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President Marjorie Hass, 2017

Item Type	Moving Image
Publisher	Rhodes College
Download date	2026-05-16 07:58:28
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/33706

Date: 2017-08-07

Interviewee: Dr. Marjorie Hass

Interviewer: Brittney Threatt

Location: Rhodes College

Collection:

Notes

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Brittney Threatt: Good afternoon. On behalf of Crossroads to Freedom Rhodes College I want to thank you for taking the time to share your story with us today. I am Brittney Threatt, a class of 2017 graduate of Rhodes College and I'm honored to be with you and learn about your experiences and how they will shape your vision for the college. It is August 7th, 2017 and we are currently in Barrett Library at Rhodes College. Today's interview will be archived online on the Crossroads to Freedom website. So we like to begin our interviews with a bit of background to create context going forward. Can you please state your name and occupation using the full title?

Marjorie Hass: Sure. I am Marjorie Hass. I'm President of Rhodes College.

Threatt: We're so elated. What year were you born?

Hass: I was born in 1965.

Threatt: Where did you grow up? If you could just describe your childhood community.

Hass: Sure. I grew up on the North Shore of Chicago, which was a great, beautiful place to grow up. Right on Lake Michigan. My parents worked in the city

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and we lived in more of a suburban kind of context just outside the city.

Threatt: Are you an only child?

Hass: I have two younger sisters.

Threatt: Could you talk a little bit about your family and your upbringing?

Hass: Sure. I grew up, as I said, outside of Chicago. We're Jewish, so we were engaged in that when I was growing up. Certainly culturally, a little bit less religiously. But very culturally important in my family. My parents were both born in this country, but their parents were immigrants to the United States. Coming over in maybe the early 1900s from Russia. My sisters and I were good students. We loved school. We were involved in a number of kinds of extra curricular kinds of things that were typical in the place and time that I grew up. Like ballet and piano lessons and those sorts of things.

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Tell me, are there other kinds of things that you want to know about my childhood?

Threatt: Just whatever you would like to share. You said you did ballet. Did all three of you do ballet?

Hass: I think two of us did. We were busy doing those kinds of things. My parents both worked. My father is a psychoanalyst and my mother was, when I was a child, a school teacher and then she went back for additional training and became a special education teacher. Then when I started graduate school to get my Ph.D., she also started a Ph.D. program and she's now a clinical psychologist.

Threatt: Growing up, did you grow up in an affluent neighborhood, in a modest neighborhood...?

Hass: It was very much an affluent neighborhood.

Threatt: So it was an affluent neighborhood, and the school district, I assume, is pretty-

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Hass: Yes. I went to public schools, but they were considered among the best schools in the state of Illinois.

Threatt: And what was the state of diversity in your neighborhood and in your school?

Hass: Well it was interesting because the little community that we lived in, the North Shore of Chicago there's a bunch of small villages that go up the lake shore. They're all relatively affluent, but they definitely have their own personalities. When my parents first moved to that area in the late '60s early '70s, Jewish families couldn't buy houses in several of those communities. So they bought a house in a little town called Glencoe and that was at that time- and I think probably still is- the most diverse of those villages because there were no covenants that prohibited the sale of homes to families of color or to Jewish families. While I would not describe these communities as diverse, they were more diverse than the communities that surrounded them.

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While it was a primarily white community, it was not exclusively white and while it was primarily a Christian community, it was not exclusively Christian. I go back now and then. My parents still live in that general area. Glencoe is much more diverse, certainly, racially and ethnically than it was when I was growing up, but it's still I think more so than those other communities even these many years later.

Threatt: Looking back, do you consider yourself to have had access to the privileges of whiteness? You said that you were-

Hass: Many, many privileges of whiteness. Yes. Absolutely. I think the place where I lived was a bastion of privilege on a number of factors. Absolutely. Being able to live so close to a city and, yet, without having to encounter the daily problems of the city or challenges of the city. That in and of itself was a privilege.

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Threatt: Did being Jewish bring on any oppression or was that just sort of a reality that you were able to enjoy without any repercussions?

Hass: Yeah, I don't think we used the term "oppression" at that point. Remember I'm the grandchild of immigrants and many of our family's closest friends and relatives had escaped from Europe. The notion of what it meant to be persecuted as a Jew, the standard for that was so high that not being able to buy a house or somebody making a comment in the cafeteria line hardly even rose to the level of notice because, again, we felt, and I was raised in a family that felt at that time, like America was a haven for immigrants and a haven for our own family and had allowed all of these opportunities and certainly a form of safety. So very much a kind of immigrant, American Dream sort of story, right? My grandparents came to this country with nothing,

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they were able to start their own businesses, they were able to flourish, they were able to send their own children to college and then to medical school. So we lived as recipients of that sort of vision of what was, at that point, understood as the American Dream.

Threatt: What do your siblings do now?

Hass: My youngest sister is a professor of mathematics and my middle sister is an attorney. We flourished in that way.

Threatt: Yes, you did. And what does your father do now?

Hass: My father's a psychoanalyst.

Threatt: Ok. That's probably it, thank you.

Hass: I don't usually lead with that in my conversations.

Threatt: I mean we just want some context.

Hass: What do you say about that? Absolutely.

Threatt: Sort of a broad question, but you hit all the points.

Hass: Good.

Threatt: Where did you complete your undergraduate degree?

Hass: All of my degrees are from the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. I have a BA, an MA, and a Ph.D.

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from that university.

Threatt: Okay and what's your Ph.D. in?

Hass: Philosophy.

Threatt: What made you choose that school as an undergraduate and then what prompted you to remain in that school when you did your doctoral work?

Hass: I would say it's hard to, you know it's hard to reconstruct your college choice. It's probably hard for you now and you're much closer to that decision making point than I am. I looked at several different institutions. Not nearly as many as students today would look at. It was a very common thing for students from my high school to consider one of the flagship Big 10 schools. I have a lot of friends who went to the University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois. I was accepted into an honors special program there, which was attractive. I really only considered public universities. Again, in that time and place, small colleges were not understood as necessarily welcoming to Jews and to Jewish families. I think

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some of them probably were, but it just wasn't in the air. So, big, public universities were understood as more welcoming. My parents had both gone to University of Illinois and, in fact, had met at the Hillel there. There was some nice family history there as well.

Threatt: Are there any memories that you would like to share with us? Like any special memories or any memories that shaped your decisions or your trajectory professionally, academically, personally.

Hass: I was very fortunate to have parents who were very supportive of whatever it was I wanted to study. So when I called my mother my freshmen year and said, "You know, I've gone through the catalogue and I've put a checkmark next to all the courses that really seem exciting to me and they're all in the Philosophy Department." She said, "So, be a philosophy major." I was fortunate that they gave me permission to study what I wanted to study. That they had confidence that that would be

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possible and a way to success for me, which many families I know are much more cautious about that. I do think it probably was, in part, tied to the fact that I was a girl. I think they maybe thought that there was less pressure on me to build a career, earn a living than there would have been had I been the son of the family or the oldest son.

Threatt: How do you think, if at all, it affected your parents' view of you and your sisters that they didn't have any sons?

Hass: Oh, I think that was significant for them. When you think about my mother's life trajectory, she certainly was raised to expect to go to college, but not raised to expect to necessarily be the breadwinner in her family or to support herself. It was assumed she would get married and her husband would be the main breadwinner. That turned out to be true. It's amazing

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as a woman to remember that when my mother was a school teacher and got pregnant, she was fired from her job. When she, as the only one working, my father was in medical school so she was supporting him, went to get a credit card they said you need your husband's approval and signature. Those things were- Women had a really tough go and had to- She was part of the generation that really had to fight for a lot of the rights that I and you take for granted that we have as women. Including property rights, including rights to fair treatment in the workforce. My mother was having her consciousness raised during my early and mid-childhood, so she went back to school. She had decided that even though she had three children she wanted to work. She had to push forward in many of those areas and that certainly set a model, I think, for my sisters and I of what's possible.

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It's a cliché to say that many men become feminists because their fathers have daughters, but I think for my father that was very much a truth. He came to understand and to be a champion of women's opportunities because he wanted his daughters to have those opportunities. Even though that was not something he had grown up witnessing.

Threatt: Ok, thank you. We're gonna move now to your early career.

Hass: Ok.

Threatt: Exciting. So after you finished your doctorate, you having multiple degrees, a Ph.D. among them, what moved you from the classroom to administration?

Hass: Well let me back up one step and talk about even how I found myself in the classroom because my husband and I graduated from the University of Illinois. We both had Ph.D.s in Philosophy and by the time we finished those degrees, we had a two year old.

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I think by the time I was finished we had a three year old. He was three. I had gotten married right after college and had a baby two years later. I was very much juggling a lot of things in my early 20's. Degree program, child, marriage, all of those pieces. Larry and I felt so fortunate that we were able to find work at the same institution. Muhlenberg College offered us both tenure track jobs in the same Philosophy Department, which was- We were legendary among academic couples. People would call us from all over the world saying, "We heard you hit the jackpot. How did you do that?" So we were very, very fortunate. Certainly, as a working mother, I didn't have to choose between staying with my family and pursuing my career, which is a very tough choice that a lot of women have to make. I was very, very

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Fortunate that we had that opportunity. I taught in the classroom for many years and then began to be invited to do more leadership roles as a faculty member. Chaired important committees, be parts of important task forces and that lead then ultimately to my being appointed as Dean and then ultimately as Provost at Muhlenberg.

Threatt: Since we've backed up, did you already know when you were getting your doctorate- I just assumed you wanted to teach- but did you always want to teach when you decided to be a doctorate?

Hass: Yes, that was- Absolutely. Really, I thought I would build a career more focused on research than teaching because I had not had the benefit of a Rhodes College education. I hadn't had the experience

at a small liberal arts college and my work was very technical and so I thought I would be more focused on that, but in graduate school I had the opportunity

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to teach and I found I loved it. My husband, who grew up very different kinds of experiences than I did, he had been able to go to a small liberal arts college. Ripon College in Wisconsin. In graduate school he knew that he wanted to return and teach and have a teaching facing and focused career. Wanted to make a difference in the lives of students in the way that his professors had made a difference in his life. Muhlenberg was the perfect town for us, but I really had to learn a lot about the expectations for a faculty member in the classroom and what it meant to be an outstanding teacher from my work there.

Threatt: What were your research interests when you were in the doctoral program?

Hass: My Ph.D. is focused in philosophy of logic and philosophy of language and I did work on non-standard logics and how negation functions in them, which, as you can tell even from that conversation,

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is not really something we teach at the undergraduate level. When I came to Muhlenberg I had to refocus those interests so that I was having a connection between the work I was doing as a philosopher and the work I was teaching in the classroom. It was a very growing experience for me.

Threatt: Ok. Can you actually explain a little more about what that means? The philosophy of negation and logic.

Hass: Sure, I will do my very best. I did work on- If you think about various logical systems as almost algebras that make certain kinds of assumptions. So a standard logical system makes the assumption that there's two truth values: true and false. And it spits out results from those assumptions and it's a binary system in the way that sort of feeds and powers, say, binary computer languages.

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If you relax or change those assumptions, say you decide you're gonna look at a system that has three values instead of two or now you can even look at systems that have infinitely many values, the structure that you're studying changes. I was very interested in how negation operators work in those complicated systems. If you think about it again in just a binary system, you've got a switch that turns something on and turns it off. I was interested in learning about the operation that makes that switch, from a logical perspective. Again, this is highly technical work. You need to have studied mathematics and logic and formal logic to be interested in this question, but when I started to teach undergraduates, I had to learn ways to talk about some of those questions in ways that

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didn't require that technical framework. It was really intellectually grueling for me because I had to figure out what interested me in that. I became very interested in feminist philosophy because there were a group of French feminist philosophers at that time that were really interested in exploring gender difference outside of a binary and outside of a conversation about having and lacking and more and less. I realized it was a perfect instantiation of what I'd been studying in more a theoretical sense. So, what does it mean, for example, to talk about the difference between the feminine and the masculine outside of the terminology of having and lacking? Which traditionally philosophy, in theory, has done. Traditionally, you look at the history of philosophy and women are

understood as men who lack something. The phallus, reason, the ability to think ethically. You

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pick something and that's what femininity had been understood as. So, you had these French feminists trying to understand difference, to acknowledge sexual difference in a way that wasn't about more and less, having and lacking. It was very much akin to the work I had been doing more formally. I kind of morphed into studying and teaching and thinking about some of those issues.

Threatt: So then you moved into administration.

Hass: Yes.

Threatt: Did you have to leave your philosophical work? How did that-

Hass: I did, ultimately, but it was really, I think in all of these trajectories I've followed my passion and the thing that I found most interesting in the moment. The thing that surprised me most about senior level administrative work was that I liked it and that it was intellectually interesting and that the problems we were trying to solve were engaging. I also

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found that I really liked working as part of a team and philosophy hadn't offered me that experience. It's very much an individual kind of discipline. We don't even, we rarely co-author papers in my field. We don't work as part of a lab or as part of a group, so the opportunity to be a part of a team was really compelling to me, and continues to be compelling.

Threatt: So some of your administrative work at Middleburg?

Hass: No, Muhlenberg.

Threatt: Muhlenberg.

Hass: Yeah.

Threatt: Sorry. From your administrative work at Muhlenberg, what prompted your move to Texas?

Hass: When I became provost, it was with the recognition that I probably wouldn't be returning to the faculty at Muhlenberg even though Larry and I had loved being part of that faculty. But I was appointed into those roles at a relatively young age, so I had a long way to go

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before I would be ready to retire. Longer than it would make sense to serve in that capacity. It would be difficult, I think, after serving in that role to just return and sort of be seen and be part of the faculty again in a more normalized way, not just for a year or two before retirement, but for another 20 years, 25 years. I knew when I took that position that it probably meant that I would not be ending my career at Muhlenberg. That was a big decision for me and for my family, to decide that we wanted to go that route. Once I was there, I began to receive invitations to consider both provost positions at different institutions and presidencies. I ultimately made the decision that were I to leave Muhlenberg, it would be to pursue a presidency. Something different than what I was doing as provost there rather than doing that same thing at another institution.

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Larry and I made a long list of things that an institution would have to have for me to feel like it was the right match and I thought it would take many, many years to find the right thing, but in fact Austin College came along and met all of those boxes and I was very privileged to be chosen to serve as its 15th president.

Threatt: What were some of the things on your list?

Hass: I knew I wanted to be at a place that was very mission-centered. That had a vision and a sense of who it was. I wanted it to be a place that was focused on both excellence in liberal arts education, but also on increasing access for students and opening the doors to that kind of education to a wider group. I wanted to be at a place that had a good feeling on campus and a warm feeling and a feeling of connection. Those were things that were important to me.

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Threatt: Ok. How did your husband- So he joined the faculty at that college?

Hass: He did. And at that point- You should interview him because his story is more interesting than mine. Larry, as I said, was a very accomplished philosophy professor and worked his way up the ranks, tenured, full professor. He was very accomplished as a professor, award-winning professor, much beloved. The kind of professor, like you don't graduate unless you've taken a Larry Hass class professor. He also was very well known in his area of scholarship. But along the way, he had developed an interest in sleight of hand magic and it came up by he was working, he hadn't done magic as a boy, but he was writing a book on the phenomenology of wonder and he got interested in magicians who were trying to create that aesthetic experience. He began to

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study what they did and how they tried to create it. He got to know some of the top magicians in Chicago and eventually decided he wanted to learn a little and became very talented and accomplished and started to both teach courses in philosophy- He was already teaching philosophy in the arts and aesthetics and began to incorporate magic there. Was then invited by the theater department to teach courses on performance magic and eventually came to hold a joint appointment in philosophy and theater arts. Meanwhile he was busy being invited to teach magicians and writing for magicians and others and did some academic work on the history of magic and as a performing art, which is fascinating all on its own. Eventually, by the time we arrived at Austin College, he realized that he was busy enough with that side of his career that he would retire from full time teaching.

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He now is a full time magician, teacher, publisher, writer, scholar. You can go watch his TedTalk. Yeah, it's awesome.

Threatt: That's so interesting. Do you know if he is interested in doing anything with the theater department here in McCoy?

Hass: I'm sure he'll be really interested in meeting the faculty here. This is such a rich theater culture being in Memphis. He's definitely going to make his rounds and become part of that.

Threatt: You already said you went to *Aida* at Hattiloo, so-

Hass: Yes, exactly.

Threatt: -you've seen a little of the theater.

Hass: I saw a glimpse. What a great start, too. I had never seen that show, so the whole thing was awesome.

Threatt: How are your- Do you still have children that live with you in the house?

Hass: I don't. Our children are grown. Our daughter is still in school, so she's back and forth a little bit.

Threatt: How did they feel about the move to Texas?

Hass: They were

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great sports about it. My son was in college, but he had chosen to go to college at Muhlenberg where we were. He likes to say he's the only kid whose parents went away

to college. He picked a college close to home and then we moved to Texas. Our daughter moved with us to be in high school in Texas, so they were great sports. I am very fortunate to have had the support of my family. I think it's very difficult for women to have professional success without the support of their families.

Threatt: Yes. I can't really comment on that, but I assume it's true.

Hass: Yes, it is true. You will find it's true. You need to form a family that is supportive. It's very hard to transform a family that's not supportive into a family that's supportive. It's better to form families with people who will be supportive of your work if that's important to you.

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That's just a tip for young women.

Threatt: For young professionals.

Hass: Yeah, absolutely.

Threatt: On this train of thought, there aren't that many women to this day who are at the administrative level of collegiate education. Can you just share more specifically your experiences of joining it when you did and the difficulties and joys and successes you experienced?

Hass: Yes. I think about 20% of college presidents are women and that number is not growing. It's stayed relatively flat, which is, I think, a shame. I think some of that is because we're still opening doors for women and some of that is because, I think, the pressures of the position have meant that many women look at what is involved in being a college president think it's not for me, I won't feel like I'm flourishing as a person if I

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take on that role. One of the things I do is really try to work with women at different stages of their administrative careers to encourage them to think about the presidency. I do a lot of mentoring and a lot of informal encouraging as well. I'm well aware of the women who pushed open doors that I got to walk through, and I really want to leave the door wider open behind me. Not just for women, but for others who've been unrepresented in higher education leadership.

Threatt: Ok. What was, if there was, a goal in your becoming an administrator and has it changed since? If so, how?

Hass: I think the goal has remained largely the same. It's to serve institutions that transform the lives of students.

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Being able to do that from the office of the presidency is humbling, but it's also awesome in terms of the kinds of changes that you can make and the difference you can make. You sometimes feel as though you're making difference up here, you have to really be in touch with what that's meaning in terms of the impact and the opportunity for individual students.

Threatt: Ok. Has your awareness of that grown? I'm sure no one starts off perfectly. How has your awareness of that chain of command developed?

Hass: Yeah, oh, absolutely. And still develops. If you're not continually learning in your work, then you need to find a different work because your work should challenge you. Part of coming to Rhodes is to accept new challenges and to think about ways that, what has to happen here and how I can help be part of moving the college forward.

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One thing that's remained very important to me is to try to stay in touch with that student experience and listen and learn about what's important to students and how a change we make over here actually impacts them.

Threatt: Ok. Since we're talking about Rhodes, let's move on.

Hass: Yes, absolutely. My new favorite subject, Rhodes College.

Threatt: Yes, of course. So we're so pleased to welcome you to Rhodes College.

Hass: Thank you.

Threatt: Yes, indeed. What moved you to apply here?

Hass: It's hard, again, hard to reconstruct because the short answer is, well, God led me here. But how that happened and the mechanism that helped that along is a little bit hard to reconstruct. I was very aware of Rhodes by its reputation and just because I've made a career in higher education, I had worked with Bill Troutt and Milton Moreland on some different projects, so I knew them and knew Rhodes

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by reputation, but I didn't know a lot about Rhodes on the detail level. I was at a conference, maybe a year and a half ago, and there was a presentation by a Rhodes faculty member who was talking about the public health initiative and the connections in the city and all the opportunities that Rhodes students had. Also about how the college prepared students to go out and do work in the city. I was just awestruck by the kinds of things she was saying were happening at Rhodes, by the ways she was describing some

of the challenges and I made a note to myself to look more deeply into that and learn a little bit more about what was happening. So, when I received a call inviting me to consider the presidency at Rhodes, it certainly sparked a little bit

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of interest. I was not an easy sell because I loved the work that I was doing. It wasn't that I was looking for a job, it wasn't that I was...but I was at the point where I thought, ok we've reached a moment where I could consider a next position and feel that I had made, had a complete presidency at Austin College. The timing was good, my interest in Rhodes was peaked, and so I agreed to at least learn a little bit more. Once I met the Rhodes people, once I had met with the search committee with trustees and some faculty and students, that was very compelling.

Threatt: How long had you been at Austin?

Hass: Eight years.

Threatt: Eight years, ok. You just talked a little bit about your first impressions of Rhodes and the research that you did when we reached out to you. Could you share a bit more specifically about your first impressions,

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both ones that were overtly positive, and ones that struck you as you could come in and help make improvements in that area?

Hass: That's a great way to put it, right, because part of what you want in a presidency is to feel that there's a match between who you are and what the institution needs at this moment, right? Different presidents are the right president for different moment. That was very much a process of discernment and conversation with the Board of Trustees as part of the search, is what would we try to do and what would we try to do together and why might this make a good match at this moment. The academic caliber of what happens here, the commitment to teaching and learning, the ambition to be the model for how we do liberal arts in the city, those really, really resonate with me. But I'm also where Rhodes is at something of a turning point- I was gonna say crossroads, but that felt too cliché- but

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something of a turning point in the way that it's thinking about inclusion and about how we make every student feel that they are at the center of the Rhodes experience and that was something that I certainly had experience with and something that's an important passion of mine. I felt that Rhodes is at a moment where we have the opportunity to be more ambitious about who knows about us and what we're known for. Again, I felt that was something that I could come in and be part of. Helping to change.

Threatt: Did any of your previous work at Austin or before that, did any of the work that you'd done at those colleges make you feel more equipped and confident about what you could bring to Rhodes?

Hass: Oh, there is no comparison to starting a second presidency to starting a first presidency. When you come in and you've done the work of being a president, yes, Rhodes is getting an experienced president,

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which is good for Rhodes and good for me. Everything I learned is a help and helps. But, you also have to come in very much with a beginner's mind because Rhodes is not Austin College, it's not Muhlenberg College. I need to be very open to learning about the culture here and about the practices and the history here, about the strengths, about the challenges. I want to both bring the expertise I've developed as an experienced president, but also connect that to a sense of openness to learn.

Threatt: Are there any specific experiences that you garnered that you think will arm you effectively when you are coming to Rhodes with these?

Hass: I think having experience with a campus that has been focused on

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diversity and inclusion for a longer time will be helpful. I also think coming from a campus that is less financially secure than Rhodes is also helpful. I certainly know how to find the coins that are hiding under the seat cushions. I am very experienced in making sure that we are matching the expenditure of resources to our values. Spending money on the right things. I think that will be helpful as well.

Threatt: Ok, that's exciting. I'm sad I'm graduating. Sad is an overstatement, but...

Hass: There you go.

Threatt: It's great that you're here now.

Hass: Well you will be a member of the Rhodes Alumni Association forever. So you never leave Rhodes.

Threatt: That's true, I have a wine glass that says so.

Hass: Oh, good. Excellent.

Threatt: How do you plan on engaging your new homes? By your new homes I'm meaning the Rhodes community and the Memphis community at large.

Hass: The nice thing about Memphis is, you really just have to stand around with a sign saying, "I'm from Rhodes College," and people come and want to meet you. I have been very warmly

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welcomed. So far, one of my strategies is just to follow Dr. Wigginton around town and eventually you meet everybody there is to meet. So that has been a good strategy. Rhodes already has so many connections and people willing to reach out and who want to learn, so it's really more of a process of just being patient with myself 'cause there's only so many hours in a day. We've been trying to schedule a lot of meetings and conversations. I've had to limit myself a little bit more than is typical for me because I'm also recuperating from treatment for breast cancer. I'm just finishing- just finished!- my fourth round of chemotherapy two weeks ago-

Threatt: Congratulations!

Hass: -so, I'm done with that. Clean bill of health. Done with cancer, done with treatment. Curing me of cancer was easy. Recuperating from the treatment is gonna be the hard part. So, I am having to limit myself a little bit more than I ordinarily would.

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It may take just a little bit longer to make all of the rounds, but we'll be very thoughtful and I certainly am eager to do as much as I can on any given day.

Threatt: Ok. So, no specific, like, "Here's a strategy for how I'm going to get to both Rhodes people and Memphis."

Hass: Well, there is. No, I mean I think you're right. We've tried to be very thoughtful and identify people that we really want to make sure I'm connected with early on. Some of those, of course, are people who support Rhodes financially or in terms of being really important in helping us in other ways. Some of that is to meet the movers and the shakers in Memphis and to get to learn a little bit about their work. Then also to be as involved on campus as I can be. Today I had a meeting with a group of a dozen student leaders. That was the highlight. First time I've met with a group of students, so that was really fun. Obviously, as we start up and

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opening of school, my attention will be turning more and more to campus. Once we get opening of school underway then I should have my energy back and be able to do some more traveling to visit alumni groups. One of the jokes about the college presidency is that, a good president spends 75% of her time on campus and 75% of her time off campus. There's a truth, like most good jokes, there's a truth there. That that's really one

of the biggest tensions in the presidency, is how do you make sure you're visible and engaged and a participant on campus and that you're off campus being an advocate for this institution, raising money for the institution, meeting those people who care about and support Rhodes College.

Threatt: Right. What do you know or how much do you know about the college's history to date about diversity and the lack thereof?

Hass: I would say I'm still learning

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about it. Some of that history is very visible, just in what we choose to lift up and honor and make visible on our campus and some of that history is really hidden. There's a lot to learn about the history. I think Rhodes' history in some ways is like many of our liberal arts colleges that began as predominately white institutions, predominately Christian institutions, and predominately male institutions and then over time have understood and realized, not just that it's a nice idea to invite others in, but that you actually better fulfill the teaching and learning mission when you have a diversity of voices in the classroom. To me the challenge for Rhodes is to live that out and to try and understand things deep at that mission level and I'm interested in learning about this. I'm excited to learn that we're coming up on a hundred years of co-education.

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That's a really exciting moment and very different than many of our sisters in, say, the east coast, for whom women were not admitted until the '70s.

Threatt: Ok. How do you plan on joining the push that Rhodes is experiencing right now towards diversity and inclusion?

Hass: Well, I think I'm part of that push as the first woman president and the first Jewish president of Rhodes College. I think my hiring is symbolic to many people that we are recognizing that diversity of viewpoints, perspectives, experiences makes a difference. I think in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, the president plays a role both in terms of having the bully pulpit, being able to set a standard for how we speak and talk and think about these, what kinds of questions we raise. Also, in terms of making sure that our

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policies and our practices live up to our rhetoric.

Threatt: What excites you most about Rhodes now that you are here? What are you most anxious about?

Hass: Well I think I'm like a new freshmen, right? So what excited me most is, oh, there's so many opportunities, there's so many fun things. I want to sign up for everything and be involved in everything. And then what you're most nervous about is how will I live up to this? How will I make the most of these opportunities? How will I make sure that I focus myself on the things that can have the biggest impact and not spread myself too thin?

Threatt: Ok. This wasn't one of the questions, but you said you just had a meeting with a-

Hass: I didn't have time to read the questions, so you're, whatever you're asking me is coming as, you know-

Threatt: It's all new.

Hass: That's part of the presidency, too, I'm an as-needed information gatherer.

Threatt: So you just came from a meeting with a group of student leaders. Was it

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a sort of interview that they were giving you, too, or were you having a planning meeting?

Hass: No, I had asked the student body president if there were enough students on campus that he could just gather because I haven't had the opportunity because students aren't here, we're not in session. It was really just an informal conversation. I got to meet them, we got to talk about some of their thoughts about Rhodes, about issues on their mind, about what drew them to Rhodes. It was really fun for me.

Threatt: So they brought up concerns that they might have had or was it just like, "Here's who we are."

Hass: Both. I think it was just a really wide ranging conversation. Yeah, absolutely. We talked about what they see as the issues facing Rhodes and they have really good thoughts, both about the strengths and about the challenges and about things that were important to them and things they felt they wanted to have on my radar. It was good.

Threatt: Was anything that they said new to you or was it things that you'd

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talked about before?

Hass: Some of the specifics, obviously, were new, but the general issues they brought up were things I'd heard about in the presidential search process. I thought it was a very open search. I would have been very turned off and very suspicious if the Board had

simply presented the college as absolutely perfect in every way, right? Then why would you be hiring a president at all? Just continue on. Obviously there's a lot of pride and Bill Troutt and his leadership brought the college forward in so many ways, so there was a lot of pride in the college, a lot of feeling that there had been a great deal of success, but also a very clear sense that we want to continue to move the college forward. It was a good process.

Threatt: What is your goal for the college in a nutshell, as concisely as you please?

Hass: My goal is that Rhodes will be

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the most outstanding Rhodes College it can be. That we will live up to the image we have of ourselves on our very best day. When we're at our best. I mean, you look at Rhodes and you think, "That's a perfect Rhodes moment," that that will be the norm and not an exception. It's really a process of unfolding and growth and flowering than it is a process of charting a brand new course. I don't think Rhodes needs to charter a brand new course. I think Rhodes needs to unfold in its fullness of what it can be and what it should be. The president has to think about that on a number of vectors. I have to think about that in terms of the college's mission. How do we best live out that teaching and learning mission? As I said, from my perspective, inclusion is one of the ways we best live that out. I have to think about it from a campus culture perspective,

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right, when we talk about honor, we talk about integrity, how do we live that out institutionally? What kinds of ways do we demonstrate that? Who can we be when we're at our best? I have to think about that from the third leg of that stool, which is the financial piece. How do we make sure that a Rhodes College education is affordable for talented students? How do we make sure that we can identify new resources so that we can continue to attract great faculty and staff and continue to have the facilities that support that education? So, for me, all of those things are deeply connected.

Threatt: Thank you. As we move to our close-

Hass: Ok.

Threatt: Yes. If you could-

Hass: You made this very easy, you're an outstanding interviewer.

Threatt: Oh, thank you.

Hass: I don't know if you have professional plans in this direction, but you're very good at it.

Threatt: Thank you very much. IF you could give your earlier presidential self any advice, what would it be?

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Hass: I think it's very easy as a president to overly identify with the challenges and the problems at an institution. 'Cause you see them up close, so you see them so vividly and they weigh on you. It's very easy to not be able to get enough distance that you can separate yourself from the college. I think I've become a better president as I've learned to make that distance. I approach the problems with a fresher mind. I sleep better and live better and work better. I think I enjoy the work more.

Threatt: What is your proudest moment as a president?

Hass: There are so

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many and I think having just left a presidency at an institution that I loved, there were a lot of moments of people gathering to celebrate the things we had accomplished and the buildings we built and the big splashy programs we had started and those are very, very gratifying, but I think the most gratifying pieces are the people that you see whose lives are transformed by the institution. Many of those are students, right? When I'm up there shaking every hand at graduation, there are some kids that walk across the stage and you just think, "I know what it has taken for you to be here and to do this," and you're so proud and you know they're walking towards something incredibly- Where they'll transform lives. That's gratifying. As president I see that, too, with staff members and faculty members and see their growth and their change and feel the sense of what the institution

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offers to them. I see the Board of Trustees and know that we've found ways to engage really bright and talented people. It's that personal moment where you're aware of the transforming power of the institution that, to me, are the most gratifying. And there's nothing wrong with the ribbon cutting for a new building either.

Threatt: Feels pretty good.

Hass: It may not be first on the list, but it's a pretty close second. Those institutional milestones are great, too.

Threatt: Of course. Finally, is there anything that we have not broached on which you would like to speak?

Hass: No, you really hit on great, great topics. I like the way that you've asked me to reflect on my own upbringing, my own experience as a woman, as a mother, as a Jew, and then how that shapes and informs the work that I do today. I appreciated this opportunity.

Threatt: Thank you.

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Hass: It's a little like psychoanalyst. I could've been laying down and just free associating.

Threatt: This is Crossroads to Freedom therapy.

Hass: Exactly.

Threatt: Book a session.

Hass: Exactly. So, thank you for letting me be part of this project and-

Threatt: Absolutely.

Hass: -I'm excited. We'll pick a date in the future. Let's say on my 10th anniversary as president and we'll come back together and watch this and we'll see how I've changed and how you've changed and how the college has changed. Is that a deal?

Threat: That's a deal.

Hass: Alright.

Threatt: That's a deal.

Hass: Good, I'll look forward to that.

Threatt: Thank you so much for participating in the Crossroads to Freedom project. Good luck in your administration.

Hass: Thank you!