

Transcript – Zelda Fisher Gourse '36

Narrator: Zelda Fisher Gourse  
Interviewer: Sasha Oster  
Interview Date: May 13, 1988  
Location: Providence, Rhode Island  
Length: 1 audio track; 37:15

- Track 1 -

Sasha Oster: [00:00] This is Sasha Oster, Brown class of 1990.5, interviewing Zelda Fisher Gourse, Brown Class of 1936, on Friday, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1988, in her home in Providence, Rhode Island.

[break in audio]

SO: I'm here.

Zelda Fisher Gorse: Where do you want to start?

SO: OK, I guess we can start with why you went to Brown. What –

ZFG: Well, it happened to be in Providence, Rhode Island. And I know when I finished high school, there was just never any question, was I going to go to college? Of course I was going to college. And Brown was here, and that was the place. I didn't even think about going away from home. I don't know why I didn't think of it, it just didn't enter my head. It was the good school, right here, and that was it.

Well, of course, the other thing that may have come into play was the fact that 1932, when I graduated from high school, was the Depression year. [01:00] And it never occurred to me to ask my folks to send me out of town. So I just lived here in Providence and that was it. And, you know, what did they call the day students? I think the men called them carpetbaggers, because they lived at home. [laughing] You'll see that in that little booklet, you know, about the

Brown fraternity. And, well, I was practically at school all the time, so all my friends were – lived in the dorms. And I was very friendly with all the girls.

I loved Brown for one particular reason. I liked being a big fish in a small pond. You know, if you go to a big school, you just get gobbled up and you don't get to know people. Whereas here – of course, Brown is big now. But then, it was small. I think the entire Pembroke student body was under 500. It must have been under 400. I mean, I'm not sure what it was, but in that vicinity. [02:00] And I had a nodding acquaintance with everybody on campus. And actually, I think I knew everybody on campus, and everybody knew me. I mean, it was a very warm situation. As I look back at it now, if I was going to college now, I'd want to go to someplace that was small. Although, Pembroke is still small, but it's not Pembroke. I mean, it's integrated. I was never really in favor of the merger.

SO: You weren't?

ZFG: No. But I accepted it. My class did vote for it, so I went along with it. But I don't know, there's something about a women's college that's... It was very nice. We had classes over on the men's campus. I took – I majored in economics, so I had to take some of my courses over there. And at their convenience, 8:00 in the morning, you know? And they were very, very nice about letting us come into a section over there. Although, other sections were held on the Pembroke campus. [03:00] Their faculty came and lectured to us on the Pembroke campus.

SO: Did you –

ZFG: I have a few notes that I made, if you want me to –

SO: Sure.

ZFG: – go over them?

SO: Please.

ZFG: I'll tell you something I remember about Dean Morriss. She was the dean when I was there. She was wonderful We called her "Peggy Push." Her name was Margaret Shove Morriss. So the Margaret Shove became "Peggy Push."

SO: Why Peg – why –

ZFG: Well, "Shove."

SO: Oh, OK. [laughter]

ZFG: And her last name was Morriss. And she was the girlfriend of Senator Theodore Francis Green, who was the senator from Rhode Island. He was governor of Rhode Island. He was senator from Rhode Island. At least that was the talk around the school, that she was his girlfriend. They never married. She had a mother and father with whom she lived. But she was a wonderful person, really couldn't have asked for a nicer person to run the school. [04:00] That was my impression of her. But she always said that, whatever you're going to say, have it completely written out. For instance, when it came to Ivy Day speeches, she said, "Be sure you have your speech all written out with you. Whether you refer to it or not doesn't matter." She said, "I remember once, I had to make a speech," she said. "And I got up, and my mind was a complete blank. From that day to this," she said, "I've never gone anywhere on a platform without having the speech written out. Whether you need it or not, you have it." So, of course I listened to her.

Then we had a teacher by the name of Bessie Rudd, who was the gym teacher. And you could be dying on your feet but she never excused you, unless you brought an affidavit from your doctor saying that you were dying on your feet, [laughs], you know, that sort of thing. I didn't believe that. It never happened to me, but that was the rumor around school, that that was the way she [05:00] handled things.

And we had another teacher by name of Mrs. Hall. I think her maiden name must have been Jinks, because we called her Jinks all the time.

SO: Jinx, J-I-N-X, or...? J-I-N-X?

ZFG: J-I-N-K-S.

SO: K-S.

ZFG: Yeah. Mrs. Hall. And to all of us, she was the Public Speaking teacher, and she was a joy. At least she was to me. I mean, I liked her very much.

And we had a Professor George, who came over from the men's campus. He was a European History teacher. And I swear, he must have been [inaudible], because as soon as the bell rang for the period to begin, he would start talking, and he didn't stop until the bell rang when the period was over. He just went constantly. I sound like I'm doing it now. [laughs]

SO: Not at all.

ZFG: What was I going to tell you about him particularly? His lectures never varied. [06:00] They were the same, year in and year out. And if you missed one, and you wanted to pick it up, just have a recording made of last year's, and you'd pick it up the next year. He was that kind of a teacher, you know?

SO: Wow. So you found that he was good, or that he wasn't good?

ZFG: Oh, yes, he was –

SO: Was it interesting, regardless?

ZFG: – very good. But I mean, he was very predictable. And you knew just what was going to happen. Then I had a professor of economics by the name of Brown. They said he was related to the Brown family of New York. That is, the Brown brothers, and some kind of a financial firm they had. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. But, you know, when you're 18, 19, and 20, people can tell you things, and you –

SO: You accept it?

ZFG: At least back in those days, we did. I don't think the 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds believe anything they're told. They're really hip, and they know the score. But we were a bunch of schmoes. [laughter] We believed [07:00] whatever we were told. But he was the economics professor, and invariably, he would come to class with egg on his tie, or on his vest, because he had this rotund front, bay window. And I'm sure whatever he had for breakfast landed on his clothes. So we always knew what he ate. What else can I tell you?

SO: Who was your favorite teacher?

ZFG: Oh, I had several. There was "Kappy." You maybe have heard the name Israel Kapstein. He was a close friend of Sid Perelman. Do you know Sid Perelman?

SO: Sure.

ZFG: They were at school at the same time. And he was the favorite professor of everybody. A wonderful guy. There's a chair named for him right now, and I'll tell you who has it. I don't know his name, but he's the black professor in the English Department. Does that ring a bell?

SO: I don't know.

ZFG: [08:00] And he likes jazz, this professor. I can't think of his name. Maybe it will come to me before we're through. My daughter is a writer. And she's into jazz –

SO: Roberta? Your daughter Roberta? That's who I –

ZFG: Roberta Leslie, yeah.

SO: Yeah.

ZFG: But she goes by the name of Leslie. After the first book came out, she dropped the R. She didn't want that on any more covers. Those are her books up there. Her first book was *With Gall and Honey*.

SO: Where are you pointing?

ZFG: Right up there, on the top shelf. One is *Louis' Children*, and then the next one to that is –

SO: *Every Day*?

ZFG: *Every Day*, that's about Joe Williams, the singer. And the other one next to that is *With Gall and Honey*. And that's a love story. It's based in Israel. She went to Lincoln School in Providence, here, see? And when she was 16, [09:00] she was graduating, and she said she wanted to go to Israel. We sort of called her bluff, [inaudible] Israel at 16. Why? Who's talked about it, you know? "All right, well, you've got some Israel bonds," we said. "You want to cash them in and sponsor yourself to a trip? That's all right with us." So she did. And she went, and she spent the summer there.

SO: On a kibbutz?

ZFG: [Unclear] yeah. She went over on a boat, one of the Zim Line. And it left from Brooklyn. We went down to see her off. Went with a group, of course, from this country. And we went to see her off. And she got there, and they went to – they were in Ein Karem, which is near where the Hadassah Hospital is. Have you been to Israel?

SO: Yup.

ZFG: Oh, yeah? Well, she was in Ein Karem for a while, and then they went out to some kind of a kibbutz, where she had to pick grapes in this hot sun. Yeah, she did the whole bit. When were you there?

SO: I was there after [10:00] my first year in college, for six months, on a kibbutz.

ZFG: Oh, and how long did you stay?

SO: Six months.

ZFG: Six months?

SO: Yup.

ZFG: Did you go to school over there, or –

SO: I studied Hebrew.

ZFG: You did? Good for you.

SO: Picked grapes, and did all the –

ZFG: You were in Ulpan, or...

SO: Yes.

ZFG: You were? Oh, that's the [inaudible].

SO: It really is. It's rigorous.

ZFG: Yeah. Well, after your first year of school, and you're starting your second year, so when did you go?

SO: I went in 1983, and then a took a few years –

ZFG: Oh, you weren't in college, then?

SO: – off. I had done one year of college.

ZFG: Oh, I see. Uh-huh. And you went in '83.

SO: Yeah.

ZFG: And then you came back and decided to go back to school?

SO: Well, I went back to work, and then I went back to school.

ZFG: Oh, good for you, good for you.

SO: Do you think that your parents would have allowed you to do something so [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]?

ZFG: I'll tell you why, no. Because when I graduated from Pembroke, from here. Dean Morriss approached me, and she said, "Zelda, would you like a job [11:00] at the American University in Beirut, teaching English?" And I said, "What?" You know, I didn't even know what American University was, or where Lebanon was. I mean, it was a vague place somewhere in the world, but God knew where. And I said, "Well, I'll speak to my folks." And I spoke to my mother. She said, "Absolutely not." [laughs] So I didn't even question her. She said no. I just didn't think about going [inaudible]. So I told her no, I wouldn't consider it at all. But now, as I look back at it, what an experience that would have been. It would have been wonderful. It didn't even occur to me to say, "Oh, I've got to go," or, "This is what I've got to do." I guess I was just a girl who listened to her parents, that's all. [laughs]

SO: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents' background, so I can get a better understanding of where they were coming from?



ZFG: Well, like what, for instance? My father, I know, went to [12:00] elementary school in Russia, before he came here. So he didn't have much of a formal education. My mother, on the other hand, went through grammar school in this country. She came when she was four or five. And she always hungered after education. She said her children were going to be college graduates, all of them. So of course, my brother was the first – he went to Brown, too. And my sister went to high school, but she didn't want to go to college. And no matter what they said to her, it just didn't – she wasn't going to change her mind.

And then she got married when she was very young. She was only 19. And after she had her daughter – one child, she had – she decided that she wanted to go back to school. Well, she didn't have the credits to get into college, because she was taking cooking courses, and typing courses, and shorthand, stuff like that. So she had to go back and get a high school diploma. [13:00] She had to spend two years then. And she was in high school with me. And she's 11 years older than I.

So she was in high school with me, and then when she got through high school, she saw I was going on to college, and she decided she wanted to go college, too. So her husband was very much in agreement. It was okay with him. And her daughter was in grammar school at the time, and she went back to get a post-graduate diploma, because she didn't have enough math and enough foreign language. So it was two more years before she got into... Though she came into Pembroke as my freshman. See, in those days –

SO: What's it called? You were her sister?

ZFG: I was her senior sister.

SO: You were her senior sister, okay.

ZFG: Yeah. In those years, they called them -- she was my freshman. And what did she have to do to be my freshman? Well, Sophomore Masque Day, she had to prepare a great, tremendous May basket for the senior [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]. [14:00] And I think I gave all those pictures to – yes, I did, to Karen [Lamoree]. And you'll see a picture of my sister giving me – she made a basket out of a washtub, and decorated the whole thing. It was that big. You know,

she had to do everything in a big way. And she had everything under the sun in there, all kinds of gifts, and all kinds of food, and everything. So it was quite a beautiful basket. And that was on May Day. I don't think you have that anymore.

SO: No. I think it was stopped –

ZFG: That was Sophomore Masques. No, May Day wasn't Sophomore Masques, excuse me. Sophomore Masque was Sophomore Masque. We had to put on some kind of play. I was the prince in my Sophomore Masque, and we had the music, Tchaikovsky's music. Oh, you know. I'm sure you know.

SO: I'm not sure.

ZFG: Well, [inaudible].

SO: OK. [laughs]

ZFG: [15:00] It was a terribly rainy day, so we had to go inside the Marvel Gym, which is on Elmgrove Avenue, the Brown gym out there. And it was beautiful. Everything went off very, very nicely. I was in riding britches and boots, and I was supposed to be the prince with a high Russian hat. I forget the name of the prince, but anyway, I had my beautiful princess, and blonde, long hair, and she – one of my classmates. And it was Tchaikovsky's – oh, dear. You know, the sugarplum fairy is one of the songs in it, and then the "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy" -- the dance of the – hm.

SO: That really rings I bell. I just don't know what it's called.

ZFG: [overlapping dialogue; inaudible] You'll have to come. So that was Sophomore Masques, when I was presented with that tremendous basket. Then, of course, there was Junior Prom, and I said, [16:00] "Well, I'm not going to Junior Prom. I'm not going to invite anybody. I don't like to –"

SO: Wait, let me backtrack for a second. It's at Sophomore Masque that you were in the play?

ZFG: Yes.

SO: You were the prince.

ZFG: I was the prince.

SO: And that was when – but you were a senior at that time?

ZFG: No, I was a sophomore.

SO: Oh, okay.

ZFG: Sophomore Masque was for sophomores.

SO: Only the sophomores can play – okay.

ZFG: Yeah. Everybody came to see it, but the big deal for the sophomore year was the Sophomore Masque. And I had the leading role. It was really –

SO: Was that the leading role?

ZFG: – quite a feather in my cap. Yes, that was I. It was really beautiful. And the junior year was the Junior Prom. Still want to backtrack?

SO: No, I understand that.

ZFG: Oh, all right. The Junior Prom, and I said, “No, I’m not going, because I’m not going to invite anybody. I don’t want to give a guy any ideas.”

SO: Oh, the girls invited the guys?

ZFG: Yes. Well, we were a college by ourselves. We were not –

SO: So you had – okay.

ZFG: We were not integrated, at that time. So it was our Junior Prom, not the men and women's Junior Prom.

SO: Okay.

ZFG: Anyway, we would have invited our own date, [17:00] and the boys would have invited their own dates, if they were [inaudible] junior class. So they said, "Well, you've got to go. How would it look if you don't go? You've just been elected president of student government, and this won't be nice for the college if the president of student government doesn't go to the Junior Prom." I said, "Well, all right, then, fix me up." And they did. It was a blind date, of all things. I had never gone on a blind date. We had a wonderful time. I gave the picture also to Karen. It's a great, big picture, showing all the people at the Junior Prom.

And it so happened that the man I went with was a very nice – I knew him, casually, but I didn't really know him. He was a doctor in town. I didn't really know him. So they said, "Well, you've got to go." I said, and I said, "Well, all right. So find somebody for me to go with."

Then what was in the senior year? Well, of course, Ivy Day was the big thing. And...

SO: What was that all about?

ZFG: Well, [18:00] it was two seniors that gave the addresses of the senior class. That was held in Alumnae Hall. And –

SO: And you were one of the speakers?

ZFG: Yeah, those two. Bernice Bigelow was one, and I was the other one. And then we had lots of wonderful things when we were seniors. We had a thing called the Question Club. Only presidents of organizations belonged to that. We had a beautiful little Question Club pin made of – it was gold; gold with pearls on it. And –

SO: What was the Question Club like?

ZFG: Well, it was just an honorary organization, and you had to be the president of SGA, or the Christian Association, or the Athletic Association, or all the different associations in the... Did you ever see the book? I mean, all the different pictures in it?

SO: The yearbook?

ZFG: Yeah.

SO: I looked at it myself, but I'm sure I could understand a lot more if you showed me.

ZFG: [19:00] It gives you all the – the *Brun Mael*. Yeah, this is the 50<sup>th</sup> one. Oh, I'm sorry. See, these are the different – this was Question Club. These were the different presidents. [Inaudible] --- what? They were SGA, Komians, *Brun Mael*.

SO: Where are you in the picture?

ZFG: Right here. And then this was the president of the senior class. Christian Association –

SO: Were you the only Jewish leader in the –

ZFG: Well, this girl was Jewish, too.

SO: Was it hard for...?

ZFG: Yes, it wasn't – well, I didn't find it hard, but I mean, they didn't – do you know, the organizations are all here, see? As a matter of fact, the year that I was elected student government president, it always had been a closed circuit. You sort of came up through the ranks. And if you didn't belong – if you weren't in that group, you just – [20:00] there was no way. Then this one year, they decided it was going to be open to the whole student body. And whoever wanted to run for the office would campaign, and see what would happen. And this Jewish girl was in my class. She came from Boise, Idaho. She went to my best friend, and she said, "She'll never make it, so don't –"

SO: Meaning you'll –

ZFG: Meaning me. You know, my best friend was not Jewish. She went to her, and she said, "Why don't you run?" Jill says, "Zelda will never make it." Well, anyway, Zelda made it. [laughs] And you didn't know Rabbi [William G.] Braude, here in town, did you?

SO: Yes, I did.

ZFG: Oh, did you?

SO: Yes.

ZFG: Well, I used to go to read to him all the time, since I moved back to Providence. And we were very good friends, even from way back then. I knew him when he first came. And I went out to dinner with him one night, with he and his wife, and a few other couples. And we were talking about Brown, and I said, well, how – when I ran for student government president, [21:00] I campaigned. Naturally, I had a campaign message, what I was going to do if I became president and everything. And it was the first time it had been open to the college, to all the girls in the school. I mean, that is, the seniors. Juniors we were, then. And I said to Rabbi Braude, "I remember getting into my car, and driving down to the Seekonk River." You know where the Seekonk River is?

SO: This was – you remember when you were – before you were going to run? Is that what you're saying?

ZFG: No, it was when I had already campaigned, and was going to run – I was running. And then the voting was going on. And I –

SO: OK, and you got into your car.

ZFG: And I got into my car, and I left school, and I went away all by myself, down by the Seekonk River, and I said, “Dear God, why not a Jewish girl?” You know? Because there was another girl running against me who was not Jewish, see? And I said, “Why not a Jewish girl?” [22:00] And then when I came home, my mother said, “You had a phone call that you won the election.” And I said, “Is that right?” So I was telling Rabbi Braude about it, and from that day on, he never would see me without saying, “Why not a Jewish girl?” [laughter] It was a sort of a joke between the two of us. And – oh, I get carried away, don't I?

SO: No, that was really interesting. I'm glad that you told me that.

ZFG: Well, it was very interesting, because of the underground, undercurrent, you know? You don't expect girls that are Jewish to go to girls who are not Jewish, who would – and she knows it's your very best friend. You know, I went to high school with her, and I went through all college with her, and through all the years at college. And to have her say, “Why don't you run, because she'll never make it,” you know? So, of course, I didn't realize that in those days, there was a quota – a Jewish quota – [23:00] at Pembroke and Brown.

SO: Oh, I didn't know that.

ZFG: Yes, there was a certain number that could be admitted to school. And as a matter of fact, Karen Lamoree will tell you about it. She told us about it a couple of weeks ago. And there was a certain percentage. And it's particularly in the dorms. There wasn't that kind of a restriction on in-town girls. If you lived in Providence, and you applied, and you had the credentials to get to

school, you were usually accepted. But if you had to live in a dormitory, it had to be a certain percentage of the girls living in the dorms who were Jewish. And it couldn't be more than – I don't know whether it was ten percent or five percent. I'm not sure what she did say, but she would be able to tell you. And of course, they had a quota at Brown, too, the same thing. They were sister and brother schools, so...

SO: Would non-Jewish guys date Jewish girls, or Jewish girls – I mean, was it hard to find...?

ZFG: [24:00] Did they date Jewish girls? Oh, yeah. But not necessarily. I mean, there were mixed dating, even in those days. There was a Jewish fraternity when I was there: Pi Lambda Phi was the fraternity. But the years before that, Pi Lamb came in, I think, in '31, but before that, they had a club called the Menorah Club, and they had one called the Tower Club, that are forerunners of the fraternity. But there were a couple of Jewish boys who belonged to Christian fraternities.

SO: I saw that you belonged to – you were on the council for one of the Christian – you were on the Christian Association Council?

ZFG: Yeah, we had no sororities at Pembroke. But I was on different organizations, yeah. Christian Association. But it was not just necessarily Christian. I mean, it was – [25:00] what was Christian Association? It was a religious organization, I mean, to further understanding between the different girls on campus.

SO: Yeah?

ZFG: Another interesting thing, while I was student government president. I used to get letters from Communist organizations, saying that the Jews were going to take the world over, and you as student government president should do all you possibly can to thwart what they want to do. They didn't know who they were writing to, you see? They had no idea that a student government president might be a... But I remember taking those letters to Dean Morriss, and showing them. She said, "Zelda, just disregard them. They're just cranks writing these things."



Because they weren't cranks, but her advice was good. There was nothing I could do about it anyway. But she said, "Don't pay any attention to it, it will blow over." And it did. But I had postcards and letters, and you could see they were written by someone who didn't have [26:00] much of an education. I mean, they were not grammatically, correctly written. They just didn't make sense. They sounded like cranks. That's what they did sound like. That's why she said they're just written by cranks. But they didn't know where it was ending up, they just put it in my SGA box. You know, we had mailboxes, and they had no name on it, just the president of SGA, it was addressed to. So, it came to me.

SO: Yeah, I was wondering, because they would know from your name.

ZFG: No, that's how it –

SO: Right.

ZFG: – that's how it came. Although, you can't tell from names anymore. I was just reading the other day that that Quigley, you know, the astrologer in California who was supposed to be Mrs. Reagan's good friend. Her mother's name was Zelda – Zelda Quigley. Fitzgerald's wife's name was Zelda – Zelda Fitzgerald. So Zelda is not a just only a Jewish name. [laughs]

SO: That's true. [27:00] What were your family's expectations of what you would do when you finished college, and also what were your –

ZFG: What do you mean by their expectations? What was I going to become, you mean?

SO: Like, did they have aspirations for you beyond college?

ZFG: No, I remember my mother saying it's good to be able to prepare yourself to do something, because even if you marry, and you marry very well, and you're supported in great style, you never know when you're going to need to fall back on your own... You know, that was the old-

fashioned way of thinking, and it's a good way of thinking, too. So I majored in economics.  
[laughs]

SO: Yeah. That's –

ZFG: Of all things, you know?

SO: – sort of a masculine field.

ZFG: Yeah, and then we had one of our professors, Bigge, I think his name was. He left Brown and went to work in Roosevelt's Washington. And he took [28:00] a lot of his students with him. And I could have gone with him to the Washington... So there were two jobs that I passed up. One was the American University in Beirut, and the other one was working for Bigge in Washington.

SO: What did he want you to do there?

ZFG: They didn't say they didn't want me to. I guess I just didn't do it. I don't know why. I just didn't. And I did work for a while for an orthodontist in Providence. Not very long. I just thought it sort of got my feet wet, so I could see how I'd work out as a working girl. And it was all right, but I didn't care for it particularly. And I did have to wear a white uniform, and it looked very impressive. But I didn't care for it too much. And then I got married. I was married when I was 23. So I didn't have any career, as far as that was concerned. But after my family was grown... [29:00] I had two daughters. One died when she was five. And then Leslie is living in New York, and she's the writer.

Oh, it must have been 1966, or '65, I said, "What am I going to do with the rest of my life?" So then I decided – I always wanted to study law, but it meant commuting to Boston, and I just didn't feel like doing that. So I settled for library science. And I came to University of Rhode Island, and got my master's degree. Took me a year and a summer. And then I got –

SO: That's very fast, isn't it, for a master's?

ZFG: Well, it was –

SO: Was it an accelerated...?

ZFG: Well, the whole year – two semesters, and then another semester in the summer. Yeah, that was all there was, I'm quite sure. Because I got it in '66. So when I got through, I said, "Well, what am I going to do with this now? Where am I going to use it?" I could have gotten a job at Brown, probably, at the library, but that meant coming into Brown, [30:00] and going back and forth. Just at that time, the community college in Fall River was born – Bristol Community College. And I got in on the ground floor there. My boss was a 25-year-old Brooklyn boy. And from him, I learned more than I learned from all my teachers all my life. [laughs] He was just remarkable. The most amazing young man. He went to Brooklyn College, and he was a true Brooklynese – speech and everything. But bright, and his wife was bright, and we were very friendly. And he used to come to my house all the time, and once he drove up with another boy that worked in the library. And he said, "Zelda lives here." He said, "She does? How do you get to be a librarian?" [laughter] That was my house, up there. See the picture of it?

SO: It's beautiful.

ZFG: It was an English house, and we built it in 1940. So he said, "She does? How do you get to be a librarian?" [laughs] [31:00] Well, anyway, I was the coordinator of Reader Services, and it was a very responsible job. We built a library from nothing to 40,000 volumes. And of course, we introduced audio/visual things, and things that libraries didn't have before. But, at that particular time, in 1967, it started up. And Massachusetts was rolling in dough. So, it was in Massachusetts, you see? So anything we wanted, we could get. You know, books – it didn't matter what they cost, it didn't matter what anything cost. Everything was very, very free and easy. I don't think it's that way today, but I just happened to luck out. It was fine, you know?

SO: Right.

ZFG: And I stayed there. I wanted a part-time job. I didn't want to work full time. They said, "Well, there's no such thing as a part-time job." So I was "The Man That Came to Dinner."  
[32:00] I was there for 12 years.

SO: Whoa.

ZFG: Yeah, and it was wonderful. Really wonderful.

SO: Any particular reason why you left?

ZFG: Well, it was 1978, and I had been there 12 years, and I decided that I had had enough. My husband wasn't too well, and he had retired from business, and –

SO: He was in real estate? Is that what –

ZFG: What did you say?

SO: Your husband was in real estate? Is that...?

ZFG: No. My father was.

SO: Oh, your dad.

ZFG: My husband was a merchant in Fall River. He had a men's and boys' clothing store. He had one also in Taunton, but then they gave that one up. He had one in Providence, a small one, but that was before I was married. And that one he gave up, too. It was the Fall River store that was this big store.

So his health was not too great. He wasn't sick, or wasn't incapacitated, but I could see the handwriting on the wall, because he died in 1981. And this was the end of '78. So [33:00] I figured it was time for me to spend more time with him. And that's what we did.

And then when I moved out of my big house into an apartment – because we had about, oh, it must have been about 5,000 volumes, and he was a book collector of first editions, and fine editions, and unusual things. And that he started long before he met me. So, he was a book man before I even thought about being a book lady, you see? [laughs] So at that time, we had to get rid of some books. So I gave some to Brandeis. I gave some to Bristol Community College, where I was working. And then, after my husband died and I moved to Providence, I still wanted to get rid of some more books. So I did. I gave them away again. And then this past year, I gave some to RISD’s library, some very fine editions of art books and stuff. [34:00] And my Israeli stamp collection I gave to the John Hay Library.

SO: Oh, wow.

ZFG: You know, I read one day in the paper that John Hay has one of the finest stamp collections in the country.

SO: Really?

ZFG: And I didn’t know that. I think it’s third finest in New England. So I called this man, who was written up in the *Journal* that morning. His name is John Stanley. And I asked him if he’d be interested. And he said, “Would I ever!” And he came up here, and he saw the stamps. And he was delighted. And he wanted to take all my rugs with him, too. And I said, “No, the rugs don’t go with the stamps.” [laughter]

SO: These are beautiful rugs.

ZFG: Yeah. So the living room rug in particular he liked. He said, “You know I have 16 oriental rugs, and I have them hanging on the wall. They have no room for them in my apartment. But I have them hanging on the wall, because I love them so.”

SO: I don’t know if I asked you this: what was your best [35:00] experience at Pembroke, that you can...?

ZFG: My best experience?

SO: Yeah. Like if you could...?

ZFG: Oh, being elected president of student government.

SO: Is that the...?

ZFG: That was the crowning glory for me. And there was another thing there, too. They have an organization – a club called the Elizabethans.

SO: Right. Yeah, I saw that among –

ZFG: Yeah, and nobody ever – Karen had never even heard of them. And you had to be invited. You had to be a senior. You had to be invited to join. It was a very secret organization. It met up in the upper regions of Alumnae Hall, up in a room up there, where nobody even knew it existed. And it was conducted like the queen and her chancellor of the exchequer, and the secretary. They were all called by the names that they'd use in England, you know? It was a very British organization.

We did nothing. We accomplished nothing. I think we gave a dollar every time we came. And it was – [36:00] who was the advisor? He was a man who spoke with a British accent. I think his name was Loughnan. It's all very vague, and I don't remember too much about it, except that I know that I was invited to become a member, and you don't refuse those things. You say yes, you see? I was just like the Erasmians on the hill, which I think no longer exists on the hill, either. The Cammarian Club was the student-government association at Brown. That was comparable to the Student Government Association at Pembroke. So we each had our own governing bodies, you see. And then the Cammarian Club, and the Erasmians, and Elizabethans were comparable. I think they also had to be invited to become a member. You're just – there weren't many, just a few of – mostly the Question Club girls. Not all of them.

(break in audio)

SO: Thank you. That ends the interview. Interviewer Sasha Oster, interviewing Zelda Fisher Gourse, Pembroke class of 1936. Please note that this tape got cut off about ten minutes before the interview ended.

- END -