeah, kind of a twist. You see, the Teacher's College is now called the Graduate School of Education. It was called Teacher's College back then.

JT: But once again, Columbia is a good school and Conn ...

LC: Oh, excellent. I got three degrees from there.

JT: Did you have any professors you wanted to name and stand it out or anything?

LC: Here?

JT: Yeah.

LC: George Willauer. He was in the English Department. I loved George Willauer. I think he loved me too. George [Robert] Hampton was also somebody else that I sort of connected with here. But other professors ... the other one I remember is Barkley, Barkley Hendricks. We weren't, like, friendly-friendly, but I have to say, I think we went in the same circles. But Barkley Hendricks would be another one that I said really sort of stood out here for me and Dean Joan King. So, I have four She was the dean here.

DW: Not so much professors, although Dr. Robert Hampton, I mean, he was a sociology professor and I took sociology or whatever, but, you know, it's just the intro or whatever, but I think as a professor of color he was sort of important, just in terms of, you know, in that aspect as well. But I was a house fellow my senior year and I really have fond memories of Dean Watson who managed that program and, you know, took care of us seniors who were put in positions to be, you know, pseudo-adults over other students.

JT: Right, helped you out, okay. Were you involved with any groups or activities that were important to you?

LC: I was a DJ. WCNI. I was a DJ at the radio station. I really enjoyed that. I was involved with my class, so I believe I was ...

DW: You were vice-president?

LC: No, vice-president. Laurie was president. I was vice president of my class, so I enjoyed doing that and I was on a crew team. That was only for a year though. I only lasted a year.

JT: What did you row? What position? What boat did you row?

LC: No, I- I was eighth. I was the person that brought it up.

JT: But you were the coxswain?

LC: No, I never count the cox- I never count them. They're just a ...

JT: Oh, so you were in an eight-person shell?

LC: And I was the eighth person

JT: Right. Did you enjoy that? I mean, that's hard work.

LC: It was. That's why I hesitate. You know, running around the block used to be my exercise. I came here and they were, like, running down to the river and crewing every morning and then we had to go lift weights and then we had to go ...

JT: Were you on the varsity?

LC: Yes.

JT: So, you were doing well. Did you see that movie that came out in the last year about the kids from the University of Washington that went to the Olympics in the 1930s?

LC: I have to watch it

JT: Oh yeah. And it's all these poor kids and like this one guy, you know, he couldn't- he had no scholarship. He couldn't really afford to go to school, but if he went and made the crew team and then he got free housing. It's a great movie, you'll like it.

LC: I have to watch it. The crew team taught me how to swim, so they're the reason I know how to swim to this day.

DW: I think the two things that stand out was I was involved in Unity House when I was here and also my year as a house fellow.

JT: So, tell me a little bit about Unity House, because I see you're wearing the t-shirts, but I know nothing about it.

DW: It's funny, we just had a session with ...

LC: panel

DW: past directors of Unity House and how it started or whatever. Because if you imagine back in the initial days students felt very isolated. Also, there were no African American studies and so it sort of started as a- a place to give students of color a place to be on campus to connect. And it's expanded. It used to just mean Black and ...

LC: Hispanic. Well, it started off Black, then sort of we added Hispanic.

DW: Then it's like Asian, South Asian, LGBTQ. I mean, it's like- and there's a lot of international students now.

JT: They're inclusive

LC: Now it is. It's really innovated.

DW: We've really expanded what it, you know, what it means.

JT: But it wasn't a dorm.

DW: It was- it used to be in the house by the ...

LC: It's called Vinal Cottage, across the street, 32.

DW: And there used to be room for four students, so four students used to live in it. It's since moved on campus, right next to Becker.

LC: And no one lives in it.

DW: No one's lived in it. I think that may be because of the plumbing problems they had or whatever.

JT: It's used to get together and socialize there?

LC: Oh, yeah. We used to relax.

DW: We used to have parties there. We used to, you know- so, it really was sort of like ...

LC: The house was always open, I guess I'd say. You could go across the street and sit in the living room, study, relax. You could schedule, like, having meetings or rap sessions or stuff like that.

JT: So how often would you go over there? Like all the time?

LC: I don't know about all the time. It was across the street.

DW: You know, I mean, I would say some students used it more than ...

JT: Like several times a week?

LC: Yeah.

JT: So, it was a regular thing.

DW: So, and then, you know ...

LC: They had a kitchen. You could have meals over there and all that stuff.

DW: And now they use it, I mean- like I said they've expanded it. They'll do different- they'll have meals down there Asian cooking or, you know, whatever, they'll have different sort of experiences down there. The second thing that was sort of impactful was being a house fellow. And because I was a Black house fellow, I had a lot of freshmen in my dorm who were- swho are- ome of whom are here this weekend. They were like my children in so many ways.

JT: And you got paid to do that? Plus, you got a better suite?

DW: You got a really nice suite before they cut them up in the Plex. It used to be a really nice one-bedroom apartment with maid service once a week.

JT: Oh really?

DW: Yeah, and I think that you got a break on your ...

LC: tuition. I think you got, like a stipend, they called it, a reduced rate.

DW: A reduced rate or whatever, but it really was interesting to me because they slap this label of house fellow on to you and because- maybe because they're freshmen, people actually come to you like you know something, like you're a real adult and you're still figuring it out,

LC: Like you're a counsellor.

DW: But it was really impactful for me I really enjoyed that role. And I love to see the students that were in my dorm.

JT: And you developed leadership skills.

DW: Yeah, you learned how to, you know, sort of talk people through things, you know, especially with freshmen, because you had people who were homesick who were trying to adjust to being, you know, to being away from home.

JT: Sure.

LC: Some were crazy.

DW: Some people were just ...

LC: The skunk.

JT: I always say in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king, so if you have one more year of experience you're the king.

DW: She's referring to the skunk story, because there were two different dorms of guys, they found- somebody found a skunk, a dead skunk and they put it in one dorm and those guys took it back over to the other dorm and you could smell this thing halfway to campus and it was in my dorm at some point. And so, I'm like, They don't pay me enough to deal with this, you know?

JT: That's funny. Okay let's see, what was campus like- campus climate like while you were here. Do you remember any particular events or controversies. Like this year, the whole thing with Palestine or 1969 when the students went on strike.

DW: I think we kind of, like- It's funny because there's like these Fanning takeovers that were all around us ...

LC: Around us, but nothing happened while we were there.

DW: I don't think anything, you know, happened at least politically that was as big as some of the events or even last year with the whole president.

LC: Well, Tony just mentioned because he technically was before us because he knows Lionel -- he's always asking me about him -- so, his year had a takeover. But then we came in '76. He graduated in '75. So, he got- they got permission to have Unity across the street. They started a- so, we technically came in at the tail end of the "We made them happy, so let's see what we can do to keep it going." So, our four years were like "Oh yeah, honeymoon." And then when we left the honeymoon stopped and then there was some more controversy.

JT: During the war were there any major events where you really remember?

LC: Martin Luther King passed.

JT: Well, that's a major event.

LC: Not during our time, but that's what I remember.

DW: That was '68.

LC: No, but I'm saying, it was one of the things that sort of led me as I was here, I was like I keep fighting.

JT: When did John Lennon get shot?

DW: That was '80 I think.

JT: Was that while you were here?

DW: It would have been.

LC: It might have been.

JT: So, it wasn't a big deal to you?

DW: It wasn't our senior year.

LC: To be honest I really have to say, I was a young teenager. There really weren't many things like that was a big deal to me.

DW: It was to me because I remember seeing The Beatles as a really little kid on the Ed Sullivan show, and so- and it happened in New York, so ...

JT: So that's why I was wondering if there was any world event that kind of stood out.

DW: I remember, I think- I remember- I know Reagan was elected and I remember saying to people who were not political, I bet you'll pay attention now, because it would have to be ...

LC: You would have to say that to me, because I was not political.

DW: Well, I was a government major. I was always interested in politics, you know, which makes me sad now, because I don't pay- you know- because of current situations. I don't pay attention. I have to filter it out of my life.

LC: Were there any wars while you were here? I don't know.

JT: The [unclear] War.

DW: The Gulf War was after and Vietnam was before, so it was a good time of life.

LC: It was. It was a nice time to be here.

JT: Okay can you talk- we've talked about some of this, but can you talk a little bit about your life after Conn? How did your experience at Conn shape your life after graduation if at all?

LC: I think I'm a stronger person because of my time here at Conn. It helped me make career decisions that I probably would not have had the opportunity to make otherwise. My coming to Conn, it's- when I was at Bryn Mawr I did admissions and you know there's always the colleges where you mention them and people go, "Oooh, they had a really good education, so we want to make sure we keep them on our top list." Conn is in that list. And so, I think that made a decision with where I applied to when I was looking for grad school, where I applied to when I was looking for work, the fact that I had what people assumed was a very foundational strong educational background helped them choose me and me choose them. So, it did have that type of effect on me.

JT: Well, let me ask you another- some people come to college and, like, I hate this. I can't wait till I graduate. I'm going to do anything but education. I never want to go back to school again.

LC: I was a teacher.

JT: Right but when you were, at Stuyvesant High School- no, I'm sorry ...

LC: Bay Ridge.

JT: Bay Ridge. Were you thinking, "I'm going to get a Ph.D.?"

LC: I don't think I thought I was going to get a Ph.D. I don't think that was in my realm of opportunity until I came here.

JT: Right. So, when you came to college there was something about education that you liked. You said, "Now I want to go to grad school and get more."

LC: And I want to teach other people so that they will be able to have these opportunities also. But yes, no, I don't think that going on to doctoral school was just- it wasn't. Didn't think about it then.

JT: Well, I'm thinking about sometimes you go to a restaurant you try a new food and if you get -this is terrible. I never want to eat this again or that was really good I'd like to ...

LC: Oh, no. Conn did that.

JT: So in terms of education Conn was kind of ...

LC: It was like a spark. It did- I think so. I think the conversations I had in grad school I was able to have them because of the conversations that I had here and when I had them here, I was like, Oh, that's interesting. Maybe grad school will be even more interesting.

JT: And you felt Conn prepared you well for grad school?

LC: Definitely, I do.

DW: It's funny, my Conn experience is sort of colored now, because I've been on the Alumni Board for five years, and so in many ways it sort of brought me back in a way that I have a fondness for this place now I don't necessarily think I had when I graduated or an appreciation for it. And part of it is because on the Alumni Board there are all different classes. Like, you know we have women from '69 and whatever and there is a certain, I think, Conn spirit, like a Conn person. Because I see it in those women, a curiosity that still exists, a real interest in people. And it's funny, given their era I don't ever feel anything racial from them in terms of like, you know- so it's, you know- that's been- that and being able to connect with current students, which is something I probably wouldn't have experienced, I wouldn't have had without the Alumni Board, have been real blessings in my life and I really appreciate that. So, I would- I think because I've served on the Board and made connections with people from other classes that I will always, even with all of its problems, I will have a fondness for this place.

LC: To add to that, serving on the Board, so it will be on the record, I now have friends that I know I would not have made here, because I just don't think, based on them, that we would have talked. But because we were on the Board together and because it gave me the opportunity to really get to know them, to see a different perspective and all of that stuff, I now have friends that I was like, Oh wow we're probably going to be friends for the rest of life. And it was all because of the Alumni Board exposing me ...

JT: So, you're already getting into the next question, do you keep in touch with your classmates?

LC: Well, ask the two of us!

JT: Well right there is the start. But you do tend to keep in touch with a bunch of your classmates?

LC: Yes.

DW: Yes.

LC: Not only my classmates. So, my husband is class of '79. I keep in touch with all of his friends. So, I keep in touch with them also. And then there's a couple of classes that came in while we were here. So, some of them -- I was just mentioning one of them -- I get a Christmas notice from her family every single year. And I was like oh that's so cute. So, we exchange at least once a year and I think she was three classes below me, so ... So, yeah, it's not just my class, it's all around.

DW: Yeah, I would agree.

JT: Now how about you- the kids you went to high school with, do you keep ...

LC: No

JT: So Conn is much different than that?

LC: Yes

DW: Yeah, I have one friend that I keep in contact with that's like from 6th grade, but other than that I think all of my friends were met after.

LC: I think because inner city schools also are very much of a you graduate, you leave, you move on with life. But here you sort of lived with these people for four years and so you develop much deeper meaningful relationships than I'm going to take the train, meet you at school, do whatever. Then I'm going to get back on the train, go home. So, it's different.

JT: Okay. So let's see, final question and then we go to the bonus round. In thinking about the College today is there something from your experience that you wish students could- students today could have -- it's a two-part question -- is there something happening on campus now that you wish you could have had experienced while you were here?

LC: Study away. I know what my experience is. Now, I don't know if it existed when I was here, but if it did, it wasn't advertised enough because I never heard about it. I would have studied away.

JT: What is it?

LC: Study abroad.

JT: Oh, study abroad.

LC: I would have taken a semester and gone somewhere else.

JT: Well, that was definitely here when I was here.

LC: So, then I just- I never heard about it. And I was like, Oh, really? After I left, I was like that program existed? So, I would have done that

JT: See, like I had a couple of classmates that did their junior year at Dartmouth. A lot of students did junior year in Europe, so it was ...

LC: Yeah, the Europe part. We have a friend who did a semester someplace else, but I meant away, like internationally away.

DW: It was- I don't think it would have- and I think it's- and this is one of those situations, like I said, class plays into it. I don't know that we would have seen that as a real possibility. At least I don't think I would have seen that as a real possibility to go and do that. For something I think I wish the students had, it was our tuition, because our tuition ...

LC: Oh gosh

DW: It's like, I tell people when I want to blow young current students' minds I tell them from Conn and law school, I owed a total of \$24,000. Which you can't even do a semester someplace ...

LC: No, not even a quarter, half a semester. I mean really

JT: No like being in the house, hitting a hundred grand a year. And for tuition, room, and board, full.

DW: And in terms of what I wish, I'd had -- and again I think this comes from being young -- a different perspective, because I actually took an art history class as an adult, a night course while I was working, because I didn't take it here and I think it was sort of like, why didn't you take it when it was, like, all paid for, and, you know- and I do find the students here -- maybe it's because of the Connections program they have, you know, a much more varied- even if it's not something they're going to major in or something they're going to do in long term, I think they have much broader experiences ...

LC: They try it out

DW: They try, you know, try different things and create their, you know, majors in various interesting ways and definitely more involved in anything. You know, because I'm on the Board I've interviewed, like, young- you know, we take the recent graduate on the Alumni Board and these kids are involved. I mean, some of them have started their own businesses. They've created non-profits and while they're students they do incredible things, but I think it's of that generation that they have such a wider view in some ways than we did. Because you know it's like we go to school, you get your degree, you get a job in your field and you ...

LC: It's like prescribed.

DW: Yeah, this ...

JT: Listening to that- well let me ask you, when you were in high school, did you take like a class trip? Did you- did you do things summer ...

LC: Local stuff, so ...

JT: Did you ever leave the city?

LC: No

JT: See like in Maine, used to be like a big deal, it was a class trip, you'd go to Washington D.C.

LC: Ok, no.

JT: Nothing like that

DW: No, it was like, and I don't even remember, like, in elementary school or junior high school you did ...

LC: like museum trips around the city ...

DW: Yeah, I was going to say museums and that kind of stuff, but I don't think in high school ...

JT: So, you guys never went to summer camp. Pretty much until you came to Conn you'd been in the city?

LC: Yes

DW: Well, no I had to- my parents are from North Carolina, so I spent all my summers from the time I was probably ten until I was eighteen in North Carolina.

LC: Now mine was in the city.

JT: You see because back in my generation if somebody had gone to Europe in the summer, that would be like a major thing. Now it's like ...

LC: Everybody goes, I know.

JT: Oh, you know, I went to Kenya, I went to here, I did this, I did that. Now it's, like, whoa, it's changed so much.

DW: It's a whole different world, a whole different world.

LC: I did take photography here, which is one of the things that I enjoyed, really, probably because I hung out at Cummings a little bit. But I took a photography course that I loved, like how to develop it, how to do all ... I still have pictures that I took from when I was on campus here.

JT: See, you're on the Board, so let me ask you, one of the things Conn does is an internship program, right? And if a student gets- Conn will pay them a salary if they get a non-paid internship, right? They didn't have anything like that when we were ...

DW: No.

LC: No. I don't remember ...

JT: Is that something in which you feel if you had had it then it would have been beneficial to you?

LC: If they were going to pay me, yes.

JT: Well, did you get any kind of - what did you do in the summers?

LC: I worked at a record store.

JT: Ok, but I ...

LC: That was it! So, I didn't do anything major-related, nothing related to what I was doing here, but if I could have and gotten paid for it, I would have.

JT: So- so is that effective now for the students today? Are they getting better opportunities in the summer?

LC: I think so, yes.

DW: Oh, definitely. They're getting better opportunities, just generally.

JT: So that's something you would have liked to have had while you were here.

LC: And I think a lot of alums now, because of where we are in our lives are able to offer those type of opportunities, so that somebody can go work with an alum someplace and, you know, not really have to shell out a lot of money in order to make it happen, so ...

DW: I also would have liked the variety of food at Harris.

LC: Oh, yes!

DW: Our dining was- you know, you were lucky if you had two choices.

LC: I always remember beef au jus. It's, like, I'm from the city, like what is au jus?

DW: London broil.

LC: London broil in some watery gravy.

JT: You know what I mean? It's like the jokes about English food. It's just bland, bland as hell and a lot of it. That would be the definition. You know, here's some mashed potatoes with nothing on them.

LC: The best part was the free dessert. My husband had a friend who came up to visit him while he was here, that was the part of dinner that really excited him, "You get free ice cream every night?" I was like, Yes, they give us free ice cream.

JT: I came here, like, we had Dannon yogurt. I never had yogurt until then. Oh, this is new food. And we had the mystery mocha that- Have you heard the story of the mystery mocha? It's mocha dessert and one of the people in the cafeteria made the mystery mocha and she died. But when she died, she was the only one that had the recipe.

LC: Oh no!

JT: So they lost the recipe. But somebody today said they had come up with the recipe ...

LC: For the mystery mocha?

JT: Yeah, so that was like a big deal. We lost the mystery mocha, but, yeah exotic foods were not a big deal.

LC: They were not. Any more questions?

JT: That is it, but there anything else you'd like to add?

LC: No. I think this is a really good opportunity to sort of keep on file what's been going on at the campus. I've been on the Board some time and I keep going, Why are we still reinventing the wheel? Why can't we go look it up and see what happened? And it's because no one's been keeping records like that. So, this is like a perfect way to say what happened.

JT: Let me ask you an interesting question. Did you do anything with computers while you were here?

LC: Oh God, yes, I did. I always remembered my computer experience in the basement over there where I spent like 7 hours trying to figure out something and ...

JT: Did they still have the IBM 1130 in the basement?

LC: Yes, with the little cards with the little punch things. Yes.

JT: That came here in 1971, my sophomore year. So, it was still there? Was it still there when you graduated?

LC: Oh, that I don't know. I know it was ...

DW: I never used it. I took type.

JT: Did you take any computer classes?

DW: No, ironically. I took one in high school, but I never took one here. In high school it was still like the punch cards. What was it, FORTRAN language?

LC: It was punch cards here.

DW: They're the reason that I decided not to ...

JT: You didn't have a PC here?

DW: No, no.

LC: We had a typewriter. Are you kidding?

DW: That's one thing I wish, you know, if you had a laptop. We didn't have no ...

LC: We had typewriters with carbon paper ...

JT: And it was like, Oh I want to change that.

LC: There was no changing.

JT: No changing, right?

LC: It took me a long time, I have to say, to move from doing handwritten things to just typing on a laptop, because I was always of the- because we had to write everything out because we couldn't type, because if you made a mistake you had to redo the whole thing, so everything was handwritten and you had to get it perfect handwritten, so you could then just pretty much transcribe it for the English department.

JT: So you- so you never got a- any kind of PC?

LC: Not while I was here.

JT: So, did you take a computer course while you were here?

LC: Yes, I did. I was the one with the Fortran and the cards and stuff down in the basement.

JT: What was it called? Intro to ...

LC: Oh, God, I don't remember.

JT: And did many people take it or ...

LC: Yeah, I think there was a fairly decent amount of people in that class to be honest. There were. It was a core requirement at the time I remember, because that's the only reason I would have taken it.

JT: Because it definitely wasn't while I was here.

LC: Well, it was like an option. So, I could either do like intense math or I could do computers. So, I chose computers, so ...

JT: You had experience at Bryn Mawr?

LC: Yeah.

JT: Now with Bryn Mawr essentially everybody gets some kind of ...

LC: Yes, they do.

JT: So, it becomes a mandatory class. So, my interest in computer science particularly the history here, it started from something. It's like a typewriter it's not an academic thing. It's just a tool to it's a mandatory part of a liberal ...

LC: Part of- yes, it is.

JT: So you were in that transition period.

LC: Yes, at Bryn Mawr all the students had to do computer science courses or some type of computer ...

JT: And Conn got the computer science department I believe in the late 90's.

LC: They have an IT department now. I was like, Oh, IT.

JT: It became- was like 20 years after I graduated.

LC: Oh, wow.

JT: Yeah. Were you at Starks, what, the luncheon yesterday? Stokes luncheon? Starks?

LC: Sykes Luncheon.

JT: Oh no, you had to be 50.

LC: I was not in that class.

JT: They had a German professor talking about AI and its impact in the classroom. Are they going nuts at Bryn Mawr? Like ...

LC: Well, I'm not still there, but they are. My son uses AI to write letters and I'm always going, You didn't write your own letter? What you doing? What's with that?

JT: Somebody is turning in a paper, and you know, like is it really a paper or how do you tell?

LC: We have arguments over that, because as a professor if you didn't write it, it is not yours, So, you told the computer the parameters, sure, but the computer wrote it, so how is that yours? They technically did the research, you know, so ...

DW: I think technically you're not supposed to be using it to write ...

JT: You certainly should cite it.

LC: Well, you should, but I don't think they do.

JT: But, don't even start that. You know, at BU, they have problems with people who plagiarize stuff and my attitude is you're out. This is grad school. You're a major institution.

LC: Yeah, especially in grad school.

JT: High school sure. But, no, the Asian students are really bad. We have to warn them, you know ...

LC: When you're an undergrad, I allow you to make mistakes, but by the time you get to grad school ...

JT: Being a mistake is different than plagiarizing.

LC: Well, it is.

JT: Remember when we had the Honor Code?

LC: Yeah, we did. Deliberate plagiarizing is a different thing, so, yes.

JT: Yeah- well, did you have- there used to be a time when math- they made you do your own math. You couldn't use a calculator, because this was an important skill for life. At this point, you could ...

LC: You could use a calculator for everything.

JT: So, I don't know if AI is going to follow the same ... You know, maybe there was a time it was important to learn how to type. I definitely use word processing.

LC: Yeah, I do too. I don't know, I'm mixed about it only because I feel as time changes, we technically have to change too, so this might be the future, so I might have to accept it, but I'm having some difficulties accepting it.

JT: But, let me ask you this question, if AI falls, because everything gets better over time, and you say AI give me a cure for cancer and it does are you going to reject the cure?

DW: Well, I don't know- I must say, because there was all this negative stuff about AI and the only positive thing I saw was a 60 Minutes piece on how it could be used to help paralyzed patients walk, you know, so, like everything else, there are good uses, there are bad uses. People always find ...

LC: People abuse it.

JT: But the other thing is there's got to be change.

DW: I'm not yet- I'm more concerned about, you know, people using it to defraud people, to mimic people's voices ...

JT: Yeah, all that stuff.

LC: That would be terrible

DW: All of that stuff.

LC: I just watched a Jason Strahan --I watch violet movies -- that deals with a company, and it's AI and how it's defrauding older people to give away all of their money and all of that stuff and what happens as a result of that.

JT: It's got nothing to do with this interview, but my personal view is the ethics around any technology, that's where liberal arts graduates should be bringing a perspective. You don't want to just leave this to the programmers.

LC: Oh, no. Because they're singularly focused, okay?

DW: Yeah, it's a new toy. That's their perspective. Well, we're always behind in considering what the impact and what the ethical considerations are of this- of technology. We just don't keep up, our laws don't keep up in terms of protecting people, from, you know ...

JT: Well, yes, that's always going to be- and the other problem is we're in an international world, so we can make laws and rules in America. If somebody doesn't like them, they just go to another country.

DW: That's true.

LC: That's true.

DW: Yeah, China doesn't care anything about copyright infringement. They use everybody's picture for everything.

JT: Okay, well I'll end the interview and let you go.

LC: A good interview. Thank you, you were really good.