Mindy Farber

Interviewed by Jennifer Kinniff

October 9, 2015
MF: Mindy Farber

JK: Jennifer Kinniff

Subject: Life of Mindy Farber

Date: October 9, 2015

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JK: Today is October 9, 2015, and this is Jenny Kinniff from Hopkins Retrospective. And I'm here today with Mindy Farber, Johns Hopkins Alumni. Thanks for being here today.

MF: You're welcome.

JK: Can we start by you telling me a little bit about where you were born and about your family?

MF: I was born in New York City and my parents went to the City Universities of New York. They were one of the few parents of my friends who actually were college graduates. My brother is five and a half years older than I am and went through school so quickly that at 15 he was applying to college. So he applied to Johns Hopkins University when I was ten years old or nine years old, and it was the first college I had ever seen.

After he went to Johns Hopkins, it was a place that occasionally I would visit in those years. I went to public high school on Long Island and did well. When it came to looking at colleges, I had gotten the word that Hopkins was going coed and I applied. What happened was, that it was going coed but it wasn't ready to accept people from out of the area, so it accepted me but then told me to go away for a year and come back.

JK: And is that because they were only taking transfer students or people who lived locally?

MF: They decided they were only ready to take people who lived locally, so a few of the women in my class came in that first year
and were either living at home or whatever arrangements were made, but there were no dormitories ready at that point in terms of living arrangements.

So I went off, and at that time if you did well in school and you're a girl, generally the guidance counselors would send you to what were called the Seven Sisters schools: Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke, Smith. And my parents fell in love with Mount Holyoke. It was unlike anything they had ever seen. It was extremely beautiful. And so I spent my first year there.

But I couldn't get Hopkins out of my head, and someone that I was very close to from my high school came here as a freshman. So one day I went out to the front of my campus at Mount Holyoke College, along with I think a friend of mine, as many people did then, put our thumbs up and we hitchhiked from Massachusetts to Baltimore. I went to the admissions office and I spoke to them at great length and decided that I would come back here my sophomore year.

JK: And what was it about Hopkins in particular that made you want to transfer, as opposed to being at Mount Holyoke?

MF: It was still a very pretty school. It had all the magnolia trees in front. I had always known it as a little girl growing up because of my brother. I liked the idea that it was going to be coed, whereas Mount Holyoke was all women and a little artificial. Coming from a public high school, going to Mount Holyoke with the mixers and just being with girls all day long – not to put anyone down, but they all knitted during class. It was a little bit too much for me. So I thought Hopkins would be kind of a challenge and I thought being in the first coed class would be challenging.

JK: Okay, so you thought about that in advance and that was something that you were ready to take on.

MF: I was. So I came back and I spoke to the head of admissions, and what was funny back then was he said, "Oh yes, we are definitely going to now take you girls in, who are from other places, because we have 30 more beds to fill." That was the way he put it. Thirty more beds to fill.

So I said all right, I'll be coming back. So the two people I failed to tell that I was coming to Johns Hopkins were my parents, and to this day my mother will never let it go that I made a decision to leave one college, go to another and just forgot to tell them. Also I
really messed up because I arrived here and I came in for what would have been my sophomore year.

JK: Okay, and what year was that?

MF: That would have been the fall of 1971. And actually, the dorms were kind of ready and they kind of weren't. Some girls were put in the dorms, but then some people were not put in the dorms, and I was one of them. They put me in what was then, and I think it still is, Wolman Hall. It was a building for all graduate students, and they didn't tell me, but they put me with these two graduate student girls. It was then the original apartment building from the 1920s. As a matter of fact, they had an apartment that F. Scott Fitzgerald had lived in on top and they put me in with these two girls who were a few years older, but to me they were like twenty years older.

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They were probably five years older or three years older. And it was a very awkward situation.

JK: And that was because they thought they would have more rooms ready than they did by the time –

MF: It was disorganized. It was really disorganized. Some girls were in the dorms, the first few dorms. And then somehow a couple of us, maybe just me. I don't know. But I was put into Wolman Hall. There was really no thought at that time of integrating us together or having kind of a community life.

So to their horror, these two graduate students found themselves with this 18-year-old girl, and they were very upset about it because I would have friends come up and people would watch TV. I would sprawl out with my work and they did not like it. So in the middle of the year, we then had a dean of women. Her name was Dottie Lebo. She was appointed to help the girls who had come in. They said that they didn't think it was fair that they had this sophomore girl when they were trying to study for their PhDs.

So she said, "How would you like to have your own apartment?" And she gave me an apartment in Wolman Hall that for some reason was used for visitors. And so for the rest of the year, I had a one-bedroom, dining room, kitchen, living room, and some kind of little study all to myself.
JK: That's pretty nice.

MF: That was very nice.

JK: And did you have to go back to dorm life then sophomore year?

MF: Well, the irony was that by junior year those two girls were kicked out because it became an undergraduate building. So they were told to leave and I went right back into that same apartment.

JK: Oh, how funny. And you had roommates then.

MF: One of the girls in my class had become very friendly with me, and because I had this lush apartment everyone used to like to really hang out there. She hated her roommate, so she would spend a lot of time in my apartment or sleep over because I had a living room with a pull out sofa. It was really a nice place. She became my roommate my last two years and is still my best friend.

JK: And what was the dorm situation like for the girls who were put in the dorms together?

MF: So the girls were put into I think two dorms. It might have been one dorm with two girls in each room, and they were kept separate from the guys. So it was the guys, the guys, then the girls, and the guys, the guys. And so it was a little strange.

JK: And then so in terms of being on campus in general, you talked about the dorms. Were there other things on campus that were sort of closed or limited to women, or they weren't ready for women yet?

MF: They weren't ready in a lot of ways. They really hadn't fixed up any bathrooms for women. They did it in a very hurried way, but they didn't think about things. So if you went to a bathroom let's say in an academic building, it would say women. But then if you want to comb your hair, the mirrors were six feet tall. You had to jump to see yourself in the mirror.

And most of the rooms that the girls lived in, and then the bathrooms that they put up for women, still had urinals. So no one knew what to do, so people would put flower pots in them and people would do all kinds of – we'd put tablecloths on them. It was very strange. And the gym wasn't set up for women yet.
So if we wanted to use the gym in the first few months, believe it or not, a male would have to sign us in. True. And there were no sports, of course. So the first thing that somebody thought of was let's have a cheerleading team. So we'll have all the girls become cheerleaders for the lacrosse and football teams. And some girls did it and some girls said this is crazy.

JK: So did women's sports start to get organized the following year?

MF: The following year there was a coed soccer team, but there really were no women's sports teams in the years that I was there. The other thing, too, was there was no medical facility. So if a woman had a problem health wise, they would send us on the bus to Johns Hopkins Medical Center.

Junior year, they had a doctor come from the medical center to a little – maybe it is still there – a little infirmary area on the bottom of one of the dorms and I think once a week the doctor would see the girls, if they had any problem. But otherwise they would put you on a bus.

JK: And was birth control an option for you when you were talking to those doctors?

MF: No. If you were interested, there was a Planned Parenthood on Mount Vernon Place and they would send you over there. So there was no discussion of things like that. That was something that you just made private decisions about.

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JK: So how did that environment kind of ripple among the women that year? How do you think that that impacted your first year of college?

MF: So I got there and I was still fairly young, and I don't know what actually prompted it, but I thought of the fact that we should really have something going. So I put an ad in the newsletter and I found a graduate student named Emily Toth, who was sympathetic. And I said all the girls who are interested, let's think about forming a Women’s Center, and a lot of people came that night.

And we formed a Women’s Center and we named it the M. Carey Thomas Women’s Center because she was a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, who later became president of Bryn Mawr. So we
had the Women’s Center and we set it up, and quite a number of people came.

There were two I think women faculty members at the time. There was Mary Ainsworth and there was Phoebe Stanton, and they came. And a couple of female graduate students came, and then a number of the women undergraduates came. And we formed the group and it stayed very, very active for all the years that I was there that I was president. It was very fulfilling.

JK: Did Dottie Lebo ever participate?

MF: Dottie Lebo would come now and then. She was very nice. Dottie Lebo would come and she would ask for reports of what was going on. And then my sophomore year, I think toward the end when I came in, President Eisenhower had been president. There was a president named Lincoln Gordon who would have been president my freshman year, but there was some kind of controversy and he I think was asked to leave and they brought Milton Eisenhower back. So he was there for an interim period of time, and then Steve Muller came in from Cornell. And Steve Muller became a real ally. And Steve Muller was very supportive of the women for the last three years that I was there and would often get us funding for different activities. He was very sympathetic.

JK: Okay, that's good. I've read a lot of articles in the newsletter of people saying that maybe the environment wasn't the greatest, especially in that first year. So it sounds like you had some supportive administrators. Who were you finding it challenging to work with or to be there with?

MF: Well, some of the professors were very difficult. I know that it sort of broke into two kinds of problems. One was professors who just didn't want to have women there and just had it in their heads that we were taking up space or didn't think that we were going to be as academic as the men there. There was some theory that we were being recruited and the standards were lower in bringing in women than in bringing in men. That was one issue. And so some of the male professors were a little condescending.

The other part of it was, some of the male professors saw an opportunity having these relatively young women come in, to engage in dating and going out and social interaction. So it was very awkward, because you could be in a class with a professor, or you could have finished taking a class with a professor, and there
was a fairly heavy undercurrent of surreptitious or not so surreptitious dating

JK: And so how did women handle that situation?

MF: Well, there was no term called sexual harassment then, and so there was no concept for it. So everybody made an individual decision about what to do. Some people were very nervous about it because they didn't want their grades to be affected. Some people really liked some of these professors. It really varied, but there was definitely this thing going on.

JK: And is that something you would talk about at the Women’s Center, or was it something that was seen, but kind of not talked about?

MF: Everybody knew about it. It wasn't talked about that much. Everybody kind of knew about it. Everyone knew which professors were the players. Some of it was a kind of passivity that I don't think you would have now. For example, there was a professor who came in who chaired the history department when I was there and I was a major in history. And at that time, if you wrote a senior thesis and you got an A on it, you got not only your bachelor's, but your master's, and that was what I was aiming for. So I asked him to be my senior thesis advisor.

I actually had asked another professor who's still here, Ron Walters, but he was gone I think that semester. So he advised me to go see the chairman of the department. And every graduate student that I spoke to said when you go see him, don't wear your usual outfit of shorts up to here and the little tops up to here. Go in like a very conservative dress and sweater because he really has his eye on all the women.

So it was kind of a more passive thing. So I put on this little modest dress and went to see him, and that was the way you sort of dumbed it down. But it was not an issue that came up in the Women’s Center.

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The issues that came up in the Women’s Center were women's health, getting a doctor on campus, getting women to freely use the athletic facilities, and a big thing was getting more women professors and specifically someone to teach women's history. And we did succeed in doing all of that.
JK: When you first mentioned bringing the doctor to campus, you didn't mention the role that you played in doing that. But can you talk about that? What exactly did the Women's Center do to sort of make these changes?

MF: So I used to meet with Dottie Lebo, and then I would meet with President Muller. Everything was very accessible then. Things were smaller then. So President Muller was in Garland Hall. Garland Hall had just opened and literally you would just walk in and if he was there you would say hi and walk in. So I would go in and just talk to him about things. And I also would talk to his assistant. He had an assistant named Jakey Hall, and I would say these are the things we want.

Or we would write letters in the News-Letter. It was just constant communication and I guess in a way I became one of these sort of distinctive characters on campus. There was the big man on campus and then I was sort of the woman on campus because I was very vocal. And when I look back on it now, it's amazing to me because I was really fairly young. So how did I do all that? But we were vocal.

JK: And so it seems to me, what's your sense of the shortcomings that you found when you came to campus. Did you feel that there was generally good will towards the women, but they just didn't really know what they were doing? Where does that kind of disconnect come from?

MF: I think that at first there was this real resistance to having women because it was sort of still like a southern school. There was this aura about it that it was very academic on one hand, but on the other it was still this southern white frat boy school with the heavy drinking and a lot of fraternities off campus. The women, they didn't really know what to do with the women. They knew they wanted women because Princeton had gone coed and Yale had gone coed and other schools were going coed and they knew that it was a good trend.

And it was also being done in a cynical fashion because the feeling was if they brought women in it would pump up the arts and sciences area beside the premed programs—that women, the stereotype was, would come in and fill up more of the history and the history of art and those kinds of classes. Actually, it did not turn out to be necessarily true. So there was this feeling of what to do with us, and it started breaking down over time. Younger male
professors came in, who I think got it. The women were very vocal and the women did not let themselves be pushed back. I have to say that the women in my class were an extraordinary group and did not let themselves get pushed around.

So it was a combination of younger professors, fairly assertive women, and then academically some of us did really well and there was no way that anyone could get around that. So I think as time went on, it became better. But I have to say, I had some professors here who I'll never forget, male professors who were older and had a tremendous impact on me and were incredibly supportive. One was in the history department named – well, he's no longer here. He's deceased. He was British and he really pushed me along. And then in –

JK: What was his name?

MF: His name was David [Spring]. And then after that, all of us were assigned to advisors and each of us had an advisor who would talk to us about what we were going to do after college. I don't know if they still do that, but the advisor was very homey. You would go out for milkshakes – not Wolman Hall, but the building next to it had Blackstone. Blackstone had a pharmacy and the other building next door had a pharmacy and they still had the swivel seats where you could get the milkshakes in the silver canisters. And they would take you for milkshakes, they would take you for lunch and they would talk to you about what you wanted to do.

I had an advisor, his name was Fred Dierman, and he wasn't a professor. He was an administrative person, but he was my advisor and he said to me, "You know, Mindy, I found out for you there's a scholarship that you can get to go to law school. I think you should go to law school." I was applying to grad school at the time in history. "Go to law school, and I found a scholarship for you," which I thought was very amazing. He said, "I did some research. There's a scholarship at NYU Law School. They'll pay your whole way through and it's called the Ruth Tilden Scholarship for Women." And he said, "Apply for it because you have grades and you have extracurricular activities, and that's what they're looking for." So I wrote – of course everything in those days was writing. I wrote a letter to the Ruth Tilden Scholarship for Women at NYU and it turned out to be the Root, R-o-o-t, Scholarship for Men and Women.
And it didn't daunt me. I applied. They took 20 from across the country. But he left, and when I told him he was wrong but he was very supportive. And Hopkins was so supportive. I had to say it was so homey then that when I did get into the finals for it, I had to interview in the Fourth Circuit, which the seat was Richmond, Virginia. And Hopkins paid my airfare to go from BWI to Richmond. And not only that, I had to go home that weekend.

My brother was coming in, and because my brother was an alum, Steve Muller, President Muller, said, "Don't worry about it. We'll pay for you to go to New York." So there was a lot of overall fairness and support, but then there were some things that when I look back on that should not have happened.

JK: What about your fellow students? The male students? What was life like with them?

MF: So again it broke down into two very strange things. One was you would walk into a class and none of the men would sit next to you. It didn't matter what you were wearing, it didn't matter how you looked, it didn't matter anything. Whether you were nice, you were mean – as soon as a woman sat down in class the men would all take their whatever, their bags, and they would move back. And then if you sat in the second row they would move further back.

So if you really wanted to play games, you would move to the center, and then some of the men would actually stand in the back. Nobody would sit around the women. It was a total phenomenon and it was everywhere. It didn't matter what class you were in. A woman sat down and none of the men would sit next to her. And that went on – and it wasn't even an unfriendly thing. It was just this strange – I can't even explain it now.

JK: You really don't think it was unfriendly?

MF: Well, it seemed like it was unfriendly, but then they would be nice. But nobody would sit next to the women. You would sit down and nobody would sit next to you. People would smile. People would be okay. But nobody would sit next to a woman in class. Well, it ultimately broke down because my roommate, who again is still my best friend, she and I were waiting to go to a social psychology class and we would always get there early.

This was, I think, in Shaffer Hall, and we would sit on the floor. She had this thing about black nail polish, so sometimes when we were early she would polish her nails black. And I would sit and do
all kinds of crazy things. A fellow came in, a student, and started
talking to us and so we stopped. And he came in our row with us
and that's now her husband. They've been married all these years.

JK: Oh, how nice.

MF: So it did break down somewhat over time, but that was the first
thing that happened. And the second thing of course was that by
the time we graduated there were only 50 of us. But when I started,
there were probably only maybe 35 of us. So if you had any
halfway something going for you, the social life was incredible. It
was just there for the picking. Everybody was out there. So the
social life was quite intense.

JK: I wonder, too, I mean your story about them not wanting to sit next
to you. It makes you wonder what sort of peer pressure that they
might have had going on that you guys didn't know about. Because
surely not every guy there went to a single sex school. You went to
a coed high school. Surely a lot of them did, too. It almost makes
me think there might have been some sort of peer pressure going
on, like no one wanted to be the first one to sit next to you.

MF: It could have been, but it was very rampant and the professors
didn't discourage it. They just watched it happen. And as I said,
most of the professors, to be fair, became really good. But then
there were some who would say, "Well, Ms. Farber, did you have
time to read this last night or were you busy going out on dates?"
They would have these funny attitudes. But it quickly stopped
because I think as I said the women would not tolerate it. And
there was one professor in the history department who was awful.
Awful. And I went in, talked to Steve Muller about it. I didn't care.
And I just said this is not right. So somehow this awareness was
developing.

JK: I was looking in the yearbook at pictures of the Women’s Center
and things like that. I noticed in the 1974 picture of the Women’s
Center there were two men in the picture.

MF: There could be.

JK: Did you have men that were participating in your events?

MF: Yes. As a matter of fact, in our senior year we were given a fair
amount of money to celebrate the fact of the first women were
graduating, and it was called the Women's Festival. And one of my
friends, Ann Hagerty, who is an architect in the Baltimore area,
designed the pamphlet. I still have the original pamphlet. On the committee were two of my very close friends who were male, so we welcomed them. And we had some fairly well known speakers, and again Steve Muller made sure that we got the money for it. One of the notorious speakers at the time that came was Jane Fonda, because she was not Jane Fonda the exercise guru.

She was not Jane Fonda married to Ted Turner. She was Jane Fonda who was still Hanoi Jane. Jane who had been very active with anti-war activities and at the time was married to Tom Hayden. So she agreed to come to campus, so she was part of it. But we also had Anne Sexton, who was a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, and that was a very interesting night. When we had speakers come, we were also given money to take them out to dinner. So the better restaurants around Hopkins at the time were in the old stodgy apartment buildings.

One had a Chinese restaurant, one had a very old fashioned American restaurant, and we were also told that we had a certain budget to allow the speakers to get drinks. So she became very intoxicated. And when she went to speak, and it was a tremendous crowd because a lot of grad students were there in particular. She started reading her poetry but she was kind of inebriated and at one point just flung her glasses out at everybody and then said, "What else can I fling out?"

So we had everyone from her to Jane Fonda to Anais Nin to Sissy Farenthold, who was running for president at the time. Everyone's forgotten about her. She was one of the first to run. And a number of other speakers, and it was really interesting.

JK: That sounds like a lot of responsibility to pull all that together.

MF: It was. And then of the month before, I think two months before I think we had Shirley Chisholm who was running for president. We were always given a lot of, when I look back on it now, there was a lot of support, more so I think than there wasn't support. And maybe I'm saying this from the vantage point of being older looking back, but it was a very heady time. It was very interesting. If you enjoyed change and you enjoyed feeling like you were making a difference, it was a good time to be here because so much was starting to crumble. So much was changing around me, and it was happening in those four years.
JK: I saw an article in the Evening Sun, and it was in October '72, which would have been the start of your junior year maybe. Or was that your –

MF: Yes.

JK: Yes. And I think you actually were quoted in the article as saying, "If I had to do it over again, I wouldn't have come here."

MF: Is that right?

JK: Yeah, but that was after your first year, so I imagine – but then you also ran for student council president that year, so I feel like even in the things that I dug up about you, I can kind of see this tension between being frustrated, but also being really involved and trying to change it.

MF: Well, running for president was a challenge. I was running against someone who was an incumbent, who I think was president for two or three years actually. His name is Andy Savitz. That was hard because I think that's where there was a lot of discrimination. It was very hard as a woman to get the men, as it probably still is now, to vote for you and there probably were some women actually who didn't like some of what was going on. I mean I was considered in those days to be controversial and a radical. And some women who were here, although most of us were together in the Women’s Center, there were some who didn't like it at all. And then there were some who simply came [who were] older, who just weren't living on campus or couldn't relate. So they weren't part of it. But running for president was very difficult. But I was glad to do it. It was a good experience. But I think by my senior year I was very glad to have been here. And I say to this day it really taught me to write well and it also really gave me the – maybe because there was so much autonomy.

Maybe because they were so hands off with students. There was so little provided in the way of campus activities. You had to create your own – so because we did so much creating of our own, it gave me a lot of self assurance so that by the time I got to law school, law school was a piece of cake.

JK: Yeah, you had already learned how to advocate for what you wanted.

MF: Absolutely.
JK: And what about – so there were women in your class who were African American, right? There was some diversity within your class. Do you think that they had a different experience than you did? Was the diversity on campus, did they have sort of two hurdles that they were trying to deal with?

MF: There was a Black Student Association that often did activities with the Women’s Center. We co-sponsored Shirley Chisholm, so that was one thing we did together. I don't think so. We had in our class the largest number of African American students to that point, and I think we had two or three African American women who have been very active and coming back to the little reunions we've had here and there, and they've actually come from different places to be with us.

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So I don't think it was that much different. I really think the real issue was women versus men, not so much the racial issue. I don't think – of course I don't want to speak for – but I've never heard feedback from the African American women in my class that they thought there were two hurdles. Maybe they did, but I never heard it.

JK: And so you had some other activism going on, too. You were working on a committee on human rights in Chile. Can you talk about that and how that got started?

MF: My junior year, I believe – I have to think. I think it was my junior year, the government in Chile, Allende government was overthrown and Pinochet came in and took over and established a military dictatorship. I had lived in Chile for a year in high school and was still very close to the family, and indeed to this day still am. And so I truly identified with Chile. I, with a number of other students, including somebody who's on the Board of Trustees right now, formed an ad hoc committee for democracy in Chile and we had some professors join us.

We had various fundraising activities and we sponsored speakers and put up all kinds of brochures and letters to the editor and the News-Letter about that. So that was one other thing that I did. And then I think the most controversial thing was senior year, that almost back-to-back, like bookends we had Jane Fonda, and then a few weeks later we had Alger Hiss. That was very interesting because both were very controversial figures. Alger Hiss, of
course, was a very controversial Johns Hopkins figure. He was just a controversial figure. And one day I was walking on campus and President Muller said, "I want to show you something." So we went up to his office and he had a stack of letters this high from alums saying, what has happened to Johns Hopkins University?

How on earth can you have these people come speak? I'm not giving money anymore. This is becoming a radical hotbed. I never thought of Johns Hopkins that way and I'm not going to put up with it. And he laughed. And he said, "You know, Mindy? Don't worry about it." Because I was so nervous. He said, "Any engagement is good engagement and the fact that we've got the alumni engaged like this is fine with me." He said, "Don't ever worry about it, but I thought you would want to know what you've created here." And it was just letters all over the floor, everywhere. I will also say that when I graduated five women in my class out of the fifty made Phi Beta Kappa, and I happily was one of them. Steve Muller was there to give out not the keys, but I think some certificate.

And it was also held in some apartment building. The apartment buildings were like a big thing and he whispered in my ear and said, "Don't ever forget what I'm about to tell you. You were a Renaissance woman on campus and we will never forget you." And I still remember this, and I have very, very fond memories of him.

JK: That's wonderful.

MF: It was very nice.

JK: I feel like that's a side of him that maybe not a lot of students got to see, because I've heard things that he was sort of strict and had this presence that was very severe at times. But that sounds like a whole different side of him.

MF: He was always to me very, very nice. I don't know what it might have been or what it was or wasn't, but very, very personable. And in those days, you really got to know the president of the university, maybe because every division was smaller. But people were just walking around all the time and everybody would just say hello to each other and you got to know people. So it was very, I thought, personal thing and I have never forgotten that.

JK: That's really cool. Did you work in your various sorts of activist roles with Chester Wickwire at all?
MF: I worked a little bit with Chester Wickwire. One of my good friends actually was the biggest liaison with him, Kathy Klemmer, who unfortunately has passed away. She had come in as a [junior] and she died of cancer a few years ago, which was a terrible tragedy. But I worked a little bit with Chester Wickwire on social programs. He got involved with the Chile program. He was very happy that Alger Hiss came to campus, and so he helped a little bit in smoothing the way on that. He gave us some money for that program that we had at the end to celebrate women graduating from the school. I did a little bit with the tutorials and the teaching and the tutoring.

JK: The Tutorial Project.

MF: I did a little bit of that. Unfortunately, I had a bad incident with that in that I was tutoring and my wallet was stolen that afternoon, so it was like a bad week for me. But he was a very inspirational figure, but he was not really as directly involved I would say with the women.

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I think of all the professors who really actually gave women the strongest support was, interestingly, a male professor who's still here, named Ron Walters, in the history department. You could count on him for anything. He was a very big advocate and he would do things that were very funny actually at times to help out. This isn't necessarily a women's story, but I do have to say this about Ron Walters because this is such a classic story. Alger Hiss said that he would only come to campus if he could teach – he didn't want to be a source of just controversy.

He wanted everyone at Hopkins to remember that he had actually been the valedictorian and that he had gone on to clerk for a Supreme Court justice, Oliver Wendell Holmes. So he wanted to teach a class and so I didn't know what to do because if he had any idea of what went on at Hopkins, there were no classes on Friday afternoon. He was giving a lecture on Friday night so on Friday afternoon we had to pull together a class. So I said to Ron Walters, "What are we going to do? He wants to teach a class."

He says, "Don't worry about it," and he got some grad students and he got some undergraduates and he said, "I'll make up a class immediately." So he called it Current Issues in American Politics, I think. And the class that Alger Hiss thought he was teaching was
Actually a class that was put together within ten minutes by Ron Walters. So we were all kind of like actors and actresses in the class faking the whole thing out. And I, to this day, have laughed with him about it.

JK: That is really funny.

MF: It was very funny. I don't know if this could still go on, but it was very funny then.

JK: And so how do you think your undergrad experiences influenced the trajectory of your career or what happened in your life and the decades after that?

MF: So I won the scholarship and it paid my way through. So I have a big debt to Fred Dierman, wherever he may be. I don't know if he's still alive. And I did public interest work in law school. And then when I came out of law school, I was in the civil rights division of both the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Justice, and then went on to become an employment attorney. So to this day I do a lot of civil rights work. And I think a lot of it has to do with things that went on in my undergraduate days. It was that interest in helping people along, and I've done a lot of work with women.

I haven't given up on it. Over the years I was legal advisor to the National Organization for Women on the national level, and I was legal advisor to the American Association of University Women. And I was vice president of the American Civil Liberties Union doing women's issues. I live in Montgomery County, Maryland, and I was on the Montgomery County Commission for Women. So a lot of the things that I did in college I continued to do afterwards. I have a daughter and a son. My daughter went to Johns Hopkins and she in her years here was not active in the Women’s Center. She was very active in the American Civil Liberties Union, but is a feminist and so I like to think it's been passed on.

The most poignant thing that happened was – I don't know if you know about this – but three years ago – actually it was four years ago I started wondering what happened to all the women in the class. We were never brought together, so when I talk about the professors in the Women’s Center, that was all true. But as a class, nobody ever thought about having a tea or a luncheon or a dinner for us to meet each other. We only met if we got involved in common activities. But we never met because the school said, “Here's all the women. Get together.” So a couple of years ago
when it was approaching our 30th reunion I believe, I started thinking about it.

And I decided that what I would like to do is see if I could pull together the women in the class to get together. Unfortunately that year I had a health scare, which thank goodness stopped and is gone. So I had to put it off. But I didn't forget about it, and a year later I decided that I was going to track down every woman in the class. It wasn't easy because some women had changed their names, although a great many had not. I had not and a lot of women had not. And some women just fell off the face of the earth and in those years Hopkins did not keep good records. Don't forget, we did not go to school with computers.

There was a computer and it was like the size of this room, and it was the computer. But other than that, it was keeping things manually or God knows what they were doing. So I approached Hopkins about it, and I don't think at first – and this is where I will say something negative.

I don't think the school took it seriously. And then finally they brought a junior person from the development office to help me, not quite understanding what was going to happen. And what did happen was out of the 50 women in the class, we found out that of the 50, sadly, 5 had passed away. They passed away from their 30s to their 50s. Four from cancer and one from an embolism. Actually, she had been a teacher here, Nancy Forgione. She had been the History of Art professor.

Out of the 45, 42 came. One woman, Barbara Benton Hill, whose father was vice president under Steve Muller, cut a trip to China short to be here. And one woman left her husband in Italy to come. The 42 of us out of the 45 surviving were there and it was a very memorable time. But it was the first time all of us were in one room. Can you imagine? And so we all started, for the first time ever, comparing what had happened to all of us. And it turned out that it was an incredibly high achieving class. One of my friends is CEO of the American Red Cross.

She was on the Board of Trustees here. I don't know if she still is – Gail Rosenberg McGovern. Barbara Benton Hill is one of the leading persons in the health industry in the United States. She's always listed on the top hundred, and she's on a lot of national
boards. She's a dear friend and she's done very, very well. But really, we have art professors and other professors.

We have doctors and lawyers. It was probably, for its day, almost an unusually high achieving group. So I think something about Hopkins had to—it either filtered out and brought in a certain kind of person, or people came here and something was of great impact. Because the women were, almost to a T, high achieving career women, who also had families by and large, but very high achieving career women. PhDs and so on.

JK: And did you get the sense from your fellow graduates that Hopkins had the same sort of formative role for them as it did for you? It must have if they all came back like that.

MF: I think something touched everyone's heart. I sent out a letter by email or whatever I could do saying, "I don't know if you all feel the same way I do, but I don't know what happened to everyone. I don't think I know everybody. So maybe we should do it now and learn to find who we are and where we were and what did we do." And so I think part of it was just a curiosity and then we all got swept up in it. It just became a big snowballing thing.

But when I spoke to women, and some of them are friends now that I had no idea of their existence then – one is a friend who I didn't know then because she came in four years older than me with a six-year-old when she graduated. So we'd become very friendly, and Barbara had two children by the time she graduated even though she was my age and graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a two-year-old and a baby in her arms. So I think people came from different perspectives, but I think by the time we all got together again, and this is what age does to you, everybody was very kind to each other and very, very warm to each other.

When I graduated, the decision was made to let a woman speak at graduation and this was something that I don't really talk much about. We decided we were going to have a speaker speak against – it was the waning days of the war in Vietnam and a lot of us came in red arm bands. And we're allowed to have a speaker, Martin Goldsmith from our class. We wrote a speech and he gave it. He actually became a very well known DJ in classical music on NPR. He's actually very well known in the classical music field. He does a lot of narration at the Kennedy Center. But we wrote a speech and he gave it against the war. But then we were also told that we could have a woman speak.
And some of the women in the class said we like the idea, but it shouldn't be Mindy who speaks because Mindy has so dominated the years here that frankly it's just not getting fair anymore. And to some extent, she has a voice and a vision that is little bit more radical than some of us feel. And I do remember, and maybe it's just the way I am. But sometimes you don't forget your whole life, some of these things.

And I remembered. I remembered who they were, and I'll never say who they were, but when we came back to the reunion those women were there and they couldn't remember that they had said that and all of us were very, very warm to each other and to this day still communicate with each other. So I think everyone had somewhat of a different feeling about things.

The most heartwarming thing was we had as a highlight of the weekend that we were all here together in Baltimore a luncheon at the Hopkins Club. In our day, the Hopkins club did not let women sit in the main dining area. And when a few of the male professors took me to lunch there, we sat in the lower bottom area. It was just one thing that I didn't take on, but it was something that really was going on then. So there we were, all of the women, and we invited all the professors that we could find who were still around who were our teachers and when it all happened there was almost a fire code problem with the Hopkins Club. It was so many people at lunch.

You practically had to stuff people in. Barbara Benton Hill got up. She was the one who had come back from China early, and her experience obviously was very different because she had the two children. So I knew her, but how well could I know her because she had the family. She came back with Bell’s Palsy. It was a form of shingles that she developed in China, but she was determined to be at this reunion. So all of a sudden I saw her get up to the front of the Hopkins Club. And I said, is she getting up because everyone feels badly that she had an eye patch on and her face was totally – I can say this now because she looks so great now. Her face was totally sliding to one side.

I said, "Is she going up because we feel so badly about what she's going through?" And nobody would tell me. And I said why is she going up? And she said, "Some people would say why am I up here looking as bad as I am." She said, "But if we have to wait another 30 years, I have to look better now than I will 30 years
And then she said, "I'm up here because some of us knew hardly anyone in those years and some of us knew some people and some of us knew a lot of people. But all of us in this knew one person, and that was Mindy Farber." And then she presented me with a Hopkins, one of those Windsor chairs, and it says Mindy Farber, First Class of Women.

And I really cherish it. I think whatever the experience was then, it did propel us to all come together. And we periodically try to set something up together. I know that individually I have lunch with a lot of the people from that class now, and I think we all agree that it was a time and a place. And if it did nothing else, it got us to be very assertive and feeling that for the rest of our lives we wanted to look out for the women so that other women, rather than go through what we went through, could go back not even realizing what we had gone through because we had done it for them. And indeed when my daughter got there, she had no idea of all these things except occasionally what she would hear from me, but she didn't want to hear from me because, you know, I'm her mom. It's all boring.

**JK:** And you're on the Alumni Council today, right?

**MF:** Yes.

**JK:** What sorts of things, issues are you working on with them?

**MF:** Well actually, on the Alumni Council, I'm chair of a committee on the executive committee but it's kind of a committee in the throes of being reworked. And there's some talk about trying to survey alums as to what activities they would like and what they would not like, and also suggest to Hopkins, interesting alums who maybe Communications would want to write about for the various magazines and publications. But I have it in my head actually. I hope by next year I'm going to really start cutting back in terms of my full-time legal practice.

And what I'd like to do is I'd actually like to take the idea that I had of the very successful women's reunion. Oh, and then afterwards I was chair of my fortieth reunion class for men and women, and have what Brown University has and Duke University has, which is a women's weekend and get everybody younger and older to come back to campus, women, and have a whole series of seminars and issues and speakers. That would be something I'd like to do. So I've talked a little bit about it.
JK: There are still a lot of active women on campus today. There's a lot of, I guess, some issues are new and different and some issues are always the same, but I have thought they could really benefit from people like you who have decades of experience in the field to offer them insight.

MF: Well, last year I came back. Everything goes around that comes around and the Women’s Center has had many changes over the years. And another thing people realize where it started from or how it started, but they were trying to start another Women’s Center last year.

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And somebody suggested that someone on the Board of Trustees speak, a woman, and somebody suggested that I come. I think the women thought that some 95-year-old woman with a walker was gonna walk in and be like horribly – you know. And I think they were surprised that I had a sense of humor and that I talked to them, but I liked very much interacting with the women, and I think they didn't realize all the things that I told them about. They loved the story, the urinals and things like that. I said I jumped, and I said we would jump to see ourselves when we want to brush our hair.

But there are different issues, of course. But I still think there are a number of issues that never go away. We had, and we didn't speak about this issue of, now they talk about sexual assault. Was it sexual assault that was going on then? I'm not sure it really was. Was it women voluntarily going out with their professors? Was there an element of coercion and duress because these were people who had our lives on the line? So to some extent it had different names, and so I understand I think from the vantage point of looking at it from then and from now, similar issues that unfortunately have never really gone away.

But I think there's always that issue of pay equity and also the issue of juggling career and family. I have a much more mellow attitude about it because I've done both, but I think there's still this issue of what is a woman's place and what is a woman's challenge in life, and I think that's something that's still obviously that's much debated.

JK: Is there anything else you want to add that I forgot to ask you about or that you didn't get to say?
MF: I think we pretty much covered it. I'm trying to remember if there was any other compelling issue at the time.

JK: Tell me about your graduation speech, actually. You alluded to the fact that you didn't give it by yourself, but you didn't really say what happened at graduation.

MF: So I helped write two speeches. One was the anti-war speech and one was the speech for the women. And actually when the women got together at the reunion three years ago somebody found an original copy of it, and it was so ahead of its time. It was so amazing because it was not only written well, but it was all about our hopes for the generation after us. And I should get a copy of it. We have a copy of it and I think we gave a copy to the archives, but it was all about not only the challenges we had, but what we hoped for the future.

We hoped that there would be more women in academics so that women would have more mentors. We hoped that the mentors wouldn’t just be male professors, but we would have women professors here. We talked about having better health facilities and having sports teams, and we talked about just having the feeling among the community that women academically could do just as well as men and indeed had done just as well. So when I read it again, I also had tears in my eyes three years ago because I just thought about 21 and 22-year-old girls basically writing it in a world where there were only at best 50 of us surrounded by 350 men in the class in a group of 400 that graduated that year. Much smaller than the classes now.

And it was, I would say, ahead of its time. But the graduation itself was also very innovative. It was such a small class that the graduation was held on the campus. It wasn't held in the stadium area. We just walked from the lower campus up the steps to the upper campus, and it was so small that the parents were on either side taking pictures and then we ended up I think by walking over to the library and there was a big tent. And the governor of Puerto Rico spoke that year because he was some alumnus of Hopkins, but he was so boring. Most of us took out cards and we were playing cards and nobody was listening.

Of course we didn't have cell phones in those days and we didn't have anything to really look at, so it was playing cards. But prior to that, the very fact that a woman spoke, that a student spoke out against the war, was very – if you look back on it, given that this was 1974, it was something. And it was something for, to be fair to
Hopkins, it went from being in my brother's time in the late '60s, this real southern frat boy school, although very academically good, it really said a lot that in those four years it ended up that way. And I think a lot had to do with Steve Muller. I will give him credit for that.

JK: Do you think 1974 Mindy would be happy with what you're seeing today at Hopkins in terms of the equity and how far things have come?

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MF: I think that we talked about this three years ago, all the women in my class. We would be happy in a lot of ways but there was a disturbed feeling that in some ways the women who were on campus take so much for granted that, to some extent, the activism that we had has not really quite gone over to the women now. Are they academically sure of themselves? Yes. Are they at this very academically great school? Yes. Is it ranked even higher than it was in our day? Yes. But the feeling is somehow there's some kind of steeliness, some kind of...Here's what it is. I know what it is.

I think it was either Ron Walters or Matthew Crenson who said when we graduated, "There will never be another class like the class of 1974 because they took social issues and brought them into the classroom, and they took the classroom and brought it into the world and the social issues. And they were able to mix the two and understand that there was juxtaposition. There was a connection that had to be, and so they brought the world in and they brought the world out."

And our feeling was in looking at Hopkins now that as many activities as there are, as many wonderful things as there are, our feeling is, and maybe we're wrong about this, the women somehow don't have that same social sense. Because I think that there's so much that's been given to them that they just don't realize in their own parents' lifetime had to be fought for. So I think I would like it, but I think in some ways I wouldn't like it, if you know what I mean.

JK: I do. I do. I guess that's about all the questions I have. Do you have anything else?

MF: I don't think so, unless there was something I clearly missed. But I hope I gave you a good snapshot of it.
JK: I think you did. Thank you so much.

MF: You're welcome.¹

[End of Audio]

¹ Note from Mindy Farber: “As a result of that reunion three years ago of the first undergraduate women, we seeded and endowed a scholarship in our pioneering name that has its first recipient this year, a needy woman from Arizona who wants to major in public health. I am so proud that we pioneering women could do this as a group for the next wave of women.”