

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Eva Rabin, Class of 2008

Interviewed by
Anne Ames, Class of 2015

May 17, 2013

Abstract

In this oral history Eva Rabin discusses the pull that attending Smith reunions has for her and her friends. She recalls her decision to go to Smith after attending an alumnae reception in California and her continuing admiration for Smith graduates. Rabin recalls her junior year abroad in Scotland and the ways in which that experience changed her future.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 30-minute tape.

Transcript

Transcribed by Janet Harris with Harris Reporting.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Rabin, Eva. Interview by Anne Ames. Video recording, May 17, 2013. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Eva Rabin, interview by Anne Ames, transcript of video recording, May 17, 2013, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

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Transcript of interview conducted May 17, 2013, with:

EVA RABIN

by: ANNIE AMES

AMES: This is Anne Ames and I am conducting an interview with Eva Rabin on May 17, 2013 for the Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project. So first of all, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be part of this. So let's start with why did you choose to attend reunion this year?

RABIN: Why did I choose? Oh, that was always a no-brainer. That was always a no-brainer. I mean why wouldn't you want to come back for, you know, a weekend, feel like you're back in college, and I think there is such an emphasis on it that everyone is so excited, especially during Ivy day when you see all little old ladies in wheelchairs who are just amazing and you want to strive to be that little old lady you know, 70 years down the road, of course.

AMES: Absolutely. So backing up a few years, how did you come to be at Smith?

RABIN: That's a good question. I think it was my mom was looking through the college books, and she thought Smith would be a good idea. I had no interest in going to an all women's college, but she is like with your grade point, you know, GPA and your SAT scores I think this could be an actual possibility, and I was like alright, begrudgingly I applied and then I went to the Smith College Club of LA's Little prospective party at Vivian Ford's house. Blew me away. I knew that like there was something about these group of women that was amazing. They were awesome. They were well-traveled, well-read and I -- you know, if that was the common factor at Smith, I knew I had to go there to be just like these women.

AMES: Absolutely. So did those impressions that they made on you when you went to visit, did they match your expectations once you got to Smith as a student?

RABIN: Oh yeah, I think so. Definitely. I mean Smith is just -- it's hard to describe but Smith is so awesome in almost every aspect. And I think it's really great that they encourage us to be whomever we want to be despite conforming to what we should be or going down a completely different path. So yeah.

AMES: Absolutely. Well, since you are at reunion we can't not ask you the question, what are your favorite Smith traditions?

RABIN: My favorite Smith traditions. I'm trying to think. Oh dear. That would have been an easy question if somebody else asked me, but now -- I think probably dining, the dining system. You know, I've been to other colleges and some of them don't allow you wear pajamas to the dining halls. Of course Smith does. It is very important, especially when you're studying for finals, right? Or being able to bring food back to your room. Living in houses and not dorms. You know, you feel a part -- it's almost like a sorority without that bad connotation. I guess just how Smith is just crazy in general, we've got, you know, the crazy traditions like Ivy day. Who doesn't want to see the old students and the new students, or the alumnae I should say. And I guess convocation, you know, as a first year coming in terrified of it, but as a second year and senior, you know, very much look forward to it. So I can't remember -- I can't remember any other traditions. I can't remember. It's only been five years, but I can't remember. Maybe -- oh, yeah, definitely during finals when we have got care packages from our parents or a few left over from the dining hall, that makes every little bit of difference when it's complete torture. It makes every bit of difference. So that may not be a tradition, but I think it's something that definitely sticks out as a tradition.

AMES: Absolutely. And those are just as important, just as important. So during your time at Smith, were you involved in any extracurriculars?

RABIN: Not really. Looking back I probably should have but I did Smith Democrats a little, little, little, but just politics isn't my thing. I was also what -- I think I was a senator, but politics is also not my thing that just kind of -- it was kind of like alright, I will do it. But no, I should have.

AMES: Were you involved in any student organizations or how sports?

RABIN: No, no. I should have as well. I should have but no unfortunately.

AMES: So shifting gears, how did you decide on your major or area of study?

RABIN: That is an interesting question. I came in wanting to be a classics major because I loved Greek mythology and my dad and I both were antiquities collectors, so that was kind of the path that I was going to go down, and so as a classics major I had to take Latin which was an absolute failure. I very nearly failed and I thought if I have to take another year of Latin this is not going to happen, so I wasn't a Classics major obviously. And then I thought well, I could do history, I could do anthropology, what could I do? And I finally decided on being a history major. It still encompassed my love of the past but it didn't include Latin, thank god. Latin is not for everybody. Latin is not for everybody.

AMES: I agree. I agree with that.

RABIN: Power to you if you know how to do it.

AMES: So how would you describe a typical Smithie during your four years at Smith?

RABIN: A typical Smithie? I don't think there is a typical Smithie, but I think a lot of things that we share probably being outspoken, we could probably talk your head off about Smith, especially as alumnae. Trying to carve your own path no matter how traditional or untraditional it is. Probably being part of a community. I mean I think we can all -- especially for back for our reunion, we have to love Smith, right? Probably really wanting to strive for the best, you know, overachievers, academic students, and hopefully you know awesome, awesome women in the future.

AMES: Absolutely. That sums it up very well. So it's impossible to talk about Smith and Smith culture without talking about the topic of going abroad. Did you go abroad?

RABIN: Of course I went abroad. I remember coming in as a first year and being bombarded by all this information by my premajor advisor. I was like where do you want to study abroad? And I thought oh my God, I've been here like a month, I don't think about it. But yes, studying abroad was really important for me. I studied abroad at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland about three years after William and Kate damn --

AMES: It could've been you.

RABIN: I know -- no, no I would not have, no. I loved it so much that I actually did not want to come back to Smith. Actually hated Smith for the first couple of months senior year because you know, I missed all my friends over there, and I knew I probably would never see them, but then I realized that Smith was a little bit better than St. Andrews and I got reacclimated to it I loved it. But for me personally studying abroad was so important and it was such an amazing experience that after graduating from Smith, I went back to the UK and I did another degree, so I lived there for four years. This time in England, exactly. And I just graduated again and moved back in July, so I can honestly say had it not been for Smith I don't know if I would've studied abroad. And I do not know what would have happened after graduation and the UK is just so important to me, I love it. I love it almost as much as Smith, so it's all because of Smith that I studied abroad.

AMES: So what did degree did you earn when you went abroad again when you graduated?

RABIN: I -- well, I minored in art while I was here, and I knew I kind of wanted to do art again, but I didn't know if I wanted to do a degree. So I went over there and I did an art and design foundation, which is kind of like your first year at art school but not at a university, and then after that I decided to apply for an art degree, and so I did three-dimensional design at Manchester Metropolitan in Manchester England

and I basically focused on making jewelry and doing events and coordination and things like that. No, sadly it did not make it -- I bought it, I bought it. I know but I could -- I could make it if I wanted to.

AMES: That's great. So I guess this question applies now to your time at Smith and your time abroad, but were there any professors or mentors that inspired you?

RABIN: Very much so. I am kind of envious of those students who have, you know, like a really powerful mentor whose house they went to and knew their family, but it was definitely my first year professor Lee Burns in art department. You know, I took his design workshop as a first year because I wanted to balance out my schedule. You know, I had three essay classes and I wanted one without any essays or readings, so I took an art class and I had a really bad experience in high school with art classes and it just wasn't worth it. So I thought I would give it a chance. But I didn't love his class, but I loved him and I thought he was awesome. So I kind of kept in contact with him, took more art classes. I would see him in the hallways and then senior year I took sculpture one and two with him, and I just -- I just thought he was an awesome crazy, old man who goes around Northampton finding street sweeper blades to use in our projects. He hoards everything so that we could use it. He's crazy, he's kooky, but he's the sweetest man ever and I sent him e-mails back and forth and he remembers my first year when it was the first time I felt snow and how much I loved it and hated it and he has just been really helpful in everything. He wrote me a recommendation for grad school and for scholarships and things like that, and I look forward to seeing him tomorrow at the art department party.

AMES: That's fantastic. And did you have a similar experience when you're studying that St. Andrews?

RABIN: They had kooky traditions just like we did, so there was raisin day or raisin weekend where you have an academic family which used to be academically related but now it's pretty much, you know, sorry to say, it's a family to help you get truck and party, because that's what you do when you are in the UK. But you know you're academic mother dresses you up in some crazy costume and your father gives you this obnoxious thing to carry. Some people would carry squid around, some people carry their father on the couch, like crazy, crazy traditions. I loved it. I loved it. The only thing is we did live in dorms -- they weren't really doors but they were almost like community houses which very much resembled Smith, but I remember we could not wear our pajamas to the dining hall. No no no. That's not for the British.

AMES: And that's why you came back?

RABIN: That was partially why I came back. But yeah, it's an old university with some crazy, awesome, traditions like May Dip where you get -- you know, you drink all night long and then at dawn on the 1st of May you jump into the North Sea which

is freezing, so that's kind of why you have to be a little bit drunk to keep your body heat, you know, to get warm. Yeah. I would never jump into Paradise Pond because that's gross. It's gross.

AMES: Oh man, well, this is a nice segue talking about house community and what it meant to you. So what was your house community like while you were at Smith?

RABIN: I lived in Albright my first two years and it was terrible the first year. I think there was just an off balance. There was half of the community was first years and the rest were, you know, upper classmen, so I think it was just way too many first years and not any rules, and everyone had just really horrific bad roommates. It was just -- it was just not planned out well. And it did get better sophomore year once it kind of mellowed itself out, but I remember being abroad and St. Andrews in my room, my friend saying that what they were going to move to Comstock senior year, and I remember crying because I was like oh, it's my house, like good and bad it's my house. Do I stay in my house or do I go with my friends. I realized I might love this house, but it is just a house at the end of the day, I would rather go with my friends. So we moved to Comstock and, you know, probably should have moved to the Quad earlier. It was -- it was an awesome experience. It was different than lower Elm Street. The layout of Albright I liked better because it fostered more of a community because you would walk through the communal rooms and you could see people watching TV are people studying versus and I think a lot of the quad houses those -- the common rooms were more blocked off with doors. But I don't know. A blend of Comstock and Albright would have been the best, but --

AMES: So it's safe to say that the experience that you had with both of those houses kind of met in the middle in the end, and you had bad experiences and good experiences, but ultimately how did they as a whole influence your career at Smith?

RABIN: I don't know. I guess -- I guess every time you meet a Smithie whether you are anywhere, you are always asked oh, what house did you live in? I mean there are some certain stereotypes about the Quad or Green Street or that sort of thing and you know -- but I think it was just about a community having -- my mom was a sorority girl and I remember her telling me all these awesome experiences and I thought it would be fun to live in a sorority, and yeah, we have to admit, Smith is kind of like a sorority, but without the bad connotation so it was awesome to kind of follow in my mom's footsteps, but with a more academically rigorous atmosphere. Not to say hers wasn't, not to say hers wasn't. She got a good education as well. I think it's about belonging you know, you're -- you know it's amazing that I lived in Comstock senior year and I am going to be living there this weekend, so it's -- it is literally a homecoming in a -- in a 360, all the way back, not 180, 360 right? Yeah.

AMES: So how would you describe the campus atmosphere during your four years here?

RABIN: Oh, God, how do you -- Smith is very unique, let me say. I remember being blown away the first time I came for like -- just to walk around and that sort of thing and I just was -- you know, I'm from LA. I don't like LA. I don't think it's very pretty, you know, yes, we have a lot of greenery and there are parts that are beautiful, but I think a lot of West coasters go to the East Coast because you've got the New England collegiate sort of stereotype of the red bricks and the greenery and everything, and Smith totally lived up to it. So you just walk around, you know, with your head up in awe of everything, and so I think you have that amazing atmosphere that is beautiful in itself, and then you have got the academic atmosphere where you know you have come here to achieve something.

You know you are not here just to drink away your four years or to find a husband or a wife or, you know, just to get a degree. You know you're here to accomplish something whether it is for someone else or for you, so I remember being abroad at that other universities and thinking I miss Smith because people went to class because they wanted to go to class. They didn't go to class because they had to. I mean I can -- a lot of my friends would skip class constantly abroad, whereas here, you know, you only skipped class if you were sick or you had to do work for another class, which I did a few times, so it was just the academic atmosphere was amazing, because you know people are here because they want to do it, because they want to achieve something, and not because they're forced to, and then you've got the crazy Smithies, you know, in their pajamas or one time we were all walking to Seelye and there was this -- oh, what is it called -- you know those people that dress up in like medieval costumes and have that fake battles. I can't remember what it's called.

AMES: Clemping? (ph.)

RABIN: Yes, yeah. There we go. There we go. Yes. They were on like Seelye lawn, and I remember thinking like what is going on, but this is Smith. That's kind of normal. The abnormal is normal. And it was perfect because they were having this battle and then all of a sudden the clouds roll in and it looks like it's epic battle and it was just great. There should have been music. It would have been -- we taped it. It was awesome. It was great.

AMES: So how did the campus change in the four years?

RABIN: How did the campus change? I don't think the campus changed. I think it was probably more of I changed. I was -- I applied to be a tour guide my second year and I -- I quit after a semester because I just didn't want to be a tour guide and represent Smith, because I didn't believe in Smith. You know, I had a horrible first year so I was still getting over it, and I didn't want my somewhat negative attitude of the campus to affect other people, how they saw it, so you know I had to leave. I regained back towards the end, but it was really when I came back after being abroad and not being here for that year that I realized that this place is awesome and that I loved it more than I thought I could, so I mean aesthetically it

still looks the same, it still has the same feeling, but it's all about how you perceive it and so having a positive attitude was what made the difference, yeah.

AMES: What challenges did you face when you were here?

RABIN: That's a hard one to say. I had really bad roommates. I had three roommates my first year and two -- into rooms. I just was not lucky. It was, I think in Albright there were way too many first years and for some reason almost all of us were paired with the worst roommate we could have had, so in like the first semester I think almost all of the first year switched roommates, you know, Randi -- poor Randi Shannon -- poor, poor, poor. So I think that was definitely the hardest thing was realizing that I am away from home. I am not sheltered anymore. These people that I live don't necessarily have the same political or moral views that I do, and I have to adapt along with them. And that was really hard.

But I do have to say that the Smith counseling services were amazing, and I'm really sad to see part of it gone, because I remember that -- you know, I would -- it was Dr. Jaffe. I remember I would go see Dr. Jaffe and he was such a nice man and so caring, and he admitted me into the -- they had -- it wasn't like a hospital, but they had rooms that you could stay in and there was a nurse and they gave you food and it was a nice time to get away for a weekend from all the hell that was going on. And I'm really sad that that's no longer here, because they did away with that while I was here and I can attest to how important it was for me to be able to get away for a weekend and free, especially when you are a student, because you can't afford anything. But yeah, there are avenues that you can use to help you, but I think you just don't realize it until after the fact, which is sad. I don't even remember your question.

AMES: That's how it is supposed to go. That's how it's supposed to go.

RABIN: I don't even remember your question.

AMES: Okay, so we are approaching about the five-minute mark here, and so I'm going to -- I'm going to have to wrap this up and I'm going to ask you a few closing questions because you've answered them all so well. It's been really fantastic talking with you.

RABIN: And I haven't cried yet.

AMES: Exactly the tissues are right there. There's only been one so far. We're doing well. We're doing well.

RABIN: I know, were doing well.

AMES: So who have you become since Smith, since graduating from start?

RABIN: I don't know. I'm definitely more of an independent, outgoing person. You know, I was definitely really shy when I came here. I knew that I was independent and I knew that I was going to achieve something, but I think had you told me yes -- if you had told me nine years ago when I stepped on campus, my God, that I would've studied abroad, I probably would have said yes. Had you told me I would've lived abroad for four more years after that I probably would've said no. You know, I never thought I would've been someone who would have lived abroad for so long, thought about living there for maybe 10 years. I don't know. I think because of all of the bad things that happened at Smith, it definitely has made me a stronger person. I do wish they had never happened, but I'm happy that they did because I never would have come across those -- I could have, but, I had to grow from them. I had to grow and so I think I am a strong independent Smithie. Everyone knows my pride, I've got my Smith ring on always.

AMES: That's right.

RABIN: I don't know. I'm not the person I want to be yet obviously, but I always dip back into the little Smith pool and think about it.

AMES: All right, and one last question and only have to go. What would your advice be for current and future Smithies?

RABIN: Really live in the moment, because I remember being at graduation. It's kind of like your wedding or your bar mitzvah or really something really big where you know, you are rushing to go to lunch because you know you are not confined to table or you are annoyed that you can't find your parents even though you told them to be in that one spot after graduation, which is what happened with me, and I don't really have many pictures from graduation, you know, so I wish I could have been told to step back, take a couple of minutes, you know, talk to your parents, talk to your friends, and realize this is the last time you are ever going to be on campus in the same way. I mean I wish I had done everything and anything at Smith. I wish I would've been more active. I wish someone would have told me, you know, that these are going to be -- you know these are the best four years of your life. So you really need to take advantage and do everything and take every class you want to, even if you fail it, it doesn't matter. Take advantage of everything, because you will miss it when it's gone.

AMES: Well, that's some fantastic advice and concludes our interview and I really appreciate you taking the time and talking to us because the contributions of the alumni are very important to the future.

RABIN: No problem.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2013.