

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Rosalie Horne Franks, Class of 1958

Interviewed by
Carolyn Rees, Class of 2014

May 24, 2013

Abstract

In this oral history, Rosalie Horne Franks talks about why she has attended every Smith reunion since graduation in 1958. She discusses her experience of entering Smith at 16 as well as her observations of how Smith has changed, including the growing diversity of the student body and the global nature of the curriculum and the student population.

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: Franks, Rosalie Horne. Interview by Carolyn Rees. Video recording, May 24, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Rosalie Horne Franks, interview by Carolyn Rees, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Franks, Rosalie Horne. Interview by Carolyn Rees. Transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Rosalie Horne Franks, interview by Carolyn Rees, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project
Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted May 24, 2013, with:

ROSALIE HORNE FRANKS

by: CAROLYN REES

REES: Okay, so this is Carolyn Rees and I am conducting an interview with Rosalie Horne Franks on May 24, 2013 for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History project. So thank you for great being here and agreeing to participate. We will start off by talking about why are you attending reunion this year?

FRANKS: I am attending reunion because I love Smith College and I have attended every reunion since I graduated so I've gone to the fifth 10th 15th and dried-up and this is my 55th reunion and I come back every five years to remember how wonderful this place was and how much I owe Smith College for my education and for my career.

REES: How did you choose to attend Smith?

FRANKS: How did I choose Smith? Years ago when I applied to college in 1953, I was 15 years old. I came to Smith college when I was 16, so I knew I wanted to go to a women's college. I had dated a lot in high school, but I wanted to be able to seriously study, and I didn't want to be distracted or worried about men. So that was part of the reason I wanted to go to a women's college. And I applied to Mount Holyoke, to Smith, Wellesley, and Simmons. And I got into all of them except for Wellesley. And Wellesley was like 20 minutes away from my home, so it was just as well that I came to Smith. And I came to Smith because it had an outstanding reputation and I went to both I went to an intermediate at Mount Holyoke and that Smith and my interview at Smith was much more focused on who I was and I felt reassured that I would be respected even though I was a baby, 15 years old you are pretty young, but they treated me like a young adult so I felt reassured that this was a good place for me.

REES: So what was it like being younger than your colleagues?

FRANKS: It really – Smith was very different than it is now. It was almost like a girls' prep school, so I was very socially mature I could get along with people, so I never felt too young. Because what was respected here was your intellect, and I felt I could keep up with the other women and I made friends right away. And a lot of the women were only a year older than I was. I was 16 when I came and most of the people were 17, so a years' difference wasn't that great.

REES: All right. So tell me about your first few days at Smith and what you are doing or expecting?

FRANKS: Well, first of all when I first arrived, many of the students came with their mothers and fathers. My mother – I think she drove, but she never drove long distances and my father worked very hard so he couldn't drive me here. So he arranged to have someone who works for him, a shipper in his shipping department who took me here. And I didn't think that was very strange. It was only in retrospect that I realize – I mean, I took my three daughters to college. A parent takes their child. Well, and there were other students here from long distances who came on their own, so I came pretty much on my own. And he came and he brought my clothes and put them in the room and left. So I felt almost immediately at home and my roommate arrived with her parents and she was lovely, lovely young woman and the first day or second day I was here I ran into a friend who I didn't know very well, but I had been on a special exchange program from Newton High School where I attended to Cleveland Heights High School, and I had met this woman, her name was Ruth Strauss. And we both said that we wanted to go to Smith and that we would call the other person when we got in, but we never did because if I was in and she didn't get in, I would have hurt her feelings and she felt the same way. So the second day I was here I just ran into Ruth by accident and we became long – you know, friends forever. She called me yesterday to talk about reunion. So it was wonderful. I felt almost immediately at home here. And I didn't miss my parents, I didn't miss school. I mean I just was happy to be here.

REES: So returning to Smith how do you find – given that you've returned –

FRANKS: So many times.

REES: -- so many times to reunion, how do you find that Smith has changed and how does it feel for you?

FRANKS: Well there are new buildings of course. I read a lot about Smith. I read the

alumnae quarterly. I think it has changed in that it is keeping up with the times. I am a college professor myself so I am very much aware that you have to prepare students for the world they are living in now and in the future. And I think Smith does that. For example, the student body is very different. We did not have a diverse student body. They were almost no African-American students, very few international students. Today the student body reflects our global heritage which is a good thing. But it's not the way it was at Smith then. So student body is different. Of course the course offerings are different, and the encouragement to study abroad then – I think the study abroad program was in Geneva and in Paris. A friend of mine went to Spain. Now you go all over the world and it's important to do that. I did that later, but not under the auspices of Smith, just knowing that it was important to have a broader understanding of the world, I myself went abroad. But I think Smith encourages that. So I think the curriculum and the new engineering building. We never had that. The curriculum is very much in keeping with the times. Otherwise Smith would not have the reputation – continue to have the outstanding reputation it has. So that's how it's different.

REES: And how does it stay the same?

FRANKS: How has it stayed the same? Buildings. It's just getting older. The traditions. I think you still have the Ivy chain. I was in the Ivy chain. I love that. I can think back how many years – almost 60 years, but it was just so pretty and I think – we used to go to chapel. That's the other thing. We went to chapel every Wednesday morning and we were on our honor to go to chapel and you don't do that now I'm sure. And that's too bad in a way because it was a time of silence and quiet when the community came together and we always had wonderful speakers. We had the chaplain of course was there, but we had people talk to us about values, about what it means to be part of the community, what our obligations are, and I think when you do that as a community you give each of the girls a foundation upon which to make decisions, so that was special, but you don't do that anymore. But what has remained the same? Standards, buildings. The celebration of women's intellect. Those are sort of – they are not concrete. They are abstract kinds of principles but they are critical for the development of women. That has remained the same, and respect for alums. I mean there – this is the class where the 55th reunion there is about 65 or 70 of us came back. That's a lot of women. I mean they come long distances, so I think the attachment to Smith is consistent with – over a period of time.

REES: So what is your house community like? Which houses did you live in?

FRANKS: I was in Chapin House. It was a beautiful house. In fact Chapin House is doing it's – it's 100 years old this year and they are doing an oral history and I had to fill

out a questionnaire for them. I loved being in Chapin House. One of the reasons – apart from it being very beautiful, you know, it's surrounded by beautiful house. It gives you a wonderful aesthetic sense of beauty and you feel at home. It was a very homey place. It was also near the library and loved to study in the library, and I still have fond memories of going to the reading room in the library, curling up in a wing chair looking out the window and reading and studying. And I would study at the library every night. I never studied in my room, but it was so close and the library was a lot smaller than it is now, the building. We didn't have the – this building attached to it.

REES: And did you have a house mother in Chapin house mother during your time here?

FRANKS: Did I have a –

REES: A house mother.

FRANKS: Oh, my house mother.

REES: What was your relationship like with her?

FRANKS: Mrs. Giffords – I can't remember. It began with a G. I'm sure if somebody looks up who the house mother was in 1954 to '58, then could find out. She never knew my name after four years. She always called me by my roommate's name and my roommate and I were roommates for four years. I think she played favorites. There were some women that she felt very much at home with. She was cordial. She was nice, but she had no interest in me. She didn't know my name. She didn't know where I came from. She didn't know anything about me. But I gave her no trouble. I mean I was very obedient. I came in on time. I never broke the rules, and so – you know, I'm sure she's a nice person but she was an older woman, but that was my house mother. She never knew my name. That would make a nice book.

REES: So what are some of your favorite Smith traditions?

FRANKS: My favorite Smith traditions – well, when I was here, I love Mountain Day. I went to Yale every Mountain Day and that was fun. I dated a lot of people from Yale. I married a Yali. I didn't mean him on Mountain Day, but I was always drawn to people from Yale. They were very intelligent and very refined and a lot of fun. So I loved Mountain Day. I loved the Rally Day shows and I was in them my sophomore and junior year, and that was fun because you just – it was fun. I mean you weren't studying. A lot of my friends were in it and I love to sing to dance. Even to this day I'm in follies and things like that. So I loved Mountain – what other tradition? I think we used to have a dance in Chapin House. It was something – we had a junior ball or something. That was fun. I can't think of any other major traditions. That was it. I'm sure there are others, I just can't remember them.

REES: Excuse me. How would you describe a typical Smithie during your time here?

FRANKS: How would I describe a typical Smithie then?

REES: Yes.

FRANKS: White. I would say many from private schools. I came from public high school, but many people from private schools, fairly wealthy, extremely smart. Very, very smart, inclusive. I always felt very much at home. People were very accepting. Typical Smithie, very conscientious and ambitious. Now ambitious not necessarily in the professions because we were expected to get married. Many of my friends got engaged their senior year. I didn't. I was an exception really, but they were ambitious in the sense that they wanted to excel at Smith and to do something with their lives. But their primary goal was to be a wife and a mother, but that didn't mean they would stop fulfilling their potential. I think they – people wanted to do that, and I'm trying to think of what else would be a typical Smithie. I think there wasn't a lot of diversity. There were Catholic, Protestant and Jewish women, but that was it. When I went to Smith I wasn't sure if I would be accepted because I am Jewish, and I wasn't sure whether Smith College had a quota because Yale had a quota. And number of the schools had quotas as to whether or not they would accept you if you were not White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant. I did get in and there were at least 15 percent of the student body at Smith at the time was Jewish, but that was something that both my parents and I were concerned about that I don't think is the case today anywhere. At Yale or Harvard, anywhere, but that was not uncommon in the '50s, early '50s.

REES: And what were your experiences with that when you were actually at Smith?

FRANKS: What was my experience vis-à-vis being Jewish here?

REES: Yes, and not being sure whether you would be accepted or not.

FRANKS: Everybody was very welcoming and I became the vice president and then the president of the Hillel foundation, and I was trained by the Hillel foundation – we had a lot of activities that were interfaith activities. We had – when I was president of Smith – I'm sorry, when I was president of Hillel foundation, Abraham Heschel – Abraham Heschel is one of the premier Jewish theologians of the 20th century and he came to Smith and spoke not only to the Jewish students but to the student body at large, and that was quite, you know, an exceptional opportunity. So I did an experience anything. I mean I came and became very involved as did my friends. So what I anticipated did not come to be. I was just very welcomed and so were my friends, and many of my friends were Jewish. They had no problem.

REES: Were you involved in any other extracurriculars?

FRANKS: Well, when you are the president of an organization at Smith back then, I was on the activities board which planned all of the activities at Smith. I was on the interfaith committee, so I worked with the head of Newman Club and the head of the – I think it was called the Christian Association. I don't know what they call it today. And so I did the interfaith committee. I served – I sang in the choir freshman and sophomore choir. I was in Rally Day. I think they elected me a house rep because I wasn't at the meeting, so they decided since you are not at the meeting you are the one that is going to do it. I think that's what they did. I mean that was a lot because I studied a lot.

REES: Right. And what did you study? Was –

FRANKS: I was an English major, and I was an education minor and a religion minor, so – and I anticipated going to graduate school and I did.

REES: What did you go to graduate school for?

FRANKS: Well, I was going to go to Harvard. They accepted me into the school of education at Harvard, and then two weeks before I graduated I met a young man who was going to medical school in New York and very soon after that he asked me to marry him, like within six weeks. So I said I had to get to know him better after six weeks, so I applied to and was accepted at Columbia, so I got my Masters in curriculum design from Columbia University, and then I started teaching and I did that until I got married and had three children and did a lot of other things.

REES: And so what was the dating culture like at Smith during your time here?

FRANKS: Well, no men were allowed above the first floor. There was no smoking in your room. You were not allowed to have drinks, any drinking in your room. You were supposed to be in on Friday and Sunday nights. I believe it was at 10:30 at night and then on Saturday – I'm sorry, Friday nights you could stay out until 12. I think Friday and Sunday you could stay out until 12. Saturday you had to be in at 1 and during the week, you had to be in at 10:30. I may be off, but I think that's what it was, and if you wanted to come in later, you had to get permission, and there was always someone at the door so – we didn't have keys to the houses, we didn't have keys to our rooms, but they locked the door and someone had to be on watch, I think it was called watch and you let the person in.

REES: What were your experiences with relationships and dating while at Smith?

FRANKS: I dated a lot. You know, I met people – you know, I was fixed up. I went

to parties, met them that way. I dated every weekend, sometimes Friday and Saturday nights and as time went on and my friends became engaged, then their friends would call me. So a lot of people, I got to know a lot of young men. Mainly from Yale, one guy I dated – in fact most of them were from Yale come to think of it. I dated somebody from Williams, somebody from Dartmouth. But my junior year – my senior year I dated a young man who was the president of the Hillel foundation at Yale, dated him all year. It just was – I had a lot of fun. I dated a lot. I look back on it – I sometimes check on the Internet to see what happened to all these men, they became very successful, very.

REES: Were your relationships influenced by the strict house policy?

FRANKS: By what?

REES: The strict house policy?

FRANKS: They really weren't -- you know, it sounds funny because it is so different today. It was fine. I'd – in fact, I liked it. I could come in when I – you know, I had an excuse, you know, especially if you didn't like the person. Well, I have to – I'm sorry, I have to go in. But the men were not – they weren't aggressors. They didn't insist. They knew the rules and they lived up to them.

REES: And so what were some of your most favorite or memorable courses?

FRANKS: I think one memorable – I loved English literature and there was a professor here named Bob Peterson. I don't know if anyone told you – he was a professor of English literature and I had English 101 with him, which was the introductory writing and critical analysis course, and then I had another course with him on 17th century poetry, and he loved John Dunn as did I. So that was a very – I mean it really was very influential because I went on to get a Ph.D. in humanistic studies and I teach critical analysis now and many of the principles that he taught me I try to integrate. He was a very warm, supportive – very young professor. When I think back, he might have just graduated, gotten his Ph.D. from Yale himself. But that was a very memorable course. Just I – and the teachers in the English department, some of them – Ms. – I'm trying to think. I can't remember all of their names. I think if I thought for a minute I could, but they were very – oh, I had a course with she taught Joyce, Yeats and Eliot. I can't think of her – she was terrific. They were highly trained, extremely well-informed professors, but I – anyway, you never got close to them. I never approached them. I always put them sort of on a pedestal. I don't think young people do that today. Certainly my students don't do that with me, but then they were special. You didn't bother them. And if they gave you an assignment, you did it. You didn't challenge, you didn't talk back to them. I'm trying to think of who taught Joyce, Yeats and Eliot. It will come to me in a minute. Ms. Drew. Her name was Drew.

REES: So how would you describe the campus atmosphere during your time at Smith?

FRANKS: Happy. Very happy. Very warm, hard-working, very, very hard-working. People really studied a lot, and that was something that was celebrated. So if you were a nerdy type like me, that was good, because everybody else was like that. Everybody else worked hard, and I was the editor of my 50th reunion year book, and the accomplishments of members of our class are staggering. So all that hard work led to other great achievements and, you know, contribution to the rest of the world, so I would say that was it. But fun. I mean you studied hard, but it was a lot of fun.

REES: So what difference has your Smith education made in your life?

FRANKS: What difference has it made? Well, first of all it reaffirmed the value of learning, that being an intellectual is something to be proud of, that it's okay to be that way. I got my Master's but then I married and had three children and so on. Then I went back to school when I was 44, and earned my Ph.D. from Boston University and in between I did a lot of research and writing. I worked at Brown. I worked on television. All of these things I was doing I could do because of my Smith education. It gave me a capacity to adjust to the demands of life so that I had the intellect and the skills to make the changes that life insists that you make, because sometimes you can't always do what you want, and so – and I had the confidence that I could do that and so then I applied to be – to Boston University, was accepted, wrote a Ph.D. thesis and frankly, it wasn't that hard for me. I had worked all – I really think – and I had three children by then and I was working. I think it's because of my Smith education I could – I had to write a long thesis, I had to write two qualifying papers and I did it and it wasn't hard. That's what Smith did for me.

REES: What are some of your richest memories from Smith?

FRANKS: I had five – there were like five of us that were good friends and I have a very warm memory of that. We would come back after the summer and we were so happy to see each other and talking what we had done and I think the friendship, the community of women – I love that. Those five friends really were the foundation and support for me. I mean I had many friends, but having them as my friends really helped, you know, give me the confidence to go forward. I was very happy here. I saw – it was just such a nurturing environment and the world, in a way, was not good because the world was outside. The world was outside of this campus and inside you were protected to do what needed to be done to be able to grow as a strong and confident person, and that's a very special gift that Smith gave to me.

REES: JFK was your commencement speaker?

FRANKS: Yes, he was.

REES: What was that like?

FRANKS: Well, he was drop dead gorgeous. And I say that because I stood there – he was – he came – after his wonderful speech he happened to be standing there when my parents and I were standing, and I looked at him and he was as handsome as he appeared in pictures, but he spoke beautifully and we used excerpts from his graduation commencement speech for our 50th reunion year book, and his message was now that you are educated you need to give back to the community. But he said it beautifully and we have the text of some of what he said in our year book, and at the time – I mean he wasn't president, he was a senator, but his message was a universal message. It's still very pertinent for today, but of course we loved having him. I mean he walked in and there was like this side that went through the whole class, so it was special. And you know like anything, you look back on it and you realize, you know, that we had the president of the United States when he was senator as our guest speaker, so it makes it special.

REES: Right, absolutely. Well, will wrap it up. Do you want to talk a little bit about what you've been up to since Smith? Do you want to like explore what you've been up to since Smith?

FRANKS: Oh, since Smith? It's been a long time. I graduated in 1958, so it is now what, 55 years. What I have been up to? Well, when I left Smith, I started teaching as an elementary school teacher fourth-grade teacher and then I met my husband and we were married, but then I had an opportunity to teach on television. So I was one of the early teachers on WGBH PBS, taught fourth-grade science. So that introduced me to the television world. And then as my children got older I was on television, I worked on Evening Magazine, I don't know if you know that, and PM Magazine. When I was on PM Magazine, Matt Lauer was the anchor and I was what they call a tipster, and then later on I was on television as a host interviewing people about what it means to grow older and how they're coping with the changes that take place. After my children got older and I was very involved in education and with them I did research for the town I lived in on the teaching of gifted children. Then once I earned my doctorate, which I loved, I wrote my doctoral thesis on something that is very relevant to having been to Smith. It was called struggling to the top, the managerial woman's view of aging and retirement and it was a qualitative study of a dozen women who were the first to enter the executive suite with the advent of women's liberation. So they were the first women becoming presidents and vice presidents of major corporations, so I was able to sort of connect my roots as a Smithie and as a person committed to women's feminism, feminism and liberation to women who actually were able to take advantage of that opportunity. So I did that and then I – when my youngest daughter went off to college – they all went to college – I was invited to teach at Roger Williams University in Bristol Rhode Island, and I have been teaching literature, philosophy and critical writing there for the past 26 years, and I've been married for 50 years. That's my greatest achievement.

REES: So as a last question, do you have any advice for current and future Smithies?

FRANKS: I do. I think women, and Smithies in particular, cherish their own capacities, have confidence and faith in who you are, to keep on challenging yourself so that all of these wonderful qualities you have can grow and develop and never compromise your own commitment to excellence and have faith in your ability to succeed.

REES: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2013.