

Transcript – Delta Sigma Theta Sorority  
Teresa Cheeks, Renee Hill, Lori Hollins, class of 1979

Narrator: Teresa Cheeks, Renee Hill, Lori Hollins  
Interviewer: Mary Murphy  
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Location: Brown University Pembroke Seminar Room, Rhode Island  
Length: 1 audio file; 50:54

Track 1

Mary Murphy: [00:00] OK, here we go. Hi. My name is Mary Murphy. I'm the Nancy L. Buc Pembroke Center Archivist at Brown University. It's September 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 2:11 p.m., in Pembroke Hall. We are on the second floor, in the Pembroke seminar room. I am joined today by three members of the Brown University alumnae community and one current member of the Brown University community, who will now introduce themselves and will begin in conversation. Thank you for joining me. I'll begin with you.

Teresa Cheeks: My name is Teresa Cheeks.

MM: And please do speak up because of the recording level.

TC: Great. So my name's Teresa Cheeks, and I'm class of 1979.

Renee Hill: I'm Renee Hill, and I'm also the class of 1979.

Lori Hollins: Lori Linell-Hollins, class of 1979.

Melana Krongelb: And my name's Melana Krongelb, class of '19.

MM: Thank you. So, Renee, I believe it was you who [01:00] responded to the call to come on in for an interview.

RH: Right.

MM: So why don't we just start this group discussion, and tell us what brought you here, and also as a group: what made you decide to come in as a group?

RH: OK. So first I want to thank my sorors for joining me in this interview. [laughter] I recruited them as we were walking up here and said, "OK, come on, join me." That's a good and that's a great thing for them to do.

I grew up in Detroit, Michigan, and actually I had never heard of Brown before. I went to Cass Technical High School, which is a very large high school – or at that time was a very large high school – in Detroit, with about 5,000 students in it. But, what happened is, is if you're relatively smart you went to University of Michigan, and that's where your counselors tracked you to go. And then it went down: you went to Michigan State, you went to... But you pretty much concentrated in the Michigan schools. And I knew of some other schools, like some HBCU schools, and some other predominant schools, but I did not know of [02:00] the Ivy Leagues. I really had never even heard of an Ivy League school. My parents are both educated: my father's a physician, my mother is an educated person, but we never heard of Brown. I'd never heard of an Ivy League school.

And I was walking through the dance room, and a counselor from another school stopped me and said, "You're a senior this year, right?" And I said, "Right." He said, "What was your SAT score?" I gave him my SAT score. He said, "What was your GPA?" I gave him my GPA. And he said to me, "Where are you going to school?" I said, "University of Michigan." He said, "No, you're not." I said, "What do you mean, no, I'm not?" Said, "I want you to meet me on Saturday morning at such-and-such a time –"

F: (inaudible).

RH: "– in my office at this other high school, and I'm going to show you some pamphlets, and you're going to go somewhere else." And so that's my introduction to Brown. I went; I was shown some pamphlets; I was really intrigued with the Brown's mission; I was really intrigued with the fact that they said I would never have to take another English class in my life. [laughter]

So the open curriculum was like, “Wow, yes, open curriculum. [03:00] I’m really thrilled with that idea.” And I applied to a couple schools that I had not thought about applying to before, which was Brown and Wellesley.

And I actually came up here in ’74 during the takeover. So they had the pre-frosh weekend during the takeover. My mother was very hesitant about allowing me to come. But we had a friend of ours who was also from Detroit whose daughter was I believe a senior at that time. And she said, “Lesley’s going to take care of you; I’m going to let you come.” My mother, of course, stayed in a hotel down the street, you know, [laughter] at a Holiday Inn at that time, because we didn’t have all these other hotels then. And she allowed me to stay on campus. And so we all kind of, like, looked at each other and said, “OK, no, we won’t go down there to (inaudible) [like that?] with [laughter] everybody else during the takeover of the administration building.” So I liked the soc–

MM: That was in the fall? Was that in the fall the takeover? I think it –

RH: I mean, I really can’t remember.

MM: OK. Another –

RH: I’m thinking it’s spring, because I was already admitted.

MM: OK.

RH: Right. So it was – I guess [04:00] that would be spring of ’75. Yeah, spring of ’75.

MM: We had a couple other folks talk about that, the takeover –

RH: Right.

MM: – so I’m trying to situate it exactly (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RH: Yeah, I think it was spring of '75, because I was already admitted, and so we were admitted students coming to spend the night with people, and –

MM: Just one second. Thank you. Continue.

RH: OK. And that to me was, I think – the community here was really important. The fact that people had social conscience were really important to me. And that's really what attracted me to Brown, and I was sold after that, so that's why I came to Brown.

MM: Wonderful, thank you.

LH: So my experience was different. I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, went to a pretty much all Black high school, because schools were segregated even then. I don't think the schools became desegregated in Ohio till, like, the late '70s. At the time a lot of Ivy League schools and schools in the Northeast were recruiting. Our high school had advanced placement classes and was known as [05:00], you know, lot of smart Black kids, so a lot of the schools had come to recruit. So Brown had come, Harvard, Yale – matter of fact, all of the top 10 students in my high school went to Columbia, Cornell, Harvard... We all went to – Williams. So all these schools had come to recruit students to go to these schools. So Brown – we actually had a student who had graduated the year before who came back to recruit.

I was interested in engineering. So – for some kind of funny reason. Well, I wanted to make [shockified?] shoes. That's all another story. [laughter] So also there was a push at that time to get women to go into engineering and STEM as well, especially Black students. So the thing I liked about Brown, though, was it didn't have a sep– I didn't want to go to a separate engineering school. I wanted to go to a school that had liberal arts and things like that. So that was, like, attractive to me in the sense that [6:00] if I changed majors or I wanted to be exposed to everything else – although I ended up getting an SEB and pretty much taking, you know, 90% [laughter] of my classes in engineering. But that was attractive to me.

I never visited Brown before I came, so I had not set foot on – a matter of fact, I didn't visit any college campuses. I mean, we were kind of, like, middle class, but we didn't have money for me to go visit colleges. Actually, my mom wanted me to go to an HBCU. My mom

hadn't gone to college. My dad had. But she wanted me to go to an HBCU, and I guess – I'm going to say (inaudible), but I was like, "You know, I already had the Black experience." But the interesting thing was when I did come to Brown, all the Black students sat together in – I was probably maybe the only Black woman in engineering at the time. You know. I ended up majoring in – I found out I hated engineering, but I ended up majoring in biomedical engineering and went to medical school. But [07:00] I was probably – I think there were two of us. Well, there were probably – it was another guy in engineering, and we were really close, and he actually did end up going to medical school too. So, I – Like, my experience was really different. And like I said, I had never visited. I actually ended up working for the admissions office to try to recruit students to come to Brown. But yeah, that's kind of how I got here. You know, different – like I said, just had been recruited, actively recruited. They were actively recruiting – affirmative action was pretty much active. You know, although we were all qualified, obviously, you know, had great SAT scores and school – and then also our guidance counselors in the high school really encouraged us to go to top schools. And so that's how I got here.

MM: Thank you.

TC: My experience was a little bit different. I grew up in Schenectady, New York. It's a small town in upstate [08:00] New York. The high school I went to is Mount Pleasant High School. Nothing unusual about the high school, except that we were in a GE town – General Electric. And General Electric sponsored a number of programs in the high school, particularly mine. So I was in a technical program, which gave me a little bit more technical informa– you know, different classes that were related to mechanical engineering and civil engineering. And there were these people that would come and say – there was a program, it was called PIMEG, and it was to promote women and men in engineering. And so they would come and bring us to different colleges, and so we got to see different places and different technical companies, they would take us to companies, so we would get an idea of what we were doing. So at first I went to Northeastern because I thought it had – I was really interested in making sure I could get a job when I was done.

RH: That was my (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). [laughter]

TC: And engineering was the way. And so since they were talking [09:00] about, “You will have a job when you are finished,” that was important to me because I didn’t want to have to go back home or – I just needed the money, and it sort of didn’t matter what I did. But I was also good in math and science. So I went to Northeastern because they had a co-op program, so I knew I would at least have some kind of job when I was done. But I had a couple of friends who went to Brown, and they would talk about it. And also there was a basketball coach here that was also somehow related or talked to our parents, and he knew some avenues, and he said, “Oh you know, you guys really should think about Brown. It has a good engineering program. You should really consider coming here.” And so I thought, “Well...” He said, you know, “Northeastern’s great, but Brown would be better for your resume. And it will open up avenues for you in the future that you may or may not have at Northeastern.” So I think I came here a couple times to visit, and thought, “Oh, it’s pretty nice.” And I applied, and I got in. So I was absolutely stunned that that would happen. And [10:00] I just came, and went to the engineering school, and I had a number of dubs and douses to what – because one day, one week I thought, “Oh, I’m going to be...” Because everybody was a medical student, or they were, you know, art students who took some art – good thing about Brown is you could take classes, even if you were an engineer, in art. I could take classes in chemistry, in medical things, but I always ended up back in engineering, and I ended up in material science and engineering because I could see what I was doing, as opposed to electrical and mechanical, you can’t really tell what you’re doing. And I needed something physical. So I became a materials engineer and then went on and got a master’s degree and worked for General Electric for two years. And then went on to Cornell and got a PhD in material science.

RH: So it’s so funny to hear them talk because I came in pre-med also, right? [laughter] I came in thinking, oh, I was going to be a doctor. And I was pre-med up until the second semester of my sophomore year, where I [11:00] pledged a sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, and I decided I would take a break and not take any science courses. And I was like, “Oh my goodness. There are so many other things that you could be taking in life. I really don’t want to be a doctor.” I was just going to be a doctor because I wanted to make money, right? [laughter] And so as a result of that I did not pursue medicine. I took a semester off, and I took all kinds of different courses. I maintained my major in psychology. I did get a bachelor’s of science because I’d taken

all the science classes, so I might as well get the BS, right, rather than the BA. So I took all those science classes. But I just broadened my horizons. And really I think took advantage of the fact that you did have an open curriculum. And I could take Econ 101 as a senior and just see what economics was about. Or, you know, take some different classes. And so I think I enjoyed my Brown experience better after I got out of pre-med, as far as the coursework was concerned, [12:00] than kind of fitting into that pigeonhole of being a doctor.

I did end up being a lawyer. [laughter] So I left Brown and went to Harvard Law School and –

?: [How's that? Harvard?]?

RH: [Not too?] bad. [laughter] And then, you know, practiced law for a number of years, and then I was on law faculty for a number of years. Like 20-something years. And then I retired, and now I'm a realtor. So I've done a variety of things. But it's funny how you come into an institution thinking you're going to do one thing, and you get here, and you know, you change.

?: Yeah, actually, I – I wanted to –

LH: – I had planned to be a civil engineer. I'm not really – had gone to a summer engineering program in Cleveland at Case Western, and initially thought civil engineering, architectural engineering, and took this course in (inaudible) couldn't see things in three dimensions. So I said, "OK, I'll do civil engineering." And [13:00] Brown had a – you know, like a summer internship program. So the summer after my sophomore year I went to Wisconsin, Green Bay. Here they used to always ask me if I was a Packer wife, because there weren't very many Black people in Green Bay. And I was working on doing surveying and slope staking on highways. Steel-toed boots, hard hats. I don't think I like steel-toed boots, hard hats. [laughter] So I was like, OK –

MM: Those weren't the shoes you wanted?

LH: – I can't do – I'm not going to do civil engineering. So – for me. So I came back, and I'm like, "Well, I've taken two years of engineering stuff. I have to graduate in four years. I have loans. You know, I cannot – once again, a job was my main thing. I mean, my mother was like, "You're not coming back home and live at home. You're not on the five-year plan." My family could not help me financially. So I'm like, "OK." So then I said, "Well, I could take biomedical, because I could take some – [14:00] pre-med classes and bioengineering classes were – molecular biology or whatever classes will go for both." And actually the reason I decided to transition to going to medical school was my mom had taken me to her gynecologist when I was 16, and I had a horrible experience with him. He treated me – and this was at the time when Roe v. Wade first was passed. And he just treated –

MM: Just recently passed.

LH: Recently passed. So this was, like, '75, '76.

MM: Right there. Yeah.

LH: And so, you know, just had a horrible experience. And I said, "Well, if I ever become –" And I had no intentions of going into medicine at that time. So I said, "But if I'm ever a doctor, I'm going to be an OB/GYN." And so when I found out I hated engineering [laughter] I said, "Well, OK, I'm going to take some pre-med classes."

Took a year off between Brown and going to medical school and worked for General Electric Aircraft Engine Group in [15:00] Boston and was in a manufacturing – because I'd actually gone on engineering job interviews and realized, "I can't do that. [laughter] I can't do an engineering job. That's not me." So I did that and actually was pretty successful. We made jet engine parts. And so I was actually working in production control and was actually – had older people who'd been there for 40 years working under me. And it was actually pretty successful, but I just couldn't get excited about – you know, we'd be in these production meetings and the engineering manager would be, "Where is part 67809?" and would be getting all upset about it, and I'm like, "OK, I can't do this. I'm going to medical school." So – although now when I think



about it, you know, making those jet engine parts was pretty important. [laughter] But at the time I didn't think that.

And so ended up applying to medical school and going to medical school and knew from – as soon as I said I was going to medical school I was going to be an OB/GYN, so I knew that. And I'm actually a [16:00] subspecialist in OB/GYN. I'm a reproductive endocrinology and fertility specialist. So I actually help people have babies. So it's interesting how –

The one thing I was going to say that I regret, that I didn't do at Brown – so I did take – like, I've always had an artistic side but never thought I could be an artist, because all like, “I gotta eat. I got my shoes, right?” So as far as I knew, artists didn't get famous till after they died. So that wasn't an option for me. So I did sign up for an art class, introductory drawing class, at Brown. And I remember at that time we had to stand in line – to get into the introductory art we had to stay in line for hours, got up at five o'clock in the morning, stood in line, got into class. So I'm taking the class, and so the professor, I don't remember his name, he's like, “Oh, you draw like Giacometti.” I've never forgot that. But after about two weeks of taking the class, I'm like, “He wants me to draw every day. I ain't got time for that shit.” [laughter] I'm an engineering major. I don't have [17:00] time to be drawing every day. Well, what's interesting is a few years ago I decided I am an artist, even though I'm a physician, and I started painting and drawing and writing haiku every day. And I did that for almost two years and posted on Instagram. So, you know, I regret not taking that class. I mean, over the years I've taken art classes; I've done a little bit of comedy. So that part of me is still there. And I've given myself more permission to do it now. But at the time my emphasis was, “I gotta get a job,” you know? “Got to be able to feed myself. Got to be able to take care of my family.” So I didn't really pursue that part. I did take an English class – loved it – at Brown. Loved, loved, loved it. Did really well in it. But I'm like, “I can't do this. I mean, what am I going to do with an English degree?” You know, it's kind of like my emphasis was very practical: this is what I need to do so I can make sure I eat.

MM: So you were all, though – you became sorority sisters?

Collective group: Yes.

MM: So this [18:00] is another strain that connects you together.

?: Yes.

LH: Yes.

MM: So tell me about the impact of that sorority in your lives here on campus – or maybe beyond.

LH: Well, you know, what's amazing is – I'm an introvert. I may not seem like that, but I really am an introvert. So I don't think I had a lot of friends initially when I first came to Brown. And I think – well, actually, I got a scholarship, a Delta scholarship, when I – my guidance counselor was a Delta Sigma Theta sorority. And I got a Delta scholarship in high school for, like, \$500 or something like that. And so I knew if I was going to pledge – I never really thought about pledging a sorority because, once again, that wasn't in my frame of reference. My mom, like I said, hadn't gone to college, so that wasn't really – but when I did think about pledging I was like, "Well, of course I'm going to be Delta, I'm not going to be anything else. I got this scholarship." We actually hung more with the class of '78, [19:00] which is who actually pledged. So I met the women. They had what they call a rush. And we actually really did, have become sisters. And so it was kind of like we pledged together, you know, we remained friends – we lost contact at various time in our lives, but it gave me friends that I really didn't have at the time, and it gave me a support system that I really didn't have. But I used to always get mad at them because, like, her, because she's – senior year they're like, "I don't have to take any more classes," and I'm still going – you know, doing engineering problems [laughter] and taking a full load and taking histology, and they're up there partying, you know. So I would be, like, upset. But yeah, it gave me – it was a sense of support, you know. I mean, like, people talk about how all the Black kids sit together. Well, you know, Brown – we weren't one of the smallest African American communities, but people hung together. [20:00] And you needed that support. We walked down Fraternity Row, and people would yell at you. You know, you'd get called the n-word –

?: Yes.

LH: – walking past Fraternity Row. I didn't feel threatened, but I'm just saying that you needed a sense of community in this White space, honestly. The sorority was a sense of support. You had somebody you could talk to. You could vent. You had some – even though we were all very different – because, like I said, you know –

MM: Yeah, can I – if I can interrupt –

LH: – (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) upper-middle class, I'm kind of like – my mom actually became a news reporter – one of the first Black female news reporters in Cleveland, during the late '60s and '70s. So we were kind of, like, middle class. But I'm just saying, it's a different experience of how we grew up. And, you know, people were from all over, but it was like really – it was a support system.

MM: I'm going to have – if I can hear from each of you.

RH: So I can say that – [21:00] I'm a legacy. My mother was a Delta, so I had to pledge Delta. I mean, you know, my mother had actually chose where I was going to go to law school on whether they had a Delta chapter. “You can go here, you can go here, [laughter] you can go here...” If [they?] don't have a Delta chapter, it was not on her list of places to go. But I think Delta had – in addition to everything that Lori just said, it really did have a very strong impact on me. Because as part of it – we were a service organization, and we had to pick a community service project to do after you went over and you were a sorority – for a year. You had to make a commitment for that year on what you were going to do. Well, I had always been in Girl Scouts, so believe it or not, I was in Girl Scouts all the way up till my junior year of high school, [laughter] which is very unusual for people. People always drop out before seniors, but I didn't. And mine was to be a Girl Scout leader. So my junior year I had a Brownie troop. And the troop was [22:00] located in the Cape Verde – is that – Cape (inaudible) Portuguese?

?: (inaudible).

RH: Yeah, in that – in one of the churches. I went down there, and I had a troop. And then my senior year they determined that they would like me to take over a Cadet senior troop as a – well, here I am, I'm 21 years old, I'm not much older than them. But they really wanted to do this in a low-income area, and they wanted somebody that they could relate to – so they really wanted somebody Black – [laughter] to run this troop. You know, I had had the experience, I was interested – so that's what I did. I took these girls for the first time camping, [laughter] you know? I just, like –

MM: Do you remember where you went?

RH: Pardon me?

MM: Do you remember where you went? Were you in the Rhode Island area?

RH: Some Girl Scout camp. It was, like, a Girl Scout camp here and – yeah, in Rhode Island. I can't remember. Everything I wanted to do was free. So I wanted to go bowling; the Girl Scouts paid for it. [laughter] Because none of these kids had any money, but they wanted them to be exposed to the activities. And the funny thing is, I had a co-leader; she was a White female, [23:00] with a Black Muslim boyfriend. [laughter] So it really did have a big impact on me. One of the things that I did as part of my sorority is I did some tutoring. And one of the kids that I tutored, his life experience was totally different than mine. Like she said, I came up upper-middle class, [probably family?]. And this kid, he couldn't read. You know. And he was, like, in the sixth grade, and I swear he couldn't read better – first-grade level. But the life experience that he had... And that's why I went to law school. I went to law school – so the sorority really kind of directed – because, you know, after you drop med school, what are you going to do, you know? I thought [maybe I'll get my PhD in?] psychology, what am I going to do, I don't know. But I ended up in law school with the idea that I was going to do juvenile justice work and that this was really important to me, that these were things that these kids didn't have, and I could make an impact. And that's how I [24:00] ended up in law school. So...

MM: And for you.

TC: And for me I think it was a combination. One, I came as a transfer student. So when I came as a transfer student you kind of had to – everybody – their friendships were already created.

MM: Where did you start out?

TC: Northeastern?

MM: At North– OK.

TC: Yeah.

MM: Oh, I'm sorry. OK.

TC: And so when I came here it was kind of isolating, in a way. And as I tried to maneuver my way into figuring out what group I might fit into, there was a group of ladies – these ladies right here, actually – who were friendly, and they ate early in the Ratty. And I liked to eat early in the Ratty, because then I didn't have to deal with all these other, these bigger groups of people. And so it actually all started around food. [laughter] And then – as usual.

MM: This is not the first time I've heard (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). Yeah. [laughter]

TC: And, you know, then – I didn't know anything about sororities. My mother does not – you know, she didn't really belong to any clubs; we weren't part of that. She didn't really do any community service. I mean, my father was a mortician. So that's community service in a [25:00] way.

MM: Absolutely.

TC: But we didn't volunteer, because there was no time for that, because they were working. We came home, we did our homework, and you just lived. But when she – Renee – would start

talking to me about, “Oh, Delta Sigma Theta,” I’m like, “What is that?” And she would tell me, “Oh, it’s this...” And then they would all start telling me, you know, and I thought, “Community service is something that I really would like to be interest—” I liked that, as opposed to the other sororities really wasn’t a main point. So I liked that about it. And also, I was friends with these women. And I thought, “Well, I would like to be in a sorority with women like this.”

So I joined, and it was one of the best things I ever did, because as you go forward, whatever city you go into, you can find your Delta chapter. And therefore you have a group of sisters with you. And they always have some community service project. And I think as a group of women we do well when we have a project and something that we’re doing good in society with. And it also broadened my horizons, since I didn’t come from – I remember our first project was [26:00] going to a nursing home. And I was just appalled that I would have to go to a nursing home. But that experience changed my heart, changed the way I looked at things... To this day I am very good with all people. You know, I can go, I sit there and talk to them, I’ve actually volunteered to – I’m a Eucharistic minister at my church, and I – actually, a lot of the friends that I have right now are over 70 because I just relate to older people well. And I think it comes back to that first experience at Brown, with my community service project. So it’s really formed my life in a number of ways. And also I had the best grade point average when I pledged than I did the –

LH: Because you had to have certain GPA.

TC: Right. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RH: And you lived with the Dean of Pledges, which was me. [laughter]

TC: And also, it taught me how to schedule my time. It makes your brain work on a number of levels. So I was engineering, OK; I had this sorority, and, you know – so I had to do a number of things all on my plate all at once. And to this day I can do a number of things [27:00] high-pressure and get it done – well – in all the areas. So I think that had something to do with everything in my life even now.

MM: Something – thank you. Something I’ve been hearing about from other people who’ve come in for interviews is the diminishing of historically Black sororities on campus – and fraternities. And – do you have any thoughts on that? And Melania, you could probably weigh in too, but do you have any thoughts on that you’d like to share as part of this interview?

LH: Well, that’s been a huge concern. Because, like, I have actually – this is only the second time I’ve been back to Brown since I graduated, honestly. But – so we’re finding out that there’s hardly any. And I think – you know, we’re trying – OK, we graduated 40 years [laughter] ago, so we’re trying to understand what’s happened and why is that the case. And the only thing I’m kind of understanding is [28:00] it has to do, I think, with the type of students that are being potentially recruited, and maybe they don’t actually see Greek life as important and understand the history of – for example, Alpha Phi Alpha, which is a Black male fraternity, was started at Cornell, you know? [laughter] So they don’t really understand the history of how this came to be, how the fraternities and sororities came to be. And I think there’s this idea that they’re just a social club, which ours was never that. It was always about community service. And you had fun, but it was always about that. And so I think there’s a different – there’s not an understanding of the history behind it and how important – well, at least, it was very important for me. My kids both went to HBCUs, Morehouse and Spellman, [29:00] and of course there’s a huge legacy – and it’s a big deal to be in a fraternity or a sorority. Matter of fact, my daughter was going to try to pledge at Spellman, and she wasn’t able to, because it’s huge there. But I think it’s probably where we are in time and what people think is important, and then also really not understanding the legacy and the history of where it comes from. I think people think it’s only at HBCUs, and it’s not, it’s not the case. So I think it’s all –

MM: Or maybe like a lumping-in. Like, there’s an idea about fraternities and sororities as a whole, as opposed to, like, unique histories (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

LH: Well, I think it’s different from the White frats [laughter] and sororities – I mean different –

MM: Totally.

LH: – it's totally different. You know, like I said, there's a huge emphasis on ethics and morals and – not saying people don't have fun and party, but the community service and how people banded together because [30:00] there's one or two [laughter] Black people on a campus. And so it's giving back – and even afterwards – I mean, I haven't been as active as I probably should be, but – about going forward and giving back to society. So there's that huge emphasis that people maybe don't – maybe we just haven't done a good job of educating people about it and continuing to – we actually had our forty-fifth anniversary of our chapter starting here on Brown's campus. It was actually a citywide chapter. I think I can say this – what we're coming away with is the fact that we, as the elders, per se – because we were the third line – need to come back, and we have a huge Delta circle on campus, on Quad A.

MM: Yes, I heard this.

LH: Yeah. And so I think we need to show how it's vital and important and [31:00] something that you might want to aspire to. But you have to have the grades; you have to have the character. It's not about, like, a fashion contest or anything like that. And I think we as the elders need to come back and participate and show how it's benefited us and how it can actually improve the lives of everybody on the campus.

MM: Yeah, do you both have further thoughts, other thoughts, on that?

RH: Well, I do think it's a shame that people don't take the opportunity to do that, because it is a sisterhood that lasts long – it's a life–

TC: It's a lifelong thing.

RH: – lifeline. It's a lifeline and a lifelong experience. And the networking and – you know, I will tell you, as – when I've been making decisions on admissions, like when I'm going through – and I was on the admissions committee at the law school – I actually looked not only [32:00] towards Delta Sigma Theta, but to see if you participated in a Greek organization. Because I know there you had to make a commitment and that you – you know, AKAs, they're my sisters



too, right? And that they're service-oriented too, and that they're making a commitment to something. So it's a legacy that I'm hoping that will continue.

You know, I see a lot of the traditional Black cultural experiences dying. We all played Bid Whist. Most of us. Now, that's a – have you ever heard of Bid Whist?

MC: Mm-mm.

RH: Now, see – yeah. See, she doesn't even know about it.

?: Card game.

RH: It's a card game, right? And it's a card game that got passed down for years and years and years and years from – as a kid, you know, six, seven years old, I'm sitting down, playing Bid Whist with my parents and with my aunts and uncles.

MC: I grew up playing Spades. That's (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

RH: Yeah, that's like – [laughter] you played Spades.

?: That's similar. Very similar.

RH: But Bid Whist is a uniquely kind of Black card game, right? [33:00] And most kids don't – I would go into an academic setting, and I would say to them, “Hey, let's get a game of Bid Whist going.” “My parents played that, but I don't know anything – I play Spades,” right? So it's important that we maintain some of our cultural things. We want to integrate into society. It's important for us to do that too. We want the good jobs. We want all the benefits. But we also need to keep some of our cultural experiences. And the – The Black sororities and fraternities, it's part of it. And so I would hate to see that die on Brown's campus. And like Lori said, it was a citywide chapter – and that was the other great thing. I mean, I met people at URI. I pledged with people at RISD. You know. [laughter] So we were able to kind of integrate into other campuses

as a result of that. And we really – we are concerned that it is a dying experience here on Brown’s campus, and we have made a [34:00] commitment to try to do something about that.

?: (inaudible)

MM: So unless you ha– would you like to add anything, or we can move on to the next --

TC: You can move on to the next.

MM: OK. So we’re wrapping up – it’s about 2:45 right now. So with the remainder of the time here, I really want you to be able to share what you want to share. So if you’d like to throw out further comments about the impact of Brown in your life, if you have any topics that touch upon your experience specifically as women at Brown in the ’70s – it was quite an era. It was right after – post-merger, right, of Pembroke College or the – if you want to discuss any of that, please take these last few minutes to share anything else you’d like to get on the record. If I can start with you?

TC: Well, I guess it would be my experience [35:00] in the engineering department. There were very few women. But I did have a couple that were there. But I found that the professors were really open to having women. It was very progressive. I never felt like I wasn’t good enough or that there was something wrong. In fact, we had Professor Hazeltine, which I think is still here.

?: Barrett Hazeltine.

TC: Yeah, Professor Haze– who was a great inspiration to everyone. And I think, because it was so positive – it was difficult. There was no question about – it was hard to do. I think because there were – I always felt like I was in a protected environment and that Brown was there to support me to do whatever I wanted to do in the future. And also gave me an opportunity – because I didn’t have to really choose a major until my junior year – yes, as an engineer you had to keep those courses, but I was able to take other classes, which broadened my horizons – that that [36:00] just stayed with me all my life, and that I know, “Yes, I can do engineering, but on

the other hand, I can also take an art class; I can also learn a lot of things about politics.” And I’ve always just been thankful of that initial education that allows me to see all of the world as opposed to just being narrow. Because you can go to an engineering school and just be pigeonholed into just doing engineering. Whereas Brown I really had engineering and kind of a liberal arts. And I found that experience, even with my colleagues, that – you know, I worked as a professor, so I had all these colleagues. But they were, like, just – you couldn’t talk about anything else but engineering.

MM: Can I ask you a question? You’ve touched on something. You said that you felt protected here.

TC: Yes, I did.

MM: And I’ve heard that over the course of the weekend. But we also heard that you said that you endured, as students of color, unfriendly – to say [37:00] it politely – or discriminatory racist comments. How did those two things fit together –

LH: Well –

MM: – in your – how did you feel –

TC: Well, I –

MM: – protected and exposed?

LH: They’re not – OK, go ahead. I’m sorry.

TC: Yeah, so my protected meant that Brown provided a bubble in which all you had to do – which I was so thankful for – was focus on your schoolwork. I didn’t have to deal with anything else but my schoolwork. And that, I thought, was a great thing. And then when I left, then you have all these other things that enter from the world that then you have to deal with as you’re

working. But that was a great era for me to be in at that point. I didn't have that experience, so I don't know.

LH: Well, honestly, I mean, that happened, but I didn't feel threatened or that I shouldn't be here. And actually, Barrett Hazeltine was my academic advisor for actually pre-med and engineering and... You know, honestly I did not feel [38:00] discriminated against as a woman or as a Black person in engineering. And I can't tell you, I don't necessarily remember any of my other engineering professors, but I just felt like I did the work and – I mean, I was good in math and science, but I probably would've had straight As if I had majored in art [laughter] or something like that. But obviously I was able to go to medical school and got in the first time to several schools. So it's funny when you – I mean, I think I in some ways had a love-hate relationship with Brown. I'm not saying my experience was bad – it wasn't bad, but it was just – it was hard. Because I chose a really hard major. And so I was always working, pretty much. But I appreciated it, though. Because when I got to medical school – to me medical school was actually easy. And the reason was because I knew how to stu– I actually didn't even go to classes in medical school except for my labs, because I would just go to the library and study, because I [39:00] learned how to study as an engineering major. So the coursework was not hard for me, actually, in medical school at all. So people would be freaking out, staying up till five o'clock in the morning before a test; I never did that.

MM: Can you say again where you attended medical school? I (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

LH: University of Cincinnati, Univers– like I said, it wasn't difficult to me. I mean, [not that I am brilliant?], but – no – [laughter] but it wasn't difficult because I had that training as an engineer, and I knew how to study, and I knew how I learned. So it wasn't hard. And actually, you know, it's funny, sometimes you don't really appreciate the education that you get. So that really made me appreciate going to – having engineering background and thinking very logically and as a doctor is very helpful. And then the other thing – it's funny; I've had patients come to see me because I've gone to Brown, believe it or not. So I don't, like, advertise, "I went to Brown" or whatever, but – you know, of course people can pull up your information online, [40:00] and there's this whole verify movement in physician now, verify your credentials. So I

had a patient say, “Oh yeah, I looked at you,” and I was getting ready to do her embryo transfer in fertility, and I hadn't met her, and she looked me up online. “Yeah, I saw you went to Brown undergrad.” I'm like, “Oh, OK. All right, cool.” [laughter] So it's like amazing, you don't – and Brown has – I will say honestly – it has opened doors for me. Not necessarily intentionally all the time. But people are like, “Oh, OK, she went to Brown, she must be kind of smart. She made engineering, you know, hey.” So it's definitely opened up some doors.

So even though that experience may have happened to me walking past frat – I never felt – I didn't report it. Because, I mean, even during that time and even in medical school when – and even in residency, when some of those kind of sexist, racist stuff happened, you didn't report it. You know, you're a woman, if you – there's all men, nobody's going to listen to you. You're a crybaby. So [41:00] you didn't report it.

MM: And situating this in the '80s.

LH: Seventies and '80s.

MM: Seventies and '80s.

LH: So you didn't – '80s – so you didn't report it, because you're like, OK, you're going to put your career on the line? So you just sucked it up and dealt with it. So I never – and in general I didn't feel threatened. I felt like I belonged here; I felt like I could do the work; I felt like – I mean, I won't say people were, like, “Oh, Lori Hollins, [come?]...” I mean, I did research. I mean, I sought those things out, and I wasn't turned away. So I can honestly say that I pretty much for the most part had a positive experience.

RH: But I will say that that time was a more racially tense time, in many ways. And so, you know, I didn't do engineering, and there were a lot of women in the psychology department, so I was good, [laughter] you know? That was fine. I didn't have the women issue. But the race issue [wasn't?] a very interesting issue. You know, we had just come out of '75, you know, and so there was a little racial tension there. [42:00] Black parties start at a different time than White parties. And so we almost had to work with the administration to get to –

MM: Earlier or later? When –

RH: Later.

?: Later.

RH: Our parties don't start till eleven o'clock.

?: Right. [Because you studied?].

RH: And they would shut parties down at eleven o'clock. And so we really had to work with –

MC: It's still true. [laughter]

?: Like tonight. Funk –

RH: Right. Funk doesn't start till nine or ten o'clock.

?: [So you'll have?] the alcohol. We don't have alcohol; we just had music and dance.

RH: We just had music and dance and party, right?

?: Yeah, because it --

?: (inaudible) beer (inaudible).

RH: But we – that's just our tradition. It's our culture. And during that time we had some very good people in administration that would work with us. We'd go and they'd say – you know, campus police would come to shut us down at eleven o'clock or 11:30; we'd call the senior administrator and say, "They're shutting us down." "No they're not; I'm coming down." They would actually physically come down to parties, some of the Black administrators would, and

work it out with the campus police to make sure that our parties could stay open later. Because we just got [43:00] started, you know? [laughter] So we had to work through some things. I mean, I think that you look at it – we're part of the community at that time. There were racial tensions during that time, you know? And we were working through them at Brown's campus just like we were working through them in society in general.

But it was really, for me, an extremely positive experience. I mean, I went on to Harvard Law School; I give my money to Brown well before I give my money to Harvard – for a variety of reasons, and professional school is certainly different. But it's because I have a relationship with Brown, you know?

My sister, class of '86, also came to Brown. She actually got called the n-word.

MM: While on campus here?

RH: Yeah. So this is many years later, after we – so there is racial tension. It's something that – and it's funny, when my sister got called the n-word, she was very, very, [44:00] very upset.

MM: I bet.

RH: And she reached out to me. And she was always the one that said, "Why is everything black and white to you, Renee? We're all people." She was colorblind, right? And I had come up in a different era. I had come up in an era where I was sat here and there was nobody sitting around me because I was the only Black in the class, and the teacher whispered when she talked to me. You know. So I had had some really very – and this was in Detroit – but some very –

MM: Raw.

RH: – yeah, bad experiences. And so, yes, if you walk in my shoes, you understand why a lot of things were race-oriented. But she had not had that experience. She's seven years younger than me. So she had led a very sheltered life.

?: Kumbaya.

RH: Yeah, things – yeah, kumbaya. Everything was – and so she didn't understand it. And that was the first time – it was really an experience for her, because she was, like, “Oh my goodness, somebody just called me the n-word. [laughter] And I'm on Brown's campus.” And someone had to walk her back and try to help her understand [45:00] that, you know, that's one person. And you look at your broader experience, you look at the support that you're getting from the faculty, you look at the support that you're getting from your other students, and you go on [room?] from that. So I just think that Brown is – both my kids applied, both got in – neither of them went – [laughter] but, you know –

MM: Where'd they go?

RH: – I just think that Brown is just a fabulous place to go. I do interviews every year for students, and I cannot – and I've been doing that for about 10 years, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

MM: It's so fun.

RH: Yeah, it's so much fun. It really is. And you get to meet young people, and you get to just sing the praises of Brown and try to encourage them to come here. And I'm just hoping that Brown's Black community continues to have cohesiveness. Because we don't live in a race-neutral, racial-blind society. We do need to have that cultural cohesiveness. [46:00] But we also need to be a part of the broader community. And so, you know, we need both. And I think Brown is just a great opportunity – at least when we were here –

LH: Well, I will say one thing now.

RH: – to provide –

LH: I will say that I didn't – my kids both went to HBCUs. And when I – their love – I'm not going to say I don't appreciate my education, but the love that my kids have for their experience is much greater than anything I felt for Brown [that I can come back?]. I mean, I'm just saying



that I was here, but I don't think I felt that I loved it, necessarily. Do you know what I'm saying? I'm saying that's my experience. So I felt like I was here, I got what I needed, but – you know, like I said, I can remember one professor's name. OK. One out of – I was here four years. So was that my fault, was that – I don't know, but I'm just saying that I didn't have [47:00] that, “Oh, I just love Brown,” in that I wanted to come back. Now, coming back this time and hearing about what happened in '68, and maybe as I'm older – I certainly always appreciated the education that I got, but when I see how much my kids loved and how much they got – because I don't feel like I just – I feel like everything that I got I had to really go after so much. I don't feel like anybody just said, “Hey Lori, let me help you do this.” No, I had to go and find it, and nobody, like, said, “Here, this is for you.” I had to forcefully make myself go find opportunities because nobody was coming to me to help me.

TC: So I –

RH: Well, I – go ahead, Teresa.

TC: I guess I find I – when I think back at Brown it was one of my better experiences. Because, you know, I went on to grad [48:00] school – which was OK, but it was still a little more impersonal. And then I went on to another grad school, and it was still impersonal. So for some reason – and I don't keep up with those people. I keep up with the people – some of my best friends are from this experience. So I have to say it was one of the – If I look back at all the experiences that I've had in academic environment, including being a professor, this was the one that I would cherish, and this was the one that propelled me into the future. And this is the one that when people say, “Well, where'd you go to school?” I'll say “Brown.” I never say “Cornell.” I say, “I went to Brown.” And if I didn't have it, I don't know where I would have been, where I would be now. So I think that I built myself based on how I started here.

LH: Well, I will say one thing. I've never gone back to my medical school for – I've been out of medical school 30 years – no, longer than that. [Holy shit?]. Thirty-four years? [49:00] I've never been back to a medical school graduation. I don't give them money. I probably never will

go back. I won't – I mean, not that it was horrible. Certainly I got a good education and all that, but I had no desire –

MM: But the connection –

LH: – to go back.

MM: We are just about out of time. As the person who connected us all today, do you have any final thoughts that you'd like to share, and we'll close out with those comments?

RH: Well, I don't know. I guess my final thoughts are I appreciate the opportunity to record our – some of our history.

MM: Yeah, absolutely. I feel like we could go on for –

RH: Yeah. [laughter] You know, you can see that each of us had a slightly different experience. And as we came here we came from different backgrounds, different experience. And that's one of the wonderful things about Brown. You have people from a variety of places. [50:00] I know my freshman-year roommate and I just recently reconnected on Facebook – White female, very, very rich. [laughter] And – you know, just –

MM: That's another Brown story.

RH: Right, right, right. And just to be able to just have those kinds of connections, to be able to network in that kind of environment, to develop lifelong friends like we have been able to develop, it's just really important to do. I taught for many years. I was a professor for 20-something years. Every experience doesn't allow you to have that connection. And so I appreciate Brown for that. And I appreciate you –

MM: Thank you.

RH: – allowing us in.

MM: Thank you so much. We're going to close at this time. Just so appreciate you taking an hour of your time on this busy, wonderful weekend to sit with the Pembroke Center Archives. So thank you.

?: Thank you. Welcome.

RH: All right.

- END -