

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Martha Grace, Class of 1961

Interviewed by
Olivia Mandica-Hart, Class of 2011

May 20, 2011

Abstract

In this oral history, Martha Grace discusses the overall atmosphere at Smith, her work as a zoology major, her experiences living in Dewey House, her marriage after her junior year, what a Smith education has meant to her, and her decision to attend law school and obtain a Masters degree in Animals and Public Policy.

Restrictions

None

Format

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

Transcript

Transcribed by Thomas Goodman at the Audio Transcription Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Olivia Mandica-Hart.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Grace, Martha. Interview by Olivia Mandica-Hart. Video recording, May 20, 2011. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Martha Grace, interview by Olivia Mandica-Hart, video recording, May 20, 2011, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: Grace, Martha. Interview by Olivia Mandica-Hart. Transcript of video recording, May 20, 2011. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Martha Grace, interview by Olivia Mandica-Hart, transcript of video recording, May 20, 2011, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted on May 20, 2011, with:

MARTHA GRACE

by: OLIVIA MANDICA-HART
filmed by: KATE GEIS

MANDICA-HART: This is Olivia Mandica-Hart, and Martha Grace, Class of 1961. The date is May 20, 2011. I'm here in the Alumnae Gymnasium at Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts. So just to start off, why did you choose to come to Smith?

GRACE: It was an interesting kind of choice. My mother passed away during my senior year, in high school, and I had thought that I wanted to go further away from home, but then once she passed away, I decided I needed to stay closer to home. I was born in Providence, Rhode Island, and I wanted to be near my father. So, I came to Smith. It was in a sense by default, but no regrets, it was terrific.

MANDICA-HART: So, the fact that it was a women's college didn't really factor in –

GRACE: No, the other place I was going to go was (unclear) so yes I was absolutely interested in a women's college, and I wanted some place out of the city. My sister had gone to Simmons. I wanted to be in a country environment. This was perfect.

MANDICA-HART: So how'd you describe the campus atmosphere when you got here?

GRACE: It was a time — it was before the women's movement, so it was somewhat different than it is now. It was quite different. It was very exciting. I was nervous. I had come from a public high school, and it seemed that everybody was from private schools. I mean, I later found out that wasn't so. It seemed like the young women who had gone to private schools were much more assured, much more confident. I soon learned everybody was as scared as you were. But it was exciting. It was exciting and scary.

MANDICA-HART: So how would you describe a typical Smith student at the time?

GRACE: Typical. I think in some ways, they seemed much more self-assured than they were. They were, it seemed to me that everybody was very, very smart, much smarter than I was. I felt very out of my element academically. That all passed, but so I think the students who came,

many of them were legacy, so they had much more familiarity with Smith than I did. But they were of a same mind in the sense that they wanted a campus, or a country type of school. They wanted to be able to do outdoor things. They were enthusiastic. It was easy to make friends.

MANDICA-HART: So what did you study?

GRACE: I majored in zoology because I wanted to be a veterinarian.

MANDICA-HART: And were you part of any clubs or organizations?

GRACE: There were science groups, I can't even remember the clubs. There were science groups, and I was a member of those. But the first year, I was just overwhelmed, and I don't think I joined anything.

MANDICA-HART: And what house did you live in?

GRACE: Dewey.

MANDICA-HART: Dewey. Did that shape your experience?

GRACE: To a great extent. As I come back now, I realize that the young women who lived in the quad had a much different experience because there were so many more women in those schools, whereas in those dormitories, whereas they women that lived in Dewey, and (unclear) all these tiny little houses, have a different experience. So to some extent, I knew fewer people, and because I majored in something that was very small, there were only four zoology majors, which was wonderful for intimacy, but you also didn't know as many people, and I think that's true of everybody that I've spoken to. We realize that you became very close with the people in your house, but you didn't get to know as many other people on the campus. The great thing about Dewey was being located in sort of the center of campus, you can just get to places very easily, which was helpful when it was snowing, and stuff like that.

MANDICA-HART: So you enjoyed living in a smaller house.

GRACE: I did, I did.

MANDICA-HART: Were there any professors that particularly inspired you?

GRACE: Yeah, there was one professor, who her name was B. Elizabeth Horner, Dr. Horner. She just passed away a couple of years ago. A couple of years before that, when she was 90, she got an honorary degree from Smith, at President Chris House. I went to it because they invited me. I stayed in touch with her for a long time. She was a zoology professor, and as a matter of fact when I went to law school probably 17 years

after I graduated Smith, and she still wrote me a reference, and I stayed in touch with her until her passing. She had an enormous influence. She was enthusiastic about kids, and committed. But generally speaking, because you had primary professors teaching, what I mean, it wasn't at a graduate university, where you had teaching assistants teach, and the high level names were doing something else, the people who were teaching here, all were here because they primarily wanted to teach, not because they wanted to do research. So I think the student at Smith got a very different learning experience.

MANDICA-HART: So, when you graduated, what were your expectations for yourself?

GRACE: Well, one of the things that I did, I got married after my junior year, which I hadn't actually anticipated doing, and I stayed on. My husband then had just graduated law school, he got a job at a law firm here. So we stayed right off campus, at an apartment, and I was able to continue my studies. My father then — you had to, in those days, you had to ask permission of the dean, and of course I had to ask permission with my father, and he said you can get married, but you have to finish school, and I did. So my dreams for going to veterinary school were a little dashed, because in 1961, impossibly did you go to graduate school and get married. You did one or the other. So I had to wait years before I can sort of fulfill those kinds of achievements. But there was an expectation that women would get married, that women would be engaged. I saw in a clip last night, at one of the houses, that the *Sophian* published engagement lists at the time, which I don't even remember that happening, but that was a big deal, and it's interesting now, from a historical point of view, to see how many of those marriages stayed, and whether young women getting married much later as they're doing now, will make for better marriages, or longer marriages, don't know yet.

MANDICA-HART: So did your marriage have an affect on your senior year?

GRACE: I did better. I did much better, which the school was horrified, the dean was simply horrified that a young woman would enter into matrimony, and try to complete her studies at the same time, but I was going to show them, and did really well, and some of my friends used to come over with their boyfriends, and so forth, and it was different. I think I missed a lot by not being here, not being in the campus for senior year, but you know when you're young, you don't really realize what the consequences are to the decisions you make.

MANDICA-HART: So would you say, it sounds like, was there opposition from the administration?

GRACE: It wasn't opposition. They were just cautious. They were cautious, and they said you know that I wasn't going to get any special consideration because I was married, expected my grades to be up, and my attendance

to class and all that sort of thing, and I don't know if I was off-put so much, as I was determined that I was going to show them that it could be done. So I did.

MANDICA-HART: So, were your father's expectations for you were consistent with your own?

GRACE: Yeah, I mean you know, today I don't know that young women — first of all young women are not getting married while they're in school. They're often getting married, if at all, much, much later, but those days, parents really ruled. I mean, it was unthinkable that young women would say, well no I'm not going to do what you want, because a parent could then say, look I'm paying for school, and I'm not going to pay if you do something that I disapprove. I don't think parents are quite as strict as they were then, but my father's expect — I mean there was no question that I wouldn't finish school. It never dawned on me not to finish.

MANDICA-HART: So what difference has a Smith education been for you?

GRACE: There was no question that it gives you a sense of confidence, and a sense of ability, and a confidence in your abilities, and a sense of being able to do anything that you wouldn't otherwise get. I went to a male and female high school, and of course again, as I said, it was before the women's movement. You know, women still didn't get the top job as the editor of the paper, or the editor of this, it didn't happen that way, then. So coming to a women's school, there was nothing you couldn't do, and all the jobs had to be filled by women. So whether it was the worst job, or the best job. Whether it was videotaping, or whether it was emptying the wastebaskets, women had to do it. I think that the opportunity to demonstrate your abilities, gave you enormous confidence. I didn't have that kind of confidence when I came to Smith, and I went out into the world and achieved a great deal, and I absolutely attribute it to what I learned in Smith. The other thing is that Smith opened doors. It opened doors professionally in the oddest ways, you never would've thought it, but it happened. The first job I got, I had applied, they had my resume, and as a woman said to me, I don't really need to worry about you because you went to Smith, and I was simply floored. I mean it was like my first job out of school and I thought, oh. Then some years later, I was being vetted by a counsel for a judgeship in Massachusetts, and you're vetted by a body called the Governor's Council, and had to go to each of these people, after you were selected by the Governor, and I went to this, and I had to go see each one of these women, and one of the women said, I haven't read your resume, but I do know that you went to Smith. My daughter's at Smith. That's good enough for me. And I thought, it was extraordinary to get that kind of reaction. Now, once you got in the door, you had to deliver, and

you had to work well, but I was always amazed by what the name of Smith, and the reputation of Smith gave you.

MANDICA-HART: So how did you make your decision to go to law school?

GRACE: That's a very interesting decision. I majored in zoology. I wanted to be a veterinarian. In those days, it was inconceivable that women went to graduate school, and went to law school — I apologize if I said that, I mean go to graduate school and get married. I apologize if I said that before. So I went what I call the Betty Crocker route, and did other things. Then in 1976, which was 15 years after I graduated, the Tufts Veterinary School opened a veterinary school campus not far from where I lived, and I went to talk to them, and they told me I was too old, they wanted younger students. I was 37, or 36, so I went to law school instead.

MANDICA-HART: So do you feel as though the atmosphere for women, the climate for women was different when you went back in the '70s, as it was when you graduated?

GRACE: It was different. That was the beginning of the time when there were just the beginning of more women in veterinary schools, but still very few. When I went to law school, there were probably 10%, whereas now there's 50%, and so I went to law school, and practiced law, and became a judge, when I really started experienced gender bias, in a very, very peculiar way, and I retired a couple of years ago, and I just finished last week, a Masters in Animals and Public Policy, at Tufts Veterinary School. So, when I applied and spoke to the dean, I said to her, I'm sure you took me because you were afraid of an age discrimination suit, because in those days, when they said no, I was in a very difficult marriage, I was subsequently divorced and I'm remarried, but I think it was probably actionable. Today it would be actionable for them to say to me you're too old, but in those days it didn't happen. I wasn't going to do it. But there's no question. I've just completed a Master's degree, and I realize that all of those skills, the writing skills, and critical analysis, and all of those things, were what I got at Smith, and that it's still in my brain, and still in my psyche, is amazing, there's no question that it had an affect.

MANDICA-HART: Well, congratulations.

GRACE: Thanks. (laughs)

MANDICA-HART: So what was it like being a woman in the legal field?

GRACE: It was not overt. It was not overt, but we would all be at — there'd be a group of men, let's say, involved in a particular trial, or a particular case, and they would all go out to lunch, and they often didn't ask me,

not that we weren't good colleagues, but they'd maybe go to a bar, or go to a pub or something, and they didn't think to ask me in the beginning. I was very offended. That all started to change though. We watched the women's movement happening. I remember, was out of school, when *The Women's Room*, by Marilyn French, and Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* came out, I remember discussing it with women, but *The Women's Room* particularly sort of hit a nerve, because it basically said to women, we understand why you're unhappy. After all, Smith, a school like Smith, prepares you to go forth into the world, and then society says to you, be a good housewife, be a good entertainer. Educate — I mean entertain your husband's associates. Educate your children. Somehow that isn't quite enough for a lot of people to sustain an intellectual curiosity. So I think that the women's movement, who had struggled through its own set of problems, has come out. Now, the young women, like yourself, you may wonder what the fuss is all about with women. It's not over. It is not over. I can tell you that it's absolutely not over. There are still lots of places where women get less pay, for the same job. You don't always know it. Companies that do that are very, very careful. It's astonishing to me today that that even happens. When I started as a judge in the court department that I was in, I was the first woman. By the time I left, they were 50% of our bench was women, but I made concerted efforts, every time the governor appointed a woman, I would write to him and say thank you, so and so is a terrific appointment, and I'm glad that women are being recognized. So the point is to have people knowing that somebody is watching them with respect to women, but I couldn't even tell you what fields they are, but there is still discrimination, and it's not overt. I mean, at Smith for instance, race was not really discussed, but the young women that came from the south had a very different view of race than the women from the north. Women from the north knew, or were trained that they shouldn't talk about it. There was a sort of make believe everybody's the same, where in fact they weren't raised that way, whereas the south was much more open about it. So those things change. There's still that feeling about women in many quarters.

MANDICA-HART: So was race a point of tension when you were at Smith?

GRACE: I didn't feel it. I didn't feel it, because I grew up in a very heterogeneous environment, and I was in a public school, and my parents were very active in the community, and in all sorts of things, so it was not unusual for us to have close friends of color, and to have people in our homes and so forth, but I know that there were women in our house, and people that we met, that other young women had difficulty with, and it wasn't an antipathy as much as they didn't know. They didn't know, they had never been raised, or gone to school with people of color. So, but the young women from the south, often who had clear racial divides, were very clear about their, and interesting enough, more willing to learn about other people's cultural differences.

MANDICA-HART: So do you feel as though, in general, the community was accepting of the –

GRACE: Yes.

MANDICA-HART: -- minorities?

GRACE: Yes. Now, we didn't have other issues. We didn't have such, we had some, but we didn't have a large — we didn't have a huge amount of diversity here. We had some, and maybe for them, then at that time it was a lot, but I don't see it today when I look at the campus makeup, I don't see a huge amount of diversity then. I think it was very accepting. If there were gender issues, and sexuality issues, we didn't even talk about them. We didn't know, we didn't know. It wasn't that people said, oh no that's not good, we just didn't know.

MANDICA-HART: It wasn't discussed.

GRACE: It wasn't discussed.

MANDICA-HART: So do you still believe that single-sex education is important?

GRACE: Absolutely. Absolutely. I can't even imagine it, and some time, when places like Vassar, Skidmore, I'm trying to think who else went co-ed, it was probably in the '70s, not sure about the timing, Smith sent letters around to the alums saying how do you feel about it? I, who was not in a position to contribute anything, sent a letter back to Smith and said if you ever go co-ed, I will not contribute a dime. I was hardly in a position to say that because I hadn't contributed yet a dime, but I still feel that way. I think women's education is extraordinary, and I'm glad that Smith held out, but if you look, Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, are also holdouts, and I think that's to the good.

MANDICA-HART: Did you encourage your children or grandchildren to attend Smith?

GRACE: Yeah, my children. I have one daughter, and a son, and my daughter didn't want to go. She went to a city school co-ed. I don't think she would've liked Smith, but I absolutely would've encouraged her. One of my babysitters went here, and her daughter went here, and her father used to berate me, because he said, she doesn't even want to look at anyplace else but Smith. I said good, I've done a good job. So yes, I've encouraged other young women to come to Smith.

MANDICA-HART: Would you still choose to come to –

GRACE: Absolutely. I don't know if I'd get in. (laughter)

MANDICA-HART: Do you have any advice for the current, and future generations of Smith women?

GRACE: You know, it's easy for me to say because I'm at the other end. I think people take life much too seriously. Life's way too important to be taken so seriously. I think that young women should come, and not — I worry a little bit that this generation, and partly way society works, is what are you going to do when you graduate? It's not so important to decide what you're going to do when you graduate, with all do respect to your chosen career, I would love every graduate school to make as a requirement that women, that people, are out for at least two years doing anything else before they go to graduate school. So I would advice people here to, I think it's fine to have an idea of what you want, but this is the only place and the only time in your life, where you can take East African art or Botanical whatever, there's such a richness here, that this is the only time when you can do it. The rest of your life, you may be raising a family, you may have a full-time job, you may not have the opportunity to take these amazing offerings, and every time I've come back to reunion, and I've seen what they have, and I felt this way when my children went to college, I thought they're too young. Now I can take advantage of these courses, and I could really get a lot out of it. So I would like to see us as a society say to kids coming to a place like Smith, take advantage of it all. Don't worry about a career. A career will come. Law schools don't care whether you took pre-law, or whether you majored in East African art. Medical schools don't care either, and if they do care and they start requiring things, then you'll take a couple of courses in biology. I do worry about our emphasis in our society on careers, so what you're going to do afterwards. Then the college degree is spent preparing for the career afterwards. I'm not sure that that's necessary. Law schools, medical schools, they teach you all you need to know.

GRACE: You don't need to learn it in college. I know that's very controversial, but I feel very strongly about that.

MANDICA-HART: And what do you think the current Smith student looks like, in comparison to a Smith student then?

GRACE: They're more relaxed, less uptight. You know, I feel like I'm talking out of both sides of my mouth. One of them I feel they are much more career-oriented, and sort of career-focused, meaning they have to kind of find a place, at the same time, there are more people doing more amazing things, and I don't think we had the feeling that we could or should do that. The people in our class who went off and did amazing things, in far-flung countries, were few and far between, and I think you have many more options today. Options sometimes are difficult. Kids don't know what to do. So parents sometimes are at their wits end, that their child comes out of Smith with this very expensive education, and

they say yeah, but he's not fit to do anything, but you have a lifelong learning experience, that it doesn't matter. It's like in law school, they only teach you where to find the information, it doesn't matter that you don't know every law, and that's the same thing. That's what the education ought to do, it ought to train you to think critically, and analyze, and ask questions, and Smith was unbelievable at doing that.

GEIS: I had a question about the point in your life when you were working at, actually I have to look at my notes to go back, but that juncture between that vet school and you've gotten married, and you ended up going to law school, tell us about why law school. Were you feeling like you were being pressured in a way (unclear)?

GRACE: Yes. I was married, I was still married, and my marriage was in shambles, and I naively thought I could keep it together. My husband was a lawyer. I knew he would never have understood going to vet school, because it was laps, it was going to be a lot of things, I figured he would understand law school, and he would be supportive. That's the reason I chose law school. I had no interest going to law school. I mean it sounds so funny today, but it was good to be out, and sort of challenge your mind, and do stuff like that. So, that's the reason I chose law school. I wish I could say I had some great, grand scheme, but it didn't. It's a life, life doesn't always take you in the direction of your dreams, I have to — and I don't know how many people from our class you've interview, but as I talk to women now, and I've been back to some of the other reunions because I live close by, I find that life is sort of serendipitous. You do things for different reasons, that sound silly in retrospect, but that's the way it is. Could I have gone to do something else? I did, because I majored in zoology, I did along the way before I went to law school or anything, I went to Clark where I got a Master's in history, because all of a sudden I decided I loved majoring at zoology at Smith, but I was in a lab most of the time, so I decided I needed some history. Before that, I had gone to the head of the biology department at Clark University where I lived, and I wanted to get a Ph.D. in biology, so that might have taken me into a different path, and the professor said to me, my dear you're married, and you'll get pregnant. No I won't take you. When I say that, it sounds crazy today, but that's what it was, and I — and what is worse, I didn't say oh no I'm going to file a suit. You didn't do those things.

GEIS: So what do you think your next act is going to be?

GRACE: Now?

GEIS: What do you want to do now?

GRACE: My husband would like to know that as well. Actually, I've gotten some offers. I've gotten some people have been trying to — I have a

final project to do for this paper, and I thought I wanted for this veterinary program to go completely out of my comfort zone, but sort of the subject came into my lap and I couldn't turn it down, because it marries both what I — I was a Juvenile Court judge where I did mostly child abuse and neglect cases, so I'm doing a final project on the links between human violence and animal cruelty, and it's really fascinating. So I've gotten a couple of inquiries, if I ever come down and teach, or do something, I'll see.

MANDICA-HART: Still deciding?

GRACE: I'm still deciding.

MANDICA-HART: Thank you so much.

GRACE: You're welcome. Say, my daughter or son wants to go to law school, will you talk to them, and I say, look the first thing I'm going to say to them is, you need to take off two years. No, no, I want them to go right on to school. I said it's the worst thing. Now I'm not saying everybody needs to wait 15 years to go back to school, but I do think that when you start out, and most young people go to school from K through 12, and then they go to four years of college, I think there needs to be a break at some time, because if you graduate from law school for instance, you're expected to go get a job. You're not going to go tour the world when you finish law school. It doesn't happen that way, usually. So I think it's a much, and Harvard used to require that of their MBA, it was the only one I knew of, they would not accept you without two years of doing something, and they didn't care whether you sold shoes, or dug ditches, they just wanted you in the stream of commerce, to pay a bill, to pay a mortgage, to understand what it meant to do something without your parents' supervision. I think because school is so expensive today, and there are so many loans out there, that kids are being pressured far more, if there's any pressure at all, it's there. And you got to get a job, and you got to pay off your loans. So that's unfortunate. I think that people still need a break.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Thomas Goodman, July 2011.