

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Jessica Chesnutt, Class of 2006
Natalie Sauro, Class of 2006

Interviewed by
Sunny Lawrence, Class of 2017

May 13, 2016

Abstract

In this interview, Jessica Chesnutt and Natalie Sauro talk about their time at Smith, including how they met, the influence of feminism on campus culture, and favorite Smith traditions. Chesnutt was a member of Ziskind House and Sessions Annex, while Sauro lived in Albright House.

Restrictions

None.

Format

Interview recorded using Sony EX1R camera, XDCam format.

Videographer

Video recorded by Kate Geis.

Transcript

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Chesnutt, Jessica and Natalie Sauro. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Video recording, May 13, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Jessica Chesnutt and Natalie Sauro, interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 13, 2016, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Chesnutt, Jessica and Natalie Sauro. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Transcript of video recording, May 13, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Jessica Chesnutt and Natalie Sauro, interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 13, 2016, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

Alumnae Oral History Project
Sophia Smith Collection
Smith College
Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted May13, 2016 with:

JESSICA CHESNUTT
NATALIE SAURO
Northampton, Massachusetts

by: SUNNY LAWRENCE

SAURO: Ready when you are.

CHESNUTT: OK.

LAWRENCE: So, I'm Sunny Lawrence, I'm here doing this interview for the Documenting Alumnae Oral History Project, and I'm here with, could you both say your full name and your class graduating here?

CHESNUTT: Sure, Jessica Chesnutt, 2006.

SAURO: And Natalie Sauro, 2006.

LAWRENCE: Thank you so much for being here. So just to start I want to talk a little bit about what your life was like before Smith, and how you came here. So, where did you both grow up?

SAURO: You can go first.

CHESNUTT: I grew up in San Francisco, California, and I went to what I call a hippie high school where we didn't really get grades and we had a lot of involvement, personal involvement with the teachers, and I was looking for a school that had strong dance program and a strong science program, and that's when I found Smith.

SAURO: And you were only looking East Coast schools?

CHESNUTT: I was only looking on the East Coast.

LAWRENCE: Was it important to you to go to a women's college?

CHESNUTT: I think, by the end of my decision making, it was, definitely.

LAWRENCE: What about you?

SAURO: So, I grew up in Maryland and Virginia, and a more traditional, public school background. And Smith was the only women's college I applied to, it was not important to my decision at all; however, once I got accepted and visited, you know, it felt right, and I knew immediately that it was where I should be, and I stayed on campus all four years because I loved it so much.

LAWRENCE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So once you got to Smith, what houses were both in?

CHESNUTT: I lived in Ziskind House for three years and then Sessions Annex.

SAURO: I lived in Albright for all four years.

LAWRENCE: Did you find your friends in your house or elsewhere?

CHESNUTT: Largely in the house. I also, I worked in the kitchen, so I met people that way, too. Oh, and, I worked in the boathouse too, that's a lot more exciting, and I met people there, too.

SAURO: Most of my friends were from Albright.

LAWRENCE: Did you, so you were working for a place with strong dance and science, is that what you ended up majoring in?

CHESNUTT: No, I majored in studio art by the end, but I took a lot of dance classes here, enjoyed them a lot, and I returned to science later in life, because now I'm a nurse practitioner and I did graduate school in nursing.

LAWRENCE: What about you?

SAURO: Which, what was the initial question, sorry?

LAWRENCE: What was your major?

SAURO: I majored in English, and I came as an English major and knew I was going to be and stuck with it the whole time. I actually kept my advisor the whole time as well, which I think is kind of rare, but I was assigned a really great professor, [Luke Gilliman?], as my pre-major advisor, and he was an English professor and stuck with him the whole time.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like you had mentors, either as professors or in older students?

SAURO: Definitely both, I would say. I actually, although my advisor was a great professor and a mentor of mine, I had a stronger mentor that I met in the writing center, and that I had taken a class with, so that would be probably my professor mentor figure, [Holly Davis?]. And then,

certainly, older students. I worked for the *Sophian*, all four years, and I looked up to the higher-up editors there.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, I don't know, I had both, too. Older students from my house, and I guess, basically, any of my art professors.

LAWRENCE: So, did you guys meet, like, really early in your Smith careers or did it take you a little while?

CHESNUTT: We did not, we met senior year in September, at Packard's and we found out, you know, once we started dating, that we had all these friends in common and all these missed connections, all these chances that we could have met before. And, my favorite missed connection was that we were both junior ushers and so if you remember, they line you up by height, and have the laurel draped between your shoulders, and we are basically the same height, and so six months later, when we met in September, we were looking at photos from Ivy Day, and we were just one person apart. So that was my favorite missed connection.

SAURO: And there's a photograph, an aerial photograph, of us, and that's how we figured it out.

LAWRENCE: So, once you met each other you said you moved to New York right after.

SAURO: We did, the day after Commencement.

LAWRENCE: Oh, OK. Cool.

CHESNUTT: Straight to Brooklyn, yep.

LAWRENCE: So it must have been a very rocky courtship.

CHESNUTT: It was, I think our initial plans were to move with two other Smithies to Brooklyn, and then in the last month that fell through, and so it was, you know, You're moving in together, get ready. And it, obviously, turned out fine.

LAWRENCE: Just going through your old *Sophians* it really seems like there's a very strong gay presence in Smith while you were there, is that true to your experience?

CHESNUTT: Yeah, I think so, yes. During our years, I think Celebration became Celebration Without Sisterhood, so I think there was a large gay presence and culture, but I think the movement during our time was towards trans acceptance, I think that was probably the change factor that was going on.

SAURO: Right, right.

LAWRENCE: Can you talk about the ways that you saw a movement towards trans acceptance happening on campus?

CHESNUTT: Well, I certainly don't have an intimate knowledge of what it was like before I got there, so I'm not sure what the starting point was, but when I came, my very first year, my Head Resident was trans, and so that was the first trans person I ever met, and it was literally day one. And, so it was just part of our day to day life, and it felt like the institution of Smith wasn't quite used to having trans people around yet, but it felt like the students were super already accepting and comfortable with it, would you describe that as accurate?

SAURO: Yeah, I agree, yeah, I think.

LAWRENCE: So, let's see, also it seems like there has always been, like, a liberal community here, but it seems like there was a lot of tension between liberals and conservatives at the time, was that part of your –

SAURO: A little bit.

LAWRENCE: Yeah?

SAURO: Yeah, I actually, and I'm still kind of proud that when I was editor of the *Sophian* I called upon the Smith Republicans to find my opinion page editor, and I wanted to do that on purpose so that the paper wasn't just a liberal perspective. And so I think that we reflected their views much more strongly than might have otherwise been the case if I didn't proactively try to seek somebody to provide that perspective. But they were really interesting conversations; I remember Ann Coulter came to campus while we were here and spoke, I'm pretty sure she spoke at JMG [John M. Greene Hall], I don't think she got that many people to come out, and protests and everything. Tammy Bruce, a slightly less famous conservative firebrand also came to speak, so I think that conservative students on campus were really active, and even though a much smaller group, were very vocal and lively.

LAWRENCE: Did you ever get any pushback for seeking out conservatives' opinions and publishing them?

SAURO: I don't think so, because we — and I mean, it was certainly always on the opinion page, we tried to make the news section truly objective. The bias there would have come from what stories we chose to cover, bias that you don't intend to have there as opposed to an opinion page where you can really just say whatever you feel. So, I don't think, I don't remember any strong pushback, I think it was, I think it was respected.

- LAWRENCE: Can you talk a little bit about your work in the *Sophian* more generally?
- SAURO: Sure, I kind of described my work at the *Sophian* as my minor, because it took so much time. I worked for the *Sophian* all four years on the features and art sections early on, and then for the whole paper as Associate Editor and Editor in Chief my last two years. It took up a lot of time, but it was really rewarding, I got to meet more people on campus that way and learn what was going on, I got to regularly meet with President Christ, and the administration, so I really enjoyed it, and it was one of my favorite things that I did here for sure.
- CHESNUTT: And you were publishing it weekly?
- SAURO: We were publishing weekly and we were publishing — and we would put it in everybody's mailbox because there were mailboxes and people read the paper, it was great.
- LAWRENCE: Were you involved in any kind of orgs, clubs?
- CHESNUTT: No, not really.
- SAURO: You did Celebrations.
- CHESNUTT: Oh, I did Celebrations Dance Company, my last two years, and I was Albright House President for my junior and senior year, so I was really into my Albright Community, I was a HONS.
- SAURO: You were more just all House, all the time.
- CHESNUTT: Basically.
- LAWRENCE: So, you met with Carol Christ earlier, what were the general student impressions about her, how did people feel about her?
- SAURO: So, I think people generally liked her, we were also the — the year we came was also the year she was inaugurated, and actually at our Reunion class headquarters right now there is a giant Carol Christ head about this big that we're all taking pictures with, so I think there's a lot of affection towards her. Because we were her first year, who was it, [John Connolly?] had been interim president just before, just prior, and because, I don't think he teaches here anymore, but because he was a philosophy professor and people had him as a professor, everybody loved him and then there was a stranger that came after, and so, she couldn't possibly have quite the same reception that John Connolly had, but I think everybody liked her and respected her.
- CHESNUTT: By the end everyone was –

SAURO: I was an English major, so I also liked her academic background, and she would occasionally teach; we took a class senior year, that was one credit, and it was in, I believe it was in Sage, it was an art performance class, and it met once a week. And it was a really simple class, we just had to write papers occasionally and go to concerts and performances, and so that was really cool to have her as a teacher as well.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, she came to lecture.

LAWRENCE: I read that there was some tension between students and administration about how racial issues were handled on campus?

CHESNUTT: I vaguely remember that, but I don't remember the details unfortunately.

SAURO: I don't remember that. I think it might have been more in the quad, and we were not quad people.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like Smith was a very racially diverse place?

CHESNUTT: It was a racially diverse place, I wouldn't say very.

SAURO: Yeah, I think so.

LAWRENCE: Were most of your friends also white people or did you hang out with a wide variety of people?

CHESNUTT: They were; in Ziskind, I mean, there were a lot of international students, I don't know if that is still the case, but so my first three years I had friends that were not white because of where I lived and I was introduced to them there. My roommate my first year was Nigerian, but the campus was still overwhelmingly white.

SAURO: Yeah, and I feel like it was pretty segregated most of the time.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like you fit in at Smith?

CHESNUTT: Yeah.

SAURO: Yeah. It still feels like I fit in here.

LAWRENCE: Do you feel like there was an image of a typical Smithie?

CHESNUTT: I think there would be a typical Smithie, but it would be different depending on who you ask, you know, a student would say it's one thing, a professor would say it's another, and an outsider would say it's something completely different.

LAWRENCE: Well, what would you say it is? Or, what it was in your moment.

- SAURO: Somebody you probably have — OK, so I'm going to describe both physical and personality. You would probably have tattoos or really visible piercings, we both had facial piercings when we were here.
- CHESNUTT: We do not anymore. Your hair would probably be this short or shorter; you would wear comfortable clothes and practical shoes, right? But you would be politically engaged even if, no matter what side of the spectrum you would fall on. Intellectually engaged, interested in arts and culture, pretty awesome people. That's what I would say.
- SAURO: Yeah, and vocal, and yeah, spirited, I think.
- LAWRENCE: Do you feel like there was a widespread feminist consciousness?
- SAURO: Yeah, oh yes. It's in the water.
- LAWRENCE: Can you talk about what it was like going to a feminist school?
- CHESNUTT: Sure, that certainly, I couldn't have put my finger on it when I chose Smith, but that was certainly one of the things that made it feel right to me. And, there was never one day where I wanted to be in a different environment, this place felt so supportive and that I really could do anything. I feel like it set us up to succeed in whatever you wanted to do, and that's what you want from a college experience, and it had to be, because it had a feminist core. This is a place to build strong women, basically.
- LAWRENCE: And you feel the same way?
- SAURO: Yeah, and I — what was the march in Washington for reproductive health or something that we all went to and we were passionate about.
- CHESNUTT: Circa 2003.
- SAURO: Yeah, 2003, 2004, and it's funny now because I can't even remember what it was for, but it was a big deal at the time.
- LAWRENCE: I know that besides being involved, that a lot of the Smithies were involved with marches against the war, what was it like being here during the Bush years and while all that was happening?
- CHESNUTT: It was bizarre; I remember precisely when war was declared, I was in my room in Ziskind and I had the TV on. And my stepfather was a Marine at the time, so it was weird because although we lived through the First Gulf War, we were very young then, and it had felt like we had been in a time of peace for a long time, I think, before that. And being

in such a liberal environment as the Smith community is, it also felt crazy that that was what was going on outside of this bubble.

SAURO: And I kept myself in the bubble and didn't really pay attention, I think, that the war was, going on.

CHESNUTT: If my stepfather wasn't a Marine I might not have.

SAURO: And it was something that we could be against, but other than that I wasn't.

CHESNUTT: There were some really great [shirts and faces?], though. Like, anti-Bush shirts at the time, you know, ones that made jokes about genitalia, good Bush, bad Bush, that kind of stuff.

LAWRENCE: Were you involved in any of the anti-war demonstrations?

SAURO: No, I would cover them sometimes in the *Sophian*, but no, I didn't engage.

LAWRENCE: I probably read your articles while I was (inaudible). So one thing that we did read a lot about is how there was an online presence of Smithies and anonymous forums, did that change the way, change the community at all, or change the way students could talk about the college?

SAURO: It did; so we had this thing called the Daily Jolt, and you could be anonymous on there and really complain about anything you wanted, and it was kind of vicious, and I think it was the local version of what Reddit is today. But Facebook also came along like sophomore year, maybe, and I think that that threw everything out in the open, and I think that was actually almost a healthy development, because people were no longer using the Jolt, no longer using an anonymous forum so much. But yeah, I mean, it could be a way to kind of say mean things about people without identifying who you were, so it was kind of an unhealthy place, I think. But I stayed out of it.

LAWRENCE: So did that, the rise of social media, you find that changing the way people communicated on campus?

SAURO: Oh, definitely. Yeah, I mean, so Facebook was brand new, it was easier to connect with people, and somebody in your class, you could find out who they were more easily than before. But we all still had phones in our rooms and we — smart phones weren't quite a thing yet, but we had cell phones so we would text.

CHESNUTT: Were we texting?

SAURO: Yeah, people would text. I wasn't. I remember Facebook coming out and it being a big deal, and we were one of the first colleges that were, you know, invited.

CHESNUTT: Right, because you had to have a .edu email address originally. And we would do a lot of Facebook stalking, we Facebook stalked each other.

SAURO: So, when we met, somebody said that they were dating you, and you were not with this person. But she had on her page that she was with you, and I found that out on Facebook.

CHESNUTT: Oh, sorry about that.

LAWRENCE: So, besides Facebook stalk each other, what did people do for fun, what were some standard recreational activities?

CHESNUTT: Well, I did spend a lot of time at the boathouse, so I would go I would take canoes out and kayaks, and go up the river, and once it was senior year go up the river with some beers. I would go to the music and see movies; I really miss all the great concerts that Smith put on. We went to a lot of concerts. We had a John Legend concert and I did not know who he was, and I regret to this day that I did not go see him, because he is amazing. But yeah so arts and culture, the entertainment venues in town are great, too, and bring in great bands. I think it was mostly that.

SAURO: Yeah, we would go out into town mostly, had such good restaurants and bars and everything.

LAWRENCE: Did you have Smith traditions that were very important to you?

CHESNUTT: All of them.

LAWRENCE: Got any favorites?

CHESNUTT: I loved Primal Scream.

SAURO: Primal Scream, yes. I love Convocation, Convocation is great, we were just looking at yearbook photos, I can't believe how many people have their nipples forever in the yearbook in Convocation photos, but it was really fun.

CHESNUTT: Ziskind would wear white shirts with black electrical tape Zs on them, we were very conservative, and then my final year in Sessions I wore a full coverage bra, that was as sexy as I got.

SAURO: Oh, for Convocation.

CHESNUTT: For Convocation.

SAURO: I was like, What are you talking about?

CHESNUTT: What other traditions? I never jumped in the pond, but people did that.

SAURO: I don't know if it was an Albright tradition or what, but we would go into the fountain.

CHESNUTT: The [Lyman?] fountain?

SAURO: The Lyman fountain, after Convocation, and play around with the statue.

CHESNUTT: There was also, I don't know if they still do this, there was a float race that would happen in the fall, from the boathouse dock, but it was each House or clubs would decorate a canoe, essentially, and then have a race, but the decorations would fall into the pond and everything would go crazy, that was one of my favorite. I think it was called Float Night.

SAURO: It was called Float Night.

CHESNUTT: That was one of my favorite traditions. What else? I don't know. I mean, I loved [tea?], yes.

LAWRENCE: So, besides meeting each other, are there particularly significant parts of your Smith experience that you think of as being the most important?

SAURO: Well, when President Christ was inaugurated, the college put on a big party, essentially, and they might have done the same thing with [Kathy McCarthy?]. But I remember we had a weeklong slew of activities and they brought Gloria back and had all these panels and fireworks and everything, so that I still remember to this day. And they scheduled it over Parents weekend too, so a lot of our families got to come, so that I remember very distinctly and that was the first time I ever saw Gloria Steinem speak. So that was great. And I do remember some of the speakers that I mentioned earlier, the conservative people that came, Dennis Kucinich came, Carol Moseley Braun came, I think I remember those opportunities to hear people that I otherwise wouldn't have. And certain classes definitely stick out to me as well. I took a politics and language class that I still remember really fondly, the American presidency was great and I had a lot of friends in that; we had that cool Carol Christ class, I feel like everybody in the class of 2006 was in queer studies with us, and that was so big that we had to have the class in Stoddard Hall in the auditorium.

LAWRENCE: They still do that, by the way.

SAURO: Yeah, good. So those were memorable.

CHESNUTT: I really liked being on campus early and late, like when it was more empty, because then you're making memories with just your close, close friends. So for me it was being HONS sophomore year was really memorable, and then my closest friends were from that and they still are. And I remember silly things too, like once I was able to drink, I tried one spring weekend to hit up all the parties, and so I had all these wristbands, and it was just silly, but when you're younger at Smith you're more intimidated by everybody around and impressing people and things like that, and then by senior year, it's like, I haven't seen all the Houses yet, I want to go to all the parties just to see all the houses before I leave this place, I don't care. So, I remember fun things like that, too.

SAURO: Because you get a wristband at each party, right?

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like anything about Smith changed while you were here at all, did they evolve?

CHESNUTT: I think so, it became more important, and you realize how special the place it is, you know by junior and senior year. And then you cherish a little bit more and get sad that you're leaving.

SAURO: Yeah, I think that it grows stronger with time.

CHESNUTT: Or you leave, I mean I think if you stay, because people do choose to transfer out, but I think if you stay you stay for a reason and you love it. This is a unique place, and it either fits or it doesn't.

LAWRENCE: Did either of you go abroad?

CHESNUTT: Nope.

SAURO: No.

LAWRENCE: Neither of you.

SAURO: And that might be why we love it so much. Also, we had a whole extra year here.

CHESNUTT: I said I love this place too much, I don't want to leave it, I remember making that decision very early.

LAWRENCE: What were your favorite places on campus or in town to spend time?

CHESNUTT: I like the trees all over campus, and I know this sounds silly, but I used to go on tree walks with my best friend Judy. And it is an arboretum,

and the trees have tags and you can learn about them, and I would — I loved that, so on our walk here we saw the giant sequoia behind the library. And I was like, Hi, hi favorite tree. So, I like the trees, and the boathouse, I love the boathouse.

SAURO: Albright porch, porch swing always one of my favorite places.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, and I liked the Sessions Annex porch swing, they have one, too. Both, all the porches, the outdoor spaces, the greenery. Yes, the only other place would be the *Sophian* office used to be in a tiny little house behind Davis, called Capen Annex, and now it's something else, they moved the *Sophian* to I think the basement of King-Scales, but I spent a lot of time there, and it was right behind Ziskind, in that same area, so it was very convenient when I was living there. But, that's another one.

LAWRENCE: What were your social circles like, what were your friend groups like?

CHESNUTT: Well I had a lot of different circles that would overlap in different ways, it was the House, it was my major, people that I knew from class, people that I knew from working so either in the kitchen or in the boathouse, and I moved houses so I got to have a new circle. Mostly those.

SAURO: Yeah, you had a lot of friends, I had a smaller group.

CHESNUTT: Well, you stayed put.

SAURO: I stayed put, so I had a smaller group. But then I guess I was friendly with my dance groups and that was different grades and different class years.

LAWRENCE: Were you friends mostly with other LGBT people (inaudible). The open ceiling (inaudible). OK, were you friends mostly with other LGBT people or was it more diverse?

SAURO: I probably wasn't until we started dating, actually.

CHESNUTT: It was mixed, I would say. I don't know, it just depends on who you randomly get assigned to live with, I feel like, and Ziskind didn't have a lot of queer people in it, so my first couple of years it would be a minority of my friends, but then your group had a lot more queer people, so once we dated it was more 50-50 I would say, but never a majority.

LAWRENCE: Did you ever try to sneak out of your community at all?

SAURO: I don't think we felt the need to; it just was a queer community already. I feel like the straight community is deferential toward the queer

community here, so it's like by default a queer-accepting space, you don't have to assert yourself, it's just understood. That's how I feel.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, I agree.

LAWRENCE: What was the dating culture like here?

SAURO: Promiscuous, everybody dated each other, right?

CHESNUTT: Or, dating, I think was hooking up, really.

SAURO: So we were just, yeah sure, both, we were just with a friend on the Albright porch and she was saying that when she was dating somebody senior year, she didn't realize, but she was the piece on the side, and this woman had a girlfriend, and she found out after the fact.

CHESNUTT: We didn't know this. This is gossip that we're sharing now.

SAURO: Ten years later we found out. Yeah, it's funny.

LAWRENCE: Did either of you have other relationships while you were at Smith?

CHESNUTT: Yes.

SAURO: I did, but not with other Smithies. (inaudible) other Smithies.

CHESNUTT: Yes, I dated other Smithies before.

LAWRENCE: What was that experience like?

CHESNUTT: I don't want to talk about it.

LAWRENCE: Did you — so you dated someone who wasn't a Smithie, were they another Five College student?

SAURO: No, I dated some men in town that were other college students, but not Five College. So some townies, they were fine.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like there was interaction with the other Five Colleges?

SAURO: A little bit.

CHESNUTT: I think there was.

SAURO: More of my, again, we're going to stereotype a little bit, but more of my quad friends interacted with mostly men from the Five Colleges.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, the men.

- LAWRENCE: Did you ever take Five College classes?
- SAURO: I did, but at Mount Holy Oak. I took history of jazz there, it was a great class. I really enjoyed it.
- CHESNUTT: And I took a color theory at Hampshire. It was a good class.
- LAWRENCE: What did you feel like people were concerned with, on a political level, what were the issues that were in the air?
- SAURO: Well, we had a presidential election during our four years, when John Kerry ran and lost. So that was, I mean, I think people were really focused on that election and the war, as you've already brought up. I think those were probably the biggest things. I mean, you can't even remember what your reproductive rights march, what bill, court case or whatever it was in support of. I'll have to look it up. But yeah, I mean, it was really all about the war, and then the presidential election, I would say.
- LAWRENCE: Did you feel like the majority of people were politically engaged?
- CHESNUTT: Yeah, definitely. I think, not everybody would necessarily take pleasure in talking about politics, but everybody was engaged and knew what was going on, some people were just more private, I would say. The Smith Feminist Club sold t-shirts from Hillary Clinton's New York Senate run, during our time, so there was even knowledge of races that had nothing to do with Massachusetts or nationwide.
- LAWRENCE: Smith is still part of this whole conversation about college campuses being too politically correct; did you feel like that was something that was talked about when you were there?
- CHESNUTT: Maybe a little bit, I have followed a lot of that conversation after graduation, and in the years since, I don't remember too much of it when we were here, I think the closest thing to political correctness was really dropping sisterhood from Celebration, as such an internal Smith culture thing, that it didn't involve the outside world saying, "Why are you being so PC," it was really just the Smith community, because it's a student event and everything.
- SAURO: Yeah, I don't think we were very politically correct, or concerned about it.
- LAWRENCE: Was there ever a student objection to having conservative speakers on campus?

CHESNUTT: Yes, but not to the extent that anybody cancelled to my knowledge. So, also right before us, right before we came, I think 2001 or so, it was when Madeline Albright was there the commencement speaker, and there was a lot of protest about her, that might have, or it might have been our first year, it might have been our first year, it might have been 2003. But then it was kind of quiet. That was the last thing that we really remember.

LAWRENCE: Do you feel like you made the most of your time here?

CHESNUTT: I think so, I could have gotten more As but I don't think so.

SAURO: I guess I made the most of my, no, there's always more, there's always more to do.

LAWRENCE: Are there things you wish you would have done differently?

SAURO: Yes.

CHESNUTT: What?

SAURO: I think, just being a little bit more, not worldly, but a little more open, not so, you know, clique-ish.

LAWRENCE: Do you feel like it was hard to make friends outside the House?

SAURO: Sometimes.

LAWRENCE: Do you didn't seem to feel that way?

CHESNUTT: No, I mean, the Houses have different cultures, too, so she, I know this after the fact, we didn't know each other first year, but she started out in one of the only triples on campus. So she got really strong friendships from day one, and I lived in Ziskind where there's very few doubles, almost everybody has a single. And I did have a roommate my first year as I mentioned, but you, once you're isolated in a single you have to try harder to make friends, and so you had your build-in natural friend group there that was really strong from the beginning, and I had to find mine. But I also had the advantage that Sessions was across the street and they ate in our dining room, so I had multiple Houses that I could befriend easily. And that's how I know where the secret staircase is.

LAWRENCE: Do you feel like going to a women's college has served you since?

SAURO: I do, I think it's one of the best decisions I've made in my entire life, and I volunteer for the Alumni Association to interview applicants as well, and they often ask me what did Smith do for you, and why I do

love it so much. I've really, I mean, I think it gave me incredible confidence, and I don't know how, I joked that feminism is in the water, I feel like the confidence just, it comes to you when you're here, it's not something that is explicitly taught or anything. And that is the greatest gift that I received here, I honestly think. I also think the network is incredibly strong, it hasn't gotten me a job, but it has gotten me all of our core friend group is Smithies, including those from other years that we've met in New York. Obviously, we met there, I love it. It's a core part of my identity; and I do think Smith, although being an alum has never given me a job, I do think having it on my resume gets me in the door.

CHESNUTT: Yeah, I think so, too, I think just having the name helps sometimes. And it's like a shorthand, you meet somebody from Smith and you just understand each other. Yeah, and you, it makes you very confident and self assured, because you feel safe; even coming back I feel more confident than I do at home, and I guess it's because I feel safer here, or whatever.

LAWRENCE: I feel like there's been some conversation that I've seen in the news lately about Are women's colleges still relevant? What's your reaction to that?

SAURO: I think that — well, my reaction is I think that question will be perpetual and keep coming back, but I think that there will still be women that want this kind of environment, and I think that Smith is the strongest women's college out there in a number of different ways, including financially. We're doing all right, so I'm not concerned about this place in particular, and I hope that the other women's colleges do not keep shrinking, and stick around, I think it's important.

CHESNUTT: I think they're very important and even though they're changing, they're still relevant and you still gain a sense of community and all of those other things from it that make us feel good.

LAWRENCE: What have your lives been like since Smith?

CHESNUTT: The best. We live in New York, I work in academic publishing, and I have — since Smith, I've had a 10-year career now, but I think been pretty great, I work for Oxford University Press, now, so another hallowed institution, and we have a nine-year-old pug, Olive, it's our fur baby as well, so we have a nice life. And Natalie's a pediatric nurse practitioner in private practice; she went to graduate school at Columbia —

SAURO: I did.

CHESNUTT: To get a nursing degree. And things are good right now.

LAWRENCE: You didn't major in anything to do with academic publishing.

CHESNUTT: No, I didn't major in anything –

LAWRENCE: How did you go down that road?

CHESNUTT: I was working in advertising after Smith, and –

END OF INTERVIEW

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