

Interview with Jane Crosthwaithe

Record button. All right. Okay. So my first question for you is, could you share a little bit about your background and where you grew up?

I grew up in small towns. Salisbury, North Carolina. Uh, just the first person in my family to go to college, which would not be unusual. My mother had one year, which she loved. Uh, ran out of money. Uh, she went to Queens, but I don't think she was really any kind of a scholar ever, anyway. And so, uh, it was assumed that I would go to college, but we were post-World War Two generation, ten years out from the war, and the world had opened up for all sorts of people and opportunities. So, uh, had a very good, stable early childhood, you know, sort of classic, uh, in a town that was terribly divided by segregation, which we took as normal, which we learned was not to be seen as normal and should not have ever been normal. But that was part of the southern experience.

Yes. For sure. Now, could you tell me a little bit about how you decided to to actually attend Wake Forest? What was kind of that thought process like?

We had very good advice in high school. Sorry. About education. And we should apply for college. And so Wake Forest was offering scholarships and they sent applications around to my high school. And I applied and got a scholarship. And that sort of did it. I wanted a lot of my friends went to Woman's College in Greensboro, which was now UNC Greensboro and, I thought at the time they would become teachers and many of them did. I did not know the power of women's college at that time, which educated people like Emily Wilson. So it was very much against my assumptions. What really happened there? But my girlfriends from high school who went there tended to come back home and marry their boyfriends. And I went to Wake Forest, where the world was larger and more wide open for me, where I could meet guys today, but also just as friends as I had had in high school. And I went with my friend. We didn't plan it that way. Uh, Barbara Cook, Barbara Cook, who had had polio. So she and I remained friends for many, many years. Uh, but we both went from from Salisbury through Wake Forest together.

Very cool. Um, And so what were your initial impressions of Wake Forest like that? The campus, the community, the faculty. When you were first a student here.

Absolutely awestruck. Everything was wonderful. The world was opening up. Um, I loved my classes. I had my English class was with Ed Wilson. So that's where my friendship with Ed started and continued now for almost 70 years. The last, uh, if you want to count the minutes and hours, uh, but I loved every second of it. It was new people, funny people, odd people. Uh, we were a girls. We had we were we had two dorms of women. And then there were 1000 men around. We weren't boy crazy. It was just closeted and happy, uh, to know our our friends in the in the dorms. Uh, we we, uh, the campus was wide and beautiful, and we walked everywhere across campus. Except that my friend Barbara had a car because of her polio. So we got to ride around a little more than more than some people. We rarely went to the campus cafeteria, which was a far way, and we ate all of our meals at those little dining areas downtown, uh, which was normal for a lot of people.

Yes, yes. And were there any professors I know you mentioned Doctor Wilson. Were there any professors that really stood out in your memory as being very influential during your time?

Well, that's also where I first met Claude Roebuck. And Claude had been a Wake Forest graduate as well, and he later became professor of philosophy, uh, at Wake Forest. And I took thousands of courses with him. Philosophy and religion were then combined, so I also had some stupid psychology classes with him. You know, like, how does. Where's the brain? What? How does the brain of a worm differ from the brain of a person kind of category, which was not that interesting. But Claude was a lovely, interesting guy whom I knew also for a long time. He died, um, soon after I graduated. I have a brain tumor, but he was much loved. He was also a Sigma Chi with those guys. He joined the fraternity as a faculty member with those guys who did the great bra drop. So there were a lot of interactions and strange ways.

Yes. For sure. Now you mentioned go ahead. Sorry.

No, I was going to say that the women at Wake Forest and this goes from the old campus where I was the last class on the old campus, uh, the women in Wake Forest, Illinois occasion anywhere were ever allowed to drink which which was fine. I wasn't interested in alcohol, but Barbara and I used to debate whether we could have wine at home, even although our parents never served wine. So it was really a theoretical discussion just to let

you know how closed down we were and happy with it because we were safe that way.

Yeah, exactly.

We had one telephone on the hall, uh, where the call would come in, and whoever was answering the phone would call through the loudspeaker to take your turn to speak to whoever was calling. Uh, it was it was very, they would say simple. We found it very confusing and complicated, but, uh, looks different, at least from now.

Yeah, absolutely. I can't imagine that, you know, now we just hop on the cell phone whenever we want to, to make a call.

That's right, that's right.

We have a very, very different. Yes. Yeah. So how did you decide on your your major?

By eliminating other things. Probably. And also I think that, um, philosophy was more, more interesting to me. There were wider range of questions that were dealt with in history class and that were dealt with in, in English classes. Um, but the maybe philosophy brought them all together. And maybe Claude Roebuck, being one of the faculty members, had something to do with that too. You know, you tend to major in your favorite faculty, uh, the people who inspire you and give you ideas, I think. Yes. Yes. Then I discovered that with a philosophy major, you couldn't do anything, uh, because, you know, you can't go out and be a philosopher kind of thing. Uh, so then the question was, should I suddenly, my senior year, try to get an education degree so I could teach, you know, do do something? Women didn't do much, I guess, at that point. And I talked to the guy in education and he said, don't bother, follow your philosophy. And so then I got a a good, good scholarship to graduate school. So off I went to graduate school. But I switched from philosophy to religion by the time I got to graduate school, having discovered that religion did not mean you had to be a pious minister's wife, but that you could actually study ideas through history comparatively, that were far more interesting and complicated, uh, in some ways even than philosophy. By then, for me Yeah.

For sure. That's really interesting. Um, now, now, speaking about the the social scene on campus, could you tell me a little bit about what that was like? Were you involved in one of the societies? They were kind of early on back then.

No, there were no societies then. Uh, by the time I came back to, uh, Wake Forest in 1962 as assistant dean of women, that is when, uh, tassels had long been the Women's Honor Society and a funny bunch of, uh, erratic and strange and outlandish women had created strings to sort of make fun of the tassels. So, you know, you were going to be an academic with the golden tassel. They were going to wear a string kind of category. And I thought they were really silly. And as a, as a senior, tassels came along and then SOP H appeared Sometime around my senior year. I thought that was all so silly. Until they asked me to join one night and I did. Just to let you know how principled a person I am. Uh, but even then, uh, the real dealing with societies didn't occur until after 1962, when I came back as assistant dean of women. And there was another one I don't I don't remember what it was. There were others that were springing up, and there were calls from the the students in that 4 or 5 year period who had decided that they wanted to be national sororities. So we launched a big, big study group to create our. To decide what would be the best, since the men had always had their fraternities. And that was really the center of social life for men and women on campus. Um, I never wanted the societies to go national. I thought it was too good a small campus. I thought there were too few women. I thought to make those societies into sororities was a divisive maneuver, and I thought the women needed themselves and not special groups. That was stratified by whatever levels or class or personality or major that they did. But I was overruled. And I think the world changed in many ways between 1962 and 64 when I left, and certainly thereafter. So I don't spend my time regretting my position or the college's position, but I think I do not know enough about societies and their later impact over the last 50 years or more.

Yeah. For sure. Now, you mentioned how you were the assistant dean of women. Could you tell me a little bit about that and what that was like.

When I was in graduate school. After three years, as my scholarship was running out, and Wilson called and said, come back to campus and be assistant dean of women. That's when Lois Johnson, the revered woman who had long been the only dean of women, was retiring, and they were trying to imagine the world without Lois Johnson, who was just a wonderfully funny and warm, warm person. Uh, and so what they did in 62 was to structure, uh, Jean Owen, who had been in business law, who taught business law, who had been denied a

position in the law faculty because she was a woman, although she had a doctorate of law. And at that point, men didn't do that. And, uh, they thought if Jean came in and had me as an assistant, the two of us could figure out the transition between Lois Johnson and the New World. Had I not left to get married, I might have stayed in and done more work. Uh, within the dean's office and administration.

Interesting.

It was, uh. Yeah, yeah. And so, anyway, Ed Wilson is the one who called and said, come try this job. We'll pay you \$6,000 a year. Wow. Yeah. Hey.

Pretty good.

Thank you very much. Yeah, and I got faculty housing. I mean, I paid for faculty housing, but it was wonderful. That was a pretty standard, uh, fair salary at that point. Yeah.

Yeah, absolutely. And what a time to to be in that position, too, during that time of transition.

And I got to work in the dean's office, which was really enlightening because with Ed Wilson in charge and all the other men who were in the dean of men's office and Jean and me, we had a wonderful working relationship. And what we cared about was students. We spent hours talking about students who were good students, students who were problem students, how to improve student life. We were deeply involved in social life, to be sure we were more involved in their academic lives, but we really learned there that if you had a good administration that cared about students, you would have a better student body. That impressed me constantly. Absolutely. In our in our in our women's deans. Dean of women's office, down the hall from the larger dean's office, we also kept poundcake and coffee. So everybody was in our office all the time.

Yes, and rightfully so. Yeah.

Yeah, yeah. She knew what she was doing. She made the poundcake, I ate it.

That's great. Now, you have mentioned your friend Barbara, who had polio. Can you tell me a little bit more about her experience at Wake Forest? What was that like for her and for you as well?

And did you interview? Have you interviewed Donna Gaddis Anderson?

Yes, I have.

Diana was Barbara's roommate for four years and wonderful, different people, but wonderful together. And the three of us were very, very nicely good friends. I think Barbara did very well. She had the car which went for long distances. She worked. She trapped around campus on crutches. She had a one long leg brace and crutches, and she was strong and brave and bitchy when she needed to be, and stubborn when she needed to be, and full of laughter when we all got together. The great story about her came when she couldn't do the PE requirements that we were all required to meet. And that's when Marge, Casey, Casey, and Marge Crisp, who were running the women's programs pop into the story because they created a PE class for Barbara Sue called fishing, and they would sit her on the side of the swimming pool and give her a fishing rod and see if she caught anything. I think I think Don and Marge and Barbara sat there and smoked cigarettes, frankly, and told dirty stories or whatever they did. Student and faculty, I mean, mom and dad were wonderful, but that was one of Barbara's PE classes. Uh, she, uh, she she dated some. Not a lot. Uh, that was a struggle for a lot of, you know, young men to try to figure out how to date. But she had a lot of friends, uh, among the both the boys and the girls on campus, the men and the women on campus. Um, and she went on to get a to work for NASA for two years. Come back to Wake Forest, get a master's, master's in math, one of the early women to get a master's in math and then go back to NASA and where she married and had two children.

Wow, what a career there to go to NASA.

And but most of her career later was doing taxes. She did CPA work. She only died two years ago now. So it's a major loss for us all.

Yeah. Yeah.

Interesting. Interesting people.

Absolutely, absolutely. That's something I've definitely learned in doing these interviews. So many interesting Wake Forest people that have walked these halls on this campus. So that's pretty neat. So you in the pre-interview information you mentioned knowing a lot of the women faculty members. Can you tell me a little bit about what the role of women was on campus and how you've seen this change over time since you are so involved with the university or happen.

Well, I'm not the greatest historian of women's lives on campus. Although I lived as I told you I loved. I loved the the dorm life we had on the old campus and on the new campus. The new campus just sort of was bigger and less, um, cozy in some odd ways. Um, but I loved the women that I met, and there were always just enough women students where you. There were more people to meet, so you never knew everybody. And that was a comfort, um, in, uh, even when we moved to the new campus, which we hated because it was big and sterile and didn't have the old magnolia trees, and it was a lot of red mud for a number of years, to be fair, uh, we had one television set, uh, in the basement, which we occasionally watched, but we really did study a lot. We have had to be back in the dorm by 11:00 at night. So you sort of went from the library where you maybe a boyfriend or two or to whatever soda shop was open. Um, and then we we did a lot of studying. Um, and then back to the residence hall where you were locked in. Um, technically, uh, as the world changed, um, after I left Wake Forest, it was only after that that the residence halls, uh, began to have both men and women and to. So I never had to navigate dining under those particular circumstances. Um, which I think could have been interesting and might have very much been in favor of it. There was not a world I ever lived in.

Yes. For sure. We don't know how good we have it today. I feel.

Yeah. I don't know whether you have it better or not. We have to. I mean, be interesting to consider that, uh, it's a good question.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Well, the other the other wonderful thing about being a woman at, uh, at Wake Forest as a student was that when when any of your friends or anybody in any of the residence halls got pinned or to some fraternity guy, then the fraternities would march down and sing to her. Do they still do that?

No, they don't do that anymore. We've lost a lot of those good traditions.

We would all be out there, lined up on all those balconies, and the woman who was being sung to would hold a candle, and her boyfriend would be standing down below with, surrounded by guys who could or couldn't sing. That didn't matter. Singing their fraternity songs or whatever their girlfriend songs were for that particular fraternity, and we would all weep and laugh and cry and wave to some other guy we saw down there, uh, hoping to catch somebody else's eye. But, you know, that was a wonderful, fun, uh, and it just sort of part of the social life that you didn't get once you were freer. Uh, in some ways, I think.

Yes, absolutely. Um, so could you tell me a little bit about your experience as a member of the Board of Visitors? What was that like?

Really interesting. Um, I think I've told you, and I think you've learned that the Board of Visitors was initiated when Wake Forest was breaking away from the southern, from the North Carolina Baptist Convention. The North Carolina Baptist Convention had controlled the Wake Forest Board of Visitors Board of Trustees. That was just the way it always had been. It was always seen as a Baptist college. After that great dancing story, which you helped to document on campus When the campus had moved to Winston and asked for permission to have dancing on campus. Uh, you don't ask because people like the North Carolina Baptist Convention was going to say no. Uh, because they couldn't find a legitimate way to say yes. Right. I mean, it's almost logical that they would say no. Um, and so the college faced not dancing wasn't the the first issue, but they also faced issues as the college was growing and beginning to consider itself possibly a university. It needed federal funds for science research and for educational support, and for all sorts of other instrumental instruments in the across the campus. And so you couldn't get federal funding on a lot of issues if you were tied to a religious organization, if you were a religious organization. And so the Board of Visitors was initially created to sort through the Baptist tradition, the relationship to the North Carolina Convention and Wake Forest becoming an independent, uh, standing college, later university. So that was the origin of the Board of Visitors. A consulting group to help the

college organization figure it out and change the trustee structure of the college.

Yes.

The people who were board of visitors loved being consulted. The faculty and administration often like to have the board of visitors to consult on a lot of issues, including status of sports from time to time, expanding programs from time to time. They also saw the Board of Visitors as a source of money. Uh, you you get money from people whose ideas you value. So, I mean, there was there was a rich stream board of visitors. People were also being groomed to become members of the board of trustees. Uh, so there was a lot of give and take. And we were given by the time I was on it, which was 30 years later, practically, uh, we were given a lot of insight into decisions about race, questions about diversity, uh, which some of us, your dean, uh, Ashley Hairston and I were on the board of visitors together in the back of the room and wish people did better things our way because we always thought we had a better view than some slightly more conservative folk on the board had, as you know, from as we debated issues. Uh, so Ashley and I always like to get together and remember the good old days, which he is now living out some of the better parts of our vision. But the Board of Visitors has, um, become an institution at the at the university. But I think it's, uh, really now even seen even more so as people who give money. When I was there, they wanted work, wisdom or wealth, and I pretended either that I was working wisdom. I certainly wasn't wealth. And now I think the board, the standard for getting invited into the board, has to do with all three. Uh, without question.

Yes.

You were a wealth of wisdom. How about that?

Yeah.

I love this. You marry me? Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. Yeah. So I was, I was I was also full of opinions. Right.

There you go. That's what. What more can you ask for in a board?

That's right.

So how have you stayed connected with your Wake Forest friends since graduation?

Uh, not. Not well. Uh, I stopped being connected after I left the dean's office, uh, after I got married. Um, and just life changed and a lot of a lot of different kind of directions. My closest old friends, Barbara and Dinah and I have always remained friends wherever we were. And a couple of others. But I didn't come back to reunion for about 30 years, maybe because I wasn't interested in football games and I didn't see anything else happening on campus. I mean, I would come back to see Ed and I'd come back to visit other faculty friends, and I was very active, um, for a number of years when Phyllis Tribble, who had been in the religion department, ran the Tribble lectures, which was on women and religion, particularly scriptural, uh, because she was the Hebrew Bible scholar. So I came back for the triple lectures, both to participate and wants to give a lecture, and that really brought me back in. I was able to meet with Lou Leek all the time, when she was being the major administrative woman on campus, no longer just the dean of women. Um, and I think it was triple lecture and then the Board of visitors who got me back, and after that I then I saw more of my old friends at reunions. Uh, in case you don't know, Phyllis Tribble, who is, uh, still alive. She's, uh, was a professor. She taught at Wake Forest when I was there in 1962. 64. Period of time. She's the one who very, very carefully and you'll hear me say this when I talk about the shakers. She was a Hebrew Bible scholar of Hebrew, uh, who really read that section where God creates the world in God's image, male and female, in God's image, which means that God is both male and female. Hear it. So it's reflective. Both. And she was reading the Genesis section in a way that opened what was obvious in the Bible, but always ignored by tradition. And the work that she did has always been very important to me. And my teaching, uh, at a women's college at, uh, at Mount Holyoke College as well. Uh, but that was also one of the major germs of ideas and growth and excitement, intellectual excitement from my days at Wake Forest as a student. And then later, uh, Knowing faculty. They were interesting women.

Absolutely. Well, thank you for sharing that little tidbit of information. That's very interesting. Um, so what impact do you think your, your time at Wake Forest had on the rest of your life? What impact did your education have?

Total, total? I mean, my ideas have expanded. I, uh, obviously I don't think I don't think you know, a lot until you start teaching and then you learn. You don't know anything, or you have to learn what you're going to talk with your students about. And so I learned to do that at Wake Forest. But I but I had they gave me the tools uh, to grow into I think teaching. But teaching to me is when you stand in front of a classroom and your students aren't going to believe you and are going to challenge you every day and are going to say as they do. I have done 40 years of teaching at Mount Holyoke. Oh, Jane, that can't work, you know. What do you mean? Tell me that again. You know, or. And then I would have to say, well, you explain it to me. I mean, why am I here? I'm not. You know, I'm not the expert in life. You tell me. We've read the same book. What you got to tell me? So, I mean, I learned to learn, I guess, at Wake Forest.

Yeah, that's a fabulous answer. Thank you for that. Um, so I always like to ask. It's always, like, probably the toughest question that I asked for the interview, but what is your favorite Wake Forest memory?

I'm not telling. My second favorite Wake Forest. No. Um. You know, I worked a lot with the theater which I had a good time. As we built the theater on the eighth floor of the library. It was just an empty space. We got old theater seats from from a burned out movie house downtown and built literally by hand, put seats in and built the theater in the round and the eighth floor of the library where there wasn't anything at that time. Long before scales, of course. Uh uh, uh, Fine Arts Center was built. Um, one of those old stories that I think you've heard a piece of was one of the nights on the old campus where the women could not go to Shorty's, which served hot dogs and beer. God forbid we should be anywhere near. There was a beer. And, um, my roommate at that time arranged for one of her boyfriend's friend boys. Men who were friends to bring us hot dogs from Shorty's. So we went out onto the balcony of old dorm on the old campus, and down the alley comes this guy with a bag of hot dogs, which he tosses up to the second floor and we sit up there giggling. We didn't need beer at all. Uh. Eating hot dogs that were forbidden fruit. Uh, you know, that sort of thing is what makes college. I hope you have. I hope you're not too free. I hope you have little ways to manipulate, uh, so that when you break a rule, you get a hot dog.

That's a great story. I had heard about the Shorty's story from. I'm blanking on her name right now, but she was in a documentary I did on the history of women at work. And yeah, she talked about squeezing it through the window. One of the guys squeezed it through the window.

There were more.

I'm sure it happened more than once. Yeah, ours. Ours came over the balcony, you know. You know.

Back.

Out. got. Oh, hell, I don't know what we got to eat. Finally, it was probably just smashed stuff that we liked it.

Hey, whatever works, whatever works. That's pretty.

Cool.

The forbidden. It was the forbidden part. And, you know, it's a beautiful campus. It was. It was wonderful.

Absolutely.

The other thing we had, one other thing that we had that we weren't supposed to like, and that they gave up, was, uh, required chapel on the old campus. We went to chapel maybe three times a week on the new campus at least twice a week. And they took attendance. And you got, I don't know what if you didn't if you weren't there. But we had common experience and sometimes we had common boring sermons, and sometimes they had really common, boring lectures, and sometimes we had music and sometimes we had really interesting speakers. But we all the whole campus was there, and there was something wonderful about knowing you would see somebody that you needed to make a connection with going in or out, or you knew who was there or who was sick or or, I mean, and you hated every minute of it, but when it was over, you lost part of the community that you had had, obviously. Parker I know about the college. I don't know about Wake Forest University. That's an entirely different world. It's an entirely different, uh, enterprise. I mean, I learned about it through the Board of Visitors, but what you're hearing from me is college stories of a small, workable community. You have a relatively small community, uh, that you need to find ways to cherish and make fun with.

Yes, absolutely. I think that's a that's a wonderful way to to almost wrap up the interview. I always like to ask, is there anything that we didn't touch on that. You would like to share. You've shared wonderful, great memories with me and I appreciate it. But anything else you want to put out there.

I'll probably have to call you tomorrow.

Hey. You can. That's totally.

Fine. I should have said.

Oh, uh, no, I mean, I think I think we were. I think life is. I think we were young. We were in a very good spot in the world in the 60s. Um, and the world was changing by the end of the 60s in many interesting and horrifying ways. With Vietnam, we were finally learning slowly to deal with our black brothers and sisters better. Uh, slowly. And I think that's an ongoing project. Um, but I think the stories I have are sort of. Well, because they're past they're semi idyllic. I don't have to take a quiz tomorrow on. You know how many small dates I know in the history of France? I you know which I would fail instantly. The pop quizzes that we had with the professor known as Pop Jones. Um, but the memories are large, and the friendships that I have recreated and maintained have been valuable to me as our new students like you. More fun to meet students.

Oh, well, that's very sweet. It's been a pleasure getting to meet you too. And I always love hearing all these stories. I could sit and chat with folks for for hours upon hours, I think.

And I also.

I'd love to get your stories. You know, that's what's missing in our conversation.

Yeah, for sure, for sure. Yeah. We yeah, we should probably start interviewing some current students instead of just focusing on alums to just to get that perspective. Yeah, I'll have to mention that.

Do.