

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Lucille Nawara, Class of 1962*

Interviewed by  
Vivian Andreani, Class of 2013

May 25, 2012

## **Abstract**

In this oral history, Lucille Nawara describes coming to Smith as a legacy student, her fear of posture pictures, coming from an artistic family and deciding to study art and music at Smith, feeling out of place in high school but comfortable at Smith, struggling through astronomy class, living in Tenney House and having President Mendenhall over for dinner, traditions like Mountain Day and regulations in the houses, the positive aspects of taking phys ed, and the confidence and analytical skills that Smith gave her as she continued on as an art professor and landscape designer.

## **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:** Nawara, Lucille. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Video recording, May 25, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Lucille Nawara, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 25, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Nawara, Lucille. Interview by Vivian Andreani. Transcript of video recording, May 25, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Lucille Nawara, interview by Vivian Andreani, transcript of video recording, May 25, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 25, 2012, with:

LUCILLE NAWARA

by: VIVIAN ANDREANI  
filmed by: REBECCA RIDEOUT

ANDREANI: This is Vivian Andreani, and I'm conducting an interview with Lucille Nawara on May 25, 2012, for the Smith College Alumnae and Oral History Project. Thank you for agreeing to be here.

NAWARA: I'm glad to be here and if I can help.

ANDREANI: Okay, so what was the process of choosing Smith? How did you choose Smith?

NAWARA: I was studying -- I was taking extra classes in art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and also at the New England Conservatory Music. I was taking solfège and other music classes. I love art and music, and so I picked Smith basically because I could take the -- study violin, play in an orchestra and study art. I knew Leonard Bascom was highly respected, and I had interviewed at Colby (phonetic) and Rhode Island School of Design. Colby was very nice. They invited us to join their orchestra, so we -- my sister is a cellist in the Boston Symphony for many years. We performed with the Colby Symphony in different places, but then I went to the Rhode Island School of Design and they were just not very friendly.

And so when I had lunch, my mother brought me here -- well, she had gone here herself, so did her two sisters. That was another factor. But it was the people -- the students here were so warm and friendly and it was so beautiful, and I didn't realize that I later was going to turn into a landscaper, but the appreciation of Olmstead's landscape design and the beautiful trees and everything -- I mean it just felt really comfortable here. So that's how I ended up here.

ANDREANI: So what was the experience having your mother have come to Smith and then coming here?

NAWARA: Well, I had great enthusiasm because I know she loved it. In fact, I even had Ms. Silbert who was one of her teachers and teaching figured bass and music history, but I dreaded the posture pictures. And I knew that we were going to have to have them. And they've eliminated it, haven't they, since then?

ANDREANI: Yeah.

NAWARA: But it served no purpose that I could figure out other than a big nightmare standing around naked in these sheets and having to un -- reveal everything, front side and back and bend over -- I mean it was just horrible. But we got through that, and I rediscovered an old friend from junior high school in the process of that waiting line, so that was good.

ANDREANI: So did you have a musical family?

NAWARA: Yes, my parents were both composers, Leland Proctor and Alice Proctor, and they met at the Eastman School of Music and he taught at -- he taught at the -- he taught composition at the New England Conservatory of Music for many years and Wellesley also and my mother taught piano. She was a stay at home mom and donated some of her time, gave free lessons to poor kids. And my sister as I said, my twin, played in the Boston Symphony for 38 years, Carol Proctor. And my brother John Proctor is a baritone horn player in the Metropolitan Wind Symphony in Boston and the New England Brass Ensemble or BA -- I forget what they call it.

So that -- you know, that really helped and I had Gabrielle Benot (phonetic) here for my violin teacher and he was Hungarian, thick accent and kind of young at that time I guess and he played -- he was the concert master of the Metropolitan opera orchestra and had a French wife and he was terrific. I learned so much from him and it was weird, because I practiced so hard in the basement of my dorm and -- and some of the weeks that I practiced the most, I actually didn't have good lessons and then maybe the benefit of that would be the next week if I didn't have time because of exams and then I'd just have this great -- great lesson, but I continued the violin for many years after I left Smith. Yep.

ANDREANI: So if you were to describe the typical Smithie of the time you were here, how would you describe them?

NAWARA: I can see them. Blonde page-boy, cashmere sweaters which I couldn't afford. I came from a very poor family. Kilts, pretty uptight and conservative. Very, very conservative looking. My husband laughs when he looks at my old pictures from the dorm and stuff. He said, you all look alike, and little collars that are Liberty -- for the girls that had the money, Liberty blouses and flowers and little flat collars. Yep, that -- and -- but I made wonderful friends. I made the best friends of my life here and a couple of them are here -- several of them are here now so it's just going to be fun.

ANDREANI: So did you ever feel excluded based on like class issues or --

NAWARA: I felt excluded in high school because I was -- my sister and I were the youngest in the class. We started -- like we skipped kindergarten. It was

private then. You couldn't go to public kindergarten, and so my parents couldn't afford it, so we just started when we were five in first grade, and so when I started here I was just barely 17, and it -- but in high school if you liked to study and read and play violin and do art, you were -- back then it was called a brownie. Now you'd be a nerd, but we were definitely in the brownie category, and we had friends, but the best friends that really I shared so much with were when I came here.

So when I came from public high school in Dedham, Massachusetts to Smith, it was like going to heaven and I loved it. The biggest struggle though my freshman year was -- well, I would say the astronomy class was just so hard for me. I'd never had physics before and the professor admitted at the end of the term -- I thought I was going to lose my scholarship and he admitted that he was not cut out for teaching. He said, "I'm really a research scientist," and he was going to go back to MIT, and -- because -- he was -- there were some people who had had physics in the class and they understood what was expected, but I had to literally memorize a five page equation, like full text, every line, memorize five pages, because I didn't understand. It was all having to do with gravitation of planetary bodies and orbits. It was very complicated.

So I -- I managed to stay on the Dean's list all four years but because of that concern about that astronomy class, I was asked to move from Lamont, which I just loved, into Tenney House, but then I loved that too, and we all cooked and you know, we enjoyed the creativity of making our own food and we had to clean and wash the ceilings and all that stuff, but that was -- that was a good experience. That was a real life experience that was important.

ANDREANI: Can you talk a little bit more about your house experiences in Lamont and in Tenney?

NAWARA: Yeah, I'll tell you one thing first that comes to mind. We loved sitting around the big table -- we had one big round table, and I think there as a secondary small table, and we shared a lot. And I don't think any freshman were in that dorm, I think it was all sophomore through senior, and President Mendenhall who lived right behind Tenney House came over quite often for dinner. He just said he loved it. He said you are the best food on campus, and there was an Italian girl and she introduced us to a lot of the recipes from her family and we learned how to budget. We had to go grocery shopping for just some of the ingredients. The college would provide flours and eggs and milk and a few basics, but we had to do it on a tight budget. So that was a good experience and I've stayed in touch with quite a few of those friends. Mm-hmm.

ANDREANI: What were your experiences with the traditions here at Smith College?

NAWARA: Well, the posture picture tradition was horrible. That -- that would have been -- but the traditions, I'm trying to think. Mountain Day, wow, that

was the first one, tradition that I experienced. That was in early October on a beautiful day and I had bought a bike for ten dollars. It was kind of rusty, but -- and it was single speed, but we set out ambitiously to go up Mt. Tom or into the Mt. Tom reservation. We bicycled there all day, and we came back about 10 at night. It was dangerous. We had no lights on our bikes. There were about five of us. We were going up steep hills with these bikes trying to ride them, I think -- I had no gears other than just the basic one, and it was about -- I don't know if that was 40 miles or what, but that was a big day and we loved it thought and every year I loved Mountain Day.

Traditions, Christmas party in the dorm. I remember one roommate's dad taught us how to make a peach brandy ginger ale punch that was -- knock you over, that was fun. And I remember other traditions of -- on days -- certain days when you could have boys in your room one day out of the year, which you also had to have your door open six inches and three feet on the floor. You've probably heard that one, haven't you?

ANDREANI: Yeah.

NAWARA: That was very funny. So we all assumed the position and then yelled out, hey, are you -- you know, "Are you doing it?" meaning the position -- "Yeah," we're all in it now. It was just cute. And I can't think of other traditions, having the Sunday -- when I was at Lamont house having the Sunday brunch to set up right out your dorm -- your room, that was so nice. I had a friend -- I think it was Alice Hawkes (phonetic) when were freshmen at Lamont. It was right after we had had -- it was George Washington's birthday and the cooks had made cherry pie. And after everybody had gone to bed, she said, "Do you want to go in the kitchen and get another piece of pie?" And I didn't really like cherry pie, but it sounded like fun, so we sneaked in and stole a pie and then the dorm mistress was really mad. The next day she said, "Someone has stolen some of the pie." And we never confessed so now it's out -- it's out of the bag.

But the other traditions? I loved taking -- well, it's not a tradition, but I loved that we were required to take phys ed, and it's not that I'm a great athlete but I loved the balance to all the mental work and the stress. And I never worked so hard. I went subsequently to Boston University and then to University of Illinois for further studies, but I never had to work so hard with so much pressure because I was doing a double major with art as the primary and then music -- but taking more music courses than art and then the required subjects which I loved. I mean I loved French and I loved European history or world history. I -- there were many courses that I liked, philosophy, sociology and so on, but it was very balanced, but it was hard to keep up with all that, so the phys ed was fabulous.

I loved the canoeing and swimming and I remember coming -- bicycling back up the hill by Lym -- by the botanical center with ice just

dripping down my hair. Does that happen to you? Icicles coming down your hair and your eyelashes by the time you get back to the dorm you have to thaw out, you know. Those were good memories.

ANDREANI: Were there any professors or mentors that inspired you during your stay here at Smith?

NAWARA: Elliott Offner who taught design. He was fresh out of Yale -- he was a young faculty member. He was very good and supportive and Jules -- oh, Jules -- oh my gosh, Mervin Jules. He was so sweet, and he had polio as a child and he was -- he was like Toulouse Lautrec. He was quite short as a result of the illness and he had a hard time walking. It was a strong, you know, limp. He was so nice and he -- he didn't teach me a lot but he was supportive, and he was responsible for Barbara Bernstein, who -- she's changed her name. She's got a different name now, but Barbara Bernstein, he gave the two of us -- it was in collaboration with other faculty's approval, a studio that was overlooking the art history study room and we just worked things out, and she and I had these most wonderful discussions. She would say that she was more of a painter and I was more of a draftsman. You know, she admired my drawings, I loved her free, wide- brush strokes, and that was so nice to have people trust in us, and I think that's one of the best things a teacher can do is believe in you.

But it was a privilege. It was a special privilege. We honored it and we worked very, very hard. And it's interesting because a lot of the imagery that I work as a -- I do -- I'm a professional artist and I work with landscape. And I remember my freshman year, this is sort of a digression, but taking my -- my little ten dollar bike, and I had a canvas that was about like this size and my painting materials, and I didn't have paper towels, no money for that, so I just took some rags from the doom and put them in a paper bag and off I went to -- by the Connecticut River, and I looked around and there was Mt. Tom in the distance, and I took my rags and I made like a blanket out of them, because I saw poison ivy was on the ground and I don't want to get poison ivy.

So I covered the ground with the rags. Well, as I -- and I propped the painting up against the bike and it really is -- came out really nice. It was quite textured, kind of Van Gogh-like where there's trees reflecting and very textural and colorful, but as I painted, I pulled one rag out from under me to wipe my brushes and then another rag, and I got the worst case of poison ivy.

ANDREANI: Oh, gosh.

NAWARA: Yeah, my violin teacher noticed it, yeah. Yep. So.

ANDREANI: So during your time here at Smith, Newton Arvin was around still and he got fired.

NAWARA: Who?

ANDREANI: Newton Arvin.

NAWARA: I don't remember him.

ANDREANI: You don't remember him? Well, Smith started to have many more students of color at that time. Do -- what was your experience with that? Did you --

NAWARA: There were very few black or Asian people or Hispanic people. It was mostly white. A lot of the girls I knew had gone to prep schools and came from -- lived in places like -- you know, some of the fancier towns in Connecticut or went to boarding schools and that kind of thing.

ANDREANI: So not a lot of diversity?

NAWARA: You didn't see that then. It's quite different now.

ANDREANI: Uh-huh.

NAWARA: Thankfully.

ANDREANI: Yeah. Did you go abroad at all, or did you stay here?

NAWARA: Couldn't because I didn't have that kind of money. Yeah.

ANDREANI: So what were your experiences with dating while you were here at Smith?

NAWARA: Well, that's a good question. The first week I was here at Lamont House there was a mixer with some boys that came up from Wesleyan, and one of them was -- he was from my hometown. We went to the same high school, and he and his girl -- he had a girl -- steady girl, and we younger kids, you know, it was spread when we were freshman and sophomores, we just thought they were the "it" couple, you know. And so he asked me out and we ended up going out, but he -- I was -- he really wasn't for me, but it was funny to have that happen my first week. So that was a little bit of a confidence builder, you know, and -- and he was just a nice person.

But I did -- one night I came in late from the print studio. I had been working on some etchings and ink was everywhere, and I took -- I called Tenney House and I said, "I'm stuck at the print studio. I can't be home at the designated hour." I don't know if it was 9:30 at night or whatever and it's like, "I'm going to be like 15 to 20 minutes late, I just wanted to let you know." I didn't think I would be penalized for it because I did call them and let them know. And I couldn't -- there was nothing I could do about it. Something unforeseen had happened that I had to clean up and so when I got back to the dorm, I was given the strict, you know, you have to get a penalty and we'll tell you what it is. Well, the penalty

was to clean the big stove in the dorm where we lived. And it was really greasy and really dirty and full of soot, and so I'm in my oldest clothes chipping away and getting the soot off and my -- my best friend -- one of my best friends from Smith comes in the door, she lived there, and she's -- "I would like you to meet" -- and she introduces this stone handsome Yaley.

And I ended up marrying him. A very sad thing though because he turned out to be crazy and violent, and we were divorced less than a year, but we courted here and sat by Paradise Pond and everything seemed quite good when we were dating, but I don't think that Smith prepared my friends and me for marriage very well, because a lot of us ended up getting divorced. I mean not that college is supposed to train you how to pick a good husband, or whether -- you know hold off on getting married or anything like that, but we just -- that was one of the things I noticed in the book that we all of us got in our class that was so outstanding is how many of us were unhappily married.

ANDREANI: Were there a lot of pressures towards dating and marriage while you were here?

NAWARA: Not at all. Not at all. Not from my parents and not from the friends here, no.

ANDREANI: So what --

NAWARA: I didn't --

ANDREANI: Sorry.

NAWARA: No, nothing.

ANDREANI: So what was the dating culture here like? There wasn't much of one?

NAWARA: It was fun. I mean sometimes when I was in Lamont House guys would come up from some college and if you were just there studying, you were bored, you might just go out with a total stranger and there wasn't that much dating going on during the week. It was mostly weekends, and then I guess one of the nice things is you get to travel and go to -- you know, Amherst or Yale or Dartmouth or Williams and pretty soon you know, you get a collection of big wool scarves with maroon and white stripes for Harvard, their sort of English style scarves, and then green and white for Dartmouth and you knew who was fickle when they changed scarves, but that was part of it. And it was just a lot of fun.

I told my daughter when she was looking at colleges and she came here for an interview, she knew how much I loved it and my mother and her sisters loved it, and it wasn't for her. She had an urban school in mind, so she chose Penn, but -- and it was good for her. She did very well there.

But I told her it was never a limitation that we -- it wasn't co-ed at the time because you didn't feel like you had to let the guys do the talking and you didn't sort of shy back where you felt like you had to put your makeup on or anything like that. It just felt you could be yourself and you felt assertive and strong as a woman, and I've noticed in my life sometimes people call me Queen Bee because I tend to be assertive and kind of a leader in situations and I initiate projects and would be a chairman of a -- director of an art gallery or take on big grant writing project to do urban improvement in Detroit, that kind of thing and I think Smith really -- I'm going to switch off of the dating and that kind of thing, but I think what it taught me more than anything is -- besides confidence is how to think analytically and that's where my basic requirement courses were so good.

And I got an E on my first philosophy paper, I was trying to be more creative and I wasn't following the formula and it -- Matthew Arnold article -- essay and I noticed one of my classmates actually wrote about getting an F on that same paper, and I thought, oh good -- I just read that a couple months ago, and I said, "I'm not the only one." But we learned to think analytically and it surprises me so much nowadays how many people don't do that. Now my husband has a sister who is really smart. She's a doctor -- an M.D. and she's much loved and a very fine doctor, but I notice that when people go to law school or med school, or conservatory, they don't get the broad overall education with liberal arts. I'm just getting goosebumps just thinking how much that has helped me in life with whether it's writing letters or grant writing, whatever.

And I remember -- this is changing the subject, there was a girl in our class, maybe even in our junior year she dropped out to marry a lobster fisherman. I didn't know this girl, but of course, the word goes around, did you know one of our classmates is dropping out and she's -- she wasn't pregnant, but she's marrying a lobster fisherman. Oh boy. You know, what is she getting in for. Of course, now I read Greenlaw's book on lobster fishing and I think wow, you know, some pretty smart people to be able to do that or -- but it -- now after 20 years or so teaching drawing and painting at different colleges in the Detroit area, Wayne State University, Cranbrook, different community colleges and the Center for Creative Studies, I decided to go into landscape design and installation. Never took any college courses in it, and I said to my husband after the second week or so after doing this, "I feel like a charlatan."

Here I am passing myself off as a landscaper. I had studied eight years of college for being an artist and none for being -- and he said, "But look you've been gardening for many years, and you read all the time. We go to all these gardens and arboretums and you know your plants in Latin and English and all that (claps), and so that was a confidence I had that I could go into something new and do a good job, learn it as I went and I didn't -- and everybody was happy. I mean it wasn't like I cheated people because I didn't have the training.

But I think Smith helped with that and the creativity that I would have in the studio would apply to the design, and a lot of the landscape designers begin as artists but now I've retired and when I hit 70 last year I retired -- from the installation because it was so tiring, and I mean I wasn't just bossing people. I'm not in the captain's chair. I'm doing everything that my crew would be doing. I had -- our son helped me and some of his rock and roll buddies, and -- so they were pretty -- they've travelled all the world with their bands, but they were -- they loved landscaping with me, and we did some beautiful work. Got -- did a Japanese garden at Oakland University in the courtyard of the student center, and mostly residential, churches and things like that. So that was another thing. Smith didn't prepare me to be a botanist or a landscaper, but it really did prepare me to be able to take it on myself, which I appreciated. I credit Smith for that.

RIDEOUT: A few more minutes.

ANDREANI: Okay. Since we're wrapping, we're probably wrapping it up, do you have any -- first of all, why did you choose to attend reunion this year?

NAWARA: Why did I what?

ANDREANI: Choose to attend reunion this year.

NAWARA: 50th is a big one, and 25th I came to. That's the only reunion I've been to and because I live far away it's hard, and also for the last 20 years that I've been landscaping, this is my peak season, and I had to do a tremendous amount just on my own acre of land just to get off. A lot of us are probably in the same boat, but I wanted to see my good friends, a chance to meet, and collecting social security, so I could afford to fly out, you know, and I'm very grateful for that, and also for that reunion book that I told you about that's so good, and there's still a lot of people that I'm looking forward to seeing that I haven't seen yet. They just are still coming in.

ANDREANI: As a final question, so do you have any advice for current or future Smithies?

NAWARA: Oh, that's a hard one. That's the hardest question. I -- well, the basics -- this sounds so simplistic, but follow your bliss and trust your instincts about doing what you love to do and not what your parents are coaxing you to do. My mother, even though she had a doctorate in music composition, she was discouraged after I left Smith when I wanted to get a Masters in Fine Arts degree. She was, well, you should get a job right away, go teach high school, you know, and I said, well, I'd need to get a degree to do that too, Mom. But she -- she -- my advice is just trust your instincts, and regarding graduate school too I didn't know -- when I was at Smith I didn't get good advice about where to apply to go to graduate

school or how to do it, where you get -- where you get assistantships or fellowships.

I didn't know anything about that, although Mervin Jules, the art professor that I said helped me get that nice studio, he recommended me for a scholarship the summer I graduated at the Provincetown Art Workshop and it was fabulous, the free tuition there, but I said, where will I live. It turned out that they needed some help at the house. His wife was having some problems, so I cooked and cleaned, swept the sand out of the garage. The ocean was right there and it was a fabulous summer and he made it possible.

But I think, you know, finding -- when I was at Boston University, and wanted to continue further, they said, we don't have any money for you, but here's the Midwestern University -- they actually recommended, the University of Illinois. Iowa, Indiana, Wisconsin, which had a very good art programs and they had money for students. That's not advice I got from my parents or from Smith. I had to figure that kind of as I went, but I don't know if that answers your question.

ANDREANI: It does.

NAWARA: Okay.

ANDREANI: Thank you very much for being here.

NAWARA: Oh, you're very welcome. I enjoyed.

RIDEOUT: Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2012.*