Brenda R. Silver
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Karen Navarro

KESLER: So this is Rachel Kesler (’19) in Rauner [Special Collections] Library on Dartmouth College’s campus. I’m going to be interviewing Professor Brenda Silver. It’s January 22nd, 2018. It’s 2:12 p.m. Professor Silver, just to start off, could you tell me a little bit about where and when you were born?

SILVER: I was born in 1942 in Philadelphia. And when I was seven, we moved just outside of Philadelphia to the suburbs to Cheltenham Township.

KESLER: And tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up. Did you have any siblings? What were your parents like?

SILVER: I had two siblings, an older sister and a younger sister. My father was a Republican. He used to say he had voted for FDR once, and it was the biggest mistake he ever made. But, I kind of always felt there was something different. And this is an interesting moment, because just this weekend, I went onto Facebook to see if I could find the girl who was my best friend when I was in elementary school, and moved when we were either in fourth or fifth grade. And one of the things that I remember most about her is that during the 1952 elections, she wore Stevenson, Adlai Stevenson’s buttons, Democrat, and I was wearing “I like Ike” buttons. And even then, I knew that she was on the right side. I must have been, oh, I was about 10 at the time. So, and she did respond, by the way.

KESLER: Oh, very good. Good to hear.

SILVER: I found the right person. [laughter] So, anyway, so it was a fairly conservative upper middle class, except my father did not believe in letting his daughters go away to college. So, my older sister went to the University of Pennsylvania [Philadelphia, PA] and commuted for four years. I commuted for my first year to, again, to Penn, and then they opened up a new women’s dormitory and they allowed me to move to campus for the next three years. My younger sister, by that time they had worn him down and my younger sister went to Wellesley [College, Wellesley, MA]. [laughter]

KESLER: Oh, very cool. Tell me a little bit, backtracking just a little bit, about what primary school was like, what was elementary school like for you?

SILVER: Well, I moved in second—well, I went to kindergarten and first grade in Philadelphia. We moved in February of when I was seven years old, but my older sister and I started going to the new school that year, so we were bussed every year. So I moved into the new school when I was in second grade. I always loved school. Yeah, and I have teachers that I remember very fondly from school. I loved when we got to third grade and started doing math.

My father was a writer. He was a businessman. He came from an immigrant family, had worked his way through college, and business school, and was at that time working with my grandfather in a wholesale business. But he was a writer. He was always a writer. He used to write columns of various sorts. He wrote poetry. He was humorous. So there were always a lot of books around and we all read, all of the time, you know, so that was what we did. So that was very nice. Then, junior high school, I went to the local junior high school and high school. I graduated from Cheltenham High School. And I guess I was always a good student. I was in the honors class when I was in eighth grade and, you know, so what else happened, you know, my other experiences? I chose not to do—to go on in math. I did Latin, I did French. I tended to stick with the humanities.

KESLER: And what year did you graduate high school?

SILVER: 1960.

KESLER: Okay. And tell me a little bit more about your mother. You talked about your father. Let's talk about your mom.

SILVER: My mother, well, my mother was a woman of her generation. She was very smart. She graduated high school at like 15 or 16. She wanted to go to library school, but her father insisted that she go out and get a job. And what she did, and I give her a lot of credit for this, she went to work for the man who was his rival. And it was there that she met my father, because my father was an accountant at that business at the time. And when my parents got engaged, the man whom my father was working for said he would have to quit because

he was marrying the daughter of his biggest competitor. So, an interesting background. But then, mostly she just had three children and took care of us. She loved art. She used to take us to the art museum. And I don't know if you know the Philadelphia Art Museum?

KESLER: No.

SILVER: But it's absolutely wonderful. And it has a quite extraordinary Modernist collection. So I fell in love with all the Modernist paintings very, very early on, and I've always wondered whether that was why when I began to specialize, I did go in for the Modernist period. They had a wonderful Japanese garden, as well. She was very interested in music. When she was younger, she used to go to the children's concerts on Saturday afternoon in Philadelphia, and then they would all go to—Eugene Ormandy was the conductor—they would go to his house and he would wave to all the kids. So we grew up with a certain amount of music. What my father really liked were youthful comedies. And one of the nice things about growing up in Philadelphia at that time is that all the shows previewed in Philadelphia before they went to New York. So, we got to see absolutely amazing things. And every year my mother would take us to see *The Mikado* when the D'Oyly Carte [Opera] Company came over from England. So, yeah, there's nothing to complain about, you know. [laughter] In some ways it was a very, you know, sort of culturally rich background.

KESLER: Yeah, it sounds like it. Tell me a little bit more about living in the city or living right outside of the city and what that was like for you?

SILVER: I think… I mean, it was nice to have to be able to go into the city. But what I loved and what I can remember most strongly from being a kid, is that at least once a year my mother would take us to New York. And it was always on a Wednesday because Wednesday was women's day on the train, so it was less money. And we'd get off at Pennsylvania Station in New York and we'd walk outside, and I can still remember just the energy, you know? The difference of what it was like just stepping out of that train station into the streets of New York. And we would go to Rockefeller Center, we would have lunch at the Horn and Hardart's automat, where you'd put—do you even know what an automat is?

KESLER: No.

SILVER: It had all of these windows and the food was behind the windows, that you put your coins into the window and you opened it up and you took the food out. So that was, I mean, I have very strong memories of doing that. My father used to take us to the Thanksgiving Day Parade, which was nice. He had a friend who had an office right over, looking over the route.

I went to summer camp starting at the age of six-and-a-half, believe it or not. So I went to overnight camp for many, many years. And I was always a water person. So, I was qualified. I got qualified in lifesaving, and then I got qualified in instructor– in instructing in swimming. And I spent one summer teaching boating at the summer camp, and two summers teaching swimming at a camp for underprivileged children in the neighborhood where I was just commuting every day. So… Let's see, what else did I do when I was a kid? I read a lot. [laughter]

KESLER: Yeah, tell me a little bit more about books.

SILVER: I started to write a novel at the age of 10, and that's the last thing I've ever written. [laughter] I was more a reader than I was a writer.

KESLER: Talk to me a little bit more about your, you said two sisters?

SILVER: Yeah.

KESLER: Talk to me a little bit more about them. Is one older and one younger?

SILVER: One is older and one is younger. We were about three-and-a-half years' difference. But my older sister actually skipped a grade, so she was four years ahead of me in school. And my younger sister was born in February, so she was just over the edge, so she was four years behind me. So we were three years in age, but four years in school.

KESLER: And what were their names?

SILVER: Lois was the oldest. Carol was the younger.

KESLER: I see. And were you guys close?

SILVER: Hum?

KESLER: Were you guys close?

SILVER: Where did they go?

KESLER: Um, were you guys close?

SILVER: Oh, were they close? I don't know. Carol and I shared a room. My older sister had her—yeah, Lois had her own room. Carol and I shared a room. I should put my hearing aids in. [laughter]

KESLER: Sorry about that.

SILVER: I wear them so rarely, I don't think about it. Um, yeah, we were very close, you know. We all went to summer camp together, until my older sister got too old, and then Carol and I went off together. But we all very much had our own lives, okay, in different ways. I got much close to my older sister as we got older, because she was actually a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania when I was an undergraduate there. And as I got to the point where I really needed to ask people about things, I would go to her rather than my mother.

KESLER: And it must have been nice for you to have somebody to look up to, to ask the questions.

SILVER: Right.

KESLER: Talk to me a little bit more about that transition from high school into college, kind of jumping forward a little bit more. So your sister had already left and she was attending UPenn?

SILVER: Yes. She was a graduate student. I want to come back to that later, about how she went to graduate school and that whole story. But, so she was a first year graduate student in English. And a lot of the professors knew her. So, I would come into class and they would go down the list of—they would, you know, go "Brenda Silver," they would look at me, and they would go "Lois's sister?" And I would go "yes." And one part of me really didn't like it, but she'd been a terrific student, so part of me thought *well, okay*, you know, kind of.

I don't really mind being identified as her sister. And I had, my first year in my freshman writing class we had to write a short story, and I wrote one about a little girl pushing her sister off the porch, and it turns out that my instructor of the course knew my sister, okay? And he wrote a note at the bottom that said, "Should I warn her?" [laughter] I actually told her about it. So that was it.

And as I say, I was commuting the first year. I joined a sorority because I was a legacy. My sister had been in the sorority, and for the women who were commuting, that was a good thing, because it gave them some place where they could go, so they had a place that they could kind of be during the day. So I joined a sorority my first year. I went through rush the second—you know, not my rush, but the rush for the next year, the first term of my sophomore year. And I was just very disillusioned with it, so I dropped out of the sorority, because I was living on campus by that time, so I dropped out of the sorority. And my closest friend in college was a woman who was from Atlanta, Georgia. Her father was British. He had been stationed in the States during World War II and met her mother. And they were very involved in the civil rights movement. So, I learned a lot. I mean, I got to know what was going on down in the South during that period. Can I have some water?

KESLER: Yes, of course. Let me pause this for a second. [Pause in recording]

SILVER: Anyway, back to college. I always knew I was going to major in English.

KESLER: I was about to ask.

SILVER: But I loved all literature. And I used to take six courses a semester rather than the five, because there was just so much I wanted to do. And I took courses in Russian literature and Greek literature, German literature. My two best professors when I was at Penn—that was from '60 to '64—were both German immigrés, and who had fled Germany during the war and settled at the University of Pennsylvania. And I took a year-long course in German literature from one of them, who was absolutely amazing. And then, I took a Comp Lit [Comparative Literature] course in 20th Century literature with a man named Adolf Clarmon, who was also great. Yeah. So I really loved those.

I took history courses. I had a lot of history courses. I took minimum of the sciences that I needed to get through. And luckily for me, at Penn, psychology counted as a science. [laughter] So, I mean, I don't know whether I could have gotten through Dartmouth with my background, because I really had no math at all. So, and I loved it.

I actually worked, as well. I worked in the summers, and then I continued working the summer after my sophomore year, I worked for a research psychiatrist at the University of Pennsylvania Med School. And then, at the end of my junior year, I started working for a sociology professor named Kaplan, Norman Kaplan. And he did the sociology of medicine. He was quite an amazing man. And I really owe him a lot, because he was the person who really pushed me to apply to fellowships, and to do things like that. And so, he really played a major role, because he pushed me to apply for the Fulbright Fellowship, which I did, and which actually changed my life, because I got that Fulbright Fellowship.

So as I said, I took a lot of courses. I wrote my senior thesis in the English Department on the women in Faulkner. And at the time, there was no such thing as feminist criticism. There was one woman professor in the college, a junior woman in the department. And I wrote it under a professor of American literature who was very encouraging and very good. And then, when it went to my two readers, one of them was this man who I had taken two courses with and gotten A's in both of them, so he knew I was a good student. And the other was this woman. And the man, Bob Turner, Robert Turner was his name, and he was from the South, and he hated my thesis. He said his reason for hating it, or, you know, for disliking it was the fact that I didn't talk about Dilsey in the *Sound and the Fury*. And I was very clear about why I left her out, because I said as a black woman, she did not fit into the pattern that I was exploring in the thesis. So, it went to the director, my graduate director, and he gave it honor, so I did actually graduate by honors. [laughter] But by that time I had won the fellowship and I was going over to London to do research, and kind of things like that. But it was an interesting experience of what was later going to become the resistance to feminist criticism. I mean, I had no way of knowing that at the time. It was just, I didn't really understand what was happening.

KESLER: Let's take a quick step back, and talk to me a little bit more about your early days in college. Let's chat a little bit about your sorority and what that was like to have this all-female space for you on campus.

SILVER: Yeah. I didn't really spend much time there. And I made—one woman who was really a friend, you know, who became sort of a friend. But I just, I don't know, it just wasn't me. It just wasn't me. And as I say, going through rush the following year so put me off, the whole system, which is why many years later when the early women at Dartmouth decided that they wanted to form sororities, I and so many of the other women faculty really resisted, really told them they were making a mistake. So, anyway… Follow the story. [laughter]

KESLER: Yeah, we'll get there. Tell me a little bit about your early days in school and what that, specifically the transition into college was like. You said you really enjoyed taking classes.

SILVER: Oh, I loved taking classes.

KESLER: Tell me more. What was campus culture like? What was it like commuting back and forth?

SILVER: Well, commuting back and forth meant I didn't have much time in campus culture. The one thing I remember—this is actually an interesting experience—I had exempted out of the basic courses in French through my advanced placement, through my exams, the advanced placement exam. So I went right into a 20th Century literature course. This is my first semester freshman year. And the woman who was teaching it, Mademoiselle [Lucienne] Frappier, had just come from France. She had never taught in the States before. Okay. She was amazed that we didn't stand up for her when she came into the class, okay, because totally different system, right? And then she started speaking Parisian French. Now, I was pretty fluent in French. I could read French very, very well. I could not speak a word, because I had the same teacher for French in high school all the way through, and we never spoke. And I'm not sure she even knew how to speak the language. So, I didn't understand a word. And for the first two weeks, I went home and cried every day after that class. And then, I got more used to her, she got more used to us, and I actually ended up taking two classes from her.

Many years later, I was at one of the women's history conferences that used to be held, the Berkshire women's history conference. And by that time she had married someone in the Spanish Department and she was [laughter] Madame Mazur. So, I went up and I introduced myself and I said, "You won't remember me, but I was in the very first class you taught at Penn," and I told her my story. And she said, "You have no idea how scary it was for me." Just being new, not understanding the students, not understanding the culture. So it was just a lovely experience to have so many years later with this professor who had meant so much to me in my early days. As I say…

KESLER: Were there a whole lot of women on campus at that point? You mentioned that there was only a couple of female professors.

SILVER: Yeah, there were a lot of women. Oh, there were practically no women professors. I mean, I think that, except for her, Mademoiselle Frappier, I don't think I had any other women professors the entire time.

KESLER: And was that like a strange experience at all or was it something that you questioned or just something that was kind of, to be expected?

SILVER: By the time I got to be a senior, you know, junior or senior, I was much more aware of the fact that there were no women. But, it just seemed to be natural at the time. And you just… And I remember at one point as an undergraduate, one of my professors told me that I thought like a man, and I took that as a compliment. Looking back at it now, I'm horrified. [laughter] So, I don't think in those days I was really that aware. We were more concerned—as I say, my best friend was this woman from Atlanta—we were more concerned as we moved on about sexual issues, because Pennsylvania was a very—it had very strict blue laws for alcohol, but also you could not get birth control if you weren't married or engaged.

KESLER: Wow. Yeah, tell me a little bit more about your involvement in activism. And do you mind, what was your friend's name?

SILVER: Joan. [laughter] She became Joan—I can't remember now whether she was Joan Stevens or whether her husband's name was Stevens.

KESLER: Okay, I see.

SILVER: Because she was Joan Stevens. And she was great, you know, because, I mean, among other wonderful things she taught me to brew tea, because I had always been a tea drinker, and her father being from Britain, she brewed real tea, you know, kind of that Brit stuff. [laughter]

KESLER: Did she do sweet tea if she's from the South?

SILVER: Yeah, she had all the… She was fantastic actually. But, you know, I had a lot of other people who were friends, but she was really the person that I was closest to. And I've always felt about Penn that it was wrong place, wrong time, and if it hadn't been for my father's insisting that we had to stay home and commute, I would have been in a very different place and it would have been a different experience for me. But, you know, I got a good education, there's no question about that.

I wasn't really much of an activist at all. I mean, I was kind of aware of what was happening. And then a couple of things happened. I turned 21 the day they buried John Kennedy. And that was my political coming of age, because in those days, you didn't vote until you were 21. I had already registered, I think. Pretty sure I had registered. And I registered Democratic, much to my father's horror, because the area that we lived was very Republican. But anyway, so, my birthday was November 25th. It was a Monday that year. And the whole weekend was totally surreal. And I had an old boyfriend from high school who was in medical school at Penn at the time, and he had always said he would send me a dozen red roses for my birthday, and he did. So I was sitting. I just didn't want to be with anyone else, so I was sitting in my dorm room—I had a single—listening to the funeral on the radio with these dozen long-stemmed red roses.

So, but the weekend was made even more bizarre. Well, I'd gone home the Sunday night before for what was supposed to be a family birthday party, and all my aunts and uncles were there. But nobody moved from the television, and that

was the night that Ruby shot Oswald. So, my whole coming of age was so linked to the Kennedy assassination. But, the other thing was, this was what really got me involved in politics, was a boyfriend, which I think is not unusual, and he was very active in the Young Democrats. So, he had much more of a sense of what was going on in the world than I did. His birthday was actually two days before mine. So, Kennedy was shot on the 22nd, Rob's birthday was the 23rd and my birthday was the 25th. So, but he and I, even though we were a couple and very close, somehow neither of us wanted to be with other people. And the person that I actually spent the most time with that weekend was Norman Kaplan, the sociology professor I was working for, because I had gotten out of an exam on the Friday morning, I had gone to the Commons to get some lunch, and heard the news on the radio, and I went immediately to his office. And he was really the person who as much as anybody really got me through that moment.

KESLER: Talk to me about, yeah, the moment that you heard the news and walking over to his office. Tell me—let's just delve into it a little bit more.

SILVER: It was just, I mean it was such a shock and it was so upsetting because, you know, Kennedy, he was the great hope, and he was young, and sort of just what everybody always says about that moment, you know. It's a moment that you just never forget. Everybody I know, knows exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news. Yeah. Even my husband, who was living in England at the time. So, you know, it was that universal, that widely spread. Anyway, so that was a very strange weekend.

KESLER: Yeah, it sounds like it.

SILVER: That would have been the fall of my senior year. I guess, because of my relationship with Rob. The other thing from my senior year that I have a very clear recollection of is when the Buddhist monk burned himself in 1963. I mean, that was, I think, the first moment that I became aware of the war, you know, kind of that there was a war going on, although I wasn't very involved in it. I think I followed civil rights much more at that time because of my friend and her family, and things like that.

And then what happened is I applied to graduate school. My father said, "If you stay at home and go to Penn, I'll pay for it." [laughter] And I decided over my dead body. I would rather move to New York and go to work as a secretary, because when I was in high school, I had actually taken a typing class in the evening as an extra class, because I knew even then that I wanted to be able to take care of myself and I knew that typing at that time was absolutely essential. And it actually stood me in good stead, because it helped me get like the job that I had with the psychiatrist. Both of my jobs were actually doing a lot of typing, and by that time I was already a very good touch typist. And it also means that I could use their typewriters, and they had electric typewriters, so I got to write all of my papers on their electric typewriters, which was very nice. So, I already knew that I wanted that kind of independence. So, I applied—I can't remember, I think the only one that I applied for actually was Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA], and I think maybe I applied to Penn. I'm not sure.

KESLER: And before we step forward, real quick, let's talk about your sister a little bit more and her time in grad school at UPenn while you were there.

SILVER: Okay. Yeah, okay, what happened is my older sister got married at the age of 20. She was a senior. And she got married I think to get out of the house as much as anything else, because she, of course, had been living at home for the four years that she was in college. She started graduate school. She got pregnant almost right away, so she turned in her master's thesis at the end of her first year and had her baby in the same week, her first child. And then, two years later… And then they went to St. Louis for a year, so my sophomore year she was living in St. Louis. And she used to call me, and what I remember most was my brother-in-law in the background saying, "Get off the phone. It's my money." And I swore I would never ever be in a position when anyone could say to me, "You can't do it. It's my money." So, the little things, you know?

So, anyway, she came back my junior year, and then we started going to concerts together and doing things like that. So she finished all of her course work, but by that time she had three children, so she was pretty much, you know, it took her quite a while. And in fact, she finished her Ph.D. at

about the same time I did, because it took her about 10 years on and off writing her dissertation.

My younger sister also got married at 20, 21, left Wellesley to go to Bryn Mawr [College, Bryn Mawr, PA] for her senior year, because her husband was in medical school in Philadelphia. So they moved back to Philadelphia. She had met her husband—when she was in 11th grade, he was in 12th grade, so they were high school sweethearts. And then, she went to graduate school in German at University of Pennsylvania, and she actually worked with one of the men that I loved when I was an undergraduate, which was really very, very nice. And then she had some kids, and then she finished her dissertation. But, anyway, we can talk more about that later.

But, so my older sister was there for my last few years, and it was actually her thesis supervisor who was also a tremendous help in terms of my getting, really getting the Fulbright, because I needed a project, and he was British, and my sister was writing her dissertation on Iris Murdoch with him. And he knew me. I had taken a class from him. And I went to him and I said, "I want to go—you know, I'm applying for a Fulbright—I want to go to London. What's going on there that might be interesting to me, a project that I could write down on my application that I wanted to do?" And he gave me some suggestions, and one of them was this sort of history of serialization of [Charles] Dickens that was being done by a husband and wife team named the Tillotsons [Kathleen and Geoffrey]. So, I wrote up this application and he wrote me a letter of recommendation, and other people did.

But it was Norman Kaplan who had been a Fulbright lecturer who insisted I apply for this, because I thought I didn't have a chance in the world. You know, I was just coming right out of college, I had no background, nothing else. So, as I say, it was my older sister's dissertation advisor who actually was, again, instrumental in helping me get that fellowship to London. And I also applied for another fellowship that year which I did not get. [laughter] I did get it later, but I didn't take it because I didn't need it. So, what happened was that I got the fellowship, and a lot of my friends said to me, "Are you going to give up the fellowship because of Rob?" who was my boyfriend. And he was going off to the University of Michigan Law School. He wanted to become a labor lawyer,

which he did. And I looked at them in absolute disbelief, because it had never dawned on my mind, you know, dawned on me that I would ever give up this fellowship to go to London because of Rob. So, I went off to London in the summer of 1964. [laughter]

KESLER: Tell me about that transition. Have you ever been abroad before at that point?

SILVER: Oh, no. I mean, I had never been any place but New York. And the only plane I had ever been on was one of my good friends from high school was at Chatham College [Chatham University] in Pittsburgh, and I flew out to Pittsburgh to spend a weekend with her one time. But, no, I had never been anywhere, you know. [laughter]

KESLER: Wow, so talk to me about taking that leap of faith. Why London in the first place?

SILVER: Well, I just wanted to go to a city, and you know, I had specialized in English literature. It was what I loved. I just wanted to go to London. So as I say, and I got accepted, but the place where I was, the university where I was placed was King's College, London. And there was nobody there. Neither of the Tillotsons who I wanted to do this project with was there. So, the man who was my supervisor who had agreed to take me on was actually a Renaissance scholar. So, I was pretty much free to do whatever I wanted. And what happened was is that I was living in a post-graduate residence in Bloomsbury on Mecklenburgh Square. And it was very interesting. It was called Goodenough House, William Goodenough House. And it was the women's half of two buildings. The other was London House, which was where the men were. And they had been built by the British government for American and Commonwealth post-graduate students as a way of giving back what they had gotten after the war to help them rebuild. So I was living with this wonderful group of international students. No Brits. You know, that was the weird thing. But all these wonderful international students in this house.

So I was living in Bloomsbury and when… My freshman year I had read just a short story by Virginia Woolf, which I had actually, you know, which I had loved, and given that I wrote my thesis on [William] Faulkner, you can kind of see why. Anyway, so I started reading Virginia Woolf because I was

living… and oh, Virginia Woolf's last house had been in Mecklenburgh Square. It was bombed during the war, the whole square had been bombed, which is why they rebuilt these buildings on either end of it, the housing for the students. So I started reading Virginia Woolf, and I just absolutely, completely and totally fell in love with Virginia Woolf. So, I was able to switch my topic, and I decided I wanted to stay. And by that time I had discovered that there were some manuscripts of *Mrs. Dalloway* that were in the British Museum library, and I wanted to work on the development of the novel from there.

So I applied to do a Ph.D. at King's College, London, and I was accepted into the program. But I had also switched supervisors, because there was a young woman in the department who had just come down from Oxford, and her field was 19th Century, but she knew Virginia Woolf and she loved Virginia Woolf. So she agreed to take me on as a student to supervise my Woolf project. And she was a quite amazing woman who I am still in touch with.

KESLER: Really?

SILVER: Yeah, her name is Leiani Ordenant. And so, so I got accepted for the Ph.D. program, which meant that the Fulbright renewed for a second year.

KESLER: Okay, so you switched topics still in '64 or was that in '65?

SILVER: But, that would have been in '65. '64-'65. So I switched the topic to working on the development of *Mrs. Dalloway*, which evolved in the development of her novel. And what happened was, that summer… Well, that spring, when I was working in the library, I met an American woman from New York who was there also looking at the manuscripts, and she told me that there were five more manuscripts that had *Mrs. Dalloway*, drafts of *Mrs. Dalloway* in it at the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. And the Berg Collection had the largest collection of Woolf manuscripts at the time. Leonard Woolf had sold them to someone who sold them to the Berg. They had all of the diaries, they had just tons of her manuscripts. So they were all in New York.

So I went home, back to the States that first summer, and I went to the library, and while I was there, I discovered not only the *Mrs. Dalloway* notebooks, but this huge pile of

reading notebooks which were all the notes she took while she was reading. And I got totally hooked. So, anyway, I ended up actually spending the next two years working on the topic. I switched my topic to "Virginia Woolf and the Elizabethans," because what I discovered in the reading notes was a lot of reading that she had done of Elizabethan literature. And the novel that I was most fascinated by was *Between the Acts*. I discovered that there was this whole section of *Between the Acts* that a lot of *Between* the Acts was actually based on and similar to the work she was doing. She was writing a history of English literature when she died at the same time. And so, I knew what she had been reading for that and I could see how it was working its way into the novel, because I had the reading notes, I had her drafts, I had all of that. So that was what I was working on. But I also started tracking down all of the works that she was reading, so that you could identify, you know, so if you went to the Berg collection and you wanted to see her reading notes, say, on Joseph Conrad, you could get those things and you could use my index. I indexed it, so you would know not only which novel she was writing about, but which edition of which novel, so you could match the page numbers.

KESLER: Oh, wow.

SILVER: Okay? [laughter] I don't know if that makes any sense. But anyway, so, and then I decided I wanted to stay a third year in London. By that time I couldn't be supported by the Fulbright anymore, so I got a job proofreading for Penguin Books, and I got some support from my parents. And that year… Meanwhile, I'd been applying to graduate school every year, and I'd been accepted. But, in that third year when I decided I really needed to come back to the States, I got full funding from Harvard for the following year. So, that's how I ended up at Harvard. I'd been applying every year, you know, since I had been accepted. I had been accepted at Harvard when I graduated from college, but with no funding. And that's when my father had said to me, "If you stay home and go to Penn, I'll pay for you," and I said, "No way." So, I went on to Harvard.

But, the story about London, I mean, London was really crucial, because I think my real entry into Vietnam and the Vietnam War occurred during the orientation for the Fulbright program, and that would have been September of 1964. And

during the orientation for all of the Fulbright fellows, the cultural attaché from the US Embassy came to talk to us, and he spent most of the talk telling the audience, telling this group of scholars what they should say if people asked them about Vietnam. And everybody around me was kind of gasping. They just could not believe this. He was totally unaware of the response that he was getting. And I was listening to this, and I wasn't really familiar enough with what was happening in Vietnam at that time to really make sense of it. I just knew that there was something seriously wrong.

So, at that point I began to read the papers, I began to follow the news. So, that spring, which would have been Easter, April, 1965, I went on my first anti-war march. And it was what was known as the Aldermaston march (A-l-d-e-r-m-a-s-t-o-n), Aldermaston. And the Aldermaston marches had been going on since 1958, and they started as anti-nuclear marches. They were very much against, and there was a whole anti-nuclear group who kind of ran them, and they always walked with lilies from Aldermaston to London. But, in 1965, the focus switched from anti-nuclear to being anti-war. So, my recollection is that it was the first time that the Aldermaston march was as much about Vietnam, if not more, than it was about nuclear weapons.

And, shortly after that—that was in April—sometime later that spring, I think it was like May or June, I started going out with a man who had just come back from a year in the States. He was doing a Ph.D. on government at LSE, at the London School of Economics, and he was associated with the [International] Institute for Strategic Studies [London]. And he had been working that past year as an intern in [President] Lyndon Johnson's White House. And he was very pro-war. And I went out with him for the next two years. We were a couple for the next two years. And I so completely disagreed with his politics. And, you know, looking back, really I could say that it was partly in response to his politics that I actually began to form my own. So, it's very…[laughter]

KESLER: What year did you guys start dating?

SILVER: That would have been spring of '65. 1965.

KESLER: And similarly, tell me just about that first march that you attended, that first anti-war march. What was it like? What were the feelings surrounding that time for you?

SILVER: Well, I think, you know, I mean, it was the first time really I had done anything political, because I'd really not been an activist at all when I was younger. And I don't even remember—I don't remember whether anybody went with me. I assume, because I had a lot of friends from the residence, as well as I had met some English people by that time who were quite political. So I suspect that there were other people who I went with, other friends. And I don't remember much about it except being quite happy to be there, and feeling that there was something happening and that if I could be part of it, that was a good thing.

Later, I think it must have been the spring of 1967, I was involved in a protest in front of the US Embassy. I was still in London. I was involved in a protest in front of the embassy. And I always kid and say that's the one thing that Bill Clinton and I have in common was that we protested in front of the American Embassy. [laughter] Yeah, I think he was there later than I was. Anyway, it would have been '66 or '67, one of those years. So, yeah, so I began to kind of feel that that was a very, very important thing.

KESLER: And so, so then, heading back to the United States, what year did you come back?

SILVER: '67. I came back in the summer of 1967, and it was a different world. I had come home both summers, but I spent both of those summers working in the New York Public Library. You know, there were other things going on and I did a lot of exciting things in New York. I went to something put on by Yoko Ono when she was still married to her first husband, and so there were a lot of interesting things happening. But…

KESLER: And did you visit home during that time period, too?

SILVER: Well, I resided in Philadelphia with my parents, but I was spending most of my time in New York. So, I was living with friends of mine from high school who were living in New York at the time, so I kind of moved around a lot from friend to friend. And then I would go back, went back to London. And my third year in London, I actually moved out of the

residence with another American woman, and we lived in an apartment. Those were great years to be in London. It was Mary Quant, it was the Beatles, it was just, it was really wonderful. So I came back in 1967 and, before I came back, I met this man—I can't remember, you know, it's just the way you do meet people—who knew this man, a philosophy student, a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard, who was very involved in the Vietnam, in the protest movement. He was a member of SDS, the Students for a Democratic Society. And, so when I got to Harvard, I looked him up. And as I say, he was in the Philosophy Department, and the Philosophy Department at Harvard was actually the center of the anti-war movement at the university. And the person very much behind this was an analytical philosopher named Hilary Puttnam (H-i-l-a-r-y) Puttnam (P-u-t-t-n-a-m). And he was the faculty advisor to the SDS and he organized a lot of the protests and things like that.

So, I got hooked up, involved with the anti-war protests on campus from the very beginning. And it was actually through this man, this graduate student in philosophy, that I met the woman who became my closest friend, and still is my closest friend, because she was also—she was British, and she had come over to do a degree in what was known as Soc Rel, which was sociology, religion and anthropology. She was basically an anthropologist. And we ended up rooming together because he put us together, and she needed a place to stay, and my original roommate left and she moved in. So, that was one sort of thing.

So, that's how I got involved with the anti-war movement there. So, as I said earlier, on it would have been May 1st—I do have the days for this, I looked it up—May 1st, 1970, which was the day after the bombing of Cambodia, we went down to Boston Common, which was where the protest was, and then the protest moved all the way up Mass Avenue to Cambridge, into Cambridge to the Green. And that was the one time when I was teargassed because of the police were on the streets and it was teargas and it was rioting going on, you know, kind of. So, that's one of the sort of the high points.

Now, at the time that I was at Harvard, it was just at the time that Harvard and Radcliffe [College] were integrating, so they were integrating the houses, because before the women had been at Radcliff and the men had been at

Harvard. So, I was actually the first woman tutor at Adams House. And Adams House was one of the more radical, one of the more political houses. So, that was very interesting. And then, during the big March on Washington, which was November, 1970, so that would have been November, 1970, that huge, one of the huge marches on Washington, I went down with a bunch of people from Harvard to the march. And Adams House, it was quite amazing, the master of Adams House was a physicist, but he and his wife were very political, and they did a little street performance of the play called *Marat/Sade*. And they played, if you know that in the play itself there's the kind of, the head of the institution and his wife who are watching this performance. It's set in an insane asylum. And they played, the master of Adams House and his wife, played the master in the play. And the students just had created this whole wonderful thing that they were doing on the streets of Washington. So, that was quite an extraordinary experience.

KESLER: Yeah, it sounds like it. Talk to me—let's juxtapose the anti-war movement starting off when you were in London, and then comparing it to what it was like back in the United States. Were they massively different? It seems like you definitely got more involved?

SILVER: Well, they were also more violent. I mean, by the time 1967, they had turned much more violent, and there was much more police protests and things like that. And because it wasn't just—I mean, it wasn't just the war. I mean, it was civil rights and… One of the other things that I did when I was in graduate school is I went down with some friends from Harvard to Yale [University]. This was at the time of the Black Panther trials. That would have been in May, 1970. They were known as the New Haven Nine. And there were a number of protests. So, I went down. We drove down one day. There were about four of us, because there was a big protest going on. And as you drove into New Haven, the streets were lined with military people in combat gear with their rifles and their gas masks and everything else. And we went—it was happening on the Green. And there were all sorts of food. The Yale students had set up all this food. And when I got to Dartmouth many years later, I discovered that one of the women who they hired in the Italian Department, French and Italian Department, had been one of the people serving food that day when I was down there. [laughter]

KESLER: Oh, that's funny, yes.

SILVER: So there was that kind of interesting crossover. So, as I say, by 1967, '68, '70, again… 1970 after the Cambodian bombing, Harvard, the graduate students and the faculty shut the university down. They went on strike. So, there were no classes. Everything just ended. There were no exams, there were no nothing for that term.

KESLER: What did it feel like on campus?

SILVER: There was a lot going on, okay? Well, and it wasn't… of course, as I say, it was civil rights, which was, again, turning more violent. It was the anti-war movement, which was much more intense at that particular period. And there was also the feminist movement, the women's movement. And one of the points I really want to make is the kind of the intersection of the Vietnam War with the women's movement in my experience in particular. I had noted that on my…

KESLER: Yeah, I saw that as well on something that yeah, I wanted to make sure to cover with you, as well.

SILVER: On my thing, so… And people say to me now, well, not now, but, you know, when I was a younger faculty person here, and they would say to me, "What's it like being in graduate school?" And I would say, "Don't ask me. I spent all my time doing political organizing," and a lot of that was true. Not so much for the Vietnam things, but I was very actively involved, because the graduate women at Harvard formed a graduate women's organization. It's just a point that I really want to go back to, that in a way, all of us women benefitted from the war, because Harvard, as so many of those institutions, run on graduate student labor. And, because of the draft and the lottery, they couldn't be guaranteed to get the men that they needed in order to run their courses, to do the tutorials, to be the teaching assistants, to do everything else. So there were a lot more women in graduate school when I was there, because of the war. So there was that interesting pride thing. And they knew while they were there.

But, I want to backtrack here a little bit, because both of my sisters—I was on a Ford Foundation fellowship at Harvard—both of my sisters went to graduate school on what was called National Defense fellowships. And these National Defense fellowships for graduate students were set up post-

Sputnik, at the time the US was very upset by the fact that Russia had beat them in getting this thing into space. So, they set up—they wanted to get more people into graduate school. I don't know if you're familiar with Donna Haraway and with "A Cyborg Manifesto."

KESLER: Yes, I've heard of it.

SILVER: Okay, "A Cyborg Manifesto." Well, she has a footnote where she writes about this and how she went to graduate school in biology on the National Defense fellowship. Okay, this was post-Sputnik. But it also extended into other fields, as well. So my sister who, you know, my sister did the English and German, but they both went. And they had to sign a loyalty oath. You had to sign something saying that you would not overthrow the US Government.

KESLER: Wow.

SILVER: And my older sister actually said to the person, she said, "You know, if I was not going to overthrow the government, I would sign it, but if I was, I would also sign it." [laughter] So, anyway, so in that sense alone there was a major intersection between women entering graduate school at the time and the war, you know, the Cold War. First the Cold War, and then the Vietnam War. So we did a lot of organizing, the women when I was at Harvard. So, between that and the anti-war stuff, as I say, I had a very unusual graduate career. I'll just put it that way. [laughter]

KESLER: Yeah, it sounds like it. It sounds like it. To take a quick sidestep into something that you mentioned, something I didn't necessary cover earlier was just asking what it was like to grow up during the Cold War and what those years were like. Do you have anything that you want to add in terms of that part of the timeline?

SILVER: Yeah, I do, but I want to add something else about the Harvard years. Because I think it must have been the fall of 1970, because that would have been my fourth year, and at that time I had become a senior tutor, and you get an undergraduate student who you help with your thesis and sort of things like that. Or maybe it was just a junior tutor. Anyway, I had become a tutor. And the young man who was supposed to be my tutee actually was applying for conscientious objector status. So, I helped him go through

that process of getting conscientious objector status, which he did, and then he dropped out of Harvard and went back later.

KESLER: What's the process like?

SILVER: It was filling out forms, and he had to prove why he was doing it. He had to prove that he had been involved in these other things. And I think he spent the time farming. I think he actually, you know, sort of was doing some kind of farm work in northern Massachusetts. He was up around the Amherst area during that period. So, I think it was a shame because he was a really bright kid, and I liked him. But I was certainly happy to help him do that.

KESLER: And was that something common that people tried to do during college, or was it a little bit more difficult?

SILVER: He was the only person I knew, the only student I knew who applied for conscientious objection status. But, the reason I knew that was because he was supposed to be my tutee. So, anyway, that was an interesting thing. To go back to the Cold War…

KESLER: Yeah, let's take us a quick step back.

SILVER: Well, I mean, I was a war baby, you know. I'm not even a [Baby] Boomer. So, I do remember very clearly, one of my first recollections of anything sort of political in the press or in the media was the headlines in the paper at the end of the Korean War that said, "Korean War Over" or "War Over" or something like that. As I say, my best friend in elementary school had Stevenson buttons, so I was wearing "I like Ike." We had bomb drills. And when we moved out of the city into the suburbs, we moved onto a block where one side of the street had houses on it, but everything behind it was still woods. So, our house was kind of brand new and it was an area, and at the end of the street there was a factory that made seamless steel tubing, and it was apparently, if I remember correctly, it was one of only two factories in the US that made this particular kind of seamless steel tubing, so it was used for a lot of guns, and what they were saying, you know, for military things. And the kids used to say, "Oh, well, if there's ever another war, this property will be bombed." And that played a major role in my psyche as a kid, you know, knowing that there was this factory right down

the street that might be bombed. And for years afterwards, up through graduate school, every time I had an anxiety dream, it was about being bombed by the Russians.

KESLER: Really?

SILVER: Yeah. And we had bomb drills where we had to go underneath the table. You know, that was all there, kind of that stuff. The other major part of my growing up, what I remember from the political aspect, were the [Senator Joe] McCarthy hearings, because I was still in elementary school when the McCarthy hearings were happening. I must have been in sixth grade. And, so I was going home for lunch, and my mother had a card table set up in the den where the television was. So, I would go home for lunch and we would sit there watching the McCarthy hearings while I was having lunch. And I have a very strong memory of that and how scared everybody was, because my family was Jewish, and my parents felt… and then, of course, there was the [Julius and Ethel] Rosenberg trial. My mother's maiden name was Rosenberg. So, there was a real sense that, *Keep your head down. Don't make trouble, because you never know what's going to happen.* You know, kind of, *It could happen here*. So, I think the McCarthy moment, that McCarthy moment also kind of is part of what went into my political kind of unconscious, we could say. And my friend, Linda, the one who was wearing the Stevenson button. I think her parents were much more left than mine were. Her father worked at the post office. I suspect he was probably a Socialist or had been. And they were very nervous. I know that her family was very nervous during the McCarthy period, as well.

KESLER: Wow. Now, jumping kind of back forward to where we left off, can I ask, what did your parents think about your somewhat newfound political activism?

SILVER: [laughter] Well, they were not happy. One of my favorite stories is that I happened to be visiting my parents when Watergate broke, and we were watching the news, my father and I were sitting there watching the news, and I said to my father, "I bet that there are people who are going to think Nixon had nothing to do with this." And my father said, "Of course Nixon had nothing to do with this." And many years later… [laughter] And he really stuck by Nixon throughout all of the political stuff. What turned him off was when it became public that Nixon had cheated on his taxes, because my

father was trained as an accountant, and for him, that was over the top. So, very interesting. So, they were not happy.

We had a huge fight at dinner. I don't think it was that time. Another time I was there I had a huge fight with him over dinner. It was at the time when the Columbia [University] graduate students were occupying the buildings there, so that was a little bit earlier. No, it was about the same time, '67, '68, yeah. And he kept talking about the sanctity of property and the sanctity of private property and whatever. And the next morning—well, the next day I went to pack, and I couldn't find my favorite pair of sandals which I had bought in London the year that I left. And they were very grubby, but I loved them. And I said to my mother, "What happened to my sandals?" And she said, "I threw them away. They were so awful." And I said to her, I was literally—I was standing at the top of the stairs; my mother was at the bottom, and I screamed down the stairs, "So much for the sanctity of private property." [laughter] So, let's just say we were not politically—my mother simply tended to stay out of politics, but my father and I were not on the same side. But, actually, none of his children turned out to be Republicans. We all became…

KESLER: Did your sisters become involved in political activism, as well?

SILVER: Not really. Yeah, I think for my older sister, she said she was born just a little bit too early, because the four years difference in terms of what was available to me as opposed to what was available for her was really great. My younger sister, because she got married so early—they both got married and had kids very early, so… So, then we had different trajectories.

KESLER: Jumping forward a little bit, so when did you finally finish your Ph.D. at Harvard?

SILVER: I turned it in—well, I finished it in the summer of '72, and I got my degree in '73. But by that time, I was already here at Dartmouth.

KESLER: Yeah, so talk to me about that first year at Dartmouth, because '72 was the first year that women were admitted to the college. So, tell me about what that was like to kind of come in in the midst of all of this.

SILVER: Want to see the scars on my back? [laughter] It was really hard. Well, you know, as I say, I had been involved in a lot of women's things at Harvard. I had joined a consciousness raising group. We had organized, as I say, this graduate women's organization, and we did a lot of things, like we did a survey of the women graduate students, and we did a lot of politicking to make sure that when professors came to interview students for jobs, women were included as well as men. And that's actually the irony of that's how I got my job at Dartmouth, because Henry Terry, who was then at the English Department, came to Harvard, and he asked to see a group of people. But, he was interested in hiring a woman, because there were no women in the English Department and they knew they were going coed the next year. So, I was actually hired on the old boy network.

KESLER: Wow.

SILVER: So, it was a very interesting story. And so, the thing… Oh, what else have I done? I have campaigned for Shirley Chisholm in the summer of 1972, before I moved up to Hanover the spring [stet] of 1972, and I had, as I say, I had integrated Adams House, I had been the first woman there. So, when they offered me the job at Dartmouth, I thought, *Well, I'll just come for a couple of years. I have a mission. I've done this. How bad can it be?* But, as I always say to people, nothing could have prepared me for Dartmouth.

KESLER: Really?

SILVER: Even my experiences at Harvard could not have prepared me for Dartmouth.

KESLER: Talk to me about like those first couple of weeks, maybe like the first class that you ever taught?

SILVER: Well, I actually moved up in July, so I was here for the summer. And I think that what really was the amazing thing about the history of women at Dartmouth was that by the time I got here, which was '72, there was already a very strong women's caucus on campus that was made up of faculty, administrators, and staff. I don't know if—do you know any of this history? And they had actually come together when they first started talking about going coed, because the original plan was to build a coordinated college

for women in Norwich. So, they wanted to recreate Harvard, Radcliffe, Brown, Pembroke, at the time that all of those schools were in the process of integrating. So, this group of very savvy women got together in order to make the argument that they should not do that, they should just make Dartmouth coed.

So, I walked in, all of us, because there were 12 women hired that year. There were nine junior women, three senior women. And so, we already walked in to a place where there were a very savvy, very smart group of women organizing for women. And I think that made a huge difference. It made a huge difference for me and all of the other women faculty coming in. And, you know, they were very good. And it was actually through the women's caucus that I met Rona Mirsky, and Rona Mirsky was married to Jonathan Mirsky, who was in the History Department. You've probably heard this name before. And, so they were really the people who got me involved with the anti-war movement here.

So, again, there was always the intersection between the kind of, you know, the feminist and the anti-war protests going on here. And in fact, when we were arrested, when I was being booked, the officer who was in the picture with me as my arresting officer, made some very sexist remark. And I complained about it, and it went all the way to the Chief of Police. And, you know, he just said, "Let's drop it." He didn't want it to really to be a fuss, and so nothing was ever done about it. But, for years after that, I didn't go into Lebanon [NH]. I just never went into Lebanon, because I was scared about being stopped by the police.

KESLER: Talk to me about that specific protest. So, you moved in the summer of 1972, and then…

SILVER: Yeah, this was in the fall, that fall, okay?

KESLER: Okay, that's what I thought.

SILVER: As I say, it was… Rona and Jonathan were not arrested. They were one of the organizers. But, Marlene Fried, who was actually, she had just been hired, she came the same year I did in the Philosophy Department. So, Marlene and her husband, Bill, and me and Leo, and I can't remember, you know, I don't remember who the other people were. There must have been about eight of us maybe, maybe less.

And, but as I say, the protests had been going on for years and essentially, they involved sitting down in front of the buses that were taking the recruits off to boot camp. So, it was obstruction of justice. And it went to trial and people made very—had written quite passionate speeches about why they were doing it and about the war. There was one woman in our group who actually chose to go to jail rather than to pay the fine. She wasn't an academic. So, and it was very… I felt good doing it.

KESLER: And was there a strong community presence?

SILVER: It was a very strong community presence. And, you know, that's the thing really about Dartmouth is that there was. As I say, there was this women's caucus that was terrific, but there was also the anti-war people who were also terrific. And in the early days, one knew everybody. Yeah, I knew every woman on campus, I think. So, it was a very different time. It was hard, because, as I'm sure you know the history, because of Carroll [W.] Brewster, who was dean of students at the time, and his support for the male students, his attitude that "boys will be boys." I was on the sort of the judiciary committee and there was the case of two young men who had trashed these women's room, and they were—ordinarily they would have been suspended for two years, but he argued that they were—I think they were skiers—that if they—or sailors or something—that if they suspended them, they probably wouldn't come back to Dartmouth and we couldn't afford to do that because we needed them on the team. And it was attitudes like that, you know. And I really, I mean, there's a part of me that thinks if we had had a different dean of students in those early years, the whole process of coeducation would have been entirely different.

KESLER: Yeah, yeah. Talk to me a bit about classes. What was it like coming in and beginning teaching?

SILVER: Well, I mean, I got to know the women students very quickly, and in fact, one of my first students was Louise Erdrich. [laughter]

KESLER: I just read one of her books over break. I got it for Christmas.

SILVER: And she was Karen Erdrich then. Louise is her middle name. And there were a group of these amazing women who were English majors in the English Department and, you know, I

used to see them in the ladies room in Sanborn House. So, that was, I mean, all of that was terrific, as I say. Classes, you could tell, you could always tell when, particularly in freshman writing, because in freshman English, the students didn't have a choice of who they had as a professor, and you could always tell when the men walked in and they thought, "A woman," you know, there was this kind of antagonism. Not often, but occasionally you would get it.

KESLER: And how did you deal with those kinds of attitudes?

SILVER: Well, you tried to ignore it as much as possible and don't take it on. I did something once—I don't know whether you'll probably have to extract it—but there was this man who had gone to, he had gone to a Benedictine all male high school, and he clearly thought that having a woman professor was just beneath him. And he was writing in those days, as you may or not know—everybody had to read *Paradise Lost* in freshman English—and he was writing a paper about Eve and Pandora. So he came for a conference, and he was talking about Eve and Pandora and women being the source of all evil and this whole myth and all the rest of it. And then he said, "You know, that's why I'm so glad my father sent me to this all male school," he said, "because you know what they say in the dorm? An erect penis has no conscience." And I looked him in the eye and I said, "Have you ever thought of masturbation?" And he was out the door. [laughter] And that's the only time I ever did anything like that. But I had just had it with this kid.

KESLER: Yeah, wow, wow.

SILVER: Aren't you glad you weren't here then? [laughter]

KESLER: I hear some of the stories, especially—and it just really—I heard a couple of professors talk about how men would turn their desks around in classes where female professors were teaching and things like that where, you think about it now and it just—nobody in their right mind would do anything like that.

SILVER: Would do anything like that.

KESLER: Yeah.

SILVER: And then there were like, of course, I was active in starting women's studies, and then when I was teaching one of the first women's studies courses, I had this young man, and it was in the beginning of the term and it was really hot. You know how sometimes in September you get like this Indian summer? So I was wearing something very sheer, and in those days I didn't always wear a bra when I was teaching. And I got—in the journal he wrote down, "I was having a hard concentrating because I was so busy watching you." And, so that's when I decided really, you know, kind of I needed to wear a bra when I was teaching, because I never literally burned my bras, I just stopped wearing them. [laughter] So it was an interesting period.

KESLER: Yeah, I believe it, I believe it. What were interactions with female students like?

SILVER: Oh, that was usually great. They were really terrific. There was sort of none of that. When I was TA'ing a class in graduate school, I had this one woman student, named Esther Dyson, who is now quite famous. She's an economist. She writes about digital things. And she came up to me. She has a very famous father who was a physicist. And she came up to me at the end of the term and she said, "You know, when I was first assigned to you and I thought, *Oh, God, a woman. I don't really want a woman TA* [teaching assistant]," she said. "But really," she said, "it was a great experience and I thank you for everything." So, I mean, I think there were also women who kind of felt that at the time, you know, because they weren't used to having women professors.

It was very hard for the junior women, a lot of the junior women in the English Department, because the way the classes were organized at the time, the junior faculty and senior faculty taught the introductory courses. So, I was quite lucky, because the senior professor who I was teaching with—this was in the modern British novel course, 20th Century British novel course—was Peter [A.] Bien. And Peter Bien, he was actually a Quaker, and he was one of the people who actually supported me in my anti-war work. And, so he was very good to me. But there were some of the senior male professors whose style, as you know, was very *bang on the table* and oratorical, and the junior women just could not compete. So, this wonderful woman named Marilyn Jacobs, that was her name—I'm going to have to go

back and check that name—but anyway, she set up a speech class for women--she was in the Speech Department; she taught all the speech classes—for women faculty, junior women. And then, I took it a couple of years later when she began admitting men to it, as well. Because as I say, I never really had to compete with a male professor. But it was very, very hard for the women faculty, as well, because the standards were all geared towards that male style of lecturing, and a lot of women just didn't do that.

KESLER: Talk to me some more about your interactions with different faculty, both female and male.

SILVER: Well, [laughter] it was always very, it was very complicated. I mean, obviously I knew the English Department best. There were always issues. I've always said I wanted to write something about this, because one of the big issues, not just in the English Department alone, the campus in general, was women's rooms, women's toilets. Every woman I know who went to work at what had been a previously all male institution had bathroom stories, because the men were very loathe to give their bathrooms up.

So, among all the unpopular things that I did my first year here, like saying I wanted to teach a course on women of literature, my anti-war protests, kind of all of the various things that I did, the one that really got the biggest reaction was when I suggested that we turn the downstairs bathroom in Sanborn, which is actually—it was still a men's room—which was the men's room at the bottom of the steps, into a coed bathroom, because you could actually lock the door. Even though it had two stools, you could lock the door. The men in the department went crazy, absolutely crazy. Because at that time there was only one ladies room in Sanborn House, and it was on the second floor, and most of the women faculty, like Carol and I, were in the basement, which meant that every time I wanted to use the toilet, I had to climb three flights of stairs. Yeah. So, and then in the Philosophy/ Religion Department, they had the bathroom at the end, and one of the male faculty actually suggested putting a red light out of there, and when a woman was in there, she could just turn the red light on so men would know not to come in.

KESLER: Wow.

SILVER: I mean, things you never think about, that it wasn't until many, many years later that someone suggested turning the downstairs bathroom in Sanborn into a women's room, and everybody went crazy that they built this small—the outcome was that they built a small little women's room.

KESLER: Right by the kitchen, right?

SILVER: Right by the kitchen. So, that happened. And then there was this whole series of what became known as the, what my colleague, Bill, called "the crapper wars." But I have letters and images. I can document this whole thing. So, I mean, it sort of just encapsulated that sense that somehow we were infringing, we were infringing on something that was theirs.

KESLER: Yeah, and it seems very reminiscent, too, of more recently bathrooms for transgender folks, kind of like a similar argument there.

SILVER: Yes.

KESLER: That's so interesting. Wow. And so, the female faculty, then, on the other end, you said you knew a lot of them because they just tended to be…

SILVER: Yeah, and what happened is, is that we very quickly realized that there women in departments all of whom were in one or another had begun doing feminist scholarship. So, I taught my first class on women of literature my second year here. Marlene was teaching a course in philosophy on women in philosophy. There was a woman in history. So there were women scattered around. And we organized that spring, that would have been the spring of '74, we actually had our first conference, or women's speaker series, where we invited eminent feminist scholars up. And then, my fourth year here I was away. My fifth year, we started what was known as the feminist inquiry seminar, which still goes on today.

KESLER: So that would have been '77?

SILVER: That would have been… let's see, I came back '76. Yeah, so it would have been '76, '76-'77, that year we started the feminist inquiry seminar. And that was really a place where women could come and present the materials that they were working on and get feedback, because feminist scholarship was really in its beginnings, you know, so it was a way to get

feedback on your work from other people. So that was terrific. And that was the year that we also started putting together the women's studies program.

KESLER: Okay, I see. And talk to me a bit, during all of this time were you still involved in on-campus activism? Were there still things going on, on campus?

SILVER: Well, there was the *Dartmouth Review*. And, of course, I was one of their "10 worst professors," because—it was a badge of honor. Not only that, but Rush Limbaugh once referred to me on air as a "feminazi."

KESLER: Really! That goes on your resume, I think. [laughter]

SILVER: That's what I keep saying, it's going on my resume. [laughter]

KESLER: "Special skills" or something like that. There's a section for it. Wow. In what context? I'm curious.

SILVER: Well, it grew out of a conference where I gave a paper. It was a conference in honor of Carolyn Howkin, this amazing woman who was retiring. And I was on a panel that was about anger. And he had gotten the information, and so he was talking about "and all of these feminazis," and he named my name. And I heard about it because, well, I heard about it for two things. One of my younger sister's friends heard it and called and said, "Carol, did you know that Brenda…" [laughter] And one of my friends was driving along and heard it and he said he almost went off the road. [laughter] So, two people called to tell me, "Brenda, did you know…" And I actually tried to track it down to see if I could get a tape of it, and I couldn't. But I know where he got—because he told a story actually about me, which was that I once got so angry, I almost burnt the apartment down, you know, kind of. And it was an anecdote that I had told in the introduction to the talk that I gave on this panel that I was at about anger. So, anyway, so that was the context for that. But that was many years ago.

But Jeffrey Hart, of course, was the man who started the *Dartmouth Review*, was in the English Department. And I don't know if you knew this, but the early *Dartmouth Review* used to be printed out on the mimeograph machine in the English Department. And Jeffrey gave keys to the

department to his son and to Dinesh D'Souza and to all of those early people who were putting that back. And it meant that they had to change every lock in Sanborn House, because the same key that opened the front door opened all of the individual offices at the time. So, the *Dartmouth Review* started in the English Department. And because I was a feminist, I was an anti-war activist, I was everything that Jeffrey Hart, you know, thought was evil in this world, I was always one of the "10 worst professors" on their list.

KESLER: And what year were they founded?

SILVER: I can't even remember.

KESLER: I think, if I remember correctly, it was '78 to '80, somewhere in there.

SILVER: Yeah, it was fairly early. And then, of course, there was the anti-Apartheid actions and the shanties.

KESLER: Yes. So that was '85 to '86, is that correct?

SILVER: Yeah, I've lost track of the time. You probably have a better sense of that than I do. So I was involved in all of those activities, as well.

KESLER: And I know that especially those protests, as well, once you get into the late '70s, early '80s, that race relations, especially on campus, were something that were particularly tense. Can you talk to me a bit about that from your perspective?

SILVER: [pause] I think where I sort of experienced it most was through Bill [William S.] Cole. And Bill Cole was the person who the *Dartmouth Review* really went after the most. He was African-American, he was in the Music Department, he had wild hair, he was very wild, you know, he was a composer. And they kept going after him and after him and after him. They would say, you know, "His courses are worthless. He doesn't teach anything. It's all…" you know, whatever. And eventually they drove him out. He left. They did not—and even the president did not support him. The administration did not support him. So, that was, I think, the place where I experienced it, because all of us, I mean, they could put me in their top 10 list and so what? You know, it was hurtful, but I could survive. But they really drove him out.

There were major problems in the History Department with black women not getting tenured. Because by that time there was a women's caucus that was composed of just women faculty, because when the first women began coming up for tenure in the end of the '70s, the '80s, and they were all being turned down. So, at that point the women sort of—the women's caucus was still functioning, but at that point the women faculty started their own organization, called "the concerned women faculty," that was very much devoted to the issues confronting women as they were going through the tenure process.

KESLER: And were students equally concerned about that, that lack of women getting tenure, or with female faculty getting tenure? Were students concerned about that, as well?

SILVER: Yes, they were. I mean, I think they were, those who were involved, because the early women students were very tough.

KESLER: Yeah, you have to be.

SILVER: They had to be. [laughter] …Last year I went to Washington for the march. And I took the train down from New York to Washington, and I sat down next to this woman, we started talking and I asked her where she was from and she said outside New York, and she asked me where I was from and I said New Hampshire. And she said, "Oh," she said, "what part?" She said, "I went to college in New Hampshire." She said, "I went to Dartmouth." And it turned out, she was one of the early women. Her name was Paula Sharp (Class of '79), and I think she started in 1975. So she wasn't in the first few classes, but she was very early. And she was talking about all of the negative experiences that she had had and still remembers, and why she became a Comp Lit major rather than becoming an English major, and things like that. It was just extraordinary. She knew who I was, and we had a lot of women student friends in common, but she had never taken a course from me. So I hadn't come across her. So, that was really quite an amazing experience.

KESLER: And just a funny coincidence, too, that that would just happen, especially on the way to something like that. That's so funny. Yeah, just a funny coincidence.

SILVER: And then, I became close, I got quite close to Louise Erdrich because she was in the English Department foreign study program with me in London for two terms, and she did her freshman seminar with me. But then, I really got to know her on the program. And so, we were always in touch. You know, I was always in touch with her. And then she moved back, of course, when she was married to Michael Dorris.

KESLER: And something else that I was curious about. Professor [Leo] Spitzer specifically talked about this split within the History Department between older history faculty and then the younger ones who were a little bit more involved in activism. Was that something that was similar to the English Department?

SILVER: The English Department was complicated, because the year that Carol and I were hired, they also hired a senior woman named Blanche Gelfant. Very smart woman, but also a very unhappy woman. And she could have been a major support for the women there, but she wasn't. So, interestingly enough, in the English Department there were a few men who for one reason or another were actually—there weren't very many, but there were some men who were at least somewhat sympathetic. And what you could do is go and ask them for help or ask them for advice, and they would be so happy to be asked. So in a way it kind of pushed them into supporting you, but, as I say, they thought, I mean, my history there wasn't easy, because when I first came up for—when I came up for reappointment, one of the things they said in the reappointment letter was "too feminist." And when I came up for tenure the first time, they said, "not feminist enough." Now, I had all this on paper. So, it was not easy. Let's just say it was not easy.

So, yes, I mean, there was one particular man in the English Department who was really very bitter about the women coming in, and every woman on the faculty in the English Department knew how nasty he was, the kind of comments he would make. You know, he was the person who said to me my first term here, he said to me, "How does it feel knowing you were hired just because you were a woman?" So, okay? And, he used to teach the contemporary American fiction course, and the only book that he taught by a woman was *Waiting for Mr. Goodbar*, [*Looking for Mr. Goodbar*] in which, of course, the woman gets murdered. And when he was teaching like the Vietnam walk, you know,

the things they carried, and he would say, “Well, you know men. You know, it’s like what you feel when you’ve had your first sex with a woman,” you know, completely ignoring the women in the class. So, there certainly was a lot of that.

And then, on the other hand, there were male professors, not so much in the English Department—there were one or two in the English Department, I shouldn’t say that—but in other departments who were extremely good and helpful to women. Yeah. So, and then, of course, one of the other things that the Concerned Women Faculty did is they set up the Women’s Mentoring Network. Did you know about this?

KESLER: No.

SILVER: And what they did is for every incoming woman, junior faculty woman, was offered the opportunity to have mentors who were in your division, but not in your department. And that meant that you had somebody that you could go and talk to about the issues you were having, because in a lot of the departments there still were no women faculty, or there were only junior women faculty, there weren’t senior women faculty. So, I mentored quite a few people over the years.

KESLER: What was that mentorship role like?

SILVER: It was, well, it was terrific. You were there for the person to talk to, but you could also help them when it came time to writing their reappointment letter, to writing their tenure letter, to offer the kind of practical advice about their career, as well as, you know, if they were having an issue with their department, they had somebody they could talk to who was outside of their department. So, it worked very well.

KESLER: Yeah. Jumping forward to the ‘80s a bit more. Let’s talk about the anti-Apartheid protest, if you played any role in that, what that was like for you?

SILVER: I was involved in it. I wasn’t actually in the shanties. But I was certainly part of the protests afterwards. Yeah, I don’t really have much to say about that. I’m sure you got a lot of that from other sort of people. As I say, that was when I stopped contributing to the ACLU, because the ACLU supported the *Dartmouth Review*, and in doing one of the lawsuits that were going on. So…

KESLER: And the *Review* was never punished for that, is that correct?

SILVER: No, they really weren't. Well, what happened is, of course, then the students took over the [Baker] Bell Tower.

KESLER: Tell me a little bit more about that.

SILVER: Okay. That happened. We had a big speaker then. Stephen Greenblatt was here. So, I was certainly among the students who were at the bottom of the Bell Tower, you know, surrounding it and supporting them and stuff like that. So, and it was really those students, the radical students, who took over the Bell Tower who were the ones who were punished. And that's what the trial was about. So, I mean, it was very complicated, because it was both the *Review* knocking down the shanties, and destroying the sukkah. I don't know if you've ever heard that. But, it's during the time of this Jewish holiday where they build this—it's food, you know, it's essentially a kind of a cornucopia of food and it's linked to this particular holiday. And it was over by Collis [Student Center] somewhere, and the *Dartmouth Review* tore it down one night. They just destroyed it.

KESLER: Did they ever say why?

SILVER: No, they just did. They just did. And they were never punished for that either. So, there was a lot… There was a feeling at the time that [David T.] McLaughlin, who was then president, McLaughlin, really basically supported the *Dartmouth Review*. He was certainly in favor of keeping the Indian symbol, bringing the Indian symbol back.

KESLER: I was curious about that, as well.

SILVER: Yeah. Which was something else that was always an issue. Now what do you do with students who come into class wearing the *Dartmouth Review* T-shirt with the Indian on it? So that was always an issue.

KESLER: Yeah, and especially when, because the college—[Dartmouth President John G.] Kemeny had rededicated the college in 1972, right? Was there, did you see a large influx of Native American students? Louise Erdrich for one.

SILVER: Oh, yeah, because Michael Dorris—I knew Michael Dorris. He came the same year I did. So, he was one of the people

that I was very friendly with. We were involved in a lot of things together. So, yes, so there was a major interconnection there between the Native Americans and… I also taught [N.] Bruce Duthu was also my student.

KESLER: I took one of his classes this summer and really, really loved it.

SILVER: Yeah. No, I mean, I love Bruce. So he was one of my students, as well, back then. So, yes.

KESLER: I see. I see. Talk to me about your tenure process and what that was like for you?

SILVER: Well, I think I told you, when I came up for reappointment, I was reappointed, but they did say I was too feminist. And when I came up for tenure, there were three of us. None of us had a book. I was the only one of the three of us who had a manuscript that had been accepted. I had an acceptance from Princeton University Press that they were going to print my book when it was done. The two men were granted extensions. I wasn't. And it was so outrageous. And there was a lot of organizing that went on. People wrote letters. And the CAP [Committee Advisory to the President] reversed the decision. And they essentially said, "You cannot give these two men—you cannot promote these two men and not promote her." And I think at that time they were also scared of a lawsuit, because the year before Joan Smith in the Sociology Department had been denied tenure, and she had brought a suit. So, there was already one outstanding suit against the college for lack of tenure. So, what happened is all three of us were promoted without tenure.

Carol, the other junior woman, did not get tenure. And of the nine junior women who came in, in 1972, who came in with me, only two of us made it through the tenure process. Yeah, Lynn Mather in the Government Department and me. Some women just chose to leave. Marlene Fried, for example, left. [Carolyn] Rusty Eisenberg in the History Department—well, she had been here earlier—she left before she came up for tenure. So a lot of women just decided to leave. But as I say, Lynn Mather and I are the only two from that first class that actually made it through the process. So it was not easy.

KESLER: Yeah, yeah, it sounds like it. Getting back to something that you had mentioned earlier was sororities on campus, and being really not in favor of them. Tell me a little bit more about that, and the other faculty on campus, as well, that might have agreed or disagreed with you.

SILVER: Well, you know, the women's students, as I'm sure you know, their point was that they wanted some place safe, they wanted some place where they could get together with just other women. Now, all of us, or all of the women faculty who had been in sororities and who were familiar with what that was like, thought that was not a good idea, because we didn't want to see them turn into the fraternities, essentially. There was many—but they went ahead and did it. And in the first few years, as you probably know, it was fine. And it was really only when the college said, "You affiliate with national chapters or you can't have a house on campus," that the sororities actually affiliated. And once they affiliated, then they were subject to all the regulations and all of the other kinds of aspects of sorority life.

Now, over the years I've had a lot of women students who were in sororities, and they were great, and they were doing terrific things, and they did wonderful programs, and they were everything. But, in general, given the whole fraternity-sorority system at Dartmouth, you know, we did not think it was a good idea to have sororities, as well. The ideal thing—of course, other places did this—would have been that they should have integrated all the fraternities at the time they went coed. And if they had done that… I think Amherst [College, Amherst, MA] did that, I think Bowdoin [College, Brunswick, ME] did that. And that made a huge difference. That would have made a huge difference, if from the very beginning they said, "We are going to integrate all of the social clubs." But instead, what happened is it became the more traditional system. And as I say, you know, we all understood exactly why there was the desire to do it. Yeah, it's just, we just felt it was unfortunate it had to take that form.

KESLER: Yeah, the desire for an all female space doesn't necessarily need to be an all female Greek space.

SILVER: Yes. And as I say, in the beginning they were, you know, I think the sororities never really became an issue until they were forced to affiliate.

KESLER: Which I didn't know that had happened. I only knew the—because we have the local chapters now, which are just different, and so I didn't know that they were forced by the college at some point to affiliate.

SILVER: Yeah, a lot of them were told that if they didn't, that they would lose their house if they didn't affiliate with the national. So, I don't know what the situation is now. I've kind of lost touch with it. [laughter]

KESLER: Yeah, one of those things that as soon as you step outside the Hanover bubble, it kind of ceases to be important at all. Talk to me a bit more about culture on campus and how that changed over your time here. It's somewhat of a broad question, but anywhere that you want to take it.

SILVER: Well, you know, I've seen ups and downs, okay? Because around the time of the anti-Apartheid movement, there was not only—I mean, there were a lot of very, very active students, and there were a lot of very angry women students. There was a very strong kind of women's group at that time, you know, women's group of women students. And the women's studies program was running. And they had these T-shirts with these letters on it that was—it actually came from Virginia Woolf—it was something about "Burn this house down" or something like that that they were wearing. They used to walk around with these t-shirts with these initials and they were very involved in all the marches and all the anti- stuff. So, there was a lot going on. And I think…

The other thing I do want to say is that in terms of support from male faculty, where there really was a lot of support was when we started the women's studies program.

KESLER: And what year was that?

SILVER: Well, we started planning it, I think, '76, '77. I can't actually remember when it went in. It was about two years in the planning. And the person who absolutely completely supported it was Kemeny. And at the very, very end, when it was a question of everything had been approved and it was a question of where the funding was going to come from, Kemeny actually said that he would fund the program for the first two years out of his venture money. So, and that's why, so he funded the program for the first two years. He also

said that he would come and do a lecture on women in mathematics as part of the introductory course. But then Three Mile Island happened, the nuclear catastrophe, and he was on the committee that looked into that, the national committee, so he was away that year. So one of the other men in the Math Department came and did the lecture. But he did come and do the lecture the second year. So Kemeny was always a great supporter. And he had a daughter who became a mathematician, so he was very tuned in to what it was like for women in science and women in mathematics.

So, but we had a lot of support from the men. And very early on we did a conference about integrating women's courses into the regular curriculum, and a lot of men participated in that. Michael Dorris gave a talk in that. So I think that was one place, interestingly enough, where there was a lot of support. And Dartmouth was interesting, because we actually had a women's studies program before we had a women's center. You know, [laughter] we went the academic route first.

KESLER: Yeah, that's so interesting. And into the '80s and the '90s and getting a little bit more to present day, did you see—like what kind of changes did you see on the college that stood out to you?

SILVER: Okay. First of all you have to go back. As you know, for the first few years the ratio of women was 4 to 1, or 3 to 1. It was very, very bad. So, I think the first major change was really the student led initiative to get rid of the quota. And we really, you have to give the students credit for that. And once that changed, I think the whole atmosphere began to change a little bit. Women started the sororities, so they felt they had more of a sense of empowerment. So, I think women began to feel kind of more integrated into Dartmouth. There was one period under McLaughlin, again, where the proportion of women to men went way down. And it was very interesting because there was one period where there were more women being admitted proportionately into MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA], a higher percentage at MIT than there was at Dartmouth. So when [James O.] Jim Freedman became president, one of his calls was to move Dartmouth towards 50-50, which he did.

KESLER: I see.

SILVER: Yeah, so that was one of the things that changed. And women became part of the campus. By the time that it moved, it began to move towards 50%, then Carroll Brewster left, we got a new dean, we got a new dean of admissions, who came from Wesleyan [University, Middletown, CT]. So, the people coming in were different. We were getting a different mix of students, and I think that made a difference. Yeah.

KESLER: I see, so just kind of like a growing diversity within the student population.

SILVER: There was a growing diversity. We had… issues certainly with black faculty in the English Department. We had two who came and never even came up for tenure because they got jobs elsewhere and left, as did other of our minority faculty, particularly if they were gay. So, that was still an issue. I think it still is an issue.

KESLER: Yeah. I would venture so far as to agree with you, especially considering Professor Duthu and the deanship last year I think is a really good example of that.

SILVER: Yeah. So, I think that Dartmouth has not resolved these issues and…

KESLER: Some things that are kind of like echoing through today.

SILVER: I want to tell you one story, which I probably shouldn't. But, as I say, McLaughlin, I think his sympathies were mixed, I think. We'll just say that they were mixed. But there was one day—I had never met his wife, who was then Judy McLaughlin, but she clearly knew who I was. And there was, I don't even remember what year it was, it was one year of his presidency, but there was an English Department party that was given by the chair of the department in the fall. And he invited the McLaughlins and they were there. And I guess I had met Judy in the past, and I was talking to her, and I said, "Judy," I said, "you haven't met my husband, have you?" And she said, "You're married?" And I said, "Yes, a lot of us feminists are." And it was so staggering that this was the wife of the president of Dartmouth College, who seemed literally to think that feminists were all unmarried.

KESLER: Wow, and just kind of goes to show what some of the attitudes on the other end were, especially from a fellow woman you would think… Wow.

SILVER: From a fellow woman… so, that was one of my more staggering moments.

KESLER: Yeah, yeah. And taking that opportunity, real quickly, we need you to take a step back. Where did you and your husband meet?

SILVER: Where did we meet? At the Club Med in Martinique. I was on vacation. It was my first year here at Dartmouth. I was on spring break with a friend of mine who taught at another institution, and he was teaching sailing. It was a Harlequin romance. [laughter]

KESLER: [laughter] And where was he living at that time?

SILVER: What?

KESLER: Where was he living at that time?

SILVER: He was living on his boat. He was looking for someone to sail across the Pacific with him.

KESLER: Really?

SILVER: Uh-huh. And I said, “I like you a lot, but it’s not going to be me.” And then, I went down and sailed with him, I spent some time on his boat with him that summer. And he headed off towards the Pacific and decided maybe he really wanted to be with me more than he wanted to go to the Pacific. So, he moved up to Hanover and went back to what he had been doing before he started sailing around the world, and that’s computer software.

KESLER: Okay, so did he end up working for Dartmouth then or did he work around the area?

SILVER: The first year… He was always a consultant. He never liked to make it a job. His first year here he was actually working for Thayer [School of Engineering at Dartmouth], and he was involved with creating, with writing the computer programs that allowed students to compose at the keyboard on the computer with all of the software that later became part of

the Synclavier. So he was working with Jon Appleton and with the people at the Thayer school who were developing all of this, this musical technology for the computer. So, that's what he did. He did some work with Peter Bean in the Writing Center and Barry Shearer doing programs for teaching languages and teaching grammar and things like that. But then he went back, got involved with a local company who did software for printing companies, because his first work out of college had been on computer typesetting. He was involved with the early days of computer typesetting.

KESLER: Okay, I see. And what were his attitudes surrounding activities going on, on campus surrounding your activism on campus?

SILVER: Oh, he was always very supportive. He was just always very, very supportive, yeah.

KESLER: Very nice.

SILVER: There was never an issue about that. And certainly he would never say to me, "You can't do that." [laughter]

KESLER: I see. Now, moving forward a little bit more in time, talk to me about your more recent scholarship at Dartmouth. You left the college in 2011, is that correct?

SILVER: Yeah. Well, I started the FRO in, I guess 2008, and then I retired completely.

KESLER: What's the FRO?

SILVER: Oh, it's what it's called, Flexible Retirement Option. It's that three year, where you phase out. But, I had already started teaching at Trinity College Dublin before then, because the English Department has as foreign study program at Trinity. My husband was actually born in Dublin, and so his whole family was in Ireland. And I took the program in 2001, and I went back again—it runs every other year—I went back again in 2003. And at that time, two of the young men in the department were starting an M. Phil. program in popular literature. And I said to them kiddingly, I said, "If you want, I'll come and teach a course on cyberculture for you," because I had been doing that here in Dartmouth. And they came back a week later and said, "We won." And I said, "Okay."

[laughter] So, every single fall since 2004 I've been teaching at Trinity College Dublin. And this is my last year. I told them this year that I was retiring. So I've been doing that, and that's been great, so it's like having a whole second life, you know, second home, second family.

KESLER: And what are the students like over there compared to here?

SILVER: It's a different system. So you're teaching students who are all English majors. They sort of concentrate in one or two things. They tend to be quieter than American students. I get a lot—I've also taught a lot of American students because it's a very popular place for a foreign study program, so I've always had visiting students in my classes.

They're not as talkative in class. It's a very different system. Very bright, and because they're all English majors, they're all very into studying English literature. So, it's different. It's a different system. It's not the same. It's not organized in the same way as the Dartmouth system, where from the very beginning you're in small classes and you're interacting with your professors. It's just a different system.

KESLER: Now, looking a little bit more at present day, let's talk about some activism today, especially because, with the political climate going on right now. Can you tell me just, have you continued to be involved in activism? You mentioned the women's march a little bit earlier.

SILVER: Well, the day after Trump was elected, I was in Dublin, and my husband was there. We were in Dublin. And I said to him, I said, "Everything that I have fought for for the last 50 years is going to disappear." And then I did the calculation and realized it was 51-and-a-half years, because as I say, the first march that I went on was 1965. And it was quite horrifying. It was absolutely horrifying. So, I decided—originally I thought that I would probably just go down to Boston for the march. But then, one of my friends who had actually started her career here at Dartmouth, and then moved to Santa Barbara in California, she and her partner were coming in for the march on Washington and they had a place to stay in Washington. They had a house that we could all stay at. So, that's when I decided to go down to Washington for the march, which I'm so glad I did.

KESLER: Yeah, tell me some more about what that was like for you. You mentioned the train ride over there and then once you were there?

SILVER: Well, I started out, what I did is I drove—my older sister now lives in Connecticut, so I drove down to her house, and I took the train from Stamford [CT] to New York, and when I got to the Stamford station, there were all of these women who were clearly going on the march, and some had hats and some had signs. So, it was just great and everybody was so cheerful and everybody was so excited.

KESLER: And you had common bonds.

SILVER: Yeah. And then I actually changed trains. I got off, and while I was waiting in New York, the waiting room was just all women. And you just, everybody was talking to each other and I met such interesting people. And then I saw this couple who I've known forever, Catharine [R.] Stimpson and Liz. And Catharine Stimpson was one of the really wonderful early leaders in feminist criticism, in the English Department, in lesbian studies, gay studies, you know, queer studies. And they live in New York and I haven't seen her in a couple of years. And I was waiting, I was in the waiting room in Penn Station, and there she was. There was Catharine and Liz. So, and then, of course, I met Paula Sharp on the train coming down.

So, even by the time I got to Washington, everything was already such a high. And the march, it was really extraordinary. And from the moment we got off the subway to the place where it was, and I looked around at all of these different people, all the different ethnicities, all the different races, all the different… the men, the women, the children, the grandparents, the people in their wheelchairs, you know, kids sitting on their things, and everybody marching and everybody happy, and everybody kind of feeling that they have this purpose, this mission. I took one look at it and I cried. I just did. And it was the same response that I had when Obama won in 2008. It was that same sense of "oh, my God."

And I think that what's been hard—I want to backtrack now—I think what's been hardest for me, and probably a lot of the other women of my generation, is that during the 1960s when I was involved in all of these kinds of things, we

really thought we were changing the world. And to a great extent, we did. I mean, we did for women, we did to some extent for blacks, less so successfully. And then, and as I say, I was involved in a consciousness raising group, and we were very aware that the problem wasn't us, the problem was systemic. That was one of the major things that came out of the consciousness raising groups. So, the personal was political. And over the years of teaching at Dartmouth, that began to get lost.

And my greatest sense of failure, and I think the movement's greatest sense of failure, was the movement away from women feeling that they needed to work together in order to make changes, and that everything was their responsibility. *How am I going to manage family and work, career,* you know? Not *what are we going to do to make it possible so that men and women can do both?* And that's been some of the hardest things. And then, you know, more and more women… And I did a paper, I did a talk which was published several years ago, and it was about Mrs. Ramsay. Have you read *To the Lighthouse*, the Virginia Woolf novel?

KESLER: No.

SILVER: Now, I mean, it's about Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay and their eight children. And Mrs. Ramsay is like the archetypal mother, okay, mother figure, in a lot of ways. And watching, I did this article that tracked reactions to Mrs. Ramsay over the time that I've been teaching the novel. And when I first started teaching it and began to sort of talk about the fact that people, you know, that even her daughters in the novel were questioning Mrs. Ramsay, and that in fact she didn't survive to the end of the novel. She actually died. Peter Bean, who was usually so supportive of me, it was like he was furious, and it was, as I like to say, it was almost as if I had committed matricide, you know, because Mrs. Ramsay was the perfect mother, period. You could not question that was what women were supposed to be.

So, and then the early women, a lot of whom—the early women students, a lot of whom had watched their parents go through divorces at a time when women were not used to supporting themselves, you know, and the struggles that their mothers had. So, for them it was clear that they were never going to be like that. So, Mrs. Ramsay was anathema. She was everything that their mothers had been and that

they were never going to be. And then, over the years, you know, it began to change. It sort of shifted, and people came back and back. And then, of course, what happened is you began to get *move away*, as women kind of, you know, there were more women in the work fields and different generations and things like that. Then you began to get women who…

Like I had one woman, she was in a course that Barbara Will and I were teaching together, who said she had really wanted to be a doctor, but she decided that it was too long and she had to get married and have her children when she was still in her 20s, her early 20s. And Barbara and I, we just kind of looked at her, because this is like so different from anything we had done in our life or anything that we would have ever thought of doing. So, I think that—and my younger sister always says to me, "You know, you fought so that women could make that kind of choice. And if they decide to drop out of work and raise their children, if they decide to do these things, you gave them the right to do that." And that's okay. I kind of understand that, you know?

But I do feel that—and I think that that's what's happening now, okay, to come back. And I think that what's happening now is that women have begun to realize that they really do need to work together. And to me, that in part was what the march was like. It was really about the sense that women need to organize. And following what's been going on, you know, about the women candidates and the march this year and the voting and getting people out, and the fact that this year it was more inclusive, they tried to be more inclusive about Black Lives Matter and prison systems and immigrants, all the other things that are happening.

So I think that—I mean, I think that there still is a real problem in the women's movement in terms of racial divides, and who you speak for when you say "we." Many years ago, Hazel Corby, she's a black British woman, she wrote this essay called "Who do you mean when you say 'we," white woman?" And then, there was all of the work that was done about how the double bind on black women, because the women's movement was mostly white, the black movement was mostly men; so, you know, the double bind that they were in. So, I mean, it's something that I've always been aware of, kind of worked with, tried to work with.

KESLER: Yeah, those ideas of intersectionality and those…

SILVER: Right. We didn't have the term back then. [laughter]

KESLER: The language kind of comes along a little bit later.

SILVER: Yes, intersectionality. Yes. So, in terms of the things that I've seen change, you know, I think women… Although it is curious, because I was just talking to a young woman who's a freshman here at Dartmouth now, and I actually know her. I met her through her older brother who's a graduate student in the Thayer school. And the two of them were out for dinner and I was asking her what her first semester had been like. And she said that she's the only one of her friends that doesn't drink, doesn't go to the fraternities, doesn't go to the parties. And I think it's a little hard for her. I think she'll find the people who are like her, you know, kind of she'll, sort of, that will happen as she moves into, you know, takes courses and things. But I think that there's a way in which social life is still difficult for women here at Dartmouth.

KESLER: Yeah, I agree, and it's something that I talk with a lot of people about is, for freshwomen especially, you know, men can go to fraternities and that's a space that they can feel comfortable in or they can meet other men, but for freshwomen it's not necessarily the same. And trying to find those female mentors to look up to is still kind of, they're somewhat few and far between, or at the very least a little bit more difficult to find here on campus. And so it's a unique experience for women still, I think.

SILVER: Yeah. There was one other moment that was interesting actually, and this must have been in the '80s, I think. And it began to show a shift. Because as I say, in the early days the women faculty, we had all been through a lot, and we all knew each other when we worked together, and I knew women around the campus. But then things began to change a little bit, and there was sometime, which I think it must have been sometime in the 1980s, I can't remember exactly when, but there was a rally planned for *Roe v. Wade*, you know, on the anniversary at Concord [MA] at the Planned Parenthood. And there was—we got a call from the Planned Parenthood in Concord saying, could women from Dartmouth come down because there was this anti-choice group that was threatening to come and attack the women who were there to celebrate *Roe v. Wade*. And so, we said

"yes." You know, it was organized through the women's studies program. And I got up that morning, it was a Saturday morning, it was January, it was sleeting, I was sick, and I got up. My husband said, "Why are you doing this?" [laughter] And I said, "Because this is really important to me." And I got here, and the only women faculty, it was a very small group, but the only women faculty were the women of my generation. None of the junior women, the younger women, came out for that, because they no longer had the sense of urgency. You know, they took things for granted. They don't have a sense of what they had to lose. I don't think that's the case anymore. I think with the current Administration and with what's happening in the States, I think women do have a much clearer sense of what they have to lose.

KESLER: Yeah, yeah.

SILVER: So I think I've seen that shift go both ways.

KESLER: You mentioned earlier, you mentioned the phrase, "Everything I fought for, for 50 years, or 51-and-a-half is gone."

SILVER: Yeah, will go. Yeah.

KESLER: Do you think that's true or that that's the way that things are going?

SILVER: At the moment, yeah.

KESLER: Yeah.

SILVER: Yeah. I mean, Congress has just passed a law saying you can't get an abortion after the 20th week. I think abortion may go, or be so severe that it's already so limited in some states you can't get it. And that, for my generation, that was a major issue. And I mean, if you would ask me what are the main things that changed my life, the [birth control] pill is one of them, there's just no question about that. Having access to birth control. I've never had an abortion myself, but I certainly know people who have had and the struggles that they went through before abortion was legal. So, I think we stand to lose a lot of that. I think we're losing the separation of Church and State in a very, very serious way. I think the fact that the Administration has said that health providers do

not have to participate in anything that offends their religious sensibility is a horrendous decision. I don't know. I mean, where do I stop? I mean, there's not place where I look now that I say that I think things are not bad.

KESLER: Yeah, yeah.

SILVER: I did go… Nora Sizeiger and I, I don't know if you know her? She's in the English Department. We went down to Concord last Saturday.

KESLER: I was curious.

SILVER: Yeah, for the march, for the event. And, I mean, it was kind of disappointing in one way, because Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen, you know, all four women who represent New Hampshire were supposed to be here. But of course they weren't. Because of the shutdown they were all in Washington.

KESLER: That's right.

SILVER: But it was still, I'm glad, we're glad we went. And there were a lot of people there and kids and some wonderful signs.

KESLER: Yeah. The signs are always a good highlight, for sure, and good to see.

SILVER: Were you there?

KESLER: I went to the women's march last year. I argue that's why I almost failed CS 1 because I drove 12 hours there and 12 hours back the weekend before mid-terms.

SILVER: Washington?

KESLER: Yeah.

SILVER: Oh, see, you went to Washington.

KESLER: Yeah, I was there also. And similarly it made me smile.

SILVER: There were a lot of Dartmouth women there.

KESLER: It was very impressive. It made me smile when you mentioned getting closer and seeing hats pop up and signs

and things, and, you know, when we took the subway over, I just had some of the best conversations, and it was a very unique feeling, just all being there for a common cause.

SILVER: Yes.

KESLER: And I'm half Navajo, and so for me throughout most of it, I was waiting to hear about indigenous women's rights and indigenous women's problems, because, for example, as I'm sure you know here on campus, the statistic is 1 in 2 Native women will be sexually assaulted during her four years here. And there was one speaker from Standing Rock that really stood out to me, and as soon as that happened, my group kind of was passing right by this indigenous women's group from some tribe in the Southwest, I can't remember where, but I just burst into tears similarly. And it was very overwhelming. And I wished that I would have gone again this year. My younger brother went to the one in Philly, and…

SILVER: Are you from Philly?

KESLER: No, he goes to school at UPenn actually.

SILVER: Oh, he goes to UPenn, okay, all right.

KESLER: Yeah, so I was very happy. He didn't mention that he was going to be going and I saw his pictures on Facebook, and I was a proud older sister at that point. But, yeah, I wish that there had been something bigger in Hanover going on. But, yeah, it was a very cool experience last year, for sure.

SILVER: It was amazing. It really, really was amazing. So, as I say, and the other thing, in addition to reproductive rights, I think voting is the major, major, major issue right now. And I'm worried about what the Supreme Court is going to do about the redistricting case. I think the thing that is going to affect your generation the most are the judges, who have lifelong tenure, who are being approved right now, because that is really going to shape the future of the country for a whole generation. Yeah. So to me, that and the voting rights issue and the reproductive and…

KESLER: Some of the most pressing ones right now, yeah.

SILVER: Yeah, clearly the most precious things. And, but just so much. The environment. The oil. What happened at Standing Rock. I mean, as I say, so I'm… I was out for dinner in Dublin before we came back in December, we were out for dinner with some friends and we were talking about what was happening here. And someone said to me, they said, "Is there anything good coming out of the US?" And I thought for a minute and I said, "Meghan Markle." [laughter]

KESLER: [laughter] That's a good one. I mentioned I was in London in the fall, and that was a lot of—we got a lot of jokes at the college that we were attending about, "Yeah, like what do you…" I just felt like I was representing a lot of the United States. And then Meghan Markle came up and I was like, "We've got one good thing going for us, you know."

SILVER: Yeah, that's one thing. Well, I wanted to make a button before I went over to Dublin this year that said "I prefer not to talk about it." [laughter]

KESLER: [laughter] 'Cause it just gets to a point where you're like, "You know, you're right and I'm on your side and I don't know how to explain any of this, but…"

SILVER: I know.

KESLER: Yeah. Wow. Well, with that, I do want to see, do you have anything else that you would like to cover before wrapping things up at all?

SILVER: I don't think so. I mean, you know, when we did… I just did want to say one thing about the trip that we did in 2016 to Cambodia and Vietnam, and how extraordinary that was. And I must say, it's the one place I've always wanted to go, because it's so intertwined. Vietnam is just so intertwined in my life, you know, in my career and everything. And I think one of the moments that really got to me was we went to the Peace Museum, the War Peace Museum in Saigon. And it's photographic exhibits. It's really, it's an extraordinary exhibit. And very early on at the beginning there was this picture, I looked at it, and I said, "That looks like a young Richard Nixon." And that's exactly who it was. And that was the first time that I had been aware that when Nixon was Vice-President under Eisenhower, when the French were still in control, he had actually gone to Vietnam to promise support to the French fighting against the Vietnamese at the time.

And I was staggered. And it just, you know, and I thought I knew a lot about Vietnam, but I just, that was something that was totally new to me. But, the whole experience, you know, of being there and going to these places that I had read about and I kind of rammed into my memory, it was just quite extraordinary.

But, they seem not to harbor any kind of bad feelings about Americans. And I asked—in Hanoi, I asked the guide that we had whether he ever, you know, whether the interactions between Vietnamese and Americans, had he ever had an American soldier who had fought in Vietnam? And he had. And he told me stories about soldiers who come back and how they don't know what to expect, and some of them expect that they're going to be attacked, and they're always so surprised to find how welcoming people are. And he said he was… At one time there was a soldier, and he met one of the soldiers, the Vietnamese soldiers who he had been fighting against, and he said there was this reunion and they hugged, and you had this very big American and the small Vietnamese. And he said it was just extraordinary. And, so we heard that a lot, which kind of interested me. And I'm hoping they were not saying it just because we were Americans. But, I think that there was a sense that there can never be restitution obviously, but that at least something was happening.

KESLER: Some sense of closure.

SILVER: Some kind of closure was happening, yeah. So, it was just, as I say, that was really one of the high points was that trip to Vietnam, for me.

KESLER: Yeah, absolutely. Well, with that, if you don't have anything else that you would like to add, I would like to say thank you so much for sitting down and chatting with me today, and on behalf of the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, thank you. We're really excited about this. I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording.

[End of Interview.]