

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Chrissy Heyworth, Class of 1965

Interviewed by
Izzy Levy, Class of 2016

May 16, 2015

Abstract

In this interview, Chrissy Heyworth describes her transition from a small farmhouse in eastern Massachusetts to communal living in the modern Ziskind dorm. She recalls the close, lifelong friendship she and her roommate developed, and details the diversity that was particular to the Cutter Ziskind community. Heyworth describes social life and dating as well as the challenge in balancing her athletics and studies. She discusses the evolution of the Smith student population and offers her perspective on issues of sexuality, gender and identity.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded using Canon Vixia HF.

Videographer

Video recorded by Kate Geis.

Transcript

Transcribed by Jessica Rubin, Audio Transcription Center.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Heyworth, Chrissy. Interview by Izzy Levy. Video recording, May 16, 2015. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Chrissy Heyworth, interview by Izzy Levy, transcript of video recording, May 16, 2015, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

Bibliography: Heyworth, Chrissy. Interview by Izzy Levy. Transcript of video recording, May 16, 2015. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Chrissy Heyworth, interview by Izzy Levy, transcript of video recording, May 16, 2015, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

Alumnae Oral History Project
Sophia Smith Collection
Smith College
Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted May 16, 2015, with:

CHRISSY HEYWORTH
Northampton, Massachusetts

by: HANA SARFAN

SARFAN: This is Hana Sarfan. I am interviewing Chrissy Hayworth at the Sophia Smith Archives at Smith College. It is May 16th, 2015, and we're interviewing for the Alumni Oral History Project. So my first question, I guess, is for you to bring me back to when you first arrived at Smith. What were you feeling? What were your — what was going through your head? What were you expecting?

HEYWORTH: Goodness. I was coming from eastern Massachusetts — my family and I lived in Concord, Massachusetts — and for me it was a fairly short trip. And I guess my dad must have brought me, although I don't remember. I just remember being very curious about my roommate, because I knew that I was going to be in a double and this was a girl from Dallas, Texas. I'd never been to Texas. I never really had any Southern friends. And we had exchanged a couple of letters over the course of the summer and she seemed like a very nice, very friendly person. And I remember when I — when we drove up to Ziskind that I was very surprised, because I hadn't really seen Ziskind when I came here to interview, but a friend from my high school had lived in Ziskind for a couple of years. So when she heard that I was admitted and that I was planning on coming she said, "Oh, you just have to come to Ziskind." So I put it down number one and that it was really a shock, because I lived in Concord, Massachusetts, in a farmhouse that had been built in 1725. And I was used to old houses and, you know, sort of funky, uneven floorboards, and lots of wood.

So here I am in this sterile environment, and I come into my room, and I notice that on the other side of the room there are about six suitcases and one very square, small suitcase, which turned out to be her cosmetic bag. So I'm looking at this scene and I'm thinking, you know, Is this a fashion model, who I'm going to be rooming with? Well in came my roommate, Barbara, and she had a very distinct Southern, Texas accent, and she couldn't have been nicer. But she looked in the closet and she said, "Where am I going to put everything?" And I said, "Well I think you'll have to find a way." And then she unpacked the cosmetics. I don't have any — I mean, I didn't have any makeup other than, I think, probably some lipstick. And it was just one of those

moments of, oh my gosh, what has Smith done? You know, how did they put us together? And are we going to get along? And then, you know, I had a lot of jeans and she had skirt and sweater sets. And I thought, I don't know how we're really going to (unclear) (laughs) but we did, and we've become — I mean, we've been great friends ever since. And she's the godmother of my oldest son, and she turned out to be very much the career woman. Her life has taken a very different turn than she expected or I expected, but I think those three years that we were together — and we were only together three years, because I went junior year abroad to Switzerland, and so we didn't room obviously that year together, but we came back senior year — that's been the foundation of a very, very close friendship and a real appreciation of how you can't — to use the cliché — you can't judge the book by its cover. And I'm so glad that Smith put us together. I'm not quite sure why they did it, and sometime I'd like to ask the archives, or the placement office, or the, you know, the admissions office, How did you make those decisions? How were those made back in the '60s?

SARFAN: So what was your house community like, sort of generally?

HEYWORTH: Very diverse. And I say that — I know diversity is a very big thing on campus now. I don't think it was that diverse back in 1961. I think it was a pretty homogeneous community, as the college went for 2,000 plus women. But I think Ziskind and Cutter attracted a wide range of young women. And I think I benefited a lot from that, because I'd come from a girls' school in Concord, Massachusetts, and I loved it. And there was a tiny little bit of diversity there, but now I was meeting gals, of course, from all over the country. And I think that I needed that wider perspective considering where I came from, even though I, you know, really thought that my high school education was wonderful, but socially I had a ways to go. And I think Ziskind provided that.

SARFAN: Do you know what it was about Cutter and Ziskind that sort of drew so many different students?

HEYWORTH: Oh, I think the obviously the architecture suggested to a lot of women, You're not going to be comfortable here. You've got to be either thinking a little outside the box, or you've got to be — I don't know. You know, I don't think that its sterility was what — I think modern is probably what made the difference. And there must have been some women who had come from modern homes or others who just wished they had. I mean, that was a little bit, you know, why I did it, at the suggestion of this friend, you'll really love modern. (laughs) You know, and all the dormitories at our school were all old homes, just like my farmhouse, so I think she probably thought I would like the change. And I did. So different, really so different from all the other houses on campus.

SARFAN: So were you part of any clubs, or organizations, or student government, or any (unclear)?

HEYWORTH: I was not part of student government. I was very much an athlete, so the teams such as they were in those days — I mean, I was on the field hockey team and lacrosse team, and in the winter I played badminton, which was really a big change. I was so glad I didn't have to play basketball, which was what I had to play at my school, my high school. I was not a big club joiner and I was very concerned about my studies. I was sort of beating myself up most of freshman year thinking, you know, I'm going to flunk out of here. This is too much work. I'm over my head. I had gotten advanced placement in English, so I was in a sophomore English class, and I was very cowed by the upperclassmen, not because they made me feel that way, but because I let myself feel that way. And, of all things, I had an eastern European professor, a woman, teaching American literature, which was quite wonderful in its way, but she had a heavy accent; it was very hard to understand always what she said. So I'd have to borrow notes from some of the sophomores in the class. And then I took zoology, and I'd had biology but no chemistry, so that meant about half of the course was unintelligible to me and really had to learn some chemistry on the spot. Anyway, long story short, I think freshman year was really a grind, and I really didn't think — other than athletics and my coursework — that I had time for other clubs or other activities.

Sophomore year I changed my major. I'd come in thinking I was going to be an English major, and I took History One-One, and I loved it. For the first time ever I really enjoyed a history course. And I had a fabulous professor, Allan Mitchell, who — he was my section leader. And it just seemed — well, I had him walking on water before too long, and I had a true sophomore crush on him, but it was part of the appeal of the class, and I wanted to perform well. I wanted to learn as much history as I could. But it completely altered my future direction, because then I decided I wanted to go abroad. I'd never imagined doing that when I applied to Smith, and so I worked really hard that year, because I wanted to go abroad and you couldn't if your classwork wasn't really pretty topnotch. So even sophomore year I, other than sports and coursework, I don't remember joining any clubs. It's sort of curious when I think about it.

And then I went abroad junior year. And then I came back. And senior year it was all about, you know, sort of preparing myself for the next step. And my history — my advisor was one of my history teachers, and he said, "Well what do you love best?" And I said, "I love history." He said, "Well what are you going to do next year about supporting yourself?" And I said, "I'm going to support myself, I guess, as best I can, and I've been saving my summer, you know, income." But he said, "So you're going to have to support yourself in the future. You don't have somebody to depend on." I said, "Well my dad's always been a help that way, but, no, I want to earn a living." I mean, it

was almost like, you know, I was going to live on a trust fund or something. So I sort of pulled myself up, and, you know, looked at him, and he said, “Well maybe you should go and learn how — learn more history, but learn how to teach so you can pursue that as a profession.” And of course President McCartney just said about half an hour ago, “Professors love to have their students, you know, want to be professors too or do some form of teaching.” But it was great advice. I applied to four different schools of education, I got into two, I had to decide between Columbia or Stanford, and I said, “This is another moment in which I should pick, you know, the change rather than the predictable.” So I went to Stanford, and became a teacher, and I was a teacher or administrator for 35 years. So it was — and it was a very fulfilling career. And I owe a lot to Stanford for the training that I got, but all the underpinnings, you know, so much of my confidence as a social scientist was earned, I think, at Smith.

SARFAN: Awesome. So from our research we found that during the '60s social life at Smith was very structured in terms of curfew, and blue cards, and all of that.

HEYWORTH: Yes.

SARFAN: Can you tell me a little bit about that? A little bit about your experience of that?

HEYWORTH: Well when you don't know anything else I think, you know, it seemed like the norm. It wasn't, however, I don't think a very satisfactory social experience for me, other than, you know, the friends that I made are very good friends. They're lifelong friends. And I moved, I think, pretty easily among groups of women, so there wasn't, you know, I didn't become part of a clique. What I didn't ever feel particularly comfortable about was the social life outside of Smith. It wasn't — well I had a boyfriend during sophomore year, and he was at Yale, and that was great. I guess I probably wish that I didn't have to get in by a certain hour, you know, that I could have stayed out with him, or that it wasn't — that there weren't so many rules about going away for the weekend, but, as I say, I didn't know anything different. When I look back on it, after going to Stanford, I realize that I'd been craving the opportunity to just sit and talk to guys as fellow students, as, you know, intellectual equals, and that that was a deprivation of having gone to Smith. And I welcomed the Five College Consortium, the idea that there were many more guys coming on campus, and that women were going to campuses where there were men, and that the educational experience was going to be something different than what we had. But even so, you know, it wasn't anything that got me really down or — there was always something to do, even if I didn't have a date. And — is that enough about that?

SARFAN: Yeah. However much you'd like to — so what was it like being at Smith during sort of this early period of the civil rights movement during the '60s? Did that manifest at all on campus?

HEYWORTH: Yes, it did. Sixty-three to '64 was a pretty big year in terms of the beginning of the civil rights movement and I was away during that time. And I know that I really admired the gals that I knew in my class and upper classmen who went south. Did I think of going myself? Probably not, and I probably wasn't courageous enough. You know, feared that there might be some danger in it. And I lost my mother the year before I came to Smith and I think that colored what kind of risk taking I did. So I didn't want anything to happen that would worry my father. He already had a lot of burdens in the family and he was emotionally pretty distraught at his loss and ours. And so, but, you know, I think that was the first year that I remember sitting down in the lobby and reading the newspaper, and wanting to know more about what was going on in the south, and hearing from friends on different campuses that friends of theirs or — not so much they, but friends of theirs had also gone to the south, and were actively engaged in protest. And I thought that was pretty wonderful.

SARFAN: Cool. So I have just a few more questions to wrap up. So Smith is sort of an institution that's both really steeped in tradition and also is constantly evolving, and I was wondering what some of the major ways that you feel that Smith has changed since you were here?

HEYWORTH: Hugely. Well let's start with just a little bit of the tradition, which of course we saw today in Ivy Day. And, I mean, that just is a wonderful set of traditions all through the day. And I just think that this culture of today is just so, so different from the way it was for us. The hugely diverse population is — it's visible, it's audible. To hear that wonderful class speaker today from India, I've been moved on several reunions to hear women from foreign countries be the spokespeople for their college experience or share something that they really valued about Smith, and been so gratified that the, you know, the population has expanded and is so inclusive, you know, reached out so far, and brought so many interesting young women together. And as I said at the beginning, I thought that we were a pretty homogeneous lot back in our day and that we could have benefited tremendously from this exposure. But, you know, it came in time as the world expanded its outreach, as our country looked outward too, and globalization has meant that we are much more connected, and we want it to be a two-way street. So we want young women from all over to come here and educate their peers, and vice versa.

And I don't — I'm not particularly clear on what's happened in terms of the social life of women, but I think we all knew that a good many more lesbian women came to Smith, increasing in numbers and also in their vocal ability to draw attention to this. And I don't think of

— speaking for a lot of my classmates, I think we’ve watched from afar and we don’t, as five and ten year periods went by, we weren’t sure kind of what was happening. What would it be like for a young woman who was straight, for instance, to come to campus and move into a dorm? We would occasionally hear rumors that somebody who was straight was made to feel a little uncomfortable in that environment, and that, I think, has always been a source of a certain amount of dismay, because nobody should be made to feel uncomfortable, I don’t think, about their sexuality, about their gender. And I think it — I can’t quantify what Smith seems like now, but it seems as if the winds of change have really blown through, and it seems as if also — I was here for McCartney’s installation and very interested in how the students responded to her. It was overwhelming. It was — I was just so proud of the Smith community making her — she’d obviously, you know, immediately developed a vast following and all of you were very vocal in your appreciation of and support for her. And that was wonderful. I think that was a real turning point for me in being with the students. I mean, I was sitting right behind a whole mass of you, and I think that I felt bonded in a way that I hadn’t when I came back for reunion, and that’s one of the drawbacks, I think, of reunion. You get to see so few of the students, maybe the ambassadors — are a wonderful group of women — but I’m not sure that we’ve ever really — I haven’t anyway — probed and asked a lot about, So what’s it like as a woman, you know, and what’s happening? What — I think some of us are interested in, well, how many women, what percentage are straight? What percentage are lesbian? What percentage are thinking in terms of all of the transgender? I have to say that we — some of us were shocked yesterday to hear a young woman on the panel, the student panel, say, “One of the first struggles for me was I was asked the question, ‘Well, what pronoun are you?’” And she said, “I didn’t know what they were talking about, but soon it became evident that, you know, was she ‘her’, or he ‘him’, or ‘ze’?” To this moment we still, many of us, don’t know what ze means. So after this interview is over, maybe you’d like to fill me in on that. (laughs)

SARFAN: Sure.

SARFAN: Or we can do it now too.

SARFAN: Yeah, sure. I think it’s just a pronoun, like — I think it — I’m not sure actually when people sort of coined it, but I know that it’s been around for longer than it might seem. But it’s a pronoun people use when they feel like their gender maybe doesn’t fit into a binary of male or female, and so some people like to use that to bring up another option for how to describe their gender using pronouns.

HEYWORTH: OK. It's not a neutral? You're not saying, "I'm nothing," but you're just saying, "I can't quantify my — I can't identify myself as this category or this category, the traditional categories."

SARFAN: Yeah. I think it actually could be either of those, that it could — some people would say that they were completely in between, some people might say that they didn't know what their gender was, sort of how to figure it out. So I guess it sort of covers, like, a broad variety.

HEYWORTH: Mm-hmm. I realize more and more that this issue of identity is much, much, much more significant at least in this way, about how do I describe myself and what pronouns am I going to use? I think back, you know, I obviously struggled with some identity issues, but they weren't these identity issues. I don't think that many of us were ambivalent or, you know, questioning even. At least we weren't talking about it, so I wasn't aware of it. And I thought, Wow, that's a hard struggle when there are all these other issues of, you know, have I signed up for the right courses? Can I make the grade academically? And socially, you know, when it's a homogeneous community you don't have to ask, "Will I fit in?" But when it's a heterogeneous community, the way it is now, I suppose that's pretty logical, pretty normal. But it — this sort of focus on identity that these gals were talking about yesterday, it seemed as if a lot of attention, a lot of time, attention, and even angst was being devoted to it. And I guess I don't know whether that's a good thing. But it is what it is. You know, it's what's happening, and I guess I need to understand it better. I guess we all do, you know, coming from 50 years back.

SARFAN: Do you think we have time for one more or?

GEIS: Sure.

SARFAN: All right, I think this is the last interview right? Yeah. So considering all of these new dimensions coming up, what sort of things do you think Smith should keep in mind for the future? What sort of, I guess, principles, or traditions, or things like that?

HEYWORTH: Well it after all has always been a place where women could feel more empowered, more confident, where they could explore a vast range of experiences in learning in the company of one another. And I love this idea of women in the world, that we're moving out into the world — your generation anyway is doing that much more than ours did. And so, I mean, the message and the mission that Sophia Smith established, I think, shouldn't change. And certainly the — I mean, I just love the old architecture. I don't want to see that go. I love the idea that we are now educating engineers and many more scientists. That's so great for those women, for our society. I don't want you — I don't want this place to lose the richness that was offered in art, and music, and literature, but I

was, you know, that was my focus even though I became a history major, I took lots of, you know, the liberal arts courses — I think of the fine arts — and somebody turned to me today at the ceremony, which I just love and would never want to see changed, and I guess I asked her first, “What was your favorite course? What’s the course that you are most happy you took?” And she said, “Logic.” And so she talked about that for a minute, and then she turned the tables on me, and I said, “Art One-One.” And I think I — I know I heard President McCartney say that the art department feels that it can offer great courses in art, but I’m so sorry to hear that Art One-One, as a survey course, isn’t still offered, because, well, I especially benefited from it going abroad. If I hadn’t had that course I know I would have missed out on some marvelous museum experience and walking experience all over Europe. And I was so grateful that I had to have that distribution of courses and that Art One-One was one of them. And that wide ranging experience in the liberal arts was really the heart of my education, and I guess I might have to just reconcile myself to the fact that, well, times have changed, and, you know, the professors and administrators, in their wisdom, have decided that we don’t need distribution requirements here. But I sure hope that the advisors are a little heavy handed about suggesting to every student here, you know, You need to take a wide range. You may not think you do, and you may not want to, because you’re so steeped in whatever your field is, but it really turns out to be beneficial in the long run. I just have never not valued the kind of broad education I got here.

SARFAN: Awesome. Well thank you so much.

HEYWORTH: You’re very welcome. It was my pleasure. Thanks for making it so easy.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Jessica Rubin, June 2015.