

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Anne Devaney, Class of 1977

Interviewed by
Vivian Andreani, Class of 2013

May 26, 2012

Abstract

In this oral history, Anne Devaney describes being at Smith for its' Centennial, living in Wilder, Washburn, and Lawrence and the house traditions she remembers, the struggle for funding for the lesbian organization Sophia's Sisters, being the only white student in an African American literature class, the excitement and happiness around President Conway's appointment, her experiences as head of rec council, and her career after Smith in student services and human resources.

Restrictions

None.

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 60-minute tape.

Transcript

Transcribed by Janet Harris with Harris Reporting. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Kayla Ginsburg.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Devaney, Anne. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Video recording, May 26, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Anne Devaney, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 26, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: Devaney, Anne. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Transcript of video recording, May 26, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Anne Devaney, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 26, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 26, 2012, with:

ANNE DEVANEY

by: VIVIAN ANDREANI

ANDREANI: This is Vivian Andreani, and I'm conducting an interview with Anna Devaney, Class of 1977 on May 26, 2012, for the Smith College Alumnae and Oral History Project. Thank you for agreeing to be here.

DEVANEY: Thank you.

ANDREANI: So how did you choose Smith?

DEVANEY: It was very funny actually how I choose Smith. I was not going to a woman's college, not for nothing, uh-uh, nope. Not gonna happen. My aunt was a class -- graduate of the Class of '26, so my mother said, "Just please visit, just for your aunt." So I did and was very happy I didn't get accepted to any of the places that I had applied that I had originally had on my list. I was waitlisted at them and was even more happy to get the letter from Smith that said come here.

ANDREANI: So you fell in love automatically when you got to campus?

DEVANEY: Mm-hmm.

ANDREANI: So how would you describe a typical Smithie from your time?

DEVANEY: From my time?

ANDREANI: Mm-hmm.

DEVANEY: It was a combination of people. There were the people who were a lot of work in a lot of ways, academically, music or social service or fill in the blank, but they were involved in lots of things that were all serious; and then there were some of the rest of us who were decent students. I believe one of my own faculty said, "Well, you're trying to get a well-rounded education." Emphasis apparently was on the well-rounded, so I said, "Well, I'm trying to get everything in, yes." (laughter) And then there were the other -- a few, but you didn't last very long if you forgot the well-rounded part and you forgot the education part, so those weren't very many. Mid-terms came and that was a deciding factor typically for many amongst us about which way we were going. Out or --

ANDREANI: Or staying.

DEVANEY: Or staying and changing our approaches to life. Yeah, yeah.

ANDREANI: So how would you describe the campus atmosphere during your time?

DEVANEY: It's funny. We were in a transition time between the '60s of avid advocacy and involvement and uproar on campus were changing everything that happened at Smith, and we were the beginning of the people who had all these things done for us, if you will. So sort of like as a 50-something woman now, I wonder how many young women understand what happened that paved the way for them, who are -- I'm sure a number of alums who are wondering why we didn't get that the way had been paved for us to be more independent on campus. So it was different.

ANDREANI: So could you tell that the times were changing at that time?

DEVANEY: Absolutely. There were lots of -- there were social, cultural markers, popular cultural markers. Things like the Billie Jean King, oh, heck, what was his name -- oh, I blanked on his name. The tennis match that was the women and men championship match, and of course, Billie Jean won and things like that were going on. Discussions here had ended about being co-educational, but they were starting at Amherst and other places, so it was not necessarily pretty in the discussions about gender in general.

ANDREANI: Okay. So were there any discussions about that while you were here or they already were --

DEVANEY: Absolutely while I was here and especially because the Centennial was going on then so the whole Centennial year was kind of a revelation in many ways that we all learned together about Smith and I was one of the lucky people to actually take the seminar that was offered in the archives, so there were only 15 of us that were even allowed into it and luck of the draw, I got into it. So that was a totally different emphasis to learn too.

ANDREANI: So what were your experiences at the archives learning about Smith history?

DEVANEY: It was interesting, you know, coming -- because I spent most of my time in the Sophia Smith Collection just because that's what I was focusing on and others were doing more work in the archive. So I was looking at Women's history and other things related to campus and some others were looking at different directions, so it was fascinating, and just as Professor Van Dyne said yesterday during the seminar that this is -- you know, you get in, you actually get to touch it, feel it, see it, read the original, puzzle over the handwriting, and it's not because you're looking at a photocopy. You're looking at the real thing, which is very cool. Very cool.

ANDREANI: So have you ever -- always been kind of connected to women's history and --

DEVANEY: Yeah, I think that's a safe statement to make, yeah.

ANDREANI: Changing gears a little bit, what house did you live in?

DEVANEY: I started in Wilder and I lived there for two years before I moved to Washburn for junior year and then I moved to Lawrence for senior year. I was very unusual at that point, although as it turned out there were several of us that migrated to Lawrence for our senior year.

ANDREANI: Yeah? What was the motivation for that, do you know?

DEVANEY: For a couple of -- they had been away so they wanted to change houses when they came back. For me Washburn house was great. It was a nice environment, but I wanted to be in a place where there were going to be a few more seniors. I think there were only going to be two of us for senior year and one went to Chase, so that meant one of us was going to be there, and so I said I think I might want to go someplace where there are seniors.

ANDREANI: So were there any stereotypes about areas of the campus. You moved from the Quad to Green Street, like what -- were there tensions between areas of campus, I mean, huge differences?

DEVANEY: Weren't tensions, but you know, there wasn't a whole lot of meeting between -- unless you were in class with somebody, you very rarely got to know the people in the other houses, so that was one of the advantages I had that I didn't realize how much of an advantage I had by doing that.

ANDREANI: By moving?

DEVANEY: Yeah.

ANDREANI: How did Smith deal with outsiders? I mean racial outsiders, sexuality-wise, class-wise, not everybody fits the Smith bill, so --

DEVANEY: Right.

ANDREANI: -- how did Smith deal with that? Smith as an institution, and the students themselves?

DEVANEY: Well, the students themselves, I'll kind of focus on that because I was -- student government was very different back then and we had student government cabinet and then house governance and all the other things that related to it, and I was a member of the cabinet because I was head of rec council which was the student body president, the treasurer, the rec

council and I forget to be perfectly honest. There were five is all I can remember and those are the ones I remember.

And one of the things that we had to do was get the student activity budget approved, and my senior year was the first year that funding was being sought for the organization then known as Sophia Sisters for lesbian -- transgender wasn't a word then -- students. And it was a big fight and I think it was for a whopping \$250 in allocations which in a -- at that point \$100,000 budget wasn't exactly a lot of money, but it almost defeated the budget because students had to vote on it house by house. And it was not a pleasant place to be from -- if you were advocating -- never mind if you were more than just an ally. It was not a pretty place and there were issues with race that was still -- there was lots of leftovers from the 60s, still here, absolutely.

I remember one class I was in that was a literature class in African-American studies and I was the only white woman in the class, and there was a discussion that came up from some of the students in the class and they said, "Well, we can't have any white women here." And unfortunately the professor did not say, yes, we can. And she actually asked me to leave the room, which was -- I was quite disheartened that our academic environment was not as open as one would hope. I appreciated the fact that the students felt that they needed to have a conversation, but I didn't think if that was going to be the case, the classroom was not going to be the right place for that conversation. And there was another one we should have had instead.

But it also put me in the position of understanding something that other students had had plenty of opportunity to be subjected to.

ANDREANI: So did you ever see homophobia and racism actually re-enacted at Smith?

DEVANEY: I don't think I really saw the racism re-enacted at Smith, although I won't say that I didn't, because I just don't remember that. But yes, the homophobia very definitely so.

ANDREANI: Did that -- did your experiences here at Smith with racism, homophobia, et cetera, did that shape the rest of your life in any way? Did that raise your political consciousness?

DEVANEY: It certainly made me much more conscious of how challenging it was going to be --

ANDREANI: Mm-hmm.

DEVANEY: -- to be a member of society at large, not just this relatively closed society and if it was going to happen in a place that had the kind of community that Smith had, then it was going to be not very pretty where there wasn't community of the same level. So I certainly have never been known as being shy and I wasn't then either, but at least from being outspoken about

political things, but it made me much more conscious and much more aware of raising questions.

ANDREANI: You mentioned a professor that asked you to leave the classroom, were there any other negative experiences or positive experiences that you had with professors at Smith?

DEVANEY: Lots of positive ones actually. I was -- you know, I was lucky enough to have some really good teachers and in and out of the classroom, I might add and learning a lot from them, and one of the ones that was from my political science -- the gov side, from early American political thought, Cecilia Kenyon who there are like three sets of memories. Everybody remembers her driving this enormous boat of a car that was old then and so it was even more of a boat than the rest of us had because we all had the older family cars that were boats, those of us who had cars that is, and she drove an enormous boat and everyday she would come in with an armful of books. She was about 4'10" and tiny, not just short, and she would come in with an armload of books that probably every day weighed more than she did, to her office up in Wright Hall and her door was very rarely open, but if you knocked you were always invited in.

So she really made an impression on me because I was fascinated by the founders and everything related to the Constitution and the Revolution and what happened as we got into later days and the country's Bicentennial was going on, and she got a call when we were in class one day and the department secretary came running over in a tizzy that it was a very important call and she needed to take it. And she said, 'I don't care where it's from, I'm teaching.' It was the White House wanting her to speak at one of the Bicentennial events and she didn't care. She was going to finish class and then they could talk with her.

ANDREANI: That's amazing. So how did campus change while you were at Smith? Did you see any changes?

DEVANEY: Physically it didn't change very much. The one big change here was that Ainsworth Gym opened while we were here, this was still a gym [referring to the Alumnae Gym where the interview took place]. We were still using it for gym things and student events. So there was very little physical change at that time. It's changed a lot more since I left. Actually I shouldn't say that. There were -- oh, heck, the Friedman complex was also built while we were here. I don't think it opened while we were here, but it was -- it was underway, so that kind of change was limited, but it was -- that was kind of okay too.

ANDREANI: Other kind of change, have you seen any other kind of change?

DEVANEY: Well, big change from President Mendenhall to President Conway.

ANDREANI: Can you talk a little bit about that?

DEVANEY: That was one of the cooler things at the convocation when she was announced as president during the -- excuse me, the centennial year was a pretty big deal. So that was pretty cool to add to everything else that was going on and to have her come to campus and get to know her just a little bit by virtue of being on rec council because you got invited to -- you will attend meetings in the president's office with some regularity if something happened in some social event somewhere on campus over the weekend, because students were in charge and I did have those phone calls on some Monday mornings.

ANDREANI: She was the first female president of Smith.

DEVANEY: Mm-hmm.

ANDREANI: How did that change the campus atmosphere? How did people react to her? How did you react to her as well?

DEVANEY: Well, not surprisingly it was very celebratory to have that. Since we had had acting women presidents -- women acting as president, but we had never had somebody named to an official term and everything and it was pretty cool just to say the doors are open and maybe it took us longer than we'd like to think it did at a woman's college but it's happened and it's here. And she has got an incredible academic reputation and reputation as an administrator and you know, she was very welcoming and yet also very presidential, for lack of a better definition. Yeah.

ANDREANI: Was there any dialogue about feminism during your stay here?

DEVANEY: Any doubt?

ANDREANI: Any dialogue.

DEVANEY: Oh, any dialogue. I mean I think that was kind of an ongoing discussion at that time. You know Ms. magazine was now moving to a mass market as opposed to being kind of a limited market, shall we say. And so there were lots of discussions but not in the '60s conscious-raising kind of direction. It was sort of transitioning into the women can do and be anywhere and do and be anything.

ANDREANI: Mm-hmm.

DEVANEY: We hadn't quite gotten past the hurdle of you have to choose between work and family but we were still at the place where you could have it all which wasn't necessarily the smartest idea the way it was being approached at the time, but yeah, those discussions were all ongoing.

ANDREANI: What was the campus's reaction to the Vietnam War?

DEVANEY: Well, see by the time I was here, it was over.

ANDREANI: It was over.

DEVANEY: It was -- or all but over I should say. It ended while we were here, but so that all of the things that had happened before us, so we were sort of in the -- I won't say lull, but in a way it was a lull in the political environment, so we were at first thought of as being apathetic which wasn't really true, it's just that we didn't have quite the same number of big things with the war, the draft, civil rights, other things. Now we were, what do we find to be active about and that included things like being women and feminists and how do we make life remember to include us at the 100 percent level instead of the afterthought.

ANDREANI: What were your experiences with dating while at Smith?

DEVANEY: They were limited, I would say, but that was also because I wasn't willing to say I'm going to go off to all of these places so I can meet men, and then because I got involved in rec council, trust me there wasn't time, because we didn't have any staff then. We didn't have like a student activities and campus center staff. There weren't any. The students were the staff. And so I used to do things like on house party weekends, it was my responsibility to walk around with public safety and somebody from facilities management to see what the problems were so that when I did get the call on Monday morning from the president's office, it wasn't the first I heard of it at least.

But yeah, it was a different -- it was a different world from that perspective so that I wasn't able to do it and I didn't have a tremendous amount of interest in that either at the time, because I really wasn't interested in going to meat markets. It didn't matter what kind, I wasn't interested.

ANDREANI: Yeah, what clubs and organizations were you part of besides SGA and cabinet?

DEVANEY: I was involved in the house council when I was in Wilder and a little bit at Washburn. I wasn't at all at Lawrence, but once I got involved in rec council it kept me pretty busy because I joined that actually my sophomore year, so that was sort of my biggest involvement but supported lots of others by either participating in their activities and events or doing something but not a lot with the international students.

ANDREANI: So what was the interactions of the campus with international students while you were here?

DEVANEY: We certainly didn't have the number that are here now but international students at that point still outnumbered any American students of color at least. And I always seemed to end up with a neighbor who was from another country, usually an Asian country but not always, in one place or another so that I always had the opportunity to interact with people from China or Thailand or Malaysia or Taiwan or Hong Kong it seemed like in every -- every building I was in and then we had a couple of French students and I remember one Italian in one house I was in, so it was kind of Western or Asian at that time and it is far more diverse now.

ANDREANI: What did it mean for you to have those interactions?

DEVANEY: I had -- I had grown up having a lot of those interactions because my family had hosted international students that were on either long term travel programs but they only had short stops so we would host them then, so it was important to me to learn because I learned to make it important. So it was a privilege to me to be able to be part of conversations with people who had totally different backgrounds and who had come a very long ways to go to school.

ANDREANI: So what has your career been like since Smith?

DEVANEY: Well, the irony is that the first 25 years after I got out of here I worked in student activities, so it led to my career. I was quite surprised to discover that people actually got paid to do that. It really was quite a surprise that there were people who like got degrees in everything, so I in fact went on and got my masters and worked in student activities and campus center management, and then there were some changes for me in life, and when I came back East those opportunities were not in the area where I needed to be geographically and I ended up making a career change into human resources, which is not so different actually, at least when you're in the hospitality business, because now you're recruiting college students to work at your facilities, if you're in New England, especially if you're in a wedding market that focuses on the summer season. You just have a different relationship with college students now. It's -- it hasn't been as difficult a transition as some people think it would be.

ANDREANI: So how does Smith factor into your life?

DEVANEY: Not as much as I would like it to be able to. But always factors into my life as a point of meaning, a place that I'm always proud to say that I'm associated with, graduated from, connections over the years for a long time with, you know, it's a small circle relatively speaking when you look at how many of us there are, but those folks are there, they always will be whether they are here physically or not doesn't matter, they always will be -- we'll always be connected, so it has been a base for me in that way and I had an aunt who came here and so it was also a family connection that

way, even though I didn't want to fess up to it for the first 18 years of my life.

ANDREANI: So you --- what was your connection like -- do you still have your friends from Smith? Do you keep -- have you kept contact?

DEVANEY: I have -- Facebook, thank God, has made that a lot easier. I -- we moved a lot in the course of my work and so that made it hard for people to keep up with me more than anything else and I've not been known as the best correspondent. So Facebook, it doesn't matter where you are, you actually are able to stay connected so that -- yes, we have been, but it's amazing how, especially with the Smith connection, you don't necessarily have to have known one another when you were in school, come to reunion and you get the opportunity to talk with people you didn't get to know until you came to reunion, which is pretty cool.

ANDREANI: Looking back, what's your favorite Smith memory.

DEVANEY: Oh. That's a hard question. That's a very hard question actually because I don't know how to pull one out, but --

ANDREANI: Well, if you can just -- you can give as many as you want, you don't need to choose one.

DEVANEY: I was going to say there'd be a composite of -- you know, every house has its own traditions and one of the ones that was very cool, I think, in Wilder was the extemporaneous speech contest, which was always coupled with the ice cream eating contest. They don't really fit together but that's just -- they worked together there, so they were, and extemporaneous, which I never entered it because I knew that based on what the topics were, I was never going to make it (laughs) but -- and you -- you kind of really had to be up for it. After you saw it the first couple times you knew that you really best be up for it and they were fun. They were very competitive, but really fun because house council picked a topic and then people drew their part of the topic out of the hat and had less than two minutes to give a ten-minute talk.

Yeah. So no easy thing but they were not usually kind of straight, dry topics that they had to speak on so you got a chance to really see your classmates senses of humor or their ability to struggle to find that humor in the topics that they were given as the case may be. And that was pretty cool. That was a -- you know, you didn't miss that one come hell or high water and it was not scheduled when M.A.S.H. was on TV.

ANDREANI: What topic -- like can you remember any specific topics there were?

DEVANEY: There would be something like farming is really important, especially for -
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ANDREANI: What --

DEVANEY: Yeah.

ANDREANI: Okay. Are there any other traditions that you maybe are fond of?

DEVANEY: Tea was always very nice. And I especially liked it when I lived in Washburn because they always did it on Saturday, which was actually quite a bit more relaxing than on Friday. And the cooks would get pretty creative for us too.

ANDREANI: So did the tea mean that you were bonding with your house or what was the significance of it.

DEVANEY: It was just a time that wasn't a, hurry up and eat, meal. It was a chance to just sit around for awhile, and there wasn't anything else to do except sit around together for awhile and have a cup of tea and eat cookies or whatever was being served at that particular afternoon and it was just fun to kind of hang, and you were usually in a big enough group because you weren't -- you know, it wasn't a dinner table for six or eight or four or whatever, it was wherever you found a spot to sit down in the living room.

ANDREANI: Did you fit in well at Smith?

DEVANEY: Like everybody, not in the beginning. I don't know who does in the beginning unless they grew up here. And even then you grew up here but you didn't grow up that way, but I think everybody has a hard time in the beginning until you find your way and get used to what the place is like. I certainly found my niche and you know, getting involved was one of the ways of finding my niche so that I had something that I was doing that was keeping me connected and involved and active. My faculty might have said that there were some times when I maybe gave that more weight than I should have, but it also became my career so my answer to that is, "Yes, but!"

ANDREANI: So if you could give a piece of advice or multiple pieces of advice to current and future Smithies, what would you --

DEVANEY: Do something academically that is not even in entering into the range of what you consider your comfort zone. Always find one class that is totally off your chart. Find an activity that you wouldn't think of yourself as attending or doing or getting involved in and do it. You may not like it after that either, but that's okay, you did it. You learned it. You tried it. Use every resource you possibly can that's here, 'cause you're be crazy not to. Go to the plays. Go to the concerts. Go to the lectures. Go to the ones that you haven't a clue about what they're talking about just so that you can be awed by the people that go to school with you when they start -
- I mean I'm not a science person and every once in awhile someone

would same come with me to this. And I'd be like, I'm not even going to know the language. It's -- I might as well go to a foreign language that I've never heard before, but it was pretty cool to hear people having conversation afterwards with the lecturers that actually knew what they were doing. They could actually engage while I would just sit there awed.

ANDREANI: So you've worked with other colleges, right?

DEVANEY: Mm-hmm. I have.

ANDREANI: How is that different from Smith?

DEVANEY: Big difference is the house system here and the size of the housing units now with the more communal dining, it's more open but not the same way. You know, when I went to graduate school, I was in a residence hall that I worked in that had 2100 people that lived in it. And they said to me, well, but that's not our biggest. I said, yeah, but it's bigger than my undergraduate institution houses on campus. And the campus enrolls four times more people than we have in my hometown.

So you know, there are some -- some pretty big differences there. But at the same time, here the size of the classes -- you know, there might be the Art 100, the Gov 100, the -- pick the lecture class, but they are very limited, and I had them even in graduate school that were bigger than -- and those were graduate classes that were bigger than anything. You actually interact with the faculty, not just the grad assistants here. You have the ability to do things that you can't do on most other campuses. Yes, you can do it on several of the ones I've been at but not to the degree you have that opportunity here, where you really get in and can start doing that in your first year.

ANDREANI: Mm-hmm. Well, I want to thank you for your time.

DEVANEY: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2012.