

Spring 2019

Interview of Alice L. Hoersch, Ph.D.

Alice L. Hoersch Ph.D.

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Recommended Citation

Hoersch, Alice L. Ph.D. and Bemak, Selena, "Interview of Alice L. Hoersch, Ph.D." (2019). *All Oral Histories*. 123.
<https://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptohall/123>

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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Alice L. Hoersch

Interviewer: Selena M. Bemak

Interview date: March 20, 2019 at 1:00 P.M and April 3, 2019 at 1:00 P.M.

Interview location: Dr. Hoersch's office in the Holroyd Science Building at La Salle University, 1900 W. Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19141

Field notes written on April 28, 2019 and corrected on May 2, 2019

The Interviewee:

Alice Lynn Hoersch was born in 1950 in Abington, PA to Albert and Alice Hoersch. She moved to Honey Brook, located in Chester County, PA at two-years-old. Hoersch lived in Honey Brook until she finished graduate school in 1977. She attended Honey Brook Elementary School. She graduated as valedictorian from Twin Valley High School in 1968. Hoersch studied geology at Bryn Mawr College, graduating in 1972. She received both her master's and Ph.D. in metamorphic petrology from Johns Hopkins University in 1974 and 1977, respectively. The same year she obtained her Ph.D., Hoersch began teaching as an assistant professor of geology at La Salle University. She has served La Salle as a professor of geology, physics and environmental science for 42 years. She also took on additional roles at the University, including serving as associate dean of the School of Arts and Sciences from 1986 to 1993. While in this role, she became one of the founders of the Freshman Year Experience, now known as the Freshman Seminar. From 1993 to 2017, she performed the duties of executive assistant to the president of La Salle University. In this role, she served as the school's liaison to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, organized and contacted La Salle's honorary degree recipients, and pioneered La Salle's Heritage Week (previously known as Charter Week). Hoersch also participated in a group of women faculty members on campus, named Professional Women of La Salle, which aimed at establishing equality amongst the faculty. She currently chairs the environmental science department (now absorbed into the biology department), though she intends on retiring at the end of the 2019 school year. Hoersch currently resides in Hatfield, PA with her two dogs, Laddie and Dyson.

The Interviewer:

I, Selena Marie Bemak, (born 1997 in Philadelphia, PA) grew up in the Oxford Circle section of Northeast Philadelphia. I am currently an undergraduate senior in the 5-year BA/Master's history program at La Salle University. I am both the daughter of immigrants and a first-generation college student. My research interests include Philadelphia/Germantown, Quaker women and immigration history. My father immigrated to the United States from the Philippines in 1980. My mother moved from Ponce, Puerto Rico to Philadelphia in 1965. Although my parents were born outside of the contiguous United States, both were raised and have since remained in Philadelphia. I met my interviewee, Dr. Hoersch, through class. I enrolled in Dr.

Hoersch's Introduction to Geographic Information Systems Class in the spring 2019 semester. This was my second time interviewing someone for an oral history project.

Background:

I first met Alice Hoersch as a student in her Introduction to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) class in the spring of 2019. When considering potential candidates to interview for this project, Dr. Barbara Allen suggested Dr. Hoersch. My interest immediately peaked for a myriad of reasons; Dr. Hoersch spent the majority of her life – approximately 42 years – working at La Salle. My curiosity surged as I wondered if she ever faced gender discrimination or sexism as a woman in STEM.

I initially contacted Dr. Hoersch about potentially interviewing her in mid-February. I sent a formal email explaining the goals of the project and requesting her participation on February 19, 2019. In my note to her, I included a full disclosure of everything that the interview process would entail, including the signing of legal releases. Rather than responding by email, Dr. Hoersch approached me in class the following day, agreeing to participate in the project with the stipulation that we conduct the interviews after spring break.

We held several informal, preliminary meetings before and after class in the leadup to the formal interviews. During La Salle's spring break, I sent Dr. Hoersch another email on March 14, 2019, requesting prospective times to meet and explaining the interview process once again. I also sent Dr. Hoersch my prepared questionnaire, which contained approximately 90 questions and was based off of Paul Thompson's model, for her to review ahead of our meetings. She informed that she would prefer to schedule the interview in two sessions. We settled on meeting for about an hour in the afternoon on Wednesday, March 20, 2019, in her office, room 43 in the Holroyd Science Center at La Salle.

When I arrived at her office for our first interview session, Dr. Hoersch was sitting at her computer in her work clothes. She and I spoke for approximately 25 minutes about the project, as well as additional, unrelated topics, such as the coursework in the GIS class and her dogs, Laddie and Dyson. I also re-explained the objective of the oral history project and the purpose of the legal releases. I gave her another copy of my questionnaire for her to follow along with during the session. When we finally commenced the interview, our first session lasted for just a minute or two over an hour. We focused primarily on her early life, covering her childhood, teenage years, college and graduate school experience. Dr. Hoersch and I both set our phones on airplane mode and closed the door to her office in order to avoid any potential distractions or interruptions. During the session, outside noise from faculty speaking in the room behind us can be heard at approximately 33:30 in the first audio file. Occasionally, tapping noises can be heard throughout the recording as Dr. Hoersch tapped her drink or played with her pen while we spoke. An example of these tapping noises occurs at the 51:25 mark in the audio. She also frequently played with her hands and touched her face throughout the interview. Occasionally, Dr. Hoersch took long pauses while contemplating potential answers to my questions. She also tended to smile at me when telling fond stories of her life's history. After wrapping up the first session, Dr. Hoersch signed the legal release form and agreed to meet again at the same time and place exactly two weeks later, on Wednesday, April 3, 2019.



In the interim period between our sessions, Dr. Hoersch and I saw each other frequently in class. She and I spoke often about the project. Dr. Hoersch also asked that in the second session we return to some of the topics we briefly discussed in the first session. When we meet in her office on April 3, once again we casually spoke for approximately 20 minutes before starting the interview. On the second day, Dr. Hoersch's puppy Dyson remained in the room for the duration of our meeting. Although he briefly roamed around her office, Dyson (pictured to the left, sitting on the floor in Dr. Hoersch's office) eventually settled and slept under Dr. Hoersch's desk for the majority of the session.

In the beginning of the second interview, we returned to some topics previously discussed, such as her father working as a chemical engineer on the atomic bomb project in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. After revisiting some topics she wanted to discuss more in

depth, the interview circled back to her career. For the majority of the second session, we discussed her career at La Salle in the various roles she has served. We also spent some time discussing the evolution and future of the University. At one point during the interview (1:03:41) her office telephone rang. We briefly paused the interview in order for her to answer the call. When we returned to the session, we spoke briefly on her personal life. Although I initially prompted her with several questions on marriage, I eased off of the subject when she appeared melancholy while discussing her decision to never marry. Our second session concluded after speaking for approximately one hour and 10 minutes.

Since completing our interview sessions, Dr. Hoersch and I have encountered each other multiple times, both in and out of class.

Note on recording:

For recording, I used the Voice Memos application on my iPhone 6s for the first interview session. For the second session, I downloaded and used the Voice Recorder application on the same iPhone. I did not use an additional microphone. The file originally saved as a .m4a file so I converted the audio to a .wav file using the Voice Recorder app. I uploaded and saved the audio files to both my HP Intel Pentium Laptop, as well as my iCloud drive. While creating my interview log, I used the suggested NCH Express Scribe Transcription Software Pro to play back the audio at a slowed speed. I replayed the audio on normal speed when checking and editing the log.

Creating and editing the log:

My decisions included:

- 1) Using timestamps to indicate Hoersch's response to a question
- 2) Providing information about names or places in brackets
- 3) Using footnotes to provide context through supplementary information
- 4) Following the Alexander Turnbull Library's guidelines for abstracting oral history interviews
- 5) Employing the NCH Express Scribe Transcription Software Pro in order to slow down the audio recording