

Major Points and Themes

1. Introductions & Setting of the Conversation

- The meeting begins with Naomi Katz Mintz explaining that the group has been gathering since March to archive freshman-year memories and answer recurring questions.
 - Participants introduce themselves: where they grew up, where they lived on campus, and one memory they want preserved.
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2. First Memories of Freshman Year

2.1 Campus Beauty & Newfound Freedom

Many participants emphasize the wonder of arriving at Cornell:

- Feelings of independence, campus beauty, and meeting diverse peers.
- Carol recalls the fall leaves and Cornell's stunning environment.
- Risley, Donlon, Founders Hall, and other dorms are recalled fondly.

2.2 Social Adaptation

- Exposure to people from different regions and backgrounds was eye-opening, especially for those from small towns or homogenous communities.
 - Many describe freshman year as "heady," "idyllic," and filled with new opportunities in clubs, music, and academics.
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3. International & National Events (Vietnam War, MLK Assassination)

3.1 Vietnam War Awareness

Participants had varying levels of engagement:

- Some were deeply involved in campus journalism and anti-war coverage. Judith covered SDS activities as a student reporter.
 - Others admit they were "clueless" or too busy with campus life to fully engage.
 - Several recollect watching the draft lottery together and anxiously awaiting their numbers.
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3.2 Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

The MLK assassination had a deep emotional and social impact:

- Immediate tension and estrangement between Black and white students were described, especially in dorms and labs.
 - Some Black classmates abruptly withdrew from friendships, leaving lasting impressions of grief and division.
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4. Jobs, Money, and Managing Finances

4.1 Necessity of Working

- Many students worked to pay tuition or cover extras:
 - Dining hall work, clearing tables, catering events (with the perk of eating leftovers).
 - Others were involved in the Cornell Sun newspaper, sometimes treating it like a full-time job, staying up until 2–3 AM to put the paper to bed.

4.2 Financial Support & Banking

- Several depended on modest family support or inheritance-based funds.
 - Students often cashed checks “down at the Straight.”
 - Shared recollections of opening first bank accounts in Collegetown.
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5. Communication with Parents

5.1 Infrequent and Structured Communication

Nearly everyone notes that communication with home was limited:

- Weekly Sunday-night phone calls were typical, due to long-distance rates and limited access to dorm phones.
- Calls home were often collect. Some parents used person-to-person calls as a “signal” that their child had arrived safely.

5.2 Limited Parental Involvement

- Parents rarely intervened in daily life; students made decisions independently for the first time.
 - Some students were so busy they hardly contacted home at all, prompting worried parents to send postcards with checkboxes.
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6. Social Life & Anecdotes

Participants share many humorous and nostalgic stories:

- First experiences with alcohol—Ripple, apricot brandy with Diet Wink, Valentine beer, and dorm-delivered liquor.
 - One participant recalls passing out from beer, being carried back to the dorm, and waking up fully clothed in a running shower.
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7. Clubs, Arts, and Activities

Freshman year was highly active:

- Music and singing were central for some; joining the Glee Club was a transformative achievement leading to cross-country tours.
- Participation in sports journalism, performances, rehearsals, and multiple clubs every semester.
- A general sense of constant activity and exploration permeated the year.