

Reminiscences of Abbey Berger-Knorr

January 15, 2021

Narrator: Abbey Berger-Knorr, Champlain College Class of 2024

Interviewer: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Location: This interview was conducted virtually, via Zoom

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Duration of Interview: 18:08

Transcriptionist: Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director

Introduction

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Abbey Berger-Knorr, Champlain College Class of 2024, conducted by Erica Donnis, Champlain College Special Collections Director, on January 25, 2021. This interview is part of the Champlain College Archives COVID-19 Oral History Project. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Interview Transcription

[Start of recording]

Donnis: Okay, I'm starting the recording. And I'm going to start out by introducing myself, and having you introduce yourself. So I'm Erica Donnis. I work for Champlain College. I'm the Special Collections Director. I use she/her pronouns. And we are conducting an oral history interview today. It is January 15, 2021. Abbey, could you introduce yourself, please.

Berger-Knorr: Sure. I am Abbey Berger-Knorr, and I am a freshman at Champlain College, majoring in communications.

Donnis: Great. Well thank you for joining me today. This is so great.

Donnis: So I'm going to ask you a series of questions. I think a lot of them are open-ended, and we can take this interview in a number of different directions. So feel free to kind of go off-script if you want to, and keep going on a topic that is interesting to you.

Donnis: So the first question on my list, or the first prompt is, "I came to Champlain College because ..."

Berger-Knorr: So, I came to Champlain firstly because my mom is a professor at Lebanon Valley College, which is a small college in PA [Pennsylvania], where I'm from. And because she is a professor at that college she has access to tuition exchange, which grants a scholarship to students who apply who are affiliated with people who work for the college. And so when I was searching for colleges I looked at that scholarship specifically, and Champlain College was on the list, and so I went and toured, and I fell in

love with it, and I absolutely loved Burlington, and I loved the vibe. Everybody seemed super positive at Champlain, and I decided to go there.

Donnis: What were your first impressions of Champlain College?

Berger-Knorr: I definitely, like I said, I thought that it was a very inclusive and friendly community. Right away I noticed, like any questions that I had, or anyone that I talked to, was just very welcoming, and I really liked that. Everyone was really excited to share Champlain's values with me when I went and toured, and I really appreciated that.

Donnis: Tell us about your first few days on campus.

Berger-Knorr: My first few days on campus. So, it was a little bit weird, because we couldn't bring our parents into the houses with us, and I remember and still am excited about where I'm living, because it's crazy that we get to live in Victorian mansions. And so I was super excited to see the inside of my house and my dorm room, but I remember the first couple days of like – well, the first day of moving in was definitely weird because my mom couldn't come in and see the building or like meet anybody who was like living near me. And then it was also kind of bizarre because I moved in I believe on a Friday, and so there was still the weekend before classes started and so not everybody was moved in yet so the past like the first couple days I didn't really know who to talk to or what to do because of the restrictions, and not everybody was there yet. So it was definitely a little bit of a wake up call and I felt kind of lonely my first couple days, but it definitely got better once I met people and we understood that we could do certain things and other things we couldn't and it made more sense.

Donnis: So just for the record, could you tell us why your parents couldn't enter your dorm room when you first arrived.

Berger-Knorr: Right. So because of COVID-19, the pandemic that occurred in 2020, the college decided to create a lot of restrictions just to ensure the safety of the students and faculty and anybody living on campus. And so they did not allow parents to come into the dorm rooms and help their children move into the houses just so that they wouldn't contaminate anything within the dorm should they have had COVID-19.

Donnis: So it sounds like you lived on campus this fall. Which residence hall did you live in, and what's your dorm room like?

Berger-Knorr: I am. This year I'm in McDonald Hall, and my dorm room, I'm in a single room, which, that was another change, was that we could only decide between having one roommate or being in a single, and I just decided to be in a single because I thought that I would like it better. Not that I dislike the idea of having a roommate, but I thought it might be kind of peaceful. And my room is located, the view from it, I look out over the, I can see the lake [Lake Champlain], I can see Burlington, the city, and I can see, I can also see the quad [Finney Quad]. So it's a very nice view from my window. I have one of the smaller rooms, but like I said, I'm in a room that's meant to be a single, so I got what I wanted.

Donnis: So how did you make your dorm room feel like home?

Berger-Knorr: To make it feel like home, I brought a lot of stuff from home. I definitely overpacked with clothing. My room has a decent sized walk in closet, and so that was a nice surprise when I saw my room for the first time because I was like oh, that's good, because I overpacked. So my clothing definitely made me feel at home. But also just decorating it and making it filled with things that I like and my favorite colors and such made it feel homey.

Donnis: When you're on campus, where do you spend most of your time?

Berger-Knorr: So I would say most of my time has either been in my dorm room or probably at IDX [IDX Student Life Center on the Champlain College campus]. I tend to like meet up with my friends to eat take out from IDX, and then we'll either eat in like the little dining area outside of the dining hall or outside. When it was nice out we would always eat outside, which was nice. But mostly because my classes were online I did spend a lot of time in my room, just because classes were held, and I had to be on my laptop.

Donnis: So you said that most of your classes were online?

Berger-Knorr: I had, I believe it was five classes last semester. Two were in person and the other three were online. So I was actually pretty lucky because I knew a couple of people that had all of their classes online. But I definitely enjoyed being able, the first semester of college, to have the in-person experience, which was really nice. But I didn't feel that the online classes got in the way of anything, if that makes sense. I didn't really struggle with it, but I did like that I could still have the in-person feel.

Donnis: So what was it about attending class in person that was appealing?

Berger-Knorr: I think it's probably because that's just what we all had in our brains before the pandemic, is that that's how it was going to be, and so, to not have that was kind of like a shocker, because it was new for professors, it was new for students, it was new for everyone to really do the whole online teaching thing. So I think, I think I also just enjoy meeting people in person more so than online. I think there's a lot of, kind of, barriers between how you interact over Zoom or something. You can't really tell when someone's about to speak, or when someone's about to, you know, you can't really read people as much. So I think I like doing that in person more than online.

Donnis: So this leads into my next question, which is: tell us about attending college during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Berger-Knorr: Okay. I would say I have a pretty optimistic look on it. I personally don't feel like it affected my, like, experience too much. I really did have a really great time the first semester. And I also think that was a credit to, I, on my own time I pursued an internship downtown, so I was still, like, going out and about in a sense, in a safe way during the pandemic, and doing some things in person and be able to like explore the town. So I don't really think that COVID affected me that negatively. I would say, however, it definitely affected my college experience in the fact that we got tested weekly, which, we

kind of had to figure out how to plan that into our schedules. Also the fact that we always have to wear a mask and abide by social distancing, which we were kind of used to at that point when we had moved in, but was still kind of a factor. And then probably just being aware of communication efforts by the college through email, and always being updated on kind of what we were allowed to do and what we weren't allowed to do because of the pandemic.

Donnis: Has your college experience been different from how you imagined it?

Berger-Knorr: Definitely. I kind of touched upon that. I, first off, I feel like nobody really knows what their college experience is going to be, until you have it, and I think we all kind of have a grandiose idea of what the future will be like, but I definitely did not think that I would be wearing a mask in my room, or something, like walking around all the time, and not being able to, like, shake hands with people, or hug people. It's definitely very strange, not being able to meet all of my professors in person. I think for a lot of students, a lot of students felt isolated. I didn't so much feel that way, but I think that it's definitely strange.

Donnis: Tell us about a memorable class from the fall semester.

Berger-Knorr: I had two that were pretty memorable. And both of them were my in-person ones, and that's probably why. I had public speaking, which was held in the auditorium, which made a lot of sense since it was a public speaking class. But that was a lot of fun. We had a mix of students from all different years in the class, which was interesting, because it was also my first class that I ever attended, because it was my first class on Monday morning. And so, like, that was an interesting way to introduce me to Champlain, because it was in-person, because it was like a mix of different people, so I kind of felt like it was like the experience I had been hoping for instead of being online. And then I also was in a video storytelling class, which also I attended in person. And that stuck out to me because, even though we had the pandemic, we still got to learn how to use the equipment if we were on campus, with all of the film equipment, and I learned so much about it. I knew nothing about film before this past semester, and to be able to have the hands-on experience to learn how to like set up a camera and do all of that was definitely worthwhile.

Donnis: If you could change one thing about your first semester at college, what would it be?

Berger-Knorr: I'd like to say that I wouldn't change anything, just because I don't like to live with regrets, but I think if I had to change something, it would kind of just be ... I would more so change the way that the college went about things. I think that more efforts could have been made to, kind of, have people meet each other, get people out there, just because I know that a lot of people struggled with that, and I think that the college probably could have done more to maybe, I don't know, enhance like the clubs or enhance like activities or something that were COVID safe, to just get people out there to meet each other so that they didn't feel isolated in their rooms.

Donnis: When you look back on your first semester at college, what do you think you'll remember the most, and why?

Berger-Knorr: I think I will definitely remember where I interned. I am interning at Big Heavy World, and I do communications and video stuff there. And what was really awesome about that is even though they had the pandemic they would still have, with social distancing, live bands come in and play for their radio show, so every Wednesday night I would go down to where I intern and watch the bands play and listen to them, which is something that I know I will always remember because I didn't even think, like live music is not even happening right now so the fact that I could have that, during the pandemic, and even if there wasn't a pandemic it would be something I was interested in, so it kind of added another layer of like fascination to being able to do that.

Donnis: So when you're on campus, attending classes, how do you connect with your friends, both those at Champlain, and those outside of Champlain?

Berger-Knorr: I think the good thing about social media is that among this pandemic you can totally use it to connect with people. I honestly met a lot of my friends through social media even before coming to campus, and then because we kind of established that friendliness we then decided to meet up somewhere like outside or we found a way to make it work. And that's definitely how I kept in touch too with people that weren't at Champlain. But I think that texting people or using social media to be able to communicate during the pandemic on campus was very helpful.

Donnis: And how did you connect with your family while you were on campus?

Berger-Knorr: Pretty much the same thing. I would text my mom from time to time. I would also FaceTime her, which was fun. And because, also the first day when parents weren't allowed inside I FaceTimed her as I was setting up my room so it still felt like she was there which was kind of cute. But yeah also yeah I would really just text. I would send like funny things to my friends and family that reminded me of them through texting or social media.

Donnis: Well great. So that is the end of my list of questions. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

Berger-Knorr: Hmm. I'm trying to think. I think one thing that would just be kind of interesting to note for history's sake, which is completely random, but is the fact that getting food on campus also completely changed. I think that's something that like nobody talks about. But everything was takeout. And I was looking at pictures, like while I was on campus, of the website about how like the dining hall used to be set up and everything, and I became friends with a couple of upperclassmen, and they were talking about how nice it was to like go in and sit and be able to sit wherever and sit with whoever you wanted and like eat tons of food there. And I think that's really crazy because I had no idea what they were talking about because I was like I can't even imagine that because that's not my experience because while you could like eat in IDX if you said that you wanted to with like the spaced out seating, nobody really did that, like everybody just kind of took it back to their rooms or ate outside. Which I think was another reason probably why a lot of people felt that they didn't get the socialization that they needed in because I feel like the dining hall was probably a really easy way to meet people. And I think that it's just weird to think about it that way so I'm honestly excited hopefully when this pandemic is over and we're all vaccinated that that will come back.

Donnis: Absolutely, that makes sense. I appreciate your bringing that up because I think that is an important part of the college experience, definitely. And something that has definitely changed in the last year.

Berger-Knorr: Yeah.

Donnis: Anything else you'd like to add?

Berger-Knorr: I don't think so.

Donnis: Okay, well, thank you so much. It's been wonderful to capture your reflections in this interview, and I'm looking forward to putting them in the archives.

Berger-Knorr: Yeah, thank you for interviewing me.

Donnis: My pleasure. Thank you, Abbey.

Berger-Knorr: You're welcome.

[end of recording]