

Transcript – Karen T. Romer, class of staff

Narrator: Karen T. Romer

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist

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Location: Romer's home in Providence, Rhode Island

Length: 1:47:30

Amanda Knox: Good morning. My name is Amanda Knox. I am the Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist. It is Monday, January 13, 2020. And I am here in Providence with Karen Romer to collect her oral history for the Pembroke Center Oral History Project. It is 10:12 in the morning, so good morning Karen.

Karen Romer: Good morning, Amanda.

AK: So, I would like to kind of start our story at the very beginning, if you don't mind, if you'd like to tell us a little bit about where you grew up, where you went to school, maybe a little bit your parents educations, kind of where they came from. Any kind of little early background history you'd like to share.

KR: I was born in 1936 in Chelsea, London, England [1:00] and came to Cambridge when I was three months old. My parents had immigrated to the United States a decade earlier, but it was a quirk of family circumstances that I happened to be born in England.

My first few years in Cambridge were pre-war years and by 1940 I was four years old. Those war-years were very significant for me. My father was a professor of biology at Harvard who joined the intellectual war work, and spent much of the war in London. – very scary for us at home with the Blitz and able to get very little news etc.

AK: So your parents were British?

KR: Yes, and they both grew up in England. In 1929 he had taken a one year job at Cal-Tech, and then it turned into a five year job, after which he came to Harvard in 1935. My mother was an artist. She had wanted to be a musician, but she had osteomyelitis as a child, [3:00] a bone disease for which, at that time, there was no cure, so she spent her childhood, in plaster casts, in nursing homes. And at home in bed with a fantastic mother who, gave her every reason to battle

on and survive. She was a woman of great fortitude and a healthy no-nonsense spirit, which proved useful in child rearing! And when she found she couldn't do music because osteomyelitis partly crippled one of her hands and her other arm, she turned to art, and later in life became a weaver. [4:00] She was always the only person who could fix a tangled zipper. Or knots that were –

AK: The worst part knitting.

KR: Yes, a knitter – in fact, she made this. (Scandinavian sweater)

AK: Did she really?

KR: Yeah. And she made it, actually, for a friend. And after my mother died, she sent it to me and said, “I think you should have this. It's a very special sweater.”

AK: Wow. It's beautiful.

KR: It's very special to get to put it on in the morning.

AK: Yeah. Right.

KR: So, my father had had also thought of a career in music that then turned to science instead. And so our household was rich in interest in the arts and music as well as science. I had one older sister and [5:00] one younger sister, and another sister who would have been older than I was who died in infancy. So when I was born, the previous child had, you know, tragically died. But I didn't know the details of that till later in my life.

In Cambridge, the public schools were really, alas, poor. My parents tried them with my older sister for a while. And my mother felt it was impossible. She couldn't bear to go. The principal of the public school that she had to interact with one final time, had great big boots that he had kept on the table [6:00] with his feet inside them while they were talking! But it was not just the appearance. It was also the fact that there was really no understanding between them. Here he was running a school.... So she and my Dad turned to a private school that was in the area called

the Buckingham School. At that time, it was a girl's school and had a very remarkable and extraordinary Headmistress named Marion Valiant. And it was a wonderful school and we all went there as children right, right through. It was a school that –

AK: Up through high school?

KR: All the way through high school. Yeah, and it was a school that took in refugees during, during the war years, paid attention to what was going on in the world outside. [7:00] But also provided first rate, education. Marion Valiant was herself an exceptional person. And she also had a great flair, talent for identifying good teachers. So sometimes now, when I'm with people who are straining to remember the names of one or two of their school teachers, I can pretty much give you the names of every teacher that I had in every, every year all the way through Buckingham because they just, they just were individuals, they made a real and deep impression and you can remember the things that you learned from them - so I'm very, very, very grateful for that.

And music was very important to me when I, when I was growing up; [8:00] I played the piano first, until I was big enough for a full sized cello at 10. My mother had wanted to play the cello but she hadn't been able to because of her handicaps, which I also learned later. My sisters played other instruments, but they weren't as passionate about it as I was. And then, let's see. What did I do? After, the war we had a year in England when my father went on sabbatical. And my younger sister and I went to boarding school. She for a semester and me for the whole year (my family was only there for one semester. So I had a year in an English school in the ninth grade, which was an excellent experience to have had. It was an international world, it was how even though the language was the same, you know, there were so many things that were thought about with from a different angle, and it was lovely [9:00] to have had that exposure. A little bit I'd had a little bit of that growing up simply because my parents had been English and, you know, often I'd say, "Well, so and so can do that." My mother would say, "Well, we're different. We don't, we don't you know, we don't do that." So that was, that was the first of my international experiences which was very important. And then when I was a senior, I had applied to colleges and got in a couple of places –

AK: Is this still in England?

KR: No, no, I came back and I finished high school, which was wonderful. We did lots of, lots of theater. All of us in our family we love to act. We always got parts and plays were a big production at Buckingham, and the community came and it was really very exciting. And, and meanwhile music was going on and getting more important to me. [10:00]

Then it happened that my parents were going to go, in what would have been my freshman year, - they were going to have a sabbatical and they were going to spend the fall in Paris; and my experience in England had been so positive... And I was struggling with this, did I want to be a musician, kind of thing? So I said to my parents, "What if I didn't go to College? What if I took a year off? What if I didn't go to college next year? What if I went to France? I wouldn't hang out with you. I'd find something to do and play cello."

AK: This is about what year?

KR: That would have been my year, my first year of college. Oh, what year would it have been? That was 1954-55.

AK: And is that when you graduated high school?

KR: '54 I graduated from high school. So I ended up spending that next year '54-55, in Paris. And the first semester I got a job teaching in, in a school run by a convent. [11:00] Not too far from, from Paris. The thing that I was ostensibly doing when I decided to do this was that I would have lessons and spend the year really doing music intensively. But I was determined to, you know, pay my, find a way to pay my own room and board, as part of our agreement. So it was in and of itself a very interesting experience for me and very important bit of education because here I was, 18, and I was the same - there were some of the girls who were in this school who were, who were my age. And ostensibly I was supposed to be sort of running a conversational group, helping them to learn English because they all took English and they needed a chance to speak it.

AK: Did you know French at the time?

KR: I had had excellent French at school and so I understood it very well. [12:00] And in the course of several months, I became quite fluent. And by the time I'd been there for a year it was good, but you know, it was, it was so unrealistic of the, of the nuns. Well, actually what happened was when they interviewed me for the job and they said, "You know, what's your experience with children?" I said, "Oh, I've always loved children. I've done tons of babysitting and you know, we had a lot of family life. My parents have always communicated a love of children. They're both basically teacher people and what's the problem?" You know? So then they hired me, but it actually proved really quite difficult.

We lived in an old French mansion. I had steps about 2 yards wide that went in a huge arc up to my bedroom. [13:00] And they were made of old hand-made bricks... But in the beginning it was just really hard making a connection, especially with the older teens. I had asked the sisters if there was some little room that I could make into a hangout, you know, cushions on the floor, and I cut out all kinds of magazine pictures, pasted them up, you know, so for vocabulary things we could talk about the pictures. But it really wasn't working and the older ones weren't coming. Then it got more interesting: after I'd been there for maybe a month, I was told that at the weekend, instead of eating with the kids the way we always did, each teacher at a table of eight, there would be a special meal because there were some visiting guests who were coming. They may have told me more detail, but maybe I just didn't get it. Anyway, so [14:00] several of us lay teachers, - I think there were four people, out of habit, there. After we had all had a really gourmet five course meal with these two men who had these distinguished little things in their lapels, you know, so I knew they were distinguished men, and it turned out they were psychoanalysts or psychologists (I never learned their credentials. And then after the meal out came this huge stack of folders, and they opened one and started discussing it, and it was one of the one of the girls I was trying to engage, and then another.... It turned out, all of the kids [15:00] in this school had had some sort of run in with the law or otherwise were behaviorally challenged.

AK: Oh no!

KR: And it wasn't a reform school or anything like that. It was private, thought they were not all

rich by any means. So, the girls who'd had whatever the problem were being sent there. So they were not a cross section of French children, as I had thought, and especially the older ones, - they weren't about to hang out with a strange American girl.

AK: Right. Right. That would have been helpful information.

KR: Yeah, exactly. So anyway, after a few weeks, I went to one of the nuns and I said, you know, I think it would be better if I focused on some younger kids, you know, like the 10, 11, 12 year olds, something like that. And if I could have them in, in a classroom where they each had a desk to sit at. And that was that was very successful because then [16:00] they had a project and I helped them each choose a project. Well, I don't have to do too much detail on this. I get carried away. But it was quite good. But by the end of the semester, I knew that I wasn't doing as much with my cello which was all the reason for being there, you know. So I steeled myself to go to the Mother Superior; I remembered that when I was hired, I had asked for some history on their prior English speaking instructors. And they said, well, they hadn't had a great deal of success. People hadn't always stayed for very long; so I determined at least to stay for a semester, but it made me feel maybe it wasn't the end of the world to say I wasn't going to come back. The Mother Superior was very kind. But I remember sitting outside the door trembling, waiting to see her and say "I'm not going to come back." [17:00] But challenging as it was, in terms of my later life, it was very important for me because I realized that I did care a lot about teaching. I did care a lot about education and how it worked. In the arrangement I developed for the younger girls, I had each of them choose something they were really interested in, whether it was cooking or fashion, or music, or art or something like that. Then they began collecting appropriate English words and finding out more about that topic. One did coins so she copied pictures of English coins and compared their value to French coins; somebody else did different kinds of buildings - houses, cathedrals etc - and pasted pictures cut from a travel guide. So all of that made me realize that having an interest was powerful in learning, and that was something that I followed up on actively in my future.

And then I moved into Paris in the spring which was much better for my cello progress [18:00] because I had lessons with a wonderful man who taught at the Academie. I could go easily to my lessons at his house, and he also requested I attend his master classes at the

Conservatory which proved fascinating. So, I would spend my mornings practicing; then I had a class in French culture at the Alliance Française; after that I wandered around in museums, in parks, and generally soaked up all things French.

AK: That sounds amazing.

KR: It was really quite special.

AK: What was it like living in postwar Paris?

KR: It was just lovely and I really mean that; the last time I was there, I thought it had been so much better then. There wasn't as much traffic. I mean, there was plenty of traffic, [19:00] you know. I wasn't as aware that it was postwar Paris as I had been in England 5 years before, when I was there in 1950. Then walking around in London, you know, the bombing was still so visible: you would turn a corner and there would be half of a building; you can see the second floor wallpaper and visualize the apartment, but in 1955 I didn't see anything that in Paris. It was, Paris in the spring time, of course, and I was very happy with my changed circumstances!

AK: We're about ten years out at that point.

KR: Yeah, but, you know, my life was ahead of me. The war was history and I lived in the moment; I walked I took the metro, I explored. So I stayed mostly in Paris. I was very focused on the city, on the music, on the art. And there was one wonderful family I got to know who invited me over just about every week for a family supper and to play chamber music at their house. That was really great for me. So then I came back from, from Paris.

AK: Back to Cambridge?

KR: Back to Cambridge. Yep. I had thought when I left, [20:00] that I would come back to Bryn Mawr College which is where I had been admitted. And when I had told them I wanted to take the year off, they wrote back and said, "Oh that sounds like a wonderful thing to do. We'll expect

to see the following year.”

AK: Oh, nice.

KR: Yes, it was! and I also wrote to Radcliffe where I had been admitted too, and they were very stuffy about it. Said, “Well, if that’s what you want to do, you’ll have to reapply next year.” So I thought to myself, “Well, of course, I’m going to Bryn Mawr. Radcliffe’s so stuffy about somebody’s going out in the world, - whatever.” As it turned out, long about April or March or something like that, Radcliffe wrote and said, “Are we expecting you to enroll?”

AK: Oh, wow.

KR: They didn’t make me reapply.

AK: Okay.

KR: So I, having been away from Cambridge for the year, thought now I think maybe I will stay there. So that’s how that worked out.

AK: What was the, the appeal of Radcliffe [21:00] to you?

KR: It was –

AK: Aside from it being in Cambridge.

KR: It was an excellent school. But it’s a really good question. I probably knew a lot more about Harvard than I did Bryn Mawr.

AK: And, because your father was working there.

KR: Yeah, and I had friends whose parents were there, so I knew some of the different

departments, knew about the music department, and I knew about the music activity. One of the things Harvard and Radcliffe had at that time was, that if you could get into the Radcliffe Chorale Society, then with the Harvard Glee Club they sang with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, because the orchestra at that time did not have their own chorus as they do now. So I think there were things like that, that weighed in with me. And maybe me just being [22:00] closer to my family at that point, having had a year of total separation.

AK: Were your parents back in Cambridge by that time, too?

KR: Yeah. Yeah, they had gone back to Cambridge by then, they went back right after Christmas.

AK: Oh, okay.

KR: Yeah. So it had the whole spring. I traveled a little bit. That year my younger sister was at school in Switzerland. In spring break, I went to Switzerland to see her. We had some friends, family in Switzerland. I had made a couple of trips in France with friends and people that I got to know and done a little of that sort of long weekend exploring. So I am sure I was feeling sort of worldly. And Cambridge was not just home, Cambridge was this place I was going to, I mean, Harvard was, you know, something like that.

AK: Had you considered any other schools besides Radcliffe and Bryn Mawr?

KR: No, I didn't. In those days, you know, you didn't have to make [23:00] 15 so many applications.

AK: Exactly. And all of your sisters went to college as well. It sounds like that was sort of encouraged in your life. Was it kind of expected you would go to college?

KR: It was the normal thing at my school. And my older sister had gone to Swarthmore. And then she went to Harvard Medical School. But I have to say, my idea of taking off to Paris – a year off – was quite revolutionary, you might say. In retrospect I was impressed that my parents

didn't discourage it. Their trust was really important to me then and later.

AK: Oh, wow.

KR: And re my sister: admission to the Harvard Medical School was pretty remarkable in those days because they only took teeny number of women. They hadn't been taking women for very long.

AK: Right.

AK: And your school was preparing you for that sort of thing anyway.

KR: Yes, for sure; thought there was one person in our class, who I think left in the 10th grade to finish high school elsewhere. She was an artist, and she had quite a lot of psychological problems. And I don't think she did go to college, though I think she ended up later going to RISD actually. But I mean, the normal thing was everybody was going to college and people went in different directions. But anyway, the music was really great for me in Cambridge because I did in fact, get into the Chorale Society my freshman year, and so I had four years of singing with the BSO, usually one or two concerts a year.

AK: And this would have been about 1957 or was this '56?

KR: It was '55 to '59.

AK: Okay.

KR: Yeah, I graduated in '59.

AK: Okay. And, in my junior year, I did a similar thing. Because my, my family was going to Naples for a semester (and my major at that time was focused on the Renaissance in Italy, France and England) I thought I would take a semester off and live in Florence, since my French year had worked so well, and I had been learning Italian intensively. And of course spend more time

with my cello again.

AK: Right. You may as well.

KR: In Florence. So I thought like, what could be the matter with that? But it was very interesting that the, once again, stuffy old Harvard – oh, it was the spring of my junior year – “you can’t be gone in the spring because that’s when History and Lit (the name of my major) has its junior year qualifying exams and of course you wouldn’t then be able to qualify.”

AK: It’s positively immovable, I’m sure.

KR: Absolutely immovable. And I thought again, = something like = “Well, to hell with you.” For me to be interested in this subject and want to go and spend some [26:00] time in Florence, you know. S I figured out that I could change and complete an English major.

AK: Oh, okay.

KR: But I could do that and I did, and by taking a summer school session, - and I forget how it worked out. But anyway, I graduated on time, as they say, with my class, you know, with an English major.

AK: Did you live on campus while you were there? Or did you live at home?

KR: I did a little of both. Mostly at home, partly because my parents were away once, one or twice, a couple of semesters where they wanted me to be at home and they didn’t have to rent the house. And I liked that because we had a big-ish living room with a piano, so you could play chamber music. So I had a regular string quartet that came to the house and played. It was very, very nice to have my own house, you know, where people could come. That was great. [27:00]

AK: Do you have any really wonderful memories of being in college or really not so great memories of being in college?

KR: A lot of my memories from being in college are connected with friends that I made. And occasionally, occasionally a really exciting class. But they were, they were not mostly. It was in graduate school I had a couple of even more memorable English classes that I had. Some of the English classes, yeah, I had a couple of English classes in my, in my last two years that were really good, but I had a natural science class, general education class, that was really terrific. I loved that, it was wonderful. I took a lot of French literature [28:00] They were really very poorly taught.

AK: They were all taught by Harvard professors, right?

KR: Yeah, they were all taught by Harvard. And the French classes, they were all taught by native speakers. But they weren't alive, they, they just droned on about the books we were reading, you know, nothing about –

AK: And were you, were the courses coeducational or the courses were strictly women?

KR: No, no. All coeducational, you know, it's interesting. Radcliffe, up, up until World War Two had had separate classes taught by Harvard faculty, but –

AK: For women?

KR: My father, for example, had taught biology to Harvard students at like nine o'clock and then at 10, he went and taught the same class to the women at Radcliffe. And during the war when a lot of faculty were away, Harvard woke up enough to say this is silly. We'll, integrate it in wartime, you know. [29:00] You have to make the sacrifices.

AK: The sacrifices of women and men being in the same room.

KR: Yeah. And after the war was over, you know, none of the faculty wanted to do this silly double teaching anyway. So from then on, even though Radcliffe still existed until it was

submerged in whenever that was.

AK: It was late, wasn't it?

KR: Yeah, I think it was. It was maybe the late '60s or something like that.

AK: Was it?

KR: Maybe? Maybe? I think so. I graduated in '59. I think, I think it was a while later. What did you think it was?

AK: Well, I know that Brown and Pembroke merged in '71.

KR: Yeah.

AK: And I thought Radcliffe came after that, but I could be misremembering that.

KR: I think you're more likely to remember accurately because once I left I didn't pay that much attention. It seemed so logical to do. I was at Harvard for graduate school, because I did my doctorate there, but then it didn't, [30:00] it didn't touch me. (When I had graduated in '59 we had Radcliffe commencement separately from Harvard: we got our diplomas which were signed by the Presidents of both Harvard and Radcliffe.) But as a graduate student, you know, it was just all about the classes I was going to, and the other graduate students.

AK: Sure.

KR: But I did have one very important memory about it from later: when I had been out working for a number of years, - I got my PhD in '68, so it was probably - I was here at Brown, - it was probably sometime in the early '70s. Or maybe the late '70s. Anyway I got a letter from the graduate school at Harvard saying they were putting together a handbook for women in the graduate school - might even have been the '80s - [31:00] and they, and they invited me to write an essay that would be, you know about my professional life and its relation to, to my education.

And so, so I wrote an essay, which was basically very positive, but the opening was a scene that happened to me, my first year in graduate school. And that was, I was invited to come to the English department, which was a lovely wood-framed house with a sort of wood-paneled sitting room. It was probably twice the size of this room. And there were, I think, about 10 of us there or 12 of us, 12 of us I think. 2 of us were women and the rest were men. And into this room came Jack Bates [32:00] who was a very distinguished Keats scholar, probably in his mid 50s or something like that. And he had, you know, leather patches on his tweed jacket, and he was leaning on his pipe. He came in and looked around the room and he said, “Gentlemen, I want to welcome you to the English department.” And I was stunned. I thought, what did he say? And I looked, I looked around and nobody was moving and I thought, “There are two women in here.” Anyway, I used that for the opening –

AK: Did you say anything in that moment?

KR: I did not.

AK: Was that kind of your first experience with something like that?

KR: Well, no. I had, I had thought about these things earlier. My mother, before her time, you know, she had spent years being incapacitated, sometimes in a nursing home, until she made what was thought to be an extraordinary recovery. She was written up in [33:00] medical magazines. She had had osteomyelitis when she was an infant, and spent her years til her late teens partly in bed, partly in nursing homes, a few days per semester at school. Nobody could understand how she recovered. Penicillin came along a few decades later, and that took care of it. But anyway, she had been very observant of others over the years and she had seen things... and I think instilled in me the powers of observation, leading to comparisons when something was unequal, and then to begin to think about it. So it wasn't entirely new. I wasn't aware of having first-hand experience of it in my intellectual life. Buckingham, for one thing, had been just completely supportive. Wonderful women as teachers and as human beings!. In fact, if we had a man teacher at Buckingham it was usually in the sciences and he usually was a terrible teacher. [34:00] We did, we did have a couple of really wonderful science teachers just at the end. I didn't

really get the benefit of them. I don't mean to say that they weren't out there, but for a while, they weren't.

And anyway, so, I just used that incident for the opening of the piece. But when I had agreed to write for them, I had specifically said, "I would like to see the final copy before it goes to print."

AK: That was wise.

KR: Anyway, when they sent me the copy, they had removed the opening part. They didn't touch the rest!

AK: What a surprise.

KR: So I wrote back and said, I don't accept the changes; I withdrew it. And that was [35:00] very significant, but that happened, as I said, years later. But at the time I just swallowed it in that moment. I wasn't about to take on Jack Bates.

AK: Right.

KR: And I was processing it, too, you know, in a way. So.

AK: And did the other woman who was with you in that moment, did she ever mention anything?

KR: We did make eye contact then, but we became friends afterwards.

AK: Yeah.

KR: Not good friends over time, but in graduate school, we were friends. So then I had some more, some more experiences a little bit like that. Anyway I did my coursework, passed my qualifying exams passed my three required language exams: French, Italian, and Latin. Then I

prepared for my orals intensively, which I passed - I left Cambridge with the thesis still to do.

AK: O what year was that?

KR: I got married in the summer of '66. That was when I left Cambridge. So I had finished all my preparatory stuff; I had dissertation fellowship and my husband was working in DC. So I worked out of the Folger Library.

AK: Oh, wow.

KR: It was perfect as a research base, and I began writing my dissertation. And then we moved halfway through the year to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where my husband was doing graduate work.

AK: So you're moving as you're finishing your PhD?

KR: To Penn, yeah, I moved. [37:00] And that year I had a fellowship, so although I moved, I wasn't trying to do something else at the same time. And seems like the rest of my life I was always doing multiple things at the same time. But, where was I going with that? Oh, yeah. So, so then when I got to Penn, and I still hadn't quite finished yet, I started applying for jobs. First of all, I made connection with Harvard with the Career Services Office, you know, to tell them that I was, maybe two thirds, three quarters done with, with my dissertation, and I would be looking for work in the Philly area – and they wrote back and said, “Well, it's very difficult for us to help you because you don't live in Cambridge.” So I thought, “Well that was sort of curious!”

AK: Right. [38:00]

KR: So then, then I started asking around and I had a few, a few contacts with people at the University of Pennsylvania. There was somebody in the admissions office. I had worked as Assistant Director of admissions at Radcliffe for two years ('62-'64). And I had also spent one summer as Assistant Director of the Harvard Summer School. So I had admissions experience. So I went to see the contact in the Penn Admissions Office, and he offered me a job as a

receptionist. Then somebody put me in touch with a [39:00] Bryn Mawr alum whose name was Alice Emerson, who had just been appointed Dean of Women at Penn, - she soon became Dean of Students. I think she was the first, but in any case they had just built a big residence hall for women about that time. Tish was there, and making a splash. So I called her, telling her who had referred me.

AK: So you're actively looking for positions in universities?

KR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

AK: To teach English?

KR: Yeah.

AK: To be an English professor.

KR: Preferably, though I needed a job above all. I am now realizing that I left out telling you that I had taught for two years at Wheaton College in the English Department, just to be sure that I really wanted to get that PhD. I filled in for an older faculty member on sabbatical, so I got to teach all sorts of good classes like Chaucer.

AK: Okay.

KR: That was at '60-'62.

AK: Okay.

KR: So I had that experience of teaching and doing administration at that point.

AK: And so you officially had your PhD in '69 you said?

KR: '68.

AK: '68. Okay, so then you were teaching at this time, too. [40:00] Okay.

KR: Now I'm only telling you this story about Alice Emerson because, again, in terms of feminist issues, she immediately understood my situation. She said "What are you doing? What's been going on?" I filled her in. "Oh," she said, "I was in the same situation. I moved with my husband to Cambridge, and I had my doctorate from Bryn Mawr, and I was trying to find a job and that's what happened to me too, people offering me secretarial positions in the office and stuff." She said, "Come on, let's talk." So I went over.

AK: Do you think part of it had to do with being married at the time? Or do you think it was just you know, strictly because of what they thought a woman should be doing?

KR: I think at that point it was because we were women; because when that happened to both of us, we didn't have any children. If we had had children at that point that would have entered into it even more dramatically.

AK: Yeah.

KR: But it was just the woman thing. And a woman with a PhD was kind of an oddball thing.

AK: Right. [41:00]

KR: Anyway –

AK: What would you do with one of those?

KR: Exactly. Anyway it was so great because then she offered me a job. I think the details will come back to meyes... She offered me a job as Assistant Dean of Women the first year, and then she became Dean of Students the next year and I became Assistant Dean of Students for a

year.

AK: And what university is this again?

KR: University of Pennsylvania.

AK: Okay.

KR: But I only cited it because it was so fantastic. I had been beginning to doubt myself and what I was doing, and the feedback from people like no, no jobs, no, no, no; [42:00] and saying things like you live too far away.... So it was wonderful to meet Tish, and discover she had had a similar experience in a similar situation. It was such a powerful moment. We talked together about our lives, about education and serious things as equals. It was great! And she offered me a job. And it was exciting work. I enjoyed it a lot.

AK: And you became Assistant Dean?

KR: Yeah.

AK: Yeah. Okay.

KR: Yeah. And then I had the second year with her – '68. I finished my dissertation and in then, my first baby was born.

AK: In '69?

KR: '69, yes.

AK: Okay.

KR: At that point, some changes happened in the dean's office: Tish left to become president of

Wheaton. She ended up being the last President at Wheaton when it was a women's college, and led it through its complex transformation to a co-ed school. I hated to see her go and when an Assistant Professorship in the English Department opened up, they offered me the job.

AK: After having your first baby?

KR: Yes, and you are right, it was, [43:00] quite hard because Bryony was three weeks late and so she wasn't born till the end of July. And the fall semester started at the end of August. So it was just a month –

AK: So you just took a month off?

KR: Well, at Penn at that time, they had a paternity leave of three days.

AK: How generous.

KR: But they didn't have any maternity leave at all, because, well..... and it took them a while to get around to doing that, you know; it happened some years later. So, I went, and that was a real challenge. I had a wonderful woman who took care of Bryony. And because I was faculty, I didn't have to be on campus all day; I had my office hours and I had my teaching schedule, but it mostly was a MWF schedule. Still it was stressful. Little jabs along the way: I remember being in a committee meeting, on the future of ROTC on campus, (as one of the faculty designated), and one of my colleagues, -I think he was in Engineering said, "Do you mind my asking what you do with your baby when you come to work?"

AK: Oh, my gosh.

KR: I said I keep her in a little fur lined drawer.

AK: Right, exactly! What do you think I do with my baby?

KR: But it was, it was, it was very early days.

AK: Right, right.

KR: And when I came to Brown,... (I was at Penn until '71). In '71 I got a job offer from Sarah Lawrence College, where I was for a year, and came to Brown in 1972.

AK: Oh wow.

KR: The Sarah Lawrence job had appealed to me very much, partly because the person who was at that point the dean, [45:00] a very key person under the president, had been a dean at Radcliffe, when I was Assistant Director of Admission. We had served on the Admission Committee. I'd gotten to know her, and she was a very impressive woman, musicologist with a Yale PhD, but super good as an administrator, and as a mentor, you know, so I had learned a lot from her and admired her. So anyway, she invited me to apply, I got the job, and my husband and I moved to Sarah Lawrence.

AK: Had your husband gotten a job there or was your husband following you at that point?

KR: No, at that point, my husband was planning to open a bookstore, - a progressive, radical bookstore. And so he was happy to move to New York because he needed time to plan it. [46:00] Then in late in the summer Jacquelyn Mattfeld took a job she couldn't resist at Brown University.

AK: Okay.

KR: So she was at Brown. I moved to Sarah Lawrence and she wasn't there. So I had a year there at Sarah Lawrence which I had primarily taken because she was there, you know, she was a good friend and a wonderful person to learn from and work under. As a family we were mobile and Sarah Lawrence was an excellent college, and I was open to learning. It was interesting to go from a university setting to a college like Sarah Lawrence, which was deeply concerned with individual students' development. I don't know if you know anything about it, but they build a

very important relationship between [47:00] the student and one of their faculty; they have weekly meetings together all through the year, which proves often a key and productive relationship for the student in deepening their relationship with the College and their own education.

AK: Juli Anna who works at the Athenaeum, she went to Sarah Lawrence and speaks very highly of her experience.

KR: Yes. It's educationally very interesting and distinctive. And its location! Believe it or not, when I went I thought I'll be close to New York, we can go to all sorts of interesting things! In the course of that year (I did have a two year old), I did not once go into New York city.

AK: Right. It's like a world away.

KR: Yeah, it felt like a world away, - and it proved quite busy at the weekends too!

AK: Right.

KR: But anyway, it then happened that Jackie Mattfeld at Brown had an opening in her Dean of the College staff, and I applied for that; they invited me for a campus interview in December and we went and I was interviewed by lots of people and my husband checked out the potential for the book store and we were both pleased, and they did offer me the job. [48:00] And so the following year, 1972, I came to Brown. I was thrilled at that point because I didn't really know that much about Brown, but as I had read about it, and what had just happened, - the new curriculum, the Black walkout -, I was fascinated. I think the combination of having gone to a school like Buckingham, where things were not cut and dried, but what you thought, even as young person was recognized; disciplines were recognized too, but people also taught ideas that crossed boundaries. Then at Radcliffe, having chosen to do a History and Lit major, I was working across disciplinary boundaries in the Renaissance - art, music, history, politics, etc - so I had always been drawn to the connections between disciplines, the ways ideas didn't necessarily cluster in categories. Then, too, I didn't like super-structured education with a lot of rules and dos and don'ts if they didn't make sense. So I was lucky to have been able to break out

at times - stopping out of my [49:00] formal education to go off and learn on my own and directly from another culture. So Brown proved a really good match for me, especially because of the new curriculum, - the idea that you can give students the opportunity, as well as the responsibility, for shaping their own education. I was also deeply impressed by the role students had played in the curricular revolution that the New Curriculum represented

One of the curricular options that I developed at Brown, which was important to me over the years, and I think was good for Brown, was the option of an independent concentration. When I arrived in '72, everybody looked down on it, because it was largely used for people who were a course short of something required when they were to graduate; in order for them to graduate with their class, somebody had to say, "Hocus Pocus, you can count [50:00] this as part of your major," or something. The option had been used to solve an individual short coming or deserved exception. But it was a time, you know, when interdisciplinarity was emerging between former categories, - borders beginning to be crossed. Yet distribution as well as concentration requirements meant faculty didn't have flexibility to experiment with colleagues. In many institutions faculty would say, "We can't do that, because we have to teach our general education requirements as well as our concentrations. There's no time, I have no time to..." you know. Whereas at Brown, they had just voted major curricular change, so there was flexibility; so the independent concentration, as I saw it, was a chance for students who had an interest in something that was interdisciplinary to define it, and faculty became interested, especially when it reflected their own interests.. So you had environmental studies, for example. because it was begin, you know, beginning to, people were beginning to think about it and stuff. We actually had a faculty member who had been in Chemistry; he had taken a leave to get a Law degree at Harvard, because he was beginning to get interested in the legal aspects of environmental issues. So for some years a growing number of students who wanted to focus on Environmental Studies, and used the independent option. This enabled the growing group of interested faculty with both science and policy perspectives to begin to work together toward a standard E.S. concentration, and subsequently an actual department, with its own building etc.

A.K. Oh, okay.

Other key areas of course were issues of race, of gender, of urban affairs, semiotics.

I had the great satisfaction, and personal education, of working with students who came in with a general idea of something they were usually pretty passionate about, - that they had to learn how to develop into a coherent proposal: what courses they would take, who were the faculty members that might be interested, and among them, who would be willing to sponsor the concentration. They needed to submit a definition of their concentration, with a bibliography and a final culminating project. I learned a lot about faculty interests, and I got to know wonderful students who thought deeply about their educations. [54:00] Many of them that I've kept up with, or they with me, have continued their concentration essentially in their life work.

AK: Wow. That's pretty good. That's unheard of nowadays – to get a job in what you went to school for.

KR: Well it didn't happen instantly, you know. But they were working on it intensely and it became a defining vision of something that was deeply important to them. If I could be quicker on a name, quicker on names, I could give you a couple examples. They'll come to me in the night tonight probably. But there was one Andre, Andre, Andrea Levere, I think. She had been one of the four students who had been in the study group that raised the New Curriculum idea.

AK: Yeah. About that.

KR: Something like that.

AK: Right.

KR: Anyway, Andrea did a concentration that was called Vision, Action and Social Change.

AK: Wow. Wow.

KR: And she is now head of an organization, by stages she got there, but she's head of an organization which has done ground breaking work in economic justice, micro-financing... [56:00] And also, Anne Fausto-Sterling, does that name ring a bell to you?

AK: Absolutely.

KR: She had independent concentrators working with her before Women's Studies was established as a standard concentration

AK: Right, yeah. The biology of gender.

KR: Exactly. Yeah. So –

AK: So if I can ask, your role was kind of like an advisor role to students? Or what was kind of like, briefly if you can, your job description supposed to be anyway?

KR: I was Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

AK: Oh, okay.

KR: Lots of times I had to explain this to people who didn't realize, but when I was hired, Jacquelyn Mattfeld was Dean of Academic Affairs, the same job as prior Deans of the College, - and I was hired as Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. (An interesting bit of history: as the first woman appointed to that position Brown had changed the title for her appointment. After she left, to be President of Barnard, anyone, male or female in that position was named Dean of the College.

AK: Is she still with us because she's a name on my list who I'd like to interview?

KR: She would be fascinating to interview. She's in [57:00] Chicago, she's –

AK: Oh, okay.

KR: She's 92 or 3.

AK: I thought so, that she would be older.

KR: She's very sharp. It was a complex time for her here in those years. I don't know whether she would want to be interviewed, but if you could get yourself to Chicago, you would have a fascinating time with her.

AK: Interesting.

KR: And yes, so Jackie knew that I was interested in the education of undergraduates, but not so much in the social dimensions, as in Student Life, of undergraduate education. I had done some of that at Penn, and I was clear about that. I knew that I was interested both in the part of it which involves faculty-student interaction, and also the ways the curriculum itself can evolve, in response to social and intellectual change.

So my position was Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. I was in a group of people who were Assistant and Associate Deans of the College. So people often assumed in later years that I was also an Associate Dean of the College. It's not so important about the title, but the title did explain the orientation of my responsibilities.

For many years, chaired the Committee on Academic Standing, a faculty committee that reviewed the progress of undergraduates academic work. The Deans worked closely with students who had difficulties that led to academic defecits. It met at the end of each semester to discuss the cases of students who fell behind, and determined their academic standing and a recommended course of action for them, including academic dismissal or leave taking.

I also [59:00] helped to develop with Harold Ward, - the former Chemist who created Environmental Studies that I mentioned earlier, - and Deans from a couple of other colleges, the Venture Program.

AK: The Venture Program?

KR: The Venture Program, was for about 20 years, a great resource for undergraduates at seven colleges. I got involved in helping start it because it exactly addressed the thing that had been so

valuable to me of taking a semester or more off. I believed, as you now know, that planned time away from formal education can be very productive. Many people in the '70s still believed that if a student left college, they would likely not return. (Perhaps shades of the hippie '60s, or even the depression years of the '30s.) [1:00:00] Venture was committed to the idea that time away could be enhanced by helping students find interesting employment. Venture was a consortium, we had an office at Brown, with a Director and a job bank. The Director developed the job bank and coordinated the campus sites and the staff education about productive leave-taking. Our last wonderful Director, Peggy Chang, still works for Brown, although the Consortium no longer exists. (Venture was given a million dollar gift from an alumna who had gone to Brown in years when leave taking was not condoned, and that felt like a triumph.)

Over the years Venture grew and the Board members who were the Deans at these various schools would meet periodically; meetings were stimulating including brainstorming new opportunities; we developed a semester program in NYC with the Banks St School of Education for students to have a working semester in urban education. Our Education Departments supported that work; there were also environmental options and many other kinds of internships.

And then in later years I started up a new program funded first by FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education, in the early '80s. It was conceived to address the urgent need for more courses that addressed issues of race and cultural diversity, especially in America. Since the Black Walkout in '68, and subsequent student protests during the '70s, students had called for more minority faculty. Many departments would say, "But we don't have openings and we don't have anybody in the department right now who knows about this material. Be patient, it will take time." I felt that response was not enough and that it was very important to find a way forward." As I thought about how many students of color that I talked to had been thinking about these things for a long time, and it occurred to me that they might be able to work with a faculty member, bringing their keen interest, personal experience and significant knowledge to share with the faculty. If they had already taken a course with that faculty, they would not only be personally acquainted, but both of them would know the syllabus, and they could plan together where the new material and perspectives could best be integrated. So we got funding for what we called the Odyssey Program. It was an opportunity for a student and faculty [1:03:00] member to work together. You know, so you have somebody

who'd been teaching Urban Studies for years, and you have a student who is Latino and has grown up in San Antonio or somewhere where the culture is Hispanic and hence intrinsic to the history and politics of it. They work together during the summer and the course is revised. We introduced the possibility for the student, who had worked collaboratively with the faculty member over the summer, to be an undergraduate teaching assistant in the revised course. This was key, in that FIPSE was also intent on cultivating in students of color an interest in academic careers. Being effective change agents in something they felt passionate about, and did indeed inspire many of them go on to graduate school.

In respect to undergraduate teaching assistants, at first there was a lot of clamor about that. "You can't have undergraduates —" So I went around and interviewed a lot of faculty where I knew that they did use undergraduate teaching assistants effectively and had thought carefully about when and how to do it. (When you have taken a course successfully there are ways you can be very helpful to others.) I wrote up a piece about my findings in the [1:04:00] George Street Journal and so gradually it became more acceptable where the undergraduate was clearly well informed from the collaborative work.

AK: Right, right.

KR: It was really an exciting time because it suddenly said, while it's great if we can hire more minority faculty, but if we haven't any slots for such hires just now, our own faculty who are teaching relevant courses can begin to learn this new material and incorporate it into their courses. While some faculty objected, there were other faculty who thought the idea had promise.

The program developed; emphasizing collaboration between pairs of students and faculty in course revision or straight research, it grew over the years with funding from major outside organizations. We called it the Undergraduate Teaching and Research Program, UTRA. We emphasized the importance of the undergraduate having an active role. The positions were not considered slots to be filled. Instead we encouraged students to take the initiative to talk to faculty about ideas or interests they had, which often led to a proposal. A summer program of research for people headed for science careers was a natural. It was a little slower in the humanities, but gradually some faculty discovered that if they were breaking into new territory,

or starting a book, it could be very effective.

AK: And at this time also at Brown and in the world, we have the Lamphere Case going on at Brown, we have the Vietnam conflict, which I know caused a lot of protest and activity on campus, we have the second wave going on. How are these things impacting your work at Brown, in your life at all?

KR: Well, sometimes people said that when everybody else around the country was protesting Vietnam, Brown was looking internally at the curriculum. That when they did the New Curriculum change. But it was a similar sort of activism. I don't know if you know some of the stories of the curricular change. [1:07:00] Students used an Independent Study to look at the history of education and Dewey's philosophy. They wrote a proposal for change, and then there was a student faculty report. And then the four members of the committee, Magaziner, Maxwell, Levere, and who was the fourth? They wanted to generate discussion among their peers. They advertised a meeting, and maybe seven people showed up. They had a good meeting and planned another. Then there were 35 people who came, and the next meeting 70 people, and so on. Eventually they had something like 1500 students rallying on the Green. They organized students who were excited about [1:08:00] the ideas to go to their departments and talk to the faculty they knew about it. You probably know some of that, but it was extraordinary and historic. Finally the faculty held a meeting for a couple of days to debate the proposed changes, and then they voted in the New Curriculum, so that was that.

The feminist stuff was always ongoing. I mean, one of the things that I was concerned about and we eventually put in place was sexual harassment. Brown didn't really like to think about that or talk about it, but there were, I soon learned, one or two faculty who were regulars. Howard Swearer was [1:09:00] President (he came in late '78 I think) so it would have been the late '70s. We had a number of meetings about it, and finally set in place something which was much less structured than many colleges subsequently put in place: within x hours you have to do this, within x more you have to do that; ours identified a few people in offices around the campus – e.g. in the Graduate school, or the Chaplain's Office, or the College, etc. - to whom a student could go. (The designated people were usually known to the student community.) The person who received the complaint would listen carefully, address the immediate feelings,

explain the process, ask for a written description, and take that personally to the Provost. The Provost [1:10:00] would contact the chairman of the department etc. And the procedure was that the first offense gave the offender an official written warning– “At Brown, you don’t do that.” One of the realities we had to take in, was that in prior generations, there were many faculty members who had married former students.

AK: Really?

KR: Yes, it had happened quite frequently. And, you know, faculty wives in those days, and earlier, - they hadn’t worked (had employment). They’d been devoted wives and mothers, and often volunteer movers and shakers. They had taken a course in college etc. People said, “Well, you know, it’s just that this is the most natural thing to happen.” So it took a while [1:11:00] working on it to reach consensus. The idea of a warning was new, and we all agreed it was important to establish that if somebody came in thinking, “Wow, I can do this, that’s the way things happen,” that it wasn’t enough to have someone say, “Well, did you read page five of the faculty handbook,” or something? So it had to be, “Now you know what the rules are here and you can no longer do it.” So from the late ’70s forward, that was the way it worked and usually that was enough; but there were some serious, very serious cases. It took a bit to fire a tenured faculty members who had been doing this quite regularly. In the past he’d been required to see a psychiatrist [1:12:00] for a while, then he’d come back and do it again. And I thought it was absolutely terrible and I had seen the dramatic effect I remember one that was so classic. The woman was in her sophomore, in the spring of her sophomore year. Her grades all her freshman year and the first semester of her sophomore year had been A’s. This thing happened to her in the spring of the sophomore year. Her grades at the end of that year are like C’s and D’s. The fall of her following year is maybe C’s and B’s or something like that. [1:13:00] Then she takes a semester off. Finally, when she comes back, after that, the last three semesters of her college record are all A’s. But the extended trauma, and the loss of education!

AK: Wow.

KR: So I mean, you could see this.

AK: You can map it out.

KR: You can, exactly. It's very moving and very, very troubling, although more and more as time went on, because we had these channels, I think the Provost and the faculty generally were gradually educated and persuaded it was effective and just. Then in the '80s and 90s there were other institutions which came to visit in order to find out how did we had developed Women's Studies and Sarah Doyle , and how we handled sexual harassment, because they were trying to make it work etc. So that was pretty interesting. [1:14:03] Another thing we did early on (the 70s) when I first came, we started the Brown Fox Point daycare center.

AK: Oh right!

KR: Which was really, really great. And then subsequently, (late 90s?) Brown started the infant day care center; the Fox Point began at three years and also had an after school program which was really important then because once kids start going to school they finish at noon, or maybe two. Full time working parents need afternoons to be covered too. (Nowadays schools often have an extended day – after school – program. Then there was nothing.)

AK: Was that for faculty and students or was that strictly for faculty, children of faculty members?

KR: In theory it was for anybody, including undergraduates, graduate students, medical students, faculty.

AK: Anybody at Brown.

KR: Right, though I don't remember that we had undergraduate students with kids at that point in the after school, but we had faculty and administrators. (The Resumed Education Program started in about '75 might have produced some kids, but I don't remember any.)

AK: Okay.

KR: And Brown Fox Point was so well run at first; we felt pretty good about it.— In the years just before I came to Brown, Brown had done a feasibility study for day care. Mrs. Hornig, the president's wife, had been involved in that. She was herself a chemist, married to a chemist, Don Hornig; when he became a college professor she was, [1:16:00] because of nepotism rules, never allowed to have a faculty appointment in the same institution.

AK: Right.

KR: Understandably, she was frustrated, and her many talents had to be channeled in other ways. Nepotism rules were very hard on women. But anyway, now let's see what else was there that you asked that was weighing in on this.

AK: The Lamphere Case?

KR: Oh yeah.

AK: Did that impact anything you were doing?

KR: Well, very much. I wasn't directly active in it, but very, very much involved and right in our building were the pro-university people. The included faculty wives who were hired to work on the University side of the case. And at Sarah Doyle Center [1:17:00] there were active feminists and students and graduate students working with the Lamphere side. So it was really difficult and very stressful. When I first came to Brown there was an organization of faculty wives, and they called themselves, not faculty wives, but something like Women of Brown. So I thought, "Oh, I must go and meet them; I'm a woman at Brown you see." (I knew it would be different cross sections, but that appealed to me.) When I got there, I realized this is really faculty wives. I did go a number of times and I met some wonderful people that way, but during the whole Lamphere case there were really significant divisions and you didn't know where the lines were, between the faculty who supported the Lamphere case and those who [1:18:00] supported the university's opposition to it. So it was definitely, it was definitely a polarized time with

significant animosity. I've always had such incredible respect for Louise Lamphere; did you know she invested, and put into escrow the money that she was awarded when the case was settled. She gave that money, - a million dollars - to Brown a few years ago to underwrite faculty positions in women's studies. That was visionary, and extraordinary generosity in light of the hardships of the case. She won the case, yes, and yet it was a terrible ordeal. It proved excellent for the University.

AK: I'm sure.

KR: And there were three other women who joined the suit, too, which also meant the issues spread around on campus, as did the tensions.

And was there another thing you asked about?

AK: Well, I know that you were pretty significant in getting the Sarah Doyle Center going.

[1:19:00]

KR: Yeah, that's right.

AK: Tell me a little bit about that.

KR: Early on, when I first arrived, the women had no place to meet or call their own. Because of the merger, it was logical to have a place to many of us where women could gather, and women's issues could be discussed. And so finally we were given space on Waterman Street. There was a living room, which was our central gathering room, with a kitchen on the first floor. [1:20:00] That seemed to be good, but then some administrator got hold of the fact that this group had graduate students in it, and they said, "Oh, no, no, you can't have graduate students. This is just for undergraduates." And we said, "Well, that's not how it works, you know. Let us tell you about the lives of women, and why those arbitrary categories are irrelevant here."

AK: Yes. Exactly.

KR: And that became a real battle, and it went on for awhile. I can't remember how long, and how exactly it was resolved. But I know we had to struggle with it. We kept trying to explain, "We're talking about the lives of women. So in the University there are undergraduates, but there are also graduate students. It is very important for the undergraduates to meet those graduate students. The same is true of faculty, and administrators. The undergraduates need to meet women whose lives reflect the variety of women's working and "non-working" lives. (Women who have children and work, or who are taking time off because they're giving birth.) The inclusiveness of women's experience across the lifespan was thematic in the contemporary women's movement, - also scary to traditionalists..) The traditionalists at Brown wanted the space to be for undergraduate women only. (Perhaps they were afraid of change.) It ended up that the group we came to call the Working Group was effective because it had some experienced people on it, especially administrators. As a group we talked a lot about what we needed and wanted, and envisioned for the future, and then Kay Hall, who was later Kay Hall Lewis, drafted the proposal. And out of that work came the Sarah Doyle center; it was housed in a building owned by Pembroke, that had been used as the College guest and alumnae house. It had a compatible history, a lovely home-like feeling, and multiple rooms, which became small group meeting spaces, a library, and a large living-room, which served for social gatherings and especially for larger group meetings.

AK: Was this, was it originally [1:22:00] Sarah Doyle's house?

KR: No. I think she may have been the first Dean....I once knew, but have forgotten!

AK: Okay.

KR: But when we were trying to figure out what to name the house, the fact of Sarah Doyle's existence and also of a portrait of her..., we ended up choosing her. I remember we also thought about the wonderful Dean who was a mathematician too, but Sarah Doyle was earlier. And then we started raising questions about the absence of any women or contemporary people in the Sayles "gallery." We were the front edge of what led to the changes that you see there now. My god, there were just... those pictures were so old and went so far back and they were all male. It was wonderful when Howard Swearer's picture was added - he was the only contemporary one,

and then Walter Massey,... he was the first African American! [1:23:00] Later they removed some of the very old ones, and added newly painted modern ones, so it's quite different now. For the longest time, it was just like the welcoming message that I told you about when I was a new graduate student in the English Department at Harvard: "Gentlemen, I want to welcome you to Harvard." You might have thought men and women were both here, but look who's on the wall!!

AK: Exactly.

KR: And so, I remember the opening of Sarah Doyle. We got Jackie Mattfeld who was then Dean of the College, and very, very articulate. She gave a talk, which I'm sure must be in the Archives. We also had, another thing I remember is we were so excited to have the space and it had a kitchen, so we would sometimes have, you know, potlucks, or get pizza, or make stuff in the kitchen. And, and when we were opening we got some of those plate kits (my children loved them); in those days you get like 25 special paper discs with specific magic markers in a kit. You could draw on the disc and then send any that you wanted to back to the company, and they would return them as plates, with whatever you had drawn on them. And so we had a celebratory occasion when all of us who had been working on this together and made plates for Sarah Doyle. (They were there for years!)

Oh, the other thing I remember happening around that same time was people started jogging, running – the way they do now everywhere – only then it was totally new, especially for women. I remember there were students who would tell me that as they ran, some guy would stick his foot out, or stick out a hockey stick, and trip them up and laugh. I am remembering it now, because one of the undergraduates who worked in the group, - she was wonderful... lots of red hair and a terrific spirit - was the first one to tell me about that.

And, but I remember the plates! The plate event! it was just fun! We had a great evening [1:25:00] making plates for Sarah Doyle! We had a feast too, - I can't remember if we cooked or just pot lucked, but it was one of the first, if not the first when we just took over the house in the way we had conceived of its being used. A Center for women to gather, to derive strength and purpose from knowing more about one another - at whatever stage of life – and to work purposefully together and in groups in important work.

There was also considerable hostility to the Center, and some of it came from members of the Corporation, women trustees.

AK: Really?

KR: They thought it was it was a lesbian center. And they were just absolutely –

AK: God forbid, right?

KR: Yeah, God forbid. And they were just so in the boondocks about it. I can't remember details; people who were running Sarah Doyle at that time would know more about how that weighed in. Because, you know, once the Center got underway, I was a supporter, but my office and my work was in the yard. So when I went, it was usually for a specific meeting or talk....we had those wonderful, what were they? Friday noon hours. ?

AK: Friday Forum?

KR: Yeah, exactly. Brown Bag lunches. And people would come from many corners of the campus as well as outside it, you know, and we would gather there to hear what was going on, or who was doing what. It was a wonderful community building time. The various people who ran Sarah Doyle would have had more insight into that undercurrent of opposition for some time, having to deal with the rumors and the nay-sayers, including a few women trustees who had lived in Providence for years and had significant social influence. [1:27:00] I wonder if there is still some of that.

AK: I'm sure it's never really gone away completely.

KR: Yeah, but it's probably not totally focused on Sarah Doyle in the way that it was when it was new, - a visual active center around women's issues, and in a time when homophobia was widespread.

AK: It's now the Sarah Doyle Center for Women and Gender, I think is the official title of it now. Over on, what is it, Benevolent Street? Yeah.

KR: Yeah. And what is it like now. I haven't actually been over there.

AK: It's really sweet. It's, it's like a little home. And they have a library of all sorts of really wonderfully feminist books.

KR: Well, Sarah Doyle always had that upstairs. Yeah.

AK: Right. Yes. And they, they do – I know, Mary and I in March are going to be going to a lunch to talk about feminist libraries and archives.

KR: Oh, great.

AK: So they do all sorts of programs and I know that there's a lot of great student involvement. [1:28:00] So yeah, from everything I can tell it's still a very active space for people on campus.

KR: Is it the block that goes between Hope and?

AK: It's, I think Brown Street and Benevolent. It's right, like Benefit Street and Benevolent, but at the top end.

KR: Brown Street and Benevolent. Ah, okay.

AK: So when did you leave Brown?

KR: I retired in '01.

AK: So you did retire from Brown.

KR: I retired from Brown.

AK: Wow. So you were there for a while?

KR: Yes, for 29 years.

AK: Wow.

KR: I thought to myself, I don't think it should be 30.

AK: Right. [laughter]

KR: No, it was very good because I went to see president E Gordon Gee a year before [1:29:00] he left under a cloud, you might say, and he was actually very kind in that meeting. He had, he said, a lot of experience with faculty in their 60s, around or approaching retirement, and what was I planning to do? And I told him a few things. I cared a lot about music; I was hoping to, you know, be involved in the community. And he said, "I have found that it really works very, very well for people to have a year in which they slow down their pace. So what would you think of just working part time for a year? I mean," he said, "You could have Monday and Friday off or something like that." So I wasn't sure what I thought about that, but I said I'd think about it. What would I do with Monday and Friday off? I thought, how would I [1:30:00] go on doing my job if I was only working three days, you know, I'd be just driving myself crazy.

AK: Right.

KR: But as it as it turned out there were people who were "in place" to do some of it, had worked with me on things so able to take over. (There usually are, but who wants to feel dispensable!) So I decided to do that. I did it from '00 to '01. During that year, I made a point of not going to anything that was happening in the university on Monday and Friday, and I really did just work three days a week.

Then I was 65. So it was a good time to leave. And it was really great. They had a nice party for me, and the Acting President, Sheila Blumstein, announced that they were going to name the

undergraduate research program, which had grown out of the Odyssey Project, in my name. I was very touched by that.

AK: Yeah.

KR: And in retirement I was so lucky: I found the greatest satisfaction of my retirement years, - in addition to playing a lot more chamber music. Sebastian Ruth, who had graduated in '67, had started an organization called Community Music Works in the West End of Providence, you may know about it. It was in its starting years. And he came to me just as I was retiring and said, "would I like to join the Board? I had been following the Program and going to some of the events," but I told him that I had promised myself that I would say no, as somebody advised me to do, [1:32:00] to everything that came along for the first year; so please keep in touch with me as I'm so interested in what you're doing. So along about the following March, it wasn't a year, but he invited me to come and visit a Board meeting and I went you know, I knew I was going to fall in love with it. And it was so good because during the year it had happened, the way some experienced people forewarned me: when people know you're retiring, they come up with, you know, we need ...we're doing this... wouldn't you be perfect for this? And often it all sounds interesting and you can commit before you really know what you want to do, and all that is possible in the way of options. So to just say no for a year, it was such a wise way to keep it all at distance, while you transitioned to your new way of life. So then I got really deeply involved with CMW, which I've been doing ever since.

AK: And are you currently on their Board?

KR: One of the things that I did as president of the board was to make board membership terms, because by that time we had some people who [1:33:00] were going into their seventh year, and I knew that what's important about boards is that they turn over, which brings in new people, and that benefits the Board with new ideas and new energy, no matter how good the retiring members have been. So we passed legislation that board membership was a series of two year terms up to six years, and then you had to be off for at least a year, but you could come back.

AK: Okay.

KR: So, so we had this new six year limit, and we had a couple of people on the board who were excellent and very devoted, whose feelings were little hurt because they had to get off the board. They actually came around later, and have been very, very strong supporters even, but it was just because the people who were on board in those early founding years were so together and so supportive, and had gone through so much together. But it turned out for the best. At the same time we created an honorary advisory board for anybody who had had been on for six years (three consecutive two-year terms, and wanted to stay actively involved; they could opt for being on the advisory board, i.e. willing to keep working on behalf of the organization. Sebastian turns to them for various sorts of things. It serves as a core group of very knowledgeable supporters. There are also a few people who have served for six years and then gone back to the Board after a year off, but not many; but there are a lot who've been on the Board who stay very supportive and active, - attending concerts and events and providing feedback and so on. CMW is a great organization and it was perfect for me because it combined my love of music with wanting to get to know the community beyond Brown, and particularly in the West End and South Side; except for the very occasional student we would have at Brown, I had not had any connection with those neighborhoods and residents of my city of Providence.

AK: Once you're on the East Side it's very easy to never leave the East Side. Yeah, exactly. I just moved here and I don't find any reason to go to the West Side anymore.

KR: Yeah!

AK: It's very strange.

KR: Yeah. Should I invite you sometime to come to a concert? Do you like music?

AK: Oh, I do. Are you still playing cello?

KR: I do. Yeah.

AK: Absolutely.

AK: I used to see the flyers all the time when I was at the Athenaeum. I just, I've never made it to a concert.

KR: Yeah, that's great. Well, there are two kinds of things that you can go to. There's the series of concerts that are given in the [1:36:00] RISD Portrait Gallery, so very accessible to East Side.

AK: Right, right, yes. [laughter]

KR: And then in addition, depending if you want to see what's happening with the teaching part of the program and the children, periodically there's a performance party where the kids play and it is riveting!

AK: Oh wow. Wonderful.

KR: Yeah. Now one of those is coming up pretty soon, in fact, in January, so I could send you an email about it if you'd be interested?

AK: Yeah.

KR: Yeah, it'd be fun.

AK: So we've been at this for just over an hour and a half now. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your time at Brown? Highlight moments, low moments, your life, your retired life, anything that you want to get into the record that I didn't ask about or that we didn't address?

KR: It's interesting, because when you first [1:37:00] told me about coming, I thought your focus was going to be primarily Sarah Doyle and the Women's Center. So those were the kinds of things I was thinking I didn't have much detail once we got it approved. And the fact that it's been just a narrative about where I came from, what I've been doing, has made, made it much easier. And I'm wondering about things that I left out.

Brown was a fabulous place for me to work. I just feel so lucky to have been there in the

second half of the 20th century, when it was going through this process of change and transformation. Really, really, really good. But another thing we didn't touch on, not that I was directly involved in it, but I was very interested in it – We had at Brown during those years an Associate Director of Athletics, Arlene Gorton who recently died.

AK: Indeed. Just passed away. [1:38:00]

KR: Yeah. And Arlene had, you know, such a wonderful vision about women and women's athletics. She was really a terrific gift to Brown. And of course Title IX was passed during that time and we didn't know whether it would be taken away again later. But she was very observant, and she didn't hesitate to call injustice or uncertainties into question, and people didn't like it. She was often brave, and a lone voice very often.

AK: That's what I've consistently heard about her.

KR: Yeah, and for a while she was key. There was at first a certain amount of optimism and support for Title IX. Then it gradually diminished; [1:39:00] I don't know whether the opposition got bigger. I have to say that there were people appointed to positions in Brown's athletic who seem to come from a different perspective. They were not strong supporters, and indeed the women were definitely not feminist: they were often very attractive, well groomed, lovely people, but they just, without meaning to, helped to divide the terrain, I think. And I don't mean to lay a blame on them except that you know, they didn't always realize what they were enabling. The male culture in athletics is just so deep that you need to have united forces to keep the [1:40:00] focus on the inequities. And for a long time Arlene did that, and I think Brown really owes her a big debt. She was very clear eyed about what was fair.

Anyway, it was an excellent place for me to work; I don't know what I would find about it now. All the issues with race and diversity during those years were very important and led peacefully to significant growth and agreements for the University. We were gifted with very fine minority leaders among the students, and exceptional faculty, though few, for many years.. Ferdinand Jones in the Psych Dept, and head of Psych Services was an exceptionally wise and significant presence for individuals as well as for crisis times. (Ferd and I came the same year,

both from Sarah Lawrence.) Anani Dzidzyenio, in what became Afro studies, had been there for some years earlier. It took a while to gradually increase diversity in the faculty. That is another story.

There is another amusing piece: the women who got Sarah Doyle started and then some other administrators, began getting together to have lunch every now and then. So we started meeting at the Faculty Club. Maybe at the beginning there were three or four of us, or something like that. And then there got to be five or six of us. We would reserve a room, usually once a month. And so, many times a few of us would be going up the stairs together, and, seeing us, men would [1:42:00] make comments on purpose loud enough for us to hear like, "Oh, what are you plotting now?" or just "What's going on?!"

AK: Do you know, I've heard that story almost verbatim multiple times. This, this has really stuck in women's minds.

KR: Well, by the time we stopped gathering, or the last ones that I remember, we were often something like 22, 24 people, sitting around a huge table made of 4 narrow tables arranged in a square. And we would share what was happening in our various domains, or our perspectives on a current topic. In the early years (of the 70s) when we were much smaller, anywhere from five to 12, or something like that, we would get those comments. I don't remember what happened later.

But it was really a good process, because as women in different offices and with different perspectives we tended to know one another, even if we didn't have reasons to be working together a lot of time. And there was Kay Hall, who drafted the Sarah Doyle proposal; she went from [1:43:00] being an academic Dean to being Registrar, and then Director of Institutional Research. Each one of those positions gave her a different connection with people in other parts of the administration and even other buildings. So, even if some of us who came together didn't know some of those people, she was a connector, she knew them, and she knew what they did. She lives now, retired, on Block Island. Recently she came to the mainland, and by planning ahead, she gathered some of her women friends from across those years and from the end when she was Director of Institutional Research. (She didn't hesitate to call a spade a spade, and she's very good with data. So she always had data to back up [1:44:00] things that she said.) Anyway,

there were a whole group of us who met at Rasoi, I think we were 12, much on that old model of our “threatening” lunch group!

AK: Wow.

KR: It included people like Robin Rose and Karen Sibley. Either those mean anything to you? No? Robin Rose was the Dean of Students, also a psychologist; she worked with several peer groups. I’m forgetting her title. I should know. But anyway, she was very much a campus presence. She was in the Dean of Students Office for a while. Karen Sibley started out with Summer Studies, but then she became a Vice President. Recently, I am not quite sure what happened, but I think she’d been demoted or something [1:45:00] like that. She’s made a lot of money for Brown through Summer Studies, with faculty doing things with groups of students abroad. Vivian Murphy used to work in the Computer Science Department, with data analysis. She’s been retired for quite a while.

Then there were a couple of women who worked under her who also came. Anyway, it was very much like those groups we used to have. And even though they probably haven’t seen one another for, for anywhere from two to 10 years, the people around that table had immediately responded to her invitation. Maybe their whole careers had been moved along in those days by knowing how to find and connect with other women. [1:46:00]

But as I said, I was really happy to have been at Brown when I was there. Those years culminated in a wonderful period when Sheila Blumstein was Dean of the College, and then became Provost, and then was Acting President. That was a great time because her vision for Brown, her career here, her knowledge of the University, the great respect that faculty had for her made her an excellent leader. Our educational and personal values were so compatible that it was one of those special times (you are so lucky if you get during your career), when it makes every thing you are trying to do so productive and satisfying. Anyway, I also had some of the tougher contexts to work in, which made working under her leadership all that much more fabulous![1:47:00] That is something important. I have to say! And now, this has been fun, Amanda, really! Thanks for your interest and patience!

AK: Well, thank you so much for doing this. This interview is going to join over 230 other

interviews that we currently have and is going to be used by hundreds of thousands of people for hopefully a very long time to come. So thank you so much.

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