

Transcript – Class of 1994, 25th Reunion

Narrator: Jessica Rachel Arons, Daphna Caperonis Cox, Gladys Mendez, Ava Natasha Nepaul, and Gladys Xiques

Interviewer: Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist

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Mary Murphy: [00:00] So good morning. My name is Mary Murphy, and I'm the Nancy L. Buc Pembroke Center Archivist. We are here yet again on commencement and reunion weekend doing a group oral history with the 25th reunion class, class of 1994. So I'm joined today by three alumna of Brown University, and at this time I'm going to go around and ask each of you to introduce yourself. Before I do that I'd like to say it's May 25. We are in Pembroke Hall, Second Floor Seminar Room at 11:00 a.m.

Okay, so please, if each of you could just take a moment, tell me your name and so that the recording can pick it up. Introduce your name, and if you could just the very basics, where you are from and just a tiny bit about your background before we go into it deeper for each of you.

Jessica Arons: My name is Jessica Arons. [01:00] I currently live in Alexandria, Virginia, and I'm from that area. I was born in DC and grew up in the DC suburbs. How much more background?

MM: That's okay for right now.

JA: Oh, okay.

Gladys Xiques: Hi, I'm Gladys Xiques. I'm originally from Miami, Florida. I currently live in Los Angeles, California.

Daphna Caperonis Cox: And I'm Daphna Caperonis Cox, and I currently live in Sudbury, Massachusetts, which is west of Boston. And I grew up north of Boston.

MM: Okay, great. So whenever we begin these interviews, the things that we want to know that enriches our database of oral histories is to hear about, first of all, what brought you? If you could tell us about your family background a little bit for each of you, however much you're comfortable sharing, that brought you to Brown University. Take us from the beginning. We like to run these [02:00] interviews chronologically. Anyone can jump in.

DCC: I'll go. I'll go. I'll take it. So my dad went here. My dad grew up in Rhode Island, and he was the class of 1963. So I had some Brown sweatshirts when I was pretty young, and I was hearing about it, and it's interesting because I definitely kind of resisted the idea of coming here for some reason because it's where my dad went, and I wanted to do my own thing. So the first time I actually came here I didn't like it. I can't remember how old I was. I think I was, you know, 14 maybe. But then, you know, as I got older and more mature and I really started looking into it I changed my mind, obviously, but at one time I had said, "I'm never going to go there," for no real rational reason at all except that it was like sort of where my dad went. But yeah, but then once I was able to learn more about the curriculum and just [03:00] about the school I could kind of feel like it was my own decision to come here. So and I was very glad that I was able to get in.

MM: Did you look at other colleges?

DCC: Oh yes, yeah. So I basically wanted, you know, a medium-sized school in an urban environment, and I looked up and down the east coast. But this, you know, this was clearly my top choice.

MM: By the time you got there, okay.

DCC: By the time I got there.

MM: Thank you. Want to go next?

GX: I actually was raised by a single mom, and she sacrificed everything for me to go to college. And I was educated at a private school in Miami, and education really was supreme in our household. It was her gift to me. And she basically sacrificed herself and was able to send me here. [04:00]

MM: What is your mom's name?

GX: Gladys, like mine. And she basically instilled a lot of the values that I think are represented by Brown, and she did it in a very subtle and very quiet way, but, you know, her point was to really extract as much as you can from where you are educated. And Brown, it's interesting, because I did apply to many other schools, but Brown just seemed to kind of fit with my personality, and I came here sight unseen. My mom couldn't afford to even just take me on a college trip, so I really value the fact that now I get to travel the world, and I do all these amazing things, and it was on her sort of on her back, essentially. And so yeah, so I got here, and it's funny. I was actually telling this to my husband yesterday. When my aunt [05:00] brought me up here we took the ride up College Hill, and you see the gates, and it was literally instantaneous that I just felt like this was the right place, that I had made the right choice.

MM: Was your mother college educated, or are you first generation?

GX: No, first generation.

MM: I'll have more questions about that as we go. Thank you.

JA: So I grew up in a relatively privileged background, white, Jewish, upper-middle class. Both my parents had not only gone to college but had graduate degrees. My dad was an MD, and my mom had a doctorate of education. In fact, when people would call – and so I was always a feminist from the start, and so when people would call the house and ask for Dr. Arons I would say, “Which one?” And like it always caught them off guard because obviously they were all

asking for my dad. And my dad had gone to Yale, as had several other members of his family, and my mom had gone to Berkeley, and she was there during the Free [06:00] Speech Movement. And so I was always really enamored with Berkeley, felt a lot of pressure from my dad and his family to go to Yale, and Brown felt like the perfect combination of the two, and it was a way to both, like, blend, you know, both sides of me and who I was and also avoid picking one parent over the other in some fashion.

And I also recall, like, just coming up for visitor's weekend it was like cold and rainy and gloomy and, like, that bone-chilling rain that you get sometimes in Providence, and I remember walking into, I think it was, Sayles Hall, and the Indigo Girls were playing, and I felt like, [oh, I found my people?].

MM: Like they were –

JA: No, no, not live. No, not the Indigo Girls, not the real Indigo Girls. That would have been amazing. No, it was just on in the background, like, that was the music that was playing, and that just felt like, okay, this is home. But there was just so much that drew me here in terms of the open curriculum and that freedom to just kind of forge your own [07:00] path academically was very appealing to me.

MM: So before I move on to my next official question, but so this is really interesting, women in the classes of the 1990s, we've done '93, '94, and I'm wondering, and you're speaking about you were always a feminist, women leadership in your household, so now we're coming into an era of women, daughters of, potentially, not always, feminist mothers and feminist fathers from the Women's Liberation Movement. So let me just ask as a segue, like, were your – your mother obviously valued education deeply. Was there a boomer feminist philosophy happening in your home? Sounds like it was for you.

JA: Certainly with mine. I'll just jump in real quick. I mean, my mom [08:00] very much identified as a feminist, I think, and still does, and she talks about that my parents at some point had lived in Boston before I was born, and she'd gone to see Gloria Steinem speak and had come home that night so energized and so angry, and she announced to my father, "I'm not going to do

your laundry anymore.” And he’s like, “What do you mean? Of course you’re going to do my laundry.” And so it just built up until finally she, like, stuffed all his dirty laundry in the bottom of the bed on his side when he got in, so it was that kind of, like, hostile takeover of the home. But by the time I was born and my sister was born, I think my dad thought of himself as very egalitarian, and he helped out a lot in the mornings, like, because he could go into work later, and that kind of thing. So certainly by the time I was being raised it was pretty – yeah.

MM: You were feeling that.

JA: Yeah.

MM: Any other comments about [09:00] that sort of philosophy happening in your home?

DCC: Yeah, in my case it was a lot more subtle. My mother is an educator. My mother is a very strong personality. She had that shirt that says a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle. You know I just remember that, but way more subtle. But I always felt empowered to do whatever I want to, even from my dad’s side too. Like, he would teach me how to chop wood or, you know, things like whatever male types of things, and he taught me how to fix things, you know, how to sail a boat, things like that. So it’s a lot more subtle in that way, but it just made me feel like I can do what I wanted, that I wasn’t prescribed to do some kind of female, unquote – quote, unquote, role, and that included, you know, education. My parents gave me the freedom to choose where I wanted to go to school and what I wanted to study. They really gave me a lot of freedom, so that’s how it worked in my house.

MM: Okay. And for you?

GX: Without getting into too much detail my mom was actually the primary breadwinner in [10:00] my house, and even when my parents were actually married she still earned more money than him, which probably led to the erosion of their marriage. Generationally my father, Spanish background, very macho, and my mom was very much a modern, you know, even though she came from Cuba, she was a very modern, American woman. You know, kind of really scrapped

her way through and was eventually a comptroller of a company, so without being college educated, so that sort of, you know, is very, you know, it's a compliment to her and her drive. So of course having that as your role model, you know, the idea is the sky is the limit.

JA: If I could just say add one more thing.

MM: Oh yes, of course.

JA: I mean, my mom (inaudible) – hey.

MM: Please join us. [11:00] Please just take a seat towards the end. Right now I'll just say we're just diving into a conversation about feminism or women's rights in your household before we move on to college. And I'll ask that you sit closest to each other, and I'll have you introduced yourself in just one moment.

JA: I'll just add real quick my mom actually didn't teach me how to make coffee or type so that I wouldn't – so that I could aspire to being more than a secretary. So to this day I hunt and peck.

MM: So I'll ask our newest guests to please introduce yourselves as we get underway, and then we'll just jump into the next question, and I'll have you participate there. So if you could each introduce yourself.

Ava Nepaul: Hi, I'm Ava Nepaul. I'm class of 1994.

MM: Thank you.

Gladys Mendez: Gladys Mendez, also class of 1994. [12:00]

MM: Wonderful. So we're setting up this environment, right, for our listeners, right, so it is 1990, right, or '89, the fall of your freshman year, right?

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MM: Ninety, okay.

GM: Fall would have been '90, yeah.

MM: Okay, fall '90, so we're getting this moment where Bill Clinton is about to be president, right, and so we've got a lot going on nationally and internationally. We have this moment where the sort of the third wave of the feminist movement is coming at you. You have the Indigo Girls playing. You've got a lot of different stuff happening, grunge music is coming in, right. So it's like all that's all sort of around us, and then we have just this dynamic on campus. So my next question is help place our listeners into context [13:00] by telling us one of your first memories of being on campus. And again, as I said to our other participants, these memories do not have to be good. This is not a publicity video for Brown University. We're seeking real memories about people's lives and experiences here on campus. This is conversational, so if anybody would like to jump in and share a bright, whether good or bad, but a bright, in your memory, one of your first memories of being on campus.

DCC: I'll go. So I remember, I guess it would have been freshman orientation, so it was before classes started, so our freshman unit. We had a meeting in our lounge, which ironically we never really hung out in the lounge except for, like, that one time. And this is the '90s, so it was about sex and sexual behaviors, and it was the era of AIDS, but it was also the era of, where I grew up, basically nobody in my class was [14:00] out, gay. So this is also bringing in, this conversation was bringing in, you know, different sexual, you know, preferences, which is something that I, growing up in my privileged, you know, suburban environment, I just hadn't been exposed to. So it was really, really interesting, and people had little candles, and they showed us how to put the, you know, prophylactics on them. I'm trying to make this a little bit not too raunchy here. But I just remember being like, wow. Like, I just didn't even think of so many of these things.

I had no idea. I just was so sheltered growing up, and but then the other thing I remember was, you know, I was a good student in my high school. You know, I was top of my class or whatever, but the conversations around me, the vocabulary, I just remember somebody was

talking about hegemony, and I had never heard that word before. And I was like – and she was female, and I was like, wow, she is so smart. I am so excited to be around people that are already, [15:00] like, so far ahead of me in terms of their, you know, sophistication, intelligence, knowledge, you know, et cetera. So anyway, I just remember that very vividly.

MM: Any others, first memories on campus or memories of being here at Brown?

AN: So I came to campus a week early for the TWTP with the Third World Transition Program, and so Gladys and I actually went to the same inner city high school.

MM: Okay, and where are you each from, if you could just tell us?

AN: I grew up in Hartford, Connecticut.

MM: Okay.

GM: Same.

MM: Okay.

AN: And so the idea, first of all, because our high school was mainly people of color, so to even know that Brown had this Third World Transition Program, and I'm originally born in Jamaica, and so my reaction was I'm from a Third World country, does this mean that other people are from a Third World country? What does Third [16:00] World actually mean? So I just remember walking into TWTP, and at that time it was held in the basement at Andrews Hall, and it was just weird because I had never before seen that many people of color let alone in a privileged space like an Ivy League institution. And just recognizing that we all had some feeling of otherness, and in the end it was a very good experience, and I value that time that we all had together, and actually I have lifelong friendships from that.

But I think that without that experience it would have been a really rough adjustment for me. I remember meeting my freshman roommate, and it was like, I'm going to live with this person? I don't know anything about this person. And I have to stay with them for a year?

MM: Like, in the same room?

AN: Yeah, in the same room. [17:00] Yeah, and so having that kind of previous experience that I knew some people were on campus, it made it a lot easier because I, you know, knew some people.

MM: That program has been spoken about highly throughout the history of this oral history program. And that many students see it and saw it as a lifeline. We also interviewed the first woman director of the Third World Transition Program, which was great. And do you have memories, first memories?

GM: I was kind of in a bit of a different situation because I actually was dating someone who was leaving Brown when I came in. And so I had been on campus a couple times prior to, but yes, I did come to the Third World Program. And as Ava said, I think our school was extremely diverse. We had almost everything in our [18:00] high school community. It was a large school to begin with, but coming to Brown, I have to say, it was my first experience of feeling like my experience is different from the larger community experience, and that was my first, you know, my introduction to that. So that in and of itself colors and puts a different perspective on things. I remember specifically feeling like, wait, all of a sudden you're in the true minority, but it doesn't – I don't know how else to put that.

AN: Yeah, it's going from where, you know, there were tons of people that we felt we could relate to with the same life experience –

GM: And there were so different. And they were so different, back then, the countries, the languages that they spoke. [19:00] They were all different, but that was the majority. That was the majority experience, and now coming to a place where that was flipped, and all of that

diversity all of a sudden, it wasn't that. And so you were coming at that – I was coming at that from a different –

MM: What were you seeing, just to be more explicit, we'll get down to it, what were you seeing instead? What was the picture that you saw in front of you?

AN: I mean, for me it was classism. That was a real – and an understanding that while we had our, you know, low to middle to no income family stuff, while we had some commonalities, that class was a big deal. There were things that we could not relate to. Like, I knew for sure my family was never going to be able to afford for me to do a semester abroad. As much as I wanted to do that that wasn't going to happen. [20:00] And just the first week, you know, there are people, you know, who traveled the world all before their, you know, before they're even here, you know. So while it's awesome to have that knowledge, you also kind of sit with yourself like, wow. Yes, my experience is unique. And how do I continue on with my experience and still feel like I'm being successful, because if you dare put yourself in a position of comparator you will always feel like you're not achieving enough. So what you said about hearing, like, the word, you know hegemony, it's like, yeah, what 17-year-old says that?

DCC: Well, yeah, right, right.

AN: But that's like for me, you know, meeting this, you know, Japanese Peruvian kid who, like, speaks Spanish and, like, seven other languages, [21:00] and I'm like, you know. It broadens your perspective but then internally it makes you assess, like, huh? Like, where do I fit in with all this?

MM: Yeah. I just want to ask quickly before coming to experiences from you that really resonated in your memories, if you could just share whether your parent – I think it's very important to know, were your parents' college educated? We like to ask. I like to ask my interviewers the family lineage around education.

GM: First generation. My stepdad is essentially my dad, raised me, he went through fifth grade, and my mom high school, and then was a secretary professionally. But I'm the first generation, first college graduate in my family.

AN: I'm also first generation. My mom completed associate's degrees as an adult, and my father completed high school by correspondence.

MM: So if I could [22:00] just ask if either of you wanted, you don't have to, if you'd like to jump in with thoughts or comments or memories?

GX: Sure, I mean, to Gladys and Ava's experience, mine was a little bit different because I was educated in a predominantly white, affluent private school in Miami, and so having had that experience, coming here – and it's funny because I grew up with kids having BMWs as their first car and Porsches as their first car. And my mom would pull up in her little, like, beat up Ford Escort and pick me up, and it was, you know, again, I had already kind of, like, seen that, and then coming here I was in a different place where I'm like, I'm used to that and being surrounded by that kind of privilege.

And so my mom's sort of mantra was when I was in high school your [23:00] – I mean, this is going to come off as bizarre, but she said "You're using this place. Ignore the privilege. You're using this place to get you to a better place." And she said, "That's why I'm sacrificing all of this so that you can get to someplace better because I want you to do better than what we're in." And so when I came here I kind of just followed the same mantra, which is I'm just extracting as much as I can, and I'm surrounding myself with the smartest people, both professors and students, to get myself to a better place, and just kind of be a sponge.

DCC: So I grew up in Reston, Virginia, which was very intentionally saw itself as a very integrated, progressive town in northern Virginia at a time where Virginia was [24:00] and continues to be still, you know, pretty conspicuously segregated in many parts of the state. And so I remember coming here and kind of learning about the TWTP program, and that people of color had been here for a week before, and kind of both surprised to learn that, and I think I noticed more what seemed to me like self-segregation among the student body and at the time

kind of struggled with that and felt like even though there was a lot of diversity it wasn't as kind of an integrated or mixed experience as I had experienced in high school. And kind of struggled with that. I understand it now, much more, why it was that way and why it needed to be that way in many respects, but so just, that's my reflection on that experience.

MM: That's interesting. I want to just ask a quick question again [25:00] situating us generationally. Are any of your parents' vets, Vietnam vets by any chance? Okay.

DCC: No, they're older. So like, my parents, they're not boomers. They're like pre-boomer.

JA: My parents are boomers, but my dad was in medical school, so he was exempted.

MM: Okay. I just wanted to ask that question. Okay, so the campus is hot, right. You're getting onto campus. You're starting to have your first experiences, good and bad memories, culture shock on campus. If you could now – I like to do highs and lows. I like to do bright, shiny, happy memories. I like to do things that were struggles, challenges, academically or socially because again, these snapshots, they're like Polaroids in our memory, and they stand out more sharply. So if you could tell us, however you want to do this. [26:00] Let's do highs and lows and see what happens and see where this conversation goes.

GX: I'll go.

MM: And if you could tell us a little bit about your, as you're getting into this, what you're studying. Again, give us some context about where you were on campus.

GX: It's a low point and then the high point because they're kind of interrelated. Low point, Anita Hill hearings 1992. It really shaped the way that I looked at the world. And seeing a woman of color stand up for herself in front of a group of men and do it in an elegant and graceful fashion was perhaps one of the most seminal experiences and memories that I have. And being here, and I thank god I was here, because experiencing that and then vocalizing it and

having a supportive community of amazing women around me kind of rah, rah, saying what you're feeling is not alone. And then [27:00] kind of using that.

And I remember a dear friend of mine here saying you need to use that. There's something here. It's shaking you to the core. And hence it became my journey into being a lawyer. And that really kind of shifted my perspective, and it actually is what, like – it was the catalyst for me to become a public policy concentrator, to take a lot of classes in, sort of, economics and social policy and sort of take that and take that energy and that just anger and channel it into a career. And so it was a low point of seeing myself, like, nothing going to change. Wow, this is horrible. This sucks. To, okay, I can do something with this. And it was a journey. It didn't happen overnight, but it [28:00] started the thread of, you know, something that I still feel very deeply about today and care about.

MM: That's a searing memory that other interviewees have discussed, the Anita Hill hearing. It was like a grueling visual trauma that I think women particularly, particularly women viewers like we endured, you know, just watching this woman go through it. And that's interesting that sticks out in other of our interviewee's minds as well. Your other memory?

GX: Oh, it's the high point is being in public policy classes and really just feeling like – it was one of those moments where it's like I'm in the zone kind of thing. Like, I feel like this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. There was like a synchronicity, if you will, of people saying things that – and speaking in a way that, unfortunately I'm so spoiled here. We can talk about what happened after that, but [29:00] people who, like, speak from experiences and understand and just say, okay, well, that's your experience, and you're almost coddled here. And then going to law school and having my whole world turned upside down. And Anita Hill's hearing, you know, that, I'm like, wow I'm reliving that in law school. So it was good that I had that here because I saw the best of what we could be, and again I'm looking at it, you know, in hindsight, and I'm sure there were some painful moments in that. But I can tell you that in contrast to law school it was an ivory tower.

MM: Would you like to say where you went to law school?

GX: I went to George Washington University law school.

MM: Okay. Other highs and lows?

GM: My low, I came in believing I wanted to do international relations and translation. I believed I wanted to work in policy of the United Nations and did my first couple of international relations classes that first [30:00] semester, large, huge classes, as well as, you know, my foray into Chinese, and realized very quickly that it wasn't for me. I was not – it didn't feel right. And that's a nice way to put it. And there were multiple times, at least I remember two really defining experiences where I called my mom and (inaudible).

I called my mom. I said, "I need you to come pick me up. I'm done. I'm really done, mom." Down the road an hour and a half. She could have easily gotten into that car. And we didn't have cell phones and everything then. We had actual phones, and she said, "There's no way that I'm picking you up. There's no way, and you cannot take the bus." And I said, "I can take the bus. I've saved enough money that I can get on the bus." And she said, "You're not coming back. You're not allowed. You can't come back. You have to do that. You can do it. You just have to do your [31:00] best. Do your best. You can do this. You're there for a reason, and it's so you can be better." Sorry.

She didn't come pick me up. My freshman year was the hardest. I remember it like yesterday, and, you know, like, finishing my statistics exam, that was the last class, and I was like, I made it. I made it. Right, make it through that first year. It can only get better. And my high was, you know, honors thesis, defending my honor's thesis.

MM: What did you concentrate on?

GM: I did community health policy and administration. And my sophomore year, the beginning of my sophomore year I took a class in community health with Lois and it changed my world. It really changed my world and my sense of who I was and what it was that I wanted to do and how I wanted to impact the world around us, right. And I found it. As an independent concentrator in community health I was able – I found an internship, and I was able to link [32:00] Brown with the office of community services, Rhode Island Community Services, mental health services, and

I was able to essentially just do an independent study, research study around what the prevalence, you know, of homelessness, mental illness among the homelessness in Rhode Island, throughout the State of Rhode Island was. And that was my senior project.

But having been able to essentially be supported here in an environment that said, you know, take your interest and see what you want to do with it, right, and have professors who said, “Okay, I don’t know where that’s going, but go for it. If you’re interested, try it.” And being able to create those linkages and those relationships for things that weren’t here that perhaps the office of community mental health services didn’t have and needed, and Brown (inaudible) to be able to go, you know, that cross collaboration two way street in the community and have everyone benefit from [33:00] that was really empowering. And I think that’s, you know, it says honor’s thesis. Nobody can take that away from me. I did it, lived it. It was hard fought.

MM: And to have the freedom of the open curriculum to be able to not –

GM: Exactly, exactly.

MM: – be screwed after a bad first go and to be pigeon holed in that. Other highs and lows?

AN: So I’ll talk about my sophomore year. That was a crummy year. So in continuing with tradition I continued to get the worst residential lifeline there was of all time. And 25 years later I’m on North Wayland above the DJ from last night. So sophomore year I had particular bad luck. My friend Asha and I, we were the only [34:00] two females, and we were females of color on the second floor of D-Phi.

MM: What’s that?

AN: The hockey frat.

JA: D-Phi, oh yeah.

AN: Yes, see, and of course Asha had the good sense to have other friends and move out. And see Gladys sophomore year, she took off and was living off campus, so I had no hope, and Xiques, she had the good sense to become, like, a residential counselor, so she had a suite room in Andrews. So I'm like I have nowhere to go. And coupled with that I had always thought I would be some great bench scientist. In all my internships, like, I interned at Bristol-Myers and Pratt and Whitney, and you know, science was going to be my thing. Well, sophomore year taught me science is not your thing, girl, no. It was just, I mean, I'm the person that got a C in ecology. [35:00] And I said to myself, "Who gets a C in ecology? It's just plants and animals and how they hang out. How could this possibly be?" You know, I'm a biology girl, right?

And so I, at one point, while I didn't make the call to my parents, I really seriously looked at transferring my credits to UConn and taking my butt back to Connecticut. And I said you have worked out all the reasons why. It would be cheaper, in-state resident tuition. I could commute, and I don't have to deal with all of these, like, you know, hockey players every Friday night losing it. And I really questioned why. Why on earth would you put, like, females in a hockey frat?

MM: Why would they do that? Why would –

AN: Because I had crummy lottery numbers. And I remember talking to res life. I said look, "I'm not in a Greek society. Could you, like, at least put me with the A Chi Os or something?" But no, so that was really [36:00] – I was really fortunate that the guys on the sides of us, Kevin and Spinner –

JA: Spinner.

AN: Spinner.

JA: Kevin Spinner.

AN: Kevin Spinner, yeah. No, I mean, he was super nice, and so they made arrangements with us for shower schedules and stuff, and so it was basically only the four of us. There was another

independent there as well. So we all shared the corner bathroom. But it still would be like terrifying at times. Like, they would, like, do these weird chanting things at night, go around knocking on all the independent's doors, like. And it was really, like, I mean, it was frightening. Like, I felt like in fear. But I talked to Res. Life, and they say, well, there's nothing we can do about it. And so it was a really, really tough year. But I somehow, I don't know, the will of god, I made it through. And I think I had a lot of support [37:00] from the friends I had and just an understanding, like, I'm just going to get through this sophomore year, and maybe I'll pull a better lottery number and it'll be okay. But it was very disconcerting that Res. Life could have cared less.

DCC: Yes, no advocacy for women at all.

AN: And the fact that we knew also, I mean, I had several friends that were women peer counselors, and, you know, during the time that we were here, '90, '94, is when people were talking about acquaintance rape and, you know, when that conversation about interpersonal violence was going on. So I think it wasn't just me struggling academically it was like coming back every night to that dorm room and recognizing, you know, when I got home that summer I was like, you know, I was just a hyper vigilant person because I had to be. But I couldn't change that situation.

You know, it's funny because in Wayland they now [38:00] have the gender inclusive bathroom. And, you know, we're remarking to ourselves weren't they always gender inclusive? And then they got split up again, and now they're back together. But I can see with the situation I had my sophomore year why it still is important to have a space where people can feel like, you know, okay, this is actually my space, and if someone comes into my space I can stick up for myself. And again, I don't know what Res. Life policies are now, but that's something that should never happen to anyone. If you're an independent, you should not be in a frat house.

MM: That's insane. That's crazy. So can I ask what your concentration ended up being?

AN: So my concentration was human biology but thanks to the open curriculum I took a whole bunch of stuff. So I could have gotten a minor in Spanish as well, and I ended up, though, working in public health.

MM: Okay. Other highs and lows before [39:00] we move on?

JA: Sure. So my lows were – I'll mention two. One was my sophomore year. Sophomore year seems to be – for a lot of people. Buckling to pressure that I was feeling from my dad, who never approved of my choice of Brown because somehow he thought it was not rigorous enough compared to where he had gone, which was Yale, so I ended up taking the maximum course load, which I think was five, and it just about killed me, and that included an intro to economics class, which again, I had zero interest in but felt a lot of pressure from my dad to take something like, I don't know, meaningful or important or I don't know what, whatever his criteria was. And it was only at the end of the semester or after the semester that I realized that Brown courses were four credits whereas Yale courses were three credits, so I actually was taking more credits that semester than you could take [40:00] at Yale if you took a maximum load there.

So like, and the upside of that was, like, that kind of freed me. That was when I gave myself permission to stop trying to, like, please him and just, like, pursue what I wanted here. So that was one thing, and the other low was my freshman year I had a stalker. So there was someone I – I had done, like, an It's Academic or some, whatever quiz bowl kind of thing, and he was part of that. And he started, like, at some point fixating on me. You know, it's interesting to reflect now back on that, now in the #MeToo era, that it didn't even occur to me to report him. Like it just didn't. Like, I don't – it wasn't even like, oh, I should report him. Where should I go? And I didn't know where to go. I didn't even think about reporting him. So I think again back then it was one of those things were you just thought, well, this is just something I have to deal with. And, like, I took it upon myself to try to, [41:00] you know, not wait alone for friends for too long. Like, I remember being on the steps to the Ratty waiting for a friend, and he showed up, and I was like, how long until she gets here? And I remember, like, avoiding where I'd sit in the Ratty because of where he was, or, like, all my friends knew, and they would try to protect me.

Like, I remember watching some movie or being in a lecture hall for a movie on the aisle, and I saw him come in, and I crawled under my friends. Like, I made all my friends move so that I could sit by the wall so he couldn't even come talk to me. And I later learned that there were other women, of course, who had problems with him too. I think ultimately he transferred or left, so I don't know. But by the end it had gotten resolved because he wasn't there anymore. But so yeah. So that's still –

MM: A highlight?

JA: Oh okay, so highlights were – I was privileged enough to be able to study abroad, and so I spent [42:00] my spring of my junior year in Florence, Italy, which was amazing, and my concentration was Am. Civ. with a focus on gender, which I ultimate – that's another highlight is that I actually used my degree more so than just about anyone I know because I do a lot of – well, whatever. We can get into that. But had we had minors it would have been art history, and I was able to be in Florence and spend that semester just immersed in art. So that was also wonderful.

MM: Was that after the incident with the man on campus?

JA: Yeah, that was freshman year.

MM: Okay, so then you kind of – more freed?

JA: Yeah, I guess so, yeah.

MM: Anyone else that we've missed?

DCC: I'll just say in general I don't really have a specific low although after my sophomore year, after that summer I didn't want to come back, and I'm thinking in my head, like, why that was. And I don't really know. The only thing I can think of – so I went to the career [43:00] center sophomore year and was looking for a summer job, just, they used to have binders. So I'd go in,

search the binders, and I was like, I just think I want to work in a national park, you know, so this is what I did. So you can apply, and then they put you up in dorms, so that's what I did, and they trained me to be a chef. I mean, not a chef, but a cook, but still, so I did that. And it finally – I just felt like I was achieving something really tangible whereas at Brown, you know, I was an English concentrator. Again, highs and lows, but it was so hard with English especially. You're not getting – well, you're getting grades, but it's not like a test. Like, it's really hard to measure yourself and know, and then what was I going to be doing with an English major? I still, you know, I didn't want to be a professor. I just didn't know. There was just a lot of identity – lack of identity I should say. And so when I went away that summer after my sophomore year I felt like, well, I can do this. I can be a line cook. I can, you know –

MM: What park were you in?

JA: Yellowstone.

MM: Oh, wonderful. [44:00] That sounds like a dream, yeah.

JA: Yeah, it was amazing, you know, but we worked, whatever, 50 hours a week, and –

MM: Yes, hard work.

DCC: – you know, had, like, one day off a week, and there wasn't much free time at all, but it just, it felt just so real, and, you know, I was with people all my own age, but they were all from all over the country. You know, I didn't know anybody. I just kind of randomly, you know, met these people and got really close to them, and that just felt amazing. And so for whatever reason I just didn't want to go back. But I did. But I did. And then I guess for my high – so actually that junior year I was also able to go. So instead of going abroad I actually did a program called Sea Semester, which is you're on a research sailing vessel. We studied plastics in the ocean. We did oceanography. So that was just – and again, I think, like, learning a little bit more about myself and learning that I really liked to do [45:00] some of this more practical hands-on type activities. That was just a wonderful experience, and then by the time I came back for my senior year I was

good with Brown, and I was really motivated, and I had some great English classes that I was able to pick and they were fulfilling, and I ended up working in publishing, so I did finally figure that out.

MM: Right. So I want to make sure – we have 10 minutes left, and I do want to kind of keep the conversation just for a minute around this experience around female sexuality around safety on campus in the context of the early 1990s. And now reflecting in the era of #MeToo or whatever you want to say or the condition on campus now for women, do you [46:00] have other thoughts that you want to share about that time on campus, what it was like being, you know, a young woman dealing with all these different issues in that era in terms of what it was? I don't know. I mean, I know the campus was struggling at different times with the rape lists and things like that, early '90s. So if you just have any other thoughts about that.

JA: I mean, I'll just say real quickly, when the #MeToo phenomenon erupted, I mean, I immediately thought back to the rape list and the whisper network here in Brown, and how it had been put up on the bathroom walls and come down again. Like, how the administration had taken it down, and then it went back up, and all the conversation, the debate about due process where, you know, what about these men? They should be able to know their accusers. And so, like, it just, it brought it all back. And again, but now I feel like I have very, more crystalized opinions about all of this, and at the time [47:00] I felt very torn and conflicted, and I was pulled into those conversations, those arguments about due process, and I think I feel very differently now than I did at the time.

MM: And also just to extend that question to the group, as you became professional women just after college and in your early years in the professional world, just kind of, you can roll that into if you have any thoughts about what that is like to be young women in the work place.

GX: I actually will bring in a little bit of the law school. So having had the experiences of that, you know, the rape list and sort of being very sort of aware of what the issues were at the time and being sort of a young woman in this in that era, I remember something very stark happening in my communal law class, and it was on rape. And I remember kind of raising my hand. No one

was raising their hand, and some gentlemen in my class said, “Well, you know, [48:00] she showed up at his house at 3:00 a.m. What does she expect?” And everyone’s like, “yeah, yeah.” And I was like am I on another planet? And so I raised my hand, and I started yelling. I got very animated. I’ve never spoken up in class. I got very animated. I started yelling at the guy. I started yelling at my professor. I was like, what the hell? This is crazy. Are like, people, like, taking crazy pills? It was just insane. And then no woman – and I actually turned to the women. I said, “Are you on my side here? Like, what is going on here?” And I remember saying, “This would never happen at Brown.”

And it was great because it was a teaching moment. My professor was Paul Butler, who was a big advocate on jury nullification, and you know, African American, just, he was on *60 Minutes*. He became very sort of famous in this space, and I went, I [49:00] literally marched into his office. I said, “What the hell? You especially, you weren’t even like helping me.” And he said, “I did my job as a teacher.” And I said, “What are you talking about?” And he said, “The point of being an advocate is to be able to articulate your position in a passionate way. You did that today.” He said, “Who cares about the other people?” And he said, “Your education at Brown has helped fuel you and given you the language to be able to be a better advocate.” He said, “Congratulations. And you can thank your parents for sending you to a good school.” And I was like – it all kind of came together full circle. And it was a teaching moment. I still didn’t feel good. And in fact the day after I went back into class all these women came up to me and said, “Thank you for speaking up.” And I said, “You’re welcome, but you need to speak up to. You are all training to [50:00] be lawyers.”

MM: Yeah. Other thoughts?

GM: Again, I was in a different situation because I actually dated someone. He left and I came in, but I dated him throughout my experience at Brown, so I was a bit insulated with regards to, you know, I had that one person that I could turn to for that. At the same time, I was always very aware that the choices I personally made could have lifelong ramifications with regards to what is it that I’m wearing? What is it that I – I can’t tell you. There would never be a person on campus who could tell you they saw me pick up a drink ever in my hand. I did not drink. I don’t drink today unless my husband was in the room because I did not ever want to put myself in a

position whereby someone could say, well, look what she was wearing. Oh, look, [51:00] well, she got drunk, and so she doesn't remember what she gave permission for, and things like that. So it was always being very conscious of what I was doing, what I was wearing, where I was going, never going anywhere by myself.

Literally and to this day just being hyper vigilant about your surroundings, never taking them for granted, never taking your safety for granted because there is always that he said, she said potential. And I personally was going to do everything that I could to avoid that. It of course helped that I was in a long term relationship and that having come onto campus – when I came onto campus there were plenty of other people too who also knew me and who knew that I was linked to a former student, right. So that also probably played the part in it as well. [52:00]

MM: Other thoughts?

AN: Well, I just wanted to talk about the whistles.

DCC: Oh yeah.

AN: The whistles and safe walk.

DCC: I totally forgot about that. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

AN: So safe walk, you could call. So the call boxes, before the blue lights went on, were there so you could call and volunteers would come to walk you back and forth. So if you were studying late at the Rock, you know, you could have them safely escort you back to your dorm room, and it was usually a male and female pair so that people would feel, you know. And we also had the whistles that we all had on our little chain lanyards. And I was a shuttle driver for work study. And looking back at it it was a little crazy because I was driving the like 2:00 a.m. shift on Saturdays.

So I saw a lot of things, [53:00] and I will say I've seen the, you know, legit professional shuttles now, and I'm still – I'm a little weirded out by it because we used to have our little Dodge caravans with the little decal, and I think it was such a service that we provided to

students. I understand the liability implications, but I also saw some of my classmates just really – it was really great to see how many men, you know, in that dispatch station, they were dedicated to making sure this campus was safe for everyone. And then they also had women who were dispatchers, so it was a very, like, public safety oriented student, basically, run operation. And junior year one of our unit mates, Kathy, who was a very meek and mild person, there was a homicide, [54:00] and a Brown University shuttle is the one that called it in, and Kathy was on the shuttle, and she got off that shuttle. She gave that person CPR.

MM: Was this a student on campus?

AN: It was. I think it – no, it was a Providence resident but who had been attacked on campus. And I just remember the community -

MM: By another – sorry.

AN: We never knew what the outcome of the situation was, but we know that that person died on the scene. And I remember that was really powerful thing for those in our class that knew Kathy, it was a fair number of us. And I just remember seeing such a supportive community around that, to know that, you know, we're classmates with people that when something happened they're there. So I felt very – even though I lived in that hockey frat I did have safety in other ways.

MM: So [55:00] just to finish up, literally we have a minute left, so I just want to give this opportunity – it can run a little bit over. If you are here today to make sure that something is said for the record, like, sometimes people come into these interviews and they're like I really want to get this out, and I don't want to stop you from doing that, so this is last round robin for those memories, if you have any.

JA: I just want to make sure that it's chronicled somehow. I remember joining the NOW chapter on campus and then there being a split, a splinter group came off called FORCE, Feminists Organizing for Radical Change and Equality. And I remember I participated in both groups, but I loved the fact that, like, NOW wasn't radical enough for Brown, that we needed our own splinter

radical feminist group. It also was where I first was exposed to [56:00] the very valid critiques of white feminism and the reasons why women of color didn't always feel like feminism, white feminism, was their own. Again, it was just the beginning of that journey for me, so there was a lot I didn't understand. There was a lot of education, self-education that had to happen along the way. But I really appreciate even getting that exposure and understanding that there was a problem that I needed to figure out that I still continue, I think, to work on to this day. But that was an important – that was very important for me.

The other thing I want to talk about is the abortion clinic protests in the early '90s. And I remember probably as part of FORCE we went down and did the counter protests. So we created a buffer zone, a human buffer zone so that the anti-abortion protestors could not block the entrance to the clinics physically, which is what [57:00] they were doing. It was a tactic they were taking at the time. And so we would keep a pathway open so that the people who needed to get in for their procedures or whatever other healthcare they might have needed, we were able to get the clinic open. I remember very much in this powerful moment of us chanting "This clinic stays open. This clinic stays open." And I can't remember if it was in Providence or Boston. We may have actually gone up to Boston to do it. There may not have even been a clinic.

GM: There was. (inaudible) I volunteered for a couple years at the one downtown, and I remember the protesting.

JA: Yeah, so it may have been downtown Providence. But anyway, that to me is a very vivid memory, and I just wanted to make sure that got chronicled.

MM: Other memories? I also want to ask just quickly if you could, each of you, tell me now what you are doing for a living, if you are working professionally outside of the home. If not that's great too, but if you could just let me know for the record what you do now.

JA: So I [58:00] am a Senior Advocacy and Policy Council for Reproductive Freedom at the ACLU.

MM: Such a (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

JA: It's really great to see the thread. I look back on the papers I wrote and how it's all connected, and that's really cool.

MM: That's amazing.

GX: I'm an attorney. I am currently the Deputy Chief Compliance Officer at the TCW group, and I work in finance.

DCC: I'm a writer, and I'm currently working as the content manager and editor of an astrology app, but interestingly enough this job came to me through Brown alum. But it's a great job, very flexible. I work from home. It's great.

AN: So I'm an epidemiologist with the Connecticut Department of Public Health. Currently working in STD and HIV prevention.

GM: I went straight to Yale for my master's program in public health, [59:00] worked at Sloane Kettering and Johns Hopkins for a while, then became a full time mom for about 14 years and traveled with our family for my husband's different positions in different locations and am now have just gotten back into full time work, remote work. I work with Sandy Hill Promise as a training associate. I schedule all of their Promise presenters that go into the different schools throughout the US.

MM: Okay. Thank you. Really fascinating careers, each and every one of you. Okay, so with that I'm going to thank you so much for participating in this project. As I said before we started filming, this interview joins just over, I think, 250 others from women from all classes. Our earliest graduate who ever recorded an interview graduated in the class of, I think it's 1916. [60:00] She was interviewed almost at 100 in the early '80s. So that was amazing, up until our recent – we just interviewed a few students who are graduating this year. So it continues to grow. Your interview will be available soon, and then it will be to the world to be studied by students, scholars, and the community. We even had a young student in Nebraska email, and she's using

one of our interviews for an exhibit she's doing. So it's all over the world. So I just want to thank you so much for contributing your time and your memories to setting the record straight about the history of women at Brown. Thank you.

Group: Thank you!

- END -