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### Anne Zachary '93-Marta Martinez Hernandez '18

Anne Zachary

Marta Martinez Hernandez

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**Streaming audio for this oral history is available at <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/oralhistory/28>**

**Anne Zachary:** This is Anne Zachary, Connecticut College class of 1993 and today I'm here speaking with ...

**Marta Martinez Hernandez:** Marta Martinez Hernandez, class of 2018.

**AZ:** And this is your first reunion.

**MM:** It is my first reunion.

**AZ:** How does it feel to be back.

**MM:** Oh, it feels great. I do come back semi- often, like I would say I come back at least once a year. I was involved in the Conn board of directors, the alumni board of directors, so I've had a chance to come back quite often. It's very special to come back, not alone, but with, like, everybody else.

**AZ:** How did you get involved in the alumni board?

**MM:** I got involved in the alumni board because I met somebody that was the director at the time, that would be Evan Piekara, class of I want to say '08, maybe 2010, who knows, and so he spoke so highly of it, he very quickly became a mentor to me and then through conversations with him after I wanted to be involved with whatever he was doing and people like him are doing. I just loved the College so much, so I applied and I got elected and I was able to do it.

**AZ:** That's great. Now how did you end up choosing Conn in the first place?

**MM:** Oh, that's quite a story. So, I was born and raised in Valencia, Spain and at age 15 I got a scholarship that allowed me to do the last two years of high school in Italy, the program called United World College. That was my first exposure to anything international, education related. And when that experience finished I wanted to go continue to study abroad. And Connecticut College is an institution that usually takes kids from that high school that I went to, the one that I did and, you know, you can benefit from a scholarship to come here and whatnot. There were many schools that do offer those benefits, but I remember going through the list of those schools, there were about maybe 100 names. And I remember seeing Connecticut College, it being one of the very last ones to join that list or just on the list and ever since I, like, clicked on it, I vividly remember, just having, like, a gut feeling of, like, oh, like, there's something about this school that transpires, even just from the website. And actually, I didn't even visit before coming, and, like, fully committing to coming, I had never been to the US. The day that I got here ...

**AZ:** That is quite a story.

in 2014 was the first day I had ever been to the US and it was the best choice, the best experience, I could have had.

**AZ:** That is wonderful. So what made it-- what made it-- what made it the best experience you could have had.

**MM:** A lot of-- to answer your previous question, one of the reasons I decided to join was because I knew I wanted to be by the water. Grew up by the water, wanted to be by the water, that was something that I wanted to do. The US seemed so big and daunting to me that I wanted to be somewhere that felt manageable and perhaps much more approachable. And even distance-wise, you know, Connecticut is, quite close to Europe. I listed it. I considered it as an option. It was also the size. It was smaller and I thought that would give me an opportunity to really connect not only with my peers but also my professors. And it really had a strong language program. I was really interested very seriously in joining CISLA as a student and I did that. Those were reasons to join but also reasons that kept me here at Conn. I was very involved. I was a residence-- residential advisor, housefellow, I worked as a ...

**AZ:** What dorm did you have?

**MM:** So, my first two years I was in Branford. My third year I studied abroad and in my final year I was in Lambdin.

**AZ:** Lambdin, okay. So, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. You mentioned housefellow and I was like wanted to hear where that was.

**MM:** Yeah, I do still think and say that Branford is the best house on campus. It's so central and I have so many memories from my first impression ...

**AZ:** I lived in Branford most of my freshman year.

**MM:** I loved it. Even living in the basement, like, I had-- I had so much fun. I always had very good memories attached. And then my friends, I think, at Conn, like, it is all the connections, like I hate to say it, but it is. And I ...

**AZ:** Why do you hate to say it?

**MM:** Because, you know, it's like CONN-ections. It's like a buzzword and buzzwords are dangerous because they don't mean much, but to me it is about the connections that I made. So I don't want to use that term loosely because to me, like, it really transferred my experience. My best friends today are still the friends that I made here. My partner I met here. My professors I'm in touch with. My mentors I'm in touch with. Like, I continue to give to Conn year after year and it's all because of, like, the people around me that make me who I am today and just, like, inspire me and continue to inspire me every day.

**AZ:** Wow. What was your major when you were here.

**MM:** I was an International Relations major and then I had a minor in French and I was a CISLA scholar.

**AZ:** I was a French major.

**MM:** Oh, great, really nice.

**AZ:** Yeah, now I'm a French teacher.

**MM:** No way. Oh my God. Did you have a chance to, like, live in France while you were here?

**AZ:** Yeah, I did first semester junior year in France and, you know what? I didn't want to come back. I did Vanderbilt in Aix-en-Provence.

**MM:** Very nice, Provence is really nice. Senior year I studied abroad and then I ...

**AZ:** In France?

**MM:** Yeah, in Paris and then--I loved it--and then we actually started a program, with like a two-week immersion host family program in Valle de Loire in a town called Tours and from there we went to Paris and I had the time of my life again. And then I studied abroad again in Spring. I did, like, a full year abroad. I did Paris in the fall, London in the spring, and then I went back to Paris for my CISLA internship. And then once I graduated I had just the best time. I was in Paris, so I went back to Paris and I have been living-- I mean, now I live here full-time, but prior to 2021, from 2018 to 2021 I was living between France and Spain, like, half and half.

**AZ:** What was your CISLA internship?

**MM:** My CISLA internship, I was sort of at the management, but I was management intern in a nonprofit organization that provided free higher education to refugee communities in France. I was very interested in the refugee experience and how education was able or not to support their experience. I had a blast. I met again some great people that I know that CISLA students had internships with later on, so it was really nice. While I was-- did you do an internship?

**AZ:** I did not. You know, they, you know-- it, CISLA, was in its infancy, you know, when I started. It was something that I seriously considered and researched and for reasons I don't really know at the time, I decided it wasn't for me, you know, but, who knows, if I were to do it again, maybe I would do it again. I don't know.

**MM:** Yeah, no, CISLA is really strong these days. I think we've been very lucky to have Mary Devins who actually is retiring, we just had her retiring party today, but when I said I come back

to Conn and I make it a point to stay in touch with people every year, I come and I see that woman every year.

**AZ:** She actually substitute taught my Italian class a number of times, so that's how I remember-- that's how I remember her.

**MM:** She and I were talking today about Italy and Italian in general.

**AZ:** Did she tell you the story, because I'm never going to forget this, about getting appendicitis in Italy?

**MM:** No, oh my God, was that in Rome when she was, like, living there?

**AZ:** It was when she was living there, yeah, and she got appendicitis and the, you know, you know, it was very, you know, it was a horrifying experience for her because of the medical care and, you know, as they were wheeling her in, somebody said, "Is this the hysterectomy?"

**MM:** Oh no.

**AZ:** I know, you can just imagine, but, yeah, I think things ended up the way they were supposed to.

**MM:** She has the most interesting stories and memories and she's just such a wealth of knowledge in terms of, like, the network as well. She always knows somebody to put you in touch with. Yeah, she's somebody that has become a mentor for sure.

**AZ:** So what are you doing-- what are you doing now in addition to the Alumni Board or outside ...

**MM:** Yeah, I actually finished my term, like my period of, just like, serving on the Alumni Board about a year and a half ago. I do think I might want to do that or a different board in the future. You know, I want to take, like, a year or two. I'm in touch with everybody. I think it would be an easy transition back, but ...

**AZ:** What about in your personal or professional life, what-- what's happening there?

**MM:** So, I lived, like I said, between France and Spain for a while. I was working in-- mainly in product marketing for grocery stores in Europe, in London, but that also happened to be during the time of the pandemic and all supermarkets and groceries and the way that people bought food was changing. So, I learned a lot. I came back here to the US to get an MBA and I recently graduated with that.

**AZ:** Congratulations.

**MM:** Thank you. And I'm working marketing still, but for software, and I do, like, marketing operations and strategy.

**AZ:** So it sounds like your Conn experience really prepared you well for your future career and studies. Is there anything more that you can say about that?

**MM:** Yeah, I think there's been like here, obviously, being a student, was a full-time job, but everything else I did on campus was another set of two or three full-time jobs. And I think the ability to manage all of that, especially in regards to, like, time management has, like, really prepared me for what I do today, not only professionally but personally, the way that I organize and prioritize things. But, talking more professionally and, like, how, like, Conn academics prepared me for that, yeah, I mean, totally. I think, you know, language ability, management and like, your ability to relate to other people, how conversations in the classroom translate over to conversations in the workplace. All of that I definitely got from Conn. And the curiosity, leading with curiosity in any project, I think that that's something that definitely grew on me here.

**AZ:** And now, like, you've only been gone five years and you're still, like, relatively new. You still come back a lot. Have you seen any changes. I mean, obviously, I have in thirty years ...

**MM:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. There's obviously changes and there's changes that happen every year, anywhere, like, the of course there will be changes, but [unclear], because, you know. I-- I think the constant of, like, we've always had and we will always have-- I mean, it's in the nature of Conn and what Conn is to have a very demanding with very high expectations student body. And that continues to transfer over the years and that's going to always provoke changes. And changes are good. Everybody learns from changes, so I think it is in, like, the essence of Conn to have changes, just because we have such a student body that's always going to lead and provoke those.

**AZ:** Okay. What-- what was I going to ask? Oh yeah, so let's get to, like, the fun, hypothetical question. Or maybe it's not hypothetical. So, we heard a lot this morning about development and, you know, the donations that people have made. So let's just say you have at least seven figures to donate to Conn. Where would it go?

**MM:** Seven figures to go to Conn ... I think-- I like a lot of the way the campus is distributed and having, like, had experience on other college campuses, especially like when I was a graduate student, I was also working in Res Life back then. I think the way that Conn is structured is conducive to community. I wouldn't do anything too structural, but I think structurally, Conn is doing the right thing. I would probably ...

**AZ:** You mean the physical structure of the campus?

**MM:** The physical structure. I think I would expand on residence halls. I would avoid, perhaps doing, like, larger residence halls, because I think the community-- the smaller the residence hall, the tighter the community. I would add on more of that. I would definitely revisit the

compensation for staff members, faculty and staff. That is something that I've heard even in the small time I've spent here in the past 24 hours. I mean, I would invest in programs that characterize Conn, like CISLA. I think those are investments that are worth making. I would continue to invest in education. It's an educational institution. That's what I would do.

**AZ:** Okay. Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to say?

**MM:** No, I'm just very grateful for Conn and it has, like, you know, such a, like-- I had a spot for Conn in my heart and I'm very grateful. I think of Conn every day because my life in the way that it's, like, evolved, continues to be around Conn.

**AZ:** Yeah, it sounds like it. You are definitely a Conn enthusiast.

**MM:** Oh yeah, for sure. And I will always speak very highly of Conn. Forever.

**AZ:** Awesome, well, there's nothing wrong with that at all. Alright, well thank you very much. We'll see you in five years.

**MM:** Do it. Let's do it. I'm down.

**AZ:** Bye-bye.