

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Danielle Hussey, Class of 2002

Interviewed by
Vivian Andreani, Class of 2013

May 24, 2012

Abstract

In this oral history, Danielle Hussey describes how she found out about Smith from a high school English teacher, how she transferred from University of Vermont after her freshman year, her house community in Morrow House, the atmosphere of intellectual rigor, her participation in Peer Sexuality Educators (PSE) and other clubs, how the campus reacted to 9/11, and the importance of Ruth Simmons to her and the Smith Community in general.

Restrictions

None.

Format

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

Transcript

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

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Hussey, Danielle. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Video recording, May 24, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Danielle Hussey, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

Transcript

Bibliography: Hussey, Danielle. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Danielle Hussey, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 24, 2012, with:

DANIELLE HUSSEY

by: VIVIAN ANDREANI
filmed by: KATE GEISS

ANDREANI: So, this is Vivian Andreani -- and I am conducting an interview with Danielle Hussey on May 24, 2012 for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. Thank you for agreeing to be here.

HUSSEY: Thank you for having me.

ANDREANI: So how did you choose Smith?

HUSSEY: Well, it's a -- it's kind of a nice story. When I was in high school my English teacher who was both my sophomore and my senior year teacher was an alumnae, and she had a poster on the door of her office and she showed us slides from Ivy Day in class during AP English. Her daughter is also an alumnae, so they had a bit of family history and she was my favorite teacher, and she suggested that I think about it. So another very good friend of mine and I came out for a Fall Preview day and I thought it was fantastic. I think my friend was somewhat impressed but she ended up at Wellesley and I ended up here. So I obviously liked it a little bit better.

It was -- it was gorgeous. I was inspired by some of the faculty members. The students were engaged and excited, and so that's -- that's what made me want to come to Smith. I didn't actually come here my first year. I went my first year to the University of Vermont and it was beautiful there as well, but I really didn't feel like I was getting the challenge that I wanted academically, and I really had my heart set on coming to Smith, so I transferred as a sophomore. So I entered in 1998 -- no, 1999 in the Fall, and that's kind of the story of how I decided to get here.

ANDREANI: So how was it transferring? Did you find it an easy process?

HUSSEY: I -- well, I practically -- I was -- I wanted to transfer in January of my first year, and my mother told me that I should stay a whole year where I was, which I think was smart in a way just to give me some continuity and an appreciation for Vermont that I wouldn't have otherwise had and an experience at a university. I think that's -- that's been valuable to me since

-- especially in graduate school having experience in a larger setting, but transferring -- it wasn't difficult. And -- and what was exciting to me is that I was -- I was not entirely happy that first year in Burlington, and so -- but when I got here and it was absolutely gorgeous and everybody was wonderful. I just -- I felt completely like I was home, and like I had finally found this place that was very suited for me and that I was suited for it, and so it was -- it was really wonderful to transfer and I had a fantastic roommate. I loved my house. I didn't think that I wanted to live in the quad. I thought actually the quad was the last place I wanted to live at. In fact I'm sure I listed it last on my housing preference form, but I ended up there anyway and I loved Morrow house. By the time I was senior I was vice president of the house and I couldn't have been happier.

ANDREANI: So how would you describe a stereotypical Smithie at the time you were here?

HUSSEY: Oh, at the time I was here. Huh. Stereotypical? That's a chal --

ANDREANI: Or just typical

HUSSEY: Typical? Well, certainly competitive, or motivated at least. Maybe not competitive. A lot of my friends were quite competitive and it wasn't in a bad way and they weren't nasty about it, but they were -- they were certainly on top of things and they were, they wanted to be the best and do the best and be engaged and be first and that is certainly one of the sort of stereotypical things I remember. Hard-working. They were really hard-working. I always felt like I could be working so much harder. I was working pretty hard, but I looked around me and I was like wow, everybody is working so hard. Maybe I should be working harder. But they certainly motivated me. So those are some of the stereotypical things.

You know, I also think as compared to some other -- to friends and the schools that they went to, Smithies were definitely -- I don't know if it's -- I don't know if the word I am looking for is intense or -- or if it's -- it's more of the question of motivation or -- but people here or engagement I suppose is what I said before, I certainly felt a level of intelligence and outspokenness that I didn't encounter visiting friends at other colleges at that time.

ANDREANI: Were you involved in any clubs or organizations here at Smith?

HUSSEY: Yes. So like I said I was involved in my house's government, but I also was involved in the sort of health ed groups. So I was a health peer and I don't know if they still have those, but I was also in the Peer Sexuality Educators and I think they'd do still have that.

ANDREANI: Yes.

HUSSEY: And it was really fantastic begin by women's health and reproductive rights. I took a course with Gwendolyn Mink which tied some of the sort of club work I was doing with some of my academic work, writing about the global gag rule and things like that were really interesting to me and kind of set me forward to look at some of the issues that I would look at later in my education.

But yes, I really enjoyed being a PSE. We did really fun things. I remember going around with a basket of latex and my house and having T-shirts that said latex fairy and you know, promoting women's health and safe sex and loving your body, those were all really great things for me to do.

I also had a brief stint with the crew team which was brief is how I would characterize it, but also really early in the morning I think that that - - sleep was the thing that ended up pulling me from the crew team, but it's a beautiful sport and the coach here is incredible. She is still here I believe, Karen Klinger, and I learned to appreciate the sport which I have done since in other settings, so that was also really nice.

ANDREANI: There was a level of student activism at Smith in the early 2000s. Were you involved in that, were you aware of it?

HUSSEY: Yes. So my senior year was an intense year. In the Fall we had 9/11 and then in the Spring there were a series of events both racist and homophobic on campus, and there was a group who called themselves the grassroots organizers or something very close to the -- grassroots was the key word, and I was involved -- we did a bunch of different actions around campus. There was a number of dining hall sort of -- brownouts or queerouts that we did. There were -- there was definitely a walk out of class, and you know a gathering at College Hall to speak to the people there. I did some help with the organizing in my house I was involved with that.

Some of my good friends -- the SGA president at the time was on a Anna Burelia (phonetic) and she -- Anna Franker Burelia is her name now. She -- she was heavily involved and she lived on my hallway. So I worked with her and with others, you know -- I certainly wasn't at the forefront of it, but I was definitely engaged and they did a great job of motivating the student to really speak up for themselves at that time.

ANDREANI: So what was the experience being here when 9/11 happened?

HUSSEY: 9/11 was overwhelming and I think because of that level of intensity, that - - you know, Smithies are really engaged with the world. And we were so connected. You know, one of my friend's brothers had his office in the World Trade Center and another had a brother who was set to be at a meeting in the Pentagon that morning. So we were certainly reflective of the country at large and also immediately impacted. We were all glued to the television and -- it was -- I think it did intensify the experience, I mean

other than being in New York, which was obviously the most horrific and devastating place to be. It -- it was an environment of intense engagement and discussion, and so that is what we did. And I think -- that was probably a good thing in the end, because I got it out. You know, I talked to people about it, we engaged about it, we talked about what it meant sort of geopolitically, what it meant for our community. There were almost instantaneously anti-war gatherings and organizing. You know, and so that I think I was grateful for, and also to have, you know, my own family is not particularly engaged in politics or in -- in current events in the way that my Smith family was and so I felt well cared for in a way. And John Connelly and Jennifer Walters both delivered very powerful responses that were helpful and healing in a way. So --

ANDREANI: So what exactly did the college do to support students at that time?

HUSSEY: Well, I mean they certainly -- I certainly remember a response sort of within our residence. So from our HP and our HCA, and my faculty members were definitely available to me. I'm presuming there were counselors available, although I didn't feel that I needed it, so I don't -- I didn't access that. I think the response for me was a lot about my house community, I think, and about the women who were surrounding me most immediately. And that was something a function of the college, but it was -- is also a function of the way that Smith is organized, and it's sort of inherent -- the support inherent in that.

ANDREANI: You talk a lot about your house. Can you talk about what your house was like at the time? Why did it make you feel so accepted and you know, can you elaborate on Morrow House?

HUSSEY: Sure. So as I said I lived in Morrow House, the best of the quad as they say and I think -- you know, different people have different experiences with their house. I happened to fall in with the women in my class -- there were a good number of us, I don't -- 10 or 15 and -- I think we just clicked. I think eating together was very powerful. Morrow House has a jukebox in the dining room, so in addition to eating together, we would dance on the tables together in the evening and you know, I think -- the setting -- we did a lot of sitting together in the hallway, in addition to eating together. It was just conducive to forming close relationships and you know, the women that I encountered in Morrow House are still some of my closest friends. You know, some of them are in New York, some of them are in London, and I have been in both of those places over the past 10 years, and so it's really been wonderful to stay connected, but I guess at the time it was a little bit about shared experience, like I said, food and music and tea on Fridays. But it was also about the differences between us that made us each sort of special to the house. You know, I don't know, our friend Amber who was the geology major from Colorado and you know, our friend Adrienne who was the gov major from New York City, and sort of

all of us in between that, we really -- we were different in ways that I think were fun, and we were going through some of the same things, so I think it was a sort of natural affinity.

ANDREANI: So was Morrow House a supportive environment towards diversity or --

HUSSEY: Well, I think -- yes, many of my classmate that I remember spending time with are white. Not all of them, but many of them from Morrow House specifically. We come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, different places in the country, and so certainly there is that diversity of experience. We had in my senior year an HCA -- do you still have HCA's?

ANDREANI: Yes.

HUSSEY: Okay, an HCA who was really committed to her job and to us. Her name is Fahreen Ramje (phonetic) and she is wonderful. She was here with us last weekend for our reunion and did a fantastic job as HQ chair, but anyway she did a great job of bringing us together at those times for example toward the end of the year with all the grass roots organizing that happened and making us all kind of come together or not making us come together but fostering that, I think.

So you know, I work now at Amherst College, which is a very diverse place, particularly racially and socioeconomically diverse, and I think that sort of -- that experience of Amherst in 2011 seems to make my experience of Smith in 2002 feel a little bit different, I think that because they -- they have such incredible diversity there, I feel like it's not -- not that Smith wasn't diverse, because we certainly were -- I mean, and this comes -- and I've only really been talking about sort of race and socioeconomic status, but certainly, you know, in terms of sexuality and gender expression, we were -- I mean we in my house or in my class had a diversity there that was important to me as I kind of came of age and developed a consciousness about things like sexuality and gender expression, so those are some of the things that I think about when I think about diversity at that time.

ANDREANI: So how did your Smith experiences with that shape who you are now and how you have been doing -- dealing with that in Amherst?

HUSSEY: Sure, well, I mean -- you know, I first encountered what is now the Study of Women and Gender here at Smith, it was Women Studies in 2002, and I -- I was in love with it pretty instantly as an area of inquiry and scholarship, and so I did go on actually to get my Masters in gender and social policy, so I also, you know, developed a -- an adult consciousness about my own sexuality while I was at Smith. So I identify as bisexual. I had my first crush on a woman here at Smith. I -- you know, I encountered my first, you know, F-to-M trans person here at Smith, I

learned about gender-neutral pronouns and about, you know, safe spaces and what the politics of, you know, the bathroom can mean in very real and important ways. So I think both academically and socially Smith was really a launching space for me and so it has affected everything since then, the way that I see people on the street or, you know, the graduate dissertation I did this past year on gender and welfare reform. So it's been a -- it's been a big influence for me.

ANDREANI: So could you describe your experiences as a bisexual women here at Smith?

HUSSEY: Oh, gosh. Well, I mean rather limited in fact, my experiences here at Smith. I didn't -- I mean I did a lot of observing and a lot of socializing, but I think that I -- Smith -- Smith was a time where I really wasn't all that active, and this is just me personally because I'm certain that there were people who were very active. I -- you know, as I said I had my first crush here and -- or first female crush here, I suppose, and I think -- it set the stage for me, but I -- and it made me comfortable with myself and -- in a way that actually is a bit disarming, and then you go out into places outside of Northampton, and you have this idea that everybody is going to be accepting and understanding like they are at Smith, and you are quickly, quickly disenchanted. I think, you know, it's -- it's very open or at least my experience at Smith is as a very open place. I was always comfortable. I never felt afraid, and that wasn't always true in, for example, New York City, or in London.

So I think it's -- my experience here was a positive one. It was one that gave me confidence and also the conviction, I think, to -- to think about the fact that, you know, people with, you know, with non-normative sexuality or with -- you know, who are gender non-conforming, experience a lot of difficulty in places like Smith or more so outside of places like -- and spaces like Smith, so it helped me sort of foster a commitment toward making myself one of those people who would work to make the space a safe space, or my space a safe space, the space that I occupy, wherever it is.

ANDREANI: So you mentioned earlier you went -- you spent a junior year abroad. How was that experience?

HUSSEY: I had an interesting year abroad. Academically it felt like a year off. It was at a school in London and so the academics were not as rigorous, but it was incredible, both to be in London, which is an incredible city that I love very much, and to be in Europe with so many other Smithies nearby. So what was wonderful about the Smith component of this is that I had friends who were in Geneva and in Paris and Hamburg and in -- in all of the various places that I was interested in going. So I would hop around and meet friends in Paris and -- and, you know, see other friends in Italy, and I didn't get to travel that much. My budget was a little bit limited, but

I did have that network, and sort of that's just one example of the network of Smithies who sort of were willing to help me out and put me up and it was great.

ANDREANI: How was it coming back from there?

HUSSEY: I was nervous because academically it felt like a year off. I was worried that Smith would run me over like a Mack truck, but I was -- it actually forced me to work a little bit harder, I think, in the Fall of my senior year because of that anxiety over returning to a place that I knew was rigorous. It -- it was fun. I mean it was nice to come back to Smith with other experience and new eyes, and I think part of me having been here my sophomore year and then again my senior year but not the other two years is that I never -- I never had -- I never got grumpy about Smith. I never felt like I had stayed too long. In fact, I always felt like I hadn't stayed quite long enough, and I think it really helped foster an enthusiasm for Smith in my senior year that some of my friends who had stayed all four years didn't -- didn't quite have.

ANDREANI: So you have those gap years in your Smith experience, did you see any changes on campus while, you know, those years away or how was coming back? Were there differences?

HUSSEY: Well, I mean Smith felt pretty similar. My senior year John Connelly was here and Ruth Simmons was gone, which I was quite sad about. I thought Ruth was fantastic and I really appreciated her presence and her leadership and her example and her various commitments. John was fantastic as well. I mean he had been here quite a long time and was really here for us as the class of 2002 through that year, which was a bit difficult. Physically the campus changed. I mean they started preparing for the campus center, which wasn't here at that time and that was a rather big project. They moved Wesley house, so that -- that's a fairly significant change. I remember seeing them pick it up and move it.

It didn't feel too disruptive. I mean not being here the first year didn't really detract from that, it just sort of added me a little bit later, and going away, I mean, it didn't -- it didn't feel too disruptive. The changes on campus I think, you know, I do really feel like we missed Ruth Simmons when she left. She was a leader that I think a lot of people connected to, at least a lot of Smithies and she was very present. You used to see her around campus quite a lot, or at least I did. Maybe she and I had the same schedule, but it didn't -- I don't think that that -- that those two gaps or the gap in the middle was too disruptive for me.

ANDREANI: Can you elaborate a little bit more on Ruth Simmons and the changes with that? Can you talk a little bit more about Ruth Simmons as president?

HUSSEY: Sure. Well, you know, I just remember us all chanting Ruth, Ruth, Ruth all the time. Although that did switch to John, John. It's not quite the same ring. She just was -- she was really inspiring. You know, she is a charismatic person. I don't know how much you know about her, but she is rather charismatic. She started some really fantastic initiatives, Praxis, the internship program was one of them. She really -- she felt really responsive and she was warm and welcoming and so, you know, it was nice. It felt great to really love the college president as an icon, and you know, I was -- listening to her speech and her speak and the various stories she tells about her own life, and growing up as a sharecropper's daughter and coming to Harvard and ending up at Smith, and then of course going to Brown, you know, she really is an inspiring figure and I think we -- Smithies really connected with her in a way that -- I mean I haven't been here on campus during the time of Carol Christ in that same way, but I wonder if people have been able to connect to her in that same way.

ANDREANI: Did you have any other people that you looked up here on campus?

HUSSEY: Oh, certainly. But -- who -- who do I start with? Well, I think there are two different levels. So of course, you know, the faculty, right? I certainly looked up to the faculty, and I would say, you know, I really admired Mark Steinberg. He was my minor advisor and he was involved with the students who were doing a lot of organizing on campus, the student labor organizers and various other projects. You know, he really lived his convictions that he studied -- he's a sociology professor. He studied various -- very interesting topics, he taught a really hard, which could be a very dry theory course in a very fun way. I really admired Mark Steinberg quite a bit.

The other person I admired quite a lot is Marilyn Schuster, who is now the Dean of Faculty. She taught in women's studies and she really introduced me to a lot of topics in women's studies that fascinated me for the years that came afterwards. And she's just got a great personality. So those are two of the faculty that really -- really inspired me that I looked up to.

And then, you know, my classmates. I really cannot stress how much I was inspired by people like, really, Anna Burelia, Anna Franker. She was so committed to us and she worked so hard, and then, you know some of my housemates who I can think of who just -- in little ways were inspiring to me with their commitment to their work or to the various activism or academic endeavors that they undertook, so, yeah --

ANDREANI: Speaking of people you looked up to, this will be our final question, but do you have any advice for Smithies now?

HUSSEY: (Laughs.) Well, I think for current Smithies definitely do enjoy the time that you have here. It seems a little bit cliché, but I think sometimes I got a little bit caught up with what was due or what I was going to do over the

summer or next year, and I think just soaking up the beauty that is this campus and the, you know, the amazing intelligence and abilities of the faculty and staff here. I think that -- that is one thing that I would say. The other thing is to really, really you know, try to connect with your classmates and with other Smithies. I think my network of Smith connections has been wonderful for me in everything from social endeavors from dating to networking for professional or academic reasons. So try to make connections with your classmates. I mean they are wonderful people here. My classmates are, you know, doing everything from coaching sports to winning Academy Awards right now, and so it's really incredible who you will encounter, and you don't realize, I think, until maybe later that the person you see walking to class, you know, could be senator from your state in a few years, so --

ANDREANI: Thank you very much for your time.

HUSSEY: Sure.

GEISS: What are you doing now -- at Amherst College now?

HUSSEY: Oh, I work for Residential Life.

GEISS: Okay, thanks.

HUSSEY: Thank you so much.

ANDREANI: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2012.