

Project: “What a time we had ... women remember Drake”

Interviewee: Jane Burns, Drake University, class of 1983 (J)

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Interviewer: Kristin Hoelscher (JMC 171)

(Interviewer): Kegs were legal in dorm rooms.
 Erotic film festivals were the norm.
 And, still, the pope came to town.

The early 1980s were an interesting time to be a student at Drake University, especially for a small-town girl from Wisconsin. Jane Burns said things got interesting the day she moved into Goodwin-Kirk Residence Hall in 1979.

Jane: It was weird because my freshman year I was in the [Drake] band, so I moved in a day early. I think there was one other girl on my floor; I just remember this vast emptiness.

(Interviewer): Commotion replaced the emptiness as other students arrived on campus. Burns’ first week of college was typical, but she quickly realized that she was an unusual first-year student – one with career goals.

Jane: I gave [college] an obscene amount of thought for a 17-year-old. I was lucky to be able to actually pick a school based on what I wanted to do; some people I know in my career field still don’t know what they want to do.

(Interviewer): Not only was Burns sure she wanted to be a journalist, but she was also sure that she wanted to go “away” to school. This was an uncommon plan for someone who grew up in Mt. Horeb, less than 30 miles from the University of Wisconsin campus. The allure of a small, private school drew Burns, now an editor for The Capital Times in Madison, Wis., to Drake University. The journalism program was icing on the cake.

Jane: I liked how the private school was its own little community and wasn’t spread out.

(Interviewer): Drake’s small campus and close-knit community kept students close to the dorms. Burns said the college nightlife was much different than the scene she sees when she visits Des Moines for the Drake Relays every year. In the early 1980s, there were more bars close to campus and the drinking age was 19, which she said made a “huge” difference.

Jane: We could have kegs in our room. There really was no reason to go downtown. We had a lot of dorm parties, because the drinking age was such and it really kept a lot of the stuff on campus and it was perfectly legal for everybody there to be drinking.

(Interviewer): As for the restrictions on dorm life, Burns---who lived on campus all four years of college---has a hard time remembering many of the rules. Excessive noise was the most common offense. Burns had gained significant freedom compared to her counterparts who attended Drake in previous decades.

Jane: There were really no specific ‘women shouldn’t do this’ issues and there was certainly no curfew. The rules were reasonable. It was probably an interesting time to be at Drake.

(Interviewer): Most students did not have cars and computers were nonexistent, aspects of campus life that likely enhanced the collegial campus atmosphere.

Jane: You always knew somebody who had a car. A lot of people had crappy cars [and] would loan them to you in a second; they didn’t care, you always knew who you could borrow one from.

(Interviewer): She had a good reason to begin finagling her way into a borrowed car during her the first week at college when she found out Pope John Paul II would visit Des Moines that fall.

Jane: At that time, the pope never went anywhere. It was a unique thing to have a world leader like that in the area.

(Interviewer): But she also found out that there were plenty of diverse activities on campus, including an annual pornographic film festival. Burns said she attended the festival, which she described as a sign of the times. She said there was a societal attitude that supported exposing young people to different ideas and events, even to somewhat taboo topics that piqued their curiosity. Burns also spent much of her college years working at Godfather’s Pizza on University Avenue.

Jane: I worked a lot because I needed the money to go to Drake.

(Interviewer): During her four years at Drake, Burns was also a stringer for The Associated Press and an intern for The Des Moines Register. Her jobs allowed her to make friends outside of the Drake community and experience more of what Des Moines had to offer.

Burns' internship led to her first job after college as a copy editor in the sports department at The Register. She said that while she will never forget her roommates, it has been her friendships with other Drake journalism school graduates that have thrived over the years because of the nature of the profession. She said that technology has changed the way she keeps in touch with friends from college and former colleagues.

Jane: I'm using the Internet and computers in ways that I never thought I would, socially and in my career.

(Interviewer): Her advice to Drake's class of 2006 is to be open to the fact that the world is going to change.

Jane: I'm pursuing things professionally and personally that I never gave a thought to when I was in college, and that's a good thing. Learning is not over by any stretch of the imagination; it keeps going and going and going.