

Transcript—Katherine Virginia Niles Faulkner, '36

Narrator: Katherine Virginia Niles Faulkner

Interviewer: Suzanne

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Track 1

Suzanne: [00:00:00] – go over. This is an oral history interview for the Pembroke Center with Katherine Niles who graduated Pembroke in 1936. Today is January 13th, 1985.

I'd like to start out and ask you some questions, get a basic family biography. If you could speak to me a little bit about your family background and –

(break in audio)

S: – go over. This is an oral history interview for the Pembroke Center with Katherine Niles who graduated Pembroke in 1936. Today is January 13th, 1985.

I'd like to start out and ask you some questions, get a basic family biography. If you could speak to me a little bit about your family background and where you're from, and then how you wound up at Pembroke.

Katherine Virginia Niles Faulkner: I was born in Henderson, North Carolina, [00:01:00] which was this town of approximately 10,000 people with only public school available to young people in the town. I graduated from that high school with not as much preparation for college as many of the people that I met at Pembroke because it was semi-rural and had a limited curriculum in terms of time. There were only 11 grades instead of 12 and we had a shorter year than other schools had because farmers in the country around the town had to get their children home to work. Therefore, when I arrived at Pembroke in 1936, it was really with the goodwill of the college that I was able to make my way because I found it very difficult in the first term to keep

up with those students who'd come from Latin schools in Boston [00:02:00] and Providence and you-name-it.

I was one of two Southern girls in the college and there was a lot of warmth and understanding about us, I felt, because we were not only coming from a less prepared school system, but also from a different section of the country. And it was a little bit strange, naturally, to us. So, I found it very, very accommodating for me.

S: Is your family a farming family? Did you live on a farm?

KVNF: No, we lived in a small town. I was the youngest of nine children and there were various histories of schooling depending on the desire of the child, really. Because there was no competition in the family and no particular aspirational level to make everyone do the same thing. But I wanted school, and so I continued.

We were a small town [00:03:00] family with very good connections and feeling of unity. And we had a wonderful life, really, in a small town setting because there were many natural things that we enjoyed. It was not a sophisticated life such as I have known since then, but I appreciate the fact that I grew up in a small town in North Carolina. And then migrated to a place in the country where I felt I was exposed to a little bit more stimulation intellectually and otherwise.

S: What motivated you to go to Pembroke? Specifically to college and also to Pembroke?

KVNF: A brother who had been in Providence suggested it. And it seemed a very good idea to me because I was planning to go to Duke University and it was very near Henderson, only 40 miles away. And there was not much difference in the cultural [00:04:00] opportunity there, I thought. So, when changing the whole section as well as leaving home was presented to me, I felt it was an excellent way to grow. And I certainly found that to be true.

S: What motivated you to go to college at all? Did you have particular aims for which you wanted to use your education?

KVNF: I thought that I would be able to develop an interest toward work, but I was not driven toward a career at all. In fact, I'm sure, basically and subconsciously, I expected to get married and have a family. But I did think along the lines of journalism for a while, and even thought of transferring to the University of North Carolina to do the final two years in journalism. But I did not pursue that and neither did I have any vocational emphasis in the work that I did at Pembroke for which I'm very glad. I did liberal arts [00:05:00], majoring in psychology, and explaining to Dr. Carmichael, who was head of the department, that I wanted to minor in English, and I wanted to do as little psychology as possible so that I could do as much English as I could, and he thought that was very strange but he let me do it anyway.

S: What led you to choose psychology?

KVNF: I think the very fact that being in a large family and being very gregarious in high school and in a small town with lots of friends, I just wanted to know more about people and what made them act the way they do. And it was a general kind of educational direction that was more in line with my training, I think. I was not a language maj—I couldn't have been a language major with my background. I had not had strong enough languages or strong enough history or any—it just didn't interest me. I wanted, really, to know more about people.

S: Did [00:06:00] your family have any reservations about you going off to college, number one, and also going so far away to Providence, because you are a woman?

KVNF: No, it was really a democratic system in my family because, as I said, there was no attempt to force children in one direction or another. And when I said, "Well, I would like to go on and do this," they thought that was excellent. And gave me the opportunity without questioning it.

S: No distinction between how they treated the boys or the girls?

KVNF: Not that I know. I think the distinction in the family was how the child wanted to grow. Anyone that wanted to grow in one direction was allowed to do it as far as finances could

provide, and several of them did not go to college but went off in directions of work and pursued that. But no one seemed to force the issue one way or the other.

S: How many brother—what was the breakdown with brothers and sisters?

KVNF: Six brothers and two sisters. One sister was much older. The other sister was nearer [00:07:00] my age, but there were six boys in between. And they were—many of my family were away from home when I was growing up. Already had emerged.

S: And so you wound up at Pembroke and—

KVNF: And there, I found new friends. And it really was, I think, the kindness of the dean of students—her name was Miss Eva Moorar—who made it possible for me to be understood as that special kind of student for the first term. And then after that, I seemed to roll along pretty well. Not an honor student, but immediately, I was involved in activities on the campus.

S: What kinds of activities were you involved in?

KVNF: Well, I don't remember whether it was the second year of my—I think it was in my sophomore year that I was elected to the board of—what do you call it now? Student government, it was. I don't know what [00:08:00] it's called. And I functioned there as a class representative. And then went into what was called the Pembroke Christian Association as well which was a very active group on campus in peace efforts.

You're too young to realize that there was a big peace movement at Brown in between the two wars. [Brooke Anderson?] was head of the Brown Christian Association which, by the way, was nonsectarian. They named it "Christian Association" because it grew out of some efforts on the part of YMCA years ago, I guess, to get on school campuses. But the BCA, as we called it, and the PCA involved all students on the campus that wanted to become involved in works that were considered, I would think, humanitarian. They had no emphasis on religion. It was [00:09:00] strictly a human interest group. And the interest then was in peace.

And the Quakers were a big element involved in providing the opportunity to work in the peace movement in Providence, Rhode Island because the movement there was strong, and it was really out of the efforts of the Quakers in that city that the fellowship of reconciliation grew, pretty much.

And Brooke Anderson, who had been in the First World War, was injured there. Came out resolved to try to keep the world from going into war ever again. And in the 1930s, there were really war clouds forming, and the threat was there, but nothing very specific. And so Brooke organized the students that wanted to go out on deputations to talk to the communities all around Providence about how [00:10:00] to think about war and how to work toward preventing it.

S: So, you would go out and talk to families, or would you speak to groups?

KVNF: Church groups. Anyone that—I can't even remember who they were, but we would be asked to go. And we'd go as teams or we would work with them. We didn't do it all the time, but that was the biggest interest that we had.

And then he would bring—the VCA also was an instrument for enlarging the perspective of the students to understand other cultures which was really interesting. It wasn't a language thrust. It was a gain in human interests.

And I could remember that we had visiting Chinese come to speak through that organization. And, again, it was just in line with my interest in people and what other people thought and did and how they felt about the world in general. And it was not purely [00:11:00] religious at all.

But the Student Government Association, of course, did then what I imagine it does now. It sort of operated the activities in the school, of students. I don't know if you have that.

S: Oh, we still have it. It operates, basically, in the interest of the students and with the administration.

KVNF: Yes. Good.

S: So, did you do any kind of public protests? Like, you may hear about, that we have today, things on the green.

KVNF: They weren't being done that way. I think our peace movement was tantamount to what you're doing today, definitely. If what we did then could be translated into terms today, it would be protest. But we didn't have any particular body to protest against. We considered ourselves more, I suppose, the missionaries of peace, trying to [00:12:00] ask people to think about that rather than making war. And it definitely—we would have been in the peace marches to Washington or any of those efforts if we'd been later. But that was 50 years ago.

S: So there were no candlelight vigils on the green or people carrying placards around the streets.

KVNF: No, and no banking of cyanide. And therefore, I understand what everyone's trying to do, but I don't know whether our efforts would have been considered as strong as that because, as I said, we didn't really have that structure to it. It wasn't aimed--Our efforts weren't aimed at any particular group. We weren't fighting with the government because the government wasn't making a statement. We were asking people to think. It was after I graduated that the German situation [00:13:00] developed to the point where people had to really take sides.

S: How did you feel when you were working in the peace movement? Did you feel like you were being an activist? Were you very enthusiastic and excited with the other people in the PCA?

KVNF: Yes. I thought that that was the most active thing on campus, in my mind. I was not an athletic person and we didn't have sororities or things to get excited about, but I thought that that kind of activity was the most interesting of all. And I believe that it sparked a lot in my future activities that I have developed as I've grown older because it definitely led into a concern for community-based things that I've carried on as a volunteer after college.

S: Did the PCA [00:14:00] and the men from Brown work together?

KVNF: Yes. I met my husband in PCA. He was a member of the Brown Christian Association. We met, and after he left college, I completed. And then after being out of school for two years, we were married as very young student courtship days had led to—and, unfortunately, he died in his thirties. And so I was married again to my present husband and have been married to him much, much longer. But all of the children were born in the first marriage and that was—he was a Brown student who had worked in BCA.

S: Did you meet him during your freshman year?

KVNF: No. I met him in my sophomore year, I think it was, or early junior year. I forget the month. But it was through our work.

S: Is that how you generally met boys at Brown? [00:15:00]

KVNF: I don't think that I would have been considered the belle of the campus by any means and didn't meet all of the boys that were around, but I did get to know men in class because we had classes with the men.

S: Oh, really? You didn't have separate classes?

KVNF: Not all of our classes were with the men, but we were back and forth on the campus all the time. In fact, that was one of the features of Pembroke that made it quite different from other women's colleges. I mean, we were a women's college but we were definitely part of Brown University. And we shared those classes. Biology, and many of my psychology classes were there. We had the same faculty that would come to the Pembroke campus if we were only women, or we went to the men's classes on the Brown campus.

And so, there were many opportunities to talk with the men and meet them, but I think it all boiled down to when you were in smaller groups [00:16:00] and able to really relate to individuals that it seemed to work for me. I'm not sure about the other girls. I met other men at Brown and went to some of the functions, some of the parties. But I didn't really ever have a

serious interest other than the man that I married except for one person who was interested in me and I was already committed.

S: When you were in classes with the men, would you say the professors treated you both equally or were the women looked down upon as students, or not taken as seriously?

KVNF: Well, I was not such a strong student that I felt in competition with the men, academically. I don't remember specifically how they were perceived in comparison with the women, to tell you the truth. I felt equal always. I never had any feelings about [00:17:00] the men in those days because I had had so many brothers and was completely at ease with the men's world. It wasn't intimidating to me to be around the men. I didn't feel in competition, but I imagine that the numbers alone would have placed the men in a position of more strength and force overall. Because there were only 600 women in Pembroke and I think there were 2,000 men at Brown.

S: So generally, in your classes, there were a lot more men than women?

KVNF: Always.

S: Did the women speak out in class?

KVNF: I don't remember that so much, but I don't think that it was a problem. I honestly don't. I imagine that, in small classes, they probably spoke up. But we had large lecture classes. You may not have that today.

S: We still do.

KVNF: You do? And there was not much [00:18:00] freedom of speech in the classroom, in the seminar.

S: Was there any vocational counseling while you were there? A career center?

KVNF: They did have an employment office. I don't think they called it "career" because that was a word that came later, in my experience, for women. Now, I'm not sure about men, but for us, there was an opportunity or an effort to help you find something to do after college. But we were just post-Depression and jobs were very scarce. And I do not feel that they made any real effort for me.

I found a place to go to work for practically no money, almost a volunteer job, through a friend who had been at Brown, at Pembroke. And she had worked in a school, [00:19:00] an Episcopal school in New Jersey. And because of her nice experience there, she said, "Why don't you go there to work?" And I did. But I was already engaged, you see. That was the pattern. And so I wasn't interested in building a career. I was interested in having something to do that was meaningful until I was married.

S: When you entered Pembroke, or while you were there, did you have any feelings about wanting to use your education in some specific way?

KVNF: Not in terms of earning because this engagement and marriage was the most important thing to me, and I certainly did not anticipate working after that. In fact, it was so stupid. We waited until my husband's father said that he earned enough for us to get married. It was absolutely minimal, the amount that we had to live on. And [00:20:00] we didn't even think of having me go to work, which was absolutely absurd. I should have been working right from the day that I was married.

But, a baby was born a year and a half later and so that would have come in the way anyway. But the first year of marriage, if I had worked, we could've had a much better start. Instead, we just managed and we had a good family connection that made life a lot nicer and so we didn't suffer. But it wasn't in my mind to work. I think that was a big difference between then and now.

Many of the women did go to work, I'm sure, but those that I knew really were going in the direction of marriage.

S: And so when you did get married and you stopped doing any work, did you feel that you weren't using your mind so much?

KVNF: Absolutely.

S: Was that a frustrating feeling to you?

KVNF: The first year I was married, we [00:21:00] lived in Brooklyn because my husband worked in Manhattan. His family lived in Manhattan. But we couldn't afford to live in Manhattan at the same level that we could afford in Brooklyn. And so I found myself in a strange city without any connections there. He didn't have any connections there either. I realized that in the morning, I could do all of the work that I needed to do in the apartment and have it finished by 9 o'clock. And I could not believe that there were all those hours ahead of me.

So, I immediately left the apartment and found things to do. And I audited classes in a small college on the same street that we had an apartment. And I was the only woman that had ever asked to come there to school as a married woman. And they had to think about it. It was a little Roman Catholic college named St. Joseph's, and they had to have a conference about it. And finally, they came back and said, "Yes, you can sit in on the American [00:22:00] Literature course and the Shakespeare course if you would like to, but we won't give you any credit." And I said, "I don't mind. I want to be busy using my mind."

I then volunteered as a helper at the New York Infirmary for Woman and Children because one of the women doctors there was a friend in the family and she was becoming my doctor. And she got me a placement in the outpatient department there as a volunteer.

So, I was busy almost every day of the week doing something but not for money.

S: Before we go on further with what you've done, I just want to ask you a few more questions about your experience at Pembroke. Do you remember specific things while you were there, specific influences on your life aside from the PCA? Were there any other specific things that you feel directed you to becoming who you are now?

KVNF: Yes. I think that just experiencing a large university and a fine university [00:23:00] and the city made me realize that the world was much larger than what I had known as a very young person. And that I would never return to that kind of isolation. I would, definitely, seek ways of staying in the mainstream and being a part of that larger world and enjoying it. My whole philosophy has not been, I have to say, in terms of achievement so much as in terms of doing things that I like doing. And it has worked well for me because I have been able to manage finding things that were always satisfying to me. And yet, I can't say that I was directed towards achievement in terms of management or achievement in terms of research or goals, intellectual goals necessarily. But it's been a very full experience to go from Brown into the world and [00:24:00] make it expand.

S: Do you think that Pembroke played a lar—or, Brown played a large part in your life?

KVNF: Oh, definitely. If I had not gone to Brown University, I might have settled down in a small town in the South. I credit it with opening my mind to all of the things that we've been talking about and making me want to grow to the extent that I have grown which is not anything earthshaking, but it is, at least, much larger scope than I would have had if I had not gone to Brown.

S: Do you have specific memories of either very good times or very bad times at Brown?

KVNF: The hard times, for me, were academic. It was hard for me to accomplish the work at that level, in the beginning. And it became easier, but I never found that I could just study statistics and study all of the [00:25:00] hard subjects easily.

S: I don't blame you.

KVNF: It was a struggle, that part. It was never a struggle with the people. I loved the people. I loved Dean Morriss and I loved the friends that I still have from those days, two friends that I may—that are still alive and we had a reunion a year ago. And so that was not a problem.

S: What kind of experiences did you have with Dean Morriss?

KVNF: She was a little bit my model in terms of a woman who had achieved so much in her career. Not because I thought I was going to do that, but I admired her tremendously for being the president of the college at that time. And Miss Mooar, again, as I said, had a tremendous influence over me as a human being. But Miss Morriss was more—I was a little bit in awe of her, but at the same time, I could go and [00:26:00] with her if ever I had problems. And she did talk with me a few times about other... She was accessible, so I admired her for her—she was a handsome woman. A very naturally successful woman. And one that I could have really—it would have served me well to follow her as a model.

S: Did she specifically encourage you in any direction as far as your studies or your future?

KVNF: Not academically. She left that to Miss Mooar. She was the one—Miss Mooar was the one that would talk with me about subject matter and building the academic side.

S: And so what would you talk with Miss Morriss about?

KVNF: In general, if we had any activities in BCA or problems with students, she was available to have a conference. I can't remember anything more [00:27:00] specific but I do remember that I knew her personally. I did not just know her from a distance.

S: Did most of the students know her personally?

KVNF: I'm not sure. I doubt it. But, as I said, I was really active on campus and ended up as president. I ran for president of student government and lost to [Zelda Fisher?], but then I was elected president of PCA. So, I think that puts you in a slightly different relationship with the head of the college.

S: Oh, sure. Did you have any relationships with professors?

KVNF: No, I cannot say that there was a particularly personal relationship with the professors. We had one French professor on campus, a Brown professor. He taught at Pembroke, too. Can't remember his name but he was responsible for organizing a group then called the Elizabethans. I don't know whether you have it still or not. [00:28:00]

S: Not that I know of.

KVNF: It was a funny kind of organization but lots of good laughs. He thought that it would be stimulating to the women to have a mock English court session, or Parliamentary session, at which time you did ad hoc debating on subjects chosen for the evening. And so he did this around—he called it the “Elizabethans” and you had to be invited in by the members to belong to Elizabethans based partially on your ability to speak, I think, and your ability to respond to the subjects that they were talking about. Mostly, they were very, very facetious subjects that were built around humor, in a humorous way, on serious subjects with a humorous development.

S: You participated [00:29:00] in those debates?

KVNF: Yes. I belonged to Elizabethans for at least a couple of years.

S: Were you conscious of the activities that the men at Brown had?

KVNF: I knew about sock and buskin but it wasn't my thing. And I knew about the sports program and would go to the games. I was not too intrigued with anything that they were doing in particular other than—I thought that the fraternities were really ridiculous.

S: Did you go to any fraternity functions?

KVNF: Yes. And the man that I married was a Beta. And we did—he had his functions. But I went to some of the others. But I still think that that's a rather boorish, childish kind of organization. And I was very proud of Pembroke for not having sororities.

S: I would agree. I'm wondering why you feel that fraternities are ridiculous.

KVNF: Well, because they [00:30:00] had an unnatural allegiance built into them. And, of course, the hazing has pretty well died down, I guess. But that brotherhood and selectivity and isolationism, in a way, on campus was—it served well up to a point because it made a home base, in a way, for a group. They lived in the fraternities in those days. They don't anymore, I guess.

S: Some still do.

KVNF: Oh. So, but, it provided a cozier way to live, in a sense. But it got to be, in my mind, a ridiculously artificial way of bonding with people.

S: Did you walk through the fraternity area much? Did you walk around Brown campus much?

KVNF: Oh, yes. We walked from Pembroke to Brown and back and forth all the time. And I don't know how much the campus has changed, but it wasn't so large. So that we were always around. And Faunce Hall? [00:31:00]—is it still there?

S: Yeah. So, was there a lot of socializing between men and women on the green?

KVNF: I think so. I think that they would have coffee together in the cafeteria and walk two by two. Didn't seem to me to be at all prohibitive that there was a social mixture there. Or, it didn't seem intimidating in any way.

S: But as far as restrictions on you as a woman living on Pembroke, those were fairly strict, weren't they?

KVNF: Well, they had dormitory rules that were—some of the time, I lived off campus, but most—I knew about the rules and experienced the rules living on campus. But they were typical

of college rules in those days. The doors had to be locked. Of course, there were no visiting rights for the men. And you had to be in at a certain time.

S: When you lived off campus, was [00:32:00] that under Brown's supervision?

KVNF: No. I lived with a family of this friend for a while because she was an only child and they wanted a companion with her. And I stayed with them for a while. But, no. It wasn't like an apartment off campus although there were a couple of girls that did that at that time. One woman I knew quite well had an apartment off campus. I don't think it was typical, though.

S: Not like today.

KVNF: No.

S: When you were there, even though you weren't considering a career so much, was there any sense that the faculty at Pembroke was directing you toward some sort of—or directing the students at Pembroke toward some sort of appropriate careers for women? Or jobs, employment for women?

KVNF: Not very obviously so. I think there was no disdain on the part of the administration [00:33:00] or the faculty toward women who wanted to work. It was more, I think, a laissez-faire situation where they weren't encouraged to work if they wanted to get married. They did not feel that they had to have a direction. In case they were to be married, that was a direction. I think the difference between then and now is that no woman leaving college today leaves with the intention of not working. And in those days, most of them left with the intention of not working.

S: Were those who were interested in working discouraged from going on?

KVNF: No, I don't think so. I think that anyone who showed any interest in graduate school or in working would have been respected and encouraged. But it just was a social situation that was typical of women's lives. You grew up, you [00:34:00] went to school as long as you wanted

to—and don't forget. I was the generation where most women were just boarding school, finishing school. College was not the typical thing for my generation, but it was coming along to that. However, many families expected their daughters to go to finishing school and that was it. And that was quite a different experience. That's why I feel that Brown made such a difference in my life because it wasn't a finishing school.

S: Yeah. And then—so, you graduated from Brown. Did your family come up for graduation?

KVNF: Those that could, did. Yes. I had such a large family, they didn't all come, but some did and I was extremely sad to graduate. It was always that whatever I had been doing was the best thing that I'd ever done up to that point. This was the best thing I'd ever done up to that point and I sobbed and sobbed on the day we marched down the hill. And I felt [00:35:00] as though I was leaving a huge piece of my life behind, and I was, in a way. But that was only a building block to the next thing. Now, I know that. At the time, it just felt as though I would be—well, for one thing, I was leaving the area and I knew that it would be more difficult to see people because distances then were greater than distances now.

S: So, when you left, did you have specific plans?

KVNF: Yes.

S: Were you planning on going to that school?

KVNF: Yes. And I went home for the summers, so I was back in North Carolina. And then went to school in September in Mendham, New Jersey which was not so far away from New York City that I could not see [Norman Newbert?], the man that I was engaged to. And that was one of the reasons for staying there. But it was a very nice life and I enjoyed that.

S: Was it difficult being a college grad and going back to home in North Carolina? Were you treated differently by your neighbors [00:36:00] or—

KVNF: No. I think that there's a difference—in those days, there was a difference in being a southern girl and going to the north and coming back. They listened for the different sounds in your dialect, or your inflection. And they also considered that you had had another world to live in that was totally different.

And as far as the educational thing, there were plenty of people going to college. Not all of them, though.

S: Plenty of women going to college?

KVNF: Yes, but not all of them. I don't know what the percentages in my class—my best friend did not go to college. And it was not considered wrong. It was perfectly all right for her not to go to college. And then she was married. But most of the men that I knew well went on to college.

S: And so then you went back up to Mendham, [00:37:00] New Jersey and started working and school. How was that?

KVNF: It was very strange because I was not trained to be a teacher and I was teaching in a convent school that was for children who had to be cared for. It wasn't a shelter exactly, but it was like a shelter. And so these children—there were only 40 in the school. And there were two teachers, one for the lower school and one for the upper school. So, I had to work very hard to get the lessons prepared for the next day because I really didn't know what I was teaching half the time. But the children learned because not only did we help them, and they had their books, and the nuns helped them. It was a better experience than they would have had at home. But it was not an accredited school in terms of going on after that. But that was why I could teach. I had no education. [00:38:00]

S: Did Pembroke help prepare you for that, do you think?

KVNF: Well, I think just general liberal arts education made it possible for me to read and interpret and teach, up to a point. But I did not have specific training in bookkeeping or any of the subjects, some of the subjects that I was called upon to teach. I could do some better than

others. But, again, it was a limited curriculum not expected to be evaluated by the educational system, so to speak. So, whatever they learned out of this treatment of teacher/student relationship—I might have two children in the sixth grade and four children in the eighth grade. And that was about as far as it went.

S: Did you feel like that encouraged you to want to continue to work?

KVNF: Not particularly. It certainly didn't encourage me to want to teach. [00:39:00] I had never wanted to teach, particularly. I didn't want to go on and get courses and plan for teaching as a career. I was really waiting to be married, I have to say.

S: Is that why you took that job?

KVNF: Yes. It provided me with an opportunity to work because it was very busy, but I was working for very little money in a nice setting and getting a lot of outdoor life with it because it was up on a hilltop in the country. And then able to go into New York and Norman'd come out there. And so it was a waiting game then.

S: Did you think much about Pembroke while you were there? Did you miss Pembroke?

KVNF: It's the strangest thing. As much as I cried when I left, it has been true for most of my life that I turned the corner and the next thing seems almost better. And so it wasn't that it was actually better, but it was so different and there was so much more to think about in terms of getting ready to get married and getting [00:40:00] on with the next stages of life that it was never a look back situation. That's why I'm not really connected with Brown at the present. I have never gone back and dwelt on the past and I just don't seem to operate that way.

S: So, you worked there for a year.

KVNF: Two years.

S: Two years.

KVNF: And was married in the summer after the second year. And then is when we moved into Brooklyn.

S: Were you relieved to not have to work at the school anymore?

KVNF: No. As I had said, I found it very dull to be married and not working. And so I didn't know what to do about it because I didn't have enough understanding that I could go out and even be a salesperson. I had no specific training and I wasn't able to teach in a city school. So, it didn't occur to me [00:41:00] to get some kind of other merchandising job or something that I might've been able to get. I just stayed on with the plan of being married and then doing volunteer work. And that was the beginning. And going to school, back to school.

S: Were you aware that the frustration you were feeling not doing anything was because you wanted to use your mind?

KVNF: Yes.

S: Did you talk about that much with your husband?

KVNF: Well, he was very inclined to let me do anything that made it better for me. And so I had no problem with him. But I didn't know enough to discuss it in analytical terms such as you would today about the difference between men and women in their outlook and their whole development pattern. I just thought that I personally had to find a way to enjoy my days. And enjoying it meant reading and it meant going back to school and being challenged by new subject matter, but never so much in depth [00:42:00] that I wanted to go into graduate school. It never occurred to me to do that.

But I did want to keep in touch with the thinking world and the world of activity. And I did it in very simple ways. It wasn't planned and neither was it very remarkable. It was just simple.

S: Did you discuss those feelings with other women around you?

KVNF: I met--I had no friends from college in the city, so I had only a new friend that I met very soon after being married. And she has remained my oldest friend and best friend in this area. And we had many, many good visits. Yes.

Women talked to each other about their lives and about what they were doing, but not so much in terms of earning or achieving.

S: Did you speak much with this friend about your education? Did you speak about, for example, politics or other intellectual subjects?

KVNF: Well, we read, for instance [00:43:00]—I was the one that—she had been to Sarah Lawrence for two years and married after two years. So she was younger than I was, but she was stimulated as of that point in her college experience.

And I remember very well that I encouraged her that she had to read Spinoza and I would read Spinoza and then we would share. Now, that was a very simple outreach to having something in common intellectually with another person, which was definitely a carryover from classroom and school and so forth. And we read very good things.

S: What else did you read?

KVNF: Aldous Huxley and debated with the nuns at the school about what his view on religion would be. These were all unplanned, undesigned ways of using your thought process. [00:44:00]

S: Did you join any clubs?

KVNF: Not right away. I was married and had my first child. And during the period of bringing him through the first year, I read all of Thomas Wolfe's books while nursing and giving the bottle and whatever. And so there was never a period in which I wasn't reading. And I found that that was my greatest outlet during the earliest time with the first child.

But very soon after that, I found people again. And people invited me to do different things. And I was involved in the neighborhood fundraising for the United Hospital Fund and so that was a helping kind of thing that was part and parcel of this BCA/PCA development.

But out of that grew a wonderful experience that has really been [00:45:00]—next to college, I would say, almost the most influential part of my life. And that was being invited to belong to the Junior League, which is basically a training organization for volunteering. And that was like a graduate school experience.

S: How did that invitation come about?

KVNF: Through friends that I met observing that I was interested, and observing that I had a level of education, and observing that I would be willing to put myself out to belong. Because it was a voluntary thing. You had to be willing to commit yourself to hours of working and hours of training. And they saw that. And when they recognized that, they said, “Would you mind if we proposed you for this?” And they accepted me and I went into that organization at a very early time in my married life. And then became, of course, fulltime volunteer, almost, with it. And did all the things that would be done in it.

S: Like what?

KVNF: Well, you had to [00:46:00] learn committee work. First you learn about your community then you learn your committee work. Then you have to take leadership in terms of chairing a committee and making it work to do research and projects in the community that needed—needs that needed to be filled. And these were all rather studious academic pursuits.

And then as we had the second child and came to live in Westchester County, I transferred which is another aspect of that, a very good opportunity they provide. And when I transferred into the Junior League in this area, it was connected with the city but it was autonomous up to a point up here. Then it was a question of helping the Junior League grow and you had to do certain things in educational programming, [00:47:00] in management of finances, and in the community approach which was studying the community all the time to see where you might fill a need. And then in organizing people to fill the need.

So, all of that was a training process which led to being president of that and taking a leadership role.

S: When was that? What year?

KVNF: That was in the early, mid-'40s. And then from that point, [springboard?], being invited to be on the national board of the Junior League which included, at that time, something like 120 Junior League organizations. And my role was to be on the board of directors in charge of the New York State region and Canada.

And then being elected vice president of the Association which was governing all of these [00:48:00] autonomous Junior Leagues but keeping them together under policies and financial planning. And so it was like running a small corporation.

S: How do you feel you were able to handle the leadership?

KVNF: Well, it was never a problem to me because I had no—I wasn't timid in terms of speaking and interpreting and asking people to do things. Therefore, I think, those were the strengths that were growing in me from early childhood on through college into this opportunity. And this, in a sense, Suzanne, was like a career.

But, you see, it was the best thing that I could do. I had no other outlet. And no one expected me to have an outlet because I had all the children being born. And so it was the closest thing to work that I could provide myself [00:49:00] and everybody in the family understood that I needed that outlet. And I, most of all, knew that I needed it and wanted it. If I were born in today's world and doing what all the young people do, there is no question in my mind. I would have gone to work. Because it's the same instinct and the same satisfaction.

S: Sure. I can see that. Were you working basically fulltime while you were raising your family?

KVNF: It wasn't fulltime in terms of daily. It was that I did as much for that organization as I could possibly do. So that was fulltime commitment. And it meant one or two days a week, being out of the home. Paying a babysitter to take care of the children so that I could go do something

for nothing. But that never bothered me, you see, and it didn't bother my family, either. So I made an investment in work instead of work investing in me. But what it turned out to be was an investment in my future. [00:50:00]

S: Sure. Did you feel any kind of sense that you should have been being paid for what you were doing?

KVNF: Never. I understood the concept of volunteering if you were privileged enough to be able to be able to do it. And by that, I mean, if you did not have to work in order to survive on the level of subsistence, etc. And my husband was earning and able to provide. And my family were not living—my parents—and so I looked to his mother and father more at that stage. But everyone understood this as a way of life for a woman with an education.

S: And people encouraged you in the leadership role you were taking on?

KVNF: Yes. And they wanted me to have the flexibility of that kind of pattern so that I was at home with the children.

S: Did your husband get involved at all in your work?

KVNF: Very much so in the community. Not in the Junior League, but in the community. In the library and [00:51:00] the church and—he was a great activist, too. So, we had no conflict there whatever.

But he became ill in his thirties, as I mentioned. And he worked as a volunteer and in his own career right through until the end. But it was a very difficult time for him.

S: Would he ever come to hear you speak?

KVNF: I'm sure he must have, but it was not so much a time where he was involved as it was for women. It was a women's organization and mostly in the daytime. And what he did was often

evenings. Well, we did things together in the public school system, too. Yes. He would have. In Parent-Teachers.

S: Did you feel confident in the work you were doing? Did you ever have self-doubt about what you were doing?

KVNF: I never have [00:52:00] suffered from that. It was amazing. I felt capable of doing that volunteer work. I did not suffer any frustration about what I wasn't doing. In other words, I didn't think that I should be a scientist or mathematician because they weren't my strengths. But wherever I was a volunteer, I felt confident. And I went on from the Junior League volunteering to do community work which [is why I trained you for that?], to being on boards of different agencies in the county. And I had no difficulty with that at all. It was obvious on the boards that I served on that I had had that training.

S: What other boards did you serve on? When did you make this shift out of the Junior League?

KVNF: Well, at age 40, they ask you to become less active in the Junior League and more active in the community so that you use your skills that you've developed. [00:53:00] And so it was around that turning point. And I became active in the Westchester Council of Social Agencies which was a major organization. And the United Way. And the adoption service.

S: And in those organizations—

(break in audio)

KVNF: —work that I did then was part of my experience that led to working in an actual career. But I did not realize it. I just was doing, doing, all the time. But after my husband died, you see, I had five children. And he left us with a home in Chappaqua which was perfectly wonderful. And, luckily, we didn't have to move and the children didn't have to leave school and all of that. [00:54:00]

But I recognized after finishing that Junior League work on the national level that I needed to go to work because, first of all, for my sanity. And secondly, because I would have to have more money in order to finish the job that we had started. So, I began to look for something else.

And started in, as my first real job, as Assistant to the Dean of Admissions at Sarah Lawrence. And that was an opportunity to use the skills of interviewing and talking with people and being able to write and being able to organize materials for the admissions faculty, admissions group. And I worked there for two years before marrying Phillip.

S: How did you come to that job? What made you decide to work with Sarah Lawrence College at all? Or with the Dean [00:55:00] of Admissions?

KVNF: It was very interesting because I knew that I had to do something that a generalist could do, not a specialist. And I also knew that I needed to stay in Westchester County. And I had been in touch with the admissions office at Pembroke. Someone heard, through a friend that I had, that I was widowed. They wrote to say, "Would you be interested in coming to work at Pembroke in the Admissions?" And I would not move my family. So I thanked them very much and put that out of my mind. And later, when I was ready to go to work, it occurred to me that I might be able to do that in a college in Westchester, and it worked that I was able to.

But I stopped working when Phillip and I were married because he did not have any children. Was a bachelor. And I wanted to make sure that he was comfortable with our family, and he was, and [00:56:00] he was wonderful. So we've been married much longer than I was the first time.

S: So, you left Sarah Lawrence right when you got married?

KVNF: Yes. I left it to get married.

S: And didn't have any reservations about leaving this new paying career?

KVNF: I thought it was a bit of a cutoff. I wasn't sure when I would go back to work, but I knew I would go back to work because I had enjoyed that very much. And I had another whole experience and I knew that it was something out there that I wanted.

S: Did you enjoy the feeling of getting paid? How was that to you?

KVNF: Yes. Well, they paid so little that it hardly covered the tax, but anyway, it was a nice idea. Nice feeling. And I knew that I would like to earn more than that when I went back.

But I can't remember how many years it was before I started in again. However, I had to go back in the educational field because [00:57:00] that was the only opportunity I had. And I went to work for Pace University as Assistant to a Vice President in Development.

And that opened up another whole avenue because they worked with corporations and they did serious development work. And successfully. So, I worked in New York with them and during that time, which wasn't a very long period, like, a year and a half, I was asked to be interviewed at the Whitney Museum of American Art as the Director of Development. And they had not had a resident director because they had had a fundraising council (inaudible) to help them raise the money for the new building at 75th Street. And that was coming to a close. And so that firm recommended that they hire a resident development [00:58:00] officer, and that's why I was able to go there.

S: Two questions. One, what motivated you to go back to work in the first place. And secondly, how did you feel about taking on this responsibility, basically, where you were the person responsible for The Whitney's development?

KVNF: Well, I wanted to go back to work because I knew that I liked the discipline of getting up in the morning, working all day. And I liked earning. There was no question about the fact that I liked earning. And then I wanted to become seriously involved in one channel rather than a volunteer in many channels. So that motivated me to go back to work. No question. I never intended to stay out of the workforce after having been in, but I just took this time in between.

When I did get back involved as Assistant to the Vice President of Development, [00:59:00] I felt a little inadequate because it was a new field for me. But it was a learning

process because you could quickly understand what was involved and it was, again, a matter of using those skills I had had in organizing and interpreting. And it was not difficult to apply those skills to the job at Pace.

When I went into The Whitney, I had to do a lot of thinking on the job to look more as though I were experienced than I was, perhaps; and to develop the whole process of fundraising that I was responsible for. However, I had an advantage because the firm that had moved out had left a lot of things in the middle, so to speak. And we followed up—my secretary and I, or my [01:00:00] assistant and I—followed up on that. And we had the advantage of some of the board helping, too.

So we finished raising the money for the building, but the then president of the museum trustees decided that they no longer needed a development office. They needed only a glorified executive secretary for the Friends organization. So, I left there. And then I was a little bit frustrated because I could not get started right away.

But out of necessity, or out of frustration, you often are moved in the right direction and I think that The Whitney did me the greatest favor in the world because if I had not been terminated there, I wouldn't have looked for something more. And when I did look, I realized that PepsiCo was coming in to purchase. And there, I could offer them something that I felt they should have and could use. [01:01:00] And they bought it. And I've been working for them for sixteen years.

S: What did you offer them?

KVNF: I told them that they had need of a friend in the community that would be able to, in many ways, guide them in the right direction toward helping so that they would establish themselves as the good neighbors that they needed to be. Because they were not exactly popular in Harrison when they built their corporate headquarters there. And this, they understood. And they needed to have the right person be the liaison with the community. And that—the kind of person they needed was someone who was already known in the community and trusted in ways that I felt I was. And I explained it to them. And I do think it worked.

S: Did you have any reservations about going in approaching them, asking—or telling them that they needed [01:02:00] to create a position for you? Was that purely your own motivation to do that?

KVNF: Yes. I think it was, again, as I said, born out of the necessity to keep going once I'd started, and I was determined. It was a determination on my part that made me bold enough to do it. I did know one person that I could go talk with, and I wasn't afraid of him, or, I wasn't afraid of the situation.

- End of Track 1 -

Track 2

KVNF: —the point, so to speak, so that they will accept you or allow you to do what you want to do is not born out of timidity. You have to be assertive in order to make that point.

S: Was your consciousness of yourself as a woman involved in any of this?

KVNF: Well, I was much older by then. I was not a young woman starting out, but I was starting in a field that was new for me. And each time, as I told you, when I left one thing and went to the next, it was really exciting to me to enter a new experience. And so I was ready for PepsiCo whether they were ready for me or not. And I think that as of now, they might agree that it was a good thing because there's no question about the role that PepsiCo's had in the community.

S: What's your official title there now? [00:01:00]

KVNF: Well, out of the early experience of kind of weaving this fabric with the community where I represent them in local organizations if necessary and I got them to pay attention to certain things in the community. There were other people working at that level as well, naturally, but I was really the local person.

We realized as soon as the building opened in 1970 that one of the things that the community responded to the greatest was the art on the grounds. And the garden became a public

property immediately because Donald M. Kendall, the chairman and chief executive officer, said, “This will be open to the public from now on.” And for fifteen years, it has been.

As soon as it was open to the public, the community around it became the visitors. And I was elected—or, [00:02:00] it was of necessity that I had to relate to the community about the art. So, I became the person who communicated with the public about the art and then began to develop mild educational tools for it. And, in turn, became what is now my title, the Director of the Art Program at PepsiCo.

S: Just out of curiosity, did you have anything to do with the construction of the park course, the running course that goes through PepsiCo?

KVNF: No. That’s totally within the definition of physical fitness and it falls under that. No, the gardens and the art are the combination that I have worked on. But the gardening has all been—all of it has been under the chairman, Don Kendall. He’s made it all happen. He makes the selections of the sculpture. He has—unfortunately, [00:03:00] the wonderful garden planter that he had bought to plant the trees and all of the beautiful things has died. But most of it has been accomplished.

S: And so you were working with him?

KVNF: I worked with Mr. Kendall in all of the planning that goes on with the sculpture in the garden.

S: That’s a good amount of responsibility.

KVNF: Yes. I implement his decisions. I do research when he needs it. I find things that he wants. And I work with the actual installation process. I don’t do it personally, but I work with it. And I am the registrar for the art. I keep the records on all the fine art. And we have some fine art in the building.

Now, I’m also the coordinator for the other aspect of our arts program which is sponsorship [00:04:00] of the PepsiCo Summerfare. And so that’s my role.

S: Did you help create that?

KVNF: I was part of the inception of it when Mr. Kendall agreed to do it, and we wrote the agreements along the lines that our grant would finance it and make it possible for a festival to grow at the college and be produced at the college, with artistic direction from an outside source, a person.

S: That's a fine program. It's been a great reputation in Westchester.

KVNF: Yes. And it's growing all the time. It's going to be even better, we hope.

S: Were this experience at PepsiCo and at working with the Whitney your first experiences working with both men and women? Because in the Junior League, were you working primarily with women?

KVNF: Well, the women in the Junior League, as I said, were prepared [00:05:00] to work on boards outside, and there were more men than women on the outside boards. So it wasn't the first experience, no. As a matter of fact, I had been on a board in northern Westchester which was then the Westchester Cerebral Palsy Association, and I was the only woman on a board of men. So, no, I had no, really, limitations on how much association I had with men in a leadership (inaudible).

S: How do you feel you've been treated in those relations?

KVNF: I felt very able to hold my own with men in any volunteer organization that I was ever in. And I base that purely on the educational level and the development of assertiveness through taking leadership [00:06:00] and showing initiative. It was not any training for that, but it just came. It grew out of exchange of ideas and decision making. And I haven't had any difficulty with that so that I never felt, in any way, that I was at a disadvantage. But I'm not sure how the men felt about me. I just felt perfectly comfortable in my own.

When I reached the workforce, I think there are certain very subtle things that you encounter which any woman will encounter and not really deterrence to progress, necessarily, but just a new experience all over again of adjusting to what you find a situation to be.

S: Did you encounter discrimination? Do you feel like you've sensed that in the progress of your work?

KVNF: No. I feel that I [00:07:00] have had, for my age, and my stage of entering the workforce, an unusual amount of good treatment. I do not feel that I was regarded, in the beginning, as being a person to necessarily achieve status in the organization or in management. I was not a candidate, or did not have a degree in business management, and didn't want one. I was not trying to take anyone else's job away from him or her. And I had no aspirations beyond doing what I liked doing and working in the field that I had entered at PepsiCo which was the community relationship. And that is a limited field. You don't get [00:08:00] to be the chairman of the company out of that field.

So, I did not go in with expectations that young women have today when they enter, having come through an MBA, and they expect to go through finance up to something or other. I'm not sure what the pattern is, but if they have those thoughts in the beginning, it's basically because they've been trained to think that way.

S: I'm curious, in the direction that we're going, of your perceptions of feminism today. Would you consider yourself a feminist?

KVNF: Absolutely. And I have total awareness of the women's situation, and also understanding that there will never be a time again when women will not work. And there will never be a time when women should not be self-supporting. Because when you've gone through the trauma of being a dependent wife and then finding that your husband has died, [00:09:00] you know that that is a ridiculous position to hold.

So, therefore, if I were starting today, I would definitely expect to work and work through. I'm not sure I would ever have as many children. I know that I wouldn't. And I wouldn't advise anyone to have that many. And I don't believe that there is an absolute necessity

to have any children if you're working depending on the strengths of the woman and the compatibility in the marriage and the need for fulfillment.

Because I think the greatest thing about the Women's Movement is that it has opened up the options that women have which were not there when I was young. And I don't say that women are happier, necessarily, but they will never go back to being undereducated. And that has come out of higher [00:10:00] education for women since 1900. Someone once said, "When you have learned to read, you can never unlearn reading." And, therefore, when women have been educated on a higher level, they will never go back to being finishing school girls again. And why should they? Because the excitement of the mind is just as much their prerogative as it is for the man.

S: I agree with you absolutely.

KVNF: And it will work for you. At the same time, there is a tremendous need for further development and further understanding of your role in terms of the traditional historical role versus the present and future. And you have to grapple with that. No one is ever problem-free. And your generation will not be free of making those choices [00:11:00] and those decisions. But what is, I think, a little bit weighty is that many of the young women that I observe seem to think that they must follow, somewhat, the pattern of the parent generation carried over to the present. And unless parents are making you think that, you shouldn't have to think that way. You can do it your way.

S: It's hard when there are no models to follow.

KVNF: It is. Very hard because you see—I know perfectly well in my children that there are things, sentimentally, about their home life that they would like to have in their present life. They'll never have it.

S: When did you start thinking in terms of feminism, or women's opportunities?

KVNF: I think that the earliest experience [00:12:00]—I didn't think in terms of women so much as opportunity when I found a way to keep growing in my volunteer assignments. I realized that that was a place that a woman could make decisions, make choices, influence situations. And it's amazing.

Changing from that role to the paid work role, there was a difference because when you're a volunteer, you have a prestige and a status in the community, especially if you've come from this level, which people pay attention to. When you start in at a lower level and are paid to do a job, they do not necessarily give you the prestige or the status. That is a thing that you have to accommodate, but it doesn't mean that it takes anything away from the individual going into that work role. You just have [00:13:00] to be willing to adjust. You cannot expect to be the top decision maker in the first job that you have whereas you may have ended up being president of this organization over here actually making the decisions. So, you have a lot of adjustments to make.

I realized that women could do it over in the leadership role, that they could do it just as well as men, and even better. But when you get over here, it depends on your opportunity. You cannot go into a job that is defined in one way and act as though you're the president or the chairman. You have to conform to the structure and the organizational pattern in which you're working.

And I did not arrive at a sympathetic understanding of the women's needs at any given moment, but I recognize that if they're going to be in the workforce, they have to have [00:14:00] certain protections. In other words, all the civil rights actions that have protected women or protected any minorities are directed toward opening doors so that they can express what they have inherently in them to express. And women have it.

And women will become much more of an influence in the world. There definitely is no question in my mind. But what it's going to do to this side is the question.

S: Yeah. Do you feel there's any specific thing that women could bring to the world that men haven't brought?

KVNF: I think they have basic instincts for right and wrong unless they've been thwarted or warped in some way through family patterns which can happen. I understand that. But basically,

women have a kind of sympathetic understanding of other people's needs [00:15:00]. It's maybe a maternal instinct. I'm not sure what it is.

But they also have very fine analytical powers, I think. And they have, usually, verbal skills. And they are basically willing, I believe—they're willing to put up with a little bit more at times. And they should have somewhat more patience, but they have not grown to the capacity that—I mean, capability level that is ahead. But I'm not sure it should come all of a sudden either. I think it's an educational process that's going on from woman to woman, parent to child, and it's tied into schooling. But you don't have to be like a man, all [00:16:00] you know, forceful and—because you've had generations of expectation that that's the way you'll behave. You can be strong and decisive and be like a woman.

S: I appreciate what you're saying. I think we've covered a lot of ground. Is there any other direction that you'd like to go in? Any other experiences that you've had that you'd like to talk about?

KVNF: I think that I would just say that as the mother of adult children, young people, that I think the most important thing that I had to continue and complete was that role as parent. Because once having committed to that, there is no turning away. And I did not know that I would be left a widow. [00:17:00] But I knew, when I was, that I had to complete their education for them just as mine was—I was fortunate enough. And, therefore, my whole inclination was to work toward that goal.

And so, when I went to work, it was as much for them as for me. But I realized all the benefits. They were educated. They had completed their education, and I did it because my understanding with my present husband was that that was the part I would do. And after completing it, it amounted to an accumulated 39 years of boarding school, college, and graduate school. And so that, to me, is the real achievement. Not that their education is making them financially successful or powerful, but it has developed a life of the mind for them in the way that I felt I was fortunate.

And that was all I ever [00:18:00] expected. I don't have a code of success in my head for them. I just want them to grow, to develop. And I don't want them to undertake any responsibilities that they aren't willing to finish, if possible.

S: Did you encourage any sense of feminism in your children?

KVNF: No, it wasn't necessary. The three daughters that I have are all quite different. Kathy is a child who grew up with an eye problem in the beginning and was somewhat slower growing than the others. And went through five years of boarding school and not college. Is married and lives happily here in Westchester with her husband, without children, and working fulltime. She knew that she needed to work fulltime. Her husband needs to—they cannot survive unless they both work. But they're willing and happy to do that so there's not a question of inspiring [00:19:00] her to become anything. It's a question of survival and their willingness to face life together.

The other two daughters have, on their own, known that they have to survive. And one has a Master's in social work. Another is an assistant vice president in a bank. One is married without children yet, and the other is married and divorced with two little boys and has to survive. And they have no strong pronouncements about feminism, but they live it, just the way you will, and just the way I do.

Because there is only one way to live and that is that women deserve the respect and the acknowledgement that they're capable, as men are. And that they must survive the way men do. And today, it's not a dependent society for women.

S: Yeah. [00:20:00] Well, I'd like to thank you very much. If you have no further comments, I'll just stop here.

- END -