

## **Heather Higginbotham Johansen Oral History**

Recorded October 12, 2024, at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon, during Homecoming / Reunion.

Interviewer: Jenny Johnson-Riley ("JJR"), Pacific University Class of 1998.

This transcription was made through AI with manual corrections, clarifications, and editing of some repetitions and filler words, Feb. 2025.

[JJR] 0:00

This is Jenny Johnson-Riley. It is October 12, 2024 and we're at Pacific University Homecoming. I am with Heather Johansen who is a member of the class of 1974. What years were you here at Pacific?

Unknown Speaker 0:21

1970 to 74.

[JJR] 0:24

What was your field of study?

[Johansen] 0:27

Elementary education.

[JJR] 0:31

What do you remember most about your time at Pacific?

[Johansen] 0:36

Well, I studied a lot and I enjoyed being on campus. I met my husband right away when I got here. Well, [he] was a boyfriend for a couple years, and then we got married and so we moved off campus. We met lots of different people. And I enjoyed the professors. It was just a fun time. You know, after getting done with high school, you feel like you're on your first step towards the future. All of that's exciting when it's new.

[JJR] 1:21

Were you involved in any clubs or activities or organizations while you were here?

[Johansen] 1:26

The Theta Nu Alpha Sorority.

[JJR] 1:31

What do you remember? What do you think the biggest changes were while you were here?

[Johansen] 1:36

At the time I was there? I don't know if I really noticed a lot of changes back then. I think we were still pre-computer time. So things were different than they are now. The changes came later, I think for me, but I wasn't involved when that happened. It's just back then, things probably were similar year after year. I think, like, this might be a small item, and it's not really significant, because nowadays it's probably even more different... But the dormitories were definitely [separate for] men / women. No mixing; no visiting; a lot stricter. Then at some point, and I don't remember, maybe in the second year, I think visiting was more expanded, or something like that. I mean, there were definite [visiting] hours and things.

[JJR] 2:46

Where did you live when you were at Pacific?

[Johansen] 2:51

The first two years, in the dormitory.

[JJR]

What dorm were you in?

[Johansen]

Oh gosh, I don't know if I can pull it out of my head that clear, that fast. I know I walked by it yesterday. It's the one that's right across from Washburne Hall?

[JJR]

Walter?

[Johansen] 3:16

Yeah.

[JJR]

And was that an all-women's dorm, or?

[Johansen] 3:19

It was then. I don't know what it is now.

[JJR] 3:22

So men were not allowed to visit at all, or were there specific hours they could visit?

[Johansen] 3:32

No, just in the lounge.

[JJR]

Oh, just in the lounge.

[Johansen]

So then at some point they did allow it -- we could go back and forth and visit. But there were hours. I just don't remember exactly, probably reasonable hours. Maybe eight o'clock or something; nine o'clock.

[JJR] 3:52

What about your classes? What were those like?

[Johansen] 3:56

Well, to be honest with you, I felt like the first two years was a lot of review from grade school and high school, and what I noticed when I came is a lot of the students didn't have the background I had. I went to a very small school, I mean, a small school district, and I always thought everybody else was more, shall I say, more advanced or more sophisticated. I was very surprised to see that students coming from other states and all over the country, they didn't have the background I had. And so the first two years felt like a review of a lot of things, and it was kind of like, "Oh, I got to take this math. We already did all that back in eighth grade," or something, you know. PE I didn't feel was very beneficial. It was more ... You just had to take the credit and spend the time.

[Johansen]

Later in life, I got really interested in health and things like that. And it was like, what was the PE program? It was a joke. There was no exercise. It was just kind of hitting some balls in the fieldhouse and that type of thing. So I'm probably not very ... this is probably not real easy to understand from my perspective, but that's kind of what I thought about it.

[JJR] 5:29

Yeah. And then what were those last two years like?

[Johansen] 5:35

Well, we got into more of the educational things. Now, looking back on it, I didn't really enjoy them, and it kind of

turned me off from my major. I didn't really understand what was going on back then, but approximately 50 years ago, they did start the educational system changing more into an indoctrinational type, rather than drawing out the talents of the student. And so back then, I didn't understand it, but it didn't feel comfortable to me, and I thought, "What does this have to do with teaching? This doesn't have anything to do with teaching." It did, in a way. But again, it was a lot of theory and a lot of stuff that was being presented, and I didn't see the practical value of it back then.

[Johansen]

But as I went through my life, it took a long time before I heard what was going on in the schools. And even when my own children went to school, I thought "They're not teaching them what I learned back then, when I went through grade school," and there was very little science and they weren't learning to write properly. They weren't learning what I experienced. So now I look back on it, and I can see -- it's like having that big view, looking down. And I don't know if anybody would agree, but that's my perspective. And of course, now we're hearing more about the problems in the schools that kids are coming out with. They don't have the reading and math skills that they need. I mean, they're behind. And it's like, I don't understand how that can happen. It just seems like they would continue with what was working.

[JJR] 7:40

It seems almost like what you're saying is that it's less rigorous now.

[Johansen] 7:46

It is less rigorous. And maybe the teachers aren't prepared either. Maybe they aren't. It's hard. I can't put the exact thing on it. But there's going to be some changes in the future again, and I think we're at that point where a lot of parents now are aware of what's happened to the system, and they're willing to try some new things and or maybe go back to some old things. Yeah. So anyway, that's just my perspective.

[Johansen]

The other day, my great-grandson, I said, "Oh, how's school going?" because it's still fairly new in the school year. And he said, "They won't let us run, and they won't let us play tag." And I said, "What?" Because I thought at recess time you can go out and play and be a kid. And they said, well, they think it's safer if we don't run and if we don't play tag. So I kind of thought, "Oh no, it's just like COVID." Sit in front of a screen, and the kids put on weight and they're not healthy, and they don't want to move, and now they can't even run or play at recess time. So that's totally not anything related to academics, but it's related to the overall development of a child. So I just was surprised to hear that. I mean, it's a little thing, but can be a big thing.

[JJR] 9:17

Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your time at Pacific?

[Johansen] 9:22

Let me think, there's got to be something. Well, I was very honored to have been roommates with Thuy Tran [also known as Cathy Tran]. Of course, they got married after they went back to Vietnam, her and Khiem [also known as Tim Tran]. But you know, back then we were just classmates, I mean, roommates. Now they've had quite a journey and written a book, and I was just very honored to have known them and to have spent time on campus with them. So that was a highlight for me. I'm trying to really come up [with more]. If I knew ahead of time what I was going to do the interview -- I was like, Oh, I could have probably come up with something more helpful or more beneficial.

[JJR] 10:19

No, this is great. We're just kind of starting with this project. So you know, as you consider more things, if you want to reach out to the Alumni Office, they can either put you in touch with me or someone who can meet with you again.

[Johansen] 10:34

Well, one thing and another thing, I was very grateful for all the scholarships that I had, and they came not just from the college, but other places. So I was able to get all through college without paying out money. I might have bought some books or some supplies. So that was really that was exciting to me, and I was very grateful for that. Again, I did meet my husband. So sets the whole future up. You know, if you met somebody else, somewhere else, it could be a whole

different life. I might not be here today. So that's another thing that's a big deal, to have that part of your life set up that early.

[Johansen] 11:27

Yeah, I wish I could give, like I said, I wish I could give you some more, something really insightful... but like, like you say, if we think of something that might be helpful, because I wish I could contribute more toward tomorrow. Or something significant. And I just feel like our little talk here was just me talking.

[JJR] 12:01

Well, I think that when you talk about your experience in education classes and what that was like for you, I think that people looking back or hearing what that was like -- I think that's very valuable. I know that in talking with some other alumni from roughly your generation, a lot are talking about the political turmoil with the Vietnam War going on, and I don't know if you recall anything about how that impacted campus at the time? It sounds like Forest Grove was maybe a little bit more isolated from that kind of campus activism than some of the other universities?

[Johansen] 12:41

Yeah, we didn't talk too much about it then, and there were four Vietnamese students here at that that year or those two years. They were very active on campus. They participated in the organizations and everything. But I don't think ... I didn't have the political perspective back then that I have now. I think everybody was just, you know, focused on their classes and their friends, and were just typical college students.

[Johansen]

But now there's a lot more information coming about Vietnam, and it's different than what we heard back then. So it's like, oh gosh, there's so many things that we've been presented that we haven't [heard]. I just talked to a staff member yesterday about her daughter, who she adopted and grew up with an Indian tribe. Their story hasn't been told either accurately from history. I got some -- I learned some perspective from her, and I thanked her for sharing, because I think the truth is so important. Because whatever the truth is, if it's ugly or wonderful, don't sugarcoat something and don't hide something, or don't make something worse than it is. Just give history and historical facts. That's what we want to know. And getting political, sometimes you're just political, but you don't really understand the full picture either.

[JJR] 14:24

I'm gonna show my own ignorance here. You said you were roommates with Thuy Tran? She is one of the donors that the Tran libraries is named after?

[Johansen] 14:33

Yes. When they went to work, they changed their names to Kathy and Tim. Because it was hard -- the spelling and the pronunciations. Other people had problems, so they just thought it was easier to take American names. But I still call them by their real names.

[JJR] 14:53

Are you still in touch with them today?

[Johansen] 14:58

Yeah, well, her and I spent time together here yesterday, but they didn't come today. They don't drive that much anymore, so somebody actually went and picked them up from the university and helped with that. Yeah, so that was nice that they could come, and they did the Golden Guard ceremony and had the lunch. And so they were here all afternoon. I just hung out with her because I don't see her very often. So yeah, they have an incredible story.

[Johansen] 15:30

I loved his book ["American dreamer: how I escaped communist Vietnam and built a successful life in America," 2020]. Again, if someone reads that, they can get the perspective on Vietnam that I think a lot of people -- we didn't have it back then as Americans, and maybe some of the younger generations can learn from that. So he did an incredible job with that book. I'm honored to know them.

[JJR] 15:56

Well thank you so much for stopping by and talking to me here!