

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Daryl Maslow Hafter, Class of 1956

Interviewed by
Sunny Lawrence, Class of 2017

May 20, 2016

Abstract

In this interview, Daryl Maslow Hafter talks about her religious background and finding a community at Smith. Hafter also reflects on favorite campus traditions, like going to Yale for Mountain Day. Hafter talks about her passion she developed at Smith for eighteenth-century French history, which she continued to study in graduate school.

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: Hafter, Daryl Maslow. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Video recording, May 20, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Daryl Maslow Hafter, interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 20, 2016, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Hafter, Daryl Maslow. Interview by Sunny Lawrence. Transcript of video recording, May 20, 2016. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Daryl Maslow Hafter, interview by Sunny Lawrence, transcript of video recording, May 20, 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 May 20, 2016, with:

DARYL MASLOW HAFTER
Northampton, Massachusetts

by: SUNNY LAWRENCE

LAWRENCE: If it reminds you of something that you really feel like you want to talk about, go for it.

MASLO: Well, how do you usually? Oh, I love those. Somebody must have a nice — a kid?

GEIS: Yeah, the head of the archives. It's her office.

LAWRENCE Let me know when you're good to go, Kate.

GEIS: Ready.

LAWRENCE: All right, cool. So I wanted to start by asking quickly — sorry, I have to introduce myself.

MASLO: Yeah, hello.

LAWRENCE: I'm Sunny Lawrence, and I'm conducting an interview for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project on May 20, 2016 and I'm here with — could you say your full name and your graduating year?

MASLO: In my graduating year I was Daryl Elaine Maslo.

LAWRENCE: And what do you — what was your graduating year, '56?

MASLO: Nineteen fifty-six. I know it sounds very far away and long ago, but it doesn't feel that way to me.

LAWRENCE: I wanted to start by asking you quickly, what was your life like before you came to Smith and how did you end up at Smith?

MASLO: Well let's see, I grew up during World War II, and although my father was not in the Army, we moved around a lot. I was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey and went to kindergarten and first grade. Second and third grade were in Arlington, Virginia, where my father was helping — my

father was an architect, and he was helping to design the Pentagon. Then the Pentagon got finished, so he retrained himself as an aeronautical engineer, and so we moved to Seattle, Washington. That's where Boeing was then. That was, let's see, third, fourth, fourth, fifth, and half of sixth. Then, the war came to end, and my father wanted to establish himself in private practice, and he said, "You should go where you are known," so we went back to New Jersey where we came from. I was half a year in the sixth grade in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and then Berkeley Heights seven, eight, and then through high school. I did a lot of hopping around. It was very nice that Smith had four whole years where you could be.

I went to a public high school that had a few very good teachers, and a whole bunch of — I don't know, probably mediocre ones. There was a bit of good appetite for higher learning, and more imaginative things, but when I got to Smith, of course everything just opened up and it was simply marvelous for me. I — am I talking too much about this?

LAWRENCE: No, you're good. Keep going, keeping going.

MASLO: OK. Now on the fiftieth reunion, we made a booklet as you may have seen. I hope you've got it. I wrote — when I got to Smith it was meat and drink to me, and that's really what it was. I was just very thrilled. But also, it was a different climate of — well, not necessarily in a different intellectual climate, although that was true, too — of course it was higher education — but there was quite a bit of culture in my household. My father was an architect, my mother was a singer — a graduate of the Julliard — and so we lived closed enough to New York to pop into museums, and concerts, and so on. But we're Jewish, and Smith College at that time — I think it had just begun to open up its doors to more Jewish girls. So it was a very Anglo Saxon ambience, and I have a friend who came to Smith from New York area, and she came for one year and she said, "I couldn't stand it. It was like being in a different country." And I said, "Yes, it was like being in a different country. I just loved it." Because I love the country that it was. Yes, it was very different in many ways, but it was just wonderful, as far as I was concerned.

If you're interested in how I got to Smith, my parents had some friends — Shirley Whitlock was her name — who had gone to Smith. And indeed, you could even look her up, I suppose she — it never occurred to me to find out what year she was — well, she and her husband had built a modern house, and my father was interested in building modern houses, so we became fast friends, and since she had gone to Smith she thought, That's the place for Darryl to go. If it hadn't been for her, I don't think I would have come to Smith.

LAWRENCE: I'm interested in the experience of being Jewish at Smith in the '50s, because it does, from my research, seem like an overwhelmingly Anglo Saxon place. Can you say more about what that experience was like?

MASLO: Well, my family was very secular. We never went to Synagogue, we didn't know anything about — well, I didn't know anything about being Jewish, really. But I certainly knew I was Jewish. The story went — you can check this, I assume that it's correct — that there had been a quota for Jews at Smith. But then, I guess it would have been 1951, the dean of admissions went on sabbatical — she's the one who had to impose the quota — and she left her second in command in charge, and either the woman didn't know about the quota, or she thought the quota was terrible, but she simply threw it away and let everybody come in who she thought would benefit from Smith. And so there was a great influx of Jewish girls, and as a matter of fact, most of us I think were housed in the big quad and the little quad, as it turned out. I just walked down there as a nostalgic trip, and I noticed there's a kosher kitchen, which is in a way so hilarious. I mean, first of all, it is to me astonishing that Smith has established a kosher kitchen. On the other hand, it's like the ultimate ghetto, because not only were we in the big quad and the little quad, but there's a kosher kitchen now in the big quad.

But to tell you the truth, I don't think — first of all, I really wasn't so aware of who was Jewish and who wasn't. There were a lot of people from the New York area, including one woman, Katie [Hussey?] who is in my class, whom I had become friends with in Elizabeth, New Jersey just when I was there for six months, and there she was lo and behold in Comstock House.

So what was it like to a Jew in the 1950s at Smith? There was a rabbi — Rabbi Louie Ruchemes, R-U-C-H-E-M-E-S — and he invited the Jewish women to dinner, and I really — this is a great confession. I thought that was so presumptuous and terrible that I never even declined politely. I'm really embarrassed about that. The poor man was doing what he was supposed to do, and he was — and that was very generous, to open his house and put his wife to work making dinner. I'm sure he didn't make it. So that was my approach. I'm not going to be labeled as anything. But on the other hand, one of the speakers we had — I'm sure you do now, too — we had an array of wonderful, famous, excellent speakers who came. Isaiah Berlin came. He's a giant in the intellectual world. You're aware of the symposium with Auden. Just really, everybody came to speak. One of the people who came was Will Herberg, and he came and called himself a Jewish existentialist, and he really caught my attention. You don't happen to have a tissue, do you? Surely these interviews sometimes — yeah, I dare say. He pointed out — oh, thank you — how important it was.

KATE: Want to take a moment?

LAWRENCE: Yeah, you can pause. Have some water, if you want.

MASLO: OK, you don't have to put that. He pointed out how important it was for Jews to identify, and to know what it meant to be a Jew. I really think that was the first time that I personally understood that. And so it was an amazing thing, that this Anglo Saxon place would be a source for that.

And of course the other part of it was that I was so busy getting steeped in — not Judeo-Christian information and ideology, but Christian, Grecian, Roman ideology. And you know, I just adopted that. That was my background. It never occurred to me that my background was really Russian Jewish. That is to say, it did but it didn't. There's a kind of ambiguity here, and I don't know whether you'll find this — I supposed maybe from other Jewish girls, I'd like to really know about that. But there didn't seem to be a clash in these two kinds of ideologies, I just put them together, and I was very pleased to learn about all this stuff that I never had learned about before. My best friend was Connie Gates, whom you can look up — who was just here for two years. She loved the Protestant hymns, so we trotted off to the chapel, which was obligatory, but I think if it had been my own — if I hadn't had anybody influencing me, I just would have skipped chapel. Not because it was Protestant, but because who wants to go to something that you're supposed to go? That didn't seem to be so wonderful. So I learned all the Protestant hymns, and all the verses of Protestant hymns, and I really loved that, because I know them all. They're beautiful songs, and anytime I go to any funerals I can sing all the verses. It was — I never felt discriminated against. I mean, it wasn't any iota of that, not remotely. It was just that I was putting this stuff together and it wasn't until very much later that I realized how many Jews were in my — in Comstock, and there must have been 20 girls in my class — and of course, we were girls then — and maybe, I don't know, nine of us were Jewish in that class. That's rather a large number. It isn't random. Actually, when I think back on it, I think, Well, maybe they sort of wanted to put us in the corner. But it turned out to be fine, because there were people who sort of understood you, and were from the Metropolitan area — New Jersey, New York. Although one was from Canada, as I recall — Gloria [Sokolek?]. I'm sure you can look her up, too. Anyway, that was my thought.

But it is true that the two teachers that I became closest to were Jewish, Nelly Shargo Hoyt, and [Louis Conehaft?] who taught Greek. That was quite fun, he was a lovely guy. I just took Nelly Hoyt as my mentor. Well, you'll ask me some more questions, and I'll tell you that.

LAWRENCE: Well I was going to ask — one of my questions was did you have someone who you looked up to, or who was a mentor figure? So if you want to say more about that relationship, go ahead.

MASLO: Oh absolutely. She taught eighteenth-century intellectual history, and eighteenth-century France, the Enlightenment. It was so exciting. I think I must have memorized every lecture she gave. Of course I've got

terrific notes, I really do. But I just swallowed it whole, and I went on to Yale to get a PhD, and I continued to work in eighteenth-century France, and I'm still working in eighteenth-century France, not necessarily now in intellectual history, but more economic history I guess you'd call it. But she really — it's — now, did she give me the idea to do it and I might not have done it otherwise? I don't know. But certainly it was exactly what I wanted to do, and what I still wanted to do. What's interesting to me as I think back on it is when I got to Yale, the person who influenced me the most was also a Jewish professor. He was in Medieval studies — Robert Sabatino Lopez — so, you know, there is a kind of recognizing somebody who has the same approach, the same mentality. It's possible. Certainly it wasn't a bad thing, it was a good thing.

LAWRENCE: Were there every time when, either because you Jewish or because of anything else about you, when you felt like you didn't fit in here completely?

MASLO: Oh, of course. I mean, it seems to me everybody did. I mean, even people whose grandparents and parents had come to Smith. You get here, it's different, you're away from home, even though you're — well, I was thrilled to get away from home, but no matter. You're living in a dorm, the food is different, the people are different, everybody in my class at Comstock house knew how to knit argyle socks, which they did in class, and they did it — and they also played bridge. I never learned about argyle socks, and I never learned bridge, which is really too bad because it would be a good life skill to have. But I felt that was not my thing, and so — and everybody was wearing Bermuda shorts, and wearing camels hair coats, and we were certainly a middle-class family, but it just was not anything that had anything to do with me. Many of the young women had gone to private schools. The only way you found out was because they had nicknames that had to know with their last name. I don't know if you have cottoned on to that, but probably you have.

However, in my time at Smith, there was such a truly genteel manner that nobody lorded it over anybody. I know that there were girls that came out — and you know what that is.

LAWRENCE: Like—

MASLO: As debutantes. While we were in school, during the weekend. And if you didn't know, you wouldn't know, because it was not spoken of. I think that is so admirable. You know, there was a kind of Christian gentility, Anglo Saxon Christian gentility that was admirable. You were here, yes of course I felt — of course I felt out of place. I remember being in the first-year French class and we had a quiz that was coming up, and I thought, Oh my God, I'm at Smith College. This is a quiz. Oh, how awful. I'm sure everybody else had some similar thing. Not

that you said so. But I certainly didn't feel that way in the classroom, or with any professors. I just felt great camaraderie, and it was fun. It really was fun. Even the ones that were sort of a little cross. I can remember — here's a scene in first-year Western Civ and — gosh, what was his name? I know it, but I can't think of it at the moment. We were in sections, and here's this little guy, and he's kind of ugly, and actually he had asthma, the poor guy, so he was a little spastic. I remember at one point, I hadn't put my hand up, surprisingly, and he leaned over his desk and said, "Well, Ms. Maslo, what do you think about such and what, such and what?" And it was fun, it was such a neat moment. There were many lovely moments like that. Now what's the question that I'm answering?

LAWRENCE: Oh, I don't even remember either. That's fine. I wanted to ask about — you had moments of feeling like you didn't fit in. Where did you end up finding friendship and community at Smith over your years here?

MASLO: Let's see. There were several Jewish women that I became close to. Doris [Kirschbaum?] who was in Gillett, I think. And it turned out finally that our husbands both got jobs at Williams College, so we really had chance to be friends longer. Women in my house, Comstock House — that was a great group of people, both Christian and non-Christian. They were — the people who stayed on the east coast were very close, and took care of each other, and went to each other's events and so on. They became good friends. My best friend, Claire [Rosette Goldfarb?] actually ended up in Michigan, also, along with me and my husband. There were some — those were the people who were the best friends.

LAWRENCE: What do you remember doing for fun when you weren't studying?

MASLO: Oh, God. Well what was I doing for fun? I knew you would ask that, and I was trying to think, What did I do for fun? I'm sure that [Packie Linda Sonenshine?] who was in history honors with me — and that was fun to — she was aware of every event. Rally Day, and this, that, and the other thing. To tell you the truth, it just went over my head. I really — I guess I wasn't so interested in it. Did I have any fun? Well yes. I learned to drink a pousse-café, which is a drink that has various colors of liqueur on it. So, that was fun. Yes, going up to Dartmouth with boyfriends was fun. Going to Yale on Mountain Day, that was fun. Fooling around — you know, just chatting, and going to the movies, and so on. That was fun. But I have to say that I didn't ever get involved in any of the musicals and so. And I'm sorry, because I think it would have been really fun. I should have done it. Can't go back, but do other things.

LAWRENCE: Did you — were you in any, like, clubs, or anything like that at all?

- MASLO: Clubs. Were there clubs?
- LAWRENCE: Yeah.
- MASLO: Really? No seriously, I don't remember any clubs.
- LAWRENCE: I believe you. Any groups or organizations on campus?
- MASLO: I really don't remember. I certainly — it's possible that I was involved. I went to concerts all the time, and bless Smith's — they had everybody coming to — it was far from being a provincial place, as it might have been. So, clubs. What were the clubs?
- LAWRENCE: I think there was like, clubs for different languages, clubs for different sports, clubs for different social interests, things like that.
- MASLO: Oh, OK. No, no, no. I was such a klutz, really. In fact, I was so terrible at sports that when — after having tried tennis and golf and not having done well — I mean passes OK — then there was swimming and the instructor said, "Well Darryl, I'm astonished that you are doing so well." (laughter) No, I guess I just didn't get involved in any of that.
- LAWRENCE: Do you remember anything about what the political climate was like? Did people talk about politics at all?
- MASLO: Oh, that's so interesting. We were quite separate. It was, I think, the Eisenhower era, and there was also a flood in the Connecticut River Valley, and I remember being aware of both those things, but we were — maybe other people were more political. However, there were a couple of young women in my house, Betty Rose, for instance, who were in government, and they really did read *The Times* every day in the [loggia?]. Have you been to Comstock house?
- LAWRENCE: Uh-huh.
- MASLO: Isn't it nice?
- LAWRENCE: It's beautiful.
- MASLO: It's more room than you need. It's such a nice luxury. I remember I really never read the paper, and that has come home to me just yesterday. May I tell you an anecdote?
- LAWRENCE: Of course.
- MASLO: As I was checking in here at the alumni house, and there was this young thing who was checking me in, and after she put this around and so on, I asked her, really just to be nice, Well what do you think of the political

activities that are going on now? And she said, “Oh, I don’t like — I’m not involved with either party, they’re too intellectual.” Whereupon, my jaw dropped and said, “Intellectual? Donald Trump is intellectual?” Oh well, er, er, er. So, she sort of backtracked. What she meant was ideological, I assume, anyway. I said, “Well, don’t you read *The Times*?” “No,” said she, “I get my news from CNN on my little smart phone. And it’s wonderful,” she said, “because any time anything happens they let me know.” My heart is sinking. I am thinking, This is a Smith woman, she is educated in this wonderful place. She’s about to go out into the world someday, and this is going to be — this is the quality of her political acumen. I said, “But don’t you get *The Times* or *The Wallstreet Journal* or something — some paper at your house?” Well no, she doesn’t know and she doesn’t think so. I came away from that encounter thinking, Oh dear, the younger generation. And then I started thinking, Well what about that, Darryl? Did you read *The Times* when you were in college? And I thought, Maybe I was a little too hard on her? But I think she was awfully naive. Really we’re bombarded with this stuff. So, what was the question? Was I aware of the politics when I was in — no, I think I was really — I was in 18th century France. I was reading the Encyclopédie, I was doing western civ, and you know my son said I’m still there. So what can I say?

LAWRENCE: You were at Smith during a really interesting time, because it was like the Cold War and McCarthyism was still going on. Do you remember that impacting campus at all?

MASLO: Nope.

LAWRENCE: Nope, not a bit? (Laughs)

MASLO: Well no, I think it was a little — well yes, that’s right, it was the McCarthy era. I certainly — I married in 1957, so I remember — weren’t the McCarthy trials in ’58 — ’57 or ’58, because I remember watching on TV.

LAWRENCE: I think you might be right. But there was — like, the whole communist witch-hunt ideas were starting while you were still in college.

MASLO: Yes, it was very scary. That, I do remember, but I sort of felt protected from it. Somehow Smith was protecting me from any of that, I think. That’s not very politically astute, but that’s — remember we all were supposed to graduate as dilettantes. As very highly educated smart, charming, capable dilettantes who were supposed to marry and manage our husbands’ affairs, and so McCarthy — that’s very far away.

LAWRENCE: Did you feel like there was a pressure to get married and be a certain type of woman?

MASLO: Oh yes, of course. But my mother, who had been educated in the Julliard, and she would have had a singing career except that her — well, it was — she had just graduated from Julliard, and World War II was on, and that was really — mixed up everybody's lives, and so instead of staying in the New York area where she might have had a career, my father got this job in Seattle. I remember very clearly going with her to her music teacher — her singing teacher who was a Russian émigré, you know, very cultivated. She told her singing teacher that her husband was going off so she had to go with him. This Russian teacher said, "Let him go, what do you care?" No, have your own career. But fortunately for me, as her child, she did care and she went off with her husband, which paid really to her career. She said to me from — it must have been from age five on, "Get a profession, have a profession, train for a profession," and so I was one of 11 women who graduated in 1956 who went on to graduate school or somebody went to medical school. So yes there was enormous pressure, but I remember the dean of students then, who spoke at one of the — what do you call them — the sort of vespers every Sunday night there was a kind of pleasant little get together, and there were these wonderful short talks by people. They were just super. What great teaching devices they were. One time the Dean of Students said, "You will be pressured to marry right away. Don't throw yourselves into the arms of some man. Do something else with your life." Now of course, 90% of my fellow graduates did exactly that and for that matter, I got married in 1957, so I guess I didn't not heed that. But absolutely you were supposed to do that. But what's interesting is in my twentieth reunion, a lot of my classmates had divorced, and or had gone to graduate school and they were very mad. And that was the beginning of the women's' movements. I was already in a career, and married, and had kids, so I wasn't in their angry state.

LAWRENCE: Yeah. You were doing it all.

MASLO: Yeah. Experiencing discrimination yes, but no, because when I went to Yale it was a class of 20 that was inducted, five were women. They were so sort of surprised — and I think they thought they were doing this wonderful thing taking in these five women — so that I really didn't experience the kind of discrimination that a lot of other people did. I think they were just sort of stunned. When we graduated — I got my degree in 1964 — two of the five women who graduated were pregnant. And I remember going up to shake hands with this absolute dried up Yale official and they were stunned. Of course, they couldn't quite tell you were pregnant, because we were wearing robes, but they could tell, sort of. Anyway, that's sort of another vignette for you.

LAWRENCE: We're coming to the end of the time. You've already — this was supposed to be half an hour, but you're just so interesting that I kept asking questions. (laughter).

MASLO: Well, I don't mean to take up more—

KATE: (unclear)

LAWRENCE: OK, we're going to try to wrap it up in the next few minutes.

MASLO: Sure.

LAWRENCE: But you went to grad school and kept studying eighteenth-century French history? What's your — where has life taken you since then?

MASLO: Well, I just published a third volume.

LAWRENCE: Really?

MASLO: And in fact I made sure that the Smith Library got it, and they didn't. UMass has it, but I brought a copy with me. However, they really should have bought it, but anyway — I worked with a younger woman who is a French historian too. It's a collection of pieces — mine, and hers, and other people's. I just got a new idea for a book for me to do, which I think is going to be a lot of fun for me. I see myself just working away. Why not? I'm continuing to go to conferences, French history conferences, and I've also become very involved with the Society for the History of Technology. I love getting panels together and putting people together, and giving talks, and developing the talk into something else, and vetting other people's work, and I just vetted an article for *Technology and Culture*, and a manuscript for a University of Nebraska press, and I'm just doing what I always did. I worked at — I got a job teaching at Eastern Michigan University in my field, and retired in 2004 as a full professor, and I applied for every possible research leave, and went to France a whole lot. My husband was very helpful. We have two children. Matthew is 55, and he's an attorney in Chicago. Naomi is 53 and she's a librarian in Baltimore. My husband was really very good, because he stayed with them while I went off for six weeks here and there. His field was Spanish literature. He worked at the University of Michigan, which is why we're in Ann Arbor, and we went to Spain a lot.

I mean, I know a little birdie says, "Oh Darryl, you should retire and play," but I really am enjoying it so much. I think I'm getting better and better at it. It's not that I can remember everything, I guess, but I never could remember everything. I never could remember dates or names, so I don't think I'm too much behind the eight ball there. When you steep yourself in a field, you come to understand it in a way that you didn't in the beginning. You know, nothing wrong with being in the beginning, but it's very valuable, I think. I just think I'm going to keep on going until I can't. However, my husband, who is nine years older than I, has been diagnosed with dementia, and so I have now to do quite a lot of care in the house, and so on. That's sort of what I look forward to, so to

say. But it doesn't mean that I'm going to stop doing what I do, because for one thing, it's just such a wonderful thing to just get back into my work, and then I forget about everything else, and I forget about being irritated at him and so on.

So, I feel that Smith just started me off in a wonderful way, and it was the particular quality of Smith. They didn't — it wasn't — at Swarthmore, I think they sort of are a little more rigid and more professionally oriented. At Smith, they expected you to become a whole person and to just take in and love the humanities. Now I know 40% of Smithies are scientists, but I'm sure it's very much the same. The motto of that is — I was studying renaissance with [Leona Gable?] and maybe with Nelly Hoyt, too. The assignment was read 100 pages and comment on it. So we did. And I mean, they didn't say, "Read 30 in this book and 40 in that book, and so on," and 100 pages was a modest amount because you were supposed to walk around and think about what you had read. And we did, I think, really. As far as I'm concerned, the not only the actual classrooms which were neat, but it was the atmosphere of — that liberal arts was something so valuable, and that you could take it in.

LAWRENCE: Yeah.

MASLO: It's — I hope Smith never loses that. What do you think? Do you think it's continuing to do that?

LAWRENCE: I think it's continuing it. I'm double majoring in two humanities, so --

MASLO: Oh, are you? Which and which?

LAWRENCE: Women's' studies and religion.

MASLO: Good for you.

LAWRENCE: Going strong. Well, I think we have to stop there, but (unclear).

MASLO: Yes, I understand. You've been very patient.

LAWRENCE: You've been very interesting.

MASLO: Well who doesn't like to talk about what you do and what you think, and so on? Anyway, so I thank you very much.

LAWRENCE: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Audio Transcription Center, May 2016.