

Transcript – Caroline Flanders '26

Narrator: Caroline Flanders

Interviewer:

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Track 1

Q: [00:00] October 19, 1989. OK, why don't we start, as they say, at the beginning, and you tell me where you were born.

Caroline Flanders: In Rhode Island.

Q: You were born in Rhode Island?

CF: Mm-hmm, on a farm. We didn't stay there very long, but I have a great deal of farm background. We grew up, I guess, on a farm attitude, in Cranston.

Q: In Cranston?

CF: Mm-hmm.

Q: And did you go to Cranston High?

CF: Mm-hmm, and – let's see – Cranston High, and all the public schools in Cranston, and I think that I was the second woman who went to Brown from our immediate locality? Meshanticut Park – [01:00] [Elizabeth Taylor?] – I guess she must've been the class of 1915 – somewhere in there. I thought she was old, (laughs) because I was a child. And – let me see what else... I started with a commercial course in high school, and then – I don't know what year it was – maybe it was at the end of my second year – my aunt took my cousin and me up to Maine to visit relatives. That was – our beginnings were in Maine, the Flanders' beginnings. And one of – I guess she would've been a distant cousin, and while we were riding around, said, "Every girl should go [02:00] to college." So I picked up my ears (laughs) and came back, and said to the family, "Every girl should go to college." (laughs) And so then I shifted from commercial to college preparatory, and stayed five years, as a result, in high school, which wasn't so bad because I would've graduated at the age of 16. And I was pretty unsophisticated, so to say, not very worldly-wise. So it was probably very good. And then I went to Brown. I've been trying to think... In those days, the –  
(phone rings)

CF: In those days, you could be – if you had a B average, you could be certified. No such thing as entrance exams, or any of that kind of thing. And then – so I recall going up to Brown – going

up to Pembroke Hall [03:00] a couple of days before classes. This must've been in '22. And Emma B. Stanton walked into that first office in Pembroke Hall, and Emma B. Stanton was the registrar, and she – lovely-looking woman – and I could just barely reach her shelf. She had an enormous barrier between her and the door, and it intimidated me. But she was terribly nice, and I got registered and got a scholarship all in the course of half an hour, I guess.

Q: Oh my gosh!

CF: (laughs)

Q: That's amazing.

CF: That's how simple life was. And – that's cold outside. And yes, I'm sure I could never have gotten in if I'd had to take exams or anything like that. And of course they were looking for students, as a matter of fact. They didn't have too many. They weren't oversold. [04:00] So that made it very simple, and I feel very grateful to Brown – Pembroke – because it really was a wonderful experience for me, and [I?] built on it considerably. It was a very good foundation, I think. And it was there that [Katherine Davidson?], who was our first guidance counselor – was there, I guess, about my junior year – and when I said I wanted to go into social work, she said, "You go get an academic degree at Western Reserve University. There's not much choice. You just go for it." She was terribly nice. And so I'm very grateful to her that I went to Western Reserve, where they had what would now be called [05:00] "work in training," whatever it's called. For the privilege of working full-time at a social agency, we got free tuition at the – [05:15] break in tape

CF: [05:21] – course, you got a whole hour or more (laughs) to go to class, and so that was a very good experience, and I'm very grateful for that, because I was one of the first people to have a degree – an academic degree – in social work. At that time, The New York School of Social Work – before it became Columbia – was giving only certificates, because it had no university affiliation, or whatever it takes. So that – I've been lucky (laughs) from the beginning, largely to good guidance. And then, [06:00] let's see, when I first when to college, Dean Allison was still the Dean, and very much beloved, and, you know, she could stand up in chapel, and she spoke beautifully. Just literature, really, came out of her mouth. And so poor Dean Morriss had a terribly difficult time following Dean Allison. I liked Dean Morriss very much indeed. She was a wonderful woman, but she didn't have the kind of ease that Allison had, which was Allison's own (laughs) treasure, so to say. But I liked Dean Morriss, and – I don't know when it was – she hadn't been there very long. I think she taught probably the second year that she was there, and she taught "Social History of America."

Q: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

CF: And it's one of the courses that I just [07:00] – you know, I'm so grateful for, because I look back on it now – I think what it did was to give me scope, and not so much picky little things. And the way she taught it was to begin with the discovery of America, and you went all through the discovery period, and the frontier, ending up in Texas as the last frontier geographically so to say. Then it would be economics, and went all the way through from discovery to 1920, or

something, and she took every large topic like that, and began at the beginning, and went to where we were at the present time, which was very different then. You know, when I learned history in high school, we had the presidential terms, and you learned it all chopped up, as I look back. And there was no continuity – [08:00] or little continuity – and so I'm very grateful for that course, because as I say, I think it prob– I think it gave me a sense of scope and a sense of perspective. And the other one, Dr. Walter, who surely you've heard of – my friends went on to – a good many were biology majors, and I couldn't stand biology. The first year, Major Wilder – we were taught, we had freshman year with Major Wilder, in a great big auditorium, it seemed to me, in – whatever the name of that hall is at the corner of [Thayer?] and –

Q: Wilson? Is it Wilson now?

CF: I don't know. Maybe so. But anyway, I think there were 90 people. The whole class had to take it.

Q: Had to take it, right.

CF: I'd never seen that many [09:00] people in a classroom before, so I was doing this (laughs) all through Biology I, and I didn't learn very much about it, and I didn't like it. But my friends insisted that I take comp and app. I finally got around to that my third year, and that was Dr. Walter, and he was a fine teacher. And again, he was one who did things with scope, you know? I don't remember very much about it, because I wasn't much of a biologist, but I remember the feeling about it, that it was good. And so again, I'm grateful to my friends for pushing me into this. Otherwise, I wouldn't have, because I was a sociology major. [Daley and Buckland?]

Q: With classes like Bio I, that was all women?

CF: Pardon me?

Q: Was that all – that was all women?

CF: Bio I? Yes. Mm-hmm. Oh yes, you rarely had – [10:00] it wasn't until junior or senior year that occasionally you went over onto the hill for a very small, I remember some sociology courses, but I don't know which one. But also, in those days, of course, we were told to be very circumspect, and presumably we had to wear a hat and gloves when we went over to the men's campus.

Q: And did you?

CF: I guess we did, most of the time, but – I did, probably, because I was – I was docile in those days. (laughs) And generally that was respected, but generally, also, we got away from it, and life became much more open and easy, and... But going to the hill was reserved, as I say, for advanced classes. I think I went mostly to sociology – the classes there. There was another man – I can't think of his name. He was not very popular. He was new [11:00] in sociology, and I learned a great deal from him, but people didn't like him because he was very stiff and very (formal?) I think socially he was not very prepared for life, if you know what I mean? But I

thought he was great, and I learned so much from him. I can only look with pleasure and pride on my college experience, and that was a... My family were wonderful in allowing me to go. Finding the money, for heaven's sake, was not easy in those days. It was not a cash economy, (laughs) and –

Q: Did you have to work at all while you were in college?

CF: Oh, I babysat.

Q: Oh, you did?

CF: That's all there was to do, was babysit. That was virtually the only job. And I brought up Tommy [Yatchman?], who later became, I think, a city solicitor in Providence. His grandmother lived at the corner of [12:00] Cushing and Brown. I don't know if that house is still there. There's the gym, and then there was a basketball court, and then Brown Street, and they lived there. And Mrs. Yatchman Sr. credited Dean Morriss for changing the looks of the campus. She changed our hairstyle thought Mrs. Yatchman – when we used to wear big beehives, like... And it was Dean Morriss, and Mrs. Yatchman's look, that made us change our hair [after?] the style change. It's as simple as that, you know? But Mrs. Yatchman was very grateful that Dean Morriss changed our hairstyles.  
(laughter)

CF: And Tommy's mother was a Radcliffe graduate, and a scholarly type, and she really didn't know beans about bringing up a baby. [13:00] And she was so impressed, because when I went in, she was feeding Tommy – he was lying on his back – he was a little bit of a thing, and he couldn't swallow. And I sat him up, and she – (gasp) – she was so impressed. So I got through that experience very nicely (laughs) because I knew how to feed a baby. No, but that's about all. I didn't qualify for assisting with professors, and stuff like that. In those days, I think you had to have secretarial skills, and I didn't have them, so...

Q: How did you decide on the sociology major? Had you decided that before you came to college?

CF: Oh yes.

Q: Oh, you did?

CF: There was a Br– We had a small community church. It wasn't called “community” in those days. It was Baptist Chapel in Meshanticut Park and Daniel Culp – we had part-time ministers – and Daniel Culp was a professor at Brown, [14:00] and he got the job of Sunday preaching. That's about all the job was. And he was just back from China – was it Shanghai? No matter. And I got infected with the bug of social work from him, and I was going to go to China, I thought. And that's, I guess, how I got into social work. And then, as I say, I'm very grateful for Davidson – what was her name? – Katherine – for pushing me into – opening up Western Reserve for me, because it was a really a very, fine school. And I thought that was far west when

I was in Cleveland. Then I guess I came back to New York with a family agency – [15:00] Charity Organization Society, it was called.

Q: And how did you get that job?

CF: Just asked for it, I guess. I guess I wanted to live in New York. Don't ask me to be rational, because I don't know how I did these things. I just did them on the spur of the moment, for the most part. And so I was – Charity Organization, Community Service Society – and then I guess I went into city government at the time of Mayor La Guardia. It was an era all by himself. And I had something called – I was "Chief." That was the civil service title. The Bureau of Information and Inquiry. It was beginning – or shortly after The Depression, and all kinds of things were starting up – WPA government programs, emergency [16:00] relief – and nobody much knew where to go, so Edith King, who was my mentor at Welfare Council, got me to be Chairman, or Chief of The Bureau of Information and Inquiry. And so the people had a place to come, and I had a large WPA staff, and, you know, we all knew from nothing, (laughs) as far as that was concerned, and – [16:28]

Track 2

CF: – [00:00] to a large extent was just part of life, and so I'm very grateful for that. So that's about it.

Q: Now, when you were at Brown, you commuted up there every day?

CF: Yes. I lived with my aunt and uncle, who lived in East Providence, and my cousin was going – went for a year. But I stayed over there with my aunt and uncle, and my uncle drove downtown every day, because his office was in the Hospital Trust building, I think. And so that was very pleasant. And then I went home weekends. Of course, there was a real separation in those days between the [01:00] dormitory people and the city people. I don't mean socially, but – you were just too busy. It was each for your own lives, so to say. And I started to talk about Dean Morriss, and I said I think she was really very great, and did a great deal for – Then we had Dean Lewis. I don't know that she came – I don't know that I – she maybe came after I left, I think. But it was so clear that she wanted to be President of the university – President of the college. And that was – Those '20s were the years when there was a great debate on whether Pembroke could be a self-standing college, apart of the university. My own theory was that my degree was from Brown University, and Pembroke was not worth – you know, virtually nothing, [02:00] as far as those accouterments were concerned. So I was not very warm toward separating, but I think Dean Lewis so much wanted to be – and she was a busy little person. And she wanted to be President of the college. And I thought that was all pretty misguided. But anyway, that got ironed out, and we're still in the university, which I think is where we belong. But they are degrees from Brown. That's the important part of that.

Q: So the merger, then, didn't bother you?

CF: Well, I was out before the merger. No, I liked – I was all for it. I was all for it, even when it was being talked about. It was being talked about during my days there. No, I think it's a great thing.

Q: [03:00] Now, one of the questions the kids always have about the '20s – you know, we always have them coming in, and they do their papers about the '20s, and they always ask, you know, “Was it really like the books and the films? You know, was it really ‘The Roaring Twenties?’”

CF: I think so.

Q: Yeah?

CF: Not all of us, you know, were really “Roaring Twenties,” but there was the Charleston, the dances... And it was-- people were very individualistic in the '20s, I think, and I think – yeah, as I look back on it, I think the idea of freedom sort of caught on, you know? Us, in the '20s, were just ripe for that. We wanted to be in charge of ourselves, and – though I was not conscious of that at the time, but as I look back on it... No, I thought – [04:00] I thought it was a great time, and – oh yes, that was in the days of Prohibition, so the days of a hot flask on the hip at fraternity dances, and junior proms, and stuff that – We thought that was pretty hot stuff if you could have a drink out of a flask. Pretty awful because it was hot. But we lived through all of that, survived on way or another, and... Let's see. You brought me notes on the other people in my class. Norma [Mathewson?] Nelson is now, still, the president, and she was the president for our class. Martha Dickie Sharpe Jukowski... Ann [Phillip Thornton?]. [05:00] Hope Gilbert [Forden?] was another Cranston person. She's a very bright person. And those are some of the... There were others too –Edith Snow – but I haven't seen any of them. But I've maintained my – for my own circle of friends here – Norma and Anne and Hope. Not Ann & Hope,\* but –

Q: (laughs)

CF: – Anne and Hope. And they work very hard. I think also... Oh, [Betty Read?]. Have you done an oral history for Betty Read?

Q: I don't recall. We had 200, so I can't think of them all, but –

CF: I see. Well, I think she's an important person, because she's been class agent all these years, and she's a good worker. [06:00] She worked – After she left college, she took a secretarial course – oh, I forgot the name of it.

Q: Katie Gibbs?

CF: Yep. And then she became the secretary to Katherine Davidson until her marriage, and so she has a good overview of a lot of things, and I would suggest it if there isn't one – if she hasn't given an oral history, I'd certainly recommend it. I think Norma too, as far as that's concerned, but I think Betty is... Norma's a little on the crazy side. She's darling and I love her, but she goes

this way, while Betty's got her feet solidly on the ground. And she could, I think, add something...

Q: And all these people, were they all city girls?

CF: Those were. Norma defected and got to live in the dorm, and then Edith Snow was our president, also. [07:00] And we knew the people. We went there for dinner occasionally at the dormitory, and if you had a guest, you sat at the housemother's table – you and your guest – so we were all on our very best manners, watching that we used the right fork, and all that sort of thing, because most of us hadn't come from homes like that. So it was an interesting experience. I admire Martha Dickey very much – Martha Dickey Sharpe – because she really had a hard time. She really worked her way through, and not only did she sit babies – some babies I sat – but also, every night she read to two old ladies who had a bookshop at the corner of Thayer and Angell, I guess, and – [08:00] was it Youngs? I've forgotten the name. So she would read to them, and when she wanted to go out to a fraternity dance, I would take her place. And as I say, I admired her very much, because she really – as I look back, she really got through on her – by scraping her fingernails at work. And she was not popular with the girls. First of all, she had no business having all those dates. (laughs)

Q: Oh, really? (laughs) Was it with Brown men, the dates?

CF: Yes, yes. And she – you know, there's nothing for her to have three invitations to a fraternity dance, or something like that. She was very popular, and the girls couldn't understand that. Because she didn't take too much a part in the college itself. She didn't have time. And I liked her, and I hit it off with her a little bit. But she lived with – [09:00] we never understood, I think, that presumably, she lived her grandmother and grandfather, but I think there was more to the family. I think the family relationship was more complicated than that, though I never knew. But she really did great things. Norma turned out to be a biologist, in a, what do you call it, a lab – lab technician at various hospitals around town. But I think I was the only one of the locals who went away.

Q: Was that something you had wanted to do – go away from Rhode Island – or did it just happen?

CF: No, it just happened. As I say, Katherine Davidson gave me my first push when she sent me out to Cleveland, and my mother, who hadn't much education herself – she had only finished grammar school because her [10:00] father had died, and she'd had to help the family – and my mother was very ambitious. And if there was anything that was one step up, you know, she would get right behind it and do it. I think she's the one that should've had the college education, not I. (laughs) She'd have done more with it. But she was a very interesting person. I thought she was too strict a disciplinarian, but I know she wasn't. She just didn't let me do everything I wanted to do, and I thought that was pretty awful, you know? “Other people can.” “Well, you want to go and live with them? OK, but not while you live here.” (laughs)

Q: People still say that.  
(laughter)

CF: They do?

Q: Oh, sure.

CF: Oh dear, I thought she was the only one.

Q: Oh no. My mother's favorite expression was – you know, I would say, “Well, everybody else is doing it,” and she said, “Well, if everybody jumped off a bridge, would you too?”

CF: (laughs) Yes, that was another one. [11:00] But if I wanted to go and live with them, OK. That was it. So...

Q: Were you the first woman in your family to get a college degree?

CF: Oh yes. My aunt had taught school, but that was in – I guess she probably had – she was a Flanders – and I think she probably had had a high school education. Dad went to [Bryson Goff?], which was a boys school, I think, in Providence. And so that was pretty fancy. But I think my aunt probably graduated from high school and became a teacher, which is all you had to do to become a teacher then, and in one-room schools, I think, in Cranston, probably, because she too had been brought up – Our farm was on Scituate Avenue in Cranston, so I think she came through [12:00] the Cranston school system for that. I really didn't have much planned purpose in my life. I think everything happened to me kind of by happenstance, as it were. I was just lucky. I did talk about the separation of Pembroke and Brown. That was such a hot topic.

Q: When you look back, what would you say would be your greatest accomplishment?

CF: You mean in my professional life?

Q: Yes.

CF: Oh, I think The United Hospital Fund. I was privileged to work with a group of very stunning women. They were all financially comfortable, but they had brains, [13:00] and they had good sense, and we did a lot of innovative things. And I had a great time in the Hospital Fund. Not quite sure how I got there. I can't remember how I got there, but anyway, (laughs) I did. And of course, the experience in case work – that was what Katherine Davidson said – “If you're going into social work, you've got to have social case work.” She was really very far-seeing, I think. And so I dutifully did, and I didn't like case work. I don't think I did it well. But when I could get into more administrative things, not knowing what administration was, I think I was much happier. [14:00] And it was a great experience to be associated with Mayor La Guardia. (laughs) He was a great guy.

Q: When you retired, did you move back to Rhode Island immediately?

CF: No, I stayed in New York for a couple of years, because I couldn't do the things during the daytime I was working – and my mother and father, I think, had both died. I don't have a family

bible, so I'm hazy on dates. But I think mother and dad both died, and my younger brother was there, so he and I kept close for a few years until he died a couple of years ago. So I'm the last of the nuclear family.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to travel after you retired?

CF: [15:00] I travelled before I retired. I lit out for Paris one day, and stayed there a couple of weeks. Got to England somehow. I don't remember whether that was the time or another time. Then, late in the '70s – I guess after I came back here, I met the Ryans, and Mr. Ryan was with foster child planning, and they'd lived all around, and they finally were transferred to Bali, and so I – after a while, I lit out for Bali, and got to Bali, Hong Kong, [16:00] and the West Coast, some West Coast... But I haven't done any real travelling since.

Q: Well, that sounds like real – enough for a lifetime, going to Bali.

CF: (laughs)

Q: My gosh.

CF: Oh, that was really great. Really great. And I remember – what's his name – Ryan – came down with a friend to meet us, and to meet the boat as it came into Bali, and I thought that was pretty impressive, (laughs) and to be able to live with a family there, and get to see a little bit more of the inside than some of the other boat passengers did. I don't think we were there two or three days, but – really not that long. That box over there is my travel box. As you can see, I'm not yet unpacked from moving here more than a year ago. One day I'll [17:00] get to it. But all my travel stuff is there, and I've got to find out where I've been, really. And I'm glad I did my traveling when I was young, because, you know, you could sit up all night in the Pullman, (laughs) no problem. And you could go tourist abroad – The thing to do when I was in college – and I didn't get to do it – People that went abroad went on cattle boats.

Q: I've never heard of that before.

CF: Or freighters, but I think mostly cattle boats. But I couldn't take time off to do that. I had to work. And so as I say – in going tourist [18:00] was very comfortable, and I think the very first trip we ever took was my roommate and I – she was from Missouri – and Mauritania – this was in The Depression days – set up our first weekend cruise to Nassau. Fifty dollars for the weekend. So Cornelia and I signed on– we got down to the boat Friday night in time for dinner, and we sat dutifully. We were given some hints about how to behave, and how to get to wherever. And so we sat dutifully just outside the dining room, and the steward finally came over and asked us to sit at a certain table. You know, I'm sure we weren't hard to look at, and we were pretty well behaved, and hoped we were sophisticated. We probably weren't. So [19:00] we got along very well on that, and so from there on – and going tourist – as I say, people went tourist, but actually, I went third class on The Queen Mary – to where? – to France – I don't remember. And third class was not considered good. Tourist was OK. So I would sneak up the back stairs in tourists – from third class to tourist. (laughs) And I associated with all the tourist passengers, and I remember getting off the boat – one of the lounge stewards saw me coming off

the third class, and motioned me back. I said, “No,” (laughs) “I’m third class.” He didn’t apparently realize that. So all of those were adventures, and, you know, taking chances – [20:00] discrete chances. [But they were pretty great?] And then there was a trip to Grand Manan, and – what’s the river up there? Oh, I guess the (inaudible). There were many good trips, but not much money in those days. I don’t know what’s available to young people before they get on their bicycles and their cars – they all own cars, and they can go.

Q: When you were at Brown, do you remember – was it – how important was it to, you know, go to the senior prom, and things like that?

CF: Oh, it was quite important. And some [21:00] people did it easily and naturally. I wasn’t in the swim. I was too bashful, for one thing. Oh yes, that was very important. Somebody was always scratching up a date for me to go to things like that. And our proms are – I think our junior prom was in [Sayles?] Gymnasium.

Q: Right, Yes, this was before Alumnae Hall was built.

CF: Oh yes. Yes, we were – They started raising money for Alumnae Hall when I was probably a junior, probably 1925, and brash as always, I placed \$150, and then got the \$75 a month job living in Cleveland. If I hadn’t had clothes left over from college, I’m sure I couldn’t have managed in Cleveland. [22:00] But then we lived in – you know, we shared apartments, and then finally we had a house out in Lakewood, on the second floor of a tenement in Lakewood, Ohio was pretty (inaudible) in those days. So that’s how we managed. I don’t remember how much that apartment was. I’m sure it couldn’t have been \$100 a month. I’m sure. So \$20, let us say, a month, was pretty good, per person. I found Cleveland very interesting. I’d never been west of Massachusetts, I guess, before, and that was pretty interesting. I remember one of the first days, I was assigned to the Lakewood office, and [23:00] one of the first things I did was, on company time, I walked down to the lake to see Lake Erie, and I thought I was going to see Canada, you know? Well, Lake Erie, for heaven’s sake. Bigger than Narragansett Bay, certainly. And so it was a continuous eye opener experience. And there was a whole different – I guess you would call it “culture” – in Cleveland. It was a bigger city, and I hadn’t been accustomed to that before. (coughs) Excuse me. So I had very good memories of Cleveland too. And in those days, too, in private agencies – social agencies, which of course were much smaller – we had much more – [24:00] not “real contact,” but – for example, in Community Service Society, [Mr. Jackson?] was one of the grand old men – not a social worker, but a grand old man of social work. He would conduct staff meetings for the whole city, and we had that kind of contact that you don’t have these days in big organizations. And the same in Cleveland. [Miss Hanship?] was Director of – became Director, and she knew [Sabina Marshall?], who was from Boston. She was the director of the Girls Service League. And the people who worked in other agencies, as well as in the Associated Charities, as it was then called, [25:00] all really got to – not “know people” – but we had contact with them. They would occasionally invite us for dinner, which we thought was pretty grand. So I think those contacts were really worth – or rather, the experience, not the contacts per se. The experience was really worth a very great deal. A deal for which I am very grateful... I don’t mean to be sounding “grateful, grateful, grateful,” but really, it’s been a great experience, and quite wonderful, so...

Q: OK. Well, I think we're done. I have gone –

- END -

\*The reference is to a local discount department store, "Ann & Hope Mill Outlet."