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Oral History Project

Interview with: **Yvonne Dierenfield**
Class of 1949

Date: **Tuesday, July 10th, 2007, 1:00 p.m.**

Place: Dierenfield Home
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

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Interview with Yvonne Dierenfield

Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer

July 10th, 2007
Yvonne Dierenfield's Home

[00:00]

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi and I am a new graduate of Macalester College conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is July 10th, 2007, and I am interviewing Yvonne Dierenfield, Class of 1949, at her home.

YD: How did I get started at Macalester? It's a little strange. First of all, I was brought up Methodist, and Macalester, of course, is—was—Presbyterian. My goal in life was to graduate from the university and major in music. And so I started at junior college in Rochester, and after five days I became very ill with infectious mononucleosis. I was in the hospital in Rochester for ten days, which is most unusual for that disease. And then they told me I had to quit college. Well, this was a terrible blow. So after I finally got to feeling better, my parents sent me up to Saint Paul to visit a cousin who lived two or three blocks from Macalester and was attending Macalester. So every day, I would go with her to class and visit classes, for two weeks. Well I fell in love with the place. I just loved the campus, the people were so friendly, I loved everything about it. So I wrote my parents three postcards. "Can I go to Macalester?" Number one. Number two, "Send room reservation deposit." Number three, "Send tuition." I had no problem. I had graduated at the top of my class, so getting in was no problem. But I liked Macalester right from the start, and that was where I wanted to go. And it ended up I spent a

long time of my life there... I knew nothing about Macalester. In fact, if I had gone to any religious college, I should have gone to Hamline. And the minister in our church was so angry at my parents for allowing me to go to a Presbyterian college that when I would go home and play for church, he would put the hymns on the organ, and for a whole year he never spoke to me. So that's why the story about the Methodist.

[02:42]

When I started Macalester in January, I first lived in Wally [Wallace] Hall, third floor. And I had two roommates, one from Iowa and one from Sandstone, Minnesota. And we were all from small towns, small families, conservative families, and this was quite an education to see these girls. They would go on the lower level, whatever it was called, and smoke. Ugh, this flabbergasted me. I had never seen this done so freely. So I said to my mother one day, "What would you say if I started smoking?" Now can you imagine anybody asking their mother if they could... [laughs] She said, "Your father would take you right out of college." And so that's my career in smoking. Most students lived on campus, that was our life, living on campus. And, as I said, I lived on the third floor the first semester, and I became acquainted with quite a few other girls. Two of them and I decided that we were going to do something very, very daring. Now we're conservative kids, conservative families, and we decided one night that we were going to jump out the windows of Wallace Hall after curfew and we're going to do something very, very daring. So for two hours we rode streetcars, because you could pay for one and get a pass and then you could ride forever. Oh, we thought we were just pretty wild to do this for two hours. Well then we had to get back in the dorm. And we had jumped out these windows. Well, some way we got back in through those windows, and I got up to my room on the third floor, and Mrs. Culverstine [sp?], the house mother, came up and she said, "The report is Yvonne is

missing.” And my roommate said, “Oh, no. She’s right there in bed. Be quiet because she’s sleeping!” Well she told me to jump under the covers and cover up myself, even my head practically. And so, oh [sighs in relief], Mrs. Culverstine went away. She believed that, well, I was there. She didn’t believe that I could do anything bad like that. That was my wildest moment at Macalester [laughs].

[05:23]

I majored in music. I took organ from Carl Jensen, who I thought was a very fine teacher. I loved organ and my last two years I was chapel organist, and also played at the start of convocation. We always had to sing “Dear Old Macalester” at the beginning, and I would play for that. Then, I thought I was so clever, I could sneak out because they all knew I had been there because roll was always taken. I could sneak out and not have to sit through the speech. Well, later on, after I was married and at home, I found out that these talks were really very good [laughs], and I should have been staying and listening. I also played for chapel. Dr. Max Adams was the chaplain then. And he got so weary of the kids talking during the prelude that finally he said, “We’re gonna cut out the prelude. We’ll just start right with the [entry? unclear], and the choir will all of a sudden start singing.” Well, it didn’t do any good, but at least I didn’t have to practice the prelude anymore. I always had to practice at Mac Church and the minister was always in his study, so of course he always heard me, and every day he would give me a report on how I was doing on my pieces. As Dick [Richard Dierenfield, her husband] said, the music building was this church on one of the side streets behind the president’s house. We had practice rooms in the basement. It really was extremely unsatisfactory, but that’s what was there and that’s what we dealt with. I studied with Gabriel Fenyves, the great Hungarian virtuoso. And when he taught he leaned back in his chair like this. And he always knew what I was doing, you

know, he didn't have to watch the music. And so one day we were traveling in Europe years later, and in Hungary, and we saw the place where he had grown up, Venavus [unclear], Hungary. I thought my music classes were excellent. The high point, of course, was singing in the choir with Hollis Johnson. After the war, we had a huge choir, the men up the center and the sopranos on one side, the altos on the other. Excellent, excellent choir. And Hollis was the one I studied choir directing under, which, I thought he was absolutely the top. We had these little rooms in the lower level of the church, what was now the conservatory, and that's where we would practice. And of course you could hear everybody else practicing. It was very distracting, but that was what we had to deal with. The other music majors were—of course we became special friends. People in choir became special friends. Then I did my student teaching under a Mac grad in music. I had to go to a small town, Willow River, up north. And I did student teaching there, and then I came back to Mac in time to graduate.

[09:47]

Being a student at Mac, of course, I wanted to participate in everything they had. The all-college dances were special. When I started I think we had three hundred and fifty students, three hundred girls and fifty boys. So if we wanted to have a dance they would go to St. Thomas and get the V-12 [the Navy's college training program] boys to come up and be our partners at the dance. Otherwise it was not very successful. Before the war we wore jeans, big red plaid shirts that hung outside, and red—they were like beanies except they had brims. And that was our dress, we looked awful [laughter]. But the minute the fellows came back from the war, skirts, decent clothes. It was an entirely different world. Also we had to study a lot more because they were there for business. They were not there for fun and games. And so the whole campus completely changed at that time.

[10:57]

One of the high points of my being at Macalester was a canoe trip that I took in the Northwoods up into this man, that man's—the other man's lake, three lakes [Birch, Fall, and Knife Lake] up into Canada. And we were gone for ten days. Ruth Schellberg was the Phy Ed department chair in charge of it, and we had an absolute ball. A fellow from the Chicago paper [the *Chicago Tribune*] flew in to be with us for a few days to interview us and watch what we did. It was certainly one of the most exciting things I did at Mac. I absolutely loved it. And even today when I get together with girls, women, who've been on the trip, what do we talk about? The canoe trip.

[12:04]

Religion in Life Week was a big deal on campus. I remember being a part of the planning for one of them. I guess the majority of my time was spent practicing. Well, I was taking piano, organ, and voice, so I had three lessons a week, plus I, of course, put in some practice time. Some of my best friends are from college. My college roommate and I grew up together in Chatfield, Minnesota, down near Rochester. And we roomed together and have been best friends all our lives. The things we looked we looked forward to were the all-college dinner dances. Formal dresses. One year, Dick was the chair and it was over in Minneapolis someplace. That was really a big deal. We ate all our meals in the dormitories. On—I think it was Wednesday and Sunday, we had to dress up. You were served at tables with white linen tablecloths, very formal dinners. We had house mothers, Mrs. Culverstine and Mrs. [Kathryn] Tift in Wallace Hall when I started. You signed out and you signed in. You had to be in on weekdays at ten o'clock. I think you could get one twelve o'clock on a weekend, but that was a big deal, to stay out until twelve o'clock. Wallace Hall was a lovely place to live. They had a—as you go up into

the building, there were stairs—a doorway first, stairs, and then another doorway. And that's where all the couple would say their goodnights, and lots of activity about ten o'clock at night on weeknights, and twelve on other nights.

[14:49]

One of the... Oh, during the school year I would work the switchboard. You probably don't even know what that is [laughs]. On weekends I would work that. They had a full-time operator, but she would be gone on weekends. And that was a big deal, and I think we got paid for that. Summers I worked as a secretary in Rochester at a company. I also decided, "What if I don't like teaching music? That's all I know, that's all I've ever thought about, studied." So about the beginning of my junior year I started taking economics courses. I took, I think a lacked two credits of a major in economics. I took shorthand, typing, bookkeeping, the whole works. But I found I did love teaching. I taught public school music after I graduated and then for many, many years I was church organist in various churches and choir director. And then I also had a piano studio. Up until a couple years ago I taught piano full-time. And I just love teaching and love music, so it was a good combination.

[16:29]

After we were married we lived in what they called—it used to be the Mac Woods, and they brought in all these veterans housing and we lived in that for a couple years. It was really very primitive. Then Dick went to England to do further work towards his doctorate and eventually we went to Colorado for a couple years as well. Dick worked there.

[17:07]

Being a faculty wife was pretty nice, pretty special. We had a special organization: Mac Faculty Wives. We had sub groups: child study, book group. You name it, we had them. So at that

time I never felt a need to join an organization like the American Association of University Women. Eventually the one at Macalester died out, but it was where I had many, many friends, many, many contacts. And of course, being a faculty wife was special. Dick would get sabbaticals, so we were able to travel. We went around the world twice. He could always find an excuse to go study in England. So we did lots of traveling. And that was a wonderful way of life. I treasure my time at a Macalester. I treasure being a student there. I'm glad that I went to Macalester. I'm sorry it was not such that we wanted to send our boys there at the time, but my lifelong friends are from Macalester days. So it's been a wonderful life.

[End of Interview, 18:41]