

Elizabeth Faiella, Class of 2012
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
January 22, 2013

DONIN: So today is Tuesday, January 22, 2013. My name is Mary Donin, and we're here in Rauner Library with Elizabeth Faiella, Dartmouth Class of 2012. Okay, Elizabeth, just to put your story into context, we'd like to hear from you about how it is you ended up coming to Dartmouth? Where you grew up and what your influences were in terms of when you were choosing college and that sort of thing.

FAIELLA: Sure. I grew up in Northwood, New Hampshire. It's kind of a small rural town. And I grew up very rooted in New Hampshire life and going to town meetings and contra dances and all that sort of thing. And I kind of grew up with a very strong love of New Hampshire and just the outdoors around here and sort of the folk life and the local events and things of that sort. I was homeschooled actually. I think when I was looking for a college, I was looking for somewhere that wouldn't be too far from my family and that would also allow me to stay, you know, in New Hampshire or close to New Hampshire. Dartmouth was, you know, just this beautiful New Hampshire town and situated in a part of the state that I wasn't as familiar with, and I thought it would be neat to kind of explore more of the state in that way. But it was also far enough away from home so I had a little bit of independence. And the financial aid here was wonderful.

I came for Dimensions and stayed with a friend of a friend. A friend of mine was at Dartmouth and she recommended someone. She wasn't actually at Dartmouth that term, but she recommended that I stay with somebody who was there. And I stayed with Diane Fleck, and she was just the most wonderful host. And I got to really take a good look at the college and go to some of the—to Christian Impact. They have this big event, and I really clicked with that community, a sort of Christian community on campus. So I felt, after Dimensions, I felt pretty strongly that Dartmouth was the place for me to be.

DONIN: So you knew pretty fast after that weekend.

FAIELLA: Yes, yes.

- DONIN: Now, had you been around Hanover before you came to see Dartmouth?
- FAIELLA: I really had not—I came to Dartmouth one time, I think, when I was probably 13 or 14 just visiting. I can't remember exactly why. I was there on a trip with my family. And, you know, we walked around the campus. But I didn't remember much from that. So my main experience of New Hampshire had been sort of the southeastern seacoast area.
- DONIN: Oh.
- FAIELLA: I'd stayed pretty much in the southern part of the state.
- DONIN: Mm-hmm. Now tell me, in your family are you the oldest child?
- FAIELLA: I'm the middle child. I have an older brother and a younger brother.
- DONIN: And they hadn't gone to Dartmouth or anything?
- FAIELLA: No.
- DONIN: So you're the first in your family to come to Dartmouth?
- FAIELLA: Yes.
- DONIN: Great.
- FAIELLA: I have an uncle who came.
- DONIN: Yes, yes. Well, that counts probably.
- FAIELLA: Yes.
- DONIN: Had you heard stories about it from him? Did he talk about it much?
- FAIELLA: Yes, he loved Dartmouth. He talks about moving back to Hanover. He lives in New York right now, but he—yes, he just absolutely loved Dartmouth, and he was in a fraternity here and really bonded with the people here and really loved the area.
- DONIN: Nice. Yes. So what were you looking for in terms of— Did you have anything sort of fixed in your mind about what you were expecting to find in your college experience?

FAIELLA: I was hoping for a challenging academic experience. That was something I actually didn't mention. When I came up to visit, I visited a class that Allen Koop was teaching in the History Department, and he's just this wonderful history professor. And I was blown away with how the students like were so, you know, willing to contribute to the class discussion and how engaged they were, and, you know, his kind of thought-provoking style of teaching. So I was really looking for something that would challenge me. I was looking for a good liberal arts background. I'm interested in journalism. But I thought, well, maybe I want to do something a little less meta than journalism in undergrad. And I was thinking about history. What was the original question?

DONIN: What you were looking for. No, you answered the question. Yes. So you were looking for a good academic experience in liberal arts.

FAIELLA: Right. And also a good strong community, you know, just like my—particularly a good sort of Christian family to kind of bond with. And then also just communities around campus like, you know, the Italian Club really interested me and the singing groups and things like that.

DONIN: And you found it all.

FAIELLA: I did.

DONIN: Did you?

FAIELLA: Yes. [Laughs]

DONIN: So tell us about your experience of first coming here. What dorm did they put you in, and did you do a freshman trip and all that?

FAIELLA: I did. Yes. So my dorm was Zimmerman in East Wheelock. And I applied for East Wheelock because I thought it sounded like a really interesting place to live. They have these interesting arts programs and guests and things like that. It was a real cool opportunity. And then I actually—I did do a freshman trip. And I'm one of those very odd people who did not much enjoy it. I love hiking, I love, you know, the outdoors. But I think that on my trip maybe it was just the trip I was with or something. But we talked a lot about the Greek life at the college, and that wasn't something I was as interested in. And, you know, I did of course have some great experiences on the

trip. But I felt almost.... And then also there was this kind of very outgoing attitude about trips, which for some people that's wonderful and welcoming. But to me I wasn't sure that it was entirely—I felt, well, I don't really know these people very well yet. I was like I don't know how this can be really sincere. So I didn't have the most positive trip experience.

But what I did have a positive experience of when I arrived on campus was I got involved in the singing group X.ado, which is an a cappella group, a Christian a cappella group and service-based. And they were just this wonderfully welcoming community. They were so, you know, excited to have me there. And just sincerely wanted to get to know me very well. And, you know, I loved singing with them. I loved the songs that they would sing. And there was this real feeling of belonging there. So that was really positive. And then also I met a bunch of friends in East Wheelock that I pretty soon kind of became close with. It was kind of funny because I met a few people my first day when I arrived on campus to move into my dorm, who are some of my absolute best friends now. And I wound up just seeing them throughout college and becoming closer with them.

DONIN: I think the cluster, the East Wheelock Cluster, is known for being a very sort of tight-knit community.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: Within themselves.

FAIELLA: It's true. I think part of it is it's a little bit farther from the center of campus. And so, you know, people might...are kind of close together a lot, and they don't do as much traveling back and forth maybe to other dorms and to campuses as people elsewhere on campus might do.

DONIN: So that was a perfect match for you.

FAIELLA: Yes, it worked really well. It was great.

DONIN: And it's interesting what you say about—you're not the first who said that their reaction to the freshman trips. Although the intention is good, that it's to make everybody relax and realize that everybody's sort of in the same boat, they've found that level of sort of fake friendship impossible to sustain over a long period of time.

FAIELLA: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: And for some people it worked, and some people it just didn't sort of feel true somehow.

FAIELLA: Yes. I think that might be it. For some people that might be a great way of connecting initially. But for me, I feel like I can't kind of jump into things like that. And it just didn't fit my way of sort of relating to people. But, I don't know. I've definitely talked with a lot of people who really enjoyed it. Maybe I just—I don't know. [Laughs]

DONIN: Some people that works for them, and other people they have different ways of finding their comfort level in a group, and it's not dancing around with orange hair. [Laughter] The clowns that we see out in front of Robinson Hall when it's beginning. I do look at the faces of some of the students and think, oh, my goodness, what are they thinking? [Laughter]

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: So is it safe to say that you felt you found a community pretty fast here through the a cappella group as well as Wheelock.

FAIELLA: Yes. Yes, definitely.

DONIN: And what about your—how did academics go for you in the beginning? How did that work out?

FAIELLA: Well, I did well academically, but I was very stressed out, especially my first term. I was extremely stressed. I think I kind of give myself very high standards for myself, and I think that there's kind of a stereotype of overeager freshmen who feel like, you know, they can do everything and do it perfectly. And I think I was trying to do everything and do it perfectly, and that was way too much pressure.

So, you know, because I mean in addition to the a cappella group and kind of my friend group at East Wheelock, I was involved in the glee club, and I was taking voice lessons, and I was working at the Hopkins Center in marketing. And I kind of had this like crazy schedule. So it was pretty stressful, but I had great classes. One of my first classes was actually with Allen Koop, his class in the fall term. And it was Healthcare in American Society, which was a really tough class. But just extremely, you know, thought provoking,

and just made me—it was one of the classes that made me a history major in the end. It was really...he's a fascinating lecturer. And then my Italian class with Anna Minardi was fantastic. So, you know, I had great classes. I think I was trying to do a little too much and put myself under a lot of pressure. [Laughs]

DONIN: You're not alone, though. I think that happens. As you say, a lot of first—you know it's a learning process.

FAIELLA: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: It's a learning process. But you felt well prepared to be here academically.

FAIELLA: Yes, I did. I had actually—I'd taken a couple of college classes. During high school I'd taken classes at UNH. And that was great because, you know, I mean as a homeschooler we had like this cooperative group where we'd take classes from, you know, different homeschooling parents and things like that. But it was neat to have had a classroom, you know, college classroom experience as well in high school to kind of prepare me for this. So I did feel I came into it, you know, kind of ready for the college atmosphere. I had a sense of what the college atmosphere would be academically.

DONIN: So was your upbringing, your family, and your homeschooling experience, did that impact what you were looking for here in terms of feeling a sense of community here at Dartmouth? For instance, before you came here, who did you consider your community at home? Did you have a group of homeschooled friends that you spent your time with? Or did you have a hobby that you made friends through? Or something like that?

FAIELLA: My main community at home was sort of the homeschooling community around me. And then, you know, I think in our lives, at any given time, we have a number of different communities, and I had, you know, sort of my homeschooling community. I went to classes at the Concord Community Music School. And I did form a lot of friendships there. So I had kind of that community. And I think, you know, when I came to college, I wasn't 100 percent sure what community I was looking for. I think that I knew—I mean I think that a community is sort of this group that has a shared experience or a shared worldview or a shared interest or, you know, some commonality. And I think, you know, I have a number of different

interests. I mean fundamentally I wanted to find people who shared my faith and sort of my sense of what was right and wrong. I think that was kind of like one of the first things I looked for. But outside of that I certainly looked for people who shared my interest in singing. And I looked for people who had somewhere like an interest in Italian. And, you know, things like that. So, yes, I sort of took my interests and my worldview and looked for communities that meshed with those.

DONIN: You mentioned you were at the Concord Community School. Were you doing music—was it singing that you were doing before you came here?

FAIELLA: I did singing and violin and piano there.

DONIN: Oh, great! Wow!

FAIELLA: But I actually stopped doing piano after like around age 16, I think it was, to kind of focus more on singing and violin.

DONIN: Uh-huh. And were you able to continue that here, the violin?

FAIELLA: I continued singing. It was kind of sad, but I actually did—I didn't give up violin in college, but I did it only in my sort of spare moments, which I didn't have many of. [Laughs] So actually since college I've been trying to kind of revive my violin. I play a lot of folk music, and so I'm getting back into that. I kind of took the summer after graduation to play at farmers' markets and contra dances and things like that.

DONIN: Oh, yes. Well, now you've got a little bit more time, although not much it doesn't sound like to me.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: You're so busy. So did you feel during your time here.... You said that the friends that you made in the Cluster have remained your good, close friends.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: Did you have a sense that your community evolved in any way while you were here? Did it modify or change or stay the same or—

FAIELLA: It did definitely change. After my second year I actually decided to stop doing X.ado even though I really enjoyed it. And I still had wonderful friends there. I kind of felt like—it was very time-consuming, and, you know, they were.... Actually part of it was a choice in terms of community because I felt that I still wanted to remain friends with them, but because I spent so much time with that group, I wasn't getting as much of a chance to expand my friend group and meet new people. And so I actually stopped doing X.ado and started working at the Dartmouth radio station.

DONIN: Oh!

FAIELLA: And at that time really what happened was my community started to look a little bit outward from the college. So I started living at a house downtown—

DONIN: Oh!

FAIELLA: —with some friends. And we sort of formed our own like off-campus community there. And it wasn't a sorority, but it was sort of, you know, a bit like that in sort of the close friendships way. And then I also started going regularly to a church actually down in Wilmot, New Hampshire.

DONIN: Uh-huh.

FAIELLA: And formed a community there. And I started doing this thing called the Generations Project through the Tucker Foundation where you go—it's like an adopt a grandmother sort of project or adopt a grandparent.

DONIN: Oh.

FAIELLA: So I started going to Lebanon pretty regularly to visit a wonderful woman there and formed a close friendship with her. So I think my friendships and my community sort of...you know I still of course had friends at the school and interacted a lot with them. But it moved off campus a little bit in my last two years.

DONIN: Did you do any—what do they call it?—off-campus study term?

FAIELLA: Yes, I did. During my sophomore fall I studied abroad in Rome with the LSA Plus for Italian. And it was fantastic! It was just so much fun. Yes, I don't know. Like we were in the heart of Rome, and got

to visit the Coliseum and the Pantheon, oh, it was great. It was a lot of fun.

DONIN: Fantastic! That's a special experience that they have at Dartmouth, I have to say.

FAIELLA: Yes, yes.

DONIN: When you came here, did you ever.... The lens we're using to look at how the Dartmouth community has changed over all this period of time that we're focusing on is the concept of not feeling like you belong. That everyone experiences times when they feel that they're sort of an outsider as opposed to an insider. Did you ever experience that here at Dartmouth in any way?

FAIELLA: I think actually that the point at which I felt most like an outsider was DOC trips. It was right before I started going here actually. And when I felt like, oh, my goodness, the entire community at Dartmouth is, you know, sort of like—is like this. You know I had sort of this idea of like a community..... You know the Dartmouth—the campus newspaper the Dartmouth sends out an issue during the summer, like a freshman issue during the summer—

DONIN: Oh, yes.

FAIELLA: —before freshmen arrive. And it was sort of, you know, all about Greek life. And that was something I kind of going into it had decided I wasn't going to sort of participate in. And so I felt at that point, you know, just before I started that, oh, my goodness, I'm never going to fit in here. You know the previous spring I had felt, oh, this is great. This is great. I can't wait. And then I wasn't so sure anymore. But as I sort of settled in and just, you know, found that there is a different side to Dartmouth than just the frat parties and things of that nature, I started to feel so much more at home and really like I had a sense of belonging and, yes, less like I was an outsider for sure.

DONIN: I think it's true that many people when they come here, they're sort of blindsided by that whatever you call it, that Greek face of Dartmouth and the fraternity/sorority person as being the sort of norm of the students.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: And as you've discovered and so many others have, that's not true.

FAIELLA: Right, right.

DONIN: There's so much more to the Dartmouth student body than what the media portrays as sort of the frat boy kind of person.

FAIELLA: Absolutely. Yes. And I think also one of the things I discovered was, you know, not everyone who was in a fraternity or sorority was sort of what you'd think of as the stereotypical fraternity or sorority member. And you could relate to them in ways outside of, you know, any participation in the Greek system. So I think that, you know, that was a good realization for me. Just because someone is participating in Greek life at college doesn't mean that they're, you know, a typical—or what you would consider a typical—sorority girl or fraternity guy.

DONIN: Did you ever feel any pressure to be what—I guess they call it affiliated? I mean was that ever a big deal? Did you ever feel that pressure?

FAIELLA: It was never a big deal for me. And I think, you know, part of it was that I had already sort of followed the group that I felt I belonged in. But, yes, I actually—I know that there are people who do feel that pressure. But I didn't feel it.

DONIN: Mm-hmm. Well, as you say, you had already found your place.

FAIELLA: Mm-hmm. Yes.

DONIN: That's good. Let's see here now. Since you grew up in New Hampshire, I guess this isn't—Dartmouth's location probably didn't play as big a role in your adjustment to life here. For some I think the rural nature, remoteness, whatever words you want to use, has a much bigger impact on their sense of belonging here. But for you this was just another part of New Hampshire. You were used to it.

FAIELLA: Yes. And actually—I mean it is interesting because, you know, growing up I had to drive everywhere. I kind of lived in a back road and everywhere was about like 15 to 30 minutes away from where I lived. And at Dartmouth you walk everywhere. And there's something about not having a car, you know, as a student, and not—you kind of do wind up staying pretty much in this very small area. And because everyone's walking around and it's such a small

school, you see people you recognize everywhere. So that was a different experience for me than growing up where you had to kind of like very purposefully make a decision to go see somebody, you know, and to go visit. And at Dartmouth, you know, visiting with people and getting to know people happened sort of organically. And you were seeing them quite frequently because you were all in the same space then. So I think there's a closeness to this community and sort of a shared experience of almost everything: like, you know, where you live and where you eat. You might not have at, you know, at like a school in a city or a school in a different area.

DONIN: Well, there's something to be said for the residential nature of this experience. As you say, you're all living within walking distance of one another practically. And you're not encapsulated in your cars. You move around during the day.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: I should know this, but are freshmen allowed to have cars when they come on campus now?

FAIELLA: I don't think they are, but I don't remember actually. Yes, I don't know.

DONIN: But you basically feel like you're all in the same boat because everybody's here more or less carless and walking around. I hadn't thought about that.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: So there's a lot more sort of casual interactions with people.

FAIELLA: Right. You kind of—you just encounter people, you know, on The Green or in front of the library or wherever. So these kinds of spontaneous conversations happen quite frequently.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: Standing in line for food.

FAIELLA: Yes, yes. A lot of standing in line for food. [Laughter] A very high percentage of my Dartmouth experience.

DONIN: It's true. It's true. So are you able to describe how your four years here within the Dartmouth community has changed you or changed your view of what your community is now? You're in a special sort of place because you're still—even though your class has graduated, you're still among those '12's who are here. I don't know how many there are. But have you been able to maintain a community here since graduation time? I just asked you three questions in a row. [Laughter]

FAIELLA: Sure. That's okay. [Laughter]. Yes. I mean I'm continuing actually to live in the off-campus house that my friends and I lived in. And, you know, as I'm kind of transitioning into "real life," I have this nice like, you know, continuity of being able to stay with these people who, you know, we shared so many experiences together. And of course that house has—you know some people have kind of cycled in and out. But it's always been a place where I felt very much like I had close friendships, and you kind of have this familial feeling.

I mean I think it's interesting because growing up in a small town in New Hampshire; and just one more thing about like after college, I've definitely continued to kind of develop my outside of Dartmouth friend group, and of course a lot of my friends have now graduated. So I have fewer friends in the student community now. But I definitely have been getting more involved in sort of, you know, local life and just kind of developing those friendships in the music community, in like folk music and also in my church and all those things.

So as far as my experience at Dartmouth changing me, I think growing up in New Hampshire in sort of this rural area, you really very rarely encounter minorities, minority groups. And at Dartmouth I think that was a really rich part of my experience is that, you know.... I mean in X.ado, a lot of the people—and it's not this way because that's part of the bylaws or anything—but a lot of the people who join X.ado are Asian. And I kind of got to experience, you know, just a little bit of like where they're coming from and realize that we had a lot in common. And of course we were just, you know, after a little while, you kind of forget that you're different in a lot of ways. But also you kind of celebrate each other's differences and joke about each other's differences together. And so, you know, having that experience of interacting with people

from other races and cultures is just.... You know I think that has really enriched my life a good deal.

DONIN: Mm-hmm.

FAIELLA: So....

DONIN: That's one of the byproducts of the diversity that—I mean not just Dartmouth, but campus communities over the decades; you know they've totally changed what they look like.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: And not just because women are here now. But because people from all over the world are here. And, as you say, different cultures, and it certainly does enrich the pool of experiences for everybody.

FAIELLA: Mm-hmm.

DONIN: That's interesting.

FAIELLA: Yes.

DONIN: Well, unless you've got anything else you want to add, I think—did we cover all the questions? Pretty much.

FAIELLA: I think that's about it.

DONIN: Yes. Okay. Well, I guess I'll turn off the machine then.

FAIELLA: Alright. Well, thank you so much, Mary. Thank you.

DONIN: You're very welcome.

[End of Interview]