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### Carol Reeves Parke '58\_Jean Cattanach Sziklas '58

Carol Reeves Parke

Jean Cattanach Sziklas

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**Streaming audio for this oral history is available at <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/oralhistory/27>**

**Carol Reeves Parke:** My name is Carol Reeves Parke, class of 1958. We are here on June 3rd, 2023 at our 65th college reunion. I am with one of my class-- classmates Jean Cattanach ...

**Jean Cattanach Sziklas:** Sziklas.

**CP:** Yeah. Introduce yourself.

**JS:** Alright. My name is Jean Cattanach Sziklas, class of 1958, and we are here for our 65th reunion. And I'm here with Carol Reeves-- Reeves Parke.

**CP:** Jean, why did you-- why and how did you decide to come to Connecticut College?

**JS:** I came to Connecticut because where I had thought I probably would be going waitlisted me and I knew people who were here and one of the things that attracted me was the applied art program.

**CP:** Oh, that's interesting. I didn't know that. One of the things I remember about freshman year that really startled me was so many of our classmates, in fact, this was their second choice. And I felt that that initially in freshman year affected the morale of our class to some degree. But we got over it fast enough.

**JS:** But I enjoyed it once I got here.

**CP:** Oh, absolutely. That was the surprise, that people who didn't think they wanted necessarily to come here, found it was just the right school for them.

**JS:** The size was good and that made an impression on me. You could walk down one of the paths and you'd bump into someone you knew from your hometown. That didn't happen at the other school my sister was going.

**CP:** Oh, that's interesting. There were plenty of people from Connecticut here. I'm from Connecticut, originally, from Fairfield, Connecticut, but one of the things that did please me was that it is-- the College was already national in scope and I was able to meet plenty of kids from the Midwest and other places.

**JS:** And I came from Pennsylvania and when I got here, I was interviewed by Mr. Cobbledick and he said, "We hope to see you next fall," and I thought that was lovely.

**CP:** That's-- that's a lovely story. Did you live in the same dorm or did you ...

**JS:** Lived in Winthrop for the first year, all freshmen. We ate at Thames, or Thaymes as they like to say here, and shared it with people who lived in Thames as well as North Cottage. And the next year I moved to East, it was East ...

**CP:** Well, were you in East, you were never in the South Quad?

**JS:** No, never in the South Quad.

**CP:** And then where did you ...

**JS:** And from there I went to Windham for two years.

**CP:** And I started out at Grace Smith, if I remember, on the fourth floor and we had our own dining room. And then we went, several of us that turned out to be roommates in the end, were all at Plant in the South-- what we called the South Quad. We then went, there's some confusion in our minds about whether we went first to Winthrop for a year and then to Freeman or whether we went to Freeman and then to Winthrop. You would think ...

**JS:** Windham?

**CP:** Windham. Not Winthrop. Windham House.

**JS:** Probably you went to Windham last.

**CP:** I think we went to Windham last, yeah. We went to Freeman for junior year and then over to Windham for senior year.

**JS:** You moved around quite a bit.

**CP:** We moved around a lot. And in our day, of course, no men were allowed above the first floor. And we had very distinct times that we had to be in. We had an Honor Court, which I believe still exists. And I remember distinctly when the New York-- when the Connecticut Throughway got built, the Honor Court had to change-- if you said you left New Haven at a certain time, they knew how long it took with the old route from New Haven to New London, so if with the throughway, that distance-- that time shrank and so the Honor Court adjusted its time. If you said you left New Haven at a certain time, they gave you less time to get back before you got in trouble. I remember that. What was your major?

**JS:** Sociology, with Mrs. Kennedy, Ruby Jo Kennedy. And she was a very motherly kind of advisor.

**CP:** Was it a good fit for you in the end?

**JS:** It was, it was. Initially I thought, oh, I didn't want to major in sociology. I didn't want to become a social worker and carry a big pocketbook and wear clunky shoes. So I ended up working in school libraries where I would wear clunky shoes because they were more comfortable.

**CP:** I majored in English and a lot of people who knew what they were talking about felt that the Conn College English department was one of the very best undergraduate in the entire country.

**JS:** Oh, really?

**CP:** Yeah, my husband to be, my fiancé to be, was down at Yale. He roomed with a guy who was the-- ended up being the valedictorian of his Yale class and majored in English as the valedictorian, he wasn't math or science and I was always impressed by that. And he was one of the people years later who said, you know, Conn College had one of the best-- he said of course, Yale was better. Conn College was right up there with the best in the very country.

**JS:** Yale, one of the differences was with Yale was they didn't have open stacks in the library.

**CP:** They didn't have the open stacks.

**JS:** You'd ask for a book and wait. They'd come back: this one is out, this one is being repaired, this one is lost. And I found that we had open stacks here. You'd go in and browse and that was a big plus.

**CP:** One of my-- one of my downfalls is that carrel, one of my assigned carrels for English was in the sociology section of the library and I found many of those books more interesting than some of my English books. And so that was-- but my English major was very rigorous and it gave me a lot of trouble, but it all worked out in the end.

**JS:** One thing that we did in the sociology major was that we were assigned a family with our, probably our statistics course maybe second semester, and we were assigned a family with a child who had mental retardation.

**CP:** Oh, interesting.

**JS:** An exceptional child, that's what they-- that's what Ruby Jo referred to them as, and so we got to know the family and the child, saw the child in a school setting, and that was very important.

**CP:** Oh, that's very interesting. That's really reaching out to the community. But you did a lot of volunteer work as I remember.

**JS:** Not in college. I was in choir and I was on the library committee.

**CP:** That's what I thought.

**JS:** But we didn't do too much. I can't remember the librarian's name. But, again, she would have us over to her house for dinner, for supper, and it was a small group. But she took an interest in us.

**CP:** That's really nice.

**JS:** And one of the things I didn't like about the College, the library then, was the closed reserve system and I was a slow reader and you couldn't take these books out until 9:30 at night.

**CP:** I forgot that.

**JS:** And they had to be back by nine the next morning.

**CP:** I forgot that, Jean. That, oh ...

**JS:** These big books.

**CP:** That would be tough.

**JS:** It was tough.

**CP:** That was very tough. What was the campus climate like when you were here? What were the controversies going on? There was something important that happened during the time we were here that wasn't a controversy. That is that the first nuclear submarine, the Nautilus, was launched and that was a very, very big deal. And I was talking to one of our classmates who said she actually from the top of her dorm could see some of that launch way out on the river. And so that was a historic-- that was a very historic thing that happened during our time here.

**JS:** When I first came here, took art classes on the fourth floor of Bill, or whatever it was called then, I could look out and see the submarines and I thought that the Russians were coming.

**CP:** Oh my goodness, oh that's terrible. I think it's-- what am I trying to say here? I'm thinking of what Conn College did for me. I was not among the strong academic performers here. We had-- I would say on thing that has changed dramatically is my best recollection is that there was no understanding or appreciation of learning differences, so if you were dyslexic or you were ADD or something like that, the teachers, the professors pretty much taught to one style. It was pretty much lecture and I did not thrive in that environment. But I made it through and I thought it was one of the most challenging experiences of my life to get this degree and when I much later went to library school at Columbia to get my master's degree, I never felt that I had to work as hard or was as anxious about performing as I was here. Now, granted, that was some years after I had graduated and I had matured a little and learned how to learn better, but I have

always given Conn College terrific credit for the fact that I was able to think on my own when my own circumstances made it important for me to make important decisions about my life and about my education and about a library career. I ended up as a library administrator after being a librarian and a library manager and as time has gone on, I've given Conn College more and more credit.

**JS:** And I got my first job through Ruby Jo Kennedy. It was a summer job for the state farm for women in Niantic. So, I was there as a summer intern and they were hoping to lure people into the field of penology. At the end of the summer, Janet York, for whom the institution is named, said, "Would you be interested in being the parole officer for the City of Hartford?" Well, I was as naive and green as they come. The girls would disappear down the corn rows and I didn't know what was going on. I had a pickup truck and helped deliver vegetables with a couple of trustees who could have bopped me over the head. There were no fences, no guards. There was one building, a maximum-security building, that had bars on the window, but they were belled in at night and they went to their jobs in the laundry or wherever during the daytime.

**CP:** That is something I did not know about in your history, Jean. That is absolutely fascinating.

**JS:** After that, I decided that it was too late to try to change these women. I think the average age was something like 18 and so I took the test, I guess. I don't remember taking a test. I applied for the job for social worker for the division of child welfare and we had one week training in Bridgeport and that was it.

**CP:** Oh, my goodness.

**JS:** And then we were given a caseload. And at one point I had 100 on my caseload.

**CP:** Oh, Jean.

**JS:** I didn't have to see them all the time. You had to set foot in the foster home, once a month, no once every three months, I think it was. Once every three months.

**CP:** It sounds like-- it sounds like you were able to take your Conn College education and whatever you needed or wanted to do, it fit the bill.

**JS:** It did. And I got along very well with Judge Thomas Gill and at the end I was doing revocations of commitment to the state of Connecticut. They were wards of the state until they were 21. And if the parents rehabilitated themselves you could come back and study the situation, the setup they had for the children, and sometimes they would go back.

**CP:** That's really interesting.

**JS:** And I represented that to the judge so there was kind of a plan of action.

**CP:** That is a plan. In my career it took me-- I got my library degree about eight years after I graduated. One of the astonishing things to me was I went to take my GRE on no preparation because this idea came up suddenly. And on no preparation after eight years my Conn College degree brought me to the 95th percentile in my GRE. Not for the math section, but I did get about 50 percent in math and I got in-- and that's what got me into Columbia and I subsequently worked for the New York Public Library, for Yale University Library, Virginia Commonwealth University, the University of Delaware, and ended my career as one of the number two librarians at Syracuse University.

**JS:** Very good.

**CP:** Do you keep in touch with classmates, Jean?

**JS:** I do but a lot of them are deceased.

**CP:** Yeah, we're the class of 1958 and one of the sobering things is-- we've been talking a lot about our classmates who we've seen in many other reunions who aren't here any more.

**JS:** But some of these left the earth earlier. So it was-- I still hear from a couple of them, Nancy Dorian being one of them, I had heard.

**CP:** Did you read the letter that she wrote?

**JS:** I didn't read that, but I think I got something.

**CP:** Stop by the hospitality suite because I brought it there. I too keep in touch with classmates. To my-- to our mutual pleasure one of my college roommates, after many years of living very far apart, now lives about an hour from me in Virginia. So, we don't see each other all the time, but we see each other regularly, and if she needs to fly, she flies out of Richmond, Virginia and I usually put her up in my house and pick her up at the airport and drop her off. We've been asked to talk about something from our experience that we might tell you students today that we wish you had the experience we had, but we also think that you had experiences that we wish we had. And for me, I would wish that since we did not have social media, we spent a lot of time in each others' dorms simply talking to each other and with each other and sharing ideas and I'm not sure that degree of real intimacy and relationship to how you're thinking and your talking to different people from all parts of the country, I think that stood us in very good stead at an early age. And of course there's a lot going on on campus that I personally am quite jealous of. I would love to have had that waterfront. I would love to have had that waterfront. And I would had loved to have had the help that you now offer students with learning differences. And I would love to have the experiences that you-- many of you now have in sharing opportunities, work opportunities and grant opportunities and mentoring opportunities. How about you Jean?

**JS:** I'm just thinking now. One of the things that dominated my life was the concern about the comprehensive exams, because I was not a huge strong student, even in my major. By the time I got to major, I had to take sociological theory and statistics and the basic courses that were not very exciting. And then the senior course was a senior seminar where you studied the migrant workers, something like that. Each person presented a different topic. But, I don't know. I think there are a lot of distractions here that we didn't have. How are we doing with time?

**CP:** Yeah, we have to wind up.

**JS:** There are a lot of distractions that go on here. And some people think that the males have taken over the school.

**CP:** That's interesting. We hadn't even mentioned something that's probably the most important. Because we were a women's college, many of us who would have taken leadership positions in any ordinary coed school found themselves thriving on that sort of responsibility and that carried through the rest of our lives.