

TRANSCRIPT (uncorrected)

An oral history effort forming part of the 1996 Rice University Women's Conference, hosted by the program then known as Rice University Women's Studies
WRC identifier # wrc04199

Catherine Much: 1963, so I came to Rice in the fall of '59, which was just two years after the colleges had opened. And, and why did I want to come to Rice, well, I was suppose I was indoctrinated in it from babyhood. Both my parents graduated from Rice.

Tracy Hulls: Oh?

Catherine Much: My father was Fred Much in the class of '36. My mother was Ortrude Lafever from the class of '38, and my father's two brothers went to Rice, and I also had a Great Aunt who matriculated, I think, during World War I. I'm sure exactly when she was here and she did not graduate, but she did go to Rice and met her husband here. So, our ties to the university

—

Tracy Hulls: Right.

Catherine Much: - go way, way back to the beginning.

Tracy Hulls: You have quite a Rice heritage thing.

Catherine Much: Oh yes —

Tracy Hulls: Do you have —

Catherine Much: - and then my brother went to Rice as well.

Tracy Hulls: Oh really, and do you have any children that went to Rice?

Catherine Much: No. I had two sons, but neither of them was at all interested in Rice and I suspect vice versa.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: So they were California boys by that time, so they didn't see Houston as an appealing to come back and go to school. But, um, all the time I was growing up it was not assumed that I would go to Rice, but it was always assumed that I should do whatever it took to meet the requirements —

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - for admission to Rice, because then I would be qualified to go anywhere in the country.

Tracy Hulls: So the requirements were just as competitive back in the early '60s as they are today?

Catherine Much: Yes. Uh, Rice was definitely considered to be a plum because it was free. And if you had not tuition, uh, there would be very high competition. And we were told when we sat down in the, uh, auditorium on the very first day that the, the old joke really happened. The president of the university welcomed us to campus and then at some point in the lecture he said, "Now look to your left and look to your right. Four years from now one of you won't be here."

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: It was definitely considered, uh, an ordeal that one had to overcome to get through, to get out, to get a degree from Rice. And, you were supposed to be honored to be here. You were supposed to have been one of the chosen ones and, and most of the people that I knew who were accepted to Rice came. There were a few, I knew a few people from my high school who, Lamar High School here in Houston, who were accepted to Rice and chose to go to the Ivy League.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: But very few others. Um, when I was a, a senior in high school and deciding where to apply, I had finally narrowed it down to Ratcliff and Stanford and Rice. And I finally, I went to some meetings, uh, for Ratcliff. Some of the local alumni had, uh, some of the administrators from Ratcliff down to woo Houston girls. And I finally decided after talking to them that it really was not coed. They sort of tried to make you think it might be because you could attend classes with Harvard.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: But, the more your probed the more clear it became that you would go to school with just women –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - most of the time. And it was also clear to me that Harvard thought of Ratcliff as a, a poorer relation and not as an equal, and I did not want to go into that situation. And then Stanford was very appealing, um, but Stanford was not as selective as Rice –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - and it was a whole lot more expensive. And although looking back on it I suspect that my father probably would've have paid the bill and let me go to Stanford if I had chosen it, I thought that that would be asking too much, so.

Tracy Hulls: Since your family was in Houston, were you in any way reluctant to move so far away? Had you ever lived away from home?

Catherine Much: Yes. Uh, the year I was 12, I went to California and went to school for a year –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - and that was fine. I had, uh, no home sickness or anything like that. It wasn't that I wanted to stay in Houston.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: It's that I thought Rice was the best education on offer in 1959. So I came and I never regretted it. I loved Rice. I loved being a student. I have enjoyed being an alumna. I came back to graduate school after I had been out for six years. And, uh, graduate school was not an unalloyed pleasure, because I suddenly became aware of academic politics –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - that I had never known existed before.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And, uh, I certainly loved the courses I took and the ability to do research and, and that part. The intellectual part of Rice has always been terrific. But the academic politics were not good in the late '60s when I was back in graduate school.

Tracy Hulls: And what were you studying as a graduate student?

Catherine Much: Um, Medieval Studies. Of course, there was no such department, so I was doing it through the English Department. But, um, that was a big problem and, you know, Linda said I got Ph.D. at Rice and went on to greater things, which is really not true. Uh, I went into the Ph.D. program, but halfway through my advisor got caught in a battle, a departmental battle, and uh, was granted promotion but not tenure and told he had another year to go to be reevaluated for tenure. And he got an excellent offer from another institution with tenure, so he left and there was no one –

Tracy Hulls: Oh, right.

Catherine Much: - to teach Old English and Middle English for at least two, may three years after that. So I would've had to start all over and take more courses and choose a, a totally different topic that had nothing to do with Medieval Studies. And at that point, uh, I just said thanks, but I went to the MLA and even though I wasn't in the job market, I saw that there was precisely one job in the country I would've qualified for –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - that year had I been already a Ph.D. And I think it was Minnesota and I knew I was not going to uproot my husband and my two small children and drag them off to an untenured assistant professorship in Minnesota. So I stayed here and wrote a master's thesis and went to work in publishing.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm, well things have not changed much in the English Department in the last 30 years.

Catherine Much: Well, that's a shame, because they had some excellent people.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And it really is a wonderful place to study, but every place has its, uh, interpersonal problems and Rice at that time had more than its share, I think.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm, oh there are still outstanding scholars in the English Department. I didn't mean to suggest that that had changed, just that it's still a political hotbed for precisely the kinds of issues we're talking about at this conference.

Catherine Much: Mm hmm.

Tracy Hulls: You know.

Catherine Much: Well, I do very clearly remember that when Bob Cox announced his retirement the university started a search, the one that went on for about three years.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And, one of my classmates, uh, stood up in the graduate meeting, um, at which we were asked for our advice and, uh, comments on the search and said in, you know, extremely militant tones, "I demand that the university hire a Black woman to fill this position." Because we had no tenured women and no tenured Blacks in the English ****. And so, I stood up and said, "Carolyn, I understand your concerns, but I am the only person in the graduate department who would be doing a Ph.D. under the person to replace, who would replace Bob Cox, and I demand that the department hire the best qualified faculty member regardless of sex or color."

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And that your advisor be replaced by a Black woman. At which point the discussion simmered down to a low boil and Carolyn's demands were no longer heard. But you know, I thought that I would've been perfectly happy to have a Black woman advisor had she been the best qualified Medievalist on the market.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: But I thought that the qualifications should be the best scholar and I didn't care what gender or color.

Tracy Hulls: I think you mentioned there were six years between your undergraduate career and your graduate career?

Catherine Much: Right.

Tracy Hulls: Did you have some of the same professors as an undergraduate that you had as a graduate student?

Catherine Much: Let's see, uh, I don't think so. Uh, Dr. McKilup had retired –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - and, uh, Harold Candon was my, uh, initial faculty sponsor. I was his assistant. And that's how I got started in publishing as a paid position. I had done it as a volunteer ever since I was 12. You know, school publications. But he did not allow his graduate assistant to teach. He taught his own classes. He graded his own papers. And so, he was at that time the Editor of Studies and English Literature and he knew about my editorial training and abilities and so he chose me as his assistant, because he, he put his graduate assistant into the Assistant Editor slot on the Journal. So, uh, I worked for him while I was in graduate school, and then, uh, I went on and worked for Catherine Grew at Rice University Studies, which is, which was Rice University Press at the time.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Only it didn't have that title until, uh, about the time I left in '71. But you know, in between my, uh, undergraduate and graduate career I got married like most of the women in my class and taught school for a while.

Tracy Hulls: Really? What, what were you teaching?

Catherine Much: I was teaching high school math, algebra and geometry. And then I, um, decided – well, then I had children, and in those days women who got pregnant were immediately fired from teaching jobs. We would corrupt the students or something if they saw us bulging. So, I camouflaged it as best I could until a month before school was out, because I gambled that they weren't going to, uh, get rid of me and get a substitute for the final month, which happened. I, I did finish out the year and that was in the era of the sack dress, so it wasn't too obvious. And then I stayed home with my baby for three years and then I went to graduate school and had another baby and went on into publishing, uh, after that.

Tracy Hulls: And are you still working in publishing today?

Catherine Much: I'm the Editor at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, which is a think tank at, uh – it's on the Stanford campus, but it's independent.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: We just rent space from the university. So, I'm doing what I always loved best, which is reading original research on the cutting edge of their disciplines and I get paid for it.

Tracy Hulls: And then you work as an editor?

Catherine Much: Mm hmm.

Tracy Hulls: And, uh, so that these reports can be produced for publication or?

Catherine Much: It's their books and journal articles. Uh, I do our own Centers publications, but that's just part of my job. I edit our, uh, annual report and grant proposals and, uh, reports to funding agencies and that sort of thing. But what I like to do is help people write books. So that's, that's the main part of my job and, uh, we get people from all over the world who, about 45 people a year who come to spend one year doing research and writing on whatever they feel like.

Tracy Hulls: And are you part of choosing who gets to come?

Catherine Much: Not really. Uh, I attend the meetings, but it's our, really our board of trustees who make the determinations. Um, we have panels of respected scholars, mostly former Fellows, uh, in each field. So we have anthropology, psychology, sociology, history, political science, economics, education, linguistics, uh, psychiatry. I'm probably leaving some out, but we have a panel in each field that ranks nominees. Any academic researcher can be nominated, and then every other year those collected names are presented to the panel, and the panel then puts them in an ordered ranking –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - and the, uh, board of trustees looks at the panel ratings, plus letters of recommendations, and occasionally other kinds of evidence if there's a question if somebody's on the borderline. And then they choose from among those people a balanced group so that we don't have all sociologists one year and all anthropologists the next.

Tracy Hulls: Right.

Catherine Much: They try to spread it out. We try, we – it really is a very complicated procedure and I occasionally help a little bit with, uh, creating the groups, but only unofficially. I am not part of the, the uh, cohort of pickers.

Tracy Hulls: So do you think anything from your Rice experience especially prepared you for that type of position that you're in now?

Catherine Much: Absolutely, because it's one of the few places in the world where being a generalist is a bonus.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Most careers one would go into want you to specialize. I didn't want to specialize. I, I liked, I loved the Rice requirements that every student take courses in all the fields. At the time, of course, I complained like everybody else.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Why do I have to take math when I –

Tracy Hulls: Right. Why do I have to take English?

Catherine Much: Whatever. But, as it turned out, the fact that I had taken Math 100 and done well in it and hated every minute of it, it gave me the qualification I needed to become a mathematics teacher and a mathematics textbook editor.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: I taught – I worked at Addison-Wesley Publishing as the, uh, Manager of Secondary Mathematics when I first went to California. And I would not have gotten the job if I had not had the, the Rice math background. I mean it's crazy because nothing I learned in Math 100 prepared me to edit high school math textbooks, but it, it was definitely the qualification that put me in front of the competitors to get that job. And you know, I used to tell my kids and my stepchildren that when you're 17 years old you don't know what's relevant. And to just –

Tracy Hulls: When your 30, pardon me for saying something.

Catherine Much: Yeah, that's true too.

Other Speaker: Uh huh, I often wonder.

Catherine Much: When, when you go into a school situation with no requirements and you pick and choose what looks interesting to you, you really don't have the wisdom yet to choose a, a plan that's coherent and that's going to prepare you to make the kinds of intelligent choices you will be faced with in the future. So you it, it's not a bad thing to be told everyone will take mathematics, a science, English, history, and then one other course that served most of us very well. When you take a survey course, you learn what you like. Then you can go on –

Tracy Hulls: Right.

Catherine Much: - and take more. You weren't given that in high school. Nobody was given the kind of survey course in literature, for instance, or in history that would let them choose intelligently from, uh, a smorgasbord of courses. So, I'm definitely in favor of something like a great book's approach or a, a balanced curriculum approach with a lot of requirements in the first two years, and then the opportunity to choose and specialize after that.

Tracy Hulls: A little more freedom. Were you planning to be a math teacher when you left Rice –

Catherine Much: Absolutely not.

Tracy Hulls: - after you graduated?

Other Speaker: I was curious about that.

Catherine Much: No, when I came as a freshman, I wanted to be a research neurosurgeon. I was going to medical school and I was going to do research on the brain. They were just beginning in the late '50s to do open-skull surgery –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - and to map the brain, and I really thought it was absolutely fascinating to map the brain to see how sensory impressions then got into your brain –

Tracy Hulls: Register.

Catherine Much: - and what happened –

Tracy Hulls: Absolutely.

Catherine Much: - inside. So I took the standard pre-med curriculum my first two years, which was of course about the same thing everybody else was taking anyway. And then I went to my advisor, who was Calvin Class, to sign up for my junior year courses. And I showed him what I was going to take and – I forget what now, but chemistry and I think – see chemistry and anatomy and another science and then the distribution requirements in foreign language and English, I guess. He said, "Why are you doing this?" And I said, "Well, I thought those were the requirements for medical school." And he said, "But you can't go to medical school." And I said, "Oh? Why not? I had been at the top of my class in one of the most competitive colleges in the country and you're telling me a medical school is not going to accept me?" And he said, "Yes, because you're going to get married." I had just gotten engaged and, you know, I knew him so he knew that.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And I said, well so what? I'm not going to get married until after I graduate from Rice. And he said, well, medical schools do not accept married women. And I said, oh. So I did, went out and did a little research and did sort of a survey of the medical schools I thought I might be interested in attending. And he was right, medical schools accepted very few women to start with. They accepted no married women. And they – if you got through your first year and then got married, you might be allowed to stay on, but you might be put under such pressure that you would drop out. And we thought for a long time about doing one of two things; either postponing the wedding for another year –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - which did not suit my fiancée at all, or me either, or lying. Because they asked you directly, you know, do you, what are your marriage plans. And I decided that I would not lie and I would not put off the wedding and, therefore, I'd better find something else to do. And what I thought I might do was teach, but I thought then I would teach biology, or maybe English or I would – but I was qualified to teach French, because I had a French double major. But when I went on the job market they didn't have any positions open, uh, where I wanted to be and they called me and said – the question was with no preamble, "How's your math?" I said well –

Tracy Hulls: I can balance my checkbook.

Catherine Much: Yeah, how's my math what, you know?

Tracy Hulls: Right.

Catherine Much: Well, what courses in math did you take and what grades did you make? And I said what, at my high school I'd taken all the standard; four years of math in high school and calculus at Rice, and I'd always made 1s/As.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Uh, he said well, I think you could handle high school Algebra and Geometry, don't you? And I said, well, if I can get the textbooks ahead of the kids.

Tracy Hulls: I can learn it before they do; no problem.

Catherine Much: And sure enough that's what I did. So I taught for two years and I enjoyed it. I really loved being in the classroom and I found that math was very easy for me to teach, because it was quite clear when they understood or didn't understand.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And it's much more difficult to say, teach somebody how to write, than it is to teach them, uh, how to prove that something is or is not an equilateral triangle. Uh, and they had a, a harder time with geometry than algebra because it was words instead of numbers

and they couldn't memorize a formula. But I still found it quite easy to, to each. Because if you don't get across the first time, you just look for another way to explain it, so I don't, I didn't mind, uh, the teaching part a bit. Uh, the money wasn't very good.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And that's why I decided to go back to graduate school, thinking I would then teach at college and be able to do more of my personal research, as well as get paid a lot better. But that was not to be, so here I am as an editor. But I love editing, I really do, very much enjoy helping people, uh, express themselves –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - clearly and forcefully and colorfully and trying to get ideas across to other people.

Tracy Hulls: You know, at the same time I've been thinking and forming my decision to go to graduate school, not so much the money an assistant professor makes now starting out is not very different from what a teacher in a good school district would earn in secondary education. Uh, but I was, I was concerned that I wouldn't have the patience to teach secondary education.

Catherine Much: Well, in most situations I think that's true now. I think classrooms have changed.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: First, I taught in a prep school, so I had relatively mot-, uh, motivated kids, or at least kids whose parents understood the value of an education.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And you do not find that in public schools today. And second, I had a very strong faculty and, uh, administrative support system at the school, which you don't find in public schools.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And then I had reasonable-sized classes. My largest class was 20, and that's a whole lot easier to manage than 35 kids with switchblades and, and crack cocaine.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm. Right and I, I didn't wanna be put in a position to be a parent to 35 people –

Catherine Much: No.

Tracy Hulls: - seven or eight hours a day and to not be in control of what happens outside of that –

Catherine Much: Mm mm.

Tracy Hulls: - environment. That's why I came back. Going back to your undergraduate experience as a sort of segue.

Catherine Much: Mm hmm.

Tracy Hulls: Can you describe to me what the social life was like here at Rice when you were an undergraduate.

Catherine Much: Fantastic! It was absolutely wonderful for me. Uh, there were three or four times as many boys as girls –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - to start with, which was a great ratio. And given how many of the boys were nerds it was good thing. It evened up –

Other Speaker: I still hear undergraduate girls complaining about the same thing.

Catherine Much: Yea, but uh, I used to keep a, a diary; not a, not a diary of, uh, what I thought and that sort of thing, but of what I, uh, just like a datebook of what I was doing to keep all my appointments straight. And I after I graduated I went back, just out of curiosity, and I averaged seven dates a week –

Tracy Hulls: Wow!

Catherine Much: - while I was at Rice. Now, sometimes that, that didn't mean every night.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: But there'd be two or three on Saturday and Sunday.

Tracy Hulls: Just different activities, I mean like what would you do?

Catherine Much: Well, uh, we went to all the football games, although I was never a football fan and have never set foot back in a stadium since. But that was the Saturday activity in the fall. We went to movies. Uh, there were lots of school parties. All the literary societies had parties. Uh, the – we were in an odd transition stage between the college organization and the class organization, so we had both going.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: The colleges were beginning to start doing, um, social things. The classes were still doing them, uh, but that faded out. But, each class had a couple of all-school parties a year and each college did too. And then there were lots of theatrical events. I think it's still true that virtually everything is, uh, volunteer at Rice. We had the, the Shakespeare Society, the Gilbert & Sullivan Society; each literary society put on a play. Uh, some of the colleges, uh, Baker began to do plays. Rice began to do, uh, original musicals. Um, they, so there was always some kind of college activity going on, on the weekends, and then we had parties at home. Since I lived in Houston, uh, we did a lot of socializing at home, two or three couples.

Tracy Hulls: So you invite people over to your home, your family's home in Houston?

Catherine Much: Yeah. We'd have two or three couples come over and we'd play records or we'd dance or we'd, uh, make popcorn or we'd bake cookies or things like that. Uh, there were no club-type activities, because Houston was dry in those days. It was, there was no liquor by the drink. You had to go to a private club and, you know, have a locker and young people couldn't do that. Uh, there was quite a lot of drinking at all school parties, which I didn't care much for, because drank extremely sparingly. I could make one Scotch and water last a whole evening; just keep adding water. But, there was, it was, uh, I thought that was a very bad situation. Because you, there was no alcohol allowed on campus whatsoever. The, at that time the bouffant hairdo was popular and girls would set their hair with beer as a setting lotion, and the girls who lived on campus would have to get the house mother at Jones College to buy their beer and open it and leave it in her apartment until it went flat. Lukewarm, flat beer was okay as setting lotion, but you couldn't drink it, so it was, it was okay for the girls to have it under those circumstances.

Tracy Hulls: Now were you assigned to Jones College? I didn't ask you. You mentioned it was a transitional period.

Catherine Much: Yes, you had to. Everyone was assigned to a college. Jones College was extremely inhospitable to Houston girls. Uh, it was the first time women had lived on campus.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: There was not space for everybody, so it was assigned on a seniority basis. And of course, uh, only the seniors got rooms my first two years, if there were any left over. And, my junior year somebody looked at it and thought, oh, this doesn't make sense. The people who would benefit most from the college experience living on campus are the freshman.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: So we ****. The, my first two years the seniors got in; my last two years the freshman got in and I, there was never a room for me or the other Houston girls in my class. And at the time, uh, you had to live on campus to run for a college office.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Um, they had extremely limited visiting rules. I think you could stay overnight in the college three times per semester, which meant you couldn't, you know, you couldn't run for an office if you couldn't be there to do any politicking.

Tracy Hulls: Right, socialize.

Catherine Much: And, uh, there was certainly no appeal to have lunch there, because the food was terrible and it as expensive. You get lunch at Sammy's, which was not a whole lot better but cheaper. So the Houston kids mostly hung out in the student center and with each other, uh, off campus at their homes and so forth. And also, there was not a lot of incentive to want to stay in the dorm on the weekends, because the curfew on Friday was something like 10:00 o'clock, I think.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: It was very early, and on Saturday it was 1:00 o'clock and that was late enough, but still nobody really particularly wanted to stay in the dorm on the weekends. So even the girls who lived in the dorm, they'd come spend the night with me.

Tracy Hulls: Come spend the night. Wow, that sounds so very different. I imagine the medical center area wasn't – well, it would've been developed then wouldn't it?

Catherine Much: The medical center was there –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - but it's probably tripled in size since then, and so we didn't have anything to do with the medical center. Oh, we'd go – you asked what else we did on dates.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: We'd go to Herman Park. We'd go to the zoo. We'd go to, uh, concerts outdoors. Uh, a group of eight of my friends, uh, bought four tickets to the symphony in the balcony at the half price student rate and we would go – we'd take turns, uh so that four of us would go every time to the symphony. We occasionally went to the opera, but that was expensive and they didn't have the same kind of student rates. Uh, we went to the Alley Theatre, which was much better before they got their big fancy, uh, theater and had to become conservative enough to attract an audience to pay their bills.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: They were much more inventive when they were in the, the fan factory. Uh, there were several other small groups. The, I think that the Little Theatre was still going when I was in college. I remember it in high school. Uh, they put on more traditional, more classic plays. And the, what's now the Houston Music Theatre was called something else then, but they had musicals mostly and comedies.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: So there were lots of events going on. We'd go to the museums.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: The Contemporary Arts Museum was in a Quonset hut on the Prudential grounds down Main Street. Uh, they had interesting exhibits and, and they showed foreign movies.

Tracy Hulls: Hmm.

Catherine Much: Uh, on Saturday nights you could go to the Contemporary Arts Museum and see really exotic, Galeni movies; things that were not allowed in the standard movie theaters because they would be picketed by the Baptists. And we had sports. Um, I played on the badminton, uh, tournaments. One of my good friends from high school that I used to carpool with and I were the mixed doubles champions of badminton.

Tracy Hulls: Of badminton. I don't know that they still have badminton tournaments here. I don't think they do.

Catherine Much: Probably not; now they now have much more, uh, formalized athletics, and those were totally amateur except for the football and basketball and I guess track. Those we had semi-professional student athletes, but the other sports were all just whoever showed up.

Tracy Hulls: Was there any animosity – you just mentioned something that interests me. Uh, there seems to be a lot of, I would say, animosity here between the athletes and the non-athletes, because of the different admission requirements. And I'm just curious to know if that was the case back when you were an undergraduate here; if in some way, um, a large portion of the student body felt superior –

Catherine Much: Yes.

Tracy Hulls: - to the athletes and in some way sort of dis-, dis-identified to use Helena's term, with that aspect of college life?

Catherine Much: Uh, well yes and no. It was not the same, but there was – I wouldn't call it animosity.

Tracy Hulls: That might be too strong.

Catherine Much: But there was definitely a superiority feeling.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Uh, for the scholarship athletes. Now, nobody, uh, thought anything of the tennis players and the swimmers and the golfers and people like that, because they all got in on the same admissions' grounds that the rest of us did. But the, uh, football and basketball players did not have to meet the same admission requirements and the football players had their own food. They had the football tables.

Tracy Hulls: And they still do.

Catherine Much: And so, people resented that and, but mainly it was a case of intellectual superiority and kind of making fun of them a little bit, but not too much, because actually most of them were pretty nice guys.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: I ended up getting stuck in the basketball players' French class. My freshman year I had placed into sophomore French. And because of the other things I was taking, the only section that I could meet was at 8:00 a.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. So, they only other people in that class were the basketball team. And so there were, there was one girl who was a sophomore and who had to get married. She got pregnant, um, and eventually after she was about six months pregnant married a, uh, math teaching assistant, and so she didn't come to class a fair amount. And most of the basketball players didn't come to class.

Tracy Hulls: I imagine at 8:00 o'clock.

Catherine Much: So it was, there were usually about an average of four people in the class, of which I was always one. And, there was one basketball player who would call me almost every week and say, uh, Ms. Much, may I borrow your math, your French notes. And I would say, sure Ollie, come on over, or meet me after class or something. I don't think he got up that early. Meet me for lunch would be more like it.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And you can borrow my French notes, and he made it through. He passed French 2, 200. Unfortunately, he died quite young. I, I think he had a heart attack under 30, but I saw in the Sally port that Ollie Shiplan had died when he was quite young.

Tracy Hulls: Hmm.

Catherine Much: But you know, he was a very nice guy, not nearly Rice intellectual quality, but that I think has always been the case ever since World War II.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: Uh, I think Rice admitted people, uh, uniformly and then some of them could play sports up until then. But it was, the Southwest Conference really got big in the last

'40s and '50s and that's when the pressure was on to lower the admission standards to get winning teams.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: And most of my class subsequently, when we realized that Rice didn't have to be in the Southwest Conference, and if it weren't it wouldn't have to have, uh, separate admissions, then they turned against sports. And when I was calling on the Telefund Drive, uh, I got an odd split. There were some – the people that were older than I that I was calling, people who had graduated in the '50s and '40s, would say I'm not going to give Rice a dime if they get out of the Southwest Conference.

Tracy Hulls: Hmm.

Catherine Much: But people from my class and younger were telling me, I'm not going to give Rice a dime until they get out of the Southwest Conference, and I thought was an interesting –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - uh, watershed, that people in the early to mid-'60s were still ambivalent. The younger people were anti-pro sports and the older people were definitely for them. They thought it was the only unifying factor in the school.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: School spirit, it was the thing that made everybody cheer for the same side, and they saw it as a, a factor that overlay, uh, and camouflaged the academic science split. But even, even architects can go to the football games and cheer for the team and be, be part of the school. So I don't know. It's, it's odd and it's hard to decide what to do, but I thought Rice really missed its big chance when the Southwest Conference folded. I thought this was the time when we should get back to playing the Ivy League and Cornell and places that, uh, if they have athletic students who get in on academic grounds, that's great.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: It's wonderful to have people who enjoy doing those things and excel in them. But, it really cheapens the education to, to me, to have a two-tiered system of admissions.

Tracy Hulls: Well, before we finish I just want to ask you one more question that's on this sheet.

Catherine Much: Mm hmm.

Tracy Hulls: And that is what do you think is the most important thing that happened to you while you were here?

Catherine Much: Oh well, I supposed it was the intellectual horizons that opened. Now, I came from an educated family that was interested in intellectual things, was intellectually curious, and uh, strongly encouraged reading and education. But, two parents cannot do for you what a whole school full of professors can –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - to introduce you to different key points; to uh, the whole world of history and science and, uh, all of the kinds of things that you don't get until you get into a situation where you're in close contact with people with brilliant minds, and many of them.

Tracy Hulls: Right.

Catherine Much: Yes you can, you can educated one-on-one if you have to, but if, it's so much more liberating to grapple with ideas in a surrounding where that is encourage and lauded –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - where you're praised for being intellectually alive.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm, and for having an opinion.

Catherine Much: Yes, where opinions are valued and listened to respectfully and then argued with.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: But not just rejected out of hand because they don't fit the preconceived notion of what people ought to do or think or believe. So I would say it was the, the world of ideas that was, uh, cultivated and encouraged at Rice. And, I was talking to somebody last night about this. I think that what many colleges do, but Rice did consummately well, is prepare you to keep learning for the rest of your life.

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: It doesn't teach you a body of knowledge, so much as it teaches you the tools with which you can get out a body of knowledge at any time from then on until you die. And you can keep learning and keep, uh, your curiosity and feel confidence that you can read and listen and discuss and, uh, find new ideas and new things to think about for the rest of your life. And that, you know, you're not handicapped in any way. You are part of the community of the intellect, uh, when you get out of here that, uh, you can go anywhere in the world and feel competent to discuss things, uh, with anybody.

Tracy Hulls: And make contributions like you obviously have.

Other Speaker: All these years.

Catherine Much: Modest though they are, yeah, some. So well, this is a great project. I'm delighted that somebody is doing it. I think it's terrific that you're going to have this body of recollections –

Tracy Hulls: Mm hmm.

Catherine Much: - uh, preserved somewhere for future historians.

Tracy Hulls: Yeah, and I've certainly enjoyed talking with you. I wish it didn't have to end right now.

Catherine Much: Yes, but I wanted to go down –

Tracy Hulls: This is Tracy Hulls. I interviewed on this tape Catherine Much. Uh, apparently there's some problem with the end of the second side. I've been listening to the end of our conversation and it doesn't appear to be on there. I'm not sure if it's just the acoustics in this room, or if in fact, uh, there was some kind of technical problem. But I just wanted to make sure that her name appeared on the tape, and she was a graduate in the class of '63.

SpeakWrite
www.speakwrite.com
Job Number: 14038-020
Custom Filename: wrc04199
Date: 02/08/2014
Billed Word Count: 7100