Julia Stringfellow: This is the second oral history interview for June 16, 2007. Can you please state your name?

Connie Magistrelli: Sure, my name is Connie Magistrelli.

JS: Okay, and what year did you graduate?


JS: And what was your degree in?

CM: My degree was Bachelor of Music. And, I had a major in piano and when I graduated I was a minor in organ.

JS: Okay, great. Now you originally started off at Milwaukee-Downer College.

CM: Actually not, nope.

JS: Okay, so it was always Lawrence?

CM: It was always Lawrence when I came.

JS: Well, how did you choose to attend Lawrence?

CM: Well, I have been interested in music my whole life and I had been actively involved in music in high school. And my high school music instructor who was both choral and band instructor was a graduate of Lawrence, as was his wife. And so he essentially promoted Lawrence to my parents and me, and he was the critical person in getting me to Lawrence, to even know about Lawrence and attend.

JS: What were your first impressions of the campus when you first visited?

CM: Well, I was pretty naïve at that age, so everything was just new and gaga I guess. It was a college and it was away from home, so everything was just you know very strange and intimidating I guess. The people were nice, which was good.

JS: What the transition like going from high school to college, was it a smooth transition?

CM: Well, it was, I have to say, it was essentially smooth, although I came from a very small college of 200 students so coming to Lawrence was big, there were 1,200 students. And of course I couldn’t believe that some of my Lawrence classmates came from high schools that had 1,200 students in the
high school, so Lawrence was very small to them, to me it was a big switch. It was the first time I had been away from home, so again it was a little bit intimidating, but the school at that time matched you up with roommates and so, and we just had, we were assigned a dormitory, we were assigned a room, we didn’t have to make any decisions. And they were actually pretty wise in how they, at least in my case, in how they matched roommates up. Because my roommate and I got along perfectly, we were from different parts of the country, and everything backgrounds, but it was an excellent match.

JS: Great, that always makes a big difference.

CM: It does, it does.

JS: What was dorm life like? What were the different dorms that you lived in while you were at Lawrence?

CM: Well, as a freshman I lived in Ormsby. Then as a sophomore I lived in Sage, and when I was a junior I was a counselor so I was back in Ormsby. Then as a senior, I lived in one of the houses that they had for senior women. There were three honors houses for senior women, and I lived in Sabin House, which now is, well, it was always across from the President’s House, but I think it’s used for something else now.

JS: At the time you were a student were there different dorm rules for men and for women?

CM: Oh, yes, yes. Right. Good question. Well, of course all the dormitories were either for women or for men, there was no co-ed dormitory. And there was a dorm mother, and there was a counselor on each floor, on each wing of each floor. And I was on the third floor in Ormsby, and so there were, I am sorry, two counselors for each wing. And we had, we have meetings, dorm meetings, with our counselors, periodically, I don’t if it was on a regular schedule or not. Then occasionally, if there was some big issue under discussion, then the whole dormitory would meet down in the lounge on the first floor in Ormsby. Of course we had rules. We had to be in the dormitory, I think it was 10 o’clock on every night but Friday and Saturday. And, I think on Friday and Saturday we could be out ‘til 11 or midnight, I am not quite sure. But then always, you know, before the bewitching hour of having to be in the dorm, there’d be all these couples outside the dorm saying their last goodnights to each other before they had to go their, you know, own separate dormitories. It’d be “two minutes girls, thirty seconds.” And I think if we were late, I think there were penalties, I don’t remember what they were, but I think there were penalties if we got in late.

[00:05:47]

JS: Okay.

CM: Yeah. Quite different than now.

JS: Yes.

CM: I suspect.
JS: Yes, much different. Well, what were some popular hangouts for students on campus and then in the town of Appleton?

CM: Well, of course the grill on the campus was a popular hangout. And there was the student commons, there was the grill upstairs and then downstairs there was, I don’t know if there was any food there, served there, but downstairs there was an area where they had booths and people played and danced, or just sat in the dark and made out, that sort of thing. I don’t even know if that’s still there. And then was a pool room, where probably people at that time, it was mostly guys that played, and well, at least I never ventured in there, I don’t know if it was a guy thing I guess. So that was on campus. Of course we couldn’t have cars, and so most of the hangouts were in close walking distance. And there was a, I think it was the called was the Mark or Mark’s, something I can’t remember. Right off campus that was a very popular place where we’d all go for beer and pizza, and then when we got to be… In the group of girls that I hung out with when we reached of age where we could buy hard liquor, we’d go to the back section of that place and order sherry with nuts and we thought we were so grown up. Oh, gosh. Oh, so I remember that, we’d, you know, it was a big occasion that we’d mark as each one of us became adults.

JS: You have to mark those important occasions.


JS: Great.

CM: I think it was called the Mark or Mark’s or something, I don’t know. I can’t remember.

JS: Alright, well, while you were a student here what were some of the activities that you were involved in?

CM: Well, because I was in the Conservatory and people in the Conservatory were called “connies,” we tended to spend most of our time over at the con and when we weren’t participating in an ensemble or going to classes, we were most likely in a practice room, so, I personally didn’t do much of anything besides practice. Yeah, and much to the I think despair of my father who said you really shouldn’t always be working, you now go out and have a little fun, socialize, you know that sort of thing. But, so most of the time I was practicing or studying and that sort of thing. Though there were fraternity and sorority parties, and so if there were dances I’d go to those. Occasionally, I wasn’t a big party person, but I got to the main parties. And then also the school would bring guests, I don’t want to say, well, lecturers or people maybe from the Peace Corps or maybe people that were active in some social movement, or socially responsible kind of thing, they would bring them to the Union and there’d be sort of public events, informational kind of meetings that we’d attend. And then of course there were concert series and lectures series that we all had to attend that were always held at the Chapel.

[00:09:58]

JS: Were there any of these speakers or performers that were here while you were a student that really stick out in your mind?
CM: I think Leontyne Price sticks out in my mind, and it was before she became, she was just on the cusp of becoming very famous, so that sticks out. Dear me, I know we had some important speakers and I can’t remember who they were, but she sticks out. Yeah, isn’t that awful? I can’t remember too many more.

JS: Okay, well since you were a student of the sixties, all the events that were going on in the country at that time, how did they impact being a student at Lawrence?

CM: Well, it was towards I guess, towards our senior year, ’67, things were just getting wound up here. I’d say some of the California schools were a little ahead of us. And so I had some classmates that came back from the summer in Los Angeles and told about you know, what was going on, and riots, and that was very foreign to us. But then, my senior year some of the students started getting more active and a little bit of marching and that sort of thing, and at that time it was just a small group of students that were kind of awakening the rest of us, and I suspect Lawrence got much more after we graduated. As did those of us who went on to something else, became more active in the later sixties.

JS: Now there were was a presidential race going on while you were a student here at Lawrence in 1964, is that right?

CM: That’s right, yes.

JS: And, were, did any of the candidates come and speak at Lawrence?

CM: I don’t know if they did. They might have. I don’t really know. I know that, just me personally it was a big thing that I could vote. And of course, I made up my mind who I was going to vote for. I was like, “oh, this is great really becoming an adult,” and that sort of thing. I don’t know if any candidates came. I have no idea. If you told me some did, I’d say probably. Oh, yeah. I mean I suppose as a person in the Conservatory, we got so wrapped up, and it was actually sort of unusual for a connie, to be for instance a dorm counselor. I got to break out a little bit.

JS: Break out of the Conservatory.

CM: Out of the Conservatory and be a little bit of a normal person.

JS: Well, what professors did you have that really made a significant influence on your life?

CM: Well, I’d have to, certainly the most of my professors were in the Conservatory again, and there were some fine ones. Professor Fred Schroeder, I’d have to say, and Miriam Duncan. Fred Schroeder was my, well he was the band and instrumental professor, but he also took great interest in students, in the roundedness of a student. I think I may have had him, I did have him for some lessons, because the first two years I had percussion as my minor area. And he was a very alive person, very active, and he was able to make his students come alive. And so he had a lot of influence on me, and then Miriam Duncan also was my organ teacher and she had a lot of influence. And, well certainly, my piano instructors did influence me of course, but I think Prof. Schroeder and Miriam Duncan had the most influence, and I think it was because they were, they made it really clear that they, I think they were so
centered themselves that were able to make the students feel worthy of their time and attention, and feel that they had something to offer, to contribute. And then I worked for Prof after I graduated, he was partner in a camp, a girl’s camp, around Eagle River, Wisconsin, so I went and worked for the summer at the camp that he was partner of. I think that in both instances the two of them also, one of my great discoveries of growing up is the best musicians were not just music, they had other broader interests and those two seemed to exemplify that. And that was a real eye-opener since most of my Conservatory classmates seemed to have only music as their interest, which was fine but I wasn’t that good and I had broader interests so it was nice to see that in the two professors this little more depth or breadth of interest.

JS: Were there any traditions going on in the Conservatory while you were a student, since faculty and students spent so much of their time there, being music people?

CM: Certainly there were always concerts, there were faculty performances and there were chamber music series as well as the bigger ensembles. The chamber music was usually outside chamber groups that came and performed but there were always recitals to go to. As far as students, people that were in the performance track had to give a junior recital and then a senior recital, which was terrifying. I don’t know if this falls under traditions for the Conservatory but those who were interested in performance track had a comprehensive performance in their sophomore year so where as I think in the college students didn’t declare major until they were juniors, we had to have decided that early enough in our sophomore year. If it was performance track we had a sophomore comprehensive and that was a big deal. That said either you pass in terms of being a performer or you shall not follow performance. You shall go into education, which as I look back now seems like to short-change education as a value. So then if you passed your comprehensive that’s when you did your junior recital and senior recital.

JS: Do you remember what was on your program for your junior and senior recitals?

CM: I remember my junior recital more than senior because junior was a longer performance. When I was a senior, I had declared piano pedagogy as my ultimate major and so therefore I didn’t have to do a full senior recital, I just had to do a partial one. But my junior recital, I did Mozart’s sonata, one that people generally think of as the one with the Turkish rondo. So I did that. I played it much better than I can now. I also played a Bartok, I couldn’t pronounce it then and I can’t even remember it now. It was Mikrokosmos. And I loved playing that one, I liked both of them but they were very different centuries of course. My brother came to my recital, as did other members of my family, and I did both well. My brother told me afterwards, “That last piece, I thought you were hitting wrong notes all over the place because it was dissonant.” But those were the two pieces that I played. I still have the tape, when somebody mentioned that much of the music for the Conservatory is still on tape, I have one of those tapes. So that was kind of the highlight.
JS: How do you feel, going through the Conservatory and being a music student from Lawrence, how did that benefit your life after graduating?

CM: Well, I’m not such how to answer that. Of course it was excellent preparation. I think in some ways, in many ways, I was very naïve when I went to Lawrence and I think a few years after I was out I thought in retrospect, had I been a little smarter or more tuned in with things I would have been in the college with a major in music, rather be totally in the Conservatory, because I felt that I had been at this wonderful liberal arts college and there was so much I missed in terms of a liberal arts education. Obviously a lot of liberal arts attitudes and outlook and approach to life stuck, but I think I would have benefited from a little broader basis rather than something so narrow as the Conservatory. On the other hand, being in the Conservatory, we were required to take college courses. But there could have been more. I went through Lawrence without a math course, without a science course, and I think that’s important. On the other hand, in terms of the outside world, I still got a liberal arts education. It’s still the mindset that was developed here.

JS: Well, we’re almost out of time for the interview. Is there anything else you’d like to add or say? Do you have a particularly funny story you think of, when you look back on your student time here?

CM: I guess, just if I wrapped it up, I would say it was a valuable education and just being back here for the alumni week reinforces what a high quality group of people come to Lawrence and just incredibly fascinating, kind, continually searching and exploring. Just a fine group of people that once we spread out from here, you don’t run into too many like that. I guess that’s how I would sum it up.

JS: I’m going to turn off the recorder.

[End: 00:24:30]