

This is the transcript for two oral history interviews with Kathryn Briggs Johnson, conducted by Laura Ettinger. The first interview, on pp. 1-10, took place on July 23, 2008, and the second interview, on pp. 11-26, took place on August 19, 2008.

**Interview subject: Kathryn Briggs Johnson**

**Interviewer: Laura Ettinger**

**Date of Interview: July 23, 2008**

**Okay. So today is July 23, 2008, and we're in my office in Snell Hall at Clarkson University. I'm Laura Ettinger. I'm here with Kathryn Johnson who is Vice-President for University Outreach and Student Affairs.**

Correct.

**What I think I'd like to do is start with a little bit about you, and then move on to women engineering students and experiences here in the 1970's.**

Okay.

**So I know from the information that you sent to me that you began your career here at the Clarkson Fund, as a development assistant from '73-'75. So that was right out of college?**

That was right out of college. A few months out of college.

**Alright. So, how did you get that job?**

(laughter) I'll give you the short story. I actually accepted a position in Boston, and then due to personal reasons which I won't go into, (laughter) personal circumstances, my soon-to-be-in-the-next-few-years husband and I decided that we wanted to come back to Potsdam for at least a couple years because we really loved it here and kind of just do our thing here. So anyway, we moved back, and my senior year of college at SUNY Potsdam, I had been an RA and I fell in love with just being in a college environment. And I think I could make that part of my career. So I had actually accepted [a job] in the corporate world, turned that down later, and then came back here. But what I did was I literally just applied to the four universities [in this area]; for positions that were open at the time. And I was a liberal arts grad. So I essentially decided I'll take what I can to get my foot in the door which was a wise decision at the time. Although I came here saying I was going to be for two years and leave. And 35 years later, I'm still here. And that's a good thing just to let you know. So I actually wasn't hired first; they hired someone [else]. In the first week, they didn't work out. They called me back and hired me, and since then it just—

**Here you are.**

Here I am.

**(laughter)**

No. I was the second choice, but I guess, obviously, the better second choice. (laughter)

**And what did you do for the development office?**

When I first went there, I was doing a lot of just office work. Again, think of the time. This is 1973. So they didn't expect me to do anything very professional. So I did a lot of data analysis with the funds that were coming in. It was the old days when they had computer punch cards for God's sake. So, I mean, we were literally doing a lot of the things through an old main frame system. So I started using the other side of my brain I hadn't used a lot in college for four years which was good. And then when they started the people side of it which is the fundraising and developing relationships with alums and so on, they started saying, "Would you like to do a little bit more?" And I said, "I'd love to." I said, "Just give me more," and so I started running student phone-a-thons and running alumni phone-a-thons, and then I learned the business of individual fundraising during those two years. But still was always doing sort of this back shop work too because they needed to get that done. But where I really was shining was working with the students and working with the alums and bringing them together. So that's how it started.

**And then how did you get promoted to the Executive Director of the Career Center, and you must have been 24 years old or something?**

Actually, I was 23.

**Twenty-three?**

Almost 24 and A. George Davis, who at the time was he Dean of Students? No. I think he was something in student life, and then shortly after that moved back into Arts and Science, and was the Associate Dean of Arts and Science for a number of years. But, at that time, he was very visionary about student life and student affairs, and the whole field of career counseling was coming into vogue. There was a lot of theory that was out at that time. A lot of student development theory and so on. So he got to know me in those first two years, and he walked down to my office and said, "How would you like to run the," it was called the placement office? And I looked around and I said, "Me?" (laughter)

**(laughter)**

And I said, "Okay." And I said, "Well," because the gentleman that was in there had been at the university for 41 years. And he had run it; it was called the placement office for 26 of those 41 years. So I mean, he was the placement office. And before that, I think they had one other person. So I would have been the third in the center. And here I was, 23 years old, so I went down and I talked to him, and I checked it out. And literally, what they did was they said, "Okay. It's going to be a two person job. So I got to hire my own assistant who worked with me for over 25 years, Sue [Suzanne] Dougherty, and then we formed a team and we built this center together. But it was such an amazingly exciting thing for me. They knew that I was looking [for another job] after two [years in the Development office]. I mean, I wasn't going to stay in this, just as a development [assistant], doing what I was doing.

**Yeah.**

Of course, Chancellor [John W.] Graham at the time had a little bit to do with it. He worked across the hall from me from Development. One thing about Development is you get to know the right people very quickly while being a young professional, I didn't realize the advantages; it's reflecting back now. But I will tell you that I heard within the first year, "She'll never make it. She's too young and she's a woman, and she'll never make it." Well, that just made me want to do it all the more and prove myself. I knew I could do it. And I knew I had the skills and so on. I guess they all lost a bet that year. (laughter)

**(laughter)**

I must tell you, after George Davis moved back to Arts and Science, my boss was John Chapple, who was Dean of Admissions, and they put him over the Career Center too sort of, I don't know what you'd call it, maybe an enrollment management concept which was very progressive for the time. And again, George Davis would have envisioned that. John was an incredible supervisor because he just believed in me, and if I look back now, if it wasn't for John and the autonomy that he gave me, I mean, literally he just said, "It's yours to do what you want with. And just let me know how I can be of help." And anytime I was ever challenged by anybody because I was a woman, or because – he was always right there behind me, and not that I needed him to [intervene], but I knew I had him there if I needed him. And it was just incredible. So I was very fortunate to have the right people. It could have been very different otherwise.

**Good.**

Yeah.

**So I know [that] now, obviously a big part of Clarkson's reputation is we place people in excellent jobs and good grad schools. Back in 1975, what was the reputation of Clarkson in that way?**

It was excellent then. I inherited from this two person shop an incredibly organized—, it was a well-oiled machine because when you're dealing with hundreds of employers and hundreds of students going through hundreds of interviews, you have to have a process and a system in place. Ted Ramsdell, who was the director then, was absolutely phenomenal in doing all that. So I inherited a system which I changed and we improved over the years because times changed and we had to. What we brought in and what the students, I felt, needed and even the engineering school (laughter) at that time, was career counseling. So what we were doing was blending the job placement, interviewing skills, resume – all of that and we had a great reputation, but what I could see into the future was, "Okay. We just went through an early '70s recession. It's going to hit again. It typically will. So what we need to do is position ourselves." So I spent, as a director, an equal amount of time on campus as I did off campus, in building employer relations. And I remember people in the late '70s, in these big multi-national companies, saying, "Why are you out visiting?" And I said, "Because I'm building relationships with you because when things get rough, I want you to still come to Clarkson." And they'd go, "Oh. Okay." And it worked. Yeah. Then we had the '80s, and then the '90s, and it was tough to hold on. But because there was so

much emphasis on engineering at that time at Clarkson; statistically we were graduating second to Penn State in the Northeast. We were second to Penn State in the Northeast in the number of bachelor's graduates in engineering. That is taking the entire Northeast corridor, Penn State was first and Clarkson was second in the number of BS engineering grads that were coming out. All I had to do was walk into a company and say that, and the beauty of that was the other students in the other disciplines could kind of tag on to this. But it took a while because back in the '70s, people were much more narrow about only a chemical engineer can do this job. Only an electrical—, so it was very, very different then. So we were very conscious and are to this day that when you talk about that, the relationship that we have with employers, and I call them employers from my perspective because there are corporations, businesses, and not-for-profits, etc. – so the employers. It's just been one of those things where you've had to constantly, because of where we are and we're small but we're quality. And we have this special type of student here that we're able to maintain those relationships over the years. It was interesting back in the '70s because it was easy. And, the '80s were easy too. But this is not always going to be easy. So it's interesting to look back. I'd forgotten about that, thank you. (laughter)

**(laughter) This is fascinating. So turning here to the women students that you interacted with and particularly the women engineers who you interacted with in the '70s. What do you remember, and I realize you've been here, as you said, for 35 years, so you don't have it marked off in your head necessarily by—,**

(Inaudible) in some ways I do though.

**or maybe you do.**

In some ways I do. I often tell people I remember students better from the '70s and '80s than I do from the last 10 years. And I think because they were my first students, and they were my babies and it was (sigh) I don't know how to describe it. I think the relationship between the administrators in student life and students in that era was different. And not so hard to work at as it is today. I think it's harder, and of course I'm older too. So, honestly when you say that, I kind of really do remember the '70s very, very well. Well, it was a pretty exciting time for me too. So I was in a career, and reflecting back, I look at that—getting off target here. But I remember going to these incredible meetings at Westinghouse and corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh. Flying down to Boca Raton, Florida with Union Carbide. Flying off to here. And I was 25/26 years old. And I'm thinking, "Gosh, I'm lucky." And I look back on it now and I thought, "I had probably the best job at the university at that time." (laughter) And I know the people in Admissions across the hall used to say, "How do you get to do this?" You know? Oh, it's different today; I mean, they're not flying us all over the world anymore. But I just look back. So I remember that time very well because me it was a special time. So I remember the students and working with them. And there were fewer women then.

**Right.**

So I remember them well. So what would you like me to reflect on?

**Well, when women came to the career center, what do you remember about either the kinds of things they were looking for, or asking you, or concerned about? That was probably too many things.**

No, my mind is just going. I'm thinking, "Okay, how do I go through my little checklist that's coming up in my head as you say that?" At that time, they worried a lot about the stereotype that they were probably engaged; if they weren't, there was going to be another individual, a male individual in their life, that they were going to go off with. And that they wouldn't stick with a company, etc. So I remember during the interview stage, and at that time women were often engaged or had a significant other that they were going to plan to marry, right? So they would say, "Should I take my engagement ring off?" And you'd sit there, and of course, that's a values question. That's not a right or wrong. And so, we would discuss it. And I would tell them that. And, of course, they'd get upset at me because I didn't give them an answer. Because engineering students want answers, and A plus B equals C. So I said I didn't have answer, and we would talk about it. And some of the women would wear it and say, "Okay. I'll deal with it." And others just wouldn't because they just felt that deep down it would just play to—. So there was that. There were all the personal worries about how they were going to be viewed because they were a woman. They also didn't like the fact that they were filling quotas. And I will tell you that the women in the '70s had multiple offers. I mean, some of them had 10, 12 job offers to choose from and could have had more; sometimes I would tell them, "You know, you need to take fewer interviews because you can." (laughter) But the job trips that they would have to go on because they would have to do the onsite interviews. I mean, when you're talking 10, 12 companies, 10, 12 trips – when do you go to school?

**Yeah. Your senior year.**

Your senior year, right. But they did it, and they balanced it well. They were afraid, and this often was true, not often but I should say occasionally was true, that they wouldn't be treated fairly in the interview. We did have incidents of that. What I did find about that generation of women was they were very willing to report it. In the '70s and early '80s in particular. But they felt very comfortable coming to me, and knew that I would handle it appropriately. And the fact of the matter is, that if you file a complaint like that you're going to draw a whole lot more attention to yourself at that employer and they're going to do everything they can to make sure you're treated fairly. But that wasn't why they were doing it. But I knew that that would be an outcome of it. So there was fear around that. And then we did have sexual harassment types of incidents as well. Not just unfair questions in the interview about their personal life, bringing in personal questions. And understand too, at that time that the whole employment world was going through a tremendous change. And since then, there's been a lot of legislation about what you can and can't ask in interviews and so on. So I think a lot of the legislation that came down wasn't because men were being treated unfairly. It was because women were. And so what's happened now is both men and women as a result of that are being treated more fairly in interviews, and I think that's important. And they don't bring up personal circumstances. They (sigh) had such incredible confidence. I remember the first class, the class of '76 would have been the first class I worked with, and I wish statistically I could go back and remember how many women. But I know there were less than 10. I think there were less than 10 women engineers that graduated that year.

### **I could find out.**

And I'd be interested. And I'm seeing some of their faces. I remember some of them very, very well. You couldn't help but know every one of them and know them well because they were all, most of them were friends. They didn't continue to all be friends; some of them clustered. But what they had, my first class that I dealt with, was such a strong bond as women. And when the economy was just starting to pick up off that early '70s recession, they just landed at the right time and the right place. One of the things we talked about [was]: are you prepared for what you're going to hit when you get there? And they'd always say to me, "Going to Clarkson, if that has not been enough preparation to deal with a male world, then I don't know what could." And so they really felt that it was an advantage for them to go to university where they were in [a] predominantly male environment, mostly male professors, mostly male students. It's because they knew the jobs that they would walk in they may be the only, and many of them were the only woman in their group when they would join these companies.

### **And then how much contact did you have with these women once they left Clarkson?**

Some I've had contact with, and some I didn't. And I wish, (laughter) if only we could turn back time. I wish that I had tracked, and wished that I'd been doing what you're doing now and actually talked more and tracked more of those early women. I do know that some of them didn't stay in engineering. And it wasn't because they couldn't cut it.

### **Right.**

They made some work/life issue decisions that impacted their career. And at that time, it really would impact your career. If you left, it was tough to go back in. So some of them left and then never really made it. Others have just soared. That was '76, '77, '78, and '79 – I'm thinking of the women in that era; some of them are executives at companies. I mean, you're interviewing some of them. I see them at reunions. But I don't deliberately reach out. So again, I wish I had. But when I hear from them, I hear a real mix. I think that for that particular group in the '70s, those who really stuck with it, what I heard from them was, "It wasn't easy but I kept proving myself. I did a great job. People recognized it." And it also had a lot to do with where they worked. I mean, whether we like it or not, not every employer is going to have the same philosophy. And at that time, there were those who embraced women into the work force. There were those that didn't. Even in the interview process I remember an alum coming back, and I remember Sue Dougherty, who was my assistant at the time, coming into my office and she said, "Do you know what he [the alum] just said to me?" I said, "What?" He said, "There are women on my schedule. We have women at Clarkson? In engineering?" And she said, "Yes. We do." And he said, "Well, do I have to interview them?" Okay, that was a rare case. But it just brought to mind to me, God, I hope I was protecting them because I didn't want them to hear that. But then again, God bless them, they had to sit in a room and deal, and I'm sure there were men who *didn't* say that. He happened to be an alum. [I'm sure there were others] who were interviewing who were thinking the same thing like, "Oh, you're never going to make it." Same thing I got when I took my job. "She's never going to make it. It's a man's world. It's a man's job. She took the place of this man." I think for many young women it was the same thing. I probably saw it

more than they did because I was hearing a lot more than they were hearing. And then I think they experienced it more once they got on the jobs, is what I was hearing from them.

**I wanted to follow up. What kinds of advice or commentary did you get from the employers, or the corporate representatives, about hiring women? I mean, clearly, you're saying that the women engineers from the late '70s had many interviews and multiple job offers. What kinds of messages were you getting from the corporations besides the one particular one whom you just mentioned?**

Right. And that was a rare case.

**Yeah.**

I mention that anecdotally because I knew there were a few people like that, and they really were in the minority. I do think the majority of people that were interviewing were fairly open-minded. I had to always be aware of the fact that these women were going to run against that kind of [thing]. What I was hearing from most employers is that the women were far outshining the men in the interviews. Their communication skills were better. They articulated what they could offer to the employers better. They were so involved in the campus that they had a portfolio that knocked anybody—; I mean, they were so strong that when the employers would come down they would say, “Wow.” When they'd hire one, “Can you get me five more Nicky's? Can you get me five more Liz's?” You know?

**Right.**

And they realized that we weren't just producing women – we were producing incredibly talented women engineering students out of Clarkson. So, we became a place to come to for that which was good. And in retrospect, when I look back too, some of the men [students] were having a hard time with the fact that the women, “Well, they're just getting jobs because they're women.” We'd talk about it. But I think there was a little bit, I don't think it was resentment, a little jealousy perhaps, but again, men were getting multiple offers at the same time. Because it was a great job market and things were just booming. But the women were just—, I never heard a negative comment. I can't remember any. And it was always very, very positive. The negatives were those people who had blinders on before they even saw the women on their schedule. It's interesting; it changed very rapidly. It was like we were at one point where they were really breaking ground, but all of a sudden it just became the norm for women and men to be on interview schedules together. It was like those first couple of years, '75-'77/'78, and then after that, I didn't hear as much about it. It was sort of expected that there'd be. What I did get, which is not legal, is requests from employers to recruit only the women students. It's the same thing as they said to me, “Give me a list of all your black engineering students.”

**Right.**

Or all of your females; you can't discriminate based on going the other way, reverse discrimination and have selective pools. So SWE [Society of Women Engineers] was a very popular organization to speak to. They had no problem getting corporate speakers. They would

just be lining up, “Can we get to SWE?” And then, when NSBE [National Society of Black Engineers] formed, same thing.

**Yeah.**

“Can we get to the National Society of Black Engineers?” So what we did was we said, “Okay. This is how you get to those students.” So what they started to do was not just come and just recruit them. They started to build relationships with the student organizations on campus [and] with the faculty in engineering, and they learned through that. That’s how they’re going to really, totally learn who are the best matches for their corporate cultures. And take Procter and Gamble for example; we have an alum from there who’s come for years and been a strong supporter, and is currently a trustee. She has developed a strong relationship with the student organizations, has had other people from P and G [Procter and Gamble] do the same thing, other alums come back and do the same thing. And they know the faculty. So that when they’re not here, faculty ‘x’ can talk to a student about that. So it’s gone from a very black and white process of just interviewing people and hoping you get the best person, to a much more coordinated relationship, based on a type of recruiting effort to get to those special interest group[s] and still to get to women engineers. Because they still want balance.

**Right.**

They have what they’re challenged each year to go—, sort of have a curve that they fill. And they have to hire so many into their internship co-op and full-time positions. So it’s very important to them to make sure that they’re balancing it. In the past, it was just, “Go make as many offers as you could to women engineers and hope.” [Now] it’s very different, and it’s much more coordinated.

**I’m just checking the time. I have a feeling that we may be doing another interview.**

That’s fine. 35 years is hard to do in 35 minutes. (laughter)

**(laughter) In 35 minutes. Right. A minute a year. At that time, in the ’70s, you were saying before you had incredible autonomy within the Career Center,**

Right.

**how great for you.**

Right.

**Were there messages that you were being sent from the upper administration about women students here, or women engineering students in terms of placement, or in terms of dealing with them?**

Probably more, not so much upper administration—; well, you know, I take that back. Bob Plane was president at the time; he was the president for the time. I mean, you couldn’t have had—,

and he had a wife who was very involved in women's issues and had actually worked in student affairs in her previous place. So it was great because he really had that balance at home, and he understood student life and he also understood women's issues. And I think what they saw in me was sort of that neutral zone women students could come to, especially women engineering students. And I was their advocate. I could help them make things happen for themselves. So it was more in conversation than it was a directive. And people like Ed Misiaszek [Associate Dean of Engineering] were very, very involved. I remember once, in fact, a woman alum came back to me because AISES had formed at Clarkson. The American Indian Science and Engineering Society, I think that stands for. And we formed the first chapter in the nation here at Clarkson. And we had fairly significant numbers. And I remember the students; the women students typically when they made appointments in the career center, they would come to me. So I was sitting with this young woman, and she was Native American from the [Akwesasne (Mohawk)] reservation, close by, and she was talking about her background, and I said, "Do you know Ed Misiaszek?" And she said, "No." And I said, "Do you know about AISES? Do you know about the scholarships that are available? Career path-wise you can get an awful lot of assistance through that group and professionally." She came back; she ended up getting her PhD. She came back to me years later and said, "If it wasn't, I really truly believe if you had not introduced me to that group. I was coming here in my little cocoon, going to Clarkson, going home." So again, it was those little case studies that I can think of, with the women that I met who went into these fields. And here's a young woman, who's in a very secluded environment on a reservation, trying to figure out how I can do this. And she did it. She's one of the few who went through and got her PhD.

### **Is this someone from back in the '70s? Or was it later?**

She would have been early '80s I believe. Yeah, early '80s. Gosh, I'd have to look that up and see.

### **When AISES was first formed.**

It was a few years after it was formed. I know how important it was for the faculty to respect what I was doing. And to understand what we were doing in the Career Center. And so I probably knew almost every faculty member on this campus at one time. And in this job, it's a little less so because when you're vice president of a division, you're not dealing with that tactical stuff. So I miss that. But I met a lot of people through that position to engage them as part of our process. So again, going back to your original [question], it was, again, more in conversation, less in directive that I worked with the women students to advocate for them [and] to help them. We had, I can't think of her name. Heather Wilson – was that her name? Who was Dean of Women's Programs or Students and worked in Student Affairs for us. We had that position, and then that sort of faded away. It didn't work. There are women here who just don't want to be treated differently because they're women. And I heard that a lot in the '70s as well. They just [said], "Leave us alone. We'll be," it wasn't so much "Leave," they really didn't mean, "Leave us alone," they just meant, "Treat us like the guys and we'll be okay." And said, "If we want something special, we'll let you know." (laughter) And it's interesting. Although I think they realized later that SWE and these other organizations that were predominantly women did help them. I think they reflect on that later. I don't think they see it when they're students.

**When they're there?**

Yes.

**Let's wrap it up right now.**

Okay.

**And we can do this another time when we have the time to continue.**

**Interview subject: Kathryn Briggs Johnson**  
**Interviewer: Laura Ettinger**  
**Date of Interview: August 19, 2008**

**Okay. So today is August 19, 2008. I'm Laura Ettinger, and I'm here in my office at Snell Hall at Clarkson University. I'm here with Kathryn Johnson for interview number two, since she's kindly come back for more. Kathryn, in your last interview, one of the things you mentioned that intrigued me was that relations between administrators in student life and students back in the '70s weren't so hard to work at; [that's] the way you put it. That they were different than they are today. It's not specifically about women, but**

No, it's not.

**can you say more about this?**

I think it's more about the different types of generations that we have. It's a lot of reasons. (laughter) The other thing too, I guess in fairness, [is] it was acceptable then to socialize with students. I shouldn't say it's not acceptable now. There are different parameters, and it is more clearly defined; I mean, faculty [and] staff still have students over to dinner. Today there's still socialization that happens. But I think you have to work harder at it because, I think, the students don't necessarily see [us] as someone that they're going to spend that kind of time with. We were sort of part of the social fabric, but there was always that respected distance between us and the students. They understood and respected who we were. But yet, they could sit and talk to us about things; it was easier to talk to them about issues at that time. It was just much more open, but again, you're coming off the '60s, going into the '70s where you had a very vibrant social environment. And, I mean, it was a different era. So we've gone through these sweeps of changes, and I guess, what I've always felt is it's just something you need to work at. Whether you're a staff member or faculty member at a college or university, I feel it's my responsibility to try to keep that kind of communication going even today. Even though the generation's changed and you have different ways of communicating with them. I think a lot of it's trust too. Trusting you and trusting that there's not a hidden agenda with them.

**And when did this change?**

I saw it change as we got into the late '80s, early '90s. That's when I could see it just become a little bit more of the distance between the two. And well, a lot of people say that the class size has contributed to that. I don't think that; I mean, class sizes were quite large in the late '70s, early '80s. I don't think it had anything to do with class size. It's just different. I don't think what I'm saying is any different than anyone. I talk to colleagues at other universities who worked in the same fields that I have over the years, in student life. And I think they've all found they've had to work harder at building those relationships. So I just work harder at it, and try to bridge the gap between the two.

**Uh huh. That's interesting.**

Yeah. It's a trust thing. And it's interesting, I look at the student government at Clarkson over the years, traditionally, was very separated from the administration. It comes from the old student union days when students separated themselves from the administration, and "We're going to do our thing," and whatever. But what always happened, even at that time, was they worked with certain people within the administration to get their agenda to happen. Because you can't work in isolation. So what happened was our student government actually had gotten to the point, when I came into this position four years ago at Clarkson, where they really were separated. And what I tried to do and I think we've accomplished [this] is worked with them to show that we can move their agenda for them.

**"Don't be stupid." (laughter)**

(laughter) "And do you know how much power you have as students?" And they didn't realize it. It was interesting. They wanted to have that power. They wanted to have that influence. They wanted to make change. But they were struggling with how to do it. But they thought if they just governed within themselves; they didn't realize that building alliances was the way to, "I can get you in the door to the right people to get the things done." So it's interesting to watch it come back full circle again to where now they're working with us. And so, you've got to start with the student leaders because once they're engaged, then you kind of work down into the [rest of the student body], although the grassroots approach works too. I guess you kind of have to go to both ends, student leaders and just the students who are out there looking for something. But again, it's trust. I mean, it's trusting you. And you don't have to agree with everything that they're doing. But you need to understand what they're doing. And so, I think that's been my agenda for the last four years, is really working more in that collaborative environment with them. And, as I said, it's a lot harder. I don't know if I said this in the last part of our interview. But when I became a vice-president, I was still the same person, but students saw me differently. And it was such a wake up call for me. I thought, no big deal. I'll still be me. And it was like, no. And it's like, "Oooh, she's the vice-president," and I have to remind myself most days that I have that title. I don't think about my title. I think of myself more as the person who brings people together and builds alliances.

**Very interesting. Thank you.**

You're welcome.

**Another thing that you mentioned in the last interview, correctly I think, is that you said something like, "I've been here for 35 years, hard to do 35 years in 35 minutes."**

(laughter)

**(laughter) The approximate time of the last interview.**

(laughter)

**And so, what I'd be interested in hearing is how you would characterize the different periods in Clarkson's history since you've been here. So, since '73. In terms of women, gender issues, take that wherever you want to take that.**

Yeah. But the more definition you give me, the better.

**Okay, let's say for women.**

Okay. Are we speaking specifically women engineers or women in general?

**Let's start with women in general.**

Okay. Because it was different for women engineers because they were so new to the professional world. They were breaking into it. And so, there was that dynamic going on in the '70s. And then, there was the acceptance that you felt as we went into the '80s and then '90s and beyond. It's just commonplace. And there's not raised eyebrows any longer.

**About women engineers?**

About women engineers. That was kind of a blanket quick review of women engineers. I didn't mean to shortchange it. But if we're just talking women in general, I think like any place in the country in the '70s, the view of what we were capable of doing and what people thought we should be doing, was still defined so very, very narrowly. I look at myself; I look at other women who were here at the time. I must admit, I didn't interact that much with the very few women faculty we had. Most of them were adjuncts at the time. So there were so few. The few that we had were very, very strong. You had to be. In the '70s you had to be, I don't like to use the word to survive here, but to cope here perhaps would be a better term.

**And are you talking about women faculty? women staff?**

Women staff and faculty. You had to have pretty strong coping skills. And you had to be fairly resilient. And you had to just sit and say, "Okay. That's how it is. And I'll make change, being who I am and moving on." And I think a lot of women students were feeling the same way. At that time, it was much more blatant. I know, a lot of women students would confide in me in the early days that they felt different in the classroom. That's not all women, but there were women who felt that because they were a woman, the faculty member was biased, and typically male faculty member, and it wasn't all faculty, it was just certain ones. Again, you'll hear this probably from alumni, that they thought they had to work twice as hard as the men. But they somehow accepted that, and I never heard them actually complaining about it. It was more just coming to me and talking about it, and it was an observation, and it was me just sort of supporting them back saying, "I have to do the same thing."

**Uh huh.**

You know, I'm a woman administrator here, and look around, I'm one of the only ones. And so, I've got to do that too. But it's making me a stronger person, and it's making me better at what I

do. So I always tried to get them to look at the outcome. And they did. What I saw as we moved into the '80s was, like I said, [for] women in general, much more of an acceptance of them being part of the campus fabric. They started to go into leadership roles. It wasn't surprising to see women holding offices on campus, being a class president. And then going into the '90s and beyond, we've had several women who were president of the student body. I remember Cindy [Dowd] Greene [class of 1978], who I think you have interviewed as well as an alum; I mean, it was such a big to-do. She was the first woman to be president of the Alumni Association. I would sit back and just kind of smile and snicker because people would make such a big deal out of it that she was *the first*. And it was a big deal, but to Cindy, she did it because of her love for Clarkson, and not because she was trying to prove something, and that's something that I always thought about Clarkson women – they cope very well within the environment that they've been in. The women in the '70s and the '80s, I think, probably have more of an appreciation for what Clarkson did to prepare them for the work world than the current female students do, not to say they don't. But I think there was more of an obvious awareness of what Clarkson was, because they dealt with it here; they knew when they went out into the work world that many of them, whether they were women engineers, or business students, or science students, that they often would be the only woman in a meeting. Or that they might be the only woman in their division. Or they might be one of two or three. So they learned how to work in that environment here. And I don't hear that as much anymore. I heard it a lot in the '70s and the '80s that, "Clarkson prepared me for that world." I think now that there are still probably some issues. But I think a lot of that has gone away. Every now and then I still have a woman who has come to me in recent years and said that she doesn't think she's being treated equally in the classroom. But it's so rare. I think it's very different. I think that, and especially the women here because they're so strong; I've heard people say this and I've even said to people who've asked me about what Clarkson's like. And they said, "75% male/25% female. It must just be overwhelmingly male." And I said, "In the '70s it was. In the early '80s it was." And by the mid-'80s were 20/25%; what I saw was, it looked like a co-ed university. It felt like one. It didn't feel like it was 75/25. And when you walk in a classroom it probably is a little bit more blatant, but when you're working from the student life perspective the way I have, because the women proportionally are more involved than most of the male students, because they take on more leadership roles, because they multi-task and do 30 things at once, you see them more. So it's like the one person becomes five people, you know? And so I have to remind myself that this campus is 75% male. It just doesn't have that same feel that it had. And so, I don't know if that answers your question.

**Yes.**

But if you get into gender issues, I've talked mostly about students; from a staff perspective, going back through that, (laughter) this is a tough one; there are almost some things that I may be uncomfortable saying on tape, which is unusual for me.

**I respect whatever you're comfortable with.**

I'm a tough cookie, okay? So I've put up with a lot over the years. Yet Clarkson has been a wonderful place for me. So I don't begrudge any of that. I think the opportunities I've had, and the career I've had here has been phenomenal. I mean, I've traveled the world. What I've been able to do at Clarkson, and I think it's more Clarkson than it isn't because I'm a woman or

whatever; it afforded me the opportunity to have incredible autonomy, and to shape my career, and to do what I wanted to accomplish for, not just myself but for this institution. In the early '90s when students were clamoring around campus, "There's no study abroad program. There's no, we can't go anywhere." I said to someone, "Can I just do this?" And I did it. That's the thing about this place that I loved for so many years is that if you wanted to make something happen, there was no bureaucracy that you had to sift through to get it done. I could just do it. Has that changed? A little bit, I think. But maybe that's in the position I'm in. I'm not in a position which in hindsight would I have taken? Absolutely, I would have taken this job. I love what I'm doing. But when you're kind of at the director level, or you're in an operation where you kind of have your own little shop so to speak, but you're part of the bigger—, it's a little easier to kind of create things to your own liking. Whereas it's more my staff now that do that. So for me, as a woman here, and I think I mentioned this to you before, the boss I had from '75, for 15 years after, from 1975, if it wasn't for him, I don't think I would have stayed. He was so open and so supportive; he was so ahead of his time in supporting women.

### **And it's John?**

John Chapple. His wife, Helen, also worked at the university at the time. I thank Helen many times for this too because I think she made John so aware of the issues that were so important. And I remember once, there was some issue; I don't remember what it was that I was grappling with. And this was after John had retired, and I was talking to him, and somebody had said something about, "Well, why is she so," I don't know [if] the word [was] bitter, "but so, hopped up about this issue?" And he said, "If you had gone through what she did through the 15 years that she reported to me as woman at that institution, you'd be where she is too." And this is my way of relaying my story without getting into specifics.

### **I totally respect that. (laughter)**

Yeah. But I still loved it. I loved what I do. See, that's the thing. I think if you have a passion for what you're doing and you love it, and I guess the kind of person that I am. I can put up with a lot as long as I can accomplish what needs to be done for the students in this institution. I was able to do that. But I also had incredible support. So after that it was up down, up down. But I had then established myself, so it was easier for me to move my way through Clarkson. When new women, young women come into the administration and I've had to mentor a couple of them; not because they ask me but because they've come in like gangbusters. And it's still a place where, and I will say this, where I think it's okay for a male to come in with all sails flying, and I've had a few young and middle-aged women who come into the institution and have been shocked at the reaction when they state their mind about something, or they state an opinion. So what I've done is, I sort of give them a call and say, "Do you want to talk a little bit about this?" And so I'll talk to them and I'll say, "Let me just clue you in to the Clarkson environment." And you just had to learn that you need to establish yourself here before you can—, and I said, "Yes. It's a double standard. But that's the way it is." I don't know how the gender issues can be—, but especially for young professional women who come in here, who've got just incredible zest and energy, who get misunderstood because they're so assertive and so, they're just coming on very, very strong. It's tough sometimes in this environment to do that. I've seen where young men are [doing that], and it's not even a question. So is that different than any place else? I don't know.

And I just use that as a for example. I learned to sort who I could be assertive with and who I couldn't. Where you operate, and now, I could, (laughter) maybe it's just because I've been here for so many darn years, but I'm still careful but at the same time, I know I can get away with a lot more. So it's tough for me to be a role model sometimes, for young women who come in, because if they watch me, they'll go, "Oh, man. Wow. She can just, like, say what she thinks. And look at that. And it's great." And I go, "Yeah. I can. But that doesn't mean you can the first day on the job." That's probably true in any corporate culture, any educational culture. You sort of have to tread lightly at first. But I do find it's more women who are getting that negative reaction, and so there's something about the culture here that just still doesn't embrace being that assertive. So other than that, I mean, honestly looking back it's better, much, much better than it was. I think it's because of women faculty and women administrators who sort of pioneered the way, and the women students who pioneered the way for the women today. I think the women of the late '80s and early '90s had appreciation for that. And I think, it's just so far in the past now that women today, young women, I don't think see it quite as much. I don't think they see how much has changed, or how fortunate they are that things have changed to the extent they have. But again, it's mostly good but there are still some issues here. But through it all, I've been able to do what I needed to do here. Or I wouldn't have stayed. I mean, when it gets down to it, yeah, there were struggles. I mean, I remember once, and this is when I was working for John, there was a certain dean at the time, (laughter) who just went up one side of me and down the other about something, and just treated me like I was a child. And just that I knew nothing, and total lack of respect. And I remember John just marching up to his office and just saying, "If you ever have an issue with one of my staff again, you need to come to me. And she's certainly an incredible professional, blah, blah," you know. Very seldom did John ever have to speak for me. But he knew when to. And from that day on, that person had a different viewpoint, different respect for me. I built most of my relationships; I mean, there are very renowned faculty who have come through this institution who knew me as a young woman, first working here, that I will honestly say, through all those years, I always was respected by them. They saw what I did because I produced results. They saw what I did. And maybe it was the culture that they came from where they saw me. I mean, there were a few, obviously, there are always people that didn't. But I think for the most part, there was a level of respect that to this day, when I still see some of those people, even though some of them are retired and so, they talk to me as an equal. There are some individuals where I've always felt that whether I was 25 or 55, it wasn't age specific, it wasn't gender specific. They really looked at me as a professional and treated me that way. And there were others who didn't. So I had both. I mean, that's why I wanted to go back and sort of fill in a little bit, and just make it clear. It wasn't everybody that I was having issues with. I think most women who went through this stuff in the '70s and early '80s here felt that. I think, in many ways what the students were experiencing, people like myself were experiencing.

**And actually that's part of what I wanted to turn to because I'm so struck by that, because I think you keep saying something along those lines. I'm making some assumptions about why women students in the '70s, or women engineering students specifically, were turning to you. But I'd like to hear your version of why they were turning to you.**

Well, (laughter) one of the obvious [reasons] was my age. I was young. They could relate to me. They could see that I was holding a director's position in a male-dominated environment. And they saw that. They also saw that when they came in, whether I was critiquing a resume, we

usually would start talking about other things. And people open up to me. I just always had this—sometimes it's a curse, (laughter) but a gift. People, male or female actually; the male students were the same way. They would open up to me just as much as the women students. But the women, because there were so few of them, I think they found somebody who was neutral ground. I wasn't grading their exams. I wasn't in front of them; I wasn't their advisor. I was a young woman professional, whom they could relate to and they would come and talk. And I never told them my stories of what I was struggling with. But I think they could see that there were issues around that for me as well. And they're so bright. I mean, just incredibly bright and intuitive and able to see beyond the surface. So a lot of it was just a comfort zone for them. It was a place to come and talk, and there weren't a lot of women around to go to. When you looked at the Student Life staff, it was all male at that time except for Randy Lamson who was in Student Activities. And I know a lot of women related well to Randy as well at the time. But because of my role in the career center, and back then it was a small shop but busy, busy, busy. I'll tell you again, generationally – that was a generation that looked up to adults and to people in positions that were of authority.

### **You mean in the '70s?**

Yes. Even after all we went through. And again, you've got to understand, our students still sought advice from us which was interesting, and they also knew that we were their advocates. That felt strong through the '70s. That's why honestly, (laughter) I don't think it has anything to do with age, but I honestly remember more students from the '70s and '80s than I do from the '90s and the recent years. When they walk up to me at reunion, if they look somewhat like they did... (laughter) There was a relationship there; you really got to know the students because they wanted you to. It was different. But again, I think it was they saw me as someone who was not far from where they had been.

### **A few years older.**

Yeah. A few years older. It's funny, even the alums who were young men; I still get e-mails from these guys back in the '70s. They still thank me forever for helping them get their first job. But I was also their *friend*. But I could keep the [distance]; it's difficult to do. You kept that distance. You could still be their friend and be their professional support at the same time. And again, a lot of it has to do with generations; I mean, if you look at generational studies, I'm a firm believer that a lot of the communication we have with students and I'm sure you've seen it in the classroom, how you teach to different generations.

### **Yes. It's changed.**

It changes.

**I mean, even in my relatively short time, I can see it. Also, as I get older, the way I interact with students has to change. Now I'm their mother's age potentially, even though I have young children. So they look at me differently.**

Yeah. And that for me was the toughest thing throughout the years – is the older I got that, well, the generation gap.

**Yeah.**

I mean, it happens. So you have to work at it harder. I'm just glad that I was the age I was at the time that the first women students [were] going through here. And that I could be there to talk with them and work with them, and be their advocate. And it was a great experience for me because I learned so much from them and they learned from me and it was just a two way thing. I mean, just phenomenal individuals. So I think there were the commonalities that brought us [together], and the connection.

**There are a bunch of different things that you said that I'm going to want to follow up on, and also from the last interview. Let me go back to something you were saying about your boss, who was obviously extraordinarily supportive of you. What about higher up than that? Well I guess he would have been part of the upper administration?**

He would have been. What was John's title? He was the—

**In this article there was something listed back in '76.**

I think he was a dean.

**Admissions Dean.**

Yeah. He was Admissions Dean, but he also was over the career center and some other administrative offices as well.

**Okay.**

It was almost an enrollment management model before it existed. It was very interesting. But it was kind of George Davis who created that. And then George went back to Arts and Science. And he hired me and handed me to John. (laughter) So that was basically how it worked in '75. So, you were going to go back to?

**I was going to say, higher than John. What's your memory of the messages you were getting from the upper administration about what you should be doing in the career center vis-à-vis women? You may not think of it in terms of that or these eras, so if that's not a question that works for you, let me know.**

I wasn't getting specific messages about women that I recollect anyway. I had an advantage going into then what was called the Placement Office in '75, in that I [had] worked across the hall. I worked in Alumni Relations which was in old Snell, across the hall from the President's office. I look back now: right place, right time. I mean, I was incredibly fortunate. I was lucky. I was put in a situation where at that time I had no appreciation for how fortunate I was. [Chancellor] Jack Graham retired and then [President] Bob Plane came in; both knew me. Jack

was the one who was really pushing for me to stay and do things. I think I mentioned in the last interview that Mary [Bob Plane's wife] was from the Student Affairs background. So he had an incredible understanding which was very helpful for me. Bob was President for 11 years, from '74 to '85. So those are those years that we're talking about.

**Yes.**

[I was] again very fortunate. Just like John Chapple, [he had] tremendous respect for women, embraced them as professionals. His wife was a professional, not that that makes a difference but I think it did for him. I mean, he just was the students' president; he used to sit in old Lewis House and eat lunch with the students. Everything was down there [on the downtown campus]. It was a cozy little campus. So during the day everything happened downtown. So Snell Hall was vibrant; Lewis House was vibrant. Believe it or not, good old Lewis House, all those places were very, very vibrant. So whether you were a male or female student, he was there and he was part of the fabric, and he set the tone for the rest of us. And so in answering your question, I was never charged with looking specifically [at women students], but what he did was he came to me as an expert in my profession, and always looked to me to give him the information about what was going on with women in their careers. What was going on, in general, with careers. What were the salaries, what were the differences, and so on. So I was his source of information for careers and what was happening with our students. So I think it was more the outcome that he was interested in versus going at it in a specific way.

**Okay. And actually, something you just said made me think of another question I wanted to ask you. One of the things that you mentioned, and I've certainly heard this from women alums, is that in the late '70s, it was a really good time to be graduating from Clarkson with a degree in engineering. These women talked about the many job offers they had. Can you bring me through from the mid-'70s to today in terms of the waves,**

The waves, yeah. Oh, and there were waves.

**and in terms of the economy, but also in engineering because I'm less familiar with how it worked with engineering, and I know engineering cycles.**

It does cycle. It's interesting; it really follows the economy. And then, there's the lag time because what happens is when the market picks up, companies aren't savvy enough to realize that they should still have a presence on campus, and still be hiring interns in co-ops and what happened with engineering during that time was that companies learned that going to campus in the late '70s, hiring hundreds of students, and then the early '80s hit, and the petroleum, the chemical industry, I mean, all of them were just bottoming out which is where a lot of our engineering students were going. And what they learned was they had to keep the pipeline going. But they didn't learn it until after they went through that cycle. But then they learned it and then they had new people coming in, and then we went through another cycle in the early '90s where the job market fell off for engineering, and in certain pockets, but what happened through all of that, our students still were getting jobs. We just had to work harder at it. And people used to think I was just using that as a line. And it wasn't because we were so well-established and still continue to be so well-established with the employers who hire our students that if they had only

one or two jobs they would, they would get a Clarkson student to go into those. Now what that meant was there were fewer offers. There were students who weren't getting offers. It would take longer. It was six to 12 months after graduation for some students before they would get employment. So there's the overall picture. For women, what happened was there were quotas that had to be filled in the '70s. That went away in the '80s; there was a lot of criticism of that. There was equal opportunity, reverse discrimination, all of these things started to sort of surface. But what happened was because women engineers from Clarkson had established themselves so well within in the industries where they were going, they were still in demand. So they rode the curve through that. What I've seen is, it's hard to stay equal with the men on the playing field because I still think women in engineering have a slight edge over the men when it comes to recruitment,

**And you're talking today?**

today.

**Yeah.**

Today – minorities and women still have an edge over the white males in the engineering job market. But I'll say just women, not to the extent they did in the late '70s into the early '80s. It's more equalized than it was; there's still an edge. But I remember the male engineers were getting lots of offers too, but there was a period where there was some real—, there was a bit of jealousy and there was a bit of angst among the male students. "I'm equally qualified, why are these women?" "Well, because they're trying to diversify their workforce." They're still chipping away at it, and still haven't accomplished it. But I think in the minority ranks, that's a whole other story in itself. But I don't know if women today see the women students [as having a big] advantage, the way they did in the '70s. I mean, it was just so obvious. (laughter) They knew they had it made. But they weren't cocky about it. They never got to this place where they built these egos that, "Well, I got 15 job offers." It was never that way. They were just so appreciative of what was opening up to them in the world. And today I think it's, again, women not understanding that those women students that paved the way for them in the '70s, and broke into the work force, and faced the glass ceiling, and did all those things, that they paved the way and made it more of a common ground for women today to work on. Again, I think the women students here are less aware of some of the issues than women were back then. Just because of the times involved.

**Sure. What about programs and policies in the '70s, and actually if you could take me up to today on this. Programs and policies here at Clarkson that would have had impact on women engineering students. Or, maybe not only at Clarkson, because part of what you were talking about a moment ago, were the quotas that existed in the workforce starting in the early '70s. So that would have had an impact on the Career Center obviously.**

Right. Yeah.

**What about other programs or policies either here or nationally that you can think of? Or anything that your office was part of?**

(Pause) What I think about is the laws around interviewing changed. That pause was not that I couldn't answer; it was more of just trying to think back (laughter) to the way it was versus the way it is. It's like, "Okay – what changed," because you get so used to the way things are now and have been for a while. What was acceptable in interviews changed dramatically, and laws started to protect particularly women. Although I don't think it was—, yes it was. It was probably directed to help women because men were getting asked a different set of questions than women were.

**Yep.**

And they would ask similar questions, but then there'd be another set for women. And what it got into was what's legal and not legal. We used to do extensive training of our students, and we would say to them, "If any of these issues—," our interview workshops dealt a lot with law. And I think about it today; when you teach interview workshops, you brush over that because it's just the way it is.

**I was just going to ask.**

It's just the way it is. Yeah, it's just the way it is today. So you still talk about it. You still hand them the little list that says, "This is what can be asked in an interview; this is what can't be asked in an interview." It's still out there. The National Association of College Employers still provides that. What you had though on the other side was that some companies trained their interviewers and some didn't. So then what you get into is people who knew what they had to do, and they were fine. And then, you had others who were still in the old school of interviewing, and were asking inappropriate questions, had inappropriate behavior with women, etc. So that for women really put them on a level playing field in that room for 30 minutes for that preliminary interview, and when they went for their on-site all-day interviews, it changed because you couldn't go there. You couldn't ask those questions. But backing up a little bit, what I did was I dealt with a lot of cases back in the '70s and early '80s of complaints filed with my office that we had to handle with employers, corporations at the time. And they were all handled very discreetly, very appropriately. And it didn't alienate those employers from the Clarkson campus. I can only think of one case that did, but that was inappropriate behavior on the part of a recruiter. Bob Plane wrote a letter to the company and said, "You're not welcome back on this campus." That's the kind of person he was. It didn't matter that, even if they'd given 100,000, 500,000 to the campus, which I don't think they had; it wouldn't have mattered to him because that was the inappropriate. "We don't accept that here. You're gone. Don't come back. You're not welcome here." And at that time, I worked in such a great environment where you had that. Women had that kind of support at Clarkson from the right people. So those kind of cases today are rare.

**Do students report them today? Would they tell you?**

It's generational again. I went through a phase where you just had to tell students, "It's okay. It's not—" If anything the company's going to treat you, you're going to have a better chance of being considered by this company because they're going to bend over backwards now to make

sure that you're treated equally in the employment process. So it went through waves. I think there are less cases today. I mean, I've been out of the Career Center now for four years, so I can't say in the last four years,

**Right.**

but up 'til then, there were still occasionally cases where women would come in and report. Surprisingly enough, every now and then there's a man, a male student who is asked inappropriate questions in the interview about personal background, plans for marriage, etc.

**Uh huh.**

And a bit taken back by that. But I think I mentioned in the last interview, women had to make decisions back then; today you can walk into an interview with an engagement ring on. And I mentioned in the last one [interview], and then, they questioned whether they should or they shouldn't.

**Yeah.**

It's just everything was so sensitive. Every move you made was just—. Thank goodness somebody had the foresight to realize that the interview process itself was such a stumbling block for so many women because they were asked questions that would eliminate them. That weren't asked of the men that, obviously, could have eliminated them too if they were asked in the same way. So that's probably the most significant law that comes to mind.

**And I'm also thinking about if there were programs or policies on campus.**

On campus?

**Which may not apply here.**

(pause) I don't think so because again it's interesting, I remember at one point we had a woman who was sort of like the Dean of Women, Women's programs, and it didn't last long. And I think you probably have heard this from some of the women; they didn't necessarily want to be singled out and treated differently. They wanted to just be part of the whole group. So I think what we tried to do, not so much through policy but through program, we've tried different things over the years. Again, I wasn't working in Student Life at the time. The Career Center reported to John, reported back to the dean. So I was not on the Student Life side. From a day-to-day [basis], what I saw in the Student Life side from the periphery was what they were trying to do was form groups and organizations on campus. I know that SWE [Society of Women Engineers] obviously was one of the first important groups to form. Society of Women Mangers, that's gone in waves over the years. At one time it was a very, very strong group. It's kind of come and gone, and SWE has always maintained its strength. The women's athletic programs, I think, come to mind as [a place] where there's been significant change at the institution. It was interesting because I got corrected by a parent. (laughter) I caught myself. I referred to the soccer team in a conversation at a [Clarkson] parents' committee meeting, and his daughter played

soccer, and he said, “The soccer teams.” And I said, “There is a female team.” I said, “Excuse me. Yes.” And I went, “Oh my God!” I was mortified.

**(laughter)**

(laughter) Like oh gosh, I’ve gone in my own world here. I picked up what other people are doing. And it was unintentional. I said it, and it was like, “Oh.” I’ve actually fallen into this, the male team. We’ve had incredible female athletes over the years. I just actually went through an exercise, doing a collage in Club 99 in Cheel [Arena] of sports teams over the years.

**What a good idea.**

It’s going to be on the wall. It’s going to be a big mural [by] Kevan Moss, the designer who works with Clarkson; she did the Concrete Café. She does some neat things around campus. So, anyway, we were going through our old photos of teams, sports clubs, etc., and I said, “We have to have the women up here because there have been so many male sports; if you go back, way back in time, this was all men, but then to see [the mix]. So it’s going to be a blend of male and female. And it’s just so cool. But I think our athletic department has, over the years, done an outstanding job of being very inclusive of women. If there’s an area that when you look at where women feel an affinity when they come back to campus, it would be athletics. The other one is the sororities. Only 15% of [Clarkson] women participate in the sororities, but for some women, over the years, been an incredible help for them. Now, historically that’s changed too. Because I think it was mid to late ’80s before you could only belong to Clarkson sororities. I mean, [SUNY] Potsdam’s sororities were both [for] Clarkson women and SUNY Potsdam women.

**I read about that.**

And it was phenomenal because it brought the two campuses together. And it brought the women together. There were so few women here, and there were so many women at [SUNY Potsdam], that they found another group. And that was a really interesting dynamic. So I was at odds with the Student Life folks when they brought in the Dean of Women’s Programs who said, “No. We no longer are going to allow our women to join the state sororities.”

**Oh.**

Well, there were very, very good reasons for that. And now as a Vice-President for Student Affairs I totally understand it. Okay? (laughter) I say that with kind of tongue-in-cheek. But what happened was they instituted this so that we could create a culture here where women could have their own sororities, and have them be at the national level so they could have that kind of support. And they also with the Nationals, there are a lot of rules and regs that are already there, that define how that organization’s going to run. Whereas with local sororities which is mostly what SUNY Potsdam has, they don’t have a national affiliation.

**Mmm.**

So, they sort of run according to whatever the (inaudible).

**The current president. (laughter)**

Yeah, exactly. And if you have a strong alumni group. I actually was the advisor for the Agonian Sorority [Alpha Kappa Phi, a SUNY Potsdam sorority which started accepting Clarkson women in the early 1970s] for several years, and was also on the board during the '80s. We lived two houses away from them when I had young children. It was great babysitting.

**(laughter)**

But a lot of my female students also were in Ago. So we called it Ago. So I had another relationship with our female students through that sorority.

**And you said in the '80s?**

Well, actually '70s and '80s. But mostly, when I was working on their board, it was in the '80s. From '80-'88 we lived on Pierrepont Avenue in an old Colonial, and the sorority was two doors away. They used to store their furniture in our garage when they had their parties. It was just an incredible relationship. But again, it's so funny; it's sort of like, when you asked that question, at first I'm going, "Oh, gosh." Just pull out the memory banks. So that's just one more way that we addressed how we could be more supportive. I honestly think from a student life perspective and including athletics in that, that Clarkson has done a lot in support of women, along those lines. And I think the women would agree with that. When you look at the affinity groups that have formed as alumni as a result of that, I think it's made a stronger alumni body of women.

**Interestingly so far, of the women I've interviewed, which admittedly is a small group, none of them were part of the sororities back in the late '70s. I look forward to interviewing a woman who was part of one of the Potsdam State sororities.**

Yeah. It will be interesting. I just actually read the Agonian Alumni Newsletter last night. Maybe that's why it popped in my mind. There are some Clarkson women who have written their little "this is what I'm doing now." Their blurbs.

**Interesting.**

Yeah.

**So I see we're coming toward the end of an hour, so I'm curious to hear, going back to women in engineering, where you think engineering is headed, and where you think things are headed for women in engineering. So two different questions.**

Engineering is more broadly defined and will continue to be, I think. I think what's happened with that career field is that it used to be so narrowly defined. Electrical engineer—it was very, very compartmentalized. And it was not only like that at the [educational] institutions, but it also was in the work world. It's not that way anymore. And engineers can't just be engineers. And I

think that's going to become more and more the trend. But they're going to have to have other skills that they bring with them which is a real challenge.

### **Like what?**

The business skills. Well again, the writing, the communication, the ability to communicate your idea effectively. I mean, there are all those hideaway research jobs, but for the most part you're not going to hide in this profession. The beauty of that is most of our women, from what I've seen, have that skill set and that personality set and the willingness to branch out of what is that narrowly defined skill. I come from a liberal arts background. I still believe strongly in the liberal arts. But I also believe that for certain students, engineering provides them with that foundation and that breadth to get into careers that will open them up to things. I mean, it's even a great foundation for medical school. People look at me and go, "Huh?" And I say, "Well, think about it." I think it's going to just continue to go that way. I think that they're going to have to have a broader skill set. Now that's a challenge with engineering curriculum.

### **I've seen that. (laughter)**

There's this ongoing discussion: can we do it in four years? Is this a five year program? Is this a four plus one? I think a lot of employers are educating on the job. What we do is provide the foundation through our education of engineering students here. For women, I think it's going to fit them very naturally. I think that the challenge with all this is getting that word out to young women who are [in] the elementary and middle school years, to translate that somehow to these aren't going to be these boring little lock step jobs, that they can be pretty exciting. To predict the future, I mean, alternative energy—there are going to be a lot of jobs that are going to be created around that for engineers. Environmental isn't going to go away. There are the chemicals and mechanicals – there's still going to be that need for them. But what they're going to find is that—; again, they're going to have to have more of a—, and that's where the beauty of Clarkson—I sound like an ad right now—but (laughter) if we truly provide the [Clarkson] Common Experience [common set of learning expectations and outcomes required for all Clarkson students] the way we intentionally wanted to do it. If it truly happens, then our students will be ready for that because it will give them that breadth, and give them the experiences outside the classroom that will complement their education here. Because, I think, the concept is what we needed, is where education needs to be going into the future. And I'm hoping the engineering students and the engineering faculty embrace that the same way. That arts and science, and business will because it's just as important for engineering to do that [become broader] as anyone. So, for women, it's just the opportunities are amazing. If a young woman asks me, is this an area she [should pursue], "Yes. You should. If it has any spark of interest for you, explore it." I think again, there's just a lot of misconception about what engineering is. That it's boring. That it's not exciting. Not something that a woman would want to do. And so I think it's better than it was in the '70s. Much, much better. I think it used to be the stereotype of the type of woman that would go into engineering, and to me that's gone away.

### **And what was that stereotype?**

Well, the theory that they were one of the guys. That they're not particularly female. Their persona was that they belong more in a man's world than they do in a woman's world. It was almost crass in many ways. That's why I say I look back now at that unity that was between SUNY Potsdam and the Clarkson women, and how that changed the perception that SUNY Potsdam women had—I went to SUNY—of Clarkson women. And how that changed that, that they're women just like you and they were. That they had the same interest and they had the same zest for life and all of this. That any other woman has. But they just had different interests. Rather than wanting to follow the path of perhaps going into sociology, they had a path of, "I love my chemistry class." The sociology [major] like me, I probably hated chemistry. Like I said,

**(laughter)**

they were different. And I think it's so interesting because I talk to Jen deCoste [Clarkson's Vice President for Institutional Diversity Initiatives] about this, how we define diversity and just the differences in how people think and what they're interested in. I think that women have gotten more of an appreciation for *each other* about those differences and accepted it in that it's not a man's job; it's a job. You know, it's okay. You can (inaudible).

**Yeah.**

So it's changed definitely. But back then, a lot of stereotyping was going on, a lot of, "Oh, those women at Clarkson." That changed because they got out, they branched out and there were a lot of relationships that were building between the two universities [Clarkson and SUNY Potsdam]. St. Lawrence [University in Canton, NY, 10 miles from Potsdam] was really pretty much out of the picture because of the distance. So it's interesting how having SUNY Potsdam here actually helped in that relationship.

**Right. I think I will end there.**

Okay.

**Thank you very much.**

You are welcome.