

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Ruth Budd, Class of 1958

Interviewed by
Anne Ames, Class of 2015

May 24, 2013

Abstract

In this oral history, Ruth Budd recalls seeing Smith for the first time when she arrived alone as a first-year from Colorado. She speaks of the important role of women's colleges and remembers her junior year abroad in Geneva in 1956, during the Hungarian Revolution, and the life-long friendship that began during that experience.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 30-minute tape.

Transcript

Transcribed by Janet Harris with Harris Reporting.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Budd, Ruth. Interview by Anne Ames. Video recording, May 24, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Ruth Budd, interview by Anne Ames., transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Budd, Ruth. Interview by Anne Ames. Transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Ruth Budd, interview by Anne Ames, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 24, 2013, with:

RUTH BUDD

by: ANNIE AMES

AMES: All right. My name is Annie Ames, and I'm conducting an interview with Ruth Budd on May 24th, 2013, for the Smith College Alumni Oral History Project. Thank you in advance for agreeing to participate. Why are you attending the reunion this year?

BUDD: Well, it's my 55th reunion, and it's just fun to come back. The 50th, of course, was the big one. But I don't live too far away so it's nice to come back.

AMES: How did you choose to attend Smith as an undergrad?

BUDD: I grew up in Colorado, in Denver, and so I never saw Smith before I arrived freshman year. I think the main thing was that I wanted to go abroad junior year. That was a big pull for me then. And my family are immigrants. I came from Germany and so, you know, I didn't really have family members – although I did have a couple of family members who had gone here.

AMES: What drew you to Smith?

BUDD: What drew me?

AMES: Yeah. Were there specific things that you remember reading about before you came?

BUDD: You know, I think I knew very little about this school, and it just seemed like a wonderful place. And, as I say, I really wanted to go abroad junior year. That was a big feature.

AMES: What were your expectations of the college?

BUDD: I knew I'd get a good education, and I think the fact that it was all women was – I was kind of neutral about that. I had gone to a big high school in Denver and I thought that would be an interesting experience.

AMES: Tell me about your first few days at Smith, and what did you feel?

BUDD: Lost, totally lost. I arrived, as I say, never having been here, never having seen the school. I got into my room, which was bare, as you know, like just now, that we get into the rooms that we're staying in. And I didn't know where to start. And next to me was a woman who had come from New York with her parents, and they were fluffing up her pillows and putting her animals on the bed, and they took me in their arms, and said, "We're going downtown to Woolworths," which, of course – "to get a few things. Would you like to join us?" And I remember buying a wastebasket and I don't remember what else. But I was here by myself. I didn't know anybody. It was a brand new experience.

AMES: So returning to Smith as an alum for reunion, how do you find Smith changed?

BUDD: Oh, my. I can hardly find my way around campus anymore. The architecture certainly has changed. The art museum has changed enormously. I was in Franklin King, which has not changed much. Our last reunion, we were housed there, so I was able to explore that a bit. And I think the curriculum and so on, I haven't kept up with it that much, but I think there's been an enormous amount of changes.

AMES: And, on that note, what things do you think have stayed consistent, what has stayed the same?

BUDD: Well, I think the big thing is that they stayed as a women's college, you know. In our day, of course, we didn't have options at Yale and Princeton and Amherst and all of that. And I'm pleased about that. I think there really is a place for women's colleges, where women – sounds trite; it's kind of – where women can find their voice and really run everything. And I'm very pleased that Smith provides that option. It's not for everybody, but I'm happy that it has remained a women's college.

AMES: Absolutely. So moving on to academics, what was the process of deciding on your major when you got to Smith?

BUDD: I started out, I thought I was going to be a government major. I've always been interested in government. I was very active in the student government from day one here, was on the judicial board my freshman year and ran the Push program my sophomore year. And, you know, I had always been very active in student government in high school. But then I switched to history. My sophomore year, I took a bunch of history courses or, I don't know, enough history to – and then I went to Geneva for my junior year, and a lot of the courses counted for either major. And so I ended up majoring in history.

AMES: What were some of your favorite or most memorable courses?

BUDD: History courses, European history courses.

AMES: Do you have –

BUDD: And Art 11, which I knew – and I've always regretted not taking Music 11, or whatever the introductory music course was. Yeah.

AMES: Do you have any mentors or professors that come to mind?

BUDD: The one person that I got quite close to was not even a professor here. She taught the section in history. Her name was Mrs. Christman, and her husband was a physician for Smith and Amherst and so on. And she was, herself, at the time, getting a degree, I think from Yale or something. Anyway she was a wonderful teacher. But the whole history department at – Mr. Overstreet, who was, of course, in the government department and was our faculty advisor in Geneva. We became very good friends.

AMES: So you mentioned that part of the pull to Smith was the junior year abroad program.

BUDD: Yeah. And, in general, the academics. I mean, I knew it was a superb school.

AMES: Okay. And you also mentioned that you went abroad to Geneva?

BUDD: That what?

AMES: You went abroad to Geneva?

BUDD: I did.

AMES: Okay. So that's clearly a large part of your Smith career. Let's –

BUDD: It was.

AMES: – do more about that.

BUDD: Well, I was born in Europe, in Germany, and I don't know. So I felt very – you know, I wanted to go back. And I just loved it. I loved being in Geneva. It's a beautiful city. I loved to ski. I did a lot of skiing that year, you know, having grown up in Colorado. It was a wonderful experience. And I came away being very fluent in French. And I'm still friendly with the daughter of the family that I lived with. In fact, we just visited them in Geneva in January. So that, it was a life-long friendship.

AMES: Are there any other ways that it influenced the remainder of your Smith career, aside from coming away fluent in French and being friends with some of the people that you met there?

BUDD: Any other ways of what?

AMES: Were there any other ways that your year abroad in Geneva was influential to your Smith career?

BUDD: Well, I came back, and I must admit, I got married in the middle of my senior year. And I was commuting back – I mean, I'd lived in the dorm, but my husband, who – we divorced some years later, I mean, 20 years later – was at Harvard Medical School, and so I was commuting back and forth. So it was kind of neither here nor there my senior year.

AMES: Were you involved in any extracurriculars, any clubs, sports, any organizations?

BUDD: Well, you know, I don't think there was nearly as much as there is today. As I say, I was on the judicial board my freshman year. I ran the Push program. Do they still call that the – help out with graduation at the end of sophomore year?

AMES: Yeah, sophomore Push.

BUDD: Yeah. I was chair of that. And then I was head of the junior year abroad program, and I was a class officer and, you know government kinds of things. I played tennis, but I don't remember any organized sporting activities then. That may be a change that you referred to earlier.

AMES: Moving on to a few questions about your house community when you were at Smith. What was your house community like?

BUDD: The house community?

AMES: Yes.

BUDD: I was in Franklin King in the quad. When I realized, in the summer, before I came that I would be assigned to a single room, because that dorm was almost all single rooms, I remember being very disappointed. I had thought college, I wanted a roommate. So anyway, that was an initial disappointment, but it turned out to be wonderful. It was good friends. And it's interesting, a number of people from our dorm remain very active. I think of just even here in this reunion, probably more from our dorm than any other, ahead of our class, you know. Anyway, a lot of people have stayed quite involved with Smith.

AMES: Absolutely. What was your relationship like with your house mother?

BUDD: Her name was Mrs. Brakie. She tried to make ladies of us all. This is an era that you all don't know about. We had tea every afternoon. And, if you've been in Franklin King or Laura Scales, you will notice at entry to the dining room, there is a cabinet with little cubicles. And I remember five years ago asking one of the

students who was helping out, "What do you think this was for?" And she looked at it and said, "The mail?" I said, "Come on. We're in the dining room, you know. This is not mail. We had cloth napkins, and they were changed every week, but we had our little cubicle for our cloth napkins. Those were the days when Mrs. Brakie tried very hard to make ladies out of us all.

AMES: Funny story.

BUDD: And we ate, you know, we had all our meals in the dorm.

AMES: How did the curfew system affect your life at Smith?

BUDD: Well, when I was on the judicial board, I was pretty strict about people that broke it, you know. And I look back and think, that was just really ridiculous. But it was definitely enforced.

AMES: What were your favorite Smith traditions?

BUDD: Well, I remember Rally Day was fun and, you know, everybody had a bike. I mean, we biked every day back and forth. Franklin King, you know, was over at the end of the campus. So that was fun. The Push committee was fun. Yeah.

AMES: How would you describe a typical Smithie during your –

BUDD: I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time seeing you because of the light.

AMES: How would you describe a typical Smithie during your four years at Smith?

BUDD: How would I describe Smith to a –

AMES: No. A Smith student.

BUDD: To a prospective student?

AMES: Yeah.

BUDD: As I said before, I think going to a women's college has many advantages. And I think women do find their voice. There's a lot of caring for one another. And I felt that here, people that weren't so outgoing somehow got cared for by others. And in that sense, I thought it was a very special place. I don't know what it's like today. I think, you know, we were more in our dorm. That was our small community. We ate there, and you felt a part of that community.

AMES: What challenges did you face during your –

BUDD: Well, the academics was, for me, quite a challenge. I mean, I'd gone to a big high

school in Denver. I don't think I'd ever written an essay before, you know. I mean, high school was easy. I mean, I worked hard and I got good grades. But when I came here, it was challenging. I think I got a C my first year in English, and that was, like, a shock. And so I worked very hard.

AMES: Did you ever feel isolated or excluded in any way?

BUDD: No. No, I didn't. I don't think I did. I mean, I felt, I think initially, you know, meeting people that had gone to private school and had had all these – that felt very comfortable in this environment was a little intimidating. But after awhile, that all evened out.

AMES: Were you involved in any student activism of any kind?

BUDD: Well, I just described, you know, the student government stuff, yeah.

AMES: Were you involved in any kind of political work outside of the college?

BUDD: No, not here. The year that we were in Geneva was the year of the Hungarian Revolution, 1956, and the Smith group adopted a couple of Hungarian refugees and, you know, we kind of helped them, gave them some clothes and – but, no. It was the 50s. People weren't politically active. It was Eisenhower, you know. There wasn't political activism here that I remember, none, none.

AMES: What are some of your richest memories from your time at Smith?

BUDD: What?

AMES: Some of your richest memories?

BUDD: My goodness. I don't know. I took some nice vacations and, you know, I enjoyed the classes and I don't know. I just enjoyed being here. I felt very comfortable here after the first month or two.

AMES: How did Smith prepare you for life after graduation?

BUDD: Well, after I graduated, I went on to Harvard and got a master's in education. Is that what you're asking me? What did –

AMES: Yeah. How did the way in which Smith – did it prepare you socially as well as academically for life?

BUDD: Well, I think, you know, a Smith degree was respected. And I taught high school history for a few years, and then I went to law school. And then I practiced law for 35 years.

AMES: So after Smith you went on to graduate school and then you taught?

BUDD: I taught for a few years, yeah. I was married.

AMES: Did your Smith degree carry over into these other aspects that you may not have been planning for?

BUDD: Well, I think so, you know. I mean, I had a good education. And I think it was, you know, easy to get into law school because of that.

AMES: So you got married during your senior?

BUDD: Yes.

AMES: So prior to your senior year when you got married, what was the dating culture like at Smith?

BUDD: Well, you went away, you know. You went to Dartmouth winter carnival and you went – I mean, there were a few of my friends from Denver who were at eastern schools and so, you know, they would invite you to go away for the weekend, and that's what you did. And there were mixers. Do you know what mixers are? I don't know. It was fine. And then at the end of my freshman year, just at the very end of my freshman year, I met my future husband, who was at Amherst. And so then I spent all sophomore year with him, you know. And then I went away for a year. So I'm probably not the best person to ask about the dating scene.

AMES: Fair enough, fair enough. Well, we are about to run out of time, so if possible I'd like to ask you a few wrap-up questions, because we've got about four minutes left. All right. So when you think about your time at Smith, what comes to mind first?

BUDD: I don't know. I think if I had to do it again, I wouldn't work as hard, maybe, spend more time kind of hanging out. You know, I came here and I felt intimidated by what I thought, everybody was so smart and so – you know. I mean, did fine. I was Phi Beta Kappa, you know. It worked out fine. But, boy, the first couple of years was really – I think I would have spent more time just kind of hanging out. But I don't know. I was very happy here.

AMES: That's good. It sounds like you were.

BUDD: You know, would I do that again today? Is that a question you want to ask me?

AMES: Why not?

BUDD: I don't know. I don't know, with the opportunities. I have two girls. Neither of them were interested in coming to an all-women's school. One did go to Amherst,

and the other one was at Harvard. But it just wasn't – you know, they had many more options than were available to us. So they wanted a different kind of college experience.

AMES: All right. And for my last question for you today, do you have any advice for current and future Smithies?

BUDD: I think just take advantage of – you know, take things that are hard to get elsewhere. I mean, as I said, I regret not having taken a basic music course. You know, the art course was just wonderful. And I only took the one, but it really provides a foundation to build on. To take a whole variety of things that provide a foundation for later. I think, you know, there's such a richness here of things to take. I don't know if it's possible, with all the requirements and so on, but I'd like to go back and do it again, take all the things you never took, you know.

AMES: All right. Well, this seems as good as any a place to stop. So thank you so much for coming and talking to us. We really appreciate it.

BUDD: You're very welcome. Yeah, good.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2013.