

Transcript – Katherine Perkins '32

Narrator: Katherine Perkins
Interviewer: Heather Campbell
Interview Date: November 19, 1982
Location: Bristol, RI
Length: 1 audio track; 58:31

Heather Campbell: [00:00] This is Heather Campbell interviewing Katherine Perkins, at her home in Bristol, on November 19th, 1982. Miss Perkins attended Pembroke College from September, 1928, until June, 1932, upon receiving her AB degree.

HC: OK, let's start with some background. Your home was in East Providence, is that where you went to primary school?

Katherine Perkins: Yes, I did.

HC: And what do you remember of those days?

KP: Oh, I started at the age of six. I remember adoring my first-grade teacher, especially on a cold, wintry day when she saw me looking at my chapped hands and said, "Come down here," and had me sit in her lap and put my hands in her black fur muff.

HC: How lovely. Did you know then what career you wanted to follow?

KP: [01:00] Yes, I was in the fourth grade when I decided that I wanted to be a teacher.

HC: Oh, that's early. And you lived in East Providence. Is that why you decided to choose Pembroke?

KP: Yes, it was some economics.

HC: Did you know any family or friends who'd attended the university?

KP: My brother attended. He was a senior when I was a freshman.

HC: Oh, that's nice. And he lived at home, as well?

KP: Yes, he did.

HC: And what was his subject?

KP: Engineering.

HC: So, did you meet up for classes at all?

KP: Oh, heavens no.

HC: No?

KP: [laughter] He was over there. I was over here.

HC: Right. Did you have any other brothers or sisters?

KP: Not who went to Brown. No, my oldest brother went to University of Michigan. And my next older brother, older than I, went to [02:00] Rhode Island School of Design.

HC: Oh. Were both your parents alive when you started at Pembroke?

KP: Oh, yes, mm-hmm.

HC: And did they influence your reason for going there?

KP: I suppose so. Not consciously, but both of them were teachers.

HC: So they approved of women's education?

KP: Yes, mm-hmm.

HC: Your father was a teacher. Was he a teacher in this area? Was it the university?

KP: Yes, he was assistant principal of the high school in East Providence.

HC: The one that you went to?

KP: That I attended, mm-hmm.

HC: Oh, gosh having your father as the headmaster. [laughter] And your mother?

KP: And she had taught in Connecticut before she was married. And then, of course, she did not teach except at home, when she was unconsciously teaching us -- or consciously. [laughs]

HC: [03:00] Right. Were either of your parents involved in the First World War?

KP: No.

HC: No?

KP: No.

HC: Did you receive any scholarship or financial aid to go to Pembroke?

KP: I did, in my freshman year.

HC: That was as a scholarship?

KP: Yes.

HC: And the fees are considered high now. Were they considered high then, as well?

KP: Yes, I was noticing in our history from our reunion that we just had, that it was \$300 when we entered in September of 1928.

HC: Is that a term? A semester?

KP: No, that was a year.

HC: A year? [laughs]

KP: Three-hundred.

HC: Oh, and was that high in comparison to other local colleges?

KP: Oh, yes.

HC: Yes? It always was high?

KP: Yes, yes.

HC: And what educational requirements were necessary to get into Pembroke?

KP: Well, [04:00] we had certain foreign-language requirements at Pembroke. I think we had to have four years of a modern language and also Latin. At least I had four years of Latin, and I had three years of French and two years of Spanish. And I'm not exactly sure how much of that was required and how much was excess.

HC: So when you applied, were you applying to do languages?

KP: No.

HC: I mean, did you specify...?

KP: Well, I knew that I was going to, but that was, you know, the general requirements were the same for everyone.

HC: Were the requirements the same for men and for women, do you know? The entrance requirements?

KP: Yes, I think so. Yes.

HC: Brown is now considered as one of the best American universities. Did Pembroke [05:00] have that reputation in the 1920s, '30s?

KP: I think it was close. I'm sure that Smith College, Wellesley, Vassar, and Mount Holyoke rated higher than we did. We were not really stepchildren, but we hadn't quite made it with [inaudible].

HC: Let's go on, now, to your first days at Pembroke. Do you remember Dean Morriss's arrival, or was she there when you arrived?

KP: Oh, she was there, yeah, yes.

HC: And did you go to any of her Sunday evening suppers?

KP: Yes, I remember going to one.

HC: What were they like?

KP: Very formal, very stiff. And it was an experience. I wouldn't say I enjoyed it.

HC: No, no. Did you find her rather strict, very motherly?

KP: [06:00] I found her very cold. Oh, definitely not motherly. I'm sure she didn't ever want to have that image.

HC: Definitely a career woman?

KP: Yes.

HC: She believed, and I quote, that "laziness was rampant" at that time. [laughter] And she said that she thought it might have been caused by the turmoil of the times. Would you agree with that? Did you think that you were a lazy lot?

KP: No, I don't think we were. We all thought we worked very hard. [laughter]

HC: I'm sure. The campus now and the campus then are obviously very different. Which university buildings that are still standing did you use? Or do you remember?

KP: Well, of course, University Hall was there. And the whole rank of buildings between Brown Street and George, [07:00] and down to Thayer Street. Faunce House was added, I think, just about my early years there. But that quadrangle bounded by Thayer, Prospect, George, and Waterman was pretty much formed.

HC: Were those buildings used by Brown and Pembroke students?

KP: Yes, yes.

HC: Whilst at Pembroke, did you have to take a part-time job in order to support yourself?

KP: Yes, I was already working as an assistant in the local library in East Providence during my high-school days. And so, I [08:00] did do that.

HC: And how often did you do that?

KP: Usually on Saturdays, and then some evenings, depending on my schedule and on their needing me.

HC: Do you remember your wages? [laughs]

KP: No, I don't. Maybe I got 50 cents an hour.

HC: Oh, goodness. [laughter] What do you remember about your Freshman Week, with any events that took place?

KP: During Freshman Week?

HC: Yes.

KP: Yes, there was sort of an impressive service in the chapel, in Alumnae Hall. And then, a picnic up in Lincoln Woods that, I think, the Women's Athletic Association may have arranged, and that our seniors sort of chaperoned us for. [09:00] And that was very enjoyable and relaxing and casual.

HC: Presumably just females?

KP: Oh, definitely.

HC: Yes, [laughter] no frolicking in the woods.

KP: No. [laughs]

HC: Let's go on to the more serious -- the moral situation of being a female at college in the 1920s and '30s. Presumably, good behavior and decorum were considered very important. Do you think they were considered as important as academic merit?

KP: No, I don't think so. No, I think that the academic was really stressed more than...

HC: Were you restricted on what sort of clothing that you could wear?

KP: There was no dress code as such. I think you simply wore what you saw other people wearing. [10:00] And it was not as casual as it became in later years. And, according to the pictures in our yearbooks, at least if we were having our picture taken for something, we dressed as if we were going to church.

HC: What sort of dancing was allowed on campus? Was there any restriction on that? The 1920s Charleston and dances like that -- were they allowed on campus?

KP: Yes.

Q Really?

KP: Mm-hmm.

HC: Would you have described yourself as a flapper, then?

KP: No, I wouldn't. [laughter] I may have had some yearnings in that direction, but I don't...

HC: Did you have your hair bobbed?

KP: Yes, I did.

HC: What about smoking and drinking? Was it considered fast for females to smoke and drink?

KP: Yes, we didn't [11:00] hear that much about drinking. Perhaps it went on in the dorms, but there was a smoking room you could smoke in -- the Commons Room in Alumnae Hall. And you did not smoke in class.

HC: No? Was there anywhere to get alcohol on campus?

KP: Not on campus, no, no. But, of course, Thayer Street was not far away.

HC: Right. Now, you lived at home whilst you were attending Pembroke. How did you travel to Brown?

KP: I usually went on the streetcar to Downtown Providence, and walked up the hill to classes. Although sometimes I would walk a couple of blocks in East Providence and get the -- I have to remember to say trolley car, because [12:00] you're apt to say bus -- and go over the East Side to Thayer Street.

HC: How long did that take you -- the journey?

KP: Oh, I guess that probably took 20 minutes, [probably?].

HC: Did you have much interaction with the live-in students, or was there a separation at all?

KP: No, well, there was a separation. Not that it was intentional, but simply that those of us who were commuters went to our classes, and if we were going to some other affair, we did and then we [laughs] went and got our buses or our streetcars.

HC: So there wasn't too much interaction on the whole?

KP: No, although you became friendly with the dorm students, because you sat with them in class and you walked back and forth.

HC: [13:00] Right. Let's go on to your actual education. What academic courses did you take?

KP: In my freshman year, I had an English course. I was excused from the regular freshman Composition course on the basis of an entrance examination. So, I never had the agony of the four themes a week that most students had. And so, I went into an English Literature class instead, that was set up for those of us who were excused. And then I had freshman Biology, and American History, French, Latin. English, Biology, [14:00] History... I think that was it -- the five subjects.

HC: And what about further on in your career?

KP: And then, the next year I continued with the English and the Latin, and I guess I had Psychology then. And Argumentation instead of a math course.

HC: Now what is Argumentation?

KP: It was supposed to [inaudible] debate. It was a huge mistake as far as I was concerned, although we had a marvelous professor for it -- Robert W. Kenny. But I was never any good at it.

HC: That's like debating?

KP: [overlapping dialogue; inaudible] and I should have taken math instead. [laughter]

HC: You said you took Biology. Were women encouraged then to take science courses?

KP: Oh, we had to. That was a requirement.

HC: [15:00] Oh, I see.

KP: Oh, yes.

HC: And did you take that with male students or separately?

KP: No, no, we were separated, because they were going to talk about such things as reproduction.

HC: Oh, of course. [laughter] So, at this point, you still knew that you wanted to languages as your career.

KP: Yes, mm-hmm.

HC: Any specific languages?

KP: Oh, French, although I got my degree in romance languages because my advisor suggested it would be a good idea, and I had added Italian and continued Spanish, which I already had from high school.

HC: And what did the grouping romance languages include?

KP: That would be French, Italian, and Spanish.

HC: I see. Romance languages -- a lovely name.

KP: Wasn't that a pretty [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]?

HC: How was the actual education system arranged? I mean, did you have lectures and seminars [16:00] as they do today?

KP: We had lectures in History and in Biology and in Sociology and Psychology. And then we had quiz sections once a week, with a discussion and testing.

HC: Did you have to be in at a certain time every morning?

KP: Well, yes, you had to be there for chapel four days a week.

HC: Oh, of course, yeah.

KP: And chapel was at 9:00. And if you had an early class -- and eight o'clock, of course --that ended at ten minutes of 9:00, so then you would run in, like a --

HC: I see, I see.

KP: -- something to get to chapel on time.

HC: And was the system based on credits as it is now?

KP: Yes.

HC: You counted up your credits?

KP: Yes.

HC: Did you attend courses at any other institution?

KP: [17:00] I took education courses at what is now Rhode Island College.

HC: And how did they compare academically?

KP: Oh, Rhode Island College did not have the standing of Brown University then, although it has come up considerably since then.

HC: What was your ultimate favorite subject? The most favorite?

KP: It was actually French.

HC: It was French?

KP: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

HC: Did you find the work hard?

KP: I did find the work hard. It depended on... Well, that's very hard to answer. High school had been a breeze, and I was not prepared for [18:00] the type of course that we were having. I didn't feel prepared, and I was sort of a very shy person, so I didn't speak up.

HC: Right. Did you have exams or take-homes? I mean, did you have your exams to take home, or did you have to go in...?

KP: Oh, no, that was a much, much later development.

HC: And did you have them every term?

KP: Oh yes, yes.

HC: What happened if you failed?

KP: It was very painful. [laughter]

HC: OK. What happened if you failed?

KP: Well, you either repeated the subject or you substituted something else that was acceptable as an equivalent.

HC: Did you take any honors courses?

KP: No, I didn't.

HC: Women were allowed to?

KP: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

HC: Did that make the course longer, if you took [19:00] an honors course?

KP: I wouldn't say it was any longer, but it was more concentrated I think. More was required of them.

HC: So you didn't attend any lectures with male students, for anything?

KP: In my junior and senior years, the Advanced French courses -- yes, some of those were co-ed.

HC: Were all your teachers female?

KP: No, no, no.

HC: They were mixed?

KP: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

HC: Which did you prefer?

KP: I wouldn't be able to say definitely one or the other. I liked some of the women instructors, and I liked some of the men.

HC: Did you have a favorite teacher?

KP: [20:00] No, I don't think so.

HC: Or a most-hated teacher? [laughter]

KP: Yes, my History professor.

HC: Really?

KP: He was freshly out of Harvard, and he conducted the class as if it were graduate school, and it was only a sophomore course and I was a freshman. And there were only two freshmen in the class. We didn't like him.

HC: On the whole, what did you think of the academic standard of the teaching?

KP: Of that one? No, of teachers in general?

HC: Yes.

KP: With a couple of exceptions, I would say they were excellent. There were a couple, as one would find anywhere, who seemed [21:00] not too well-prepared, and who would substitute something else for the...

HC: Nowadays, we often get graduate students teaching us. Was that the case in your day?

KP: We had graduate students in lab sections in Biology, I remember. No, I think we did not have any graduate students as such.

HC: Looking back, do you think that students then had to work harder than students now, since you're still in the academic profession? [laughter]

KP: No, I suppose not. We thought we were overworked, but I'm sure we weren't.

HC: Let's go on to more of your social life. [22:00] What extracurricular activities did you become involved in? Any sports?

KP: I never made a team. I remember fistball and bowling, and tennis was part of the requirement.

HC: You had to play tennis?

KP: Well, we had spring sports and fall sports and winter sports. And tennis was a spring sport.

HC: And you had to take part?

KP: Well, yes. Perhaps we had a choice, but I did take tennis. And as I may have mentioned, I never became very expert at it, because the instructor found out I was left-handed. They suggested I go off in a corner and hit balls against the fence. [laughter]

HC: The bowling that you mentioned -- presumably that's outdoor bowling.

KP: No, that was indoors, [23:00] in the Pembroke gym. There were bowling alleys in the basement, and so, we could go bowling whenever we had free time.

HC: And, I mean, bowling with skittles rather than the old-fashioned type of bowling?

KP: I don't understand. I've forgotten what skittles are. This was a bowling ball of that size. It was not like the modern ones, but it was about that size. Now, I've forgotten what skittles...

HC: Well, was the point to knock things down?

KP: Yes, yes, [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

HC: That's what I'd call skittles.

KP: Then, well, yes, yes.

HC: Right, so it's like 10 pins.

KP: Yes.

HC: Any other extracurricular activities? Any associations?

KP: Well, I went to the French Club a few times. I did not become an active member, mainly because of my [24:00] scheduling.

HC: What about, do you particularly remember attending any notable lectures or readings by famous people?

KP: Yes, Vachel Lindsay came, I think it was during my freshman year, and also Carl Sandburg. Ethel Barrymore was in town. I think she did not come to the campus, but we all went to see her at the local opera house.

HC: And what is this that you're looking at? The Pembroke --

KP: Well, I thought I remembered -- a couple of the notables were mentioned here.

HC: In the Pembroke Class of 1932?

KP: Yes, this was our reunion booklet, that was made up for this class.

HC: Oh, I see. [25:00] The alumnae reunion.

KP: Yes, and there are a few here. There was a little history of important events, but don't let me [brush the thing?].

HC: OK, what about any acting performances? Do you remember any of those, by famous actors? Did you go to any theatrical performances?

KP: Oh, yes, yes, we used to go downtown to the theater.

HC: Was that still called the Trinity then?

KP: Oh, no, no, that didn't come into being until the 1960s, I think.

HC: So what was it called then? Same place?

KP: No, no. No, it wasn't the same place. There were two or three theaters that had [26:00] live theater. I can't think of the names.

HC: What about authors? Who were your favorite authors that you read most of and enjoyed? Can you remember?

KP: I know Thomas Hardy was not a favorite, even though I had to read a great deal of him. I did a lot of reading, but it seemed to me that I just picked and chose, but I couldn't concentrate on specific authors.

HC: Mm-hmm. Did you read many books in foreign languages since languages was your forte?

KP: No, I think I read what was required in a foreign language. And then, I didn't have the leisure to do much addition until much later.

HC: What about your [27:00] private social life as opposed to your organized social life? When you came back home, did you have friends...?

KP: Yes, our family was, you know, quite involved in church activities. My father was a deacon of our church, and we had been brought up in church. So, the young people's group, and we had, you know, little drama groups, and various activities.

HC: Which church was yours?

KP: That was the Congregational church in East Providence.

HC: Boyfriends -- did you have any boyfriends whilst you were at college?

KP: No, that was a long period without, as I recall. An occasional tennis date, or [28:00] double-dating with one of my brothers and his girlfriends. Nothing very serious.

HC: Were they students at Brown at all?

KP: No.

HC: No? Did you find there was much mixing between the male students at Brown and the female students at Pembroke?

KP: Oh, I'm sure there was a great deal more than people thought, because it was generally considered that Brown men would not go out with Pembroke [inaudible]. Had to go elsewhere.

HC: [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

KP: Yes. [laughter]

HC: They say that marriage and a career do not go together.

KP: Yes.

HC: What do you think?

KP: I don't believe that at all. Do you?

HC: No, not at all. [laughter] To go on to more serious topics, to touch on political, religious, and racial feelings at the time, presumably the majority [29:00] religion at Brown as Christian.

KP: Yes.

HC: Were other religions accepted and catered for in terms of services?

KP: I would say they were not catered for. There was an Indian swami, Akhilananda, who had a headquarters -- I don't know what you would call it -- on Angell Street, just below Thayer -- and the Vedanta Society, it was called.

HC: Is that where the church still exists?

KP: Does it still exist?

HC: Yes.

KP: Oh, [laughter] all right, that was there in our day.

HC: And what about the voluntary attendance at chapel? Were all religions supposed to attend chapel?

KP: Yes.

HC: So even if you were Jewish you would still be expected to attend chapel?

KP: Yes, yes. I suppose you could pray in your own way. You weren't required [30:00] to adhere to the...

HC: Did you exceed your normal allowance of cuts for chapel?

KP: No, I was careful. I think I took all possible cuts, but I think I had it pretty well figured.
[laughter]

HC: Did you receive any mandatory religious instruction other than during chapel?

KP: No, no. There were religion courses, but I didn't take any.

HC: They were optional?

KP: Yes.

HC: Were there any black women in your class, or any...?

KP: Yes, there was one.

HC: Do you think there was any ill feeling about that?

KP: We were not conscious of any such feeling. She was in various classes and groups with us, and she was excellent at athletics. So she was [31:00] featured for that. But it wasn't until recently that we learned she actually felt discriminated against.

HC: Was she the only one in your whole class?

KP: Yes, and there were 140 of us who entered at that time.

HC: How involved were the students in the political climate of the time?

KP: There was an International Relations Club, and I don't know [inaudible] there were as many as 20 involved other than that. But because I wasn't interested in it. Not really.

HC: Did you remember anything of [32:00] the First World War? Did it affect you in anyway, or was this too late?

KP: The First World War?

HC: Yes, the First World War.

KP: Well, I was seven years old when the armistice was signed. I remember hearing my parents discuss it enough so that I recall having nightmares in which I thought the Germans were marching up our street -- that my father took us down to the basement and put my baby sister in her high chair, and the Germans marched up our driveway and down, and went off without any incident. So that's my earliest recollection.

HC: What about the Depression? That must have affected your college days.

KP: Yes, it definitely affected those days.

HC: In what way?

KP: Well, money was very tight. [33:00] And I did not, for instance, buy a yearbook my second nor third year at college. And I recall walking back and forth, not regularly but when I had time. I was more apt to walk home than to walk to class. And I learned to sew, and I've hated it many years since. [laughter] But I think I was necessary in order to have a little wardrobe.

HC: Right. What about the food on campus? Did you eat your meals on campus, or did you come home?

KP: No, I didn't come home, because there wasn't time. I seem to recall having an apple [34:00] and peanut butter crackers day after day.

HC: That you took with you, or you bought --

KP: Yes.

HC: That you took with you.

KP: Uh-huh. But I bought lunches occasionally at the cafeteria. I guess I took sandwiches from home, but that, if I didn't, I had an apple and peanut butter crackers that were --

HC: Ways of economizing again.

KP: Yes, mm-hmm.

HC: Can you remember what you felt then about the capability of President Hoover?

KP: I think I accepted my family's feeling about him, that he was a capable man who had done a great deal for the deprived, starving people abroad. [35:00] And that, therefore, he was a good choice for a president.

HC: Did you vote whilst you were at university?

KP: No, because I was 20 when I graduated, and therefore I had to wait until I was 21.

HC: Twenty-one was the age then.

KP: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

HC: What did you vote at 21, for your politics?

KP: Oh, I probably was Republican. It wasn't until later that I learned to split my ticket.

[laughter]

HC: Are there any specific news events that you remember from your days at college? Gangsters or the first flight, or the Ku Klux Klan -- anything like that?

KP: No, I don't remember about the -- well, we knew about the Ku Klux Klan, but I don't think it affected us. And the gangsters, of course, were [36:00] in Chicago, which was 1,000 miles away, so that was a bit distant. The Lindbergh baby kidnapping was in the news a great deal. And that was in New Jersey, and therefore that seemed quite close to us.

HC: Let's go on to talk a little about your fellow students. You said there was one black girl in your class.

KP: Mm-hmm.

HC: Were the rest all local inhabitants? Were there any foreigners or people from outside Rhode Island?

KP: Yes, there was a girl from Israel. And then, she was there the whole four years. I think she had a cousin over here, that's why she had come.

HC: Was English her first language, or was it Hebrew?

KP: Oh, Hebrew was her first language.

HC: [37:00] And she was the only foreigner student?

KP: I think so.

HC: Do you remember any of your students, I mean, particularly having admiration for them, or did they just stick out in your memory?

KP: Fellow students, you mean?

HC: Yes.

KP: Oh, yes, yes. Especially in that Advanced English class that we had as freshmen. I made some good friends then, mainly two or three who were part of the group of, say, 10 or a dozen who used to go to [outing?] house, where we went for weekends -- [inaudible].

HC: Did any of them achieve fame in the profession that they chose, that you know of?

KP: Well, [38:00] I can't say they achieved fame.

HC: You told me previously of some Hollywood actresses.

KP: That was in the next class after hours. That was the class of '33. Ruth Hussey and Dorothy Lovett both became Hollywood actresses.

HC: Did they concentrate on drama whilst they were at the school?

KP: Yes.

HC: Did any of your students marry whilst they were at college?

KP: Yes. One, I think, during her -- I think it was during her sophomore year, and then another one -- oh, a couple of them, I think, in their junior year, and another one at the beginning of her senior year. [39:00] There may have been others, but I can think of four or five.

HC: Did they continue with college after that?

KP: No.

HC: Oh, they all left?

KP: Mm-hmm.

HC: Were all the students roughly the same age, or were there any mature or graduate students who were older?

KP: In our particular class, I think we were all approximately the same age.

HC: Do you remember any incidents of lying or stealing or cheating whilst you were at college?

KP: No, I don't. I just don't remember any that affected us. We knew the terms, but I don't remember ever hearing anyone accused of...

HC: So you don't know how they would have been punished if anything like that happened. Nobody was expelled?

KP: I'm sure they would have been punished, but I can't think of any specific cases.

HC: No expulsions whilst you were there?

KP: There were a couple of cases where [40:00] people left, and it wasn't until much later that it occurred to me that perhaps they had flunked out, not just transferred to some other place.

HC: Being a woman at college, you were obviously very aware of the suffrage movement. Did you actively participate in that at all?

KP: No, I didn't. [laughter]

HC: What about your female teachers? Did you think they supported the movement?

KP: I don't recall that we ever had any information about whether they did or not. No one of them was militant, that I recall.

HC: Did you find that you were treated differently from the male students at Brown?

KP: I wouldn't have had enough opportunity to know. I think that, [41:00] as a group, we were treated differently because we didn't have the same opportunities that [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

HC: You didn't discuss it among yourselves as to unfair it was?

KP: Oh, we probably did, yeah.

HC: Presumably, you, yourselves, though that you were intellectually equal to men in those days.

KP: Of course. [laughter]

HC: What were your feelings about being one of the minority of educated females at the time?

KP: Oh, I don't think we ever considered ourselves a minority. It's just you went to college if you could. If you couldn't, then you did something else.

HC: What did you think about the school's name changing from Women's College to Pembroke College at Brown University?

KP: Oh, that was great. The other sounded so lengthy, so stiff.

HC: [42:00] Let's move on now to your last months at college. So your eventual subject major was languages, specifically French, and you received an AB degree. Did you get any help with your career choice whilst you were at university?

KP: None. I had an interview with Dean Morriss. We all did. And she asked me what I had planned to do, and when I told her she said, "Well, you are here for a cultural experience, not to learn to earn your living. That you will have to acquire elsewhere."

HC: That seems very surprising. So you had no help. Did they help you with job applications or...?

KP: [43:00] No.

HC: Nothing at all. Looking back, can you think of any one event that you would consider the most memorable of your years at college? That's a difficult one. [laughter]

KP: Yes, I think I've drawn a blank on that

HC: Nothing sticks out.

KP: I should just go back to what you said about jobs. The assistant dean, Dean Mooar, who was director of personnel, was helpful in summer-job applications. She was very helpful in that.

Perhaps she also was in some measure for real life jobs. I don't recall any assistance there. I remember sending out 40 applications [44:00] for teaching jobs myself.

HC: You said about summer jobs -- did you take summer jobs?

KP: Yes. After my freshman year, a number of us took jobs at Dean Mooar -- this was M-O-O-A-R -- at her suggestion, in summer hotels. And so, for three summers, I waited on tables at a hotel in Maine -- Kennebunk Beach. And I think there were a dozen or 15 students from different colleges in New England. And all of us who were waitresses were college students.

HC: That sounds like fun.

KP: Yes, it was, mm-hmm.

HC: So you left Pembroke in 1932 without a job to go to. What happened then?

KP: [45:00] Personal depression. [laughter] I continued to work in the library. And as I said, I put out 40 job applications, and the response to most of them was, "After you've had three years experience, get in touch with us again." Many of them, of course, did not even answer my application letters.

HC: Do you feel that might have been because you were a female [inaudible]?

KP: No, it was because of the times. It was --

HC: [overlapping dialogue; inaudible]. So, how long before you managed to find a job?

KP: So, it was a year and a half, and then it was not in teaching. My dentist suggested that I [46:00] go for an interview in social work, which had never had any interest for me at all. But that's what I did, and that's what I became -- a social worker for four years. The first seven months were volunteer work, and I furnished my own car and gasoline. And after seven months,

I got a paying job through the state unemployment relief setup, whatever it was called. And so, I did that for four years.

HC: And what did that entail?

KP: That was casework, going out and visiting families, discussing the case when I came back with my supervisor, [47:00] and coming to a decision about what would be done for the person or the family, and [inaudible] assistance. And it was very interesting. And by the time I finished, I thought I would stay in social work. But a job opening came up in my own field, in French. I decided that that's what I'd really better go back to.

HC: And why was that?

KP: That happened to be an opening right in my own town, in East Providence.

HC: Oh, so, you didn't have to move away from home.

KP: No, no, I had always planned to teach in the Boston area. But nobody in the Boston area wanted me. [laughter] So that is where I taught.

HC: And how long was that for?

KP: And I stayed with that job my entire teaching career, except for the one year that [48:00] I was an exchange teacher in England.

HC: Tell me about the year's exchange in England. Did you find the education system very different?

KP: Very, yes. For one thing, I was teaching in the senior high school here, and my assignment over there was to a secondary modern school, and it was all girls instead of mixed, which I had been accustomed to. And the age group was the equivalent of our junior high here, which

everybody agrees is a difficult age group. And I found it quite different, but a delightful year, because I made some good friends, did a great deal of traveling and moving about. And also the [49:00] requirements of the school perhaps were a little different for a foreign teacher. But I had a very light schedule, and very little preparation required outside school time. There was much more free time in my schedule, which of course was really delightful.

HC: Right. So when did you retire?

KP: I retired in 1972. I had taught for 35 years.

HC: So where did you get your [overlapping dialogue; inaudible].

KP: No, I had not taught for -- yes, I had taught for 35 years. Beg your pardon? So...?

HC: Where did you get your second degree in 1966?

KP: I got my second degree -- it was called Rhode Island College.

HC: [50:00] And that was '66?

KP: That was in '66.

HC: And that was a master of arts in teaching?

KP: That was a master of arts in teaching, yes.

HC: And what did that entail?

KP: Well, that was graduate courses in education and in French.

HC: How did you compare going back to the college in 1966 from when you went in 1928?

KP: Well, it wasn't going back, because I had been taking courses right straight along anyway. I spent one summer at the University of Wisconsin. That was in 1941. I also took French courses. And I did graduate work at Brown from '39 to '43. And would have had my master's degree from Brown, except that I did not write the thesis [51:00] after a year's [hassle?] with my advisor. And we never could come to an agreement on the subject of my thesis. And I tried the two subjects that he proposed. And he wouldn't agree to what I wanted to do. And eventually, I just gave up on that, although I had completed all the course requirements and the graduate exam and so on. So, that happened in '43. I still took some courses at Brown, however. And then, as I said, Wisconsin, and it was University of Michigan that I got my... After I got my [52:00] master's at Rhode Island College, that summer of '66 I was at the University of Michigan on an NDEA... Which is a National Defense Education Act, and that was a concentrated foreign-language course.

HC: So the actual degree came from Rhode Island.

KP: Yes.

HC: Although you went to many other universities in between.

KP: Yes. Plus, I studied in France. I studied one summer at the Sorbonne, and also down in Grenoble one summer, [53:00] and at Pau, down in the Pyrenees, [inaudible] in Bordeaux.

HC: And that was learning as opposed to teaching?

KP: Yes, because I was a student. So, that was at least three summers in France.

HC: You're retired now. How do you occupy your time now?

KP: [laughter] I think I run in circles, but I try to be fairly organized. I make lists every morning of things I must do, and I cross them off. I don't always get them all crossed off, but, no, I'm involved in fewer things than when I started. Are we running out?

HC: No, no, we're fine.

KP: No, I began by [54:00] volunteering at various times, such as driving, or an organization called FISH, which was actually organized -- originated in England. Now that's a volunteer organization of people who drive those who have no -- those who need it, to hospital and clinics and doctors' appointments.

HC: What does FISH stand for?

KP: It goes back to the old Christian symbol of fish as a group, helping, reaching out their hands to help others. The letters do not mean -- don't stand for any particular organization. But they had a setup in which [55:00] you gave one day a month or more if you had time, and the TDV -- the telephone duty volunteer -- would call you the day before and give you a schedule for the time and where you were to pick somebody up, and where you were to take them. And I did that for several years. And I also did quite a bit of church work. And then, gradually, I've been able to withdraw from as many as possible of these activities so that I'd have more freedom.

HC: Uh-huh. Anything else that you keep yourself busy doing?

KP: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I got a fitness class at the [56:00] Barrington Y. We do that for an hour session.

HC: And you still keep in contact with ex-Pembroke alumnae?

KP: Yes, yes. We meet once a year for a luncheon, and I also belong to the Pembroke Club. And we meet several times a year. And also, the Brown Street Series, which has an excellent program.

HC: What is the Brown Street Series?

KP: The Brown Street Series was organized about a half-dozen years ago, and has delightful programs. Sometimes it would be a lecture by somebody with an interesting topic. [57:00] More often, it would be entertainment.

HC: Uh-huh. And how often does that happen?

KP: It's not a definite setup. They probably won't start it until just before Christmas. They always have a nice Christmas party. And then, in the second semester, there'll probably be three or four sessions.

HC: And are you still in contact with anyone from your actual class, from '28? Or is it just Pembroke alumni as a whole? Are there other people there that you actually went to school with in 1928? Any fellow students?

KP: Yes, oh, yes.

HC: So they're actually from your class?

KP: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes, when I was on my way home from New Jersey, I stopped in Connecticut to call one of [58:00] my good friends from... And then, several others lived nearby, and then several near Providence.

HC: Well, we are running out of time now.

KP: Yes.

HC: So I'd like to thank you very much, indeed.

KP: Well, I'm sorry I've been so hesitant.

HC: Not at all.

KP: It's a little difficult to recall.

HC: Indeed. Thank you, very much.

KP: Oh, thank you.

- END -