

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Melissa Homestead, Class of 1985

Interviewed by
Maggie Kraus, Class of 2012

May 14, 2010

Abstract

In this oral history, Melissa Homestead discusses living in Lawrence House, Wilder House, and Parsons Annex, her experiences as an English major and her thesis on Willa Cather, and her participation in music clubs and the Lesbian Alliance. Homestead also describes issues surrounding sexuality and lesbianism, the Hover House controversy, incidents of homophobia and tensions between heterosexual and homosexual students, the Feminist and Lesbian Alumnae of Smith College (FLASC) group, and her experiences at the University of Pennsylvania.

Restrictions

None

Format

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

Transcript

Transcribed by Linda Sariahmed 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: Homestead, Melissa. Interview by Maggie Kraus. Video recording, May 14, 2010. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Melissa Homestead, interview by Maggie Kraus, video recording, May 14, 2010, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: Homestead, Melissa. Interview by Maggie Kraus. Transcript of video recording, May 14, 2010. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Melissa Homestead, interview by Maggie Kraus, transcript of video recording, May 14, 2010, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 14, 2010, with:

MELISSA HOMESTEAD

by: MAGGIE KRAUS
filmed by: KATE GEIS

KRAUS: Last name?

HOMESTEAD: Homestead.

KRAUS: Homestead.

HOMESTEAD: H-O-M-E.

KRAUS: That's why you have a nametag.

HOMESTEAD: Yes! There it is.

KRAUS: (laughs)

HOMESTEAD: I know my handwriting is totally illegible.

KRAUS: (laughs) OK.

GEIS: And Maggie, whenever you're ready.

KRAUS: OK. So just for the record, I'm just going to say, this is Maggie Kraus, and I am conducting an interview with Melissa Homestead on May 14, 2010, for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project.

GEIS: Can we pause for one second, just want to move the mic.

KRAUS: Do you think I have to say that again?

GEIS: I think we have it.

KRAUS: OK.

GEIS: So we're good.

KRAUS: Great. Well, thank you so much for agreeing to do this, and coming and sharing everything with us. We totally appreciate it. So I guess we'll just start off with how you got to Smith, and if you want to talk a little

bit about, you know, the options that you had to go to college, why did you choose to come to Smith?

HOMESTEAD: Well, I started looking at colleges very early, and there was an alumnae recruiter, actually, from Mount Holyoke at my high school college fair, and so she was an admission — (alumnae?) admissions person, and she did the whole story of, you know, why a women's college thing, and she sold me. And I thought, and I keep telling people this, it's really true, I thought it was going to be like Girl Scout camp with intellectual content, and I was in Girl Scouting, and Girl Scouting was one of the few places that I could get away from, you know, the really bad peer pressure stuff, and the — and so I loved girl scouting, but it was also not intellectual, and I was very much a geek, and so I just was sold on it, and so I only applied to Smith, Mount Holyoke, Wellesley and Bryn Mawr, and I got into all of them, and I chose Smith after my final visit, I mean it was right up to the wire, so. Women's college, that's all I wanted.

KRAUS: Definitely. So what about your visits to Smith kind of sold you?

HOMESTEAD: Well, I had been, I think, on all of my other visits at that point, and — this is really sad, because they've dismantled what really made Smith appealing to me, which was the residential dining, and Mount Holyoke and Wellesley both had sort of broken up the house system in similar ways, although perhaps they had gone even further in that students moved potentially every year, so they wouldn't stay in a house, and when I went to the dining halls with students, it was clear that everybody sat with their cliques in these regional dining centers, and I thought, you know, social cliques did not serve me well in high school, I didn't want to go someplace where that was going to be the way that life would be organized, and it was actually a Thursday night dinner here at Smith, and everybody just went down, and found a seat, and had conversation with whomever — and sometimes people, and when I got to campus, and you would sometimes sit with people more than others, but you had to be able to be respectful with a group of — well, Lawrence House was 62 students — you had to be able to sit at dinner with anyone. And for me, that was really what sold me. And Bryn Mawr was not — I mean, it did ultimately stay single sex, but it was pretty clear to me when I visited in 1981 that they weren't entirely committed to staying a single-sex institution, and that's why I discounted them.

KRAUS: Hm. OK. Were the older women in your family college graduates, college graduates of all-women's colleges—

HOMESTEAD: My mother was a graduate of Pembroke, which was the coordinate college of Brown University, so—

KRAUS: Hm! Great.

- HOMESTEAD: And I think her aunt had also gone to Pembroke. But on the other side of the family, no college graduates.
- KRAUS: So you mentioned Lawrence House — you were in Lawrence house for all four years?
- HOMESTEAD: Three years.
- KRAUS: Three years, great. So what was it like — I mean, obviously, with the dining system kind of different these days, what was house community? What did that mean to you [audio interruption] —did it mean to everyone in that house?
- HOMESTEAD: I mean, it shifted from year to year, with new students. When — I mean, there's a long story about how I ended up not being in Lawrence my senior year, but it was a Green Street house, and Green Street was full of science geeks and pre-med students, at least ones who aspired to be, and I wasn't aspiring to pre-med, but I was very seriously academic, and so it suited me. It was a pretty serious intellectual house, I would say, but it was also fun and goofy, and we did all those other kinds of things, but I mean, it changed very much from year to year.
- KRAUS: Mm-hmm. And, I mean, so what did you study when you were here?
- HOMESTEAD: I was an English major.
- KRAUS: English major. Great. Were you involved in any clubs or organizations on campus?
- HOMESTEAD: Yeah, I was involved in a lot of music, I was in — well, there used to be a whole hierarchical system of choirs, which just became the glee club, so I was in freshman choir alpha, I was in the sophomore choir, I was in glee club, and then I was also in chamber singers. I think chamber singers for three years. I did early music — that wasn't clubs, though — and I was very active in the Lesbian Alliance.
- KRAUS: Great. So did music find its way into your academic life at Smith at all?
- HOMESTEAD: Well, I had to take — in order to get credit for my lessons, I had to take two music classes, so I took — I took two music theory classes, which I had to do to get credit for all of my performance classes. But otherwise it was really actually sort of my — I mean, I spent probably eight hours a week in rehearsals and meetings and things, but it wasn't academic for me, mostly, so—
- KRAUS: Did you happen to sing any a cappella, or was it just the choirs—

HOMESTEAD: I tried out for a cappella every year, and never got it.

KRAUS: Oh, no! (laughter) That's a bummer.

HOMESTEAD: Yeah, yeah.

KRAUS: But it sounds like you were super—

HOMESTEAD: But the choirs—

KRAUS: —busy.

HOMESTEAD: —the choirs were very different from a cappella. I mean, I liked the — I liked the a cappella stuff, but I wasn't, apparently, their cup of tea.

KRAUS: (laughs) Well, I'm sure you were busy with plenty of other wonderful things, so. So you mentioned that you were involved in the Lesbian Alliance. So what was the atmosphere like, in regards to — I mean what role did sexuality—

HOMESTEAD: Well, as I was leaving, just — and even actually, one of my first times I came back for reunions is 1776, the real issue was sort of lesbian versus bisexual women, so it hadn't gotten into the gender identity stuff that someone was telling me all about at lunch today who was a graduate in '05, and I've heard about otherwise. Junior year, the college decided to close houses, this may sound familiar, and they were going to close Oak House, which I think no longer exists, now? Which had been open temporarily as an overflow house, and they were going to close Hover House, which was a co-operative house, so there were Tenney and Hover, and Hover, I'd say, 95% of the residents of Hover were lesbian, and there was a real strong sense that that's why the house was being closed. And we organized, we occupied the president's office, and it failed. And then senior year, though, we refocused, and I was involved in efforts to try to talk to Jill Conway, and to get in contact with the trustees about adding sexual orientation to the non-discrimination policy. Which — I mean, it happened, and then it was sort of undone and redone, I never quite figured out what happened, but, you know, that was our issue senior year, was working on that, and I think that was successful. And I'd say so too, one of the great things we did senior year, I don't know, did the Radical Debutantes' Ball survive?

KRAUS: I—

HOMESTEAD: I think that went on for a while.

KRAUS: —I'm not sure (laughs).

HOMESTEAD: So senior year, we had the Radical Debutantes' Ball, which — I mean,

there had been a lot of, sort of, you know, more divisive stuff on campus between straight women and lesbians, but the Radical Debutantes' Ball was meant to be an inclusive event, and we really weren't sure — and we also did the first Smith Is for Lovers Days, I think my junior year was the first one, and the second one was senior year, and the Rad Deb Ball we just thought, Is it just going to be, like, the usual sort of lesbian alliance or women's dance crowd, and the women's center had women's dances which weren't exclusively lesbian, and all kinds of people came, and it was clearly sort of marketed as, you know, put on fun clothes and go out and dance, just in a women's environment, and all these straight women who never would have come to a women's dance or a lesbian alliance dance came at all — like, raided all the thrift shops, and everybody had a good time, and that was — that was a good moment. I think that that succeeded, and I think that did go on for some time, I don't know how long it lasted, but.

KRAUS: Mm-hmm. So was there a clear divide between straight women and lesbians, or was there any kind of tension or miscommunication between—

HOMESTEAD: There were incidents in houses of homophobia, stuff written on people's message boards, or other kinds of — it was generally sort of in a Smith way, like, behind people's backs, not direct confrontation, but there were — and then there were issues when sort of houses “went lesbian,” you know, so there was sort of like, Lamont House was one that the — it seemed the administration broke up Lamont House, and suddenly one year, 60% of the house were freshmen. (laughter) That was notable. And Lawrence House sort of went lesbian while I was there for a while. And so those kinds of issues, I think, caused tension and — and so it was — I mean, it was not — I mean it was not too overt. I mean, there was something going on in town over the summer with lesbian women who were violently assaulted, which I think was — and that was more of a concern than any, really, that kind of stuff on campus, but.

KRAUS: Now, did Smith have, I mean, a reputation, or, I mean, was it — was it the kind of place where you said, I'm going to Smith, and people immediately said, you know, oh!

HOMESTEAD: Well, Reed — Reed, the infamous Harper's article. There was an article on Smith that appeared — I think it was fall of 1982, and so it was also, you know, now, of course, it's Lesbianville, USA, right, Northampton, but at that point — I mean, that had really started in the '70s, and it was sort of like the separatist communes that were, you know, out in the hills, and — but there was this feeling, and this Harper's article was about that, and there was — we got some national press, like one of the news shows did a sort of thing on lesbians at Smith, and so this was — yeah. I mean, there was definitely that kind of focus, which was part of the friction that some people — even with the straight women felt that

that was somehow reflecting on them in a way that wasn't productive, so, yeah, that was definitely there. That was definitely there, and there was the Alumnae Association was terrible.

KRAUS: Really?

HOMESTEAD: They kept talking about the "lesbian problem."

KRAUS: Oh, wow.

HOMESTEAD: And I was very active in this — Philadelphia Smith club after I graduated, mostly so that when somebody started saying that, I would just get up and say, [loudly] "Problem? You've got a problem?"

KRAUS: (laughs)

HOMESTEAD: "I don't have a problem! Do you have a problem?" So. And it really was, and it was only — I think it was about early 1990s that the alumnae association sort of, you know, published this conciliatory column in the quarterly. I mean, the quarterly was — could be pretty bad on those issues, too, so.

KRAUS: Right. So did you kind of take it upon yourself to, you know, make your presence known, and — I mean, or did you follow the lead of, maybe, upperclassmen who'd already been pushing towards, you know, involvement in the lesbian alliance, or—

HOMESTEAD: I think I just — you know, in fact, I recently found a journal I was keeping spring of my junior year, and I totally forgot that I even kept this journal, and it was more — I mean, it was your typical kind of — you know, the coming-out process, and I just sort of decided to go to the Lesbian Alliance and I was all nervous, and — so, but then, I mean, the closing of Hover House just really — that was actually the (fall?) — but the closing of Hover House just galvanized everybody, and really — and then that was also the first attempt to organize lesbian alumnae around trying to keep them from closing Hover House. So, you know, I think that that event did a lot, but. I mean, mostly, the Lesbian Alliance was kind of, you know, social, educational, but then that external thing was from, you know, that one event, I think, did a lot to change the orientation of the group, in a sense.

KRAUS: So, I mean, I don't know how much you're keeping tabs on the current Smith population or community, but I mean, are you happy to see that it's — it seems to have come a long way in terms of being a more open, accepting—

HOMESTEAD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

KRAUS: —kind of interconnected community?

HOMESTEAD: I mean, I know that the sort of gender-identity questions and all of that have gotten — and now that there is a — finally, the alumnae association has affinity groups, so there was this group that — and it's funny, I remember when it was organized, nobody wanted to actually just call it a lesbian alumnae group, still, and so it was Feminist and Lesbian Alumnae of Smith College — FLASC — which lasted for a few years. And now that this affinity group started, you know, there was this e-mail discussion as it was trying to be organized, and the gender identity stuff almost sunk the whole thing. Because for my generation versus more recent students, yeah. Women who identified as lesbian feminists, and still identify as lesbian feminists, and then students who had transitioned to male, it was just like, different universes trying to talk to one another, and it almost didn't happen, I think, over the issue.

KRAUS: Right. Mm-hmm. So, I mean, how — between academics and your activism on campus — how did Smith live up to your expectations? I mean, coming in as a prospective student, as a first year, did you ever think that, you know, that would be your Smith experience? I mean, did you—

HOMESTEAD: I mean, I didn't — you know, I — I don't think — I mean, I think a lot of things happened that I wasn't necessarily expecting. I mean, I think the intellectual experience was, you know, 100% up to my expectations, and don't regret the decision a minute, and — although I often think, like, you know, greatest four years of my life, but I would never want to live them again. (laughter) Because it's just like — you know, I mean, everything's so intense, and there's just so much going, and — yeah. But I mean, I'm fanatically devoted to the college, still.

KRAUS: Great. Did you go abroad, or did you take any time away from Smith?

HOMESTEAD: Nope. I stayed all four years.

KRAUS: And do you want to talk a little bit about what happened senior year? Where were you living senior year?

HOMESTEAD: Well. I had wanted to move into Hover, and for a lot of reasons, including sort of the lesbian identification of the house, but also, just because I was ready to have some more independence, and be in a co-op — either wanted to be in a co-op, or I wanted to be a head resident, and I didn't get a head resident gig. And it was interesting at that point. There was some — I heard people, lesbians who interviewed — I mean, there were some lesbian head residents, but quietly so, because there was, I mean, quite seriously, the dean said things during interviews about, you know, homosexuality being against Massachusetts state law.

KRAUS: Wow.

HOMESTEAD: The residential dean, so. That was also — so I didn't get to be a head resident. I was supposed to go into Tenney, in this really big double room, with a friend who had lived in Hover, and Hover residents got priority to go into Tenney, and she pulled out a few weeks before the semester began, and took the last non-quad single on campus.

KRAUS: Oh, wow.

HOMESTEAD: And so I ended up in Wilder House.

KRAUS: No way! (laughs) Back again.

HOMESTEAD: And it was just — it was — yeah. It was culture shock. I mean, not — not just — I mean, the — Wilder Wench song that went with Wilder House, I was just like, oh my God, I have woken up in a nightmare. And then also, it was — it was a party house, and I was writing an honors thesis, and I just — I think was there maybe longer than three — I think a little longer than three weeks, but I was, you know — but by midterm, I was out of there. And ironically, where I ended up, a room opened up in Parsons Annex, which had been Hover House. So, yeah.

KRAUS: Yeah, that's — that's incredible. So, I mean, back to your academic experience, your intellectual experience at Smith. Were there any advisors or faculty members that really pushed you in the direction of your major, or pushed you to write a thesis or inspired you in any—

HOMESTEAD: You know, it's funny, my advisor was Jeff Hunter, whom I took Gen Lit 291 with. World — Masterpieces of World Literature and Translation from Homer to Tolstoy.

KRAUS: I just took that class.

HOMESTEAD: Is it still all-male authors?

KRAUS: Yes.

HOMESTEAD: It's still?

KRAUS: Yes, it is.

HOMESTEAD: Oh, crap.

KRAUS: (laughs)

HOMESTEAD: We had that battle a long time ago. Anyway! So I took that class, and

[audio interruption] –not officially my advisor, my freshman year I had a regular advisor. But right from the start, he’s like, Do you think you might want to write an honors thesis? Well, yeah. What would you want to write about? I said, “Willa Cather.” But I didn’t take any American literature. (laughter) And then I wrote my honors thesis on Willa Cather my senior year having taken no American literature, so. That was kind of bad advising, I think.

KRAUS: (laughs)

HOMESTEAD: But. But then my advisor my senior year, I’m still in touch with him, because Jeff Hunter was on leave — Bill Oram — and he was — I had him for English 207. He’s great. And then my — my honors thesis advisor was my section leader for 207, Peggy (Shook?), who was a Smith College alumna, classmate of Sylvia Plath. And — I hadn’t really had a great time in the section with her, but nobody else — so, I hadn’t had any classes with Susan Van Dyne, and she would have been the logical person to do it with, but she was going to be on sabbatical, so she said no, and the other Americanist at that point, Frank Murphy, said no, he didn’t want to work with this honors thesis with me, and so they just had to make somebody work on my honors thesis, and Peggy was a — still is — British Romanticist, and works on poetry, and I wanted to write an honors thesis on Willa Cather as a lesbian writer, and so I just sort of, you know, told her what we were going to read every week, and — I mean, it was a great, great experience. So I spent a whole semester, I was very self-directed, but had someone intelligent to talk to who would read what I read, and then read what I wrote, and that was great. One of the best experiences of my life, so.

KRAUS: Great, so you kind of decided from early on that you — this is something that you wanted to accomplish.

HOMESTEAD: Yeah, I wanted to write on Cather, because she was my favorite author, and then it was my junior year that I read a trade biography — it was the first out on Cather. And then I was just like, this is it, this is what I’m going to do! And it was — it was great. It was just a wonderful, wonderful experience.

KRAUS: Terrific! So, do you want to talk a little bit about commencement? Do you remember your commencement speaker, the message behind that?

HOMESTEAD: (whispers) Beverly Sills.

KRAUS: Beverly Sills.

HOMESTEAD: She was awful.

KRAUS: Yeah? (laughing)

HOMESTEAD: It was just this really, like, You can't have it all. That was pretty much the message.

KRAUS: Yeah. We just talked about that because of the speech that Judy Chicago gave in 2000. Do you know anything about that? She—

HOMESTEAD: I think I remember reading about it in the Quarterly, but vaguely.

KRAUS: Yeah, she had a similar message, I think that took a lot of people by surprise, especially because it was Mothers' Day, and she basically got up and said, you know, it's — it's not true, you can't be a mother and a successful person in the working world, and a wife, and you know, you can't have it all, and none of it's true, and everyone was kind of taken aback by that, but—

HOMESTEAD: Well, but, I think Judy Chicago would have probably said it from a different perspective than Beverly Sills did. Which was sort of like patting us on the head, and I had a great operatic career, and, you know, then she — yeah, it was — it was — it was very disappointing. And — yeah.

KRAUS: So what exactly — I mean, did you think that there was a common belief among Smith students, among graduates at the time that, you know, the words of wisdom, if you will, from older women, from alums, from people outside the Smith community, were those taken very to heart, or?

HOMESTEAD: I don't know who took Beverly Sills to heart, or why the hell she was our commencement speaker, but I worked commencement for three years as a commencement worker, and we just, you know, took every opportunity to plop down on a sofa next to an alum on campus and talk to everybody, and so — alumnae, yes, we took the words of wisdom from alumnae very seriously whenever we saw them. And so, yeah, that was great. And we're all — all of us in my class were so bummed because, you know how they've organized the reunions this time? So, well, it used to be that all reunions were during commencement weekend, and at first, they organized it so that the high contribution years came during commencement, so we would have been — the 25th is a big contribution year — but we would have also had the 50th year. 50th is next time, so we are the old ladies.

KRAUS: Yeah. (laughs) I wondered—

HOMESTEAD: We have no old ladies to get wisdom from, it's kind of sad.

KRAUS: I wondered how that was organized. So, I mean, when you were a student, was there an overwhelming kind of presence of alumnae on

campus? Were they something that was constantly being presented to you? I mean, were you updated on, you know, notable alums?

HOMESTEAD: Well, a lot of people didn't go to the full rally day festivities, but I always did, and so when they gave out the alumnae medals and — so, I mean, I think I was just always really keyed into the college history, and I don't know if everybody was, so I was always, if there were any alumnae on campus for anything, I mean, I would show up. And I used to just basically hang out in this reading room here once this opened for two years, and read the old *Sophians*, and the yearbooks, and just hang out and poke around college history, just because I was interested, so.

KRAUS: Is that something that you knew — I mean, did you know the extent of Smith College history when you were applying here, or when you first came, was that something that contributed to your coming here?

HOMESTEAD: I don't — I mean, I knew something about it from the admissions materials, but Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's book came out while I was a student. The — what's it called? Well, it's a whole — it's a Seven Sisters' history—

KRAUS: Right.

HOMESTEAD: —and I can see the cover in my mind, I can't remember the title, but — so that came out, and I went right over to the Quill bookstore, when it — you know, and bought it, and so I was interested, and I just — and there were also, like, even in the houses, there were the old yearbooks, and including in my house, there was this weird set of documents that I read through that were — when the Ivy Leagues started going co-ed in the late '60s and early '70s, there were really serious discussions here about Smith going co-ed, and even a report recommending that Smith go co-ed. And then I just sort of tried to, like, read through these things, and look through all the old student papers, and my hypothesis about why the tide turned had to do with — there were big organized, like, teach-ins, and student strikes related to the Vietnam War, and all of these men from, like, the little Ivies and the Ivy Leagues came in and tried to run the student protests here at Smith—

KRAUS: Oh, wow.

HOMESTEAD: —and it seemed to me, just even, this was my sort of amateur college history thing, that, you know, it went from this recommendation that Smith go co-ed to a Smith stay single-sex, and I think that really changed students' perceptions.

KRAUS: So, I mean, your enthusiasm about Smith history and everything, what does it mean for you to come back to a reunion week, even if you are the oldest class here? (laughter) I mean, what have your experiences

been? What do you look forward to about reunion week?

HOMESTEAD: I look forward to talking, often to people I never knew as an undergrad. I usually try to hunt up my professors, whom I will confess I've stayed in better touch with than fellow students. I always have an excuse to come to the archive, and I've done research here professionally since I left, so.

KRAUS: Oh, wow. I mean, did this kind of stay — stand out in your mind as some — a very — an important resource for someone doing research? I mean, I can't even imagine the kind of research that has been done here just because of, you know, the magnitude of what is being held here, but did that stand out to you as something you had to take advantage of?

HOMESTEAD: Well, when I was an undergrad, in fact, when I was reading this biography of Cather that sort of outed her as a lesbian, it mentioned that her partner had gone to Smith College, and I tried to do that research as an undergrad, and they just sort of went to the cards from the classes, and the archivist then, I'm trying to remember her name, she was very funny, she pulled out the card, and she read one comment off it, and it said, companion to Willa Cather, not for publication. She said, "Well, that tells the whole story." There was actually a lot more on the card, and then you looked at the card, but this is actually the relationship between Cather and (though this is?) my scholarly research, now, I'm writing a book about them, and there turns out to be a lot more here in the archives than you would think. So yeah, yeah. I spent two weeks here on a grant six years ago, and I've been back a couple other times to follow up on a particular person.

KRAUS: Mm-hmm. So what did you do the summer after you graduated?

HOMESTEAD: The summer after I graduated — let me think. Well, I had gotten into grad school at the University of Pennsylvania, and I moved to Philadelphia, found a place, found housing. Because I had gotten several department prizes, I had enough money for my deposit, and I got some just, odd jobs, and so I was just in Philadelphia for the summer, waiting for grad school to start.

KRAUS: And what was the grad school experience like in comparison to Smith?

HOMESTEAD: It was horribly disappointing, and I dropped out.

KRAUS: (laughing) Oh, wow. I mean just—

HOMESTEAD: And I went back, and then I dropped out again, and then I went back six years later and finished, but it was horribly, horribly disappointing.

KRAUS: Yeah? I mean, in terms of the atmosphere, or the academics?

HOMESTEAD: I mean, I think graduate study in the humanities is far more like getting an MBA or something than you might expect. It's very professionalized, and I was sort of idealistic and liberal artsy, and — it wasn't all that challenging, it was a lot of sort of poseur kind of people showing off having not really done the reading. I mean it just — it didn't seem up to the standard I was used to, and it was just — it was really disappointing.

KRAUS: Mm-hmm. So I mean, life after Smith, life after grad school, I mean, what exactly does your time at Smith mean to you now, when you're coming back as an alum, or you're outside in the real world, so to say, what do you think about when you think back at Smith? Your experiences, your academic work?

HOMESTEAD: I mean, I think about my academic work, I'm an English professor, so I think about my academic work a lot. You know, there was a lot of sort of debate even when I was here about — that Smith was too posh, and too beautiful, and it wasn't enough like the real world, and this was also part of the discourse on co-education versus single-sex education. Like, men would make it messier, and thus more real or something.

KRAUS: (laughs)

HOMESTEAD: And I just always thought that that was — I still look back to my experiences at Smith as a productive ideal. So it was sort of like, is it so terrible to live in a beautiful, serious, kind of idealized place for four years, so that when you go out into the real world, you have some notion of the potential of what you can make it into? So.

KRAUS: Mm-hmm. So I think we're going to wrap up, we're almost out of time, but do you have any advice for current Smithies or future Smithies?

HOMESTEAD: Don't go to grad school right after you finish. (laughter)

KRAUS: OK.

HOMESTEAD: Take some time, think about it, yeah. I mean, that was one of the biggest — in the end, it probably wasn't entirely a mistake, but, I mean, I do think it's really important to just, you know, get some sense of what you want to do and get a sense of the world, so, that would be my biggest piece of advice, I think.

KRAUS: Great. OK, well, thank you so much for sharing with me.

HOMESTEAD: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Linda Sariahmed, May 2011.