

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Collyn Hinchey, Class of 2005*

Interviewed by  
Tanya Pearson, Class of 2015

May 15, 2015

## **Abstract**

In this interview, Collyn Hinchey discusses how she chose Smith College and the ensuing transition away from home and family and assimilation into campus life. She talks about her involvement with the campus radio station, her job at the Sophia Smith Collection and relationships with friends and professors. Hinchey also recounts the climate on campus following the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, and contention surrounding the reelection of George W. Bush. She also describes her affinity for certain Smith traditions that remain in the midst of change.

## **Restrictions**

No online access

## **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:** Hinchey, Collyn. Interview by Tanya Pearson. Video recording, May 15, 2015. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Collyn Hinchey, interview by Tanya Pearson, transcript of video recording, May 15, 2015, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Hinchey, Collyn. Interview by Tanya Pearson. Transcript of video recording, May 15, 2015. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Collyn Hinchey, interview by Tanya Pearson, transcript of video recording, May 15, 2015, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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

Transcript of interview conducted May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, with:

COLLYN HINCHEY  
Northampton, MA

by: TANYA PEARSON

PEARSON: This is Tanya Pearson interviewing Collyn Hinchey. Did I say that correct?

HINCHEY: Yeah.

PEARSON: OK. Class of 2005, on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 for the Alumni Oral History Project. Thank you very much for coming.

HINCHEY: Sure, my pleasure. I'm a little nervous now! (laughter)

PEARSON: You'll do fine. And start with really easy questions.

HINCHEY: OK.

PEARSON: How did you choose Smith?

HINCHEY: Oh, my two — I went to a Jesuit high school, which is kind of like a little different experience, like, an educational experience. And my two best girlfriends in high school were older than me, and one went, a year older, and one went to Bryn Mawr. And then the other one went to Moore College, which is a women's art college in Philadelphia. And I visited both of them that year, and I thought it just seemed like a really different sort of unique environment, and something you don't really get the chance to be in that sort of — you, like, a same-sex environment. So, I sort of decided a women's college. And then I checked out Wellesley, and Smith, and Barnard, and I just sort of liked how Smith felt, the campus, the best. Yeah.

PEARSON: OK, so it was when you visited?

HINCHEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Wellesley, there was a little girl with, like, a lemonade stand on the lawn. And my mom — during, like, the tour, and my mom and I stopped to get a lemonade, of course. And then when we looked

back up at the tour, everyone had moved on. And we just left, we were just, like, that's clearly not the right college. (laughter) So, yeah.

PEARSON: And then how did you feel when you first arrived at Smith, like, your first couple months as a freshman?

HINCHEY: I don't really even remember. I think, probably, like, a little awkward, you know, like, just trying to figure out — and I think I sort of became aware of a lot of — when you're with your family and your friends, like, you don't realize that people are giving you special treatment for certain things, and then you sort of ensure into a general population. You're, like, oh, they were doing that to be sweet to me, that's not, you know — that's not really typical. So, yeah, just sort of, like, learning a lot about myself, and trying to make friends. And I had boyfriend my first year too, who worked at — there used to be, like, a record shop right downtown. Like, right when you started walking downtown. I don't know if it's still there, and we started dating, like, a couple weeks after I started here too. So, I had, like, a little boyfriend, too.

PEARSON: Sweet!

HINCHEY: Yeah! (laughter) Yeah.

PEARSON: Oh, sorry. Well, I think you kind of just answered this question, but how did you feel you fit in with the general population? Because there's kind of — you have a feeling that there was a typical Smithie?

HINCHEY: Yeah, totally. Like, a dorky — a cool dorky, precocious. I spent my junior year at Columbia in New York, and I was just surprised, like, how the students were — they just kind of wanted to listen to the teacher talk at them, and the students at Smith were just much more, like — they felt more comfortable engaging with the professors. And it was such an easy campus to do other — I worked at the radio station, and I kind of just walked in here one day, and that's how I ended up working here. So, I just — the size of it was — it was, like, a really nice environment to be able — you felt, like, comfortable participating in stuff, yeah. Yeah, because, like, I'm a little nerdy too, so I kind of, like, liked that, you know — I felt like they were kind of my people a little bit. (laughter) Yeah!

PEARSON: What was your house community like? Were you involved in any, like, extracurricular activities, clubs, associations?

HINCHEY: I mean, not — I did — there was a hip hop club, it was, like, 75 white girls dancing to, like, "Push It", I was in that. And I think — I lived in Emerson, which is in the Quad, and I did the historian stuff for them, like, the scrapbook, and all of that kind of stuff. Which I don't even know — I

don't really know what the point of all of that — I don't know if they keep that up still. And I did the radio station, not really, like, sports or stuff. I didn't really start, like, exercising ever in my life until, like, my senior year! (laughter) So, I wasn't too athletic, but yeah. I mean, not that I am now. But, yeah! (laughter)

PEARSON: So, you came in '01, graduated in '05?

HINCHEY: Mm-hmm.

PEARSON: How would you describe the campus atmosphere during that time? Because, you know, September 11<sup>th</sup> just happened when you first got there.

HINCHEY: Yeah, that was a really bizarre day, because we all — some of us were in class, and so I think every professor made the decision whether or not to stop the class and tell the students. And people just had cellphones, like, not — there were no, like, iPhones, but there were, like, texting phones, you know? Like, flip phones. So, some people were getting texts during class, and it was very — it was, like, you could tell something had happened, but no one was really stopping to tell you, you know? And we were all just getting to know each other, and then all of a sudden, there was, like, a real trauma in a lot of students' lives, you know, who were connected really directly to the people that were in the attacks in Washington and New York. And I think we all just felt kind of, like, a sense of rupture, and to have to try and process that with a group of strangers, basically, was, like, a really — I mean, to me, it was a really bizarre experience, yeah.

PEARSON: Did that feeling, like, extend — I mean, how long did that last? Because I feel like the whole country kind of — it was just really (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

HINCHEY: Well, you know, it was funny, because then it was, like, there were a lot of anti-war protests, and I remember sort of thinking, like, who is confused about Smith College's position on — you know, like, walkouts. And I think kids, like, students just liked to exercise that muscle, that activist muscle, in college. But it felt to me like we were much more — I thought, like, the campus was much more united in what we felt was, you know, the — I don't know, like, and how we felt about the political climate. And it seemed like it actually created, like, a lot of division in the school. Like, a lot of students who felt like they had to speak up, and there were — the elections were really big. I think my senior year, like, a lot of people who went — who traveled to do, like, a canvas work for voter registrations for the elections, because Bush was reelected, I think, my senior year. Yeah, which we were all, like, completely devastated by. (laughter) Because you

live in an environment like this, and it's hard to — we couldn't understand, like, how he got reelected. You know, it was, like, impossible to understand. Yeah.

PEARSON: Did you participate in those activities, or were you (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

HINCHEY: No, not really. No, I wasn't that political. Yeah, yeah.

PEARSON: How did you balance your — like, your radio station, academics, did you find it difficult to balance?

HINCHEY: Oh, tricky to balance?

PEARSON: Yeah, absolutely.

HINCHEY: I don't think — not really, no. Most colleges do five classes a semester, I think we do four. I don't know, they used to do four. So, it let you focus, like, a lot more on — like, you could actually concentrate things, and not kind of breeze through them, and not really absorb that much, yeah, no.

PEARSON: What about your social life while you were here?

HINCHEY: Oh, well, we watched a lot of "Elimidate", which was a show (laughter) that would come on from, like, 4:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon, where there would be five people, like, on a date with one — five girls on a date with one guy, and then it would narrow down to one. So, we watched a lot of, like, after school TV. And we did a lot of, like, drinking in the dorms, like, listening to Prince, and stuff like that. Just, like, having slumber parties, a lot of, like, slumber parties. And we loved the movie theater, like, the little one. Like, we would go to Sweeties, the candy shop, and get some candy and go to the movie theater a lot. Yeah, a lot of, like, hanging out. Which, a lot of my close friends in high school were men, boys at that point. (laughter) So, it was really, like, special to me to have, all of a sudden, like, a group of female friends. You know, I've never had that before, so yeah.

PEARSON: I kind of skipped over this one by accident. But what were the — were there any issues on campus, like, Smith is now dealing with the — admitting transgender women.

HINCHEY: Yeah, yeah, there was a lot of that. That was the same thing, I always felt, like, a little out of touch with that, because to me, the campus just seemed, like, so queer-friendly. And there was — I think my senior year, like, a group of students that did chalk-ins about how Smith is, like, homophobic. All over the campus, like, Reunion Weekend, like, right when everyone

was showing up. Which is a great — you know, I mean, if you feel like you have a message to get out, like, that's the time to do it, you know? But I was just so — I felt really out of touch with that. I just didn't understand, like, to me, you know, it seemed like it was so welcoming to students like that. So, yeah.

PEARSON: Were most of your female friends on campus straight?

HINCHEY: No, I had some friends who were trans in college, and that was interesting to try and navigate with them. I mean, you kind of had to participate in the journey with them a little bit, because they were, like, growing into their own identities, you know, everyone is. But when your identity involves, like, a gender transition like that, like, I don't know, I was always, like, really impressed by people's ability to be, like, vulnerable, you know? And go through something like that, and feel like they had the opportunity to, like, express who they are, you know? But yeah, I always thought the campus was so friendly to that, kind of. And I didn't really understand, like, why people felt like it was a hostile environment, you know?

PEARSON: No, it's interesting to get, like, every –

HINCHEY: Yeah, you get other people that are like, it was so hostile! Yeah, yeah! (laughter)

PEARSON: Well, and then so, what was your major, minor? What were your academic interests?

HINCHEY: I majored in Art History, and I minored in English. And what were my other — like, extracurricular?

PEARSON: Yeah, just your academic interests, or classes that you liked.

HINCHEY: Oh, poetry, did a lot of writing. And Art History, did a lot of, like, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, like, institutional critique, like, modern and contemporary. And now I'm an interior designer, I got a graduate degree from Pratt. And we — our firm did the science building, the Ford Hall that's here. Yeah, I mean, not my office, but, like, our firm. And so, I use that stuff every day. Like, both of it, like, both degrees, the humanities degrees. I mean, I had to, like, tack on another degree to make them, like, super useful. But, yeah! (laughter)

PEARSON: Did you come in knowing what you wanted to major in, or what your interests were?

HINCHEY: Yeah, I did. And I also — I mean, I kind of, like, regret that a little bit. I know that the college doesn't have a core, but I think — I was, like, a

senior by the time I stumbled into, like, a math class. And because I had gone to a high school that was really strong in humanities also, like, I didn't — I don't think I understood what college-level math and economics would be like, and how interesting they were. So, I kind of feel like if the college had had a couple of requirements that like that, that weren't so easy to skirt around, you know, then I might've — I might've, like, taken a bunch of other classes that I ended up taking, yeah.

PEARSON: Yeah. Did you study abroad when you were here?

HINCHEY: No, I went to New York. My mom had had some health issues, like, the spring of my sophomore year, I guess. So, I decided to stay kind of close to home, I'm from Pennsylvania, yeah.

PEARSON: Oh, you said Columbia University.

HINCHEY: Yeah, I went to Columbia, I worked at the Whitney Museum, and I went to Columbia, yeah, for the year.

PEARSON: And then you just came back senior year?

HINCHEY: Yeah, it's like — I mean, at least when I was here, everyone left. You know, so a lot of people left. (laughter) So, yeah. Yeah.

PEARSON: Let me see. Well, do you think that you made the most of your time here?

HINCHEY: No! (laughter) I mean, I don't think I knew how to.

PEARSON: Yeah? I'm trying to think, like, ten years is — oh, and is this the first time you've been back since you graduated?

HINCHEY: No, I — well, I'm friends with Nancy.

PEARSON: Right.

HINCHEY: And I have some — and my firm actually worked on the library at Williams College, which just opened last year, so I was traveling through the area a lot — not a lot, but for meetings. And I'm friends with Robert Hosmer, who's in the English department. So, I try to — I stopped up to see them a couple of times. And we came back for our five-year reunion, my group of friends that I'm staying with this year.

PEARSON: Oh, OK.

HINCHEY: Yeah. So, I've been back here a couple of times, yeah.



PEARSON: This question's, like, kind of deep, I think.

HINCHEY: OK! (laughter)

PEARSON: I'm just going to attempt it, and I'm probably just going to read it word for word.

HINCHEY: OK.

PEARSON: But Smith is a place that really is, like, steeped in tradition. But it's also constantly evolving.

HINCHEY: Yeah.

PEARSON: So, how do you think Smith has changed since you've been here? I mean, it has only been ten years, but it does seem like –

HINCHEY: Well, yeah. I mean, it's funny to — I mean, I'm Catholic, and part of what I really still feel like I can connect to about being — about participating in organized religion is, like, ritual and tradition, you know? So, I'm really interested in that kind of thing, and I always loved it. We had, like, the candlelight dinners when I was here still. Like, family-style dinners on Thursdays. And we would have tea, I don't know if you guys still have tea on Saturdays, where your professors would come, and you could see that that stuff was sort of petering out, you know? And there were just little things, like, I guess that the women, when they would get married and get, like, a china service, like, for shower gifts, they would always get, like, an extra teacup and saucer and donate it to the President's house. Like, she has this collection of, like, all of these, you know, 13<sup>th</sup> or ninth, like, teacup and saucers from all of these women. And I think that's what she uses, like, for, you know, parties over there, like, little tea services.

PEARSON: I've never heard that.

HINCHEY: Exactly, like, there's all of this stuff like that where I'm sort of, like, in my mind, like, subverting tradition, like, that's really fun. You know, to kind of keep it there, but just adapt it to the times. So, yeah, I mean, I really love all of that kind of stuff, I think it's silly, and great, you know? But I know, you know, other people have all sorts of different attachments to that kind of thing, you know? Is that kind of an answer?

PEARSON: Yeah.

HINCHEY: OK. (laughter)

PEARSON: Kate, can you think of another –

HINCHEY: Way to say it?

GEIS: No, I think –

PEARSON: We do have a few minutes, right?

GEIS: Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about, you know, your life having — leaving Smith, and what have you been up to, what have you been doing?

HINCHEY: Yeah.

GEIS: And then talk about, kind of, if there's anything about your experience here that prepared you for that, or didn't.

HINCHEY: Yeah. Well, after I left here, I was employed when I graduated, which was great, by this crazy woman, as her sort of PA. And I worked for her outside of Philadelphia and up in Maine. She ran this, like, artist colony up in Maine. And then after that, that didn't last too long. And then I worked in nonprofits, like, in development in the arts. And then I went back to school to get my MS in interior design, and then I got a job, like, in an architecture firm working with architects. I don't know, I feel like Smith, the thing it prepared me for the best was just being sort of, like, good writing skills, and good organizational skills. Like, working here was really helpful. I think the fact that I worked in the archives, like, at least when I was just starting out, like, employers really liked the fact that I was, like, you know, detail-oriented, and I had something to back it up. But yeah, that's pretty much what I've been up to. (laughter)

PEARSON: Great. Is that it?

GEIS: Yeah.

PEARSON: I can –

GEIS: No, this is OK.

PEARSON: The clock's (inaudible).

HINCHEY: Oh, oh, sorry.

PEARSON: No, you're doing great. I'm just very paranoid about how much time we have.

HINCHEY: Oh, yeah.

PEARSON: But yeah, thank you very much.

HINCHEY: Yeah, no, this was great, this was a lot of fun.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Steve Thaw, June 11, 2015*