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Ann Zachary '93-Helen Reynolds '68

Ann Zachary

Helen Reynolds

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Ann Zachary: Greetings, my name is Ann Zachary, Connecticut College class of 1993 and I'm here today with ...

Helen Reynolds: Helen Reynolds.

AZ: Class of?

HR: Oh, 1968.

AZ: Yeah, so you have a special reunion today. You're celebrating your 50th.

HR: Right.

AZ: Okay. I look forward to that in 25 years. It's my- my 25th today. So, let's get down to the nitty gritty. First of all, why Conn?

HR: Why did I come to Conn?

AZ: Yes.

HR: How did I get here?

AZ: Mmmhmm.

HR: From Dallas, Texas?

AZ: Yes, absolutely.

HR: Well, we were- my parents- my father made a generous offer when I was about in the tenth grade. He said, "I will pay for any college you can get into." So, I looked at both coasts and said, "Okay, let me get out of Texas and I going to look from sea to shining sea. I'm going to look at something else." So, before my senior year, my mother and my brother, and I got in the car and started driving around and looking at colleges. I was actually on my way to Middlebury. It was languages, I like languages. They do that. Cut to the chase, when we got to Middlebury it's in the middle of nowhere. And I'm from a big city. I mean, people think you're from Texas you must live on a ranch, but I live in a city.

AZ: Which city?

HR: Dallas.

AZ: Dallas, okay.

HR: At any rate, so, we were coming down or we were going up to Boston from New York on I-95 and my mother said that there's a college over here you might want to look at and it's called Connecticut College for Women and I said, "I told you I'm not going to go to a girls' school. I'm not going to do that." But I had just been rude, I think, to her, I was sort of a petulant teenager and I said, "Okay, okay, I'll go." So, I put on my interview skirt in the back of the car so I could be interviewed properly attired. And we came and it was gorgeous. It was a June day. It was just- the sky was blue. You could see the ocean. I was in Fanning and I looked out the window and there was that green- green space out there and all of those ...

AZ: You're referring to Tempel Green?

HR: Yes.

AZ: What's now called Tempel Green in any case.

HR: Right, right. And there are all those granite buildings and it was just gorgeous.

AZ: It really is.

HR: And so- and so, I inter- I didn't- I didn't have any reason to think I was coming here so, my interview, I think was pretty loose. In other words I just talked and told them what I thought. I had done fairly well in high school and I had a lot of activities, I was kind of a hotshot in high school and I knew I had geographical distribution in my favor because I was from Texas and fully confident that I would have been able to get in anywhere. And so, that had probably a lot to do with the way I handled everything and didn't really think about it until later and it stuck in my head that this would be a good place to be when I figured that, you know, anyway, one look at the place basicallis the answer. Long story, I know.

AZ: Yeah, you know, it's interesting because it sounds like you and I have similar stories because, you know, I thought- I kind of thought that New London was the middle of nowhere. I'm from Pittsburgh, okay, so smaller than Dallas, I'm thinking, but more metropolitan than New London. But, as I told my interviewer, I got over it. Now you said earlier that you were interested in languages. I majored in French here. What did you study here?

HR: Initially- well I thought maybe initially I was going to do something in the sciences, but then I was going to do something in art. I thought I wanted to be a sculptor. And then, after I did disastrously in the class, because I didn't attend all the classes ...

AZ: An art class?

HR: Yeah, after two years, two years. And then I didn't have a math-related in science it turns out, I didn't realize that, so after sophomore year I had to change my major or a I couldn't come

back. So, I went to summer school and took economics. Aced the economics classes. And then was an economics major and from then on it was great.

AZ: Yeah, so you said that you had to change your major. So how soon did you have to declare. I guess this would have been back when- when you were here.

HR: I have no idea. I don't remember. It must have been sophomore year or something.

AZ: Okay.

HR: I had no idea what the rule was.

AZ: Yeah, I know for us it was second semester of sophomore year. Or by March of sophomore year, something like that.

HR: Something like that, I don't remember. It was not- and again, I wouldn't have remembered one way or the other.

AZ: Okay, alright, so what- anything else that surprised you about Conn, besides how beautiful it was? Besides that you might not want to go to a college for women.

HR: When I was a freshman?

AZ: Anything during your time here at all.

HR: The surprises. Okay, so I'm coming from Texas. In my class there were- there was another girl who came from Dallas and somebody who came from Houston. And I had been to both coasts and to Mexico and to Canada, okay? And people who first met me who were from New England thought I was a hick of some kind. Lived on a ranch- lived on a ranch. Do you have horses? They would always ask, "Do you have horses?" "No, I don't have horses." You know, grass we mow and dogs and things like that, but no horses. And, so I couldn't believe- I mean I thought that when you come from Texas or even from the South you have this kind of idea that people do not understand that you are not the biggest hick in the world or you're not stupid because you have a different kind of accent. You get to New England and I thought these people were all cosmopolitan and maybe kind of smart. And they would know all of that and they know what the world was like. They were more insular and- they were more insular and unaware of what the rest of the country was like and that was very interesting. The other this is that my senior year in high school, in my hometown, JFK was assassinated. And I thought okay well that happened and that's really- that's an awful thing that happened, but it never occurred to me that people would lambast me when I got here about that. "Well you're from Dallas, huh? Where they killed the President, huh?" There was some of that early, especially freshman year. It was like, "Hello?"

AZ: That's the first time I ever heard such a story. That's really interesting.

HR: Yeah, so, that was kind of a surprise. Other than that, the biggest wonderful surprise was, the fact we were all women, okay? You put all these people together and they have some similarities: they're smart enough to get in, they read the same material you have, they seem to ...

AZ: Like what?

HR: Well, you know, everybody's read *Julius Caesar* and everybody's read whatever and know enough about the world and current events and movies and music and all that kind of stuff. You could talk to them, whoever they are. And the wonderful thing was that you could find people that you could talk to and you had something in common with. Walk in any dorm, sit down at any table- dinner table and you could find someone to have a chat with, which is what I love about reunions. I see people that I really didn't know in school and I talk to them and I have these great conversations with people because there's this commonality of who we are and where we came from and the fact that we ...

AZ: Even if you're not in the same class.

HR: Right, even- sort of paying attention to the world in the same way. That's the most wonderful surprise of the place. That if I know somebody's from Connecticut College, I already know a lot. I know, okay, I can talk to this person ...

AZ: That's true

HR: like a human being, like an intelligent human being and have a conversation and know what's going on. I don't know that I can do that with everybody in the world, but I know that when I come back here. And- and I was- I was on the board of the alumni association in the 80s and there were people in all different classes. There were older ones and younger ones and the mixes. And it was the same. That's the wonderful thing: to know people from the class of '34 and the people from the class of '54 and '74 and you can still have a good conversation with all of them because essentially you know, you have a good starting point and then they're just interesting people. I have not run into a dud that was from Connecticut College.

AZ: Of course not.

HR: Of course not. I don't know where they are. If there are duds I haven't run into them. But, that's the thing that's the most fun.

AZ: They are. So what- now where did you live. I- I'm doing the math here and the Plex was probably brand new.

HR: No, the Plex I think was built in '57. I came in '64.

AZ: Really? Okay, I thought it was- I thought a few later years than that. Pretty new in any case.

HR: Three years in Hamilton. My group was too big to get out. You know, we tried to move to another dorm. So I was three years in Hamilton and then senior year, three other of my classmates and I went to the Freeman Tower. We were the infamous Freeman Tour. At any rate, that was great.

AZ: So you were- so you did not live in a single room your senior year?

HR: No- no. The Freeman Tower has- has0 has two beds in two bedrooms and then a living room and a bathroom.

AZ: Oh, nice.

HR: And a fire escape.

AZ: Yeah, you kind of need it up in the tower. And what were your residential experiences like. Is there anything that stands out to you? I mean, Freeman Tower, that's a unique experience in itself.

HR: Yeah, but when we got here in the fall of '64 they either had overaccepted or over-, whatever, they had too many people and not enough spaces. And so, they took some of the commons rooms in the complex where there was a washer- washer and dryer and two little study carrels in another room and they turned that into a double. So, I was in a double with somebody else in a commons room. And we were sort of mismatched. She was from Boston and I was loud and chatty and she was very studious and we lasted together a semester and that was it. But ...

AZ: I lasted with my first three roommates two months.

HR: Ah.

AZ: More stories.

HR: But the most amazing thing that happened when she was still my roommate, back in those days you didn't have telephone, we didn't have cellphones obviously, we didn't have phones in our room, and there would be phones outside for incoming calls. You would get a buzzer and they'd say, "You have a phone call on line 1," or whatever. And then you go out and sit in this phone booth. And early one morning in late November or early December, she gets a phone call, like 6:30 in the morning. She came back in the room and I said, "Is everything okay?" She said, "It was my father." I said, "Okay, what's going on?" "Well, he just got the Nobel Prize." Charles Townes, invented the laser. And I went, "Oh, oh, okay."

AZ: That's amazing.

HR: That's a pretty amazing thing to happen to you.

AZ: That really is.

HR: Won't happen again in my lifetime.

AZ: Uh huh. Yeah that is definitely a standout event. Well, I'm definitely glad it was that. Could have been ... So what- any groups or activities that- that, you know, made your life at Conn worthwhile or stood out to you there?

HR: Oh sure. Junior Show, in which the Juniors put on- lights, write the music for, do the sets for, do the choreography for- choreography for Junior Show. It's a musical show. So, I was in that. I sort of helped write it, but I was terrible at that. But there were a couple of people who put the whole thing together. It was called "Junior Year, a Broad Way" or

AZ: That's perfect.

HR: Or "The Junior Doesn't Show". It was supposed to be a girl in New York who wanted to go to college and a girl in Connecticut who always wanted to go to Broadway and they switch places. So that's one. So, I was- I was sort of a comic interest in that. And then senior year I directed Senior Melodrama, which- we also wrote a melodrama and starred in it and people starred in it and just a lot of stupid stuff.

AZ: That sounds like a lot of fun though.

HR: It was wonderful.

AZ: Good. What was the campus climate like when you were here? Were there any particular events or controversies that happened?

HR: Well, we had the Vietnam War going on when we were there. Martin Luther King was shot in April of our senior year. Bobby Kennedy was shot as we were driving home from graduation. So, we were the watershed year. We were the big year of '68 with lots of things going on, but ...

AZ: Year that changed America, even more significant to you as a college graduate.

HR: And a lot of it happened after we got out, a lot of the really big events that were going on. But the war was a big deal, not so much necessarily because- I- I think that- well, some people knew people who were in the Army and were over there, but you may know this, that in Vietnam, people who were drafted generally weren't in college. They were after college or they didn't go to college. You could get a deferment if you were in college- you were in college. So

HR: the guys we knew weren't really going to Vietnam. Now, later they might have done that, but a lot of them were trying to figure out how not to go to Vietnam.

AZ: Exactly.

HR: And so we were- you're personally invested in [not] seeing people your age get killed, but it's not the same thing as if a lot of people were dating someone who's ending up over there, but we ...

AZ: Well, we had the Coast Guard Academy across the street.

HR: Yeah, it's interesting because they hardly ever got out. I don't know if they get out now or not, but Wednesday afternoons and Sunday afternoons. And they tried to have mixers between us and the Coast Guard Academy and they had to be home at nine and we had to be home at- our curfew was later than that. Some people dated Coasties, but mostly not so much, just because it was not- it was difficult to do all of that. Most people got- we didn't have cars, see. You get on a train and go to New Haven or you get on a train and go to Brown or you can go to Boston or wherever. If you had a date with somebody at Wesleyan or Trinity they probably had to come get you. Or you had to get a ride with someone who was going, but, you know, for a women's college with four men's colleges within an hour, right, that was- they were all men's colleges, so Brown and Wesleyan and Trinity and Yale were all within a, yeah, within an hour. So, but- so people would leave on the weekends.

AZ: How- so how did you meet people? Or how did you ...

HR: You had mixers. They set up mixers to meet people. Or you knew people who knew people. One of the things that happened is- almost everybody I knew had gone to high school with somebody that was at one place or another and so there was a lot of picking people up, because of all of that. So you meet people that way.

AZ: I'm- I'm just curious because we talked about it a few minutes ago because it was at the height of the Vietnam War, what was the political climate like? Was there any activism, was their protest or support for the war?

HR: Yes, there was protest of some sort. There was not a huge amount of that. We were really pretty insulated up here. And senior year there was some kind of- some protestation here and there. There were people from the Army and Marines set up a table to try to get- recruit people, women, into the Army into the Marines, whatever. And they never had anybody come by and talk to them. But they-, that's what their job was, to recruit. And we always just- everybody avoided that. Some people then complained about the fact that they were recruiting on campus. Anyway, but, so, there were some civil rights activities, minor- minor activity, there were people going to places like Mississippi to help with registration, voter registration there were some people who were active in that way. Somebody a couple years ahead of us was active in that and was arrested in a sit-in. And- and there was some beginnings of that kind of

protesting race relations before Martin Luther King was killed and then afterwards they called off classes for that day and there was kind of a march through campus for people who were concerned about those things. But it was very calm, it was not very politicized in that sense.

AZ: Alright. What about- talk a little about your life after Conn and how, if at all, did your experience here shape your post-college life.

HR: I left here and went straight to a PhD program in economics. So, I mean, it shaped a lot of things.

AZ: Clearly.

HR: I went straight into academics. I went straight into a program that started, I guess in September of '68.

AZ: And where did you attend?

HR: I went back home to Dallas. I went to Southern Methodist University and I got my PhD in 1976, so, you know, I spent the first part of my career—my career if you want to call it that—in academics. So I was-, you know, and then I went beyond in academics at the University of Texas at Dallas. I was there for a while. It really shaped my professional life.

AZ: Okay, awesome. What about your personal life? Do you still keep in touch with friends?

HR: Yes. I- there- a couple people I keep fairly close tabs with. My roommate lives in, she's not coming to this reunion, but ...

AZ: That's too bad.

HR: I know. She lives in Key West and so I go down and visit her there. I've got another friend who just showed up today, so that's good. She lives on Cape Cod so I go to visit her. I, you know, I keep up with people, email here and there.

AZ: Great, are there any particular favorite memories that you have about anything that you would like to share with us?

HR: There was a thing called mascot hunt and mascot hunt in the old days was, the sophomores and the juniors would split the campus down the middle and it was like a scavenger hunt. And what would happen is that you would be given clues along the way to the next clue and then when you got to the actual treasure, that treasure was the class banner of the other class. And then whoever found it first would win and then if you ...

AZ: Capture the flag, sort of ...

HR: Exactly. And if you were caught along the way, you went to jail. And there was a jail- there was a jail and you could get people out of the jail by running in and tapping them on the ...

AZ: Where was the jail?

HR: I can't remember. But- but so there- anyway, so anyway, scavenger hunt, capture the flag and all this happens in October and then you end up, I don't know, warm cider and donuts or something like that. We did in the- which- which class one was sort of a "all right, we did it!" you know. So, when I was a sophomore, the whole thing was over and we were eating donuts and drinking cider and there was the [unclear] junior class banner, just sitting right there all folded up. And I went [laughs] and I took it home with me and it was my bedspread for the entire semester.

AZ: So you took it back to Hamilton, not back to Dallas?

HR: Oh, no to Hamilton. You walk into my room and the bedspread in my room is the other class's banner. And then I finally said, "You can have this back." And they were like, "We were wondering where that was."

AZ: I love that story. Can I tell you that that's something that I would have wanted to do and then would have been too timid. I'm glad you weren't. I like to hear that. Do you have anything that you would have done differently regarding your Conn experience? Academic? You know, academic ...

HR: Yeah, I was kind of a goof-off. I know I have a PhD in economics, but I was kind of a goof-off. I probably should have studied more. In the afternoons, I was in Cro a lot listening to the jukebox and eating grilled cheese sandwiches and I was on every sports team. We didn't have, you know, we didn't have NCAA anything, but we would set up games with different colleges and whatever, but I played field hockey and I played lacrosse and I played basketball.

AZ: What was your favorite?

HR: Basketball, probably. But, and because I was a fencer. I had been before a fencer in high school. I was a fencer and there was a big tournament every year and I was engaged in that. Yeah, so I did this jock stuff. I got some really good friends out of it. I got good exercise and I enjoyed that but I probably should have spent more time hitting the books.

AZ: I'm going to ask you a question that was asked of me during my interview, which is if you had funds to donate to a new building on campus, what would be its purpose?

HR: A new building on campus? Hmm.

AZ: She's thinking.

HR: Probably a truly cooperative dorm in which everybody had to do some work. Now in the old days the co-op dorms were for people on financial aid, but I mean a truly cooperative dorm where people did the cooking, people did the cleaning up, people did all that stuff in a communal sort of way, because there are too many spoiled brats in this world. Many of them were in school with me and many of them are in school now. And if we had something that was more like that that people could communally get together and do stuff, and do all that, you know, help each other out. And not be "I'm better than you because I don't have to do that" sort of thing. That's what I would do.

AZ: I think North Cottage kind of adopted that kind of a system, but you're talking about, you know, like a Harkness or something like that, you know, okay, you know with much greater population. Alright, and in the little time we have left, is there anything you would like to say that we have not covered.

HR: Uh, sure. We're in the Shain Library. Charles Shain was a wonderful person and he was- everybody loved him greatly because he did talks and he was a really nice guy, his wife was nice but not overly intrusive with everything that was going on. He was a- maybe even a father figure to a lot of us. Didn't help that he was very handsome, but ...

AZ: He was the president at the time?

HR: He was the president at the time, okay. And I think that Katherine Bergeron is terrific and I think she's ...

AZ: I like her.

HR: Yeah, I think she matches the Shain sort of thing that you're so proud that they're president and they sort of have the energy to do all ... She is very energetic and she's all over the place at one time, and she's just terrific. And I ...

AZ: And she's musical, which I love.

HR: Yeah. And there are some intervening people and I won't comments on them, but I think she's terrific and she's going to go down as one of the great presidents of this college.

AZ: Awesome. One more question, what's the ribbon on your nametag?

HR: Oh, sorry.

AZ: Trustee. Okay. Very- or former trustee.

HR: Yeah, I was the president of the alumni association in the '80s.

AZ: Oh, I think you did mention that.

HR: An ex officio member of the Board of Trustees because of that.

AZ: Alright, well, Helen, I really enjoyed talking to you and it's great to meet you.

HR: Thank you.

AZ: Alright and I will maybe see you around the rest of the day. Happy reunion.

HR: Okay.

AZ: Thank you very much.