PRESERVING MEMORY: NEWARK AND RUTGERS
IN THE 1960’S AND 1970’S

An Interview with

MAXINE KAHN

Conducted by

Gilbert Cohen

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GILBERT COHEN: This is September 3, 1991, and this is Gil Cohen. I'm speaking with Maxine Kahn in the Dana Library.

[Break in recording]

Okay, we’re back. Maxine, could you just give a brief resume of your academic career?

MAXINE KAHN: I’m a nontraditional student. I went to Kean College. I got a bachelor’s in political science, cum laude. Graduated with high honors in political science, and I’m also in the National Political Science Honor Society, Pi Sigma Alpha. I then went on to Rutgers to get my master’s in public administration. One of the reasons I chose Rutgers, among others, proximity, cost, and Dr. Godfrey, whom I didn’t know at the time, balanced my GRE’s, which were not very strong in math, with my grades from Kean College, which were very strong plus a very good personal recommendation from Dr. Ellen Latisina [sp]. So that was one of the main reasons I came here. I’d been accepted elsewhere, and the cost would have been a little prohibitive. Rutgers had a fine reputation as well, so I was glad to come.

COHEN: Did elsewhere have a comparable program, do you think?

KAHN: Elsewhere was NYU and certainly had a comparable program. But the cost was phenomenal. It would have cost me about five thousand in 1977, which was a lot of money. And this was just about affordable, since I wasn’t planning on working.

COHEN: What were the requirements for admission when you were going?

KAHN: Well, I assume grades were a B or better, which I certainly had. GRE’s, there wasn’t a number given. As I said, my math was horrible, but my English has always been good. And I took a chance because I had very good recommendation letters. I worked hard. I’m task-oriented. Just math is a weak spot. As a consequence, when I came to Rutgers, I decided to take statistics first. Because if I didn’t make it, I wanted to stop before I started.

COHEN: Right.

KAHN: And at that time I did very well. I loved it.

COHEN: You made it, huh?

KAHN: Yes, very well actually.

COHEN: How did the interviewing go? If you could describe that process.
KAHN: The interviewing was…. I sent a letter of application, and I had a personal letter from Dr. Ratisina from Kean, as well as she called Dr. Godfrey. And it was as simple as that. It was quite simple. It was a very small program. It was just starting up. I think we were the second or third class to get started in the MPA.

COHEN: How many were there in that program?

KAHN: I think there were about thirty students. There were a number of foreign students from Africa. And the mix was more males than females; you could count the females on one hand. And we all seemed to be a little bit older than the normal eighteen to twenty-year-old.

COHEN: What led you to the MPA program?

KAHN: A very strong love of politics. And I wanted to place it elsewhere. And I thought that government would be the place for something similar to that, not-for-profit. And I chose to take a concentration in hospitalization, which served me well for eight years because eventually I worked in hospitals. I worked for NYU Medical Center in Bellevue for eight years. And the reason I switched jobs and came up to NJIT was the commuting was killing me. But you could put your skills anywhere.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: So I did.

COHEN: What kind of advisement did you get during the two years that you were here?

KAHN: Well, I had the fortune when I first came in to register for classes with a student advisor and, as I said, I wanted statistics first. And I just took a couple of general courses. And while I was in the first couple of weeks, Dr. Godfrey asked if I’d like to compete for a fellowship, which I did. So I had a fellowship from the New Jersey Municipal Managers Association. I wrote a monthly newsletter, and I had to sit in their office. So I became almost part of the office staff. I became part of the MPA family.

COHEN: So you worked for the New Jersey Municipal Management Association.

KAHN: Right.

COHEN: You worked in their office, not in the MPA—

KAHN: I worked in the MPA office.

COHEN: In the MPA office.

KAHN: Right. They made a place for me to sit. I was the student worker.
COHEN: On this campus?

KAHN: On this campus. I worked, and I sat with Dr. Godfrey and Terri and Dr. Davy [sp] and Gail. Dr. Davy retired. Of course Dr. Godfrey passed away a number of years. Gail is still here, Terri is still here. Mildred Berry-Gobbin [sp] is still here. And I used to sit in the office. And I had my own desk, and I’d do a monthly newsletter.

COHEN: For this association.

KAHN: Yes.

COHEN: I see.

KAHN: So they sponsored the fellowship.

COHEN: I see.

KAHN: So as a consequence I was always involved and knew what was going on. And it was easy to get counseling whenever I needed it, as far as pursuing my own path, which I did all the time. I mean Dr. Godfrey was quote-unquote “an Ace” and you always felt part of the MPA program.

COHEN: Could you expand—since we’re on the subject of Dr. Godfrey—if you could expand on him as a person, as a teacher, as a scholar, in your experience with him.

KAHN: As a person? I thought he was extremely honorable. He had a wonderful sense of humor. He was a gentleman, and he was a pleasure to work with. And then when my father passed away, I had been there just a few months, Dr. Godfrey took the time to sit down and hand write a note to me. That to me is really important. I had Dr. Godfrey as a teacher. I enjoyed his experiences especially when he lived in I think it was in Pennsylvania. He would tell us all the comings and goings, and he had been attached to the CIA, and he always had great stories, great war stories. As a scholar, I had occasion to write a paper when I was getting ready to graduate, which had been accepted for publication in a student-run organization, about congressional investigating committees, and I showed it to Dr. Godfrey. He said he had a paper he wanted me to read; he thought it was similar. He brought the paper in to me, and I sat down and I read it. I took copious notes. Then I went in and spoke to him about it for about a half hour, criticizing it, good and bad. He said he’d thought them quite similar. I said, “No, this particular paper didn’t hold a candle to mine, this was superior.” The next day he came in and gave me a copy of the paper. It was his. It had been in Foreign Affairs, and he had signed it for me. And that really made me feel good, that he’d even think it was similar. And didn’t say a word and allowed me to criticize it. I mean criticize in a positive vein, of course. That was Dr. Godfrey. He was really unique.

COHEN: How was he in the classroom?
KAHN: He was interesting. He would talk, he always had a thousand stories. And he held the interest of everybody. He had a tremendous background. I mean just working in the CIA, and his ins and outs of the government. If you love government, as I do, he was great.

COHEN: Do you remember any of his best stories?

KAHN: He said he was the third head of the CIA during the, quote “Vietnam War.” And the reason he had the job was he was the only one who had the stomach to do the job.

COHEN: The third head?

KAHN: Yes, during the war.

COHEN: Director of the CIA during the war?

KAHN: Yes. He was really interesting. They felt he was the one that had the stomach to do the job, so they gave him the job. And then he went into teaching, which he seemed to really enjoy very much.

COHEN: I wanted to get into the curriculum in the MPA program. What was the—if you can formulate it; sometimes these generalizations are difficult, but if you can—what was the program? How would you describe the program in the overall? What was its purpose, its mission?

KAHN: I think the program gave me a fairly large background because I not only took courses in Newark, I took them at the law school, and I took them at the medical center.

COHEN: In UMDNJ?

KAHN: We had a course down there, which was interesting, in community and public housing. I took a couple of law school courses which I found interesting; I had to use the library, the law library. I mean they were all different tasks, and they were all hard. You never knew when you studied how much was enough. You just kept doing more. I don’t know if it was really hard except that it was just a lot. And since I had a child at home, I didn’t spend hours here. So I would photocopy quite a bit, my house was like Collier’s Museum. I had millions of papers because this particular program is sixteen courses and sixteen major papers. A tremendous amount of research and a tremendous amount of writing, which I happen to enjoy, especially the research. It allowed you to discover things you never knew.

COHEN: You answered one of my questions about the research component of the courses. What resources did you use to do your research?

KAHN: The paper that was accepted for publication was about the Congressional Investigating Committee. I had a friend from Kean College who worked in Washington; he was able to get me some information, and I ran, and I got to use that from the State Department. I spent inordinate amounts of time here in this particular library.
COHEN: Is that right? [Laughs]

KAHN: Yes. I learned how to use microfiche. And I think the library is excellent. I was here all the time. It was always available, and I was always upstairs in a quiet room studying as well. I made it a point to spend my days here. My son was in school, and once I parked the car, even if I didn’t have a class until three o’clock, I still had to come in eight to four. And I never changed all those years. So I would come, and I would spend my time writing and reading xeroxing of course. I also used the East Orange Library. I found that helpful. I think it’s an excellent library, too.

COHEN: Yes. Did you use Newark Public at all?

KAHN: Not too much. Not too much.

COHEN: How come?

KAHN: I think I was afraid to walk there.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

KAHN: I was not terribly comfortable in this neighborhood. So I tried to stay within the campus confines.

COHEN: Now were these courses all at night?

KAHN: No, I had some courses during the—most of them were. Truthfully I don’t really remember. Some were in the day.

COHEN: Some day, some night.

KAHN: Yes. I tried to mix them up because it was not that easy for me to be out at night.

COHEN: Right.

KAHN: But you could have a class that would end at five or six. Because I remember always going into a class and asking the tallest person if they would walk me to the parking lot. At night, when it was dark.

COHEN: How did you feel about the whole question of security during the day?

KAHN: It was fair. I mean even now to come to this interview, I work across the street at NJIT. I took my personal belongs into my car, and I’ve just come with my keys. I think it’s just okay. When I was on campus one year I remember somebody had been raped in the ladies’ room in Hill Hall. Then they changed the men’s room to a ladies’ room so it would be on the main floor to avert any problems. Security was just fair. I don’t think it’s good enough, twelve people. I just
don’t. I think I see more at NJIT actually. I don’t know if that’s because the campus is small or because they have more people. But I was never comfortable going into the parking lot. I didn’t like it. And that’s problematic.

COHEN: Going back to the courses, could you sort of run through the course content, what you can remember after twelve years…[laughter].

KAHN: I know I took a course—with, now the dean, Dean Caprio [sp] I took a course in urban design, and we redesigned the Dodge Estate. That was a group effort. I worked with another woman, and that was quite a task. Not only went out to Madison, but we had to redesign the site for three different purposes. And it was a tremendous undertaking and with cost and everything. Actually we always did well. I don’t know why. But maybe returning students just work harder. I don’t know if that’s a fair statement. That was a particular course. I took statistics a couple of terms, which I did well in, but I was glad to see them come and glad to see them go.

COHEN: What department did you take the statistics in? Was it the Math Department or what?

KAHN: No, it was probably easy statistics, the easiest one that you could get by with. It was a male teacher. I don’t remember who. And I worked very, very hard. I was very nervous about it. It’s not my strength; it’s my weakness.

COHEN: Brings back memories. [Laughter] I guess that’s many people, yes.

KAHN: We can’t all be good in the same stuff.

COHEN: Yes….

KAHN: But did a number of health courses. There was a course on aging which was interesting. I went to the Office on Aging to visit and did some research there. And also the community mental health center at UMDNJ on Bergen Street. We had to write about the center itself. And I wrote in seventy-seven to seventy-eight it was the most underutilized building I’ve ever been in. It was beautiful, but there were no way for people to get to it. Just rooms with doors and lots of services, and nobody was using them. And I was quite disappointed. So I wrote what I saw and what I felt.

COHEN: What did it actually do? What type of things were they asked to do?

KAHN: Well, it provides services for people, elderly people, there was a room with they could sit and talk and work with their hands, arts and crafts, go to the kitchen, getting together.

COHEN: For the elderly.

KAHN: The elderly, yes. That was one thing. And they had some after-school stuff, but it was convenient to anything. And that’s problematic. I mean now they finally got a supermarket there on Bergen Street. But there were no services for people living in the area. And elderly people without money can’t get anywhere. So it was really, I thought, just a waste of taxpayers’ dollars;
that’s what I wrote. Right or wrong, I don’t know. But that’s how I felt about it. Everything was new and not used.

COHEN: What’s the status of that now, do you know?

KAHN: I think there’s more activity because New Communities Corporation has buses that take people all over the place. And the neighborhood’s changed considerably, too, because there’s housing across the street from the New Communities Corporation. There still is senior citizen housing, but that’s changed somewhat. And Baby Land is on the other side. So the neighborhood has changed in the years that I’ve been here. And up the street, too, is the Habitat for Humanity that’s just gone in…The neighborhoods are changing. They’re getting better.

COHEN: Habitat for Humanity is?

KAHN: That is a not-for-profit housing for people in need. In fact at NJIT now we have a couple of housing fellows working. It’s pretty interesting.

COHEN: To what extent are you in your present position involved in community affairs?

KAHN: Well, I work for the community in public service. We have a grant from DPA. We have eleven housing fellows. So I’ve made some site visits, one to Habitat. And I watch the time and deal with any problems that may come along. It’s pretty interesting. The kids are really getting good benefits from this.

COHEN: I was going to ask. My other question was, how did your MPA program further your career. And I think you’ve sort of answered my question.

KAHN: Well, I think the MPA program allowed you the opportunity to learn to think and decision-make. In policy making, in public policy making, there’s always room for slight change, not drastic change. And nothing is much different from one system to the next. So you have to work within the system to move ahead. And I think that’s what the MPA allows you to do. I think the MPA program is great in the fact that there are a wide variety of courses. Because I touched on urban, I touched on health, ethical issues which I find very, very important. And it holds you through many, many different things. It doesn’t necessarily—politics is in everything. I remember taking a course with an Egyptian professor in decision-making, and it was quite interesting. He gave us a graph, and people that are interested in politics, as I am, are often very good actors and actresses, which I love. That was my minor in Kean College. Besides being a major in political science, was speech theater. And I really found that interesting.

COHEN: He produced a graph that showed, based upon research—is that what he was saying?

KAHN: Yes. Acting and public work, people like to be on center stage or like to be in charge.

COHEN: Yes.
KAHN: It was quite interesting. A number of people were taking the course. A man was taking an MBA at the time, sitting next to me, and I asked him why he was taking the course. Well, just to fill up time. And I also had occasion...I was with one student for a number of courses, who’s now the mayor of East Orange, Cardell Cooper. In fact I just met Cardell recently at NJIT. He’s really come a long way.

COHEN: And again, this course that was taught by you said an Egyptian professor?

KAHN: An Egyptian professor.

COHEN: It was a course in what?

KAHN: Decision-making.

COHEN: Decision-making?

KAHN: Decision-making. How you make decisions, how it goes up the line. Sure.

COHEN: How did they deal with the ethics courses. Is it a separate course in ethics or a philosophy course?

KAHN: Yes. Ethics is a separate course. Ethics is very hard to teach. And for the paper that I finally presented that was for publication, to the Congressional Investigating Committee. Are they a threat to our civil liberties or not? And I focused mainly on the McCarthy era. And I said it straddled the line through my research. A tremendous amount of research. It was really, really interesting. I even went to see a play that [unintelligible name] wrote, “Are you Now of Have You Ever Been” which was all taken out of courtroom text; not one word other than that. It’s unbelievable that it’s so true. But you have to have a love for it or feel for it, which I do.

COHEN: What other courses…can you just recall some of the content?

KAHN: Those are my main courses. I really can’t at this moment.

COHEN: Who were some of your memorable teachers?

KAHN: I liked Dr. Davy a lot. He retired a couple of years ago. Dr. Bennis [sp] is interesting. I don’t remember what she taught, but I took a couple of courses with her. And there’s one professor that was excellent in Legal Issues. He did not get tenure and had to move to Tennessee, and I know there was a big uproar on campus. He was an excellent, excellent teacher. I was quite disappointed. I don’t remember his name, sorry to say.

COHEN: How would you evaluate overall the good, bad, and indifferent, the quality of it?

KAHN: Well, having gone to Kean College and then to Rutgers, I found that there was a difference. My experiences at Kean were okay except that there were a number of teachers that never were timely, would keep us waiting, and then keep us over. I like when things are more
professional, and I felt the MPA program was very professional. People came in when they were supposed to, they lectured, they were prepared. Most of the classes were give and take, and it was just not lecture. But people had the opportunity to speak, which I enjoyed. I think that’s how you learn, you learn from other students as well. So that was positive for me. I also happened to have the fellowship. At that time I think it was the last paid—not fellowship, an internship—the last paid internship I had. And I has that in the City of East Orange. That was a positive experience, too. That was a course requirement, I worked in the Health Department for three months. I think I was paid five hundred dollars a month.

COHEN: What did you do on that kind of an internship?

KAHN: I worked with the health director and tried to work on policy for aging people. And we would visit different sites and try to work on policy. It was pretty interesting. There was a lot of activity and research. And then I used to ride out with the first aid squad one day a week because I wanted to get a feel for the city.

COHEN: Now, looking back, how important for you was the education or the internship and the fellowship as far as working goes, for teaching you?

KAHN: The internship I don’t think did that much for it except that it made me aware of the City of East Orange. But the fellowship served me well because I developed strong writing skills because I wrote a monthly newsletter. I went to monthly meetings of managers. And I was able to get involved and get a feel for what goes on in the state. And I really enjoyed that a lot. And the manager at that time, he was the president; he was a retired admiral or something or other. And he was fabulous. We’d go down once a month to the meeting someplace, and there was always his expertise to listen to. I really enjoyed it. And I would take the minutes, you know, and put them together.

COHEN: The New Jersey…?

KAHN: Municipal Managers Association.

COHEN: Now was that the association that sets out New Jersey municipalities?

KAHN: It’s an association of…I live in Maplewood so there’s a town manager. It consists of all cities that have town managers.

COHEN: Oh.

KAHN: It’s about two hundred and fifty in the state, and they get together once a month to go over problems, to have at meetings. The meetings would be about fifty or sixty people.

COHEN: And this publication again that you were working on, could you give a little more detail on that?
KAHN: It was a newsletter that went out to the two hundred and fifty people. Just of what was going on in the state, what happened at the meeting, or any other interesting information that might come out. It was a small newsletter but it was timely and it was good.

COHEN: [Murmuring]

KAHN: Writing skills really served me well.

COHEN: I’m assuming you came in with these writing skills?

KAHN: Yes, I had the fortune to have Dr. Latisina as a mentor one year when I was studying at Kean. And I had been having a problem with a paper, I spent a tremendous amount of time researching, but it was not terribly organized, and I couldn’t see why. And she told me that there were three approaches to writing a paper, the beginning, the middle, and the end. The beginning you write why you’re writing the paper. The middle is what you’re writing. And the end is a summing up. And it’s good to write and then change everything that you’ve written. After that I became a very strong writer.

COHEN: Was it an English composition course?

KAHN: No, I had just taken a course, and I was disappointed that I had gotten, I had spent a tremendous amount of time on researching, it was an honors course. I just went to her because I’d worked for her as a T.A. And I asked her for her opinion, what could I do—what needed to be corrected? I wasn’t looking to change the grade. She was not the teacher. So she read the paper, and then she gave me her input. After that something clicked.

COHEN: You mentioned before you shared the common fear of statistics and math that most of us do. What kind of preparation did you have, I assume before? Of course you came—the math that you had was what you had at Kean when you came to the program, right?

KAHN: Right. I took as little as possible because it really is my weakest point. And I had to take an astronomy course. I took the one that came without math. So when I came into Rutgers, we were allowed to use our books, and I bothered the teacher with thousands of questions because that’s how I am. And I did okay. And then we had an open-book test at the end. I would have been happy with a C.

COHEN: In the statistics course.

KAHN: Right. Because you could have…. And he looked at me, he said, “You’ve worked so hard. B.” I don’t know what I deserved it, but it didn’t matter to me. I was just—I really worked, really hard.

COHEN: Talking about working hard, how demanding were the courses—honestly?

KAHN: Very. Honestly they were very demanding. First of all, when you study, you don’t know how much is enough. I don’t know how much is enough, so I used to do a lot, and then I would
do some more. But I happen to be an overachiever. That’s how I am. In research, you’d think my house was Collier’s Museum; I had papers and papers and papers. But I enjoyed it. It was a lot of work, but I really enjoyed it. And I don’t know if the more mature student just keeps pushing. I’m not too sure. I see a difference now in the students where I work at NJIT. Their energy level is not what mine is or was. I have a very strong energy level.

COHEN: I’ve found working with the University College students, the evening students, that generally they’re, I think, more attentive, I would say.

KAHN: Mm-hmm.

COHEN: I can’t judge their academic achievements because I’m not in the classroom, not a teacher. But as a librarian, teaching library instruction courses and things like that, much easier to get their attention and keep it, and obviously much more appreciative of what you’re trying to do in terms of how to use a library, things like that.

KAHN: We’ve just had our miniversity at NJIT so I’ve had to lecture at a number of classes.

COHEN: What is that?

KAHN: When the kids who are entering freshman come in and have occasions to sleep in the campus one night and then come to school the next day. So they go to various courses. So I’m out of the cooperative education office and community public service. So I had occasion to lecture twice a day for five days. And I would tell everybody what I learned at Rutgers. Always sit in the front, and don’t sit by the window. Sit by the door. Those are the students that do well. It easy to fall asleep in the back. So I don’t know if it was because I was older or I wanted to do that. Nobody was pushing me. So I tried to use everything I could possibly do. I really did well. I was very pleased. You compete with yourself, nobody else.

COHEN: How did you think…. Alright. So they pushed you, you had a lot of work. How would you assess the grading?

KAHN: I came out with a little over a B+ average, which was good.

COHEN: Mm-hmm.

KAHN: It seems to me, though, that most students when I went in, coming from similar backgrounds, we all did about the same. Because you want the same entry level of confidence more or less. Some are a little bit stronger in one part, or another part. I don’t know. I never challenged a grade. Whatever it was, I accepted it.

COHEN: But if you put it on a scale of one to five, or tough to easy?

KAHN: Well, I know I really worked hard. It wasn’t easy. I just didn’t think about something and it happened. Not only did we write major papers, but we had tests, and we were obligated to talk in class. And what was really important to me was that you were obligated to attend class. It
was not just bring in your paper and see you in September. And that I find important. I mean students do better when they do attend classes.

COHEN: Obligated to talk in class. Now was this seminar style or—

KAHN: There were a couple of seminar classes. Most of the classes were between ten and twelve people. They were never large-size classes, which made it easier. Very few times did you not talk.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: You knew practically everybody. There was a different mix of years, and other disciplines would enter into some of the classes. But things worked out well.

COHEN: Were you expected to make oral presentations beside participating in discussions?

KAHN: I know we made an oral presentation for our redesigning of the Dodge Estate.

COHEN: Oh.

KAHN: That was short.

COHEN: Could you give some detail on that?

KAHN: All I can remember is that we designed a think tank.

COHEN: You designed—

KAHN: A think tank.

COHEN: Oh, I see, to be situated on the estate.

KAHN: What happened was I worked with another woman. And we went to the Dodge Estate. We looked at the lay of the land, and we decided that would be appropriate. And we really brainstormed. And did a lot of different things before we decided, a think tank. We felt it was….

COHEN: Any think tank?

KAHN: Any think tank—for scholars actually.

COHEN: [unintelligible]

KAHN: It was really exciting. You really felt you were doing something. Even if you were walking backwards, you felt you were doing something.

COHEN: What eventually did they do with the Dodge Estate?
KAHN: I think it’s just as is.

COHEN: That’s what I understand.

KAHN: Well, you know, Mrs. Dodge and her estate.

COHEN: Maybe there’ll be a think tank there.

KAHN: But we spent a lot of time batting around a lot of different things. Because what did we know?

COHEN: Yes, yes. So you were working students, and you had a team.

KAHN: Team—team effort was good.

COHEN: How would you characterize your fellow students? Let’s say starting with level of preparation.

KAHN: One of the students—I just was reading about him recently—a couple of us, myself included, had been nominated for Presidential Management Intern positions. Twelve hundred across the country were nominated. And they chose three hundred. So two of those were nominated from my class. One had been nominated from the year before. I did not get it, another student did. We were all—as I said, we were highly energized. The student I just read about, just got his Ph.D. and doing very, very well. Donald Boudreau. The other student who took it the year that I didn’t get it, I don’t know where he’s at.

COHEN: When you were there, what was the ethnic and gender mix?

KAHN: Gender mix, I would say there were about five women out of thirty-five. There were a number of students from Africa. They were all bright because the country sent their brightest students. And I remember them always walking down with an attaché case, always with a tie and shirt. The rest were people that worked…just normal everyday people, looking to move ahead and progress.

COHEN: Of the native American population, the African students….

[Break in recording]

We were talking about the composition of the students...

KAHN: Mostly males, very few white, all-American males.

COHEN: Very few.

KAHN: Right.
COHEN: Mostly what did you say, again?

KAHN: Most of the kids were black. There was one Hispanic, no Hispanics. I don’t remember any other foreign students. And just a few females—very few.

COHEN: And how would you characterize the relations, cultural relations, among the students?

KAHN: There was a wonderful cadre because people studied together. I know that the African students were always asking me questions and following me all over campus if didn’t understand something. I always worked with somebody in statistics, even if it wasn’t a group project. But the library was a main core of activity for many of us because a lot of time was spent there because of research. A lot of the projects, too. When we went to the Office on Aging, you know, did a project with somebody else that’s just come back to you; we did a joint project. I think that was invaluable.

COHEN: So the American-born students were all male, and they were all black students?

KAHN: No, no. No, there were a couple of black students and a couple of white students. Not that many.

COHEN: And the women were then?

KAHN: White. I don’t remember any black women.

COHEN: Who were American-born.

KAHN: American-born.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: And then the rest were foreign national students.

COHEN: Was there discussion about issues, racial issues and that whole situation, among students?

KAHN: Never entered into the picture.

COHEN: Never did.

KAHN: No. It’s just how it was.

COHEN: Just how it was and the job was the subject matter. Was there any socializing on campus other than doing the projects.
KAHN: There was one woman—she just comes back to me now. She was a nurse going through the MPA program. She made one party. She typified the all-American WASP, I might say that. She was really interesting. She was enthusiastic. She had been a nurse, and she had a certain kind of outlook. She made one party, but nobody else did anything. People just worked hard because people had their home lives. A lot of married people. I was a single parent. And you can just spend so much time in school. It was a lot of time. But because I was connected with the MPA office, I had occasion at Christmas to go to the party, the office did. That was for me, excellent.

COHEN: How important in your career was that mix?

KAHN: I worked in two public institutions there. At the NYU Medical Center at Bellvue and NJIT. They’re exactly the same as Rutgers as far as the mix goes. There’s always been a mix of people. It’s what I’m used to, it’s what I know. Sometimes I’m always on the minority side, which is interesting. I’m white and Jewish. I know I’ll be one of two people that will be off next Monday for the holiday.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: And as we were talking, when I was at Rutgers, there were just two of us that were white and Jewish. We were the ones that took the holiday. In the hospital one of the doctors are Jewish, but not many of the administrators.

COHEN: Well, actually the mix in the class you were used to.

KAHN: Yes. I’ve had it for a long time.

COHEN: How did the mix here compare to the mix at Kean?

KAHN: Kean was different. Kean had a lot of Hispanic students, a lot of younger students. I was very active in Kean because I was so happy to be going to college. I was president of the political science club, but there were a lot of students from—Vietnam vets. So we were a group that was hanging out together talking politics day in and day out. There were a lot of politics to talk. There were a lot of war stories. And we used to do a lot of that. So it was different, Kean.

COHEN: Mm-hmm. Yes.

KAHN: I didn’t find any Vietnam vets at Rutgers like Kean College then.

COHEN: About the time…You didn’t find any students in your program?

KAHN: No, not in the program.

COHEN: Because there were, no I should probably…

KAHN: But at Kean College there were a lot of Vietnam vets. And then there were a number of Hispanics as I said. And not that many women either. It’s not just a thing that women travel to.
COHEN: Oh?

KAHN: Politics. I don’t know why. They do a good job.

COHEN: Yes. The field should be wide open; considering the job the men have done. [Laughter]

KAHN: But I mean if you look at most of the classrooms at that time, there weren’t that many women. But we talked politics all day long. At Kean, though, we did have a number of parties. It was a different kind of group. More teenage-like; it was different. It was good.

COHEN: Were there great differences in age and in academic preparation of the group that you were in here in the MPA program?

KAHN: I didn’t find that. There were no traditional students, so to speak, that I can think of. Because some of the courses were at night. And by the time you get to the master’s, some people are older. But I didn’t find anybody just straight out of college at twenty-two. Most of us were nontraditional. I hate to use the term “older,” but we were older.

COHEN: Well, as far as the level of preparation, the ability to hack the courses, did you find any significant difference?

KAHN: I don’t recall anybody dropping out. And I seem to remember it was incumbent upon us to be in class at all times. We weren’t allowed the luxury of just not showing up, which I find correct. We were obligated to be in class. And that, I think, is a good way to learn. Because what you can’t read, you can hear sometimes.

COHEN: It’s true.

KAHN: It works better.

COHEN: Do you have any vivid recollections of any fellow students that you can portray?

KAHN: Well, one lady I worked with, the nurse, she was really interesting. She was very opinionated. There was no left or right with her; it was just her way. I can’t seem to remember her name, but she was a powerhouse, and she was enthusiastic, and she liked what she did. I worked with another woman on the Dodge Estate. Her name was Roberta. She was an overachiever like myself. And just as nuts. So we got along very well. Because she never knew how much was enough. That was the problem. I think we were more energized than others. The foreign students I never got that close to. I would see them and talk to them. But they were different. And then they were preparing to go back eventually to their country. But they were all bright because the country paid—I think they were from Nairobi. The country paid for them to come and study. So they send their brightest and their best.

COHEN: Sounds like an interesting scene.
KAHN: And Cardell Cooper of course, he’s the mayor of East Orange.

COHEN: Oh, so he graduated out of the MPA program.

KAHN: Right.

COHEN: And then he went into local politics.

KAHN: Local politics in East Orange, and there was county something-or-other. And now he’s mayor.

COHEN: We talked a little bit about social aspects. How would you characterize the student body for the graduate students? Socializing in terms of…. Government if there was anything of that nature other than classwork.

KAHN: It never entered my mind that there was anything besides classwork and library. I never partook in anything because I just went to school and it was just about a full-time job plus that fellowship. So I never took part in any activities, if there were any; I have no idea. Only now do we get an MPA newsletter periodically. It didn’t exist when I was a student. They tried to get an honor society up again to no avail. I was disappointed in that because I would have been in it. I think there was one mailing in the MPA office last year who tried to get alumni together at some point.

COHEN: Oh.

KAHN: But that’s been it.

COHEN: Generally, in what way did gender, race, and class issues, oh, well the situation of relations between students and faculty, among students? Or how people were treated?

KAHN: No, I never found any discrimination.

COHEN: You never felt it as a woman, especially being in the minority?

KAHN: No, not at Rutgers, not at all. I was very, very comfortable here. We called professors by their given name—Professor Something-or-other. Not on a first-name basis. It was a very professional atmosphere. I really think that’s important. I seem to think it doesn’t exist today…at least—I don’t see it where I work. Kids call their teachers by their first name. I think you lose something. I think it’s better when there’s distance. I’m just trying to think where I work now and where I’ve studied, I never found all the handwritings in the bathrooms like you do here.

COHEN: Oh, yes.

KAHN: You just went to school. I didn’t feel prejudice at all.
COHEN: Talking about addressing professors, how were the students addressed?

KAHN: By their first names.

COHEN: By their first?

KAHN: Yes. But that didn’t bother me.

COHEN: It didn’t bother you. [Laughter]

KAHN: I mean if somebody earned a doctorate, they were entitled to be called “Doctor.”

COHEN: Yes, of course. Otherwise…. And even though some of the students, I’m assuming, were older.

KAHN: Sure.

COHEN: Then the professors still were not on a first-name basis there; they called their students by their first names.

KAHN: Dr. Davy retired, I think, two or three years ago. I went to his retirement dinner. Maybe it was three or four years ago actually in June. I was one of the people that spoke. And after having graduated and gone on to work and everything, I still addressed him as Dr. Davy. I felt comfortable with it. It was really an exciting evening. Another note. He wrote me a note to thank me for my talk. [Laughs]

COHEN: When did Dr. Davy retire?

KAHN: Either three or four years ago in June.

COHEN: Oh. And he was Dean…—

KAHN: Before Dr. Godfrey.

COHEN: Seventies…

KAHN: It was a tiny little small program, the MPA. I was in the second or the third class.

COHEN: Oh, so you felt like a pioneer.

KAHN: [Laughs] It was easy.

COHEN: A pioneer of all kinds.

KAHN: Right. I’m sure they’ve made it different than it used to be. But it was—I don’t know if it was easy, but it was good. When I graduated, I was very disappointed that they didn’t write my
diploma correctly. They gave me an MBA. So I had to wait for my diploma. That was only the bad part.

COHEN: [unintelligible].

KAHN: At graduation. The graduation itself was wonderful because it was only graduate students, and we just walked on the campus without anything like “Pomp and Circumstance.” It was very collegial, despite what the…. And my recollection is that most of the students were older. There were a lot of elderly parents, and a lot of children of people graduating in the audience. And we individually announced.

COHEN: Oh!

KAHN: It was really wonderful. It was really….

COHEN: I wanted to touch on something that of course has emerged over the years, and now more and more we talk about, multicultural education. At that time to what extent did the question of cultural diversity in coursework and on campus come up?

KAHN: I don’t think any of us did.

COHEN: It never was an issue.

KAHN: I don’t think I heard the word “cultural diversity” until this year.

COHEN: Or multicultural?

KAHN: It did not exist at all. My only recollection of one thing is I was taking a course and I needed to go to the law library, and I asked a student for some help. And he knew less than I did, and he was a law student. It surprised me. And I remember somebody telling me that there were a number of law students that were admitted even though they weren’t qualified because they were a minority and they wanted to give them an edge. I don’t mean an edge, but give them advantages that they didn’t have. And I was a little disappointed in that.

COHEN: Probably affirmative action.

KAHN: Yes, yes. I’m not too sure that I agree. I can see preparing before you go into school, but not while you’re studying.

COHEN: Affirmative action recruitment program.

KAHN: Yes. I can see putting people in to study and to learn, but don’t put them in there when they can’t even walk; it’s too hard. And I really remember trying to get some help from someone when I couldn’t find something. They knew less than I did which surprised me, when they were studying.
COHEN: We talked briefly before about security. What can you say about parking facilities?

KAHN: Parking is as evil and as bad as it always has been. I don’t know what the answer is.

COHEN: Let’s go back a bit. At the time that you were here—I’m trying to get a historical picture.

KAHN: I was here in seventy-seven. I would drive my car and get here before eight o’clock so I could get into the parking lot. I might not have a class ‘til the end of the day.

COHEN: Oh, boy! It was that bad.

KAHN: But it was terrible. There was no place to go, and I never wanted to be up on the roof. And I would wait. So you could never just come into a ten o’clock class. You had to be here before eight. And that was a hardship, it really was. Taking the train was not a viable alternative because it’s too late at night. So it was problematic, it really was. I remember walking in the parking lot always having somebody walk me to the car. Money wasn’t the issue to pay for parking. It was finding a spot and being comfortable. And that was not readily available.

COHEN: What about the food service?

KAHN: The cafeteria is much better now than it used to be.

COHEN: It used to be. What did it use to be?

KAHN: It used to be—it was not so pretty or clean. Well, I don’t remember if it was clean or not. I never ate anything grandiose here. Most of the time I would carry lunch and buy coffee. But it’s much nicer now. It’s ambience is much nicer. You don’t mind sitting and studying in the cafeteria. People are generally helpful—I don’t remember years ago. I don’t have any feeling one way or the other. I guess it was okay.

COHEN: Nothing terribly bad or terribly great.

KAHN: No. Probably it was the only other outside activity I had besides going to school and parking. It’s just what we did.

COHEN: You didn’t have any terribly bad experiences, and you probably didn’t have any great meals.

KAHN: No, that I’m sure of. That I’m sure of. I do remember, though, there was a priest that studied in one of my classes. Why I just don’t even know. He took a course with me from Dr. Godfrey. He was wearing his collar one night, and he was having dinner with me. And he must have been dreaming. He walked out, sat down. He suddenly realized he didn’t pay, and they didn’t ask him to pay. He said, oh my goodness! [Laughter] That’s just how it was. But then he got up and paid.
COHEN: You mentioned before—I want to go back a little bit to Tom Davy’s retirement party. Did you take any courses with him?

KAHN: Oh, sure. Yes. I mean there weren’t that many teachers to begin with.

COHEN: Could you comment on his work?

KAHN: Dr. Davy was, I guess—he wasn’t much of an enthusiastic talker. I mean you had to sit in the front so you, you know, didn’t close your eyes. He knew his stuff, but he was not highly energized. Inordinate smoker.

COHEN: Oh!

KAHN: Couldn’t smoke in class. I remember having a run-in with him once. I was in a class—I don’t remember what the class was—that was paid for by a special grant for one of the first two classes across the country. Dr. Davy asked me how old I was, and I wouldn’t tell him because it’s in front of the class because the grant required this. But I didn’t care. That was about it. I haven’t changed. [Laughter] But I liked him a lot because when you wanted to get some counseling or needed some help, he was always readily available. The MPA office was always filled with students. People just dropped in. It was open to everybody. The door just kept going back and forth. It was almost you could say a hangout.

COHEN: Was he chair?

KAHN: Dr. Godfrey was the chair. He had an office in the back. Terri and Gail were in the front. Mrs. Barber [sp] had an office, I had a desk. Dr. Davy had a desk, and you walked in. It was a tiny little office. I think it was Hill Hall; they’ve moved so many times. And people would come in and go out all the time. And you knew everybody. I think that’s really important. It makes you part of community. It makes you feel that somebody knows who you are, and you know who they are. And it makes you want to please them because when they gave you their words of encouragement, they really meant it. And for some of us that was important—myself particularly. I wanted to please them. I wanted to do well, and I did. But a lot of people were always in there. It was just a place to go. Some people had sororities and fraternities. We had the MPA office. You never felt turned away. And that’s important. It wasn’t just a place. It was a place where people were comfortable.

COHEN: Do you think that this feeling was shared by the other students?

KAHN: Yes. Because everybody was always there.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: Everybody was always there. Particularly when Dr. Godfrey was alive. I remember vividly he had a picture of Charles de Gaulle.

COHEN: De Gaulle?
KAHN: De Gaulle. That was his hero. And that was there for everybody to see. And he was readily available to talk to everybody, even after he got sick.

COHEN: Glad to hear that.

KAHN: That’s what made it so special.

COHEN: Yes, yes.

KAHN: I mean not only did you get an education, you inherited a family.

COHEN: Alright. So special…. You didn’t expect this?

KAHN: No.

COHEN: Or it was special in the sense that it was weird compared to other experiences that you had?

KAHN: Well, at Kean College I had a little group that, you know, we talked politics all the time.

COHEN: Yes.

KAHN: But it was larger. And the professors, well, they knew me because I worked in the office. We’re not as easily available. And you just dropped in. I used to bring my son with me all over. And when I came to Rutgers after all these years, we went to visit the MPA office and of course they ask me how’s Gary. Anybody who knew me, knew Gary.

COHEN: [unintelligible]

KAHN: Right. And that was nice.

COHEN: It must have been special…[unintelligible].

KAHN: Yes, yes. I enjoyed it. It was very, very familial. And that’s good.

COHEN: Yes. I, you know, I think this is something that should be publicized. [Laughs]

KAHN: That’s why there were about a hundred people at Dr. Davy’s retirement. Just tremendous.

COHEN: The collegiality of it was so important for the whole thing.

KAHN: I think so. It really makes a fair difference; it truly does. When I look back at my years at Rutgers, I look back with pride and joy and good feelings. It was a very positive experience.
COHEN: What if that collegiality, that degree of collegiality, hadn’t been there? What would it have been like?

KAHN: I think I would have worked hard, and I would have wanted to prove myself because I competed against myself. And I would have just gone to school. But I did more than just go to school. I used to help Dr. Godfrey in the office because I wanted to; it had nothing to do with my fellowship. Whatever he asked me to do, I would do. That’s the type of person he was. You’d always go the extra mile for him, and a lot of people did.

COHEN: I remember him well.

KAHN: Not many people—

COHEN: I remember him well, but I never “knew him” from the students’ point of view. He was in and out of the library…

KAHN: How many people would allow you to read their paper, criticize it, and not say a word. And Foreign Affairs, that’s a very prestigious journal.

COHEN: Oh, yes.

KAHN: I mean he made me feel twelve feet tall. And I probably needed that.

COHEN: And your comments again? I missed a little bit of that. Your comments again about that paper were?

KAHN: Oh, I sat down, and I gave him my copious notes, and I went through the paper and criticized it because I felt this was this, or that was that. And then I felt—I didn’t know it was his paper, but that paper was far superior to the one that I had written. And he said they were equal. They were similar papers. And I didn’t think they were similar at all because the paper he gave me to read was just outstanding. And I still had comments on it because that’s how he taught me to study. And this is many years later, but it was just like yesterday.

COHEN: We touched briefly on library services. I want to sort of divide my question in two. Number one, what could you say, in the time that you were here, how good were the collections for your purposes?

KAHN: I used a lot of microfiche. There was a lot of newspaper work. The journals were here. And then I had a friend who worked in the State Department, so I got some stuff. I usually—mostly—used journals and newspapers. Very few books.

COHEN: Did you ever have—did you use the interlibrary loan part of what we have?

KAHN: I don’t recall using it. I knew it was available.

COHEN: You had no need to use it?
KAHN: No, no. And then the Office on Aging, I would write to the government for paperwork, too. I mean I used many different sources.

COHEN: What was the proportion of the sources that you were able to get from the library as compared to the sources you got from your various sources through connections?

KAHN: Probably ninety percent in the library.

COHEN: Ninety percent in the library!

KAHN: Yes. I did a tremendous amount of work in the library. A lot of what I did was through newspapers.

COHEN: Here in Dana. You also mentioned before you used East Orange Public Library.

KAHN: East Orange Public Library because that was a good library. I used to go there.

COHEN: But most of it was here.

KAHN: Right here. Yes. No, I was quite satisfied with the library. And then whatever textbooks we used.

COHEN: Anything we talked about before that you’d like to get back to, elaborate or footnote or whatever?

KAHN: Well, I think my educational experiences here served me well, taught me to work hard. And I think everything I learned, if I didn’t use it immediately, I used it later. Just simple plotting and thinking because the MPA program teaches you to think. Not necessarily to do, but to think. Because you can look at a problem from many different ends and I think I learned a lot about that. You become skillful, it takes a long time. Because of the enthusiasm of my fellow students. That creates more in yourself…. You know you read today, I was just reading about the GRE’s and the SAT scores how everything is down. You didn’t get that feeling when I went to school.

COHEN: You didn’t?

KAHN: No, not at all. You got the feeling that people studied and worked hard. And whatever you did, you did. Nothing was not too much. You just did it. But everybody…. I don’t know if people are lazy or they get put off by recession. But if you can’t do one thing, you can certainly do something else. You have no choice. You really don’t. I took my skills from hospitalization and I’ve gone into higher education.

COHEN: One final question, is there anything we haven’t talked about that we should have, that you would like to talk about?

KAHN: I wish that the MPA program would have had their honor society.
COHEN: Their honor society?

KAHN: Yes. I was in Pi Sigma Alpha for political science. I thought that was important because if people do work hard it is a certain recognition. And that never came off the ground. I was disappointed in that because they could have even done it a couple of years after I graduated. I did not answer the questionnaire for any number of reasons that the MPA office sent out. I don’t know if they were looking for money or what. The time that it came had to do with the budget crisis, and I was not comfortable with what they sent out. I could be a little mixed up in the time; I don’t know. But I put it off to the side. I felt that they would have the alumni association, they should have done it because they wanted an alumni association. But it’s many, many years. I graduated in seventy-nine, and now it’s ninety-one. But I would have liked that. It’s be nice to hear where somebody is.

COHEN: Honor society…

KAHN: I think those things are really important, it adds to the program. That’s about it. Those are the main things I would have liked.

COHEN: Any other topics that…?

KAHN: No. I think Rutgers is a fine institution, and I’m glad to have graduated from Rutgers. It’s makes me good.

COHEN: Maxine, thank you very much.

KAHN: You’re quite welcome.

---------------------------------------------------------------[End of Interview]---------------------------------------------------------------

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