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Simon's Rock Oral History Project

Interviewee: **Jan Hutchinson**

Academic Affairs, Admissions and Learning Resources (1990 - present)

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Interview with Jan Hutchinson

November 24, 2015

Alumni Library, Bard College at Simon's Rock

Selected excerpts from the Oral History Project interview. The full transcript may be restricted. To request access please contact the [Simon's Rock College Archives](#).

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“Pat trusted me, I guess. Pat has always been somebody who empowers people. She’s just wonderful that way. And she saw how carefully I read the applications, and asked me to-- when the Acceleration to Excellence Program started-- some of the existing students called it the “Twenty Nerds Program,”-- but it was when they brought in these full-[merit] scholarship kids. And in the beginning, [the students] had grants to do summer studies and at that point, I had never worked with a database at all. And Ginger Warness, who worked in admissions, spent hours with me on the third floor of the [Hall] College Center teaching me how to enter things in the database. All the applicants. And I remember working until 10:00 at night sometimes because I just wanted to do it right. But the fun part of that job was that I then got to read all the applications of all these amazing kids. And they truly were amazing. Then in those early years, I also did what Nancy [Bonvillain] does now with the tutoring program. So I got to know not only the very highest functioning, intellectual, kids who were coming through the AEP program, but I got to know and love the kids who needed tutoring help. So that was very fun.”

“If I hadn’t worked at Simon’s Rock, I would have had a much more limited cultural experience. I have friends from working here from all over the world. I mean, Pauline Dongala [wife of Emmanuel Dongala, faculty in Chemistry and French], from Congo Brazzaville is one of my really close friends. I remember her sitting in this office, I was helping her with her thesis, and somebody ran by the window and she said [gasps] ‘Was that a zebra?’ and I said, ‘Pauline, in this country, we don’t have wild zebras.’ And she said, ‘Oh, yeah, I knew that.’ But it was so cute, whenever anybody runs by, I go ‘There goes a zebra.’”

“I just love the way Simon’s Rock makes people think on their feet, the way there’s so much conversation in the classroom, there’s so much writing done... People come out of here with this amazing ability to speak and to communicate.”

“I went with [Pat Sharpe] when the Bard High School Early College, the first one that had opened, that was in Brooklyn. I went with her to teach workshop, and we lived in Bard Hall. Ba Win was there, and that was the week of 9/11. And from the classrooms in Brooklyn, we could see the towers. This was supposed to be about Pat, but I want to tell a Ba Win story. So there was a tree in the way of my room, in our view of the tower. And these guys came running over from next door and said ‘Come quickly! Something’s hit the tower.’ And I can remember saying ‘Look at how big the sky is, it couldn’t...’ And I was so naive that when the next plane came, at first I thought they were coming to help. I just had this moment of hopeful-- and when we saw it crash, I remember sliding down the wall, sort of into a crouch. And Ba Win came and put his hand on my shoulder and said ‘You have five seconds to process this and then you’re on your feet helping these kids.’ And I just said ‘Yes sir.’ He was so clear and so heroic that whole day. Before the towers went down, he had Osama Bin Laden’s name on the chalkboard and he was talking to this whole group of students. And I hadn’t realized how much history he reads and how knowledgeable he is about so many parts of the world. I’d known him for years, but when I think of him, I think with tremendous admiration of that day and how he handled [it] -- with such calm and such strength.”

“I think Bernie is one of the best teachers that has ever been on this campus. I really got a chance to see that. When I first came down to the Win Commons, part of the reason I was pulled down here was we had a deaf boy and not enough support. So I went to all of his classes the first-- maybe both-- years that he was here and took notes. So I got to sit in on, sort of, as an observer in those classes and I just loved the way Bernie ran his class. Many things that he did-- I liked the way he used the response journals, so they weren’t just some empty thing that people had to do, but he would [collect] them before. He would read them and he would remember whose ideas he really liked and would say “Read that part” and initiate the discussions through that. And he’d often spend ten minutes at the beginning of the class, just sort of, giving the context of the piece of writing, the time period. I just thought it was nice because it was just a tidbit of lecture, but people really got oriented. Somehow-- there was great order and respect in his class. He had thought everything through so carefully and prepared so well. I loved that.”