

Dartmouth College Oral History Project
The War Years at Dartmouth
Interview with Marge Paulson
By Mary Donin
September 17, 2007

DONIN: OK, today is September 17, 2007. I am Mary Donin in Rauner Library. I am speaking with Marge Paulson who has come back to a mini-reunion with her husband Bob, class of 1945. OK, Marge, to give a little bit of background about how you ended up here at Dartmouth, if you could back up and just tell us (a) how you met Bob, and (b) when you first came to Dartmouth, what the circumstances were.

MARGE: I met Bob in high school and we went together for eight years before we were married and we were married in 1945, September the ninth in Brockton, Massachusetts. And we came to Dartmouth...

BOB: September '46.

MARGE: ...as a freshman?

BOB: No late sophomore, early junior because of the credit I had.

MARGE: From being in the service. And we first lived in an apartment on Wheeler Road. The first apartment we had, or actually, it was a room type of thing. There were bedbugs in it.

BOB: I knew you were going to mention that so I didn't. [Laughter]

MARGE: Which was very traumatic. However, we recovered and we moved into Wigwam Circle and that was in... What was the date that we moved in?

BOB: Well, we came up here in September of '46, right after we were released from active duty.

MARGE: OK, that's when we moved into...

BOB: Within a week or two we moved into Wigwam Circle.

MARGE: Yes.

DONIN: So you didn't have to spend too long in the apartment with the bedbugs?

MARGE: No. I think we moved someplace else, didn't we?

BOB: No.

MARGE: We moved into Wigwam Circle right after the bed bugs?

BOB: Yup.

DONIN: You must have been delighted to move in there.

MARGE: Oh, yes. It was a wonderful experience because everybody was in the same boat and everybody got together to do things together and went to the laundry underneath Thayer School.

DONIN: Oh, there was a washing machine and dryer in Thayer School?

MARGE: Umm.

BOB: In the basement, yes.

DONIN: That's convenient. Now, was it possible...? Did you have training to do a particular kind of job when you married Bob? Did you have a career?

MARGE: Yes. I was a registered nurse. And I worked at Dick's House.

DONIN: Ah hah. Was it easy to get a job when you got here?

MARGE: I didn't have any trouble that I remember. And I worked at Dick's House until I was pregnant with my first child and after that I didn't work any more. And we lived at Wigwam Circle and Allen was born on July 20th, 19—

BOB: --Forty-seven.

MARGE: Yes, 1947.

BOB: May 4th, 1949, number two came along.

MARGE: [Laughter] He's doing my interview.

BOB: There's another mathematical fact of interest. Our first child was born 22 months after we were married, the second child was born 22 months after the first one was and the third one was born 22 months after the second one. And then thirteen years later came number four.

DONIN: Wow.

MARGE: And the first two were boys and the last two were the girls.

DONIN: Well, that was very well organized of you.

MARGE: Yes, it was. [Laughter]

BOB: I am just reminded of another interruption. *The Daily Dartmouth* of the Winter Carnival of 1942 had a picture of the two of us on the first page throwing snowballs at each other at the Winter Carnival time.

DONIN: You should go out in the reading room and look it up. *The Daily Dartmouth* is out in the reading room if you want to go see it again.

BOB: OK, I'll do that. Yes.

DONIN: So what was your impression of what the other wives did with themselves? Was it generally assumed that everybody needed to work because they needed the money? Did the women all go to work if they didn't have children?

MARGE: I don't remember that Angie went to work. But two of us who lived in the same building in Wigwam Circle went to work at Dick's House. We were both nurses. I don't think Angie, the gal who lived downstairs, worked that I remember.

DONIN: But when you were staying home with your children, were there a lot of other mothers home with children?

MARGE: Yes. Yes.

DONIN: Now if you had wanted to sit in on a class while you were here at Dartmouth, were women allowed to sit in on classes?

MARGE: I am sure they were. I didn't but I'm sure they were.

DONIN: Was it... Did it feel like a welcoming place, even though it was a men's college, did it feel welcoming to you?

MARGE: Yes. Oh yes. Because we were surrounded... All of us were in the same position, you know. Most of us... Well, some of us worked part of the time, so... But it was a very friendly, comfortable place. We really enjoyed our time at Dartmouth.

DONIN: And was Bob pretty well swept up in homework and his class work and his part time job? Was it hard for you being alone with the children?

MARGE: No. I didn't have any problem with that. And I worked too.

DONIN: Before the children came along.

MARGE: Mmmm.

DONIN: Right. And what sort of things do you remember doing as couples for a social life here? Did you go out to the movies or did you stay home and cook meals with your friends or listen to music or...

MARGE: We went to the movies and I assume we went out to eat once in a while and we had a two-burner hotplate that we fixed our meals. We also took on feeding two of the undergraduates for lunches, to make a little money.

DONIN: That's a good idea.

MARGE: It was. It worked out very well.

DONIN: They were probably delighted to have some home cooking.

MARGE: One of the boys' name was Bill Beattie [?]. And the other one was Ralph and I can't think of his last name right now. But anyway, they were undergraduates that we fed meals to. Tomato soup, I can remember. I haven't eaten tomato soup since [Laughter] or vegetable soup. Canned vegetable soup and tomato soup. [Laughter] Those are the impressions that I had.

DONIN: You ate too much of it then. [Laughter]

MARGE: Well, it seemed to. I mean, they didn't mind. They were being fed, so...

DONIN: And were there lots of other children in Wigwam Circle?

MARGE: Yes, there were quite a few. We lived on the far side of the street from Thayer School. Wigwam Circle was around the bend and we lived at the other end. I guess it was still called Wigwam Circle. Then we moved down to Sachem after we'd had our second child.

DONIN: Oh.

MARGE: Oh, it was cold. Freezing cold.

DONIN: The rooms were cold?

MARGE: Ummm. The apartments were cold.

DONIN: So was it better living at Wigwam than it was at Sachem?

MARGE: Well, because we lived upstairs in Wigwam and we were kept warm from the... But there wasn't really room enough for us up there for two children. So we lived at Sachem and that was fine. We didn't have... Bob was the choir director at the Norwich Congregational Church so we were involved with that and I used to take Allen to the church service and we borrowed an ambulance, a gray ambulance. That was our transportation.

DONIN: To go to church?

MARGE: Yes.

DONIN: An ambulance? [Laughter]

MARGE: Uh huh.

DONIN: That's great.

MARGE: Yup. So... I don't know what else.

DONIN: So the students didn't generally have cars back in those days.

MARGE: Some did.

DONIN: Did they? But generally, you were able to walk around everywhere.

MARGE: Yup.

DONIN: Was there a place to do your food shopping? A place called Tanzi's?

MARGE: Yes, Tanzi's was there. I'm trying to think where we did our food shopping. It's gone. [Laughter]

DONIN: Right, well. We can find some pictures of Main Street and you'll probably recognize the store. I think I saw a picture in the file there of a place called Tanzi's.

MARGE: Yes. But that was just a small, like a variety... No, it wasn't a variety, it was a small food... It wasn't a big market. I'm trying to think where we did do our grocery shopping. It's gone.

DONIN: Did you go to the football games and the sporting events?

MARGE: Yes. Uh-huh. I can remember going to hockey games and getting so excited and banging the lady in front of me. It was the treasurer's wife or somebody.

DONIN: Oh dear. [Laughter]

MARGE: And then I worked at Dick's House, which was fun.

DONIN: Interacting with the students.

MARGE: Yes.

DONIN: But a lot of them were probably, I mean they weren't really undergraduate students in that sense. They were grown men. Like so many of the men on campus, they'd been off at war and come back. Is that right?

MARGE: Yes, there wasn't too many real undergraduate students that I remember.

DONIN: And at that point it was still operating as it does today, as an infirmary?

MARGE: Yes.

DONIN: And it's overseen by a doctor, so you were in charge of carrying out the orders of the doctor?

MARGE: Yes, right. Dr. Boardman was one, that I remember. I can see them but I can't remember the names. [Laughter]

DONIN: That's pretty good if you can still remember their faces. [Laughter]

MARGE: Right.

DONIN: So do you have any other overall impressions of what it was like here when you came, that you want to share with us?

MARGE: It was a delightful life, it really was. We still have friends that were here at the time. None of our children came... We were hoping that some one of them would come but we moved to New York and then to California so that sort of eliminated the possibilities of... And they went off to different schools. We still have one child who lives in California now and the other three live close by where we live now. One in Rutland, Mass., one in Cranston, Rhode Island and one in Shrewsbury, Mass.

DONIN: That's nice. They followed you back to the East.

MARGE: Uh-huh. Yes, they did. But our oldest daughter is still in California. And her children, one is in Las Vegas and one is in Wisconsin. She's a professor in dirt [laughter] as we call her. She's done very well. She's kind of a worldwide speaker at this point. She's not married; she doesn't have any children. The other... The oldest daughter has two children and the oldest son has one son who lives in Texas and the other son, who's supposed to be here in Hanover this weekend but we haven't seen him yet; he's coming from across the country. He's been out in school out in, I think it's Oregon, so he's on his way back.

DONIN: Oh, nice. A nice time to visit here.

MARGE: He lost his wife, I guess it's two years ago now.

DONIN: I'm sorry.

MARGE: And he has a daughter who's grown. She doesn't live with him. He still lives in the house that he had. But he went across the country with his dog.

DONIN: Wonderful. OK Marge, this has been very nice. Unless you've got any further thoughts about Dartmouth, I'm going to turn off the tape.

MARGE: Nope. It was a wonderful experience to live here and we enjoy coming back all the time too.

DONIN: The class seems to be very closely knit.

MARGE: Yes. It has been.

DONIN: And active.

MARGE: Uh huh. Yes. We've been coming back for a long time. It has been a joy.

DONIN: It's a nice place to come back to.

MARGE: It certainly is.

[End of Interview]