

Transcript – Phyllis A. Kollmer Santry, class of 1966

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Interviewer: Christy Law Blanchard
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Track 1

Christy Law Blanchard: [00:00] It is Wednesday, April 27, 2016. This is Christy Law Blanchard, Director of Program Outreach and Development for the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women. I'm in New York City, interviewing Phyllis Kollmer Santry, Class of 1966. Phyllis, can you tell me a little bit about your family and childhood?

Phyllis Kollmer Santry: Yes! I actually was born in Providence. My father was in Europe with World War II. And my mother was pregnant with me. So she went home to Providence to stay with her parents, while she had the baby, me. And so I was born in Lying-In Hospital in Providence. But she and Dad had a house on Long Island. And once I was born, she went back to Long Island. And I grew up in Long Island, on Manhasset, which is about 20 miles outside of the city on the North Shore, very upper-middle-class [01:00] neighborhood. Fortunately, they had terrific schools. And so I was – I was able to get a really fine public education. And I loved living there. I loved being with my friends there. When your parents live only in one place your whole life, you tend to think this is how it's always going to be and these friends are going to always be your friends. And then you go off to college and you find out there's a whole other world out there. And it's so wonderful. It's so great to see there's all different kinds of people and experiences and all of that. And I just loved it when I went off to Brown. I thought, "This is great. This is really for me."

I liked high school. And I was very unaffected by it. I've been organizing high school reunions, over the years, and everybody says, you know, "Oh, I have so many bad feelings about high school and my old boyfriends," and all this stuff. And I'm thinking, "Oh, Lord. Get over it." You know? Long ago... I'm a simple creature. I long ago got over what [02:00] hot guy dumped

me for what hot girl. I don't think about it anymore. And one of my friends from high school said, "Well, you embraced everybody, too," which I did. You know, I never worried about whether I was popular or whether they were popular or whatever, you know. I was just friends with everybody. So...

CLB: Were you in any clubs or...?

PKS: Oh, yeah. I was in every damn club that came along. I did a lot of – lot of that stuff in high school. I was in the Drama Club and music and... I have a good singing voice – she said modestly. So I was in choir in church and I was in... Oh, it was funny. I was in a production they did of *Oklahoma!* And my friend Kenny Howard was the lead. He's the actor who just passed away, the president of SAG. He was a friend of mine in high school. And I was Ado Annie, the girl who can't say no. And after the show one time, a colleague of my mother – my mother was a teacher – came up to her and said, "I had no idea Phyllis [Ann?] was like that." [laughs] [03:00] People think you really are the character that you play! And my mother said, "She is quite a good comedienne, isn't she?" [laughter] What are you supposed to say back to that? I didn't write those words. Oscar Hammerstein wrote those words. But it was a lot of fun. I had a really good experience with that.

CLB: Perhaps the commentary was on your delivery of those words.

PKS: Yes. I'm sure that must have been it. [laughter] So I really did enjoy high school. It was – it was a lot of fun. And...

CLB: Very good. And so you went to Brown. But you weren't the first in your family to go to Brown.

PKS: No. It was a sort of a family school – which I don't know if it still is. But back when I went there, it was a family school. My grandfather went there. His brother, Myron, went there. They had two sisters. There was Myron and Simon and Ella and Emma. And then Ella's two granddaughters also went to Brown, Marilyn Phillips, who was in my class, and – now, of

course, I can't think of her name – [04:00] [Desire?] Gorham, who was a year ahead of me – or two years ahead of me, my second cousins. They went to Brown also.

CLB: Any relation to the Gorham silver family?

PKS: I don't know. He was a professor. Gorham was a professor at Brown. Probably. Probably all Gorhams are related to each other, way back somewhere.

CLB: University library received all of the archives of the Gorham Manufacturing Company, old silver imprints and everything. So those are at the John Hay.

PKS: Well, it must have been him, then. He was a professor at Brown, Ella's husband or Emma's h– one of those husbands, and was Desire and Marilyn's grandfather. So... Because Marilyn used to say it was so funny to go into Sayles Hall and see a portrait of her grandfather sitting up on the wall in there. [laughs] "What is that?" So, yeah. So it was a family school. And my cousin went to Brown also, my mother's sister's son. And his daughter went to Brown. So [05:00] there've been a few of us.

CLB: And so what drew you to Brown, besides the family connections?

PKS: I don't really know. I didn't really think about it. When I was in high school, I really wanted to go to Smith, but I didn't get in. And I told Ruth Simmons this, one time, because she was president of Smith. And she said, "Oh, God. You and Katie Couric. I'm so sick of hearing that. Every time I see Katie Couric, she tells me, 'You know, I didn't get into Smith. I had to go UVA.'" So... I'm so glad I went to Brown. I'm so glad I didn't get into Smith. Because it was a wonderful experience. And really, I think I did better, not just academically but also socially, being in a coed environment and being in a city environment, which I really liked. So that's why I went to Brown, is because I didn't get into Smith. And it turned out to be a wonderful thing, turned out to be really good. So.

CLB: And did you have any favorite professors [06:00] or subjects?

PKS: Actually, I was a classics major. I don't know if they still do it now but, at the time, the conceit was that the head of the department would teach the entry-level course. And I always thought it was so that the professor could stay grounded in his subject matter. But, in fact, somebody else said to me, "Well, that's probably how they get people to major in the major, is because they've got the top guy or the top gal talking to them." And that is exactly what happened with me. I took Ancient History with Robinson, Charlie Robinson. And he got sick in the middle and Workman took over. He was the head of the department. He took over. And I was hooked. I mean, he was just wonderful. He was just wonderful. A-

CLB: What was his first name?

PKS: John Workman –

CLB: John...?

PKS: – John Rowe Workman. Yes. And he was terrific. And his lectures... He could do his lectures in his sleep. He was so good. He's...

CLB: There's a tree and [07:00] a plaque on the Pembroke campus dedicated to him.

PKS: Probably. He's...

CLB: Right near Alumnae Hall.

PKS: Yeah. Well, that's where he would give the lecture on classics, Classical History 101. And as the bell was ringing, he would start talking and, as the bell was ringing at the end of the lecture, he would finish talking. He was that good. He was just [laughs] right on the money every time. So he got me hooked – and then other classics professors, [Bieghold?] and Michael Putnam an– And there was a guy in the Sociology Department, van der Lippe, who was – young professor. And at that time, we had to take a certain amount of sociology and psychology and

math and science and demonstrate proficiency in a language – and English and all of these – and history.

CLB: So distribution requirements.

PKS: Yes. They called it IC and D courses. IC was identification and criticism of ideas. [08:00] And D courses, the distribution courses, you all had to take a certain amount of the distribution courses. And so I took a sociology course with him. And he was wonderful. And so I really enjoyed him. He was good. S–

CLB: Did you have any women professors?

PKS: I had one woman professor, one.

CLB: What department?

PKS: Economics. Economics one. And I can't remember her name, for the life of me. And I've looked through all my old yearbooks, to see if I could find it, and of course, I couldn't find it anyplace. There were very, very few women professors, except, of course, the gym teachers – but, other than that, very few. And Dean Pierrel, who was the dean when I was there, taught psych. And after she was no longer dean, she just stayed on as the psych teacher. So. But those were the only two women, that I knew of.

CLB: And besides academics, were you involved in clubs or student groups? What was the social life like then?

PKS: I was mostly interested in music. And I was in [09:00] the chorus freshman year. And I tried out for Chattertocks and I got into the Chattertocks. And I was a Chattertock, for a few years. And then, my junior year, it was the two hundredth anniversary of Brown. And Erich Kunzel, who was the music director there, who was about five years older than we were, formed a chorale, of 50 voices. And we went around and serenaded various Brown clubs, all around the

country. Of course, it was just to raise money. But the premise was it was celebrating Brown's two hundredth anniversary. And so we did a tour, of the chorale, and went around and sang different places. It would – 10 voices in each part, 10 or 12 voices in each part. And that was...

CLB: We should have staged a reunion for the Chattertocks to do, for the two-fiftieth. [laughter]

PKS: Well, we had a Chattertocks reunion a couple of years ago. It was the sixtieth anniversary of the Chattertocks. It was started in '51. And [10:00] so we did have a Chattertocks reunion then. And one of the gals from the original group was there. It was a lot of fun – and see... And I was surprised that so few women from that group went on to become professional musicians – Gwyneth Walker, who is a composer. And Ellen Turner teaches music at MIT. I know it's [laughs] strange combinations. But mostly, people... And most of the Chattertocks went on to get higher degrees, about half of them. I did a little research. You know me – Spreadsheets “R” Us. I had to write down where everybody was from and what they were doing.

CLB: Excellent.

PKS: And then about half of them got further degrees. And there was one priest, one rabbi, and one dentist. Sounds like a start of a joke, doesn't it?

CLB: Does. [laughs]

PKS: A priest, a rabbi, and dentist walk into a bar. But...

CLB: And start singing.

PKS: Yeah. [laughter] So it was interesting [11:00] and it was a lot of fun to see all the gals. And the current gals are just very nice to us too. They were singing at a club down in the Village, a few years ago. And I went in early and I saw them, you know, in their black dresses, and I said, “Are you the Chattertocks?” “Yes.” “I used to be a Chattertock!” So at the end of the set, they called me up and asked me to join them.

CLB: And...

PKS: They sing “My Funny Valentine” at every single set. That’s the signature song. So they asked me to come up and sing with them – which was very, very nice. They didn’t have to do that.

CLB: [Working?].

PKS: [laughs] And it was lovely. Yeah. It was fun.

CLB: Excellent!

PKS: So that was really the only thing that I did in school, that I was involved with, is music. I didn’t do any theater or... And I don’t know why. It just didn’t occur to me to do it. I knew I wanted to sing. But that was about it. So.

CLB: And was it partly because of the academic demands? I mean, I understand Pembroke was very rigorous.

PKS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was. And [12:00] my roommate was smarter than I was, which was always a challenge, you know. I w– That’s her epithet now, “Meg Emory, my college roommate, who is a lot smarter than I am.” That’s her name, [laughter] “my college roommate, who’s a lot smarter than I am.” And, yeah, it was – it was rigorous. And I was – I was naïve too. I didn’t realize how tough professors were going to be and... The thing about Brown, too, that you don’t realize – I used to tell people, when I was interviewing kids for Brown, after I got out – I used to interview high school kids – that they don’t tell you is that, when you go to Brown, you get taught by professors. When you go to Harvard, you get taught by graduate students, you get taught by teaching assistants. You know, you don’t get taught by the main guys. And at Brown, the professors pride themselves on teaching. They really do. Well, like Workman, who taught the entry-level course. I mean, these guys really know their stuff. And they’re really good teachers.

They're interested in teaching. [13:00] And my experience with most other places, other professors, they're not interested in teaching. They're interested in their research and they're interested in their next grant and they're interested in their next paper. And teaching is just sort of the way they support their habit, you know. [laughter] Don't tell any professors I said that! We're onto them!

CLB: We'll keep that quiet.

PKS: We'll keep that on the down low.

CLB: So I'm interested in exploring your experiences as a woman student at Brown. And particularly, were there rules that women students had to follow regarding dress or behavior, that you felt were challenging, or anything to that...?

PKS: Actually, there were so many fewer women than there were men, in each class, that the women were [14:00] acknowledged to be smarter than the men, there were s— It was so much harder to get into Pembroke than it was to get into Brown. And that was just kind of a given. But one of the professors I talked to once, said to me, "The women are smarter but the men are more interesting." And when you'd go to class, it was true. The... I would always just sit in the back and take notes. But the men were always the ones that were participating and arguing and, you know, contributing to the discussion. Whereas the women didn't do that. We just sat in the back.

CLB: Did you feel unwelcome to speak up?

PKS: No, we just weren't...

CLB: Intimidated?

PKS: Women just didn't do that. We just didn't do it. It was just part of being a woman. My generation — I'm a sixties hippie — when you got out of college, you were either a nurse, a teacher, or a — or a secretary. Those were the only three jobs you could get. And so we, and I'm

very proud of us, changed that, my generation. [15:00] We did. We really, you know, kicked butt. We were – we were good. We made that happen. But until then, you know, women didn't get a job. You got out of school. You got married. You know, my friend Peggy used to say, "Figure out what you want to be in life and then marry one." You know, that was... And the joke was you'd go to college to get your MRS. You know, this is what – you know. Or you educate a man and you educate a person; you educate a woman, you educate a family. Oh, give me a break. Gag me.

CLB: So you say that now. Did you feel that then?

PKS: I didn't give it that much thought.

CLB: Mm-hmm. Just the way it was.

PKS: Yeah. That's how life was. And we had, you know, parietal rules. I had to look that up. It's – comes from the Latin word that means "walls." So that, anything within the walls of the university, the university can decide. Their house, their rules. And so that's why... And we had these crazy rules. Like you couldn't wear slacks. [16:00] Do you believe that? Every time I go to the campus now and I see the gals walking around in their cut-off blue jeans, I say, "You go, girls! [laughter] Keep wearing those. Because they could take that away from you anytime, if you don't keep asserting yourselves," you know. And the... You couldn't wear slacks. You could smoke. That was... I mean, you could even smoke in the dorm. That was okay. But the university acted in loco parentis – that was their justification for these rules – and which is, of course, a legal term that means you're acting for the parents. Even though you haven't adopted this person, you still act for them. And it's your job to take care of them. And that's how they interpreted it, the rules, was they were taking care of us.

CLB: And were the men and the women parented differently?

PKS: Oh, definitely, yes. Yeah. Well, of course, the women... You know, I've always said this, that... And people think I'm crazy – which, I may be. But all that stuff about [17:00] protecting

the women is just to make them more desirable. You know, like Rapunzel is up there in that tower and you can't get to her. And, oh, my God, she must be really terrific, if she's up in this tower! You know, it's all part of the thing to make women more desirable. And it's also part of keeping them down. You know, you're not allowed to— It's like wearing a burka, you know. You're not allowed to show your face, outside. So we had rules that we had to get permission from our parents, when we first got there, whether you could stay off-campus, whether you could stay in somebody's house, whether you could stay at a hotel, whatever. You know, there were different levels of permission that your parents gave. And my parents being my parents, just said, "Sure, anything. Whatever you want. Just go. Do whatever you feel like." But my friend [Chica?] said that, you know, parents who would let you just go anywhere, that's like bad parenting. They should be ashamed of themselves, letting you do whatever you want. So there's different schools of thought on that. [18:00] So that was one of the rules.

And then, of course, we had curfews. And the Pembroke curfew was very lenient. I remember, when my sister went to school, she had to be in by 10:00. At Pembroke, we had to be in by 12:30 during the week and 1:30 on Saturdays. And then seniors could come in at 1:30 on Friday and 2:30 on Saturday. So we're talking, you know, seriously loose construction there, which was really nice. We were very, very liberal. You had to sign out, if you were going to be out after 10:00. But... There was a little sign-out board. And then, when you came in, you initialed it and flipped the card over that you were in, so they wouldn't go looking for you.

CLB: So despite the fact that some of the rules were lenient, in your estimation, did anyone resist or flout them?

PKS: Oh, yes. [laughs] Oh, yes, certainly. You [19:00] couldn't — you couldn't go out. You were not— you were not allowed to stay in a hotel in the Providence area, the premise being that, if you're in Providence, you could get back to the dorm, there would be no need to stay out all night. And frequently — I shouldn't say frequently — but, for some people, you know, you'd be out and it'd be past sign-in time, so you just stay out all night. You know. "They'll never know. I'll just wander back tomorrow sometime." You weren't supposed to do that but that's what people did. And my friend Gail remembers climbing in the windows at Miller Hall, [laughs]

when it was after closing hour. I don't remember ever doing that. But, you know, that's what she remembers. Yeah, so people did resist the rules. It was...

CLB: And when you were on campus, the Vietnam War was under way.

PKS: Yes.

CLB: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like on campus then?

PKS: There were... I was not one of those antiwar activists. I was sympathetic with [20:00] the antiwar people but I wasn't an activist. There was a group of the SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, on campus. And there was a group for SNCC. And SNCC was probably the most violent of the group, which I felt was ironic, because they were the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. "You're the nonviolent ones? I'd hate to see the violent ones!" You know.

CLB: And what do you –

PKS: They...

CLB: – mean by them being the most violent?

PKS: They were – they were always having sit-ins and lockouts and all kinds of, you know, physical demonstrations. Yeah. People moved to Canada. People dismembered themselves, you know, cut off their fingers and stuff, so they couldn't –

CLB: Students.

PKS: – students – so they wouldn't be drafted.

CLB: Male student.

PKS: Yes, men. It was – it was horrifying, was just horrifying. And there were a lot of demonstrations and all [21:00] kinds of things going on. It was terrible. And my brother, who is three years younger than I am, when they finally decided they would pick who gets drafted based on their birthdays... And it was a random drawing. And I've forgotten who was doing the drawing. But it was a random drawing of 365 numbers. And that's the order in which you would get drafted. And my brother was #365. I was so grateful – “There is a God.” But that just sort of redoubled my opposition to the war – I said – Because somebody else's brother's 1. And, you know, “So we need to still oppose this.” So it was – it was a very hard time. The sixties were very disruptive.

And my nephew, when he was little, we went to see *Beatlemania* on Broadway. And they had a recreation of The Beatles. And they had running pictures in the background [22:00] of all what was going on in the world then and headlines from the newspapers. And he asked me afterwards – he said, “What was all that?” And I said, “Well, the country was in turmoil, back in the sixties. And nobody really knew what was the best direction for the country to go in, and both at home, with the civil rights and that stuff, and then also abroad, with the war. And there was a lot of disagreement. And it erupted into,” you know, “physical fighting.” And he said, “Oh. Who won?” [laughs] “Well, I guess the good guys won. I d–” [laughs] You know, good guys always win a war. I guess the good guys won. We did eventually get out of Vietnam. We did eventually have the Civil Rights Act. So I guess the good guys won. But anyway. It was... My mother used to say, “We are in the middle of a revolution but we're right in the middle of it, so we don't even know it,” in the sixties. It was a very busy time. Yeah.

CLB: So [23:00] the stakes were particularly high for the male students.

PKS: Oh, yes.

CLB: Did you know any personally who had to take actions, like you described, or...?

PKS: One friend, who was in Classics Department with me, faked being crazy, when he went in for his interview, or whatever, swearing in, whatever. And so they didn't take him. And other

time— people went in and they discovered, after they went in, that there was something wrong with them. You know, my old boyfriend went in. He thought he wouldn't get taken, because he had flat feet. And they said, "Never mind your flat feet. You've got a heart murmur. You're an accident waiting to happen. [laughs] Go. We don't want you." And then, another case... My big sister, at Pembroke, [Aileen Seneshel?], her husband was a doctor. And he went in, to see if he could get, [24:00] you know, deferred because he had flat feet and they said, "Dr. Desmond, the fact that you could get here under your own steam means we're going to take you. We need every doctor we can get." So he was drafted. And he went to Vietnam. So. Yeah. It was – it was a major concern back then. And, you know, as – said to people, when I got thrown out of school... My then partner in crime, Gerry, was a sophomore. And he got thrown out too. There was, you know... And...

CLB: I think we need to hear more about this story.

PKS: [laughs] Right. I know! Everybody says that to me. "Wait a minute. Back up the truck" –

CLB: [laughs]

PKS: – "Say what?" But, you know, he could lose his 2-S deferment. And he could have gone to Vietnam. So that was a serious issue

CLB: And a 2-S deferment was the student exemption?

PKS: Two-Student. Yes. Yeah. So. And lots of times, you heard stories – I didn't know anybody who did it – but people [25:00] who would just get married, just to get married, so they'd be married and they wouldn't get drafted. So it was... You know, and my ex-husband pulled some political connections. You know, he knew people in Massachusetts who were in the Senate and h— So he was in the Army but he didn't get sent to Vietnam. He stayed in... So a lot of that going on. And you hear horror stories too. When I was in high school – I don't know who it was – but some of my friends said that there were fathers who bribed National Guard people to say that their son was in the National Guard – but wasn't. I mean, that's horrifying. And there are some

guys from my class in high school who have never gotten past that. You know, they still are living in Vietnam – and their friends who died and what they went through over there and – you know. So, anyway. And it was [26:00] horrifying, the thought that people bribed people, to stay out, and... I'm sure that went on all the time. But we just didn't know about it.

CLB: So it's time to back up the truck.

PKS: Ba– [laughs]

CLB: You mentioned in passing that you were thrown out of Brown?

PKS: Yes, I was, my junior year. Actually, I didn't really give it a thought. I went to Campus Dance. I'd already gone home from school. And I went back to school to Campus Dance, with my then boyfriend Gerry. And we hadn't made any plans, what we were going to do, where we were going to stay, or anything. We just went back for the dance. And school was over. So we weren't making a statement or anything. We we– It was cold. We went back to his fraternity house. And we were upstairs in the fraternity house. And we got caught. And you're not allowed to be upstairs in the fraternity house after hours, 12:30 or whatever the hour. Friday night, 12:30. [27:00] So...

CLB: And who caught you?

PKS: A campus cop.

CLB: Mm. He was patrolling the fraternity house?

PKS: I don't know what... I think... I don't know. I don't know. But anyway. Yeah. And we had to go to see the campus police. And they said all these stupid things to us, like, "How would your parents like it if we called them up right now?" I s– "Why don't you try calling them and see what they say?" What a stupid thing to say. Anyway. And the funny thing was we didn't have anyplace to go after that, so we went downtown and checked into the Biltmore, which, you

know, that, you're really not allowed to do. But that's what I did. An— Well, Gerry went back to the campus. But he checked me into the Biltmore. And so...

CLB: So you had to go to the campus police.

PKS: Right.

CLB: Was there an administrative process that happened –

PKS: Yes.

CLB: – with the deans?

PKS: Yeah. I went – I went home. Gerry said... I got a ride home with a friend who lives near me, Richie Hiller – still lives near me, actually, on the Upper West Side here. And Gerry stayed [28:00] to talk to the deans. And they had a reciprocal agreement then at Brown. Anything that happened at Pembroke had to happen to a Brown guy. And Pembroke's weren't allowed to be upstairs in the dorm. So he had to go too. I think maybe, if I hadn't been a Pembroke, this wouldn't have happened – to him.

CLB: Had you been not enrolled.

PKS: Right. Exactly. But since I was at Pembroke, he had to get the same punishment I had. And I was just expelled. They didn't say for a semester. They didn't say anything, just said, "You're out." So I told my parents.

CLB: Did your process happen first and then his? Or do you remember?

PKS: I don't know. I don't know. They called me up. And they said, "You're out." And I don't even remember who it was that I spoke to. But my mother got on the horn with Dean Perrell, who was then the dean of Pembroke, and said, "I want to make an appointment." [laughs] "Not

throwing my daughter out without me getting on the horn here.” So she went up and talked to them. And Dean [29:00] Perrell said, “Typically, it will be for one semester. And then,” you know, “get back in touch with me at the end of the semester and see about you coming back in.” So. I was really very, very noncommittal about it. I sort of didn’t care. It was like... But I was worried about Gerry losing his 2-S status. Because then you could get drafted. But he got a job working in a psych lab, at Swarthmore, for the semester, so he was able to keep his 2-S status. And I had... And I went to summer school. And I had credits from high school. I had advanced placement credits, going in. So when I got back to school, between the advanced placement credit and my summer school, I was able to graduate on time. S–

CLB: Oh, with your class.

PKS: Yes.

CLB: Very nice.

PKS: So...

CLB: So you missed the fall semester?

PKS: Semester. Exactly. And [30:00] I realize now, you know, Dean Perrell was really on my side. Of course, at the time, she couldn’t say that. But she really was. She... When I petitioned the Committee on Academic Standing to accept my summer school classes, they rejected my petition. Apparently, when you’re on social probation, you’re not supposed to have any of your academic credits credited to you. And she... I went to see her. And she said, “I wish I had been there when the committee met. I didn’t make that meeting. Let me just call up and do an informal polling and see what I can come up with.” And she called me back. She said, “All right, it’s done.” [laughs] I think she probably called them up and said, “Look. Enough already.” And same with when... I took a car back to school with me, second semester, when I was a senior. And I went to get a sticker, so I could park in the parking lot. And the guy at the – at the car place said,

“You can’t have a sticker – you’re on social probation – because you’ve been thrown out.”

[31:00] A–

CLB: You had served your time.

PKS: Yeah. And that’s... And I went back to see the dean. And the dean called them up and said, “Give her the damn sticker!” [laughter] She was... So I got the sticker. So I got to keep my car. And I realize now she was really on my side. And then I went to see Professor Workman, who was the head of the Classics Department. Because I had to change my major around. Because I had a full-length course I was supposed to take senior year, which I wasn’t going to be able to take. So he said, “Well, let me see what we can do here. Let’s just take a look at your transcript and see what we can come up with.” So he looked at the things that I’d taken and he s– “Oh, I’ll accept that for the major. Oh, yeah, I’ll accept that for the major.” And he looked at my list of what I’d taken and he said, “Oh, yeah. This is fine. We’ve got a major here. Yes. You’re a classics major now.” So.

CLB: So although the rules were enforced, there was flexibility there.

PKS: Yeah. Well, I think what ha– well, I know what happened was, the next year, women were allowed to live off campus.

CLB: Ah.

PKS: I mean, the times –

CLB: Right...

PKS: – they were [32:00] a-changin’. Yes. And I’m sure that Dean Perrell said, “For God’s sake,” you know, “How much more do you want to punish these kids? Next year, this is all going to be forgotten.” So I think she was really on my side, which I didn’t realize at the time, of

course. And definitely, Professor Workman was. He accepted all these things for the major, which he didn't have to. And so I was able to graduate. Which was very nice.

CLB: So what did you do with your time – the fall semester –

PKS: I got a job.

CLB: – when you weren't on campus?

PKS: Yeah. I lived at home with my parents, my wonderful parents. You know, when you think about it, other parents could have said, “Well, that's it, honey. You're done. [laughs] Ungrateful little girl.” But they didn't. I stayed home. I lived with them. And I got a job. I worked for a company in town, where I lived, called Home Testing Institute. And it was a market research firm. And we did testing of different products, marketing products. And I [33:00] was in the group that did spreadsheets. Spreadsheets “R” Us! I was born to do spreadsheets. I did the spreadsheets for these surveys that we did. And, you know, any job experience is good experience, I mean, just having to be there on time and –

CLB: Sure.

PKS: – having deadlines and having to get your work done and having to get along with other people who you don't necessarily like. All of that stuff is very good experience. And they were terrific to me. You know, when I... I wanted to go back to school. I went to see them after Christmas and I said, “They've taken me back. I'm going to go back.” And the president of the company said, “I think that's absolutely the right thing to do. And when you get out, if you still want a job here, call us. But,” he said, “you are doing absolutely the right thing.” He was very –

CLB: That's lovely.

PKS: – yeah – he was very positive. So. And Gerry and I promised each other, when this happened, that we would never lie about it. And I'm so glad that we did. Because we never tried

to cover it up. And it was hard, when I was first looking for a job, and... [34:00] “You were thrown out of school. That’s not a very good recommendation, is it?” you know. But they were fine. It worked out fine. Because...

CLB: The times were a-changing –

PKS: Yes. Exactly.

CLB: – so there was less –

PKS: Oh, yeah.

CLB: – shame.

PKS: And now I tell people this and – “Isn’t that quaint? They threw you out for that? That’s ridiculous!” And there was a lot of discussion, too, about being punished academically for something that you did that was a social misdemeanor. You know, you’re losing your academic time for staying out too late. It should have been, “Well, you can’t go out late anymore,” or something, a social kind of a punishment.

CLB: Social punishment for –

PKS: Right.

CLB: – a social infraction.

PKS: Exactly. Exactly. Which, there was a lot of discussion about that. So... Because it is true. That’s what happened. It was difficult acade– Gerry didn’t graduate on time. He had to come back and do another whole year. So. But at the time, that probably was okay with him, because he would have [35:00] lost his 2-S anyway, if he’d graduated on time. So... But it was – it was hard at the time. But it was part of – part of the revolution. You know, we never really thought

about it. It wasn't like we were trying to be rebels or anything like that. We were kids! We didn't think about it. And school was over! We never gave it a thought. So. Uh. Whatever. Anyway. So.

CLB: Are there any other memories or experiences, from your time at Pembroke and Brown, that you want to share?

PKS: Well, I was very, very lucky – my roommate. My sister – she's older than I – when she went off to college, she said, "The best friend you will ever have in your life is somebody you haven't met yet." And I said, "Uh, pf—" And then I met Meg. She was my freshman-year roommate. We used to say they picked us by religion. [36:00] Because two gals that lived on one side of us were Jewish, both of them Jewish. Meg was... Now why can't I remember the...? You know, Friends. What are those people called? [laughs]

CLB: Quaker?

PKS: Quakers, yes. Meg was a Quaker. My grandparents were Quaker. We weren't Quaker. But my grandparents were Quaker. The one that went to Brown was Quaker. And then people next door to us were Episcopalian and Greek Orthodox, you know, sort of high-churchy. So we figured it was by religion, that's how they picked us. Meg and I, both on the – on the questionnaire of who we wanted in a roommate, we both said we wanted somebody from another part of the country. She lived about ten miles away from me. [laughs] Another part of the country, not another part of the county! So we got to meet each other fresh– When we found out, you know, summer before freshman year, I called her up. I said, "Hey!" She said, "Come on over." So I went over and met her. And we have been friends ever since. She was just a wonderful, wonderful person. [37:00] I was so lucky to have her for my roommate. And she still is one of my closest friends.

CLB: And where does she live now?

PKS: She lives up in Rye, in New York. And she and her husband are retiring. She's a librarian. And they're retiring and they're moving down to Virginia. Their daughter lives in Virginia. So

they're moving to an adult community down there, where her brother and sister-in-law live. And they'll be near her daughter. So. That's why they're going down there. S—

CLB: So she'll come back to the big city to visit you.

PKS: Right! Yes.

CLB: [laughs]

PKS: I hope so. [laughs]

CLB: You'll have girls' weekend.

PKS: Yes. I hope so. I hope so. She's terrific. Sh— I was very, very lucky to have her. And, of course, I really enjoyed doing the music. I loved being in the chorale. The musicians there, they were wonderful, the... Everybody was really talented. And I wasn't. One day we were over at the Music Department and we were just hanging out. I used to [38:00] out with the guys in the — in the music group, different guys. I was kind of a groupie. And so I was over there with one of my boyfriends and we decided, "Well, let's just sing something, practice." So we're... The musical director, Erich Kunzel — he has since passed away — but he's playing the piano and we're singing along. We're doing all this... And I was the only girl. So I'm singing along, belting it out. And he goes, "Stop, stop! Everybody stop!" And he turns to me and he says, "That's F# there. See? It's still sharpened from three measures ago. The..." "Oh! F#! What was I singing?" I didn't [laughter] know. Everybody else knew F#. I didn't know from F#. I'm just singing along, like I always do. So it was a wonderful experience. I really, really enjoyed doing the music and made some wonderful friends. So.

CLB: Did you make any recordings of your student performances?

PKS: Chattertocks. There are several [39:00] Chattertocks albums. There's one that I worked one summer. I spent the whole summer working on getting it produced — and the album cover and all

that kind of stuff. The woman who had been the president – or the leader of the Chattertocks the year before drew the album cover. So it was a lot of fun. It was cute. So it was one little happy family. It's...

CLB: I wonder if those albums are in the archives?

PKS: I'm sure at least... Because I gave them mine and one of the old ones that we had. So I'm sure they are. And I'm sure that somebody at Brown must know how to put those onto a DVD but they haven't.

CLB: I'll have to explore that.

PKS: Yeah. They haven't. But... Yeah.

CLB: So after Brown, you went on to earn a master's in urban planning from NYU. So you were a classics major... Was it a major, back then? Or –

PKS: Yes.

CLB: – [40:00] Not a concentration? So you were a classics major at Brown and then you moved on to urban planning. How did that happen?

PKS: Well, it was another one of those ironies. Having been thrown out of school, I had to find other courses to take. And I still needed one more course in the social sciences, so I took sociology. And that was when I took a course called Community. And it was von der Lippe who was the young professor. And I loved it! And I said – “This is great! I love this stuff. I want to be a city planner.” So when I moved to New York, I went to NYU and I applied to their Urban Planning Department. And thank God for Brown University, because they took me like that. There were no questions asked. They said, “We'll sign you right up.” And their placement office had – list of places to apply for jobs. And one of them was the company that I went to work for, was a management consulting firm but they [41:00] had a department that did, you know, urban

planning kind of stuff. And since I already had worked for a semester in market research and they were a marketing company, they said, “Well, she’s already got some background in this. Let’s hire her. So I was the only woman in a company – 200 people – only woman professional. So –

CLB: What was that like?

PKS: – the times they are changin’, yes. It was... I really credit my boss. Of course, I didn’t give it a thought then. He was about 15 years older than I. I thought, “Oh, God, this old person.” And he was the one who insisted on hiring me. And you can’t believe the nonsense that went on. Women were not allowed to travel for the company. I couldn’t have a business card. Because my title... I had a title, you know, a personnel title. And I was an Analyst, which is a level of personnel, and in the Planning Department. So I was a Planning Analyst. [42:00] So why couldn’t I just get a card that said “Planning Analyst” on it? Nuh-uh. “Only the men get cards. Women don’t get business cards. You have no need for a business card since you’re not going to travel for the company anyway.” And Bob [Kayso?], my then boss, was the one who pushed for me to be able to travel and get business cards and have meetings and stuff–

CLB: How long did it take him to move the company, do you think?

PKS: Well, I was there for about a year before I took my first trip. My parents have pictures of me like going on my first trip. I wore a hat and gloves and... You know, it was – it was different back then.

CLB: Where was the trip to? Do you remember?

PKS: Washington, I think. Washington, DC? I also went to Rochester. And I went to Providence, meetings in Providence. We were working on the Port of Providence, how to develop the Port of Providence. So I went to Providence and met there. I went there by myself. I didn’t have to go with him.

CLB: How exciting.

PKS: Yeah!

CLB: [laughs]

PKS: They trusted [43:00] me!

CLB: No chaperone.

PKS: Right! They trusted me. It was great. And I saw a couple of friends of mine that were, you know, a couple of years behind me at Pembroke. So. Anyway, it was – it was not easy. You know, you had to continually take a stand. And I used to do that with the young women in my office, right up until the day I retired. I said, “You have got to keep fighting the fight. They will take it away from you, if you don’t.” My company, we used to have a meeting every Monday where they guys on the desk would go over what had happened in the stock market the week before. And it was just for the professionals. So there were usually about 100 people there. And I always counted the number of women. And there were very seldom more than 10. And I used to say to the young women, “You’ve got to go to the Monday meeting. And you’ve got to sit in the front row! Make yourself heard. Make yourself seen. Be sure you keep your position. Because they’ll take it away from you, if you don’t.”

And people used to make fun of me, at my old job, and I would answer the phone, [44:00] “Ms. Kollmer” – it was my maiden name – and instead of saying, “Phyllis Kollmer.” Because I learned, when I answered, “Phyllis Kollmer,” people would say, “Hello, Phyllis. This is Mr. Jones calling.” So then he gets to be Mr. Jones and I get to be Phyllis, in case you haven’t figured out where the power lies here. So I would just not tell people my first name. And that way, they didn’t call me by my first name. So. There was a lot of discrimination against women. And as I said, you were either a secretary, a nurse, or a teacher. That was it. So we really had to push for change.

CLB: But you were a planning analyst.

PKS: Yes. I was a planning analyst.

CLB: And then you made a career change –

PKS: Yes.

CLB: – to law.

PKS: Right.

CLB: How did that happen and why?

PKS: Actually...this is going to sound really mundane. I was getting divorced. And I used to think to myself, “David loved me because I was smart and I was tough. And I’m still smart and I’m still tough. I’m going to law school.” So that provoked me to do it. I used to think I wanted to go to law school but [45:00] women didn’t do that then. You didn’t go to... There were several women in my class who were lawyers. But they didn’t go right to law school after college. You know, it just didn’t happen. Women didn’t do that. So I thought, “I’m going to see if I can go to law school.” So I applied to Rutgers. And because there’s a law school in Newark, I could commute on the PATH train out to Rutgers after school. So that’s what I did. And I went to Rutgers after school – I mean, after work. [laughs] And, you know, everybody said, “That’s amazing, that you’d do that.” And I – “It’s not amazing. I just do it. I don’t think about it. I go to work, go to school –”

CLB: So you were still –

PKS: “– go home.”

CLB: – you were still in urban planning, while you were studying the law.

PKS: Law. And I was working for a company then, my now company I retired from, Ambac, in the municipal bond business. So it was still related to city planning. It was how things get financed, how... You know. And I started out just doing [46:00] housing and different housing projects and then eventually morphed into other areas. And a lot of what I did was legal, to begin with, reading documents and approving documents and all of that. So that's what I continued doing. Everybody at law school said to me, "Aren't you going to move in the legal department?" And I said, "No. I make more money than the lawyers do. I'm going to stay where I am." [laughs] So I stayed in my department but I did, you know, have the legal degree, have the law degree. So.

CLB: So when you were at Ambac and, you know, time had gone by since – you described – your first job, in urban planning, did the proportion of women to men start to shift? Did you notice it happen gradually, quickly?

PKS: Oh, yes, it did. And – it was interesting – the woman who hired me at Ambac is somebody I went to graduate school with at NYU. Because when I was looking for a job... It was after my fourth job. I was out of work. [47:00] I decided to check the NYU placement office. And they said, "Well, we've got this job at Ambac, this woman Joan Perry." I said, "I went to grad school with Joan Perry." So I went in for an interview and she said, "Oh, yeah. I remember you. Yeah, I'll hire you. Fine." And the president of the company then was Russ Fraser, who had come from PaineWebber and was a real feminist. He believed in women in business. And he was always very happy to hire women. Because he knew they could do the job. And he had no problem hiring women. So we had a...

CLB: Was that unusual in the insurance industry, do you think?

PKS: Yes. Yeah. It was unusual on Wall Street too, that...

CLB: Period.

PKS: Yes. I remember having this conversation with somebody, when I was – one of my jobs, when I worked for New York State Division of Housing, and he said to me, “Oh. The Street’s no place for a woman.”

CLB: [laughs]

PKS: “The Street is no place for a woman.” Anyway. Yes. So times have changed. There are women on Wall Street now. [48:00] But I look back and I think about my grandmother. When I use to go to law school at night and it was dark and it was cold, and I think, “Ma, I’m doing this for you.” Because she would have been a lawyer, if she could have, you know. My grandfather was a lawyer, the one who went to Brown. And I think of my Aunt Rose, who was... You know, she would have been Mickie Siebert, if she lived even 20 years later. You know, she was terrific with the market. She was so good at it. But women didn’t do that. You know, she stayed home and raised her children. And she would have been really good. So, yeah, it wa– it was... I think Ambac was unusual, there were so many women. But times are changing. There are women on the Street now. [laughter] It does happen. And my cousin’s daughter, who is a lawyer, is... She’s– when she went to school, it was about 50/50 men and women in law school. And it wasn’t [49:00] anywhere nearly that, when I was at...

CLB: What do you think the ratio now is for women to men, at the partner level, for law firms?

PKS: I really don’t know. I don’t...

CLB: Be interesting to think.

PKS: Yeah.

CLB: Because if law school attendance is about 50/50 –

PKS: Right.

CLB: – what happens? Because we know, PhDs, the women and the men are somewhat equal, in at least some fields, but, once you get up to full professor, they're not equal.

PKS: Yes. Oh, yeah.

CLB: Yeah.

PKS: So we got to work on that. [laughter]

CLB: So moving on from the career to your volunteer activities, I know you've been, for a long time, a volunteer and supporter of the Pembroke Center. And you've chaired the Associates Council and were a long-time member and still are, in an ex officio status. How did you get involved with the Pembroke Center? What drew you to it? [50:00] Talk a little bit about that.

PKS: Well, what is funny is what drew me to it was I got invited to one of these parties. It was at Ava Seave's apartment, on the Upper West Side. And I didn't know anything about the Pembroke Center. So I went to the party. I was in the Pembroke Club in New York. There wa— there was a Pembroke Club then. And I guess that's how they had my name. So I got invited to this party. And it was really interesting. And I got to talking to Chelsey Remington, who was very active in the Pembroke Center then. And she called me and invited me out for lunch. And then she invited me to be on the board of the Pembroke Center. So.

CLB: Very nice!

PKS: You know, I've always been a feminist, you know, so I totally agree with the work of the Pembroke Center. And so I was very thrilled to be invited. It was nice. It was great to be invited! So.

CLB: Well, we're thrilled to still have you –

PKS: Oh, thank you.

CLB: – all these years. [laughs]

PKS: That's very nice. That's very nice.

CLB: And you also [51:00] have been involved with the Center Against Domestic Violence. Can you talk a little bit about what drew you to that and –

PKS: Well –

CLB: – how you got involved?

PKS: – that's another one of those... It's even stranger. I was the president of my professional women's group, Women in Housing and Finance. And for our Christmas party every year, we used to have a bash. But we had a big enough budget that we could cover that without charging any money. So I suggested, "Instead of charging money for the party, why don't we charge everybody to come and we will donate that money to a charity of our choice?" And there are several women in the group who had charities that they were involved with and one of them was the Center Against Domestic Violence. So I said, "Let's..." You know, we voted. The board voted. And we said, "Yeah, we'll support that." So we charged everybody – I've forgotten what it was – \$20 or something for the dinner. [coughs] Excuse me. And [52:00] we gave that money to the center. And that's how the center found out about me. And they contacted me and they asked me if I would like to be on their board. So.

CLB: Excellent! And –

PKS: So I did.

CLB: – have you held any offices on the board? Or, you know, what's your service been like there?

PKS: Yes. I was on the board for six years. You can't stay more than six years. It's a rule. So I was on the board. I beca- Well, I always tell people my mother taught me three things, diversify your assets, always wear a slip, and never draw to an inside straight. I have lived by those three rules. And the greatest one is diversify your assets. So when I got involved – you know, here I was, the Wall Street person – we had, I think, \$75,000 in the bank, in working capital, for this organization. And it was all in a money market somewhere. I said, "This has got to stop." So they made me the treasurer, since I was the only one who would do it. [53:00] And I developed criteria for how to invest our money. And then we had some other people, who were in development – or they call advancement now – who were bringing in bigger bucks, from various sources. So we started having quite a bit of money. And we used my investment criteria. So that was probably the second-best thing that I did for that organization, was be the treasurer and design investment criteria for them – which is what I'd done at work. So it wasn't hard, wasn't something I didn't know how to do. And then the best thing was I recruited some other business colleagues of mine to be on the board –

CLB: Uh...

PKS: – yeah – so they didn't just have, you know, not-for profit type people on the board, they have some business-people on the board, who were looking out for how to make things happen. And the last year that I was there, we were able to open another shelter. So that felt really good.

CLB: Oh...

PKS: Because we had enough [54:00] money that we could do that. Yeah.

CLB: Are all the services located in Manhattan or...?

PKS: No. It was Brooklyn.

CLB: Okay.

PKS: And the shelters are on the down low. Nobody knows where they are.

CLB: Of course.

PKS: One of them looks like the fire department. It's got the big numbers out in front and all tha— Looks like you got fire trucks parked in there. But then we opened one in Manhattan. So that was one of our goals, was to become more citywide. So when I went off the board, we opened one in Manhattan, that last year. So that felt very good.

CLB: Do you do any other volunteer activities?

PKS: Not right now.

CLB: No?

PKS: I have two professional women's groups that I'm involved in. I was president of Women in Housing and Finance. So after that, you get to be the vice chair for life. You know, you get kicked upstairs. And I was on the New York Women's Agenda. I was the treasurer of that for a while. But I retired from that. So the only thing I'm [55:00] really involved with still is Women in Housing and Finance. It's — professional group. And people are looking for jobs or they're looking for contracts or things that I can't provide for them. So it's... It's still interesting to me, to hear what's going on.

CLB: Sure.

PKS: But I don't really bring a lot to the party anymore. [laughs] So.

CLB: Perhaps some mentorship and advice.

PKS: Right. Yes. Yes. [laughter] We tried that once. Didn't work. Move on. So.

CLB: Well, is there anything else that you want to talk about for the interview?

PKS: I did want to tell one amusing little story about me getting thrown out of school. Like that's amusing. That year, that Christmas, my mother sent around Christmas cards to everybody that she knew. And she told them. "Phyllis Ann got thrown out of school." And people wrote back, "Oh, we're so disappointed. Oh, you must feel terrible. How could somebody so smart do something so stupid?" You know, it was really a big deal. [56:00] My mother's roommate at the time, who was gay, which they didn't – that was also on the down low –

CLB: Sure.

PKS: – you don't tell people about that – and was from the South somewhere.... Dixie, her name – obviously, she was from the South – Dixie. They used to have a wastebasket in their room that had the poem from Herrick, "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" – "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time." That was the title of the poem. "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, Old Time is still a-flying: And this sweet rose that blooms to-day to-morrow will be dying." So my mother got a Christmas card back from Dixie. Everybody else had written back saying, "Oh, we're so disappointed," and, "How could Phyllis be so stupid?" and yadda, yadda, yadda. She wrote back and she said, "I rejoice to learn that Phyllis Ann has been gathering her rosebuds." [laughter]

CLB: Wonderful.

PKS: I always liked Dixie.

CLB: That might be another tenet to live by.

PKS: Yes. Exactly, [57:00] exactly. So. But it all seems very quaint now. It was really awful, at the time. But I remember telling my nephew, when he was 15, about me getting thrown out of school. And he said, "Aunt Fifi! You were a playah!" [laughter] I said, "Oh, honey, I'm still a player. I'm just a old player." So. Anyway. It was interesting times. But women have moved on. And we have to keep moving on. It's important – and we not let up and not let them get the

better of us. I always think of that, when I see... There was a woman on the subway the other day, who had on one of those black burkas and all you could see was a little slit with her eyes. Why do they do that? How come they don't just rise up and say, "We're not doing this anymore"? You know? I don't understand that. You'd think... There's a whole bunch of them over there. Just rise up and say, "No. I'm not doing that." But anyway. You have to keep watch. You have to keep on the ball all the time.

CLB: Do you find [58:00] that today's generation of young women... Do you think they appreciate the struggles that your generation went through, to sort of secure some of the advantages and equality that they now enjoy? Or do you think that that's kind of been forgotten or taken for granted?

PKS: I think it's taken for granted. I look at like the current presidential election and how many women are for Bernie, you know, and saying, "This is a chance to have a woman president! Why would you not to that?" And, uh... They like Bernie better. So I think it is sort of taken for granted. And that's why, as I said – about the morning meeting, when I would say to the women, "Go to the meeting. And sit in the front row! Make sure everybody sees you! You have to stay on top of this. Because they could all take it away from you, anytime." So, yeah, I do think [59:00] there's a lot of taking for granted. And there's a lot of eyerolling, people looking at me like, "Oh, there she goes again," you know. [laughs] But... And I do know that they're rolling their eyes. But still, I have to say it. I have to keep fighting the good fight.

CLB: Well, hopefully this interview will help sort of record some of this and share it with students and future researchers, so–

PKS: And they'll – and they'll be doing even more eyerolling!

CLB: [laughs]

PKS: There'll be people rolling eyes out there, that I don't even know! [laughter]

CLB: Well, thank you, so much, for participating in this.

PKS: Thank you.

CLB: And we will be putting it in the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives –

PKS: Thank you, very much.

CLB: – on Brown Women Speak.

PKS: Auh!

CLB: Thank you.

PKS: Thank you. Lovely!

CLB: All right. Oh, my God! We have been going an hour, haven't we? Good Lord. [59:54]

- END -