

Transcript – Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority  
Arlean Leland and Lavdena Adams Orr, class of 1976,  
Robyn Jones and Patricia Darlene Elliot, class of 1977

Narrator: Arlean Leland, Robyn Jones, Lavdena Adams Orr, and Patricia Darlene Elliot  
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Track 1

Mary Murphy: [0:00] OK, so good morning. My name is Mary Murphy and I am the Nancy L. Buc Pembroke Center Archivist. I'm sitting in Pembroke Hall in the second floor seminar room on September 22, 2018. Today, I'm joined by four members of the Brown University alumnae community who are here to share their experiences with us. I'm going to have each of them introduce themselves now for the record. I'll start with you.

Robyn Jones: Robyn Jones, Class of 1977.

Lavdena Adams Orr: Lavdena Adams Orr, Class of 1976.

Arlean Leland: Arlean Leland, Class of 1976.

Patricia Elliot: Patricia Elliot, Class of 1977.

MM: OK, so thank you. So you saw the notice that we sent out for those who would be participating in the all-class Black Alumni Reunion, to contribute an oral history to the Brown Women Speak Collection. [01:00] So maybe I'll just kick it off and ask, why are you interested in giving an interview and what brings you to us today?

AL: Well, I responded to the email and the main reason I responded was because I wanted people to know that Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority was the first African American sorority to be founded on Brown University's campus in 1974. We had 14 young African American women from very diverse backgrounds who came together to found this sorority on this campus because the sorority, at least Alpha Kappa Alpha, was the first African American sorority in the world. We were founded in 1908. And one of our founders, well not founders, but the woman who inspired our founders was Ethel Tremaine Robinson. And so it was interesting that [02:00] she had that connection, so to speak, with us. And so I wanted to make sure that people know, I mean, our Alpha made a lot of contributions to this campus in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. With the change – and you know change comes about – we are not on campus at this time, but we would certainly want people to know about the importance of the work that we did. You guys did service projects. Want to talk about those service projects that you did?

MM: Well, if I could just back up a little bit. So for our listeners who are coming to this clean for the first time, let's talk about Ethel Robinson Can we back up just a little bit? So –

AL: Well, I'm going to let Robyn. She's one – or Dena. They're our scholars. [laughter] They attended all of the leadership.

MM: And to give us a little bit more history about the sorority itself, and the meaning of a historically Black sorority.

RJ: [03:00] So I believe that Ethel Tremaine Robinson was the first African American woman to graduate from Brown. And when she left Brown, she subsequently became a professor at Howard University where she of course was very influential for the Black women students there. And one of those students was Ethel Hedgeman Lyle, who was our founder. And Ethel, what Ethel did was gather a group of women at Howard University, you know, under the guidance of Ethel Tremaine Robinson because she had been here at Pembroke and knew about sororities, and it was an opportunity for Ethel to influence women at Howard, to also start sororities. And so Ethel Hedgeman Lyle took that spark and flew with it.

So Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Incorporated, was founded at Howard University. And as you heard, in 1908. And it was founded under the premise of service and sisterhood. [04:00] And we continue that tradition today.

MM: So let's talk about those traditions and how they carried through in your own experience here at Brown.

LAO: So after the chapter was chartered, and Arlene Lealand is a charter member of the chapter, it was the process of bringing in other young women who wanted to provide service to the community. And the three of us had, myself and Robyn, were on the first line of women who were – came in after the chapter was chartered. So we were charged with – once we were accepted, of course – with doing service in the community. And you know, we did whatever was told to us under the program of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority because it is an international service organization. Every president of the sorority has a programmatic theme. So that tradition carries on now, and so the current president, Dr. [05:00] Glenda Baskin Glover, her programmatic theme is exemplifying excellence through sustainable service. And there are several targets under that for which we provide community service.

MM: So about getting the chapter established here at Brown, was that difficult? Can you recall what that was like?

AL: It took us over six months to get a chapter established here. We were very fortunate that there were two graduate students at Brown, Tommy Finley and Lucy Anderson. They were graduate students here, and so were their husbands, and they volunteered to oversee us. Since there was no sorority on campus, you had to have someone oversee the young ladies through the process. And so they volunteered to do it. So it was a matter of us learning the sorority's history, doing community service projects. [06:00] The one that's most vivid in my mind is Fox Point Daycare Center. We had to go down there every week. I think it was twice a week, four hours a day, twice a week we had to go to Fox Point Daycare Center.

And what's most vivid to me is we have – there was a little touch of lice in the hair of the children [laughter] so we wore pink bandanas because our colors are salmon pink and apple green. So we wore pink bandanas down there. [laughter]

MM: Good idea.

AL: So I remember there being, you know – we had to wear them for the lice and the kids were just a joy. I mean, they were so welcoming to us coming from the campus, going into the community, mentoring these young people. You know, showing them that, you know, because for some people in the community, Brown was, you know, that school on the hill. And for us to step out into the community being our authentic selves, [07:00] and really mingling with the people from the community, made a tremendous impact.

LAO: So another part of the sorority is partnership, so even at the undergraduate level, because there are graduate chapters here at Brown. We partnered with what was then the Jericho Society and we would go to the prison to tutor the inmates. So that was one of our main partnerships for our chapter when we were here at Brown.

RJ: And another program that we had was a Big Sister program. Yeah.

PE: (inaudible) Big Sister, Little Sister.

RJ: Well go ahead and speak to that, Pat.

PE: Well, we did have the Big Sister, Little Sister program where we mentored girls in the community. And I know my little sister, actually she lived in Brockton, Massachusetts and I was in contact with her probably up until about 15 years ago because she – I lived in Montgomery, Alabama and she went to Tuskegee for about a year down there. So some of the relationships went forward, and I think [08:00] they were probably, I think, in elementary school, like second or third grade.

RJ: Mm-hmm, that's right.

PE: So a long time. [laughs]

MM: And so for each of you, just to keep us at the core at the beginning, what drew you to do this, to start the chapter or to join the chapter, however you –

AL: Well neither of my parents finished college.

MM: Yes, let's hear –

AL: Neither of my parents finished high school. But in – I'm from Gary, Indiana originally. I was drawn to do this because I – well quite frankly, I guess should I tell the –

MM: Sure.

AL: I was valedictorian of my class [laughter] of 620 students.

MM: Congratulations. That is something to share.

AL: And I was not invited to this other sorority's scholarship luncheon, Delta Sigma Theta. They didn't invite me to their scholarship luncheon. And I learned that it was because my parents weren't [09:00] college-educated, and I thought, "What has that got to do with me, valedictorian of the class, National Merit finalist?"

MM: And that was here on camp– that luncheon?

AL: No, this was in Gary, Indiana.

MM: Oh, in Gary. OK.

AL: And so I wasn't invited. But my guidance counselor in high school, oh I just remember her name is Mrs. Marilyn Harriston. I went into her office, you know, at 16 you're very impressionable. And I said, "They didn't invite me to their luncheon" and she said, "Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. You're so accomplished, Arlean. Other organizations will recognize your worth and your value." Well that was fine, but I was still devastated. But about three weeks later, I got an invitation in the mail from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority to attend their scholarship tea. And I said, "Well, they understand my value and my worth." So my mother got me a new outfit. We were prancing up in that tea. You couldn't tell me I wasn't cute. [10:00] And not only did they highlight my accomplishments in their tea, they gave me \$1,000 a year for four years that I was here at Brown. I got a thousand – you know how much –

PE: This was significant then.

AL: This was in 1972.

PE: \$7,000 for tuition.

AL: A thousand dollars is a lot of money. And so I wanted to be like those women. I wanted to sow a seed into other young people who may not have come from a particular background, and that was what drew me to Alpha Kappa Alpha, but I knew nothing about how to start a chapter. Renee Brown, whose mother is an AKA – I'm sorry, Barbara Renee Stewart. Now it's Jackson, Stewart-Jackson, who was from Houston, Texas, mother was an AKA. So Renee and Janice [D'Frans?] was from Indianapolis, Indiana. They came to Brown knowing that they're going to be AKAs. So they kind of led us through it, like this is what we're doing. You know? [11:00] And we followed along eagerly. And then the other women who were involved, they came from schools and background and neighborhoods where AKAs were very prominent. So once they heard that Renee and Jan were leading the charge to found a chapter, they eagerly joined.

MM: What about the rest of you? Can you tell us about –

RJ: So I would say I didn't know anything about sororities, you know, coming to Brown. I had some relatives that I was well aware were in fraternities, in the male organizations, but I really didn't know anything about sororities, and I still didn't know about sororities [laughs] even when I was hearing about AKA. But I will say Renee was my college roommate. [laughter] So you know, a lot of it was who you knew, and them talking about it. And she did talk about Alpha Kappa Alpha nonstop.

MM: Booster. [laughter]

RJ: She truly was. She was a missionary. [laughter] And so that's how I learned of it. I was not [12:00] on that chartering intake group, but I, you know, we were on the very – their first – as a chapter, we were on their first intake and then Pat was on the second intake that they had. So we all came in in '74 and Pat came in in '75. But so they were still a baby organization when we joined, so we definitely chartered the way. And part of that was the service programs that you heard, but it was also the sisterhood because it was also – we were all of a sudden working with women, even though there were only a small amount of Black folks on campus, we were still working with other Black women that we didn't know at all. And that built a camaraderie, and the sisterhood. And through the sisterhood, we were able then to do that service. And as you can see, we've had lifelong relationships since then.

AL: I'm the godmother of both her daughters and the – I basically say second string godmother of her two sons [laughter] because [13:00] her two sons have godmothers, but I count myself as one.

MM: That's wonderful. So can I hear a little bit about your background and what brought you to the sorority?

LAO: Sure. I'm from Richmond, Virginia. I'm from the south and my high school counselors and teachers had a lot of influence on my ethic and career. I'm a first-generation college graduate. And so they were interested in me going to an Ivy League school. I didn't really know what that meant or what it was, but I thought, "OK, well they want me to go, I'll go." But they

were all members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. They were smart. They were, you know, well dressed. They were well poised. They were well spoken, and they worked in the community. So I knew, well, if there's going to be a sorority, I'm going to be a part of that. I don't know how, but I will. And so I was invited to be a part of the chartering group, but I was a pre-med major, really trying to get into medical school. I didn't want anything to interfere with that and so I declined. And so the very moment [14:00] that the notice went up, "We're having a" – what they called a "rush" or an invitation event so you can learn more about it, I was right there. Right there ready to go. And fortunately, I was accepted into the sorority. It's not a guarantee that you're going to be accepted, but I guess I must have impressed someone and they thought I –

AL: She had great grades.

LAO: – would be a good member of the sorority and very productive.

AL: She is also valedictorian of her class.

MM: Really? Congratulations.

AL: That's a theme. [laughter]

RJ: I was not – I will say that I was not a valedictorian.

AL: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) High School of Science. AKAs, it's a theme. We really, academically –

MM: Accomplish –

RJ: Excel.

AL: Yeah. You were Miss Porter's.

MM: So please share a little bit about your background.

PE: OK, so the way I got to Brown is I got, I'm inner city, Columbus, Ohio, first grad of my – college grad in my family. I received [15:00] what's called a Better Chance Scholarship that sent me to Miss Porter's School for Girls in Farmington, Connecticut. And that's how I got to Brown. Before I went to Miss Porter's I – you know, you learn about things in school but I never – pretty much been out the city at Columbus. So the whole country was like foreign to me. But once I got to Miss Porter's School for Girls and started meeting people, and you know, people start talking about Brown so I applied. I didn't know what Ivy League schools were or anything. I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. It was Big 10, Ohio State. [laughter] I didn't know –

MM: (inaudible) the Buckeyes.

PE: I didn't know anything about the Big 10 but people in [the Ivy League?] school were the ones that come from Brown, so I applied and I got in, so I ended up at Brown. And the way I got to AKA is that I lived with Renee Stewart, one of the founders, Robyn Jones, and our departed friend, Vicki Jones. [16:00] And they were already in. I was supposed to be on their line, but I really didn't know anything about sororities. I don't even know what happened in life that I didn't go online with them [laughter] but then I was living with three of them. So they were always there in our apartment, and I'm like OK, these are my friends. I'm joining the sorority. So that's how I came to AKA. [laughter] And then, you know, once I was online with 13 other women because we had the next largest line after the family line.

RJ: And the name?

PE: Then [Cynthia?], seven plus seven. And 14 diverse women. We were very different. We weren't friends. And it really took a lot for us to come together as a group. And I know the thing that brought us together as a group is going against the Big Sisters [laughter] when we realized that we could be just as strong as them. And so it did help us [17:00] in being able to compromise and develop a sisterhood, which is all part of the pledging process. So what the Big Sisters were putting on us, the purpose of that was to bring us together as a group so that we

would be solid and they couldn't separate us. And so that's what goes on through the pledging process, so if anyone would come in, you understand what's sisterhood and the circle gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger because there's a common denominator. So.

MM: Thank you.

RJ: I just want to comment too. I think one of the things that is unique about sororities that are historically Black is that we're not just at the college level. We continue at the graduate level, so that for myself and soro-Lavdena, we both have been presidents of our graduate chapters in our respective cities, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. And at that next level, Alpha Kappa Alpha, [18:00] these are all women who are all college-educated in this organization. And I have to say that Dr. Ruth Simmons was an honorary member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and Beverly Ledbetter. She was also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha and became a member at Howard University where the organization was founded. So you know, some women who were very prominent at Brown were members of Alpha Kappa Alpha as well, although not part of the Iota Alpha chapter, but also part of that Brown legacy. Knowing that we continued as graduate members, and that it is a lifelong membership – you are always a member and you are always recognized as a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, whether you are actively participating or inactive. You can continue to apply service and are always welcome at the sisterhood.

AL: What Robyn didn't share with you is both she and Lavdena are award-winning [19:00] presidents of their chapters. They have won awards for the region, for the whole north-atlantic region, which consists of over 10,000 women?

MM: Oh, wow.

RJ: Yes. There are 100 chapters. Yes.

AL: And 100 chapters. They both have won President of the Year for the region.

MM: Oh, wow. Congratulations.

RJ: Thank you.

AL: And I am so proud because I was [picking the?] pledges. [laughter] So I was –

LAO: She was all of our (inaudible). [laughter]

RJ: For all of our [Dena?] pledges.

AL: So I take credit for their accomplishments, Mary. [laughter]

PE: Well, so you might go and say what your accomplishment is.

AL: Oh. I was recently appointed to the International Directorate as the Chair of Contract Review and Resource Support by the International President, Dr. Glenda Glover.

MM: Oh, wow.

AL: And so I'm excited. I'm humbled, and it's a lot of hard work.

MM: I bet. I bet. It sounds like it, absolutely. So I would like to hear – paint us a picture. I want [20:00] highlights, and maybe if the sorority or just yourself during your experience here at Brown, challenges that you may have faced, maybe where the sorority backed you up, maybe where you came – well you know, a jam with them and had to get through it. I want some snapshots of some really strong memories that you have, specific memories of events.

LAO: So I'll start. Being pre-med here is, I'm sure challenging now, but it's very challenging then.

MM: Oh, I bet. [laughs]

LAO: To walk into these large auditoriums with bio one with thousands of students, or chemistry with 600 in a large hall, from someone who went to public school, who came here as the valedictorian, but this is the cream of the cream of the crop. And so that was the challenge. And focusing on that, you lose sight of social development and growth as an undergraduate. And for me, being a member of Iota Alpha Chapter of [21:00] the sorority helped with my development as a young woman because I had a nurturing, safe network that I could learn from and develop from. Being in the large auditoriums and classrooms, and the small sections and going to the professors who were like, “Well, I don’t know. Maybe you should be a teacher.” You know? It was very disheartening. But then I had my sisters to say, “Oh, you can do it. Just study hard.” And I did. I did.

MM: Can I ask you, how many other women, and specifically women of color, were in the pre-med field?

RJ: You’ve got three of us here.

LAO: You’ve got three doctors –

RJ: You’ve got three doctors here and an attorney.

LAO: Three doctors and a lawyer at the table. [laughter] That’s what you got. Three doctors and a lawyer at the table.

AL: OK. But I mean, does anybody know the number? I mean, I don’t at the time –

LAO: I don’t know the number but –

AL: I don’t know the number for our class, how many female physicians graduated from the Class of ‘76 and went on to medical school. I don’t know. Probably –

LAO: Maybe about seven or eight? [22:00] Because you got Cathy, Devon, [Dana?] –

RJ: We might have seven or eight.

AL: Probably seven or eight.

RJ: I don't even think we had that many.

AL: We were the Class of '76.

RJ: Yeah, seven or eight.

MM: So for your class –

RJ: For women. No, we're just speaking women so I don't – I don't think we have that many in our class. I mean, we had Dean Ripley, I think, who was a blessing.

LAO: Yeah, he was wonderful.

RJ: Oh, my gosh. He was wonderful.

MM: Tell me about that. Why?

RJ: First of all, let's look at Dean Ripley. He was your average White man. [laughter] That's the first thing. He was your average White man but I always felt [coddled?] and embraced, and that you could go and talk to him, and he would take care of you and give you good guidance, which who would have expected that, you know, in the – we arrived '72, '73 – in the early seventies at Brown. That there would be this White male dean taking care of the pre-med students and he cared about us as Black women also.

PE: And helped us negotiate our way into medicine.

RJ: Yes, he did.

PE: You know, if you're not having a good semester, help you look at [23:00] what do we need to do so that your semester is better? So that by the time it was time for us to send our credentials to get into med school, that we were where we needed to be.

MM: It was going to happen.

PE: And so he did take very good care of the pre-meds. He really did.

RJ: Yes, he did. He was excellent.

PE: He really did.

AL: So I can share an incident that happened for me.

MM: Please, yes.

AL: Dean Karen Romer was my savior. My freshman year, I'd come from an inner city school in Gary, Indiana, Gary West Side. Now, West Side – and I don't know how this happened – was a feeder school for Brown. Every year for about 10 years, Brown always accepted at least one person from my high school. My high school was 95% African American. OK. And I think it's because we had some people that came to Brown who were successful academically, and so Brown in their mind said, "These students from this inner city high school can handle the work." [24:00] So for about 10 years straight, there was always somebody from my high school that got accepted into Brown. And several people actually matriculated here.

My freshman year, I thought I was hot stuff. I was valedictorian of my class. I got all these scholarships, Hoosier State Scholarship, this, this, this, and this. Well, I was a political science major. Don't ask me why. I just thought if you want to go to law school, you should be a political science major. I learned later you don't have to be a political [laughter] major in anything. I'm an American history major, OK? But I came thinking I had to be a political science

major. So I took Poli-Sci 1 with Professor Ed Beiser. And he was just not a good person, essentially. I mean, he was arrogant and he didn't – I didn't feel he was approachable, unlike you all had Dean Ripley, you know. I didn't feel he was approachable or anything. And then a lot of the teaching – teacher's [25:00] assistants, teachers, the grad students, the teacher assistants were actually doing the hands-on work with people, you know. He lectured but you had about 10 or 15 of them.

And I'm sitting in this room with like 300 people. I saw two other people that looked like me, African American, in a room of 300 people. So our first assignment, we had to do a paper. And you know, I wrote this paper that I thought was absolutely fabulous. Well, when I got the paper back [laughs] – it's not funny. It said, you know, Brown had an A, B, C, no credit. You know that, right?

MM: Yeah.

AL: They didn't have D's. The comment was, "If Brown gave C's" – no, "if Brown gave D's, this paper would be a D." They gave me a C and there was a minus, and they circled the minus. I was devastated. [26:00] I was devastated. I called my mother. I was going home to Gary. [laughter] Because see, I could get a job. I could get a job at the phone company, getting the phone the trainee program. And so I was devastated, and my mother calmed me down. She said, "Go talk to your dean." And my dean was Dean Karen Romerr. So I went to Dean Romer's house – actually I went to her office – and she was so kind and so nice. I cried and she listened. And she said to me, "We're going to get you a tutor," and she was just very matter-of-fact. And she got me a tutor. I can't remember this woman's name but it was Vivian, an African American woman. She was a political sci major. She's passed away but her name was Vivian. And she tutored me in political science. We got a second paper. She helped me [27:00] you know – she didn't write my paper. I wrote my own paper. But she helped me focus on the things that were important, you know, to have analytical [treatise?]. And I got a A-minus, OK? And the comment was, "Is this your work?" Oh yeah, he did. [laughter] I was so, ooh! I took that –

MM: (inaudible) on the first one.

AL: This was the same person who graded, “Is this your work?” And so I took the paper to Dean Romer and Dean Romer was – she was like, “Oh, this is unacceptable.” All I know is I got a written apology from that teaching assistant and he was no longer assigned to work with me. But Dean Romer was like, you know, it just – I really admired the fact that she [28:00] came – she wanted to see me succeed. And then when someone challenged my hard work, she took them to task. And I, oh after that – I used to babysit Dean Romer’s kids [laughs] on the weekends, when you know, she’d go out to dinner. Oh, she paid me. [laughter] Oh, I’m sorry. I forgot. I can’t share that, right? But she – we –

MM: That’s OK. Yeah, babysitting’s OK.

AL: We developed a really good relationship. She was just an awesome person.

RJ: One of the things you asked is about support, though, from our sorority sisters. So I was not an academic star. I went to a specialized high school in New York where everyone was smart. I came from the Bronx High School of Science and there were 800-something people in my graduating class, OK? [laughs] So it was a big public school in New York. You know, some cities call them magnet schools. It was a school you had to take a test to get into [29:00] and I got into the school, which meant I had the ability, but I was not at the top of my class. So when I came to Brown, it was not my expectation to be a star. It really wasn’t. I knew that whatever they threw at me, I could probably do the work, and that I would be – I knew that I was going to be a doctor someday. I mean, I didn’t have any doubt about that. I didn’t know how I would get there.

But one of the things that happened to me at Brown, I guess it was first semester sophomore year, and with some other friends. I mean, I did awful first semester sophomore year. And I remember it was four of us, you know, and we talked about it. Two of them never graduated from Brown. They did go on leave, go to other universities, and complete their college careers. And two of us did like, OK. We’ve got to get this together. We’re going to make it through this. And I had my friends, my sorors, my sisters to help me through that process. To help me, “OK, we’re going to sit down and study with you [laughs] to make sure that you’re doing what you’re supposed to do when you do it. We’re going to review topics.” [30:00] So I had that support from my sisters, my friends. You know, that I was able to [laughs] get it

together, for lack of a better terminology, get on track, become a better student, graduate with my class, and be accepted into medical school.

MM: Wow. And so it was really your sorority sister.

RJ: Yes.

MM: Wow.

AL: OB-GYN, pediatrician, OB-GYN.

MM: Wow. Would you like to share? Flashbulb moments or key memories you have?

PE: Let me think. [laughs]

MM: We are coming up on 11:15, just to give you the sign. So let's do, let's talk about the legacy of your education and your connection to the sorority, to your life as you left Brown University and what happened. Tell me what became.

LAO: Well, I'll start. So yes, [31:00] it was challenging but there was a lot of support here if you asked for it, and Brown would support. But the thing I learned when I left was you say the name Brown, and it opened doors. I had no difficulty getting accepted into medical school, and ironically I only applied to one.

MM: And where did you end up going?

LAO: University of Miami School of Medicine, and I was admitted. And before that, I went to dental school for a little bit. I had no problem getting into Georgetown. So I mean, having the Brown portfolio, the academic portfolio, certainly opens doors. Having the sorority network provide the social, nurturing support when you're in graduate school, lifelong friendships, lifelong learning, lifelong connectivity to women of different backgrounds. The women I'm

connected with, I probably wouldn't be connected to them because I wouldn't know them. So anywhere you go in the United States, there is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority living there [32:00] that you can connect with and that you can call, and she will extend warm arms open to you.

MM: Are there chapter meetings outside of the college university setting, like wherever you are?

LAO: Oh, yes.

MM: Like in the D.C. area – and how often do they –

RJ: Yes.

LAO: The graduate chapter system, every –

MM: Is it monthly? First –

RJ: Yes.

LAO: Every city has a graduate chapter and they determine monthly when their meetings are going to be. There's a whole organizational structure for graduate chapters, guidance and oversight from our international office, which is located in Chicago. So we're just not out here kind of willy-nilly on our own. We have very structured elections and guidance, and documents, constitution, and bylaws, guides to help us with everything from protocol to standards. And so it is a highly functional organization with over, what is it now, 78,000 active members? But worldwide, 200 – over 200,000 members worldwide.

MM: Whoa.

LAO: [33:00] So like Robyn referred to earlier, once we leave undergraduate, it doesn't stop. You are committed for life to serving anyone in your community based on the sorority's

guidance in a chapter – or even if you’re not in a chapter, just participating to be of service. So our tenets are scholarship, sisterhood, and service. It always comes back to that.

MM: Can I ask what happened? The legacy of Brown University in your life after college, what happened?

PE: Well, after college I went to med school. But –

MM: Where did you go?

PE: I went to the University of Cincinnati and I did my residency at George Washington in D.C. Truly, my lifetime friends have been the people from Brown, a good portion of which were part of the sorority, some which aren’t, but mostly we were [34:00] sisters in the sorority. And they know for sure that my absolute best friend in life who is 20 years not here now, almost, was part of the sorority at (inaudible). And so here at Brown, and my life and all that stuff, was definitely affected by the people I met here, both in the sorority and not sorority. It changed my life. As you can hear, it changed most of our lives because we were part of that generation to start out inner city and benefit from some of the laws and the open policy to try and increase minority enrollment in college. So we benefit. I, like Robyn, knew I was going to be a doctor. That was never a doubt in my mind. But the path that I took to become a physician definitely changed, from the being in the right place at the right time and the experiences that I had. And [35:00] Lavdena’s right. Graduating from Brown, kind of no matter where you are in the country, it says something.

And I’m proud of my Brown education. I’m proud of the fact that Brown is really probably one of the last of the dying breeds of truly a liberal education, of some – of a place where – and it’s not for everyone because you have to have some structure for yourself. You have to have some organization because it is a great place to grow up, but it is a place that is easy to fail if you don’t have that within. You can’t graduate from Brown with less than a 2.0. You can flunk out of Brown [laughter] but you can’t graduate without – at least when we were here. I don’t know what it’s like now. But it’s a place for thinkers. When we were at Brown, you could get a degree in anything if you could find a faculty member to back your thought. You [36:00]

didn't have to just get degrees in the things that were in the book. If you could put a program together and talk with a professor and convince them to be a part of your dream, you could write your own diploma. There's not very many places in the country like that. I can only hope –I'm not that involved in Brown right now – that it's still like that because that definitely was one of the strengths, and I think one of the things that make us different than a lot of the other universities and colleges in the country.

LAO: I want to add something. In order to maintain your activity as an undergraduate in the sorority, you have to have a certain GPA. And so I think most of the members of Iota Alpha proved their GPA after – either during the process of becoming a member –

MM: [To hold the line?].

LAO: – or while you were a member. Because our Class of '76, I think it was the year of, OK we're just going to increase minority [37:00] representation on this campus.

AL: It was like 140 people in our – people of color in our (inaudible).

LAO: I mean, it was kind of –

MM: Oh, wow.

AL: When I say people of color, African American.

RL: You mean Black students. Yes.

MM: African American.

AL: Black students, 140 in our class. That was phenomenal at that time.

LAO: It was phenomenal. But as Patricia already said, it is a place where you have to have structure. You can soar or you can sink. And probably, our attrition rate was close to 50%.

MM: Oh, wow.

AL: Fifty percent. Only about half of us graduated on time.

LAO: So we saw our classmates. We were here yesterday, but you're not here tomorrow.

RJ: I want to piggyback on something that Pat said too, about being able to choose your own courses, choose your own major. You learn a lot about yourself and it really does help you to grow up and take responsibility. I mean, how many schools can you do a group independent study project, which I did, in dance therapy with local Providence students? [laughter] You know? And it's equal [38:00] to my organic chemistry class. [laughter] I mean, you know? And it's interesting when you speak – when I talk to other people about my education. I say, well, everything was equal. Every credit was equal. My English class, my writing class equaled my organic – organic chemistry with the lab was equal? Absolutely equal. So that also helps to build just relationships around campus. It's not like any – the science students are better or have to take harder, or their courses are worth more than the – than just the straight up English students or other liberal arts students. It's different. There aren't many schools, if any, like that where every class is weighted equally, and I'm hoping that that's still true. I mean, I know that was certainly the case when we were all here.

And just the A, B, C, no credit, that makes a huge difference in how you can, you know, decide what classes you want to choose. And when we were here, you had to have those 28 credits [laughs] to graduate. You know, which essentially was, you know, 28 divided by 4. [39:00] You know, [laughs] in terms of classes, to graduate. Each semester – I mean, it's easy if someone's failing out. If you only have two courses every semester, something's going on, even though there's no F to weigh in to your GPA. But knowing that gives you this freedom to explore and learn about yourself. You know, we heard some stories from the different panels that we listened to, the majors that people started out and where they ended up. We listened to Lynn Nottage this morning, the Pulitzer-winning prize playwright, and she spoke about wanting to be pre-med, taking organic chemistry. Bell-shaped curve, 32 to 100, and she was the one with the

32, and she realized, OK I'm not going to be a doctor. [laughter] Let me move on to something else. And she's a Pulitzer prize-winning playwright.

MM: It worked out.

RJ: It worked for her. And Brown had something for everyone, and not having the required courses. You know, back then there were courses where you had to take swimming, schools where you had to take swimming, [40:00] schools where you had to take English, and you had to, and Brown didn't have that. There was the freedom to explore and learn about yourself, and become an adult in a very different way.

MM: I just want to hear again the aftermath. Like what happened with the couple of you that I haven't heard from yet. The legacy of your education, and the influence of the sorority in your life, and what became.

AL: Coming from a background, my father finished the sixth grade. My mother finished the tenth grade. I am now the Associate General Counsel for Civil Rights, Labor, and Employment at the third largest federal government agency. I supervise 33 attorneys. I won the Presidential Meritorious Rank Award twice under President Obama. I mean, and that means that I'm like one of the top senior executives in government, the top 1%.

MM: Can you say for the record exactly where you are? Where –

RJ: The department.

AL: Oh, I'm at the Department of Agriculture in the Office of the General Counsel.

MM: Thank you.

AL: I mean, [41:00] you would never have imagined that for my life. I mean, you just wouldn't have. I mean, I go to my high school graduations, and you know, you have people who were

murdered, and in prison. You know, my life is just – I’m a really blessed person and I really consider Brown to have been a blessing because, I mean, the reality is everybody from my high school went to Purdue, Indiana State, or IU Bloomington. That was where you went to college. I mean, that’s where you went. And I just, my – Mrs. Harriston saw more for me. Mrs. Harriston, the AKA who told me, “There’s another organization that will value you. I wouldn’t worry about that.”

MM: She was right.

AL: Yeah. Lifelong.

RJ: I was just thinking of something I would say. Both of my parents attended college. I interrupted their college career. [laughter] OK? [42:00] Which meant that, I mean, my father did go on to complete. My mother did not. I had one grandparent who had graduated from college, so I wasn’t a first-generation college but that was always the focus. You’re going to go to college, and you’re going to finish, and you’re going to do this, and you’re going to do that, and you can be anything. So I always heard that. So even though my mother who really raised me did not complete college, she was well aware of what college could do and what the benefits would be for me. You know, I was the oldest of – I have two younger sisters. And so I was like the child who was supposed to be it. My mother’s favorite words were “my daughter, the doctor.” [laughter] But you know, part of having been here, having been to Brown, graduated, and gone on with the rest of my life, with Brown opening doors all along the way. I mean, even today. You know, I’m Class of ‘77. When you say the “went to Brown, graduated from Brown University,” [43:00] you know, there’s an immediate physical reaction from people.

PE: Even if they were talking to you at a certain level, and you say you went to Brown, it’s almost like they’re like stunned.

LAO: Ooh! Ooh! [laughter]

PE: “Oh, really? You went to Brown?” And I’m like –

LAO: And graduated.

PE: I always want to say it. [laughter] It just changes! I mean, it changes how people perceive you. It really does. Yeah, it's like all of a sudden, they might not have been listening, and now they're listening.

RJ: And now they're listening. It really is.

PE: It's a special place.

AL: The job that I'm currently in, when the political appointee interviewed me for the position, I thought he was going to talk to me about, you know, the current case law, my class action litigation experience. "So tell me about Brown." That was not the question I practiced. [laughter] [44:00] I'm sitting with the political appointee and the question –

MM: Yeah. For like a major job, yeah.

AL: – he asked me is, "So tell me about Brown." And so we talked about Brown for 20 minutes, and I got the job. Charlie Rawls, former general counsel. Clinton appointee. Yeah.

MM: OK. Well I think we have literally five minutes, if anyone would like to make a last thought. Otherwise, we can just wrap up here.

LAO: So where I am now, Washington, D.C., University of Miami Medical School. Getting into a residency training program is very competitive for some of the training programs. I wanted to go to Children's National Medical Center to train. So our training director was from New York, very academic. And when I said Brown, he was like, "Really? OK." And I thought, "Well, what does that mean?" Because there are hundreds of people applying for those spots, and I was accepted. So from there, I went up – what I learned at Brown [45:00] was to be the first. Don't be afraid. Accept the challenge. Accept the responsibility. So I completed the training. I was the director for the Child Youth Protection team at Children's for about 15 years, and then I bridged

over into managed care. So I'm the first African American female to be a chief medical officer for AmeriHealth Caritas, which is a family of companies that provide insurance for public benefit. And so having the Brown experience, my growing-up experience, the intersection of all that, taught me a lot of things in how to be first. I just stand up. And here, during my time we took over the administration building because we wanted to, you know, reinforce the promises. I was one of those who walked in. And so that advocacy piece, I learned here at Brown, and I'm still an advocate. And so I appreciate that.

AL: She was selected to go in the building.

MM: I know. Can we have another hour on that? [laughter] [46:00]

AL: Yeah! (inaudible) [laughter]

LAO: Yeah, because right now it's all about the walkout and not the walk-in. Yeah, which happened later.

MM: We've had a few other folks –

LAO: Come and talk about – OK.

MM: – talk about that. So we have, but I want more.

LAO: Yeah, I hear you. I hear you.

PE: It was quite an experience.

MM: But we can come back to that, yeah.

LAO: It was an experience.

RJ: I wanted to close out with one more thing, and kind of not related, because I really didn't say anything about where I am and what I do now.

MM: Yes, please.

RJ: I practiced medicine for almost 20 years and now I transitioned into corporate America where I'm a Global Medical Safety Officer for Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical which, at a director level, which is totally different than anything I ever thought I would be doing because I am not that corporate person. But I think as we keep hearing over and over the same theme, Brown prepares you for everything and anything. So I, you know, was hired for that job, had totally no experience. I went directly from medical practice into corporate America. [47:00] Lead a team of scientists and, you know, nurses, other folks in the health profession where I am the team lead, and I'm directing them, and not something that I had specific training for, except that at Brown I learned how to think out of the box, how to reason. You know, interacting with all kinds of people, sorority a big part of that. You know, learning to bond and get to a common goal with people you don't know and may not even like. [laughter] But all that as part, you know, built into the Brown experience.

LAO: Brown taught me how to survive.

RJ: That too.

AJ: That too.

RJ: That too, yes.

AJ: I was not going to disappoint my mom.

RJ: And survive well.

AJ: Yeah.

PE: And we had to graduate in four years. [laughter] (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RJ: That's right! We had to graduate in four years! It was not a choice.

AJ: Graduate in four years. Four years.

LAO: Because our scholarship would have been done in four years.

AJ: Four years.

RJ: Yeah, we didn't have that luxury. [laughs]

AJ: Oh, no, no, no, no. Four years. Four years. My mother didn't know what it is. Five years? Who's going to school [48:00] for five years? [laughter]

PE: That's what I said. [It becomes?] five years. [laughter]

AJ: Or with a graduate degree!

RJ: Yeah. I have one of those. I have millennial kids, so yeah I get it.

MM: I would like to thank you, on that note. [laughter]

LAO: Well, thank you for having us.

MM: Contributing this interview today. It now becomes part of a community of others, as I mentioned, or may have mentioned. Over 200 other interviews –

RJ: Oh, wonderful.

LAO: Wow.

RJ: Awesome.

MM: – are part of Brown Women Speak. Running since 1986.

PE: (inaudible)

MM: Once you can – yeah –

PE: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Oh yeah, somebody has to –

RJ: I forgot to say I worked with Sarah Doyle. I forgot to say that, when it first opened –

- END -