

Interview with Caitlin Fashbaugh

Interviewed by Ann Pflaum

Interviewed on October 16, 1999

Caitlin Fashbaugh - CF
Ann Pflaum - AP

AP: This is Ann Pflaum. Today is October 16, 1999. I am interviewing Caitlin Fashbaugh.

Caitlin, can you tell me how you got to the university and where you're from? You are a graduate of what year?

CF: Nineteen ninety-nine.

AP: What college?

CF: CLA [College of Liberal Arts].

AP: Wonderful. And how did you get to the university and what was your experience like?

CF: I have extended family in Minnesota, even though my parents live in the Upper Peninsula [UP] of Michigan. The University of Minnesota is actually closer to my parents' home in Michigan than the University of Michigan is to my parents' home, because they're so far away from the lower half of the state. And my father had been a grad student for a short period of time at the University of Minnesota in 1960s and he had a great experience here. I was looking at smaller private schools, but I wanted to go to a place that was more egalitarian and just huge. I kind of wanted to get lost for awhile, so I chose Minnesota.

AP: How big was your high school?

CF: All together there were, in grades seven through twelve, 400 students.

AP: And your senior class?

CF: There were ninety-three, I think.

AP: Where did you live when you came on the campus and what year did you enter?

CF: I entered in the fall of 1994 and I moved into Comstock Hall.

AP: What was that experience like?

CF: Great. I wanted so much to meet people who were so very different from me. It was sort of isolating because my roommate was so very different from me, so I had trouble making connections early on. My first year, I spent a lot of time sort of planning how to get out. I had a hard time adjusting to the size and to being away from my family.

AP: Did you do any student activities when you were in college?

CF: Yes. I was a volunteer usher at Northrop. I was a volunteer usher at Rarig Center. I did Habitat for Humanity. There were other little things here and there but . . .

AP: Are you talking your whole four years or are you talking your freshmen year?

CF: My freshmen year I did these things.

AP: The ushering. Can you tell me anything that you saw that struck you, that was important to you?

CF: In my extra curricular?

AP: I'm thinking of your ushering.

CF: Oh, ushering. The number of people that would show up for any particular event just blew me away, realizing that the people who came for just some jazz concert probably equaled the size of my home town. I think that that really struck me and meeting people who came to shows who were alumni of the "U". I wondered if I would end up coming back.

AP: Did you chat with any of them? That's an interesting insight that you met alumni who came back. How did you know they were alumni?

CF: Sometimes, they would be with a group, like a tour group. Then, they ended up at a show in the evening. I'd recognize them just from name tags.

AP: For the record, what was your home town and what was its population?

CF: Ironwood, Michigan, in the UP and I think the population right now is just under 5,000.

AP: So, that the 5,000 events would have been in Northrop, which has a close to 5,000 capacity.

CF: Right.

AP: Take me to your sophomore year. Did you still live in Comstock?

CF: I lived in Centennial Hall for the first half of the year. Then, I moved out and got my own place.

AP: As we look at your education, are there faculty or courses that you look back on? Did you come with an idea of what you wanted to major in?

CF: I pretty much knew that I would be majoring in English, although I wavered a little bit. My sophomore year, I realized that I also wanted to double major in some foreign language, but I wasn't sure which one.

AP: Did you pick one?

CF: Yes, I picked Spanish.

AP: Then, you, about your sophomore year or junior year, moved to your own apartment. With roommates, I assume?

CF: Yes.

AP: Again, any other different student activities or a part-time job at all? Did you work your way through?

CF: Yes, I worked my way through school. I worked as a janitor in Comstock. For my freshman and sophomore year, I worked cleaning dorms, the halls. My last three years of school, I had work study jobs, tutoring and things like that.

AP: Are there faculty members that you got to know as you went through that were important to you?

CF: Yes, probably English faculty. Those were the only professors that I really got to know at all, actually. Do you want me to name the faculty?

AP: Sure. Oh, absolutely.

CF: Michael Dennis Browne [B-r-o-w-n-e], Calvin [C-a-l-v-i-n] Kendall [K-e-n-d-a-l-l].

AP: Any others?

CF: Yes, Toni [T-o-n-i] McNaron and Ed Griffin.

AP: Did you develop a passion for a particular period or type of study?

CF: I was particularly interested in British poetry in the first half of the twentieth century.

AP: Do you have any particular favorites? Did you do a paper on somebody?

CF: I did papers on W. H. Auden and Philip Larkin. Those are the ones that stick out in my mind.

AP: They strike me as later in the first half of the twentieth century, rather than early.

CF: Yes.

AP: Did you do a dissertation or an undergraduate thesis?

CF: I did a summa thesis, a summa project, it turned out to be. It was actually a collection of creative writing poems that I had written over my five years at the university.

AP: Are there poets—I'm thinking of Auden or Larkin or Sylvia Plath—that would be part of your own vision, that influenced you or are you more unique?

CF: It's so hard to say because I've read so much. I was really omnivorous during my five years. I just read everything. I'd get psyched about a particular class or a particular professor and I would just read everything they recommended. But, I guess, Theodore Roethke [R-o-e-t-h-k-e], American poet.

AP: That's a name I've heard but I don't know. Did the study come easily to you? There are a very small number of summas each year. Here you are managing a job, graduating summa. How did you do it?

CF: I think the main thing was that it didn't seem like work to me. To me, it was . . . fun doesn't seem the right word, but it was absolutely what I wanted to do. I didn't see anything on the horizon that I really wanted to do as much as wanted to go to school. To me, it was just the number one occupation. It sort of wove into my social life, my studies, so, to me, it wasn't a grind at all. It was just fun.

AP: How did it weave into your social life?

CF: I had a couple dark years in the middle, my sophomore and junior years, where I lost contact with friends. I was pretty unhappy, I think. I didn't have a lot of friends those two years, but the last two years at the "U", I started talking to people in classes and really making a conscious effort to reach out and talk to some of the people that I saw around me. It's so common to just sort of tread your own path and not get to know anyone. Yes, I became a pretty active *partyer* my last two years.

AP: What would you tell somebody else who is thinking of going to the university?

CF: I would encourage it, of course. It's meant so much to me, but, I don't know I would valorize it over some other school, because this is my only point of reference for a college education. To me, I don't see why someone wouldn't want to go to such a huge school in the Midwest. It just seems like the perfect setting in every way. Going to a place with such a wide variety of students makes a demand on you to sort of grow and keep up with people and not be so insular in the people you talk to and the people you associate with. So, yes, I would encourage the U of M.

AP: Did you find the other students equally talented or did you find fellow students some stimulating, some not, probably?

CF: That was something that I found kind of frustrating toward the beginning—actually my first three years. I couldn't believe that people came to school as sort of an afterthought or simply because their parents were sending them and it just seemed like the thing to do. It might have been sort of snobbish of me, but I was just appalled that people didn't care as much as I did about studying. I think that was part of the reason I was sort of down during my education here.

AP: Could you flash back? I was interested in your father's experience in the 1960s. Did he tell you stories about what his life as a graduate student was like, where he studied?

CF: Yes.

AP: Was his name Fashbaugh?

CF: Yes.

AP: What was his first name?

CF: Jack. His experience at the university was sort of spotty, because I think he only took a couple classes. He also was an associate professor. He eventually moved to Ohio and got his Ph.D. there. But, he did teach a couple of classes here as a T.A. [teaching assistant] and he also taught at St. Bens [Benedict].

AP: What was his field?

CF: Medieval English literature.

AP: How did you come to live in the Upper Peninsula?

CF: My father took a number of associate or assistant professorships in Ohio at different colleges there. Then, he got a position in Iowa, but he realized that he wasn't going to get tenure and he felt pressure to publish and he didn't want to do that. So, he sort of made a really radical

move when I was in junior high; he decided to leave academia and become a screen writer. Because he didn't have an income anymore, we moved to the cheapest place he could find and that's the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It's sort of an economically depressed place and property is cheap. That's why we ended up there.

AP: Has he been successful? Has he enjoyed this?

CF: Yes, yes. He's doing as well as he can not living in Los Angeles. He has contacts and he does little write ups and treatments of other people's screen plays and makes some money here and there—but he's still waiting for his big break.

AP: Did he tell you any stories about the 1960s?

CF: Yes. What I remember the most is that he felt he was sort of the only square in his group of friends. He had a lot of friends who were heavily into drugs. They were all artists, which was very typical, I guess. He described what it was like to be kind of the straight man in a group of really chaotic wild people.

AP: So, he was hired here as a T.A.?

CF: Yes.

AP: Where did he do his undergraduate degree then?

CF: For his undergraduate degree, he went to St. Cloud State.

AP: Then, was taking some graduate courses here, but then went on to Ohio for his Ph.D.?

CF: Exactly.

AP: Do you know what year he graduated from St. Cloud State?

CF: In 1968, I think.

AP: Did your mother come from this part of the world, too?

CF: Yes, she grew up in Mankato.

AP: Did she go to Mankato State?

CF: She went to St. Cloud.

AP: That's maybe how they met?

CF: They actually met at a theater camp at the U of M. They both went the same year in high school.

AP: That's kind of an interesting story.

CF: Yes.

AP: I should ask you, what are you doing now? You're a graduate in June?

CF: Right. I accepted a position as an editor for a publishing company in St. Paul that publishes house plan magazines, so I do fact checking and designer relations. I talk to the architects on the phone and proof read descriptions of the plans and do some copyrighting.

AP: Are you thinking at all of graduate school?

CF: Ohhh, yes! Yes.

AP: English literature?

CF: Probably. I'm kind of interested in education right now. I think that's where I'm headed.

AP: Now, I always ask at this point in the interviews, are there questions that I didn't ask that you would like to comment on?

CF: Hmm. [pause] I guess not.

AP: Well, thank you very much.

CF: Thank you.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[End of the Interview]

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