

*Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project*

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Sarah Trabucchi, Class of 2000*

Interviewed by  
Maggie Kraus, Class of 2012

May 14, 2010

## **Abstract**

In this oral history, Sarah Trabucchi discusses her experiences living in Lamont House, participating in the theater department and working with the Northampton High School theater program, and her work as an American Studies major. She also describes the 1996 Presidential election, gay rights, and the general campus atmosphere.

## **Restrictions**

None

## **Format**

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

## **Transcript**

Transcribed by Steve Thaw 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:** Trabucchi, Sarah. Interview by Maggie Kraus. Video recording, May 14, 2010. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Sarah Trabucchi, interview by Maggie Kraus, video recording, May 14, 2010, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

### *Transcript*

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

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project  
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Transcript of interview conducted May 14, 2010, with:

SARAH TRABUCCHI

by: MAGGIE KRAUS  
filmed by: KATE GEIS

TRABUCCHI: Are you a student here, or --

KRAUS: Yeah, I'm a sophomore. I'm a sophomore, I'm interning at the archive, I was doing this project with Kelly, and I think you maybe emailed or something?

TRABUCCHI: Yes, I did.

KRAUS: Yeah, so myself and a first-year are doing these interviews.

TRABUCCHI: That's cool.

KRAUS: Very cool.

TRABUCCHI: Yeah.

KRAUS: It's very exciting.

TRABUCCHI: So is it just this weekend, or have you --

KRAUS: Yeah, it's just this weekend. I wish we could do it next week also, but just today and tomorrow. But we did some research on your years in the archives leading up to this. We looked at yearbooks, and --

TRABUCCHI: Cool.

KRAUS: -- Found some articles and stuff like that.

TRABUCCHI: So you're going to ask me about things that happened?

KRAUS: [laughter] Not specifics, but (inaudible).

TRABUCCHI: Hopefully I'll remember! [laughter]

KRAUS: Just your interpretations of how it happened.

TRABUCCHI: Sure, yeah.

KRAUS: Yeah, (inaudible).

TRABUCCHI: So the goal is essentially --

KRAUS: The goal is, I mean, they're definitely going to be archived here for people to research, you know, like Smith history, and all of that stuff. Hopefully by the fall, we'll have some kind of maybe like web exhibit.

TRABUCCHI: Neat.

KRAUS: Or put video clips online, or send quotes to the Quarterly, or --

TRABUCCHI: Yeah, that's great.

KRAUS: Yeah, so that's the main goal. But for now, they're definitely going to be kept here for a while.

TRABUCCHI: Great.

KRAUS: Yeah. So I'm ready? OK. So just for the record, this is Maggie Kraus, and I'm conducting an interview with Sarah Trabucchi on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 for the Smith College Alumni Oral History Project. So thank you so much for coming.

TRABUCCHI: Thanks for having me.

KRAUS: And agreeing to do this.

TRABUCCHI: It's exciting.

KRAUS: Awesome. So I guess we'll just start with basically how you got to Smith, and how you came to be here, you know, given the options, what were the benefits, in your eyes, of coming here?

TRABUCCHI: Well, I didn't want to come to Smith. And I wanted to go to Northwestern. And I had one of those moments that you hear about with kids who are looking at college where I drove across country with my mom, we stopped at Northwestern, I got out of the car, I looked at the campus, and I turned to my mother, and I was like, This is it, this is where I want to go. And I didn't get in,

which was very disappointing for me. But I had won the Smith Book Award from my local Smith chapter. I grew up in Rhode Island. And my mother made me come here to look at Smith earlier because -- and I think she in her head had really wanted me to think about a women's college. She hadn't gone to a women's college herself, but she liked the idea of it. And we live, like I said, in Rhode Island, so it was a quick trip. So we came out here, and it was really beautiful and lovely, but it was an all-women's college, and I didn't really know, and I was going to Northwestern anyway, so whatever. [laughter] And my mom made me -- like as part of the Book Award, it was free for you to apply. So, you know, I was already writing all of the essays, I was already doing all of the work, so whatever. I would apply to Smith. And I came to Smith because it was the best college that I got into, and my goal was one semester, and then I would apply to transfer to Northwestern. And I got here and I stayed.

KRAUS: Great, that's awesome. So I mean, what was the reaction from your friends, or from your family about going to Smith? Was it kind of a crazy weird thing?

TRABUCCHI: Yeah, well I think so. My mom, like I said, was really excited. I think my dad was kind of happy that I wasn't going to a college where there would be lots of boys, and it would be weird. But, you know, I ran the gamut from like the impressed people who know the history of Smith, and know the legacy of Smith, and were really impressed that I'd gotten in, and really impressed that I'd chosen it because so many wonderful women had come from Smith. And then on the other hand, you know, I had my brother who was like, don't let them turn you into a lesbian. [laughter]

KRAUS: Right, yeah.

TRABUCCHI: Which was crazy and weird, but you know, I can actually remember having that moment with him where I was like that's stupid, what are you doing? So I think it ran the gamut. I think women's colleges were -- still are very misunderstood. And I had a great time here, that's why I didn't leave, because I loved it here.

KRAUS: So was the desire to transfer kind of taken out of your mind the second you got here? Did it take a couple of weeks to adjust?

TRABUCCHI: You know, I don't remember. I met my very best friend in the world, Meghan Tierney, who you're about to interview, the very first day at Smith. She was three doors down from me. I remember registering for classes, and just being really excited

about all of the opportunities, and all of the choices. And then I think, you know, fall is so beautiful here, and I think there was a big part of me that wanted to leave home, and so the idea of going far away was tempting. But, you know, I didn't see my parents very much, so that was helpful. And I think it just -- there's something about Smith. And it's either in your blood or it isn't. You know, there were lots of women who I went to -- who I started my first year with, and who left, because it wasn't right for them. But I think I always had a sense once I got here that it was right for me.

KRAUS: So you said that you were in Lamont House.

TRABUCCHI: I was in Lamont.

KRAUS: And you were there all four years?

TRABUCCHI: I was, yeah, I loved Lamont. At the time I was here, Lamont was a really diverse community. And we used to joke that it was like the place where they put all of the extras, right? [laughter] And so it was like, there were lots of international students, and lots of students, lots of those of us who were there that we always just felt a little bit on the outside. Like, you know, we had really different majors, or we had no idea what we wanted to do, and it just felt like a really inclusive community because we had all come from different places, whereas, you know, you hear that women who ended up in the Quad were a certain way, or women on Green Street were a certain way. At Lamont, it was sort of like well, they put all of the extras and us. And it was really a great experience, I never wanted to leave.

KRAUS: Great, so that community kind of -- was that like a support system that you leaned on a lot during your time?

TRABUCCHI: Definitely. I mean, I was really -- my academic career at Smith was really odd. It sort of went all around the place until I finally was forced to pick a major. And I really leaned on my house to do that. And leaned on all of my -- the elder housemates to figure out, you know, what professors to take classes with, what professors not to take classes with, you know, what I wanted to do with my life. Yeah, and I mean, and my relationship with Smith is very much grounded in Lamont.

KRAUS: Great. So what did you end up choosing to be your major?

- TRABUCCHI: I was an American Studies major, and that was because I took so many weird classes, that it was like the very last day. [laughter] Literally, the last day, and I can remember sitting in my advisor's office like crying, not knowing what I should declare, and he looked at all of my transcripts, and he was like well, it looks like you could fit everything under American Studies. So that's what I ended up doing.
- KRAUS: So I mean, did you feel -- I mean, obviously you feel pressure when it's the last second of the last day to pick.
- TRABUCCHI: Sure! [laughter]
- KRAUS: So you kind of wanted to just take in everything that you could?
- TRABUCCHI: I did! You know, my mom tells the story that like I came, and I took my first semester, I took like Shakespeare and macroeconomics, and Icelandic, and like, post-modern American literature. And my parents were like what is she going to do with her life, we're going to have to support her forever.
- KRAUS: Right, yeah.
- TRABUCCHI: So that's what happened. I mean, I took a bunch of crazy courses, and then finally got to a place where I was like uh, American Studies! [laughter] And then I had a great time with it. It was the right choice for me, because it is such a big bucket that you can fill.
- KRAUS: Yeah. It definitely still is that way too. I think it even increases the amount of flexibility have in it.
- TRABUCCHI: Yeah.
- KRAUS: (inaudible) just, I mean, I feel like that is the epitome of a liberal arts education, so that's great. So I mean, you spoke about the house community being a support system. Were you involved in any clubs or orgs on campus?
- TRABUCCHI: I was active in theater. I did that for a while. I did that for two years here on campus, and then I actually ran -- I ended up leaving to run the drama club at Northampton High School for two years, because they lost their drama club advisor. So I ended up leaving Smith Theater to do that. Other than that, no. I mean, I was really connected to the house. And so, you know, everything was there for me, I think. I think.

KRAUS: Yeah. So what was that like?

TRABUCCHI: Obviously, it wasn't that interesting if I was involved in it, because I don't remember!

KRAUS: I mean, what was that like being involved in Northampton? Because I mean, we all live here for four years, and I think very few of us get a chance to really kind of delve into that cultural life outside.

TRABUCCHI: Yeah.

KRAUS: What was that like for you?

TRABUCCHI: It was fantastic. I was really interested in education, and it ended up being a big part of what I ended up doing for a long time. My parents -- my parents, the kids that I worked with and their parents, I think were really skeptical of me when I first started. And I think that was because I -- I think they were skeptical of me when I first started because I was a Smithie, and so there was this sense of well, is she going to be committed to this? Is she going to be committed to our kids, she's not really a member of our community. And, you know, really fast, I think they embraced the idea of having me be with them. It was really great to be around people from this area because it's such an interesting group of people. You know, on the drive up, we were coming through Northampton, and I was realizing that like, when I was student here, we would walk through Northampton, and you know, go to Harrell's and have ice cream, or go to Thornton's or Faces to buy gifts, but we didn't have any money. So we didn't eat here, and we didn't shop in a lot of the shops that were here. So really, you're right, it's two very different worlds. So I think I was always really keenly aware of the idea that Northampton is a special place. As much as Smith is a part of it, Northampton is special just outside of Smith as well. I've never -- I've been all around the world, I've never seen another place like it. And I think that my experience working with Northampton Public Schools was pretty special.

KRAUS: Yeah, that's incredibly unique. I mean, I know a lot of the education classes now go to Northampton High School to do different -- I mean, learning --

TRABUCCHI: Observe and things.



KRAUS: Yeah, definitely.

TRABUCCHI: Yeah.

KRAUS: But that's incredible. So I mean, how did Smith life and living in Northampton, how did that compare to your hometown? Like how were the two experiences different from one another?

TRABUCCHI: I grew up in a pretty conservative neighborhood in Rhode Island, as you can probably tell from my brother's ridiculous comment. And so coming here was really exciting to come to somewhere that was so liberal, and open. And I think there was also -- there's no question, you know, I think back on high school, and middle school, and now I'm an author, and I write for teens as well as adults. And when I do school visits, and I meet with kids in, you know, co-ed schools, public schools, the girls are really quiet. And it really disappoints me now. And I think back on my career, and I was never a quiet kid. But, you know, I didn't -- I think about how different I would be if I hadn't come to Smith, and what Smith gave me aside from teaching me how to think, and giving me this incredibly rich, broad, liberal arts education. And Great Friends was an opportunity to really speak my mind, and be thoughtful about what I'm thinking, and be able to articulate what I'm thinking, and my belief system without worrying about, you know, saying the wrong thing. There's a sense of confidence and real thoughtfulness that comes from Smith, and that I see in myself, and I see I built here.

KRAUS: Yeah.

TRABUCCHI: And that's different, I mean, I see people who I grew up with, and I see where they have gone, and what they've done, and they have admirable, impressive lives, but really different people.

KRAUS: Now did that occur to you when you were so set on Northwestern? Was that something that you thought -- did that ever cross your mind that, you know, a co-ed education might put you at a disadvantage, or that you wouldn't gain the attention or the confidence, did that ever cross your mind?

TRABUCCHI: I think that -- no, probably not the co-ed piece of it. But I think I was always really aware of the network that comes with Smith, and the idea that Ivy Leagues have this sort of old boy's club network, and Smith had this powerful network of women. You know, I've always been a feminist. I've always thought of myself as pro-equality, pro-gender equality. And I think Smith just brought that

out in me more. I mean, I can remember, I certainly had my year of, you know, rabid feminism once I got here. And I think that my whole family was a little bit just shaken by my -- how much I took to the dogma of Smith. I like to think I've softened. [laughter] But I think we all do that. Like we get here, and we're so -- there's something about it that just sort of sucks you in if you're really going to stay at Smith. And so you become that kind of -- I'm not a freshman, I'm a first year. I'm not a, you know -- woman should be spelled with a Y. And it's like OK, now I see that, you know, that whole experience, there is a lot to be taken from it, even as we think about the world.

KRAUS: Right, yeah.

TRABUCCHI: Beyond Northampton.

KRAUS: So, I mean, in that regard, you obviously had a very close knit house community. How can you describe the atmosphere of the campus at large? Outside of the houses, maybe did you think that there was an overwhelming, you know, that feminist, you know, kind of what has come to be the stereotypical Smith identity.

TRABUCCHI: Sure.

KRAUS: Was that an overwhelming majority, or was there, you know, a mix of everything?

TRABUCCHI: I think -- my first year here was 1996, and Clinton/Gore was running for President. Bill Clinton was running for President, and for re-election. And I remember it being -- I remember being caught up in the kind of liberal Democrat world. And I mean, I'm still an active liberal Democrat, and I have been. Smith did not turn me into a Democrat, I was one before I came here. But so there was something really powerful about that experience when I was here. And I can remember kind of like getting on a bus with a bunch of Smithies, and like trekking out to Boston to go see Clinton speak. And like being really excited, and really caught up in that sort of political activism, that I think is on college campuses always. And you just have to look at the most recent election with Obama to know that like it's a huge thing, and college campuses can carry a lot of weight.

After that, Clinton won obviously. [laughter] And after that, it was a really -- I think what you're asking -- if the question is, you know, is Smith like they say, I think in some ways, yes. I think you find your place at Smith. (inaudible) you want to be an activist, and a passionate voice for a cause, there is an audience

here to hear you. At the same time, I feel like I wasn't an activist when I was here. It never bothered me that, you know, people chalked the whole campus, and had their issues, and hung their signs. And sure, there were definitely days when I rolled my eyes and I walked past, but I think that again, it goes back to Smith being able to be an open forum for lots of voices.

I think, if anything, when I was here, there was some concern about conservatives not being heard. And like I said, I'm a liberal Democrat, so it was never really a problem for me, but I do think that there are a lot of Smithies, and I think that's part of the reason why a lot of young women leave Smith early, is because they feel like their views are counter to the culture of the college. And I do think that the most powerful classes were the ones where my professors were either conservative, or talking conservative, and the classes where we had conservative voices spoken. So I would really -- it would make me sad to think that Smith wasn't fostering that discourse.

KRAUS: Right, yeah, and I mean, I just spoke to an '85 alum who had quite a different, you know, take on it, just because the time was different, and the situation was different, and that it was totally the opposite in that there was seemingly an overwhelmingly conservative viewpoint on campus, not only among students, but the way alums attracted with current students, and alums attracted other alums about kind of trying to suppress this over (inaudible).

TRABUCCHI: Absolutely.

KRAUS: This often lesbian identity, and to try and kind of detach it from Smith's scene.

TRABUCCHI: Right.

KRAUS: Which is interesting to see how much it's changed over a short period of time.

TRABUCCHI: Well, and I think it's also a perception piece of it, right? I mean, in 1985, I mean, I graduated in 2000, my entire Smith career, I knew lesbians. I was, you know, I loved lesbians. Gay rights was a thing only because it just seemed so obvious that it should exist. But I think certainly, for older alums, who, you know, didn't -- I was here a few weeks ago with somebody from, I think the Class of 1975, and she was saying how she didn't know any lesbians when she was here. And I was like of course you did, of course you did! But here, we didn't have to hide it, and they did. So it's an interesting -- you're right, I mean, the shift is there.

- KRAUS: Which I'm not sure if it speaks more of the time period of it's just Smith itself. But I think -- and I mean now, there's an overwhelming lesbian identity on campus, and it's often the first thing people think about when people you come to Smith College.
- TRABUCCHI: Don't let them turn you into a lesbian?
- KRAUS: Right, exactly.
- TRABUCCHI: [laughter]
- KRAUS: It's written all over (inaudible).
- TRABUCCHI: Right! [laughter]
- KRAUS: So it's just funny the way that things evolved.
- TRABUCCHI: Sure, I mean, I can remember meeting my husband, and him hearing that I went to Smith. And I can remember the look across his face. Which, I mean, he didn't say anything, but I knew. And I was like, I'm not a lesbian. You know, like after you graduate, for like years, you'll hear -- you'll see that sort of like instant question. And it's a really interesting thing that that's the first thing people think of. There are lots of other things to think of.
- KRAUS: Yeah, absolutely. So, do you remember your commencement address?
- TRABUCCHI: Vaguely, vaguely.
- KRAUS: Yeah, it was Judy Chicago?
- TRABUCCHI: It was Judy Chicago, it was supposed to be Jodie Foster, and she cancelled at the last minute.
- KRAUS: Right.
- TRABUCCHI: And they shipped in Judy Chicago.
- KRAUS: Do you remember -- I mean, your reaction, do you remember (inaudible)?
- TRABUCCHI: I remember she said something about like, you can't have it all.
- KRAUS: Right.

- TRABUCCHI: So don't even try. And for a long time, I was actually just in the car on the way up, I was coming up with other 2000's, and we were talking about that. And while I think she's probably right, I think that probably wasn't the right thing to say to a class of 21 year olds who want to go out and have it all. Because the hope should be that we can, so.
- KRAUS: I mean, do you remember the reaction being kind of concerned because people were taking it to heart, or that people were ready to totally prove her wrong? I mean, do you think people took --
- TRABUCCHI: I think there was a sting already in that we were so excited about Jodie Foster. And, you know, the rumor, and I don't know if this is true, but the rumor was, you know, for years and years, we'd invited Jodie Foster to come, and she'd said no, and it was because she was closeted, and now she said yes, and oh my God! And, you know, whatever. [laughter] I mean, I don't know what it was, but I think there was certainly a sting that like, we were super excited about this person, and then there was this was like, you know, only the art historians new. And then even most of them didn't know. You know, my friend who you're about to interview was an art history major and had no idea who she was to start with. So setting that aside, I think there were -- I think we were a little shocked. That's not what we wanted to hear. And now, looking back ten years later, I think if it were me, and if I were doing the commencement, I wouldn't say it, even though I know you can't, you know? Nobody can have it all.
- KRAUS: So what did you do the summer after you graduated? What was the...
- TRABUCCHI: I went -- well, first I took a trip. I went to -- my mom's English, and so we went, we spent four weeks travelling around the British Isles. And then after that, I went straight to work in New York City. I knew I wanted to be -- I knew what I wanted to do before I left. I had interned, and I took a job doing literary publicity, so I did media relations for hard to handle authors, who I won't name for posterity's sake. [laughter] But they were hard to handle. And then so I went straight to New York, and set up shop there, and I'm still there.
- KRAUS: Great. I mean, looking back on your time at Smith, would you encourage, you know, your daughter to go to Smith for what it was, and what it might be now?

TRABUCCHI: Absolutely.

KRAUS: Yeah?

TRABUCCHI: I think that Smith builds character. And that sounds like a thing a mom would say, but I guess I'm talking about my fake daughter. [laughter] But I think that Smith builds character, and I think that even if, you know, what we were talking about, if it is an issue of, you know, the campus has its own culture, and young women who come here have to struggle to have their voice heard, I think this is a safe place to struggle. And I think it's an important place to be heard. And I think that when you're heard at Smith, at least in my experience, there's a level of respect that you don't always get outside of Smith, I know that now. And I think it's important for you to know your voice, and to know what you're thinking. And to know that if you don't know what you're thinking, you can put your ideas together and come up with something brilliant. And I think Smith gives that to me. I don't remember a thing I learned here from a book, but I remember a lot of how I learned to argue, and speak, and comport myself, and think, and I think it's a special place for that.

KRAUS: Definitely. So we're going to wrap up, we're almost out of time.

TRABUCCHI: OK.

KRAUS: But if you, I mean, do you have any advice for current Smithies, or future Smithies? I mean, that was pretty insightful, what you just said, but anything --

TRABUCCHI: My advice for current Smithies is don't get wrapped up in what you're doing today somehow leading you on to some path that you've already chosen for yourself. I thought I was going to do a lot of things, I'm a romance novelist now, so that's a completely different world. It wasn't what I thought I was going to do, and it's really awesome. And I think Smith set me up to do that, and there are a lot of reasons why. But that's my advice for current Smithies is don't get wrapped up in like, grad school, and what are you going to do after, and what's your job going to be, and are you taking the right classes. Learn how to think first, and then everything else will come. Yeah.

KRAUS: That's terrific. OK, well thank you so much.

TRABUCCHI: Thank you, I had a great time!

KRAUS:                   Yeah, this is -- this was wonderful. So, let me grab that.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Steve Thaw May 27, 2011*