

Transcript – Elizabeth Anne Gibbons (Rauh) Perryman ‘52

Narrator: Elizabeth Anne Gibbons Perryman

Interviewer: JoAnn A. Roth

Interview Date: May 4, 1988

Length: Approximately 53 minutes

Track 1

JoAnn A. Roth: I'm a member of the development staff, at Brown University, and I will be talking with Elizabeth Gibbons Rauh, class of 1952. Liz, why don't we start by my asking you the obvious question, how did you come from Texas to Pembroke?

Elizabeth Anne Gibbons Perryman: That's a good question, because, I found out, almost the first day I arrived, that I was the first Texan female at Pembroke in 35 years. I didn't know anyone, nor did I expect to know anyone because I grew up and spent my first 16 years in Brownwood, Texas. It's in the heart of Texas and a hundred miles from any town, or city, anyone has ever heard of in Texas. I was a rural product. I'm a 4th generation rancher's daughter. And my parents were only children and married very young. My mother's family were very well educated my grandmother had a masters degree in 1910, as did her two sisters, so education was very important to my mother's family. And mother had been offered a full scholarship to Radcliffe when she was 13 years old, and her family could not see that that was... that she was ready for that.

Mother's idea for my sister and me was definitely an education. Although she had a college degree it was local, and I think the idea of going away to college was very important to her, and a regret of her life. My father, who was a rancher, did not value education so much... never expected -- that I remember -- anything of my sister and me. He just, he spoiled us. So, I heard about Pembroke when an Admissions officer visited a very small boarding school that I attended Senior year in Colorado Springs, and I knew it was the place for me. I was admitted, and... but very naive about the Ivy League. I didn't know what Ivy League was, and had only the thought of: "I am going away to college." And so, I arrived a freshman, knowing no one, but the first week Dean Lewis made ten-minute appointments with every member of the Freshman class and after I [unclear] first week, I talked slower, walked slower, I could not keep up with the rest of my class mates in any way at all.

I found Dean Lewis the person who made me feel at home, and the person to whom I related more than any of my classmates, and from that first ten-minute appointment, Dean Lewis was my best friend the first year and until I graduated. She had a very soft voice, she was very feminine, and she was very understanding of a person who was really in a different culture for the first time. And so, I felt very comfortable having Dean Lewis to talk to, and unlike the rest of my classmates, I would see her walking across campus and I would run to catch up with her. So, I would talk to her, and I would go into her

office, to talk about -- not often -- but any little thing I felt I wanted her opinion about. And she was very gracious, always, and she and I talked, short times but wonderful times, through those four years. She was the most important influence on me, and my best memories of those five or ten-minute times I spent in her office -- by my choice. Much to the incredulity of my classmates, who -- I found out, late -- considered the Dean a person far removed from their lives, and a person you did not visit, unless you were in trouble. And unless she made the appointment with you.

JAR: They stood in awe of her, in other words?

EAGP: Oh yes, it was the Eastern... well, the Eastern... hierarchy of social place. And, being a Southwesterner, and being in the habit of speaking informally with strangers...

JAR: Your associations, and people had [unclear]

EAGP: yes, and know, a sense of a persons office, carrying a certain protocol, I was, totally oblivious to people who were considered above you, or, people you didn't normally [unclear] with.

JAR: Was it very unusual for you and your sister to leave Texas and go to the East to school, or was that more or less, what happened?

EAGP: It was not uncommon for families who could afford it, to send -- because we followed our parents' pattern for us, and we didn't, most of us, have the freedom of choosing our colleges to the extent that counselors played a role and your peer group influenced you. We pretty much were directed by our parents, or at least, that's what I remember. So, it was not uncommon for even Texans, southerners, to quote "go away" unquote to school for a year or two, and Dean Lewis was very familiar with this pattern, being from Kentucky and a southerner herself. She told me that she expected me to transfer, and indeed my mother's expectation was, "You will go away to school, for at least one year." And I did transfer, as much as I loved Brown, I transferred first semester sophomore year to SMU in Dallas. Which was fine with mother, I had fulfilled her requirement, but it was at SMU that I learned the meaning of ivy league, or not so much ivy league, but the difference in quality of education, and four days after I arrived at SMU I called Dean Lewis, my friend [laughing], and told her that my mistake was enormous, and I never would have, nor could I, have appreciated Brown the way I could then, after only four days at SMU, and I would do anything if she would let me come back, please? And she was very gracious, and I think I had to re-apply, but anyway, I was very lucky, and went back second semester sophomore year, and went from the train station right into Dean Lewis's office, and said, "Dean Lewis, I will be the most loyal alumna Pembroke ever had. Except maybe the few others, if there ever are any who are stupid enough to do what I did." Any others who may have the experience of comparing. I don't think people here know what Brown is like, but I feel I do, and I thanked her and thanked her. And she, she giggled.

So, it was also that semester at SMU, which cemented my loyalty to Pembroke, and my gratitude to Dean Lewis, and my friendship with her. And my sister stayed four years, she learned from my mistake.

JAR: [laughs] She never transferred?

EAGP: She never transferred. And I must say, my mother was not particularly -- this was not her plan. But we prevailed, my sister and I. That's another reason that I feel so indebted to Dean Lewis. I really found out how different my attitude was toward her, from the rest of my classmates. When I invited Dean Lewis -- and her mother, whom I so wanted to meet -- to dinner at Pembroke. Which we were allowed to do. Every Friday night faculty members could be included as guests. Faculty members. Well, I never even thought that Dean Lewis would not be -- she was the person I wanted to invite to dinner, and I wanted to meet her mother, whom I had seen, and once in a while Dean Lewis mentioned her mother. So it seemed inevitable. It seemed so natural to me, to invite Dean Lewis to the tables in Alumnae Hall. No, um, Andrews Hall was where it was, were tables where we ate.

So there were three of us, Dean Lewis, her mother, and me. So I invited my five best friends to sit with us that Friday evening. Wow! They looked at me and said, "Dean Lewis?! You invited Dean Lewis?!" And I said, "Yes, oh, she's wonderful! And we'll get to meet her mother!" Well, they were horrified. And indeed, were very reluctant to accept. They apparently felt that distance was appropriate. I ended up begging them, and explaining that Dean Lewis was the nicest person, and her mother was so darling, and she had said she would love to come. I had to convince my classmates that it was an absolutely wonderful, ok, thing.

JAR: And did they come?

EAGP: And they came, but they were very uneasy with the idea. They were very uneasy at the table, in the beginning, but I won't know that anyone ever invited...

JAR: I think the deans had a great deal of power then... I mean, they were real...

EAGP: They did. But I didn't understand that. I didn't even understand that acceptance to Pembroke was such a privilege. I considered myself -- I was very protected. I just... the thought of being rejected from school -- because I was a good student -- never entered my mind. And I had -- although after the first semester I certainly thought very differently about myself than when I first arrived.

JAR: What was your major?

EAGP: Latin.

JAR: Latin? Really?

EAGP: I've always loved Latin, and classes were small. And I had always attended a very small school.

JAR: At which they taught Latin?

EAGP: Yes.

JAR: I mean you obviously had a background in it. You studied that in Texas?

EAGP: In Texas, the reason I went to boarding school was because, to be able to take 3rd year Latin, which was a requirement at that time, imagine.

JAR: Did you enjoy your academic life at Brown?

EAGP: I loved everything about Brown. I particularly enjoyed the Friday assembly.

JAR: Was that co-ed with Brown and Pembroke?

EAGP: No, no.

JAR: That was the Pembroke assembly?

EAGP: Pembroke assembly. And especially those when Dean Lewis spoke to us. And she always spoke at least once a year, and it was called chapel. I think.

JAR: Was it, probably held in Alumnae Hall?

EAGP: Yes, it was. And as far as the... I do not remember feeling any discrimination, or any exclusion from the life at Brown, being female. But the expectations were so different. The 50s, we're the last of the traditionalists. And I suppose that...

JAR: You mean the expectations for men were so much different than they were for women? Or...?

EAGP: Well there just had been a way of life and a way of education, it was very established, throughout the United States, and at Brown/Pembroke, and there was nothing about it that did not suit me. And I never had any... I could not have suggested any changes. I was very happy except for the four-year requirement in physical education.

JAR: I don't think you're alone there. [laughs]

EAGP: Oh I wanted... if you never over-cut physical education classes, you were allowed the last semester, you were exempt. Well that relief was a goal of mine from freshman year. I never over-cut. I must say, I think it was a good idea. But I never enjoyed that, and I complained a lot about having to go to gym. It was the only thing at Pembroke I would've changed. But I'm glad it was there.

JAR: That seems like a real prevalent attitude in the 50s. Which I think has changed, you know. Women seem much more involved physically than they were in the 50s in my undergraduate days.

EAGP: Oh! It's so different.

JAR: We grew up much differently. Even on a ranch though, I mean, you weren't involved in the physical requirements of it? Your role was more of a role with your mother in the home?

EAGP: Oh yes,

JAR: That's interesting.

EAGP: And my time was spent practicing piano, voice, drawing, painting, and I did not ever participate in anything physical.

JAR: Did you ride horses?

EAGP: Yes, I rode horses. But you know, that wasn't offered at Brown so [laughs] all the rest of it, volleyball...

JAR: That was really foreign to you?

EAGP: Totally foreign.

JAR: that's interesting, I've talked to one girl who graduated, perhaps within 3 or 4 years of you, who had gone to Catholic girl's high school in NY and, had just the opposite, she was a basketball player, and when she got to Pembroke, she thought they weren't competitive enough. And so she didn't like Phys Ed cause she didn't think they took it seriously enough. And I said to her at the time, "You're probably one of the very few Pembroke's who had that reaction to the Physical Education. Because much more probably felt just the opposite.

EAGP: I'm thinking, we didn't have intermural, we didn't have girl's teams -- maybe we did, but I just

JAR: Was Bessie Rudd there, when you were there?

EAGP: Yes, Bessie Rudd was an institution. And she was reason enough to pass four years of physical education. She was marvelous as a teacher, I just would've preferred to sit and do a painting, drawing.

JAR: Your interests were in other areas.

EAGP: The irony was, that requirement... when I had my masters degree from Harvard in education and went to DeRidder, Louisiana. My husband was stationed in Fort Collins, that's why we were there. The state of Louisiana denied me a teacher's certificate, because one of the Louisiana state requirements is two years of physical education -- meaning, credit. And I said, but, look, I took three-and-a-half years, twice a week! But, you don't have credit. I said, "I don't know schools that give credit for physical education." Well they considered it serious enough to earn credit...

JAR: So you didn't receive credit at Pembroke for it?

EAGP: No, we should've received credit.

JAR: What did you do on vacations? You obviously couldn't have gone back to Texas. Did you go for Christmas, or...?

EAGP: I had a wonderful time with my eastern seaboard friends who invited me to their homes for Thanksgiving, and spring vacation, and any other time. I did go -- my sister and I went home at Christmas, but otherwise,

JAR: On the train?

EAGP: On the train. It was a two-day trip. We went to Chicago, and from Chicago to Fort Worth, on train. That was a long time ago it seems because there are no trains left.

JAR: But a lot of students travel together on trains, I think. Alums that I have met from the midwest they would all gather together in Cleveland and ride in together, it was sort of a nice kind of thing that they did together.

EAGP: But we had a nice little train group, every Christmas. Adlai Stevenson III from Harvard, and his friend John Bass Robinson III from Yale, and Beau Pope from Andover, he was in Andover then. And Eddie Ryan from Fort Worth, he was in Andover later. We had a great group on the train. And they would, play guitars and play bridge, and we'd talk...

JAR: Were you homesick?

EAGP: I think I wasn't homesick. It was really the first time that I felt out of place, and I was not part of the majority. I felt very challenged, socially, people laughed at the way I talked, I could not take notes in class...

[End of track 1]

[Track 2 begins]

EAGP: ...to make my place, and it was a very exciting challenge, and I wasn't sure I could do it. I despaired at being considered a foreigner, I was desperate to keep up in class, I felt -- I knew -- I wanted to do it. And I knew it was a lot, I had a lot to overcome and I think I was one of three freshmen who took... what's it called? Speech! Which was required. And, there was a tape recorder. It was a one-semester required course for freshmen. And I remember there were 3 of us who did not fulfill his Speech requirements. After one semester, a girl from Providence, who had a terrific Providence accent, a girl from NY, who had some kind of New York accent, and the three of us were left, to correct their speech.

JAR: How different... that whole idea of assimilation, now that differences are valued.

EAGP: Valued!

JAR: Was the faculty generally supportive, or I suppose they ran the whole gambit?

EAGP: I think that in the small classes, I was able to contribute better, and to be the kind of person and student the professors could allow more in the larger classes. I was, felt, very behind, and I struggled to keep up. Somehow, in the smaller classes it was easier. The faculty, I suppose it was always the Latin teachers who stood by me, and sort of because I loved Latin. So they were the main [unclear] of my feeling toward...

JAR: I'm interested in the person in the admissions office who came to Colorado. it must've been a very persuasive or charismatic person who could be that far away from campus...

EAGP: No, she really wasn't! It was the description of Pembroke, and the... she was a wonderful woman, Miss Irwin. Kitty Irwin. But she was older than the admissions officer from Vassar, who was very glamorous, and the admissions officer from Radcliffe, who was years younger. We had admissions from Sarah Lawrence who were sophisticated. Miss Irwin was very plain, very short, not an imposing person, or a person who was outstanding, in any way. It was that her description of Pembroke, which was very accurate, it was exactly what she [unclear]. And I had never heard of Pembroke.

JAR: And you hadn't met anyone who had gone there?

EAGP: No.

JAR: A leap of faith, wasn't it?

EAGP: My mother said I was to go away to school, to college for a year, and I said, "Well, I can go to [unclear]" I like what she said about Pembroke. And so, I applied. Gave my contact locations very little thought, other than listening to the admissions officers and thinking, well, it's that kind of place I think I would like. I would have, I was not very well prepared to choose a college. Had no sense of competing with anybody to

be a college student. So, that would have made a great deal of difference in the way I applied, but the result was perfect.

JAR: Do you feel that Brown prepared you well for what you did after?

EAGP: I must say I feel that my parents and my education, none of it has really prepared me for life. Except that, I do know my sense of value. And I feel Brown contributed a great deal to my sense of value. And other than that, I just... being prepared for life is... a very difficult question. I feel very good about my childhood, my upbringing, my education, and I have had wonderful opportunities, I have not reflected much on the past because I have so much to do right now.

JAR: And now you're going full circle and back to Texas, it's going to be very interesting.

EAGP: I'm starting a career when all my classmates seem to be retiring. That's exciting.

JAR: So you could bring Pembroke and Brown back to Texas, that should be an interesting experience.

EAGP: Interestingly, President Wriston addressed the senior class at Pembroke, in Andrews Hall. This was a tradition. He spoke to the senior class as girls, women. And he said many wise things, but the one thing he said I will never forget, was, "Go back to the blanket, go back where you came from, you grew up there, you are better able to use your education there than any other place. And they are waiting for you. Starting in a new city, in a new area, is fine but I think you can best contribute at home." And the dean of our graduate school said the same thing, in a different way: "Get out of Cambridge, get out of Boston, we don't want you, we can't use you, and my advice to you is to go cross this country, to the small towns. Where you are needed, and where you will serve best." And of course my parents said, "Please come home!" I listened to them. But, 30 years later, and I was told, "It is, it's not too late."

JAR: President Wriston had obviously not, I mean personally, because of your relationship with, to Dean Lewis. Was he quite an influence on the women in Pembroke, just as he was on the men, do you think? Wriston? being an overwhelming kind of personality, did the women at Pembroke feel that as well?

EAGP: My feeling about President Wriston and Brown, Dean Lewis and Pembroke, was separate but equal. I had a tremendous respect for Dean Wriston and the men at Brown, but I truly felt a partnership. My sense was a partnership. And I felt, Dean Lewis, she was the first person, as a leader to Pembroke. Although there was... my memory, and my sense, when I was there, was that President Wriston was for the men, but Dean Lewis was for the women. But it was very much a partnership. They were very much partners. And leaders, of their colleges. And, I just...

JAR: I have to ask you the inevitable question of what your reaction was when Pembroke merged with Brown?



EAGP: I was very sad. I felt that we had all, at Pembroke, and Brown, both -- had every advantage of co-education and there were some wonderful advantages in the coordinate set-up that the merger would remove. Forever. And those were Pembroke traditions. The chapels: which meant a lot to me. Some people complained about having to go to chapel every Friday, the way I complained about going to Physical Education twice a week. I just, I liked it. And I liked our yearbook, I liked our weekly newspaper. I liked May Day, I liked all of the Pembroke traditions. And I loved -- of course, when the decision to merge was announced, I was particularly sad because I thought, "No more Dean Lewis! For anyone." And I felt that that was, it made a large college, it made it more impersonal, maybe. Maybe not, because I just had a personal relationship with Dean Lewis, and the classics department faculty. But I thought, "Why? It is co-ed!" If I had had any sense at Pembroke for Dean Lewis, our college, being unequal, I might have felt that the merger made a lot more sense. But...

JAR: But you never had that feeling?

EAGP: I never had that feeling! I could not imagine that there was, that there could be a better set up than what was there. And I loved the Pembroke library. Which interestingly, they now feel they'd like to, and have recreated.

JAR: Oh yes. Yes, it's still there. It probably looks very much the same. It's used for more popular books. It's more contemporary literature, magazines, the kind of place where people go to, well, to study of course and also to get a novel or some lighter reading.

EAGP: Well that was the library on our campus. Now the campus is all mixed up, so, there is... it was just...

JAR: Have you visited the Pembroke Center since?

EAGP: No, I haven't.

JAR: It's very nice. The offices are up over the Crystal Room. So you have the center stairway, and then the Pembroke center offices are there. The Crystal Room is still used very much by the Pembroke Center and of course Alumnae Hall. So that building is very much intact, so that makes it very nice.

EAGP: Well there have been some wonderful changes. And, I don't consider the merger a wonderful change.

JAR: Well, I don't think you're alone...

EAGP: There have been, the Henry [unclear] Church, on the campus, and this art building, for me.

JAR: Well you must've taken art courses, a lot of art courses,

EAGP: I did,

JAR: Cause you have such an interest in it, now and in your life. You must've enjoyed it. Did you go to Boston much?

EAGP: My sister... we went to Boston on the train. She would go to the Red Sox baseball games, and I would go to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts [audio is low, noise is high, difficult to hear].

JAR: That's still considered one of the attractive things about Providence: that you can get up to Boston and down to New York fairly easily. This, location is very...

EAGP: Well there's no more beautiful location than the hill, and the beautiful [unclear]. Brown is so beautiful.

JAR: I hope you'll be able to go to your next reunion.

EAGP: Well I hope so too. I remember the alumnae poured in the year before, cause I think we graduated much later than they do now.

JAR: Well commencement and reunion are on the same weekend, Memorial Day weekend, always. I don't know if they were then or not. I think

EAGP: Well maybe they were, I remember the alumnae came back and... half of the dining room would be for the alumnae. We would look at them and think, "Ooh! I am never coming back when I graduate! I don't want to look like that!" Imagine, these old ladies coming back to College, and, I don't feel old I'm sure I look old, and I would love to come back and I know what the seniors, and undergraduates will be thinking and I can only laugh, I thought the same thing when I saw them.

JAR: Want to take a pause and...

[End of track 2]