

Transcript – Sophia “Sophie” (Schaffer) Blistein, Class of ’41

Narrator: Sophia “Sophie” (Schaffer) Blistein

Interviewer: Jane Lancaster

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Track 1

JL: – talking to Sophia Blistein in her apartment, and looking out at the not-yet-autumnal leaves here. Thank you for talking to us, Sophie. And let’s start with what you can remember about your days in Pembroke Hall.

Sophia Blistein: Pembroke Hall itself?

JL: Yup.

SSB: Well, Pembroke Hall was the center of Pembroke College. I was more – I was lucky that it was a little bit bigger than it was – than it was when Ruth – the college was a little bit bigger than it was when – you just interviewed Ruth Lubrano. I don’t know how much you know about the back of the Pembroke Hall, but I find it kind of fascinating in that the women who tried to start Pembroke College, or – what it really was was the Women’s College in Brown University – had great difficulty. And in my years of Alumnae Association [01:00] president, when we were researching a lot of the background, it was very interesting to find out from the 1880s, these women were trying to start the Women’s College, and the men would always say, quote, “the time was not right.” So when the time did become right in the early 1890s, and the president at the time – oh, I can’t (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

JL: Andrews.

SSB: – Andrews, was very supportive. And this group of women in Rhode Island who had wanted to start the Women’s College rallied forth and raised money for the first building, which was Pembroke Hall. And it’s interesting that Sarah Doyle, who was the founder of this whole group, which we used to call the Long Name Society, because they were the Society for the Collegiate Education of Women – she herself [02:00] was – she was a teacher in the Providence schools; she herself never graduated from college. Probably the first degree she got was an honorary degree from Brown University. But at any rate, they raised the money, and I have a vague feeling that it was something like 25,000 or – maybe it was 75,000. No, I think they raised 25,000, and it’s kind of funny to think of what the restoration of it is going to cost. But anyhow, that was many years ago. And they named it Pembroke Hall. We did not have a Pembroke College then; it was the Women’s College in Brown University. They named it Pembroke Hall because Roger Williams had gone to Pembroke College in Cambridge, and that college was named – was founded by a woman, a countess or somebody, whose name I’ve forgotten. [03:00] But I think it’s always important to remember that Pembroke Hall was the beginning. It was before Pembroke Hall.

And I don’t know. What I remember most, I guess, about Pembroke Hall, and everyone will say the same thing, is the four flights of stairs we had to do regularly for the library, which was at the top floor. And our classes were on the third floor. And the second floor was very austere; that was where the dean’s office was on one side, and I think the Dean of Admission probably on the other side, but I do recall a little, little room where the Brown professors came over to teach us – it was their room, which was always rather smoke-filled, and you’d see them coming and going with a bag of books. And that was the only headquarters the faculty had on our campus.

JL: So there [04:00] wasn’t anywhere for women faculty?

SSB: We didn’t have any women faculty.

JL: You didn’t have any?

SSB: Have any women fac– no, there was one that was Magel – I want to say Rogers [Wilder], but she taught biology. And she was – she did teach us biology in the honor lab. That was one class – actually, come to think of it, that was one class, as undergraduates, we did go over to the campus for. But there were no – she was, like, the first woman on campus. And – and later, I guess, women did go – well, by the time there were women faculty members there was no longer a Pembroke College to speak of.

JL: Did you have women deans?

SSB: We had women deans, yes. But it's interesting that Dean Morriss, who I always remember was dean from 1923 to [05:00] whenever Nancy Duke Lewis came, which was after my time, so I think it was probably '44 or '45 – so that was a long time, and now a college president thinks that 10 years is the maximum they should do.

JL: And what was she like?

SSB: Dean Morriss?

JL: Mm-hmm.

SSB: Very austere, very remote, very formal, very – I think I probably had maybe two interviews with her or something, all the years of my – you know, it would be something very serious that you would be called in to see the dean. The dean of admissions, Miss Eva Mooar, was much more approachable and –

JL: Did she interview you before you entered?

SSB: Miss Mooar did. Not Dean Morriss, no. And that's interesting too. I don't ever recall filling out an application to attend Pembroke College. [06:00] I went to high school in Pawtucket, and my best friend's oldest sister was already at Pembroke College, and she took us both in one day for an interview with Miss Mooar. That was it. [laughter]

JL: Easier than now.

SSB: Much easier than now.

JL: So were you a City Girl? You commuted?

SSB: I was a City Girl, yeah. I had good friends in the dormitory, fortunately, so I had a good place to hang my hat and hang out and even nap if necessary. But I do regret that, because I think I missed out on a lot. But we didn't even have – it was after my time that they had a commuter house where you could stay overnight. So I didn't have that either.

JL: Because there was West House –

SSB: West House, yeah.

JL: And then there was East House –

SSB: No, East House was actually – do you know about [07:00] East House and East Hall?

JL: No, not really.

SSB: Where Howard Terrace is now – you know Howard Terrace, going in from Cushing Street – there were two frame, gray frame buildings – you know, I almost think of them as old-fashioned tenement houses. I don't know what they were originally. But they were purchased by the university, and one of them was a dormitory. I don't know where students – well, I do know, from the books, they seem to – the undergraduates stayed all over town. They stayed on Governor Street, which is now St. Maria's Home, and they had a dormitory of some sort, I think, at one time on Benefit Street. And I don't really recall – I've forgotten when they bought East House. But there was East House and East Hall, two frame buildings there, [08:00] and in one of them we had classes – it was an overflow from Pembroke Hall. And then the other one was a –

and some of my best friends lived there; Ruth Wolf lived there – it was a cooperative house. They had to – they didn't get the maid service and all that that they got at Miller Hall and Metcalf Hall, which were the only dormitories when I was there. Andrews was built later.

JL: But Alumnae Hall was there by then?

SSB: Yes. And when I talked to Ruth Lubrano, she mentioned she remembered a cafeteria in Pembroke Hall. I don't remember that at all. I remember – because we had Andrews Hall, and we had what is now The Gate – we had a cafeteria in Andrews. So – but what I remember in Pembroke Hall was, as you walked in on that [09:00] very lower level from the campus, not going up the steps, there – that's where our mailboxes were, and they were not locked boxes in those days, they were – what do you call it, just boxes. And I think there was a Pembroke bookstore there in the corner on that level. And we had lockers where we could keep things. But the mailboxes were very important, because that's where you got notices and everything else. And so that, that was the first level, but that was where we usually went in – we seldom went in from Meeting Street.

JL: They're very steep steps.

SSB: They're very steep steps. And then, as I said, the second floor was offices, and there may have been a classroom on that floor too, I'm not sure what –

JL: Did you have to go to Chapel?

SSB: Yes. [10:00] We had to go –

JL: Was it at – Okay.

SSB: – that was in Alumnae Hall – that was in Alumnae Hall when I was there. And we had it, I think, twice a week. And our senior year we had to go in academic regalia. But – and the – Alumnae Hall was where all the student activity offices were.

JL: I see. So did you use the big auditorium at...for Chapel for Alumnae?

SSB: Yes. The big one. And the enrollment in my class was maybe – I think we started out with 130, and so the compl– you know, four classes would be four to five hundred, probably. But chapel was compulsory, and they took attendance and so forth. [11:00]

JL: And it was a good Baptist service.

SSB: Right, right. And we Jewish girls sang all the hymns. [laughter]

JL: They were not making any allowances for any difference.

SSB: No, and we didn't even – I don't think we even thought of it at that point, you know.

JL: I'm presuming there must have been Catholic girls as well.

SSB: Yes, but that was okay. I don't remember any, you know, serious praying. I think it was just a – and there is a beautiful organ there. So.

JL: So. So you – I interrupted you. You went in the back –

SSB: Campus side.

JL: – and there were the mailboxes, the lockers –

SSB: Lockers.

JL: – were the lockers lockable?

SSB: Yes, I think they were. I think a con– I'm not sure. I can't even remember where they were. I think they were on the other side of what is now bathroom facilities. [12:00] And I don't – I guess it was just –

JL: Did you have any classes down on that floor?

SSB: Carpets?

JL: Classrooms.

SSB: Classrooms. No. No.

JL: No. Were there any carpets?

SSB: I don't think so. I don't remember. I don't know.

JL: So it was just wooden floors everywhere?

SSB: Right, right.

JL: And you all banging about?

SSB: Mm-hmm. I don't remember anything very elegant – the only elegant parts were the deans' offices. And I remember being impressed with what you've probably seen – two of the classrooms had fireplaces, and kind of elaborate friezes over the fireplaces, which I always wondered about but never really found out anything about them. And I don't know what those rooms – those rooms, evidently, were used originally for probab– they probab– it would be interesting to find out that – they probably were used for Chapels or [13:00] – because the library was not that big, and I don't think the library was always on that top floor; I think originally that was their Chapel room and whatnot. And actually, one of the early histories I read, they actually

had dormitory rooms in Pembroke Hall, but I can't imagine where that would have been. I don't think that's right, actually.

JL: So we were in the room with the frieze – one of the rooms with the friezes last week, and they're apparently going to restore those friezes.

SSB: Oh.

JL: But you said there were two rooms with friezes.

SSB: I thought so. Two classrooms. Maybe, maybe not.

JL: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

SSB: I haven't been in that building for quite a while.

JL: And then up on the top floor was the library.

SSB: It was the library. Which –

JL: Did you use that library?

SSB: Always. I mean, that was what we used. And it was lovely. There may have been – I'm sure there was carpeting; probably Oriental rugs there, because there's a fireplace [14:00] and – and it was a wonderful place to study. There were wonderful, you know, wingback chairs and nooks and little coves where you could study. But of course everybody loved to go over to the university library, which at that time was the John Hay Library, and we could go there at any time to study, but –

JL: And could you speak to the male Brown students when you went there?

SSB: Oh, of c— oh, yes. And the gathering place was — there was only — there was a smoking room as you first went into the John Hay Library. And that was the meeting place.

JL: There wasn't drinking — it wasn't coffee or anything. It was just smoking.

SSB: No. No, no, no. It's not until — you know, I've been very active in the library scene, and it's not till recently that students have demanded drinks and food in the library, and it's been a great concession [15:00] on Sam Streit's part in the John Hay Library to allow even a glass of water in the reading room. But things have changed a great deal.

JL: How was the Hay differently configured in those days?

SSB: The room — when you walk in, the room that's the reading room now was — both, as I remember it, both sides — it was opened up, the whole thing. In fact, I was there just a week or two ago for a reception for the new librarian, and she was asking just that: what the room was like, and Sam was telling us even that entrance to the reading room was in a different place than it is now. So it was much different. And honor students had access to the stacks, so —

JL: With those glass floors.

SSB: With the glass floors, yes.

JL: I once went up there. It was very exciting. [16:00]

SSB: Had you not seen the glass floors before?

JL: No.

SSB: The Pawtucket Public Library also had glass floor — it was something about, I don't know, Carnegie libraries, I think, that for some reason (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JL: So was there Carnegie money in the Hay Library?

SSB: I don't know. I always wondered about that. I must ask Sam sometime. That always reminded me of the Pawtucket Public Library, where I grew up.

JL: Which is about contemporary with it – no, Pawtucket's a bit earlier, isn't it.

SSB: Yeah.

JL: Because that's the Sayles building.

SSB: Yeah, right. Well, the library – the Pawtucket Library now is much different.

JL: So back to the campus. So you've walked me through the building, I think.

SSB: Right, right.

JL: I notice there's a very elaborate grandfather clock still there in the hall, that – in the entrance hall at Pembroke. I've seen it in old photographs as well. So I'm wondering –

SSB: Uh-huh. There were many, many grandfather clocks throughout the whole university. There's a man who is still alive [17:00] who has always repaired them and taken care of them, who I think was a classmate of my husband's. Can't think of his name. But I can't tell you about the clock.

JL: Did you go into any of the deans' offices for these two interviews you had with Dean Morriss?

SSB: Dean Morriss – I don't remember being interviewed by Dean Morriss. It was just Dean Mooar.

JL: Oh, Dean Mooar. Okay.

SSB: Moore. She was the dean of admissions. And that's, you know – there were, like, three administrators at Pembroke College in those days. It was Bessie Rudd, who was head of the physical education department; it was Miss Mooar; and Miss Mooar and Miss Rudd lived together for many, many years – always, I think – and Dean Morriss, who did not have a dean's house. I've forgotten where she did live, actually. [18:00] And there was not that much communication between the two campuses, as far as even administration was concerned. I wonder if Dean Morriss, for instance, was ever invited to corporation meetings – I guess she must have been, I'm not sure. And in later years, much later years, when I was president of the Alumnae Association, there was still kind of a remnant left of the Long Name Society, and we had what was called a Pembroke Advisory Committee, and we met – this was the Alumnae Association – had this Pembroke Advisory Committee, and we met once every year in Pembroke Hall, and the president actually came to that meeting, and there was a representative, I think, of the Rhode Island Society of Collegiate Education, and the dean of Pembroke College and the president of the Alumnae Association and such, and so we had that [19:00] communication with them. But it was very formal and all – pro forma.

JL: Now, you said a few minutes ago that Miss Morriss didn't have a dean's house.

SSB: No.

JL: But there was a dean's house.

SSB: There was a dean's house, but not till Nancy Duke Lewis. Well, of course, she came right afterwards. They bought that house – they did buy that house for Nancy Duke Lewis.

JL: And which house was it?

SSB: It's the house that Bob [Reichley?] lives in right now at 100 Brown Street. But Nancy Duke Lewis lived there and Dean Pierrel lived there. And then the university actually sold it after the merger and all.

JL: Now, it's interesting about Bessie Rudd. She's the only person that anyone ever refers to by her first name.

SSB: That's int-

JL: Why is she not Miss Rudd?

SSB: She was Miss Rudd to us, that's for sure. I don't know. I don't - [20:00] That's interesting. We all talked about her as Bessie Rudd, but -

JL: Tell me about her.

SSB: She was a - she was also - you know, all these women - in those days, I guess in our youth, we thought of them as much older than they were. But they certainly were kind of dominating administrative figures, and we had a great deal of respect for them. Miss Rudd did have a staff of two or three people, but she was the one who taught the physical education - you know, the basic phys. ed., which I don't remember very much. And she also taught the swimming, which was over on the Brown campus. And she was great - I mean, everybody loved her. She had a wonderful sense of humor, and was - [21:00] but there was a great feeling of - she was up there.

JL: And Miss Mooar? What was she like?

SSB: She was very sweet. You know, she was very kind, thoughtful. She was very approachable. They were a nice pair, and they did - I can't remember why I went to their house so much. I think it may have been in my later life with Elmer. Oh, I'm sure it was. They would - I think they would have Christmas parties and things like that.

JL: Where did they live?

SSB: They lived – there was a lovely little house off Elmgrove Avenue; I can't remember the name of the street.

JL: So they were there for a long time.

SSB: A long time, right.

JL: And all three were unmarried women. But Miss – Dean Allinson, who was a bit before your time – [22:00]

SSB: Yeah.

JL: – was married.

SSB: Yes, she married a professor.

JL: And she was a dean before she married, and then she was a dean off and on after she married.

SSB: Married, right, right. Which was unusual in those days.

JL: It was very unusual. [laughter]

SSB: Yup, because actually, there was a – we called it a rule, where husbands and wives can't teach on this cam–

JL: Nepotism?

SSB: Hmm?

JL: Nepotism rule?

SSB: Nepotism. There was a nepotism rule here right through the '40s, because I remember when Elmer was first in the English department. There – we had good friends – Ed [Bloom?], whose wife could not be appointed at Brown, and she taught at Rhode Island College, much to her unhappiness for all her years, I think.

JL: So was Elmer a student at Brown the same time as you?

SSB: Yes. A year behind me.

JL: And he's also [23:00] from Pawtucket?

SSB: And we both – yup. We knew each other in high school.

JL: So it's one of these high school friendships that blossomed.

SSB: Yes, right, right, right.

JL: The Lubranos knew each other in high school as well.

SSB: Yes, in high school too. Isn't that wonderful? And she also is a year ahead of Jack. He was great. He also lived to over 100.

JL: That's amazing.

SSB: Yeah. And they attended every single event at Brown – anything that ever went on, they were there.

JL: Okay. Now, from what I read in your yearbook, you were much involved in a number of extracurricular activities. Was it the student newspaper or the yearbook?

SSB: The yearbook. The yearbook. I think I was assistant of – photographic editor. All the photographs in it are – I was there with the photographer taking them all. And I was assistant editor. And I was just photographic editor of the yearbook.

JL: [24:00] Right.

SSB: I was mostly involved with theatre. I loved doing publicity. And I was a correspondent for the *Pawtucket Times*, so I wrote news releases for the *Pawtucket Times* on anything that Pawtucket – and, you know, there were a lot of local girls at that time, anything that local girls would be doing.

JL: Was it still roughly 50/50, City Girls/dorm girls? Or what was the proportion?

SSB: I don't know. I don't know. I think – I think I read someplace that Miss Morriss said that one of her achievements was – and this is certainly in her later years – that the campus was more – or 50/50 non-local. I mean –

JL: Did some of the local girls live in the dorms?

SSB: A lot of the local girls lived in the dorm [25:00] if they could afford it, you know.

JL: But you went to college in '37.

SSB: I ended in '37. I –

JL: Which wasn't a great time.

SSB: No, it was a very difficult time. The tuition when I entered was, I think, \$350, and it went up to 400 and my father said he didn't think he could afford that. And I arranged with – to see the bursar and was able to pay in installments.

JL: Were there jobs for students on campus in those days?

SSB: I don't know. There may have been, because I know some of my contemporaries who worked in the library, but it may have been after they graduated, I don't know. But I worked summers, but I never worked while I was in college.

JL: And this work for the *Pawtucket Times*, that was free?

SSB: No, no. The funny thing about me doing – I did some – I thought I wanted to be a journalist, obviously, and I went to the [26:00] *Pawtucket Times* when I was in high school and asked for a job, because Elmer had been working as a stringer – high school stringer for the *Providence Journal*, which had an office in Pawtucket, and I thought that was great – I would do it for *Pawtucket Times*. And I walked in, and – [laughter] in this male establishment, and was greeted very gruffly by the managing editor, and was gruff with me all the time, but, you know, tolerated me. But all I wanted to tell you about that is that Elmer got 20 cents an inch for every copy he did at the *Providence Journal* and I got 10 cents an inch. And we had to keep track of, you know, how many inches, and we got paid at the end of the month, but. But, you know, the dollars were kind of important in those days.

JL: Now, given that this was 1937, and '8 and '9, and things weren't very healthy in the economy, but your parents, [27:00] even if it was a stretch, wanted you to go to college?

SSB: They did, but they didn't – my brothers had gone to the University of Rhode Island, and they were reluctant to have me go there, as a matter of fact, because my father, I think, was hoping that I wouldn't – you know, that I'd do something, that I wouldn't have to go away from home. I was the youngest of four children and was babied far too much. But it was through this good friend of mine whose sister was at Pembroke College that I went there.

JL: So in those days, was the status of Pembroke similar to the status of the University of Rhode Island?

SSB: Oh, it was better, I think.

JL: Yeah?

SSB: It was better, I think. I think it was – I mean, after all, it was – in those days, I don't – University of Rhode Island – was it a university then, or just Rhode Island College? No, I guess it was university. Yeah. But – [28:00] but Brown had much, you know, much more status.

JL: Because now it has [sophistication?].

SSB: Though my brother – actually my older brother had gone to Brown for one year and then transferred to URI. But – because we wanted –

JL: And that was down in North Kingston, was it?

SSB: Right.

JL: Yeah.

SSB: Right. Yeah. We didn't have a – they didn't have the Rhode Island camp.

JL: Yeah. So you came here, and your parents believed that all four of you should have a college education, then.

SSB: Um – no, I think we pushed it on them. [laughter] My sister actually eloped when she was 19, so she didn't go to college, unfortunately.

JL: Oh, okay. And did your parents?

SSB: No, no, no.

JL: Had they been born in America?

SSB: No. They both were born in Romania, and came – but came here very young. My mother came when she was – I don't know, maybe four or five years old, and my father came when he was about 18 – 16, 18.

JL: But they're both from Romania? [29:00]

SSB: They both were. They didn't know each other there, but they, you know, [ringing in background] (inaudible). Just let it go, not get it, yeah.

JL: Do you – where had I got to? Right. You've done the rest of your life stuff before, so maybe we don't need to do that, right? Unless there is something that you'd like to say that connects with what we've already been saying about the rest of your life.

SSB: Yeah.

JL: Because you've been so much involved in Brown for all of your life, haven't you?

SSB: Right. Yes. Well, only, you know, by happenstance, I guess, because I married Elmer, who became a faculty member, so I started off wearing that faculty wife hat, and then I became active in the Alumnae Association, wore that hat, and then was lucky enough to be [elected the corporation?], so I wore that hat, [laughter] which is the nicest of them all. And –

JL: Very fine hat.

SSB: Oh, it's a wonderful – well, as a Beefeater hat, you really should appreciate it. [30:00] And so it, you know –

JL: And then the – all the work with the library.

SSB: Well, that's – was the result of – again, it was the result of interest in the books, and, again, involvement with Elmer with the Friends of the Library. He got me started on that. And then when I went on the corporation, the first committee I was appointed to was the library corporation committee. And so – and then I became active – interested in developing the Friends of the Library, which I had been most active in.

JL: And have you been involved with the Pembroke Associates?

SSB: I was on the board of the Pembroke Associates when they first started. I was also involved with Sarah Doyle, helping them get started. I was on the – [31:00] sort of backtrack a little bit of what's on my other interviews – I was very involved with the merger of Pembroke College, because I was president of the Alumnae Association at that time, very difficult – 69, 70 years. And was against the merger at that time, because I thought it was all happening too fast. And if you look at the study report that the merger committee did, there was a minority report done by Newell Stultz, faculty member, and “Posey” Pierrel, who was dean, and Fred Lippitt and me, we were the four dissenting members. And our main complaint, or disagreement with the majority report, was that they were not making any provisions for the future of women at Brown University. [32:00] They were saying vague things like “There should be provisions made for the future of women at Brown University,” but nobody ever said what it was. And we didn't know what we thought it would be. We had looked into the Radcliffe group, and other, you know – but we didn't quite see where it was going to fit in in our needs. And it wasn't until, you know, the merger was in '71 and it wasn't till '81, when the students were clamoring for someplace for women – and at that time, because of the merger, the Alumnae House was empty. That lovely little house, which I will never forgive the university for tearing down.

JL: That's the Sarah Doyle House.

SSB: The Sarah Doyle [33:00] House, yeah. That was originally Alumnae House.

JL: It's a great shame, that.

SSB: Oh, it was very sad. And it's part of – you know, when I think of Pembroke Hall, I think of that little house across the street, I think of the woman who – can't think of her name – the woman who lived in it, Miss Parsons. Miss Parsons, who owned that house, who gave it to the university for as long as she might live. She used to sit in what was the little reception area, that was her little sitting room, and she would sit in her window when she saw us all, you know, go up and down the street. And when it became the Alumnae House, it was beautiful. I mean, you didn't know it as Alumnae House. I mean, by the time the students got in there it got a little bit – well, it just didn't have the elegance when it was the Alumnae House. We had the Oriental – [34:00]

JL: So it was a Pembroke Alumnae House.

SSB: Pembroke College Alumnae House. And then at the time of the merger, what happened was that the Alumnae Association was given a room over – such as it was – was given a room over in Maddock Center, which was alumni. So this house was absolutely empty for almost 10 years, and declining. And when the women started – it was mostly the undergraduates who wanted a place of their own – a group of us trustees, Betty Brown and Ruth Wolf and I, kind of worked towards getting that for undergraduates, for a place to do something. And I – you know, out of that actually grew, because Elizabeth Weed – out of that [35:00] grew the Pembroke Center for Research and Development, which is, you know, what we wanted originally, but it had to evolve. But it is sad that that house – and I always tell the story of – at the Rockefeller Library, you know, the – what's the name of the building where Egyptology is on the corner? – when they built the Rockefeller Library, they were going to tear that house down. And what upset most people, more than – it wasn't a house. It was really a good building. What upset many of us, in addition to tearing down that building, they would have had to tear down that beautiful beech tree, which is right next to it. And fortunately, Otto Neugebauer, who was one of the most

famous [36:00] mathematician, pure mathematicians, in the world, I think, at that time – he went to President Keeney and he said, “If you tear my building down I will go to Princeton.” And they did not tear that building down. And so I was going around and saying to everybody, “If you tear down Sarah Doyle,” [laughter] “you will be – you know, you could do what they did at the Rockefeller Library. You could build that science building around it.” But nobody listened to me, so.

JL: Well, they’ve had to build it around that pizza place, haven’t they? [laughter]

SSB: Yes, so they built it around the pizza place instead.

JL: Yeah. [laughter]

SSB: I mean, I have very few faults with my university, but I can never forgive them for that.

JL: That is a shame. So Miss Parsons was sitting there while you were a student, was she?

SSB: Yes. Yes, I remember her well. Never went in the house, but we always used to wave to her, so.

JL: So she was a little old lady, even then?

SSB: Yes, [37:00] yes, I think – and it was Miss Parsons. I know nothing about her. It would be fun to find out who she was, so –

JL: Well, the – I think I came across some Parsonses –

SSB: And, you know, next to that, you know – as part of my reminiscence about Pembroke Hall, next to Miss Parsons’ house was a, I guess, a Baptist, black Baptist church. Which was a lovely little church that was torn down. And next to that, before you got to Thayer Street, were two little – oh, little gray houses, very small, which were all occupied by Afro-American families, I guess.

And a lot of Pembroke, my New York friends, who didn't send their laundry home, would have these women do their laundry for them. They would (inaudible).

JL: That's interesting.

SSB: Of course, that was almost part of the Pembroke campus. [38:00]

JL: And further down –

SSB: Where the pizza place is now, where these little houses were.

JL: Yeah. Well, one of them was only demolished three or four years ago.

SSB: Oh, really?

JL: Right at the back of the –

SSB: Andreas.

JL: – the back of – yeah.

SSB: Avon. You remember that?

JL: Because I – yes.

SSB: I don't remember – I don't know –

JL: I interviewed the very old woman who lived in that house.

SSB: Oh, really.

JL: She was a hundred and something.

SSB: Was she really.

JL: Yeah. And she was black, and she was part of that middle-class black community that lived on that street.

SSB: Right. Uh-huh. What I remember about that, we always – is that they didn't, like, have central heating, of course, and they had kerosene stoves or something, and laundry used to come back smelling of that. Yeah, [so, still?] –

JL: What was down the other side of Meeting Street, then? Where Emma – Woolley Hall – something Woolley Hall is now?

SSB: No, I don't really remember. Must have been houses too. Must have been part of that little Afro-American community. [39:00] I can't picture it at all. Can't recall any –

JL: Interesting to see if we can find pictures of (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

SSB: Mm-hmm.

JL: So the street, or the area where Pembroke was, was quite different from how it is now.

SSB: Yes. In fact, when I was an undergraduate, they clo– the city gave permission to close Cushing Street off. When I first was enrolled at Pembroke College, we could drive up Cushing Street.

JL: Hmm.

SSB: That's where my father used to let me off, was –

JL: So where did Cushing Street go out?

SSB: It started at Thayer Street and went right through to Brown.

JL: Hmm. And it's just that little bit by Smith-Buonanno now, isn't it?

SSB: Right, right, right. I think – I remember it more as a straight street, but it must have had that hook in it, because that house [40:00] has always been up there at the corner.

JL: And Smith-Buonanno's (inaudible) [gyms?] (inaudible).

SSB: So I was wondering when I was thinking about, you know, Meeting Street, whether – whether the campus will ever include Meeting Street as it includes Cushing Street.

JL: Yeah. Tell me about Sayles Gym.

SSB: Sayles Gym was Miss Rudd's domain, and – you've heard about the bowling alleys in the basement. And I can't remember anything else that went on there except, you know, the gym. There's a little balcony in the front – are you familiar with that? And on Class Day, I don't know what – I don't know about – [Lucy Stark?], in my class, gave the Class Day address from that balcony. But –

JL: But it was a regular gym, with bars and ropes and –?

SSB: It was just a gym, right. [41:00] Right, right.

JL: I've got a very old picture here of people in the gym, long before your time, I think. I imagine you were not wearing these outfits.

SSB: No, no. We had gym outfits, but they were long – like long shorts, almost like skorts. And they were brown. But – and I don't remember ever anybody using that track. I was not

athletically inclined. I always said, in later years when I was, you know, on a personal basis with Bessie Rudd, I always said to her, “Thanks for turning your head when I [laughter] held on to the pool, and I –” I passed the swimming test, but –

JL: You had to pass the swimming test to graduate.

SSB: And you couldn't graduate unless you passed the swimming test. And I think she was very patient with me. [laughter]

JL: So I'm finding this story about Meeting Street and Cushing Street quite interest– so is it – so where Miller and – [42:00]

SSB: Miller and Metcalf were there.

JL: On the other side of Cushing Street then?

SSB: Yes. Well, they still are.

JL: Yeah. But you had to actually cross the street –

SSB: Right.

JL: – that cars could go down.

SSB: Right. But my best – my best friend lived in Miller Hall, so, you know, if I didn't have the car myself, which I didn't have my early years – well, I never really had it unless, at night, my father would let me take it. But during the daytime, frequently, he would, you know, drop me off at the school, and that's where he would drop me off, was at Miller Hall, going right up the street.

JL: So what was the typical day, length of the day, for a City Girl? You had to be there for Chapel.

SSB: Yeah, but that wasn't till noontime. I guess it depended on what your schedule was. But we had Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes and Tuesday and Thursday... Saturday? I'm not sure. Tuesday/Thursday classes, I know. And – and we had – [43:00] when I entered, actually, we had five courses, and then it went down to four.

JL: It was [blocked?] –

SSB: And the – and the (inaudible) – the – if you had a course – the only course I remember having on the Brown campus was, I took Mr. Hastings' graduate course in Shakespeare, and that met on the Brown campus.

JL: And everything else –

SSB: But any class over 100 actually went on the Brown campus. But all the other classes were held in Pem– everything I had was either in Pembroke Hall or East Hall, and the professors – I had – we had the same professors. And that, you know – in many ways that was a big advantage of Pembroke College, was as – of course, it is a university college, and we didn't have separate faculty, we had the Brown faculty, which came over and taught us – more or less taught us the same things. [44:00] [laughter] When my husband taught the course that Mr. Hastings taught, and I would sit in on it, because he frequently taught it at home, and I would say to him afterwards, "I didn't know that. I didn't know that." And Mr. Hastings was censoring all those – what he used to call obscene – obscene obscen– I don't know, something, obscene statements or something, he wouldn't interpret them for us, but he would interpret them for the men.

JL: Now, somebody told me you had a biology course that was really a sort of –

SSB: Yes, that was strictly –

JL: – reproduction course.

SSB: – right, the strictly women, you know.

JL: And the men didn't need to know this?

SSB: I don't know. Didn't they have a biology class? (inaudible)

JL: And who taught that?

SSB: Miss Wilder. Magel Wilder. She was the one woman that I mentioned to you. I don't know – it would be interesting to find out what her background was. I wonder if she had a Ph.D.
[45:00] But she taught us Biology 1.

JL: It lists the faculty in some of these books, maybe not yours – I'll have a look later.

SSB: It's probably – I'm sure it's in –

JL: But I noticed in your yearbook that you – I think it was this one; well, maybe it was an early one. But there were a lot of transfer students who had come, they said, because they wanted to take biology.

SSB: Oh, really.

JL: Yeah.

SSB: Well, that was probably – you know, we had a nursing school, a five-year nursing school, so maybe that was part of their requirement. I don't remember any biology majors or anything at that time. I remember some nursing students, but –

JL: Yeah. I saw that. I saw. [46:00] So do I need to ask you anything else?

SSB: I don't know, do you have to ask me anything else? [laughter]

JL: [laughter] Well, since it's all in your other thing, probably not. Because I've got a much clearer idea about Pembroke Hall, East Hall, and the East Building.

SSB: East House.

JL: East House. And the –

SSB: House was the dorm, and East Hall was the classroom.

JL: And I think –

SSB: There were two houses.

JL: Yeah. Jean Edwards told me she used to go and play bridge there all the time.

SSB: At East House?

JL: Yeah.

SSB: East Hall, I can't remem– I remember I had a couple of classes that I had there, but I don't remember – I don't remember any social ac– the girls used to play bridge in the cafeteria in Alumnae Hall a lot.

JL: So bridge was the big thing.

SSB: Yes. Yeah. A lot of – it was for a lot of girls. They would stay after lunch and play bridge.

JL: Yeah. And when you'd finished your day – that's what I was trying to ask – you just got home on trolley?

SSB: Took the Hope Street – [47:00] Hope Street bus home.

JL: Hope Street bus? So you'd walk up to Hope Street and –

SSB: And go to the tunnel and take the bridge –

JL: Yeah.

SSB: – take the bus home. And I lived just over the city line, so there was another bus, or else I could walk it.

JL: Up in Oak Hill.

SSB: Yeah, on Oak Hill

JL: Yeah. So that's pretty close.

SSB: Right, right. No, it was an –

JL: Any of the buses run late in those days? Were you ever here late?

SSB: Oh, I used to be here late, but sometimes my father – in my last year my brother was home and he would pick me up. I used to be late a lot, because I hung out at the theatre a lot, and – where I did publicity. And I – I just liked being around there. And the *Brun Mael* offices were in Alumnae Hall. And the news bureau, actually, [48:00] there was – oh, I can't think of her name. But there was a news bureau in the Pembroke campus, and that was in East House, because that's when I used to go to – not East House, East Hall. The office of the news bureau was there,

and that was where I did my reports for the *Pawtucket Times*, which I guess I – well, maybe sometimes mailed to them, but I – well, I hand-delivered them.

JL: And by your time, hadn't Sock and Buskin combined with the Komians by then?

SSB: No. It was still Sock and Buskin. It wasn't till the merger that – or a couple years before the merger that Komians dissolved.

JL: Okay.

SSB: All those things happened, but they all happened, actually, while I was active in the Alumnae Association.

JL: Now, I didn't understand about the Komians, because Elaine Lieberman was very active – you remember Elaine? –

SSB: Mm-hmm.

JL: – in them. She's a couple of years ahead of you.

SSB: Yes.

JL: And [49:00] – but she also acted in Sock and Buskin.

SSB: Right, right. Because in the early days of Sock and Buskin, they had men playing female parts. So they hadn't had to invite some women guests.

JL: And did the Komians invite men guests?

SSB: I guess so.

JL: There's not much point in them being separate, [laughter] is there?

SSB: No, no. But I guess they did. But we also, at Pembroke, had always had – first it was – can't think of the first one's name, but Janice Vanderwater Brown, who became the head of the Brown theatre, had taught us – not elocution, but we had to take a – someone reminded me the other day that we had to take a course in speech. Elocution, I guess it was.

JL: Not public speaking or –?

SSB: Not public speaking, but she corrected our speech habits. [50:00] I've always meant to check with one of my friends because all I remember is that I have a glottal stop –

JL: [laughter]

SSB: – and I don't know what it is.

JL: So she didn't correct that one.

SSB: No. And I also remembered there was – you know, they really did try to make ladies of us. We certainly couldn't wear pants on the Brown – none of us wore pants that much in those days. I mean, slacks, I should say. But we did have things like someone to come and teach us gracious living, like how to walk and –

JL: Did you have deportment lesson – classes? Where, you know, the book on the head?

SSB: Book – yeah, that's, that's the woman, yeah, who told me I walked like a doll. That I bounced up and down. So I – [more?] –

JL: Were they still doing these measurements?

SSB: The posture pictures?

JL: Yes.

SSB: Oh, yes. Yeah.

JL: That was when you were a freshman, you did that?

SSB: That was when we entered, yes.

JL: Yeah.

SSB: I don't know, [51:00] did they do them every year? Do they do us every year? I – mm – it was the best physical exam that anyone could ever have, really, because they had the best doctors in Providence come and – you know, best specialists would do a different thing.

JL: And so they –

SSB: It was always a big joke about the psychiatrist interview and –

JL: So what did the psychiatrist do? They interviewed you?

SSB: They interviewed us, I think.

JL: And this all went in a file.

SSB: Right.

JL: And did they ever tell you –

SSB: And are they in the archives?

JL: I don't know. I need to look. But there – did you see, a couple of – two, three, four years ago, there was an article in the *New York Times* about these things. Somebody's written a book.

SSB: Yes, because evidently they did it at Yale too.

JL: Yeah. And it's one of these eugenic program things that –

SSB: I don't know.

JL: – I think so.

SSB: Yeah. I remember that there was a fuss about it. And they were all – you know, we all found that we were all off-balance. Our spines were all over from carrying heavy books. [52:00]

JL: So they told you some things as the results of your physical? They told you –

SSB: I think only if there was anything seriously wrong, they would. You know, they'd follow up.

JL: Mm. But you were – they would explain, this is necessary because we want healthy students, and really want to make sure you're all right?

SSB: Well, and I guess they were also looking for TB and things like that.

JL: Did –?

SSB: They did X-rays.

JL: As part of it?

SSB: Hmm?

JL: As part of this general physical?

SSB: I think so.

JL: So it was a very elaborate –

SSB: Yeah, well, that was support – the X-ray, the spine thing, they had us drop our angel rugs and they did –

JL: Now, an angel rug. What was an angel rug?

SSB: That was what they gave us to wear. I mean, the fuss, as I understand it, in later years, maybe – maybe we didn't drop them, but they were just like the gowns that doctors give you to wear now.

JL: There's a picture of them in here.

SSB: Is there really?

JL: Yes.

SSB: In mine? [53:00]

JL: Well, in one of the ones I was looking at, I'm pretty sure.

SSB: Oh. I'll have to look at that. Haven't looked at that for a long time.

JL: So was the –

SSB: The only thing I remember was actually the theatre. Because when I was involved with the theatre in the, you know, late '30s, women acted – Lois Buxton, who's now Lois [McLaury?], would be a good person to interview about the theatre. You know, have you met her?

JL: No.

SSB: She's married to John McLaury now – she was married to Bert Buxton for many, many years.

JL: Is she around here somewhere?

SSB: She's local. I don't know if they live in Laurelmead or not. But John McLaury is her husband now, but she was very active and a wonderful, wonderful actress.

- END -