

Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives
Northampton, MA

Jenny Dandy, Class of 1980

Interviewed by
Tanya Pearson, Class of 2015

May 22, 2015

Abstract

Jenny Dandy recollects her move from California to Massachusetts and her transition into the Smith community. She discusses the ‘typical Smithie’ style, academic areas of interest, memorable professors and poignant classroom experiences. Dandy also the political climate on campus in the late 1970s with the arrival of the Women’s Studies Program and Lesbian Alliance student organization that vocalized LGBT issues.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded using Canon Vixia HF.

Videographer

Video recorded by Sarah Wentworth.

Transcript

Transcribed by Judith Jacobs, Audio Transcription Center.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Dandy, Jenny. Interview by Tanya Pearson. Video recording, May 22, 2015. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Jenny Dandy, interview by Tanya Pearson, transcript of video recording, May 22, 2015, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives.

Transcript

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Sophia Smith Collection
Smith College
Northampton, MA

Transcript of interview conducted May 22, 2015, with:

JENNY DANDY
Northampton, MA

by: TANYA PEARSON

PEARSON: This is Tanya Pearson and I'm conducting an interview with Jenny Dandy, Class of 1980, on May 22nd, 2015 for the Smith College Alumni Oral History Project. Thank you very much for agreeing to participate. So I'll start from the very beginning, which is how did you choose Smith College?

DANDY: OK. I grew up in Palo Alto, California and I always knew I wanted to come to New England. I just knew. I had to come to New England. So I was going to do it by going to college and we went college visiting. And my father picked this college and (unclear) you know, big, little, whatever. And when we got on campus here and I had, you know, Gold Key Guide and I just loved it. I loved the feel of the campus. I loved everybody I met. It just seemed right. And so I applied and luckily Smith thought (laughs) I was right, too. And so — and I thought, you know, single sex education at that time had sort of been in the, I would have applied in what, '75? So class of '76 in high school. You know, you kind of didn't do that. But I had a twin brother and it turned out that he was going to Wesleyan, so I thought, well, if I need boys I'll go see him. (laughs) And so I came.

PEARSON: And so you didn't have any family—

DANDY: No fam— I had never heard of it. I had never, it had never occurred to me to go to an all women's school. I just, because of the campus visit, you know, and the interview was fun and interesting. Like we went, I did an interview at Radcliffe and they acted like I was ridiculous for even thinking about putting foot on campus there. And you know, everybody was so friendly at Smith. And you know my scores were, I wasn't brilliant, but I was OK, I loved education. You know, I loved learning so, and so I guess Smith, you know, it was all right. (laughs)

PEARSON: And then how did you feel when you first arrived, if you could remember like the first few months.

DANDY: Oh, I can completely remember, well, I can remember — well anyway, I was dropped off early because my father brought me and then had to leave and so I was on, in the dorm the first night before any of the other freshmen. But luckily the sophomores were there, my big sister was there and, and so the first night I was terrified but (laughs) I'm sure that was OK. And the first couple of months I guess it was just — just sort of finding your way and getting used to it, you know. And some of the people from my house were, well, I was in Gardiner House, which was great, it was a great group of people.

The first couple of months, I think I was, I was trying to shed my California [medicine?] become more eastern and so I remember my roommate saying, who was from Connecticut, You have to, we have to get you the right clothes, so we went shopping in New York and I got a sweater and a turtleneck. (laughs)

PEARSON: That kind of is connected to my next question.

DANDY: Yeah?

PEARSON: Which is, well, you had said that you had never really heard of Smith (overlapping) until the interview — had you heard about like the typical Smithie?

DANDY: No.

PEARSON: OK.

DANDY: No, I didn't have it. But you get here and you soon, you know, those pearls and sweater sets kind of thing and, and there was that — somebody had the *New Yorker* cartoon, like on a napkin or something where the one woman's saying, I think once a Smith girl always a Smith girl. You know, and there was just, you sort of start to learn that there is kind of, you know, a tradition, which I was just eating up.

PEARSON: And did you feel like your friend took you shopping to get (laughs) a cardigan?

DANDY: Well, it was a crew neck sweater, I still remember it. And three matching turtle, because of course, back then clothes were very expensive. And so if I had three turtlenecks I was set for the week, you know, (laughs) because you could switch them. But do I feel like?

PEARSON: Did you feel pressured to look a certain way? (overlapping)

DANDY: I want — well, a little bit, a little bit, but I wanted to fit in, I wanted to adopt a new sort of persona, I think. And not be such a — well, I had, there was somebody in my dorm that would tease me and say, Oh, you're from California, getting TVs next week, you know, you're so

backward, that sort of thing. But Gardiner House wasn't that sort of, I think the elite, you know, real pearls kind of, (laughs) we were just a mixture of regular kids, you know, some scholarships, some not, you know.

PEARSON: So you were in Gardiner House. Said you were all pretty close.

DANDY: Yeah.

PEARSON: Were you involved in any clubs or organizations or extracurricular activities outside of your house?

DANDY: Not at first. I didn't, let's see we — we were just talking about this. I think I, I just stud-, it was all I could do to study, (laughs) I mean, I was an English major so there was a lot of reading. And I did a lot of history, but my favorite semester was, or year, yeah, I guess the semester when I took four reading courses and then I got all A's, so I just really learned how to work hard. But extracurriculars, not at first. And then I remember we participated in Rally Day and we did — well, when I went away my junior year to Penn and then I came back and they let me be a Gold Key Guide, which was unusual I think then. Because usually seniors are so cynical and tired of it all, but I was like so enthusiastic that you know, I came back and I could talk about the difference between coed education and single sex education and that was really interesting. But no, I guess I wasn't (laughs) involved.

PEARSON: Oh, that's OK. I'm just asking. It's OK if you weren't. It's like hard enough just doing academics.

DANDY: They were strong, yeah, it was tough academics.

PEARSON: Well, you just said that you did experience coed education at Penn, so I guess I'll just jump ahead to that—

DANDY: OK, sorry. (laughs)

PEARSON: What are the benefits, or what do you think are the benefits of going, you know, of having gone to an all-girls school?

DANDY: The single sex — they're huge. I think they're completely huge. I think that — and I'll say what, I'll elaborate more, but I think that at the time I kind of felt, I wish I could have just done that for two years and then do, you know, the coed, and get the whole experience. But I didn't, you know, it was only in retrospect that I really understood what was going on. So what I felt like at Smith was we talked to each other and looked to each other for like, OK, what's inside your brain? You know, what are you thinking? What are you learning? What's going on? You know,

and, and when I went to Penn it was, the ratio was seven men to five women. It shouldn't be a problem, right?

The women were competitive with each other. And even, there were two girls, three girls from Smith who I guess we were women, (laughs) but were, that came with me that I hadn't known before and even they were competitive, in terms of like, What are you wearing? What do you look like? What do you— And who knows, was I projecting that? I don't know. But that, that, I just had that feeling that there was that edge, that [frision?] of, of competition for the guys.

And now — I don't know that I can say within the classroom, because I don't think I was ever, I didn't worry about speaking up or not speaking up, like sometimes even at Smith that like around the seminar table, the professor would ask a question and none of us would answer. (laughs) You know. And I've since read that women learn differently and that's the sort of question and answer thing is more of a man's way of learning. And not the women's way of learning if maybe all, I don't know, all discussing everything. But — so it was interesting that that's how they were teaching all women was that (laughs) — lecture and then question and answer kind of thing.

And so I don't know that I could talk about in the classroom differences, but I just, I felt like I had really good friends at Smith that we were, we cared about each other as human beings. You know, as emotional intellectual and not the physical, the superficial stuff. And I think that was a huge difference. And I really thought long and hard about staying at Penn because I loved it, it was so much fun. It was so different. I mean, city and country and you know, big school/little school, but I thought, You know, I think I'd like to have a degree from Smith, so I think I'll go back and I was really, really glad I did. And I was really glad to see that—

PEARSON: Interesting that you could go to Penn.

DANDY: We all did. (laughs) We all did. Where our class was like the biggest, I think it was, I can't remember now, but I think it was like — everybody, of course, said, well, They accidentally accepting the wait list so I'm not supposed to be here. (laughs) You know. And it was — but I guess that we just surprised them by how many of us accepted. And so we had like an extra dorm worth of people that, you know, they had to figure out where to put. There were just so many, like 776 or something like, does that make sense? Yeah, something like that, like 770 in our class, it's huge. And then we were all restless. And I think they, you know, they had the 12-college exchange, so you could go, you know, and that course, the usual abroad — and I think we just wanted to go seek something different. And so I picked Penn, Penn was luckily wasn't as hard to — you know, you didn't have to worry about getting the credits.

It's like with the 12-college exchange it was just, No problem, we'll get the credits and with other places they'd say, Well, we'll think about it, we'll let you know, (laughs) you know, if we'll take the credits

toward your major and whatever. But Penn they did and I wanted to have something very different.

And so we all left and we left like a dorm full of beds empty and then most of us came back. So I don't know, I guess we just, you know, we just wanted to see something else. You know, and you're here, you're isolated, well, one thing is we didn't have, the five colleges, it was really hard to take classes, because at that point we had Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday classes and I think that was so that they could get professors like to give them long weekends, (laughter) you know, to come in. Or maybe some of them lived in Boston, you know, they'd just come to [Burley?] and so the other schools, like Amherst had like Monday, Wednesday, Friday; (unclear) Tuesday, Thursday. And so I remember sophomore year I thought, Oh, I'm going to go take a class at Amherst and the entire bus got off the class and went into that one classroom. So it was all, it was like two guys in there. (laughs) You know. And so —

Because that was the one that fit with the schedule. (laughs) And so I thought, Well, forget that, this is ridiculous. And so — I think we were more isolated. You felt more isolated. Not everybody had cars, so you know, kind of hard. And Northampton was not the bustling place that it is now. We had Fitzwilly's and then there was some dive bar, you know, (laughs) and some horrible little pizza place and a Friendly's and that was about it. You know so, we just would, wanted to go. (laughter) We left.

PEARSON: And if you could just describe the campus atmosphere at Smith when you were here, both socially and politically, you know, what was going on. Was there anything that you participated? I know women's studies was still like a relatively program.

DANDY: Very rare, yeah, that was very rare.

PEARSON: I think the Lesbian Alliance had formed, too, that was late, late '70s.

DANDY: Yeah. That was the last (unclear) population, that was sort of a small thing. And there were some people that I sort of felt like were a little bit in your face about, you know, political stuff. But I feel like we weren't, we're not as political, we weren't as political as it seems like everybody is now. You know, we weren't, we weren't as exposed to the rest of the world. You know, no Internet, no computers. And I think that we were coming off the '60s. You know, I have an older sister who's like seven years older, so she really was the hippies and the '60s and we weren't and I think we just sort of wanted everything to be calm and peaceful and you know, and no big deal and I think we just weren't as aware of the rest of the world and we, it didn't, in my crowd, it just didn't seem like we were all that political. It — I don't know — it was, you know, we had a girl in the hall and she, you know, nobody really talked about it. I mean she was obviously a lesbian, she had a, you know, friend that

would come, but we just didn't, I don't know, we did not talk about it, but we didn't, you know, it wasn't, you know, all the stuff that everybody's talking about now with the transgender and you know, the gender fluidity and all that kind of stuff is just — I don't know, it wasn't there. (laughs)

PEARSON: Yeah. No, I've heard that a lot too, about, yeah, just kind of like feeling isolation being on campus. And yeah, there was like an all lesbian house — (overlapping)

DANDY: Oh, maybe, yeah.

PEARSON: So you knew it was there. You knew the people who lived there were gay, but no one really talked about it.

DANDY: Yeah, exactly. One way or the other they didn't talk about it. You know, it wasn't a pro, it wasn't a con, it was just, you know, OK. (laughs)

PEARSON: Oh, OK, academics.

DANDY: Yes.

PEARSON: What were your academic interests? Major and minor and did you have like, did you have a plan in place when you got here? And if so, did that change?

DANDY: OK. I probably always thought I was going to be an English major and — I don't think we had minors, did we? Maybe minors, maybe it was just so much work that I just, it never occurred to me I was going to have a minor. And back then the English department was English literature. It wasn't creative writing, it wasn't American literature. It was like just English literature. And so I stuck with my plan and didn't minor, but I took all kinds of things, like I did art history. I wish I'd taken it sopho-, freshman year instead of senior year, but you know, I did history, I did Spanish. I took a lot of — like novels in Spanish and stuff like that. And — not any science, really. (laughs) No, I was liberal arts. And I wished that there had been creative writing. I did get to do a seminar with Richard Wilbur, he was our poet in residence and I got to do that senior year. And that was really fun. That was amazing, he was really cool. And there's a girl in there who called her boyfriend Teddy, because she thought she was Sylvia Plath.

PEARSON: Oh. (laughs) (overlapping)

DANDY: But she renamed him. She completely renamed him.

PEARSON: Oh, man.

- DANDY: I know, it was funny.
- PEARSON: So you didn't study abroad. (overlapping dialogue) Went to Penn.
- DANDY: I didn't study abroad, I went to Penn.
- PEARSON: Did you have any other like opportunities or memorable experiences pertaining to academics that you just — that seminar.
- DANDY: I'm not sure. Oh, well no, everything was fabulous. I mean I — I just — I love learning and I loved the challenge and I felt like it was really a good challenge. It was tou-, I mean we had, I think we — you know, I did Gen Lit and we'd read the Tolstoy and *War and Peace* in like the last three weeks, maybe it was four weeks, of the seme-, it was like, It's going to be on the exam, you have to read it. And — I could swear it was two weeks, but it might not have been. I did Shakespeare seminars. And Ruth Ozeki was in my class, she's written *A Tale for the Time Being* and she was Ruth Lounsbury then and I remember her in my Shakespeare seminar talking about [nephapoesis?] and it was at Mr. Young's house because he had, he had some problem, like he had a false leg or something. Anyway, he couldn't move around that much and so our seminars were at his house, which was wonderful. It was a wonderful, intimate sort of thing. We'd all sit around, we'd sit on the floor and just, you know, talk about all these ideas. And so I did Tudors and Stuart History with Howard [Menor?] — loved that. Took a drawing class senior year. Just, I don't know, fun stuff.
- PEARSON: Do you have any memorable professors? I know you said (overlapping) —
- DANDY: Yeah, I said Howard Menor for history and Richard Young for English and then, (laughs) I guess, I think this guy I heard later had committed suicide. His name was [Rahan McDonald?] and he was English, and he, I remember him, he used to come in and talk about the names in Shakespeare and look it up in his OED [Oxford English Dictionary] to see the name and then he'd start looking at the other name, you know, other words around, Oh, this is an interesting word, he sort of, you know, ADD his was through the OED for us and then — he'd talk about hunting and coon guts and, oh, anyway. (laughter) Oh, and I took economics, I loved that. I took macro and then I took micro and you know, that was fun and —
- PEARSON: That's different for an English major.
- DANDY: Yeah, I wanted to kind of have, well, I was always interested in, you know, different things and so I wanted to, you know, be exposed to all this stuff. I don't think I ever took government. I just talked to all my friends around me who took it and asked them questions. (laughs) But a

lot of the memorable experiences is outside the class. You know, when you talk to people about what you're learning. You know. It was, that was the fun part. That was the — you know, it was just such an exciting atmosphere of everybody, you know, being interested in what they were doing.

PEARSON: I know we already talked about this a little bit —

DANDY: That's OK.

PEARSON: But before I get to like the end questions, I always like to know about the social life on campus, the things that people won't — wouldn't like as readily talk about. It's like we have so much information here in the archives, so I know that there were like things going on and you know, events that other college campuses that you would go to but did you — like what was your social life like when you're here, not extracurriculars, like dating or parties or, I mean —

DANDY: Right. Well I guess — let's see, social life. That's different, different years, but I guess the middle of my freshman year I started dating a guy from Wesleyan, you know, a friend of my brother's.

PEARSON: That's what you said you would do.

DANDY: Yeah, (laughter) look what happened. And so, you know, either I would go down there or he would come up here. And — so that was, you know, that was that kind of social life. We never, I never really road-tripped, I don't think. I mean, I know some people would go up to Dartmouth Carnival and stuff like that. Sometimes the guys would come in for parties on cam-, you know, and then like hang out at our dorm knowing they'd have a place to stay and so we'd make them sleep out in the hallway. (laughter) We weren't going to have any of that. And what else? I do remember — well, just, let's see. Drinking age was 18, that wasn't a big deal, but nobody really like drank, you know. And it was such a shock senior year because we used to, I don't know if you still do this, they still do this here, but they — there was a desk to check people in at dinner, for some reason, and we'd have like our bottle of wine and our wine glass sitting at the — and that was like the shock, you know, of, Oh, so you're drinking. Whereas, I'd been at Penn, you know, who'd care? You'd go and have your beer, you'd have your beer in the dorm room or whatever, it didn't matter. And here it was a little more, I don't know, circumspect, I guess. I think there was somebody who was, who was getting high and they like crammed a blan-, a towel in the door so the smoke wouldn't seep out and you wouldn't smell it.

And I sort of, I had this feeling like, We must all think we're on campus with our mothers. You know, we're not being like regular college kids. (laughs) But in a way it's probably good because then there

wasn't as much abuse that you get on other campuses, of all the drugs and drinking.

PEARSON: Yeah. (unclear) increasing.

DANDY: Yeah, we'd go, you know, we'd go out and have a beer somewhere or something, but it what — it's just that it was a little more sort of stayed, I don't know. Social life. We'd go, you know, there'd be a movie on campus and we'd go to that or Bonnie Raitt came and we went to that.

PEARSON: Wow. Was the Calvin here then? Or is that—

DANDY: Yes it was, it was. Yeah, we went to, yeah, we'd go there. And so there's stuff, there's, I don't know, stuff around, but there were times — or you'd order a pizza and — (laughter) especially on liver night. But you know, we had, every house had its dining room still. Which I loved. I loved it and I didn't like it because you almost never saw people from other houses. And so afterwards, when I was being interviewed for my first job, the guy said, "Well, so do you know so and so from Smith? You know so and so from Smith?" (laughs) I was thinking, He's going to think I never went. Because I, you weren't as widely acquainted outside of your house. Because you all ate together. You know, you'd tumble down in your Lanz nightgown for breakfast or for coffee and I'd always get into a fight with someone over, this one particular person over [cohammer?], which is so silly, but (laughs) we'd get really — and then you'd take your coffee back and study some more or sleep or something. But — but you did, there were times when you're just thinking, I'm sort of locked up in this ivory tower here and — you know, now what am I going to do? (laughs)

Oh, I know one thing that was so startling. It was freshman year. Maybe we were a month into it, you know, it seemed like forever. And somebody's brother or father came to visit. And all of the sudden you heard this male voice in the hall. And everybody comes running out of their room, Oh my God, it's a man, it's a man! (laughter) So we were just all together, you know, women, and we hadn't heard — Well, I guess, I guess the professor's voice didn't count, you know, but it was in the dorm. It was funny.

PEARSON: (unclear) OK. Now we have five minutes left.

DANDY: Oh, sorry — (unclear)

PEARSON: No, no. When it flies by it's a good sign. But so I guess I'll skip ahead to — how has your Smith education served you since graduation personally, professionally?

DANDY: Well, professionally, I went into publishing, so I guess that helped. And then, then I followed my husband around and I run his company now, so

that doesn't count, but — Personally, I think, you know, it's more personal, which is what liberal arts is. You know, if I'd gone on to, through graduate school or whatnot, that would be something else.

But it's, you know, liberal arts education just, you know, makes your world so much bigger. You know, you learn to think, you learn to analyze, you learn to, you know, be selective in your reading, you know, and — so I guess it's just sort of more of a general thing than a specific, particular thing. You know, I think that in my book group I'm the only one who says, "This book's well written," (laughter) "He used good language," (laughter) but it's not any great shakes, anything earth-shattering thing, it's just — I mean, you know, you look out for other Smith women and, you know, who went here and—

PEARSON: Yeah. It's like a lifelong network.

DANDY: Yeah.

PEARSON: I think that's probably (overlapping) who graduate. And then my last question, what advice would you give to an incoming Smith student? And what advice would you give to someone who's just graduating?

DANDY: Oh, that's hard because it's a, you know, it's a completely different world. It's a completely different world. And I think that, and Smith has changed a lot since I was here. I mean there's, we never had the engineering. There were pre-med, but you know, not that much and it was so much more, there were government majors and econ majors and you know, history and English and some art history and it's just, I don't know. I think that, you know, I think the lifelong friendships are key. I mean that, you know, it's the atmosphere, you know, that stays with you.

You know, I'm back here for my 35th reunion and it's all my friends from Gardiner House and we're, you know, you just, you can pick up where you, not even where you left off. You pick up where you are now. And so that, so the single sex educa-, I think that's only possible in single-sex education, it seems like. That — where you're just all there together and caring about each other in a way that — that, as I saw at Penn, you don't — you had that [frision?] of competition and like it was like push the women away, not bring them in. And so I — I don't know that I have any advice really, just to make the most of them and I think it's a fabulous education.

And it's education for, for me it was education for education's sake, just learning. And then for leaving, I suppose one thing would be just to, you know, as you go out in the world hold onto that Smith network. You know, take full advantage of it. That—

PEARSON: That's a really good answer. (laughter) And thank you very much.

DANDY: Oh, you're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Judith Jacobs, June 12, 2015.-