

Transcript – Margot Landman ‘78

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Narrator: Margot Landman

Interviewer: Kirsten Rodine

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Tape 1, Side 1

Interview in 11-13-87

This is Margot Landman, Class of ‘78. Interviewed by Kirsten Rodine, Class of ‘88.

KR: Ten years! Okay, first of all to start out, we're interested on the biographical basis like where are you from, what's your family background and what not.

ML: I was born in Denver, but was taken to New York at the age of three months, grew up in New York City. I have an older brother who now works for the New York Times. My parents are retired, but don't really know the meaning of the word ...still very active. My mother was for many years the editor of a professional magazine on Planned Parenthood, put out by Planned Parenthood. My father started out as a correspondent, as did my mother, but turned to public relations as a result of the McCarthy era, when he couldn't get journalism jobs.

KR: Hmm, and what, what prompted you to come to Brown, did you go to a high school that was very college prep?

ML: I certainly did, I went to Dalton School, one of the snottier private schools in New York City, where the assumption was that everyone would go to college. And, probably 99.9% of Dalton graduates do go to college. It was originally an all women's high school. It had gone co-ed quite a while before I got there...! was there just for three years. I graduated from high school a year early, because I really didn't like the place very much. It was excellent academically, but socially/politically, it was really quite a ghastly place. The one thing that I think makes Dalton different from the other private schools in New York is that it had an enormous range of foreign languages, and that's where I started studying Chinese.

KR: Okay ...

ML: So the assumption was that I would be going to college. It wasn't a question of college or not, it was more a question of where. My parents, for financial reasons said East of the Mississippi, because they didn't want to be paying airfare several times a year out to the West coast. Beyond that, the decision was entirely mine. I knew I wanted a place where I could take four years of Chinese. I also thought at that point that I would be doing a double-major in biology, so I wanted a decent biology program. I applied to a rather bizarre collection of colleges ... Yale, Brown, Penn, Smith and Connecticut College, and the only unifying link is the Chinese. I would have died rather than gone to an all-women's college. That was absolutely out of the

question, however two of those colleges were at that time all-women's. Connecticut, has since gone co-ed. I didn't get into Yale, so the decision was very easy. Brown, even then, in the Dark Ages of 1974, was a pretty popular school. I didn't apply to it for that reason. My father is an alumnus. I also didn't apply to Brown for that reason. He was quite astonished, and sort of tickled by the idea that I would apply, but there was no pressure whatever. So, that's a roundabout answer why Brown.

KR: Yeah, did your mother go to college? Obviously ...

ML: Yes, she went to Brooklyn College, which she adored. She really had a terrific time. And her family was very different from my growing up. Her father was a tailor and her mother raised numerous children. And, my grandfather on my mother's side, died when she was twenty years old, when she was a Junior in college. And as he lay dying, and everybody knew that he was dying, he said to her "Chyola," which was her Yiddish nickname, "I have two wishes for you ... one is that you finish college, and the other is that you travel." So, it was very important to her, and to the whole family, that she go to college. She was the youngest in her family. And her brother eventually got a B. A., but he did it at night, so it took years and years. She may have been, I'm not sure what year he finished, she may have been the first in the family to graduate from college. My father's side was completely different. My paternal grandmother graduated from Cornell, class of 1911. And, her husband was a rabbi, so he had lots of education. When my grandfather died, my grandmother was 65 years old, and she went back to school, and got a Masters in social work. And, worked pretty much full-time until she was eighty years old, at which point she had an accident on a bus. The bus started suddenly, and she fell and she hurt her back. And while she was not immobilized, she decided that it was time to retire while she still had all her marbles and could make that decision rationally. So, from my father's side of the family education... well both sides, education was very important and there was absolutely no question that I, as the daughter, would get as much, and as high a quality of education as my brother did.

KR: Uh hum...Well, that's great on both sides of the family...reinforcing that. And once you got to Brown, first of all before you got to Brown, did your family have any expectations about what you should do or did you ever feel any pressure to go on as a career type preparatory, or something in the academic...?

ML: Again, on the assumption that I don't think was ever discussed because it was such an obvious assumption, was that I would be working, that I would have a career. None of us, I don't think, saw college as a vocational time. College was for studying, and studying pretty much what you wanted to study. That being said, when I wrote home, at the beginning... sometime during first semester of sophomore year, or maybe it was second semester, saying that I decided to drop the pre-med... that it was too competitive and too miserable, and that I didn't want to spend my... the rest of my time at Brown being unhappy because I was competing with all these people in nasty courses that I wasn't really interested in, ...that therefore I would do, or I thought I would do Asian history, but at the end of Sophomore year, they disbanded the department. My father wrote a letter saying, that's fine and it's your decision, but think about what it means for job prospects. You're not likely to want go into the government. One option is teaching, which you say you don't want to do. What else realistically, is there? And I wrote back to my parents saying

I'm seventeen years old, I don't have to think about those things right now. I'll deal with looking for a job later. And that was the end of that discussion. And my feeling was then, and remains now, that's fine if you have a discreet professional goal, by all means pursue it, and it's a very middle-class intellectual viewpoint. But I still think there is validity in pursuing that intellectual activity. Because it's probably gonna be the only time when that's all you do.

KR: Yeah ... And so did you find the time at Brown really helped you to form your ideas about education (no response) ...and did you feel nourished by Brown... (ML interjects "Oh,

Absolutely!!) ...or at least a lot of support by professors, students...?

ML: Well, it's actually, it's a funny question, because as I look back I say absolutely. Especially, in comparison with Columbia, which I find in many ways, a detestable institution. I'm wondering how far this transcript is gonna go. (chuckles) That's ok, I stand by it. But I was, I moved recently and I was going through zillions of papers, and I came across a quote unquote story that I wrote Freshman year, when I was taking some of those courses that I later decided I shouldn't be taking like, second semester Calculus, which did not come easily, ... second year Chinese, which while I liked it, was a lot of memorization. You can't learn a foreign language without sitting down and memorizing vocabulary lists, and with Chinese it's even worse because you have to learn all the characters. And that is just pure memorization and it's boring, it's just dull. So the story that I wrote was about how boring life was and there was so much pressure and I...Reading it now, I'm struck by the disjunction between what I remember and what I was really feeling at the time. In retrospect, I adored Brown, and at the time I adored it too. It was just that the little ups and downs seemed bigger then, (laughs) than they do ten years later. As for faculty, that was another reason that I decided not to do biology. Because I felt that to get any attention in a department that was as big as biology you needed to be utterly brilliant. And I'm not, and I wasn't then. Sure I could've gone in and knocked on professors' doors and said I have a question about whatever. ...but I was very shy, and if I didn't really have a question and didn't feel that I would be welcomed with that question, there was no way that I was gonna go pursue faculty members. The difference with the Chinese and Asian History, is that the departments were so small that the faculty members automatically knew everybody. The Chinese ...Jimmy Ren, Chairman of the department, came into class the first day and said "Hi, I'm Jimmy ...introduce yourselves." This was a faculty member, tenured faculty, but that was his approach and it made an enormous difference.

KR: Were there a lot of other students in the same area studying with you so that you get to know them as well?

ML: Well, the first year Chinese class, which I didn't take here, had fifteen people in it. By my senior year there were four of us. Then, because Asian History and History merged after my Sophomore year, for the few of us who had started in Asian History, they devised a major called History and Chinese Language. So, there were only two of us who actually got that degree. But, I took other history courses, and I took lots of other Chinese and Japanese, lots of Chinese, one Japanese history course, so I knew those people, and that's a pretty small community, and I still know a lot of them. (KR: Uh huh...) Because people who go into...well, the China field is not

large. So, of the people from Brown who went into it from my general years, I know or know of quite a number of them.

KR: A little bit more about Brown...what do you remember about your first day at Brown?

ML: My parents drove me up here ... Mostly I remember people on the Green milling about, having no idea what was going on...Must've had something to do with getting our I.D. pictures taken and filling out various forms, but it was madness, it was total chaos. And then I saw somebody from my high school graduating class, and we said hello to each other, and my parents and her parents left, and that was the first day.

Actually, I had two roommates. I was in one of the converted lounges in Jameson ... they didn't have enough housing. So they put three of us in one room, which is not an ideal number in that sort of space ... not because it was crowded, but because three is an awkward number. It didn't help that one of them was a Born-Again Christian who never tried herself to convert us, but some of her friends did. And that caused a certain amount of tension in the room. (CM and ML laugh together, agreeing).

KR: Yeah ... (ML: Yes!!) Did you find that a lot of your great friends were made in your freshman unit...it seems that at Brown there's this thing where you keep your friends that you make who are in your freshman unit.

ML: I'm smiling because three weeks ago I was in Chicago for the wedding of a high school classmate, and while I was there I looked up one of the people who was on my freshman hall ... and we hadn't seen each other in six years. And we met for coffee, and had a great chat and it was really lots of fun and we'll continue on our divergent paths, and eventually see each other again. And, one of my other closest friends who was also a freshman year pal who's now living in San Francisco and I see him occasionally ...either I go there, find some excuse to go out there or he comes to New York on business, so we get together. So, a few. I wouldn't say that I have vast numbers of friends from Brown, but some.

KR: Did Brown have some kind of really orientation week for Freshmen, especially like they still have?

ML: Yeah, well I don't know how much it's like what goes on now, but it was a week which was too long. We were really itchy for classes to begin. I remember it being fun. I really can't say what all the activities were, but one special memory is that I was sitting at the desk, my desk in the room, writing a letter to my parents (we are very active correspondents – I was writing after my first few days of college) and somebody passed, the door was open, and someone passed and stuck his head in, and said "What, studying already?" I had no idea who it was. I said "No, I'm just writing a letter." An hour or so later, it started to pour, and the same person came past and said "Do you have an umbrella?" Well, I did, but since I had just unpacked a few days before I had no idea where the umbrella was. He went dashing out to close his windows and came back and he and ...(?) who lived on my hall had gone to the same high school, he was a year ahead of us though. So I met him during Freshman week and we are still corresponding (They laugh) He is now a professor of chemistry at MIT. (They laugh) That's about my only vivid memory from Orientation week.

KR: Um hum. What do you think about your best and worst memories of your time at Brown?

ML: (After period of silence) ... that's a hard one.

KR: It's hard to think of...

ML: Nothing was so glaringly horrendous that comes to mind as a worst memory. I was telling somebody at lunch just now, of one that probably ranks though. And that was the end of first semester freshman year. I got a phone call, from my math professor, who said "Please come to my office". I thought, "My, that's peculiar". Why is he calling me to his office in the middle of exam period, not long after we'd taken the final exam, and I went over there and the place was a madhouse. The T.A.s were all flying around and there were blue books every place, and the professor said "Sit down", and I sat down and he said "Do you want a C or an NC?", and I said "What?" And he said, "You didn't do very well on this exam. That's your choice." Well, never before had I been presented with such an option, or even come close to being presented with such an option. So, I immediately started crying and said I needed time to think and tore out of there, and was beside myself, just utterly devastated. About fifteen, minutes later there was another phone call. They had misgraded the exam. It was a mistake.

KR: So what did you do?

ML: What did I do? I said "Well, I'm glad that you went over the exam. I'm glad that that's no longer a problem."

KR: How dramatic!!!

ML: It was pretty awful. It was pretty horrendous. Good experiences you would like.

KR: Just fun things you remember...

ML: There were lots of them... Again, it's hard to think of any particular parties that were fun, social functions (KR laughs), wild midnight escapades with friends. (They both laugh)

ML: That wasn't quite my style. I would say probably... it's an ongoing highlight, but working on my thesis with Jerry Reader was really an astonishing eye-opening enterprise. I guess a high point could be when I went to ask him if he would be my thesis adviser. I was terrified to ask ... because he is, and was, and he would be very embarrassed if he heard me saying this, one of the most brilliant minds I've ever come across. Very thoughtful, very careful and wise in a way that very few people are. And my thought was: Why would he want to waste his time with me? And how utterly devastated I would be if he said no. That it would be such a rejection that I was afraid to ask because if that came, I didn't know what I would do. And he had office hours at some time when I couldn't go, because I had a class, so I went up to him after class one day and asked to make appointment, and he had no idea, I don't think he had any idea why I wanted to see him. But we set an appointment, and I walked up the stairs, in a kind of rickety, narrow staircase ... and I was shaking. And I stood in the doorway, holding onto part of the door, and

said in one breath, "I'm coming to ask you if you'd be my thesis adviser". And he looked at me, and he had his feet up on the desk, and he slowly took his feet down, and held onto his pipe, and said "Well, yes. Why don't you come sit down and talk about it?" And I was so relieved and so delirious that I don't know whether I made any sense for the rest of the session. But, that was definitely a high point.

KR: What made you decide to do Ibsen in China? Did you know that when you were first thinking about doing a thesis, or what prompted you to write a thesis?

ML: What prompted me to write a thesis? I don't know. It was an option that was there and it was a challenge (ML laughs). I guess I figured I would take it. The topic, I think I went in to Jerry, who at that point was Professor Reader - he became Jerry after I was in China - ... saying that I wanted to do something on the May Fourth movement, the intellectual movement in early twentieth century China. And, I was interested in the impact of Western ideas, or something. I don't know exactly how I approached it. But, it was much too vast a topic. I had come across, in my reading, references to "A Doll's House" being translated into Chinese. And that intrigued me. What in the world would the Chinese of the 1920s get out of "A Doll's House" or certain other of Chinese plays, of the Ibsen plays that the Chinese translated? It seemed an interesting topic. So that's how I came to it. And it was absolutely fascinating, it was also an extraordinary amount of work, because I was in effect taking two discreet fields, and putting them together. I read all of Ibsen's collective letters, all of his plays, biographies ... you name it. Whatever I could get my hands on, and then a whole bunch of Chinese sources, and secondary sources, Western English language material, and did some Chinese reading as well. Ummm, but it was a fascinating topic.

KR: (?) ... a lot of, a lot of work, and at the same time rewarding. (ML laughs). Did you spend a lot of your time in The Rock? Is that the library where you usually studied or did you...?

ML: (interrupts) Yes, I mostly studied at The Rock ... and I studied a lot, but I also did a lot of, further down is your extracurricular question, but I did a lot of non-academic stuff as well. When I look back I'm not quite sure how I did it all at the same time. But, somehow, there seemed to be more hours in the day, or something...but I did study a lot, no question about it.

KR: So, why don't we just talk about your extra-curricular things? What did you do, like, outside of school?

ML: I did everything from Brown community outreach things...I was a Big Sister to somebody, supposedly tutoring English, but she wasn't really much interested in learning English, so we didn't do much of that.

KR: In what language?

ML: English.

KR: No, what, you just talked in English? You...

ML: Yeah, she was having trouble with, she was an eighth-grader, native English-speaker, but from a not very good school, ...but what she needed more than English, was reinforcement that she was an acceptable human being. And, think, for her, the most significant time that we had since we were together, was when I went in one evening to her home, and she was fooling around with a baton, as in cheerleading, a baton, which I had never seen from so close, and I said something about what are you doing with that, and she said she was in some marching band, and she was going to be in a parade the following Saturday or Sunday, or whatever it was, and she starting twirling this thing, and as I said I've never been so close to a baton, so I asked her to show me how, and that role - reversal, where she was the teacher, and I was the student, gave her such pride, because she was obviously far... then, if she remembers anything from that, which she probably doesn't, that would be it. That was far more meaningful to her than the textbooks that they were using. So, that was one thing. I was very active in Hillel all four years... I worked at the Rape-crisis center, rape-crisis center. I swam, not competitively. I needed it for my mental-health, to get some exercise so much studying. Ummm... After the Sarah Doyle Center opened, I worked on the newsletter at the Sarah Doyle Center. I was part of a Women's Reading Group. I'm sure there's other stuff, but that's what comes to mind at the moment. And, I worked.

KR: Where did you work?

ML: I worked for Food Services for two years at the Ratty (KR: At the Ratty?) and one year at The Gate (KR: Uh huh) which looked very different then, than it does now.

KR: How is it, how is it changed? Like...

ML: Oh, it's much more high-tech. Much brighter and more comfortable seating. And, as I recall, it had rickety tired, old tables and chairs. Even before you put an elbow on them, if you dared to put an elbow on, they probably overturned...., and the sandwiches weren't made on the spot. They were pre-made sandwiches. We did make pizzas, and various ice cream concoctions like that.

KR: How would you see your, yourself socially ... as an outward, sort of very gregarious, or more quiet, or how would you describe yourself?

ML: ... Both (They laugh) I certainly didn't go for the Fraternity parties. I went to a few because one of my roommates was dying to go, and she wouldn't go alone, ummm, but I hated them. Just really vile. The only reason people went to them was to get drunk and to pair off, and I wasn't interested in either of those pursuits...On the other hand, I could spend hours sitting on, in the halls, talking to people, doing, going to movies and things like that. Organized social activity, I suppose, is not my idea of a great time.

KR: Yeah, how were the relationships, like, between male and female students, granted this is two years of, when you enter, two years after Brown officially went co-ed. (They discuss accuracy of dates) That's three, excuse me.

ML: Ummm...

KR: Did you have a lot of male friends or female friends, or how would you tend to describe...?

ML: Both, and I guess in some ways, I avoided the issue, because I was going out with someone at Harvard all four years. And, everybody knew it. I didn't keep it a secret. So, that was a given in my relationships with men and women. And, it wasn't that he was around a lot, or that I was up there a lot, but everybody knew that there was this important person in my life, and I wasn't about to pick up with anybody else. And I guess in some ways, that probably made, made it easier to make friends, 'cause there wasn't gonna be of the game-playing that goes on when someone is available. I wouldn't say that I did that deliberately for that reason. (They laugh) Positive feature.

KR: Right now at Brown, there's a lot of talk about the dating scene, and about how there is none. Everybody goes out in groups, and huge groups, unless it's serious. Is that...how was it?

ML: Well, I think that that, those comments were around then...

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Tape 1, Side 2

KR: I'm sorry to get you off.

ML: It's okay. On the other hand, when I think of the women I knew, that's interesting ... when I think of the women I knew, they all at some point or another, had serious boyfriends. I hate the word. Not all the men that I knew, had serious relationships with women, though. Ummm...I'm not sure what that says (she laughs), but certainly, if people wanted to find men, they were around.

KR: Okay, well now moving on (they laugh) ...Thinking about your, your major in History in Chinese language, which gradually led you to, after Brown, to go to China. How did you find about this, or did you, did you have a mentor who was guiding you through, like as far as helping you out, or, at Brown, or. ...?

ML: Meaning professionally?

KR: Either prof... no, not, no ...

ML: Well, Jerry certainly meant more to me than he'll ever know, although I've told him. Not so much because I would go to him and say "I'm having a problem with such and such" and he would counsel me on it, but because he so obviously considered me an intellect worth spending time with, and such I considered him such an astonishing person, that meant a huge amount. The person to whom I did go most with sort of, personal stuff, was Bruce Donovan, who was the faculty fellow, my junior year, in Emery which was where I lived. He and his wife were just wonderful to me. I had spent the summer between sophomore and junior year, junior and senior year, in Israel. It was the summer of '76. So, between sophomore and junior year. And I adored it. I was working on the kibbutz, and as much as I liked the intellectual pursuit, sometimes I wondered what it all meant. When I was in Israel doing agricultural work, although I'm not about



to become a peasant, you could see what you were doing. You harvested olives, you saw them. You felt them. There was a product right there. Which, when you're writing papers, when you have a paper in hand, that doesn't feel the same. It isn't the same immediate result. And I really didn't want to come back. I wanted to take time off. But, I had gone on a ticket, an airplane ticket, that if I didn't go back when it was stated, then the ticket would be invalid for three months, and then I could come back. The problem with that was that my aunt was having heart surgery, and none of us thought she would survive it, and I didn't want to be not able to come back if she died. (KR: Yeah...) So, I came back. And I came back to discover, that there had been flooding, there had been vast amounts of rain over the summer, and all my belongings that were stored in the basement of Emery, had been destroyed. The people who had been in the States during the summer, were notified, and could come up and pull their stuff out. Because I was away - I don't know why they didn't get in touch with my parents, but they didn't - everything was moldy. So, here I was, back when I didn't want to be back, I had to throw out vast amounts of stuff, and I went to some faculty fellow function feeling miserable, absolutely miserable. And, Bruce saw immediately that something was wrong. He came over and chatted, and I said that I was really upset, and I was gonna get a lawyer, because I thought that it was negligent, and so on and so forth. Of course I didn't have a case, because they made sure to say that nothing was their responsibility. All I could get out of them was dry cleaning my winter coat, and even that didn't work. It was a real disaster. And about a week later, I ran into Bruce again in the hall, and he remembered me. And I thought, this is a special person. He had met however many hundreds of people, who were living in the dorm - he and his wife didn't live there - but he really cared. And, one point during my senior year, I had a friend, I still have a friend, who was drinking too much. I was very worried about her. And I went to him, and I said "I'm afraid that if I say anything, she's gonna think I'm abandoning her the way she thinks that everybody else has abandoned her. But, I'm really worried. Give me advice." And he did. And he was always willing to spend time. And I, you know I didn't do any Classics, it had nothing to do with having that, he's just a wonderfully decent human being. So there were certainly, in that sense ... mentors are the right word (KR: No...) for that relationship. Certainly people I could turn to for support. I had one female grad student, two actually, freshman year... a woman who taught Chinese, and a woman in the history department whose name I don't remember, taught a course on economic regulation, or government regulation, or something like that, but it was definitely noticeable that there weren't very many women faculty members around... at Brown there weren't faculty members that were women. Not that there were none (KR: No. No.), but at that time the Louise Lamphere Case was going on. She sued for sex discrimination and won. It was actually settled eventually out of, they came to a settlement. Uh, uh ... she was right.

KR: Yeah. Did your being active at Sarah Doyle sort of made you aware, or have you always been aware of women's issues, because obviously, from your thesis...

ML: Well, certainly, that comes, I would say, in a direct line from my mother. She was definitely a feminist from the word "go". She started her career in 1942, when she graduated from college, and I don't think that there was ever a question, but that she was gonna work. And, they forced her to take some time off when my brother was born - well, actually that one wasn't forced, they went to India, on a Board Foundation Grant, and that was work, but it was work out of home. So, that was different, but when I came around, was the tail end of the McCarthy period, and they had relocated to Denver, where my father could get a job, but my mother couldn't, because the

only thing they would hire women for, was secretarial work. And, after sixteen years of being a professional, she wasn't about to become a secretary. (KR sighs). So, she didn't work for two years in Denver, and was miserable, she hated it. So, the feminism came naturally, although I didn't use the word for myself. That started, I remember, in eighth grade, writing a paper for biology class on different abortion techniques. So I was certainly conscious of women and women's rights, but I didn't use the term until a conversation with Jerry began, when Trinity Rep Theater was doing a production of *Hedda Gabler* which is an Ibsen play. But I saw, and he had seen it, and I knew he had seen it, he and his wife had a series subscription to the Trinity Rep, and I went in for a weekly meeting about the thesis, and I said that I saw?", and he said "How did you like it?", and I said "Oh, I thought it was wonderful!" And he said "Really? I'm very surprised." I said "Why?" And he said "Well, the woman is such a negative character. And you are such a feminist." The bell starter ringing, and I said "Well, yes - she is a negative character, but so are all the men." And he leaned back in his chair, and said "Well, I never thought of it that way". (ML laughs) But he used the word as a description of me, and it certainly fit, but it gave it a label that I hadn't used before.

KR: Hmm. So it seems like it was so ingrained in your family, it was just so understood that it wasn't the breaking away from tradition...

ML: No, not at all. It wasn't a struggle (KR: Yeah) Not at all.

KR: And, so. This is just curious, did you go abroad your junior year? Or were you at Brown for four years?

ML: I was at Brown for four years. I went to Israel for the summer, but that was it.

KR: Uh huh, and did you live on campus? (ML: Uh huh) Where did you live? Like you lived in Jameson freshman year?

ML: Jameson freshman year, the Grad Center sophomore year, because I had a terrible lottery number, assigned over the summer. Emery, junior year, and Andrews, senior year.

KR: Ah, so you lived on Pembroke campus for...

ML: By design because it was quieter, more civilized. (KR: Uh huh) And the rooms in Andrews were so wonderful. Big, sink is in the room.

KR: Yeah, so you had singles your junior and senior year? (ML: Yeah) Hmm, that privacy is usually important.

ML: Yeah it helps a lot. Especially when you're working on a thesis.

KR: Definitely. Now, after Brown, since we've concentrated kind of on Brown, things like that, how did you find out about the China program?

ML: It wasn't a program. It, I...

KR: Well, how were you invited?

ML: I was talking with old family friends about wanting to go to China, and ... the man of the family, had a colleague, who was very interested in China, and had been several times, he's a doctor, and the family friends said that he would speak to his colleague, and see what he could see. And I guess, several weeks later, he called me up, he the friends, and said "Call Helen Rosen." She, being the wife of the colleague. Sam Rosen tells me, that the Chinese are talking about hiring an American to go teach. Helen might be able to give you some advice. So, I called her up, and I didn't like the idea of using connections. That seemed an illegitimate approach. However, since I hadn't heard about any other approaches, I had tried a couple of companies that were talking about training with China, but since it was before diplomatic recognition, there was virtually nothing going on with Americans in China. So, I spoke to Helen, and she suggested that I write to a person at the liaison office in Washington, which was the predecessor to the embassy. So, I wrote in September of '78, and I heard nothing.

(Background noise. ML: Is that outside? 'Cause that thing is still charging ... KR: It's okay) I didn't hear anything, and every month I would send off another little note saying "I'm still here, and I'm still interested". And what I said in my letter was that I wanted to go to teach English. I would go anywhere, anytime, for any length of time. And, I had virtually no qualifications for this, except that I spoke English. I had done a little tutoring, I had taught flute, (another one of my extracurricular activities). But certainly I didn't have any teaching experience to speak of. At that point it didn't matter. The Chinese were more interested in getting friends, which means politically reliable people, who weren't gonna make trouble, than people with credentials in teaching. They found that they got some lunatics that way. They got some really activist, nutty politicians, who haven't realized that the Cultural Revolution was over...who didn't wanna teach, didn't know about teaching, and they had no problem, so they reversed. They went to the other extreme, which was to require that everybody had PhDs. Well, if you've got a PhD, and you've been teaching English Literature for twenty years, you don't necessarily wanna go to China, and A) Have students who can't do the level of work that you're accustomed to your students doing, and B) live in the physical setting that, at best is not very comfortable, and at worst is a lot worse than that. Ummm, but that's all later. In December, early December, of '78, I was working freelance, doing opinion research, and living with my parents. And I got home from work, and my mother was dancing around the apartment, saying that she had just gotten a fascinating phone call. And the phone call had proceeded like this: The phone rang, my mother answered it. And the voice said, "May I speak to Mr. Landman?", and my mother, thinking that this woman was referring to her husband, said, "He's not here right now, may I take a message?" My father, at that time, had some Japanese clients, so my mother thought it was a Japanese, until the voice said, "This is the Chinese mission," or Chinese liaison office. And, my mother said, "Oh, you mean you want to speak to my daughter, Miss Landman." Well, this went right over her head. But, the message was, "Be patient." I didn't know what that meant. And, if there's anything that makes me impatient, and I'm not the world's most patient person to begin with, is to be told to be patient. On the fifteenth of December, '78, Carter announced that embassies would be established, January first, '79. So we thought huh - maybe this has something to do with the "be patient." Diplomatic relations were restored on January first. On January fourth, I got a phone call saying, you have an invitation from the Foreign Express Bureau of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, to teach English at (?) teacher's college in (?) province, will you go?

Yes, of course. For two years. Fine. How do I get there? She said "I dunno, call a travel agent". Because I knew that there were no direct flights, so I literally didn't know how you would get there from here (They laugh). But, the travel agent was able to figure that one out, and three weeks later I left.

KR: Just got on a plane...

ML: Got on a plane.

KR: That's such a fun story. Could you go over it again?

ML: You like that story. Well, before I get there, my whole family was just excited to pieces about this, and everybody took time off from work, to take me to the airport; my brother, my parents. Went out to the airport, and I had not slept for the first week after getting the invitation. I was so excited, that every time I'd be almost drifting off to sleep, a little voice would go through my head (whispers: You're going to China), and I would be completely awake and absolutely sleepless, to the point where I was totally exhausted and felt horrible, but I still couldn't sleep. But I got to the airport, or we got to the airport, and went through check-in, and passport control, and they took me to the gate, and I turned around to wave goodbye, and they had disappeared already. And I sort of stood there, and it was a JAL flight, so everybody was Japanese, and they were all men and I looked around, and I thought "What am I doing?" And then I said: Now, get a hold of yourself, sit down, be dignified. And that was the end of my moment of weakness. Well, when I got home, three and a half years later, my mother said, that when they saw me walk through, and there was this little thing looking very young, she just shook her head, and she said "How is she going to do it?" (She laughs). So, I think we were both having the same thoughts from slightly different perspectives. The story that you wanted was, I got to the airport in Beijing, the capital airport, having flown from Tokyo, on a virtually empty plane. There were six other passengers, and everybody else had disembarked, gone away, and I was standing there surrounded by my suitcase and typewriter, and a couple of other things. And I had been assured by the woman at the, at that point, embassy, that someone would be there to meet me, but I didn't know who, and I didn't know where to go in case the someone wasn't there. They knew that my final destination was (?), but I had no idea how I was supposed to get there, where I was supposed to stay in the meantime. Finally a woman came running up to me, and said something incredibly fast, that I didn't understand at all, and she said then in halting English, "May I see your passport?" So I showed her my passport, and she called out to three other people who were waiting in, a little behind her (ML speaks in Chinese) ... which means, "It's not a man, it's a woman". They had assumed from my last name, the last syllable of which is man, that I would be one.

KR (laughs): That's great. What a riot. So then from there they took you on a bus to...

ML: They took me into town, to the Friendship Hotel, which is where long-term, invited professionals live, as opposed to diplomatic types, and newspapermen - they live in a different section of town., ...and I stayed there for about ten days. The other American who was going to go to (?) also, arrived about a week after I did. And then, in early February, we went by train to

(?), which was about, on a special express, as opposed to an express, a nine-hour train ride. Four hundred and fifty miles, southwest of Peking.

KR: And so, you'd had six years of Chinese? (ML: Yup.) Yeah, wow. Did you feel prepared once you got into it?

ML: Well, prepared in what way? (they laugh) ummm...in a sense, I was fortunate, because I didn't really have a preconceived notion of what I was getting myself into. I had studied primarily Modern China, which is different from contemporary China. Modern China goes, usually, from the Opium War, 1840 to 1949. I had done a little bit of post '49 stuff, but I thought since China had been closed, people really didn't know what they were talking about, when they were talking about contemporary China, and I'd probably get some arguments if I said that to some of the people who were teaching it. But I really thought that so much of the information was so biased, either ridiculously anti-communist, so you couldn't figure out what the reality was, or so gung ho that it had to be off the scale of reality also. So, I went, not knowing really what I was going to encounter, which in some ways is a very good way to go. I had the historical background, I had the foundation of the language, although it took me a while to catch onto native speech, which happens a lot faster, and more colloquially, than classroom foreign language instruction. Ummm, the biggest shock, and it sounds stupid in retrospect, was the poverty. It's a terribly poor country. And, I was in the fourth largest city of a poor province. And, cities have money according to size. So, being in the fourth largest city meant that it was the fourth in terms of wealth as well. And how did that manifest itself? I arrived in early January, when the temperatures are in the high twenties and low thirties, and there was no heat. People had coal stoves, but they were afraid that we would asphyxiate ourselves, which we probably would have, with coal stoves. There were a couple of radiators that were occasionally warm enough that your hand didn't stick when you touched them, because they were so cold. In the whole city, there was no refrigerator, which you didn't need in January and February, but to give you an idea of the level of the poverty; there was electricity most of the time. There was no hot running water any place. There was occasionally cold running water some places. A third of the population, and this is a province in 1979, that has 70 million people, a third of the population got frostbite every year, including me, so that was a shock. The diet was atrocious. We think of Chinese food as being sumptuous banquets, but if you eat the way the Chinese eat...sumptuous banquets it isn't. It's in the North corn porridge, which is a nasty sort of mush, literally, made of ground corn, wheat products, 'cause a lot of wheat is grown in that area. Mostly noodles, and steamed bread, which is called mantou, which I quite liked. Most people find it leaden. Also, steamed things made of corn that are hard to translate, pickled vegetable, which means pickled turnip. Heavily salted, incredibly salty and cabbage. Cabbage with turnips, were the food from October-November, to the harvest, April-May. Now, they insisted on giving us meat. I didn't eat meat, but because there wasn't much else, I ate it. Actually, I tried not to eat it, except at banquets when it would've been offensive to say no, until I got hepatitis, and then I'm at the hospital, and the doctor said, "If you persist in not eating meat, because we have so few other protein sources, you're not gonna get better." That was easy. (KR laughs) There was very little decision in that one. On the other hand, people's spirits, didn't reflect the poverty. That is, people were happy and sad and laughing and crying the way everybody else does, but physically, there's nothing to be said for poverty. It's very unpleasant, very literally painful. People who lived in rooms with northern exposures, the students, had cracked, bloody hands, because of the frostbite. It was

really horrifying. And at first I was furious. Why does everybody take this passively? Why don't they do something? But what are they supposed to do? It's a whole country, with vast numbers of people and inadequate resources. The fact that people were surviving, who were basically healthy, was an enormous accomplishment, which isn't to say that there aren't lots of problems with China, but it's a very complicated situation.

KR: So you were there for two years and then...

ML: I was there for two and a half years, then I came back for the summer, and then I went back another year.

KR: You must've felt a lot of culture shock, I mean going, and coming, especially coming back. And (They laugh. ML: Yup) What affected you the most, do you think, when you were coming back and trying to get adjusted?

ML: I had a very hard time, when I came back. I guess the first hint that I would have trouble, was after we'd been in China for a year, we had a winter vacation that coincided with the Chinese New Year, and I went to Hong Kong, where I'd never been before, but we had old family friends. And, at first, I hated it. It's so commercial. You walk down the street, everything shrieks "Buy." And after four or five days resisting it, being incredibly tense, I said: Wait a minute, this is ridiculous. You're here to have fun, to relax. Enjoy it. Don't take everything so seriously. Which was fine for the remaining ten days, or whatever it was that I was in Hong Kong. But when I got back to the U.S, which is a very commercial place, and an exceedingly rich place, I was very uncomfortable in a lot of ways. An old friend of my brother's his, one of his freshman year roommates, took me out to dinner, which was a lovely thing, I'm not knocking that, but we went to a very expensive French restaurant. Kenny is a lawyer. He was working at the time for a big New York law firm, making oodles of money. I 'm sure far more than I've made, all combined, he made in one year. And I noticed that my menu didn't have any prices on it, and I thought, "My, this is peculiar." Then I leaned over and looked at his menu, and almost died when I saw the prices, because the meal that we were going to eat - one bottle of wine, appetizer, main course, dessert was gonna cost a hundred dollars, which in 1982, especially, seemed like a hell of a lot of money, seems like it now, too, and I'm thinking to myself, there are people in this city, meaning New York, who are trying to live on this for a week. And here there's someone who can spend it in one evening, and not even think about it...

(End of Tape 1, Side 2)

The saying was, that the inequities that, in some ways, had propelled me to go to China, were even more noticeable upon my return, Added to that was the fact that I didn't have a job, that I was back living with my parents, after three and a half years of being very much on my own, and while they certainly had no wish to interfere, it wasn't an ideal arrangement.

KR: Did you have a, while you were over in China, did you have any one person you could really talk to, just really...frustrations...

ML: Well, there was the other American, who was there. I think that if we had been in any other situation, we would never have become more than acquaintances, but given that situation, we became very close friends. It got complicated when he began to get involved with the woman who is now his wife, who was one of our students. The Chinese don't have a category of friendship, between single males and single females that is not leading to marriage. So, she had a very hard time with our friendship. And then he made the decision that since he was gonna spent the rest of his life with her, and not with me, he had to go by what she was comfortable with, and very considerably cut me off - which was not wonderful. It was very painful. And there was no place I could go with that, because, I wasn't gonna sort of spill the beans to the Chinese community, I did write, there were some Americans in other cities, one woman in particular in (?), in north east China to whom I wrote about this stuff. But I was afraid that mail would be opened, and I really didn't want to cause trouble for these two, because they were gonna have enough trouble getting permission to get married ...

KR: Did letters...

ML: I had Chinese friends, but this was a subject that I wasn't going to discuss with them, because I didn't want people to have to take sides, between the two Americans. That would have been very...

KR: You mentioned that in college, you kept up an active correspondence with your parents. How did, did this change or with the...

ML: Oh no! It continued. Ummm, we have volumes of mail. We saved everything too. We wrote pretty much once a week, and I wrote to everybody. I just, that's what the typewriter was for, because my handwriting was abominable, and for airmail stationary, you don't want to torture people with handwriting. Ummm, and in fact, some of them were suspicious Chinese, thought that we were spies because we were writing so much. Didn't occur to them that we'd be a little smarter than to write everything if we were spies, but that's. (KR laughs) But I wrote mammoth amounts. And, I sometimes felt that I ought to be careful what I wrote so that I didn't get people into trouble. I wasn't worried about myself, because the worst they could do to me was throw me out, but I was worried about Chinese friends, who had made the decision to confide in me. And, they couldn't leave, so if they got into trouble because I opened my mouth, that was a real problem. And that was when we, that really is one reason that I left when I left, because I felt I had a responsibility to my Chinese friends, not to harm them, but I had a responsibility to myself, for my own sense of integrity, that when I was outraged by something I wasn't gonna keep quiet about it.

KR: Yeah. So when you came back to the United States, is sort of a jump. Looking over your resume, you've changed jobs a lot. Like well, not a lot (She laughs), but quite a bit. Going back to China, and to CVS, and uh, and then working in New York. What do you fi...what did you find was your most interesting, or most challenging, like job or, what you're doing now...?

ML: Oh boy, um .....That's a hard one. Well, for a non-job,. I would say that the most interesting, challenging thing that I've done since I've been back was being on the Union Negotiating Committee, for the First Contract of the Columbia support staff - which was quite an

astounding experience. The support staff, probably here too, but certainly at Columbia, is seventy-something percent women, and about fifty percent minority, and stepped all over by the university. Columbia is a very White, male institution, and the attitude toward the support staff was, and is disgusting. To get to the point -- their lawyer, who negotiated for the "management side", actually came out and said, "We're not gonna be pushed around by a bunch of secretaries."

KR: Okay...

ML: So, when we went out on strike, which they didn't believe we'd ever do, and we got about eighty percent on strike, which is a very high percentage, we got a very good contract. The feeling that women and minorities could get together, when they were in the bottom of the heap, at that university, and it's a very powerful institution, and say "Wait a minute, we're not gonna put up with this anymore, was an incredibly exhilarating experience. And, while I, personally, felt exploited in my previous job at the Center for U.S. China (?) Exchange, it was not a personal, urn, effort. There were people there who were a lot worse off than I was. They were hiring in 1984, the minimum salary of ninety-six hundred dollars. Can't live on that in New York City. And at one point, we were at a Student Information Meeting, and students were very apathetic, they didn't give a damn ... the only thing they cared about was that maybe the libraries would be closed down if we went out on strike. But, otherwise, they didn't want to hear about it, they didn't want to get involved. And, finally I stood up and I said "I just want you to remember one thing." I said "Columbia is paying its staff, less than what you pay in tuition." And there was a silence, and then people began to nod. There's something very wrong with that. That took an enormous amount of time, because union organizing, by its very nature is slow, and Columbia fought the whole way - took it to the National Labor Relations Board, to try to get it blocked. It went on for ten years, and I wasn't involved in it for ten years, but that was quite an astounding experience.

KR: And when was that settled?

ML: '85. (KR: 85?) October, '85.

KR: And so, what, what about this going to school part-time and full-time. How did you work that?

ML: I worked full-time, I went to school part-time, took two courses per semester, and I did all the union stuff. (KR: Uh huh.) And, I didn't do much else. (KR laughs) Except that for some of that time, the spring of '85, my father lost his sight in one eye, and was in the hospital three times. So, that wasn't a great several months. It was really quite miserable, 'cause when he was in the hospital, for a few weeks after each operation, I would go to their house, their apartment every day. I'd go to their house, their apartment every day. So, that was not a good time.

KR: Must've been really hard. (ML: Yeah.) So, what, what kind of course work, focusing on China, or...

ML: No. I decided that I really needed to expand beyond China. That while China fascinated me and I adored it, and I would always be interested in it, I didn't want to be limited to China. The



International Affairs Program at Columbia; Functional specializations, and regional specializations. The Regional specializations and East Asia, Latin America, African Institute ... Western Europe, Soviet Union, Central Asia... I'm missing one. But, that gives you the idea. The Functional specializations are international finance and banking, international political economy, media and communications, economic and political development, et cetera, et cetera. I chose economic and political development, about why China had developed the way it had. And while I'd always been a pretty political spirit, China convinced me that everything is political. And, I wanted to understand more of that. So, I really went to graduate school wanting intellectual inquiry. The program in international affairs, at least at Columbia, and probably other places, can't make up its mind whether it wants to be an academic degree, or a vocational degree. So it doesn't really, I think, do either very well. So, economic and political development to me, is a theoretical approach to things, the "hows" and "whys" of political development, economic involvement, modernization - whatever that means. But, some people go into it wanting to learn how to fill out the form that A.I.D. requires for projects, and project management, whatever that may be. I took a whole course in it, I still don't know what it is. So in trying to meet those demands, you get a very funny hodge-podge. I think that the people who do the regional specializations, in some ways are more satisfied, because at least a region has some kind of discreet character to it. Latin America means something. East Asia means something. Whereas, these international, political economies, well... I did not like my graduate work at all. That isn't to say that there weren't some terrific courses, there certainly were. But, after Brown, where there were no general requirements, and the departmental requirements seemed very sensible to me, I don't remember what they were, but they were perfectly acceptable. At Columbia, they require enormous amounts. Now, the administration would dispute that, they would say "Yes, we have a requirement, but you can take any of five courses to fulfill them." To my mind, a lot of the requirements were garbage. But where was only part time, I didn't really notice it. I flew in for class, I dashed up to the office, did the work, was always panicking that I was gonna fall behind. And, didn't really think about it as a coherent whole. But, then I got a fellowship that allowed me to go full-time. I was taking four courses, and I was miserable. I was inutterably unhappy. And I said something has got to be done. And I went in, and I talked to a dean... nice guy, and I said "I'm miserable, absolutely miserable". He said "What do you mean?", and I said "What I just said. When I was sixteen years old, I was making my own decisions on what I wanted to study, and here you're telling me I have to take this and I have to take that. I'm not interested in it, it has nothing to do with why I'm at Columbia. What do I do?" He said, "Well, write us a proposal that is intellectually reasoned, about why you wanna take this and not that, and design your own specialization". So I said "Okay", and I went home, and by this time I had, I was about to complete the first full-time semester. So, I only had one more semester to go. And I really didn't wanna take stuff I didn't wanna take. So, I looked through all the courses I had taken, which included Soviet Foreign Policy, and American Political Process, and all sorts of great things that I had taken because I was interested in them, and I managed to weave some kind of logical connection through them, which I'm not sure is actually there, but I ended up with them waiving the two courses that I really didn't want to take, and substituting courses that I did want to take, and low and behold, my second semester was a much happier time. And perhaps if I had done the whole thing the way most people do, as a full-time two-year program, I would have discovered after the first semester that I had to do my own concentration, specialization. I would've had three good semesters, versus one bad one. But the way I did it, it ended up seeming like one absolutely horrendous semester, and one good one.

KR: Okay, just to, just to wrap up ...Yeah, just to wrap up, as far as personal, personal... ...you're single. (ML: um hum) And, how does this fit into, do you have any long-term plans, or any kind of vague ideas of partnership or pressures, or...

ML: (Laughs) The pressure comes when I see everybody going off two-by-two. I go to two or three weddings every summer, and I certainly notice that I'm not married. Marriage in itself, doesn't seem a goal to me. I would like the intimacy, the coming home at the end of the day and sharing what went on during that day, but I'm not pining. I have a very full life. I'm active, I have lots of friends. As for children, maybe. I'm more and more encouraged by the people I know who had their first child at forty, or forty-two. It makes me feel as though I still have some time. To say that I don't have to worry about it right now. I'll turn thirty in January, so I still have some time.

KR: What are your reactions to the Harvard-Yale study which supposedly says that women, as they get older, decrease fast...

ML: Well of course ...you can play with statistics all you want. What they failed to ask was of those people who remain single, how many of them wanted to? And that seems to me a rather crucial question. They also were asking about marriage. Lots of people are not married, but they're involved with somebody, and for all intents and purposes they're married. So, I think that study had a lot of flaws.

KR: Uh huh. (Laughs) Okay, and so what about...is there anything more that you would like to say (ML laughs) Goals ... or, if you want to go back over anything, memories that we've maybe...?

ML: I'm sure I've left lots out...but that's ok...

KR: Okay, well let's stop now, I'm sure you have other things...I want to thank you.

ML: You're very welcome.