

Transcript -- Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten, '55

Narrator: Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten

Interviewer: Mimi Pichey

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Track 1

Mimi Pichey: [00:00] -- We're going to give this thing a try and see if the tape is actually recording. This is Mimi Pichey, Brown Class of 1972 interviewing Sylvia Baumgarten. Do you go by your last name of -- or you go by Baumgarten? Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten. Brown Class of '55, in her home in New York City on East 12th Street. The date is July 6, 1988. Well, why don't we start off by asking you when you -- why you decided to attend Brown?

Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten: Well, as I think we were discussing before, my generation of women was relatively mindless; we did what we were told. And [00:01:00] my father being a strong father announced to me in I believe about March of my senior year in high school, "You will apply to," and then he listed Radcliffe and Wellesley and Smith and Bryn Mawr -- 14 schools in all he listed that I was to apply to, and I said, "OK, Daddy," and did so. Got 14 -- no, excuse me, 13 yeses. The one I really wanted was Wellesley and Wellesley put me on the waiting list. I got 13 yeses qualified, except for Pembroke. They all depended upon what we called then the afternoon boards, which I guess is the achievement tests. We had taken the morning, boards, which was the English and math and then you had to take the afternoon boards which were your achievement tests and they said you are in pending the taking [00:02:00] of the afternoon boards. But Pembroke said you can take them if you want but you don't have to, and I said, "Good".

MP: So that was really the sole reason that out of those 13 you ended up at Brown-Pembroke.

SRB: Well, that of course, because I was also new I wanted to go in for art and I liked the idea of taking courses in RISD, but I think it was the most conscious effort. I simply -- it didn't seem to matter. When I think back now, I adored Pembroke. I can't imagine having been to any school and enjoyed it so much. But it was a mindless -- semi-mindless thing I guess.

MP: But in your family it was assumed that you would go to college.

SRB: Oh, absolutely. Not because necessarily my father being very old fashioned, not that he necessarily felt that women were any great shakes, but I was after all in the '50s the child of an upwardly [00:03:00] mobile father who had to have his children in college and had to have his children in colleges that sounded wonderful, which is why I was given the instructions as to which schools. Matter of fact, Smith, when I then had to write to 13 or 12 schools since Wellesley didn't want me, when I wrote to the 12 schools saying thanks but no thanks; Smith wrote a letter to my father saying, "Did you know that your daughter refused us?" which he kept close to his heart for years and bragged at the golf club to all his friends that his daughter had rejected Smith and they were very unhappy. So, it definitely was a different time.

MP: What was your parents -- what were your parents' educational background?

SRB: My father, I think, probably only went up to the eighth grade although I'm not absolutely sure. My mother, I think, went into high school but it was an art high [00:04:00] school. My father came from a very large family in Toronto. His father was a refugee from a Russian pogrom and they simply went out to work because they had to. And he spent all his life reading because he always felt terribly insecure about his lack of education. And I remember one of the few things I was consciously aware of because I look back at those years and think how mindless much of what I did was -- one of the things I was aware of as soon as I began -- not even college, perhaps high school -- was the fact that he read everything, he knew everything, but his reasoning powers were absolutely nil and I thought, why heaven, that's what a formal education teaches is how to think. Not so much the things, but how to think, how [00:05:00] to reason, how to -- and you want to get into a pet peeve? I will say today that is what has gone out the window at even the secondary level.

And I have somewhere, and I really ought to pull it out in my notes, a letter I wrote in the '70s to Brown Alumni Monthly, which they only published a little bit of which made me seem like a real snotty lady and I got an outrage letter from an on-campus young man and I wrote him a letter back and perhaps I have to drag out that correspondence because at the time it was when Brown had had the -- may have been in your time -- the graduation where they had the tombstones lined up on the hill, and there was Martin Luther King and there was Julius and Ethel

Rosenberg and there was JFK and there was RFK and [00:06:00] there was Sacco and Vanzetti and there were all these tombstones lined up, up and down the hill. And I think that was also the year they got up and because they didn't like the guest speaker they unpeeled bananas and ate them visibly and stuff like that. And I had written this letter -- and they made it because they edited it down to nothing. I wish I still -- I didn't save the Brown Alumni Monthly, I just saved the letter that I wrote. And so I don't know how much they edited it to, but they made it seem as if I was this old fuddy-duddy who thought that everything new and wonderful and with it was obviously terrible and the thrust of my letter had been what the hell does this represent for four years of graduate -- of intelligent study? If these tombstones are lined up because the Rosenbergs [00:07:00] were found guilty. Whether they were or not, they were found guilty of treason. Martin Luther King was killed by a redneck. Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists! You know, my argument was what is the protest about? Is it because you're all leftists and you hate anything rightist? Then why mourn Sacco and Vanzetti who were anarchists? Is it -- this sort of thing? Are you against -- you know, it just was so totally illogical and that's what bothered me because all I could hear when I saw that line of all the tombstones was you're a bunch of kids saying aw, shucks, the world isn't fair. And all I could think of -- and I put it in the letter was -- is that all an education is teaching you today? Just to have a tantrum and be mad at the world? It was the lack of logic. It was the lack of reason. It was like listening to my father.

MP: I do think that's [00:08:00] one of the things, though, that you got out of your education at Brown was the ability to reason and --

SRB: To think. Yeah, and I don't think -- I don't think that it's happening today. I don't think when you can have educated people believing in what was the (inaudible) in South America? Based on no logic at all but just wishful thinking that this is from outer space that have left the -- and I think, Joe Shmoe on the street who's a truck driver and maybe didn't go past the ninth grade, let him believe it, but when I hear college educated people spewing forth illogic, it kills me, absolutely kills me. And I do think it's -- it's what a college education should be and perhaps isn't as much anymore.

MP: Just one other question about [00:09:00] your family and your background. Were you the first to go to college?

SRB: No. Oh, no

MP: Do you have other siblings?

SRB: I have an older brother who -- actually we went to college together because he had been sick during one year of high school, so we went to college together. He went to Middlebury. I think because I was the dutiful daughter who went to the prestigious school so Daddy could brag and my brother being the rebel and far brighter than I, really -- can I use a four letter word on this? Really fucked up in high school and barely graduated and graduated in I think magna cum laude in high school because I was the dutiful student. But he was a genius, my brother, and (inaudible) high school record and deliberately applied to all the little schools and went to Middlebury. He was asthmatic and of course Middlebury nearly killed him.

MP: And then you have other brothers and sisters?

SRB: I [00:10:00] have a younger sister who is seven years younger who went to Pembroke because she loved it. She had visited me a couple of times. I did bring her to a May Day. She thought that was perfectly wonderful and loved my speaking about it. Actually, I met my husband there and we started a dynasty. Obviously, the two of us raved about it so his two brothers followed him and my sister followed me and then one of my brother-in-law's daughters went and two of my sons went.

MP: So, you have a whole Brown family?

SRB: We have a whole Brown family, yeah.

MP: And what high school did you graduate from? Where did you grow up?

SRB: I grew up in two places in a teeny, teeny, teeny mill town in [Sanford?] Massachusetts until I hit 13 [00:11:00] and was used to being an absolute country girl who climbed trees and then we moved to Springfield, Mass in the big city; absolutely devastated my social life. I was one of those kids in high school who was -- that's probably why I was such a good student because I was scared to do anything else -- who could walk down the corridor and see a guy I knew and think, should I say hello? Oh, no, I better not. What if he -- by the time I decided maybe it'll be all right to just smile, he was long past. And it wasn't until I got off to college that

I made a very conscious effort, I think -- that really is another reason I chose Pembroke. I mean, it isn't quite as mindless as I like to think. I'm sure there were other reasons, one of them being was I really didn't like that -- I can't say the nerd I was in high school because nerd wasn't invented -- I think we were probably drips, I think was what [00:12:00] we called ourselves then. The drip I was, the wall flower. We were also wall flowers. And I wanted to go to a school where no one else I knew was going because it was a very conscious feeling of I don't like who I am, what I am, and I discovered once I was alone and away from my father who was a very, very negative influence I'm sure -- I had incidentally done theater. It was the only outlet that I had done all during my high school years. I had done community theater group in Springfield which has become Stage West in Hartford now, but it was -- the genesis was the community theater in Springfield. But I still probably felt constrained by my father and so being away at Pembroke made me feel he's not around.

MP: What did he do for a living?

SRB: He was a -- he is -- [00:13:00] he was, he's retired now, textiles, screen making, very interesting specialized silk screens for screen prints. I may someday use that in a book because it's such an interesting, unusual occupation. But he was a self-made man and with all the problems of a self-made man who always tends to be domineering, who always marries a woman he can dominate, who manages to terrify his children who both builds them up and knocks them down because maybe they might turn out to be better than he is. Extraordinarily destructive personality and quite clinical, that's my brother-in-law the shrink. We discuss it sometimes. Quite, quite typical except for the fact that he was more so than some. And my brother because fathers like that always destroy more the child of [00:14:00] the same sex. My brother spent many, many -- genius that he is -- many and many of these years in mental hospitals.

MP: And your mother was a housewife?

SRB: My mother was a door mat. I mean, she wasn't a house wife, she was a gopher. She was a - - but it, alas, fulfilled some need within her and the frustration for my sister and me, particularly as we broke away and became our own people, the frustration of wanting to pull her away and knowing that we couldn't. Knowing that whatever was in her kept her unhappily under his thumb.

MP: Now what kind of expectations did they have about that you would go to college and then what? Would you use that education for something?

SRB: There were no expectations.

MP: Or you would just catch a good man, you'd get your MRS or --

SRB: No, not even that. Though society told me that, but my father, I [00:15:00] don't think -- so beyond he wanted me to go to a school that he could brag about.

MP: Did he want you to major in anything (inaudible)?

SRB: On the contrary, no. I remember at one point after I'd come home bubbling, talking about something I was studying and he was saying, "Well, what are you going to do with it?" and I looked at him and I said, "Daddy, if you wanted me to do something you shouldn't have let me go to a liberal arts college." Because I don't think he really had any great thoughts about what he wanted. Again, it -- the destructive personality at work. On one hand, what are you going to do? What have you done? But on the other hand, forever kicking you down because you might be better than he. When I wrote my first book, though I thought I'd worked through everything with him, it was quite amusing that I couldn't bring myself -- though I'd told my friends what I was doing -- and [00:16:00] though I told her jokingly because I was sure it wasn't going to be anything but a big joke, I wasn't ready to tell him.

MP: When did you finally tell him?

SRB: I finally told him after I had submitted the book and I'd gotten enough feedback to know that I was on the right track. I didn't sell it right away, but I knew that I was on the right track. And it's instructive that when -- the day that I sold the book and I called to tell them, his comment was, "Now you're my daughter." My sister afterwards said, "That son of a bitch, why did you tell him that?" I said, "Because I was too busy laughing," because it didn't matter anymore and I knew what he meant. He explained it in a wonderful way and I wish I had taken it down. I can't remember how he explained it, but what he meant was this -- was that all of the years I had been in awe of him, you see. This was his interpretation. [00:17:00] All these years I had been in awe of him. Therefore I kind of could not live up to him and I couldn't measure up, and now that I had finally done something on my own, now I could call myself his daughter. You

see? He thought he was being extraordinarily kind. And I thought it was so funny that I couldn't be angry, but my sister who was younger and perhaps hadn't reached the stage I had reached, was furious when I told her, furious! But I'd figured I had already raised four kids pretty damn good in a drug era. We used to look at each other at night and say four out four ain't bad when our friends' kids were dropping like flies all around us. But he didn't see that as an accomplishment. What are you really doing with your life?

MP: Yeah, bringing [00:18:00] the next generation up and to be responsible human beings doesn't count.

SRB: But at the same time, if in the middle of a conversation they would come up and ask for something, and I would say, "Just a minute," he'd look at me and say, "What kind of mother are you?" And -- but again, it -- with him it was always a put down because it didn't matter, it didn't matter. He's a little like Sam Donaldson if you say black, he'll say white. And anyway --

MP: A digression.

SRB: Digression.

MP: So anyway, you got accepted into Pembroke and ended up accepting them and off you went away from your tyrannical father, a door mat mother --

SRB: Who I adored.

MP: — and you started your freshman year. Do you have any recollections of your first day?

SRB: The first day was a -- it was lovely day. My mother took me because my father always made her do all the dirty work. "You take her. Hell, I'm busy."

MP: She drove?

SRB: She drove, she drove. And [00:19:00] we carried --

MP: And that was 1951?

SRB: Nineteen fifty-one. We carried the clothes in great huge garment bags and my mother being crazy lady said, "You grab that corpse and I'll grab this," because that was crazy lady. And we got to the freshman dorm and I had the top -- tippy, toppest room.

MP: Which dorm?

SRB: It was Alanson House. It was -- ah, I can see by the look on your face.

MP: That's no longer -- at least it wasn't on campus in the late '60s by the time I got here.

SRB: It was -- interesting; it was when my sister was there. She graduated in '62 she -- when she went in '58 because as it turned out, she went to Alanson House, too. The freshman dorms, there were about 10 of them maybe? That sounds right. Maybe eight or ten of them scattered around campus and they held maybe 20 to 25 girls. It was a wonderful atmosphere. It was marvelous. Alanson House, alas, was almost the farthest [00:20:00] away and when you have an 8:00 class on the Brown campus, it was about -- oh, I have no sense of direction, good God -- probably about four blocks up from (inaudible) House and about eight blocks up from --

MP: It was on the other side of Hope Street, I think.

SRB: No, I don't think it was as far up as Hope, but I'm terrible. I'd have to look at a map. Anyway, it was a good long ways to the Brown campus when you had an 8:00 class, but it was a cozy atmosphere because you only had two dozen girls to relate to.

MP: Did you have a roommate?

SRB: I had a roommate and I took -- because I was a good little proper girl -- I took the smaller desk and the smaller bed and the smaller closet. She hadn't arrived yet and it worked out just as well because I was about 110 pounds and she was extraordinarily large. I adore her, but [00:21:00] she was very large in those days. She has since lost weight and gotten terribly svelte and when she married her first husband she said, "For God's sake don't ever tell him." But anyway, we had a great time. We had a great first day. We had one disagreement early on and after about a day and a half I changed my mind -- one of my great freshman dorm stories -- I changed my mind and wrote a long letter to my mother in effect saying disregard that last letter because she's terrific. She's not at all those things that I had said when we had had this fight and

she must have realized -- she said, "Who are you writing?" and I said, "My mother," and I kind of must have covered it and quick sealed it up at which point she knew. She said, "It's about me," and we raced downstairs and we had this great funny tug of war in front of terrific floor-length windows, thank heaven with venetian blinds to the floor [00:22:00] because she suddenly let go of the letter and I went into the venetian blind and we broke the window and we had to pay for it together and it cemented our friendship.

MP: Or puttied your friendship.

SRB: Or puttied our friendship, yeah. It was a very good -- the freshman dorms were wonderful, wonderful. I staid friendly by and large with my freshman dorm people more than almost anybody else.

MP: So those became your friends who tracked with you all the way through --

SRB: Yeah, mm-hmm. By and large, by and large, yes. It was a great system. Unfortunately, in about -- now again, my sister graduated in '62, I think about '63 or four somebody from Alanson House as it was, I believe was going home late one night past Roger Williams park, and was stabbed by somebody and they began to feel like they could no longer secure the dorms and they didn't want the girls walking out and that's when they [00:23:00] tore down several tennis courts and built Woolley -- what is it?

MP: Lindsey Woolley. No, [Emery and Woolley?].

SRB: Yeah, and closed off what had been the street.

MP: And now they have another dorm. I was on campus recently. They have another one over on [Thayer?] Street, which is horrible looking.

SRB: Yeah, oh, they're forever building. Although the nice thing they did do was close up the street that ran in front of the gate because that had been a road in our day and they closed that off in order to put --

MP: That was nice because that made into a -- (inaudible) into its own campus.

SRB: But, you know, the freshman dorms were quite a wonderful institution.

MP: What kinds of -- did you have any senior sisters or big --

SRB: Yes, we had --

MP: Advisors or whatever -- junior advisors?

SRB: We had junior sisters, I think. That was the nice thing because my roommate and I had the dinkiest room on the third floor in the old servants quarters of this old mansion and we came down the back stairs. Because we [00:24:00] had the dinkiest room in Alanson House for the first semester, the junior advisors only were in the dorm for first semester, the second semester they went back to the main campus and because they had the best room with a fireplace and everything and a private bathroom, that's what my roommate and I then got.

MP: Then where did you live after that?

SRB: After that I was in Miller because --

MP: I was in Miller, too, once.

SRB: I wanted to have a single and it was in Miller that I met my dearest, dearest friend because she was in my French class and Miller was all singles and we studied together and Miller was a wonderful, crazy, crazy year. We did things like -- I don't know. I think because I was a little bit off the wall I invited nuttinesses and retaliated in kind, but I would come back -- I was going to RISD then four hours -- you know, four [00:25:00] hours a day, four days a week and come staggering back and have my art projects going until three in the morning and I would come back and discover that they had piled all my furniture against the door and climbed out my fire escape and told everybody I was not to be let in and I had to go running all the way through the dorm until I found somebody who overlooked the fire escape who didn't know, so that I could go out the window and climb in. So I retaliated by stuffing somebody's room floor to ceiling with crumpled newspapers. And then they retaliated by taking strings and making like spider-webby things in my room from floor to ceiling, up and down, side to side, so there was no way -- I opened the door and there were these stringies in the whole room and it was just wonderful that I took a scissor and cut [00:26:00] only what I had to and lived with it for as long as I could with all the strings. Anyway, we did silly things like that, but -- Miller was a lovely, lovely. And then junior year it was funny because Nancy Bell and I had hit it off instantly. We had singles in

Miller. But she had already promised somebody else. She had not been in my freshman (inaudible) so I hadn't known her freshman year. And she had already promised -- sort of half promised -- somebody that she would be her roommate and didn't want to disappoint her so made up some bullshit that she was going -- her father said, "No, you have to have a single next year because you have to study," and so she was in Metcalf. But I wanted a roommate. I was tired of being alone and I hadn't -- (inaudible) was the year you got scared (inaudible).

MP: I went through that also. Well, actually I had two friends who died (inaudible).

SRB: I had a boy I had [00:27:00] a crush on and the thought of now you'll never know how I had a crush on you. And I really didn't like being alone anymore until I wanted a roommate junior year and so I went back to the freshman dorm gang and we were all sitting around and one of them said, "Gee, well why don't your room with her?" And she was a wonderfully, off the wall, strange roommate.

MP: And who was that?

SRB: Pat Goodman. She was Phi Beta Kappa, really strange girl, but creative and interesting. I can't say we liked each other -- I liked her. I can't say I knew if she liked me, but we certainly had the most interesting times, but I'm not sure that she ever liked anybody. When I saw her at our 25th reunion, she was the earth mother -- the (inaudible) boots and the skirt and the -- I mean she [00:28:00] just always was offbeat. I probably will use her personality at some point or another because she was the most interesting -- we had a wonderful time but at the same time, Nancy Bell was really the one, my friend, and I spent more time with her that year. And of course we took courses again that year together. And finally senior year we roomed together in West Andrews.

MP: Oh, that's where I started off, actually, in East Andrews.

SRB: Well, I was in West Andrews twice and we had a wonderful, wonderful -- I think in some ways --

MP: (inaudible)

SRB: Oh, no, oh, no. Andrews Jones I think went up in the '30s or '40s.

MP: Oh, my mistake.

SRB: (inaudible) in Metcalf where the older -- but Andrews had been around for awhile, but don't hold me to the date, but I know they weren't anywhere near brand new, no.

MP: So tell me about -- [00:29:00]

SRB: But friends is interesting because now that I think about it, the freshman dorm friends really wound up that I kept up with them. In retrospect the truest friends and the ones that I kept up with with my heart, not just with my Christmas cards and my notes, were senior year friends come to think of it -- were the senior year friends.

MP: (inaudible) you'd known before and cemented during senior year.

SRB: Yeah, or the ones that I had barely known but became very good friends with, but, yeah, actually in retrospect. And when I did go back to the 25th reunion, saw a lot of the freshman dorm friends and turned to my husband and said, "I think a part of me always knew that she was a snot." You know, that sort of thing. Re-seeing them. [00:30:00] Liking them in a very shallow way. There are very few people I dislike because I have friends on 25 different levels and relationships on those levels. I have a friend who's a purist who looked at me one day because he met me at a party and we'd always had a one-on-one very quiet, private -- we'd have lunch together while he was going through a messy divorce and he'd cry on my shoulder and we were just buddies. And then we met at a party and he looked at me almost in tears, poor dear, and said, "I don't know who you are. I don't like you," and I said, "I am the part of me that is at this party and having a hell of a good time." He said, "But it's not you." "Of course it's me."

MP: Another facet.

SRB: It's another facet. And I guess I'm that way with friends.

MP: Now tell me about your social life with boys.

SRB: With boys.

MP: You had classes with men.

SRB: With men, yeah. And I happened to like all-girl dorms, however. I still think even in this day and age [00:31:00] women are still living in a men's world, and the business world is co-ed and the social life is co-ed and if you're married you're social life is co-ed because like it or not, you ain't going to wind up socializing very much with a girl that you like if your husband doesn't like her husband. And there are so few opportunities for women to be one-on-one unless they have the encounter groups or what are they called now where women just congregate as women or don't they do that anymore? They did at the beginning of the women's movement, the encounter groups they --

MP: Consciousness raising.

SRB: The consciousness raising --

MP: I don't think that's done quite as much.

SRB: No, I don't think so either but it really, to me, it was filling the need that we had at Pembroke, which I think was the dumbest thing to do to integrate the dorms. Not because I was a prude, [00:32:00] but because there would never ever again be a time except those four years that women can related exclusively to women, and the bonds of women are so special and are so intruded upon by the man's world that I think women who choose co-ed dorms really miss -- they don't know it, so they look at me and say, what do you know? I'm having a good time. But I think that something is lost.

MP: So you feel that you learned something and got something special out of that experience?

SRB: Oh, I think women-to-women is absolutely super.

MP: Is that something that you use in your books?

SRB: I may not know. No, I think when I look back at my books, my books more involve -- my women are almost always -- isn't that funny? My mother and I were extraordinarily close. Not woman to woman [00:33:00] because there were things that were private to her. She was a very private person, but warm and close and fun. And I've had good relationships with women all my life and yet my heroines are almost always (inaudible) only children or they have brothers and their mothers are either non-existent --

MP: Yes, I remember in *Stolen Spring* the mother was dead.

SRB: Yes, and the fathers are very often difficult or far above them. So perhaps it's the vestige of though my father was difficult and I loved my mother, I'm more like my father because I suspect unconsciously, and I realized this rather a long time ago, that I'm far more like him because I admired him -- I didn't like him -- but I admired him. I loved her, I adored her, [00:34:00] but I didn't admire what she allowed herself to be. So perhaps in my heart I was more liberated than I thought I was because I really thought I was a drip -- my social life --

MP: As a drip, did you get a chance to meet too many boys or some boys?

SRB: I was not only a drip, I was a prude. I was an uptight prude. When I was in high school an older brother of one of my girlfriends was all the attraction and we would go out together -- he never took me anywhere, just for coffee and we'd go and we'd ride in the car and the danger of it. He would unbutton my blouse and I would button my blouse, but I never said no when he invited me because I was scared out of my gourd because I was such a proper prude. I suspect -- and it goes back to Daddy again [00:35:00] partially because I think he was a prude, but partially because he was such a destructive father that I felt ugly and I think a part of me was, God, if a guy -- if I go and have sex with a guy he'd see me naked and he'll see, I mean, flat chested and skinny -- I really was very scrawny, very scrawny, and felt very unattractive basically. And that probably had as much to do with a prude but also the times were prudish and I had carried it perhaps a little more so. And yet again, obviously, here I was involved in theater. So a part of me was -- the dichotomy was there even then because I could wade into a love scene and a kiss in a play and not be the slightest bit embarrassed. And yet if a guy put his hand on my shoulder --

MP: In real life.

SRB: In real, as my kids would say, in real -- one of the first dates I had at Brown, [00:36:00] as a matter of fact, was with a senior who had taken me out and I think why I had -- my big hot thing in high school had been a guy who had gone to Lowell College? It was a textile college within Lowell and when I was a senior in high school I had gone to his freshman something or other and for the first time I had indulged in heavy necking; necking only, no petting, mind you.

MP: I was going to say what is necking versus petting?

SRB: Necking is (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) Petting is -- again, you want terminology of my day -- petting is when they cop a feel. It's when they either touch your breasts or they grab your -- oh, never your genitals! Good God, no! That was really heavy petting. No --

MP: But copping a feel -- heavy feel copping?

SRB: No, no that was more feeling you up.

MP: Oh, what's feeling you up?

SRB: Cop a feel -- this is --

MP: [00:37:00] Cop a feel is like brushing against you or --

SRB: Or just touching your breasts or something. Now don't hold me to this because I was getting this second hand through girlfriends who had older brothers and therefore I may be wrong and if there's somebody someday who is studying slang of a period -- don't hold me to this, please. But anyway, no, always necking only above the neck.

MP: So that just means kissing, French kissing --

SRB: Oh, no. Once or twice French kissing. Only if you really like --

MP: Ear nibbling?

SRB: Ear nibbling was allowed, yes, and blowing in the ear and that sort of thing, but that's --

MP: What about hickies?

SRB: Yeah, hickies were allowed. Hickies were allowed. That's still necking although I didn't like that -- hickies were considered -- see, it's a very proper era and I was of a proper -- not only of a proper era, but I was a proper class of that era. I was of the upper-middle class; [00:38:00] the country club crowd. And hickies were for girls who worked in Woolworths. You know, whose boyfriends worked in the bowling alley. And hickies were -- college guys didn't give college girls hickies and if they --

MP: They gave them to townies.

SRB: Yes, probably, probably. Or at least, you know, somebody but not -- yeah, it was not considered -- if a guy tried that I was furious. I was furious if a guy tried a hickie because it just was not right. Anyway, but necking only. And there was this nice guy, senior. I don't think I liked him very much. We went to a movie, we double dated, and God help me, he put his arm around me driving home because the other couple was in the front seat and he kind of leaned over and I don't know what he did -- it couldn't have been very serious -- but I remember saying something like, "I'm not that kind of girl." [00:39:00] And I look back now and it's absolutely hysterical. And then I met a guy who was like the version of a townie who had dropped out of school and then came back, who was in construction. Very nice, nice guy, who scared me although, again --

MP: He was a Brown student?

SRB: He was a Brown student but he dropped out again and never did finish I don't think, was in construction, road construction. So help me, I think about two years later driving up to (inaudible) and I was in the back seat leaning out and there was a work crew and as we passed I went, "Ohhhhh!" and fell to the back seat of the car because I'm sure it was him. I'm sure it was him, but he was very -- he was the first guy, though I remember -- I went to camp with New York kids, that was scary because my father being in textiles, you see. [00:40:00] Though he was in New England, he would come down to New York and say to his salesman, you know, "Do you know a good camp?" And of course we went to a camp that had New Yorkers mostly and I remember then dancing with a guy and being so young and so stupid wondering why he had pencils in his pocket. I used that in a book once. I use all of these in books. Really, wondering why he had a pencil in his pocket. But this nice guy, this construction guy, was a little heavier. I mean, he'd kiss me but he'd kind of grab my butt and pull me in very close to him and that was very exciting. Of course it was mid-winter and we both were wearing coats but it was very exciting. Again, I don't know how typical I am because we certainly knew the girls as we put it who "did it".

MP: Now "did it" meaning --

SRB: Meaning sex.

MP: All the way?

SRB: All the way. There were girls we knew who “did it” or we suspected who “did it”.

[00:41:00]

MP: Although, it’s interesting, I remember I had an experience like that where I thought that the friend of mine had done it and I needed to know because I was getting serious with my boyfriend and I went and asked her and she didn’t know what I was talking about.

SRB: Well, yes, I know, because Nancy Bell who was cute and fun and all the guys fell all over her and the ones who didn’t like her called her a CT, which was always a guy’s way of putting a girl down if he couldn’t get to first base was to call her a CT. I was always uneasy about her --

MP: And I think for purposes of the tape and the people at Brown who might not know what a CT is --

SRB: I think, and again, I’m not sure if it was ever translated, but I think it meant cunt teaser.

MP: Cock teaser.

SRB: Cock teaser. Cock teaser was a CT, right. Yes, cock teaser. You see, I never use the word. I only use CT. [00:42:00] Anyway, I remember years later asking her did she and she said, no. She said, no, she never did -- she went in for heavy petting, but never did. So, you know, as they say, for me I’m absolutely square, absolutely square.

MP: So, how did you meet your husband?

SRB: I met him after my nice guy went -- he was great with football season and he was (inaudible), he was older, too. And then he didn’t come back second semester and in the spring of my freshman year, I used to go to the (inaudible) and according to my husband he spotted me across a crowded room, which was really very nice, and called me -- and then the rabbi gave a freshman mixer. Now he was a sophomore, [00:43:00] but he volunteered, the sleaze, volunteered to work the party, you know. He’d come as a sophomore and help out. He just wanted to case the girls. I mean, he was a New York boy. He was a lot farther ahead socially than I was. Anyway, he was at the party that the rabbi gave for the Jewish freshman students to meet each other and there were, as I said, a hand full of sophomores who were helping the rabbi at this party. A week later I got a call saying this is Sid Baumgartner and I met you at the

(inaudible) House. I said, "Oh, you're the dark haired one." "No," he said. "Oh," I said, "You're the one who was playing the guitar." (inaudible), he said. "Oh," I said, "You're the one with the curly blonde hair." "No," he said. And I -- I was also, you can see, not extraordinarily subtle or good at this sort of thing. I mean, I really had been such a -- [00:44:00] dated so little in high school. Besides in high school I belonged to a group where we were all the egg-heads and we went to parties and then everybody else went to parties to neck. We all sat around saying, "Now, if I have five ball bearings and one is defective, and I have --" and all those logic problems? That's what we did all night long and that for us was the big thrill. So you can see I had a lot to learn. I didn't know enough to keep my mouth shut and say, "Describe yourself to me." I just kept saying, "Oh, you're the one," and getting it all wrong. In spite of that, he said that in three weeks there was going to be the (inaudible) dance and would I like to go with him, and I said, yes, fine. A week went by and a Sunday came and I came back and there was a message at the dorm that he'd stopped by, and everybody said, oh, he's so cute, he's so nice, and I'm thinking I don't even know what he looks like. A few nights later I was at the library [00:45:00] with a friend and we were walking back and we stopped at some snack bar and -- just to show you how proper things were in those days -- I'm going out with her and a bunch of guys were coming in --

MP: I think we're going to have to change the tape.

Part 2

MP: [00:00] Baumgarten, Class of 1955, interviewed by Mimi Pichey, Class of '72. So, you were telling us about you were going to the snack bar. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

SRB: It was before 10:00 of course because we had the 10:00 curfews, you know. Freshman year I think we were only allowed, oh, I don't remember now how many a month that you could stay out. After 10:00 you would sign out if you were going to go out and then you'd have to sign in before 12:30. And freshman year you had limited number of late nights and this was still my freshman year and so we were coming back from the library to get back before 10:00 because we had not signed out. Incidentally, if you suddenly found yourselves far from the dorm [00:01:00] before and you knew you weren't going to get back, you had to call and you couldn't take overnights without signing out without getting -- all kinds of stuff like that.

MP: In loco parentis.

SRB: In loco parentis. Well, I don't know. You know, I have mixed feelings about whether that's good or bad. I don't know whether kids do so well without any restraints at all.

MP: But at any rate that's the way it was.

SRB: That's the way it was then. I mean, it was perhaps a little strict and we were so hard on ourselves it probably didn't matter. The funny thing is today when the kids could probably use more rules because they haven't internalized everything. We had lots of rules but we'd internalized, so we didn't need the rules. But that's life. Anyway, there I was and she and I are leaving the snack bar and a bunch of guys comes in [00:02:00] and one of them detaches himself from the group, comes over to me and says, "Miss Rosen." Miss Rosen, you catch that. It was the proper thing to do. And I said, yes. He said --

MP: They didn't call you by your first name?

SRB: Oh, yes, they did but this was a strange man who was coming over to me and they could call me -- the professors, incidentally, called you Miss and Mister. The only place not was RISD. RISD they treated the men like talented idiots and, you know, the student body were treated like talented idiots and it was very interesting the difference between on the Hill and down at RISD. Anyway, no, my friends would call me Sylvia but still it was a sign of respect to have a young man who was not introduced to me yet coming over and saying [00:03:00] "Miss Rosen?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm Sid Baumgarten. I'm your date for Saturday." No, he just said, "I'm Sid Baumgarten." And he said, "May I walk you home?" and the three of us walked home and I was absolutely zonked. He was so cute, and I had forgotten him and I still to this day don't remember him at the rabbi's house but he was so cute and I was totally awed and my friend twinkled the whole way home and we got into the dorm, she turned to me and said, "Oh, he's cute! Who is he?" and I burst into tears and said, "That's my date for Saturday night and he probably thinks your wonderful and I'm awful," because I had been totally awed by him. It was truly love at first sight. We went out on the date. My dorm mates [00:04:00] talked about it afterwards because I floated in, just floated in, and it got so every time we went out on a date they would wait around the door for me to come in to just see the idiot grin on my face. We were fated from the first.

MP: So after that you had eyes for only Sid.

SRB: Well, yeah, really, really though we -- you know, when I'd go back to (inaudible) I still hung out with the crowd and we semi-paired off. Not really, not really because that was it. However, again, sex -- I mean, because the attitudes towards sex I think are interesting, there came a time -- we'd been dating for about two months, it was magic, it was wonderful, it [00:05:00] was super, we went to a formal -- we loved going to formals. He was in the ROTC besides and when he'd put on his uniform, and he looked great in a tux and we loved going to formals -- and we still do -- and on the way home, he didn't have a car but we were double dating and we were driving home and he put his hand on my breast, over the gown mind you, and I was devastated because I thought -- I knew that I was absolutely in love with him, but I was -- we had not -- I don't think we had told each other at that point, it wasn't until the fall in the sophomore year that we said the words, but I knew I was that, you know, and the fact that he would treat [00:06:00] me like that. Now here he was --

MP: And that was bad?

SRB: To me it was. To me it meant that he didn't respect me. To me it meant that, again, there I think my views were perhaps more prudish than some, they weren't out of line with a lot of the thinking of the times. There were girls, again, who'd done it. There were girls who thought that petting was OK. There were girls who weren't nearly as uptight and square as I was, but there were a lot of girls who were as repressed and probably a hell of a lot less knowledgeable than I was who didn't even know what sex was. I knew because we all read *Forever Amber* among other things. But to me it meant that he didn't respect me. And here was this guy that I'd absolutely fallen for like a ton of bricks who -- and I remember we had a -- he was devastated because, again, this was a kid who came from [00:07:00] Rockaway who came from New York. You know, he was with the zoot suits and the key chains at the end of the war. You know, I mean, they were sharpies. They hung out on the boardwalk and the girls -- Charlotte [the Harlot?], I believe, although I think it was [Irma?] that he talks about who initiated all of the boys under the boardwalk. I mean, it was an entirely different life. I was New England. I was New England, I was a girl, I was square, I was -- and to me it meant he didn't respect me. He was devastated. I think from that moment he knew he wanted to marry me because he'd never met anybody quite so proper in all his life. But I went in and the girls were all waiting and,

“Well,” they said, and I burst into tears. They told me afterwards that they thought surely he had raped me. But that was our only [00:08:00] real setback and it was a very minor one. And we dated quite steadily although one summer when we were -- I think after sophomore year -- when we were a little tired of each other I ran off to camp and was a counselor and he dated somebody. I think it was both with a desire to get away from each other. But when we came back at the beginning of my junior year, his senior year, we talked already about getting married and I got my engagement ring at campus dance or the week before his campus dance and went through my senior year engaged -- one of the few -- and married three weeks after college.

MP: So talk to me a little bit about your academics.

SRB: Academics. All right, well, I had always been -- first of all, because my mother, though [00:09:00] she never -- didn't have that much formal education, was a woman of curiosity who would say, “Give me your hand. Come on,” and out we'd go into the garden. So she would say, “Look at that little there and look at” This wonderful sense of curiosity and I had always had it, I guess, because of her. Always that sense of isn't knowledge wonderful? Isn't stuff wonderful? And because I happened to have a good memory, I could store an awful lot of stuff in there. And it just blew me away. Always in my school years knowledge blew me away. I got off to college and was almost overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge. So much, I mean, I had been without any sweat was magna cum laude in high school. Always had straight A's, always had good report [00:10:00] -- and didn't even have to work at it. It just all -- I was a sponge; just sopping it up. And then I got off to college and there was so much -- it was so overwhelming but it was so exciting. I didn't know what to take next. It's funny --

MP: Where did you start out? What did you start out majoring in?

SRB: Art, always art. I'd always known I was interested in art. My father, after all, his business involved art. My mother when she had worked had worked with textiles, tie-dye, batik. On a rainy day she used to say, “Now let's do some tie-dyeing,” and we'd use food coloring and old sheets. So always art. I had drawn, I had thought I wanted to be a fashion designer because I was always interested in clothes. I sewed and at one point I had my sewing machine up at Pembroke and I think [00:11:00] it must have been my senior year because my mother gave it to me as an engagement present. And that year I not only for 75 cents an hour, altered my friends clothes, but

a friend of mine who was doing a dance program asked me to design and make costumes which I did for her whole group of people. So I knew I wanted to do it. Probably, possibly even fashion illustrating. So I took life drawing down at RISD. I couldn't take any RISD courses first year and besides --

MP: Did Brown have a studio art department at that time? Or just (inaudible) history.

SRB: It was minimal. They had no life models and it was assumed that you had no talent at all in your fingers if you stayed on campus because it was minimal. It's where the sculpture is. You know, the [Tchaikovsky?] -- have you been to see? Art Tchaikovsky's sculpture that he put there, that's where the little art studio was. Right across [00:12:00] the street from the (inaudible).

MP: Is that the garage?

SRB: Yeah.

MP: Is that what it's called? Well, it's no longer, but that's where I studied art also.

SRB: That was the only --

MP: Before they made them the (inaudible).

SRB: That was the studio, but it was also the --

MP: And there was a downstairs, there was a print shop.

SRB: Yeah, no, there was no print shop because Feldman came in --

MP: Feldman, OK. That's who I studied with.

SRB: He came in my senior year and because the prints were his thing, but no. There was the studio, but it was also the big slide place, too. And my freshman -- and again, we had to take distributions so I couldn't have taken RISD anyway the first year. History overwhelmed me. There was so much of it. I always loved history but I knew very little about it because in high school typically they taught you American history and, you know, you remember -- I don't know in your day, but in my day high school [00:13:00] history was nothing and so here I took this

survey history course from I guess the fall of the Roman Empire to World War I; it was a double course. Discovered myself going into my final exams with an E, or a C, no, a D or an E, going into my final exam. Floored me.

MP: They had an E grade?

SRB: Yeah, they had an F grade, but F means you couldn't repeat it. Going in with an E. Yeah, A, B, C, D, E and then F was failing and then some. If you got an F then you could no longer repeat, whereas if you got an E, you'd have to make up the credit because you had 32 credit hours and you had to pass 32 credit hours.

MP: What was a D?

SRB: D was [00:14:00] squeaking by. You know, it was OK.

MP: So, like C- would be (inaudible).

SRB: I don't know. D was not good, but at least you barely passed it. E meant you failed it and had to take it over. F meant you had to make it up in summer school because you couldn't even take the course over. And as I said, 32 credits meant 32 credits you had to pass. None of this -- what is it -- 27 today out of 32 that you can -- all you have to do is pass, no fail or something. Anyway, there was no fooling around and I remember I locked myself in the (inaudible) for three hours because I was a very slow reader. I never had read the books because I was for the first time in my life having fun. I mean, in high school I did my theater work and I did my studying and that's all I did, to speak of. And now for the first time the world was [00:15:00] opening up and I suddenly thought, oh, my God, I'm going to fail this. And I came to the inescapable conclusion that I didn't care anymore about grades. I had always sailed through. I had never had to sweat a grade. I never thought of it. I'd figured I'll go through four years of college, come up with Phi Beta Kappa, the whole thing. And I suddenly said, I don't think it was sour grapes, I can either go back to being what I was in high school, studying and having my little life or I can live and be a human being and have fun and discover the world and content myself with C's and B's. And that was the decision I made that C's and B's and living are better than straight A's and not living. However, I did lock myself in the [John Hay?] for three days [00:16:00] and read straight

through every one of the books for history and pulled -- probably pulled a C out of it. But it may have been a D; don't hold me to that either.

MP: But you squeaked by.

SRB: But I squeaked, yeah, I pulled in and from then on in I made sure I didn't get that close to the edge, but I never again sweated having to get great grades.

MP: Did you take much more history after that?

SRB: No.

MP: Because I know that -- all of your novels are very historically based.

SRB: No, no I didn't. No, I didn't because I was taking so many art classes that there were far too many distributions and by the time I got to my senior year when I had a chance to take -- I took classical for example, I took classical history [00:17:00] just to get -- that was great. Nancy Bell and I took that together and the professor did not like the approach to the classics that the art department had and we got into a fearsome battle over something with him and he was full of bullshit and we said may we have 20 minutes of tomorrow's lecture and he said, yes. And we went to the art department and said could we borrow some slides and we refuted him and at the end of 20 minutes he said, "I never said any such thing." So I really -- no, I didn't take any more history. I took a lot of literature courses. I took just everything.

MP: Now you took French, also, right?

SRB: Yes, French I minored in and I also worked as a slide pusher.

MP: Oh, I did, too!

SRB: Oh, I loved it. It was great for exam time, you made money and besides that, the teacher who had taught me the art survey, Professor [Merky?] who I think (inaudible) looked like [00:18:00] Tyrone Power and I was madly in love with him. And the day he actually took me to coffee and called me Sylvia I thought I'd die because he was just so gorgeous. And I took a lot of --

MP: Were you cheating on Sid?

SRB: Oh, no, no, no, these crushes had nothing to do with true love. I mean, you could have crushes on teachers. I'd been such a wimpy, nerdy, drippy, high school kid that I almost hardly didn't have crushes on kids even in high school or on teachers even in high school. You know, I had them on movie stars in high school because that was the safest. I didn't even have crushes on real live people I knew to speak of. So, I mean, I was just getting it out of my system. I'm living it vicariously through my daughter because she's so open and it's so much fun to see what a self-confident young girl goes [00:19:00] through as opposed to one who had to kind of fight her way to the top alone. Yeah, it's marvelous to watch her. Anyway, I took a lot of French also because I loved Beverly [Ridgely?] who is -- I still send him my -- I'm waiting now to send him *Stolen Spring* because I think he will love that. I still send him all the books and when I wrote -- did you read *Dreams of* (inaudible), the theater one?

MP: Not yet, no.

SRB: Well, in that the characters meet in [Moyer?] on their travels and because we read Moyer together, the letter he wrote to me almost had tears on the page he was so moved by having read it and recapturing. But no, I took everything I could. I was a sponge. I took some German literature courses. I took [00:20:00] just everything. And by the end I applied for permission to take several graduate courses in my senior year that were combined French and art. Most of the students there, however, were French majors. Therefore, when they did their lectures they used books and they got into the history and the Frenchness of it. It was all in English. You know, your lecture was in English, not in French. On the other hand, I went to the art department and said can I borrow slides and a slide room and took my French class into the art department to give my lecture in this thing. Yes, I just loved stuff.

MP: Do you want to comment on any of these things that different faculty members or deans or people like that who might have influenced [00:21:00] you or rules or regulations. Do you want to get into any of those things?

SRB: I think -- no, the rules and regulations I took as a matter of course. It didn't bother me. I didn't champion anything. I wasn't up in arms over anything really because for me it was such an intellectual opening up as it was for me in high school. I think teachers have always been my great influences. Ben Brown, who was the theater -- I took a course in theater with him and I also

was in (inaudible). Did a lot of theater; kept up my theater. Ben Brown was so stimulating. Beverly Ridgley, it was because of him I had taken French in high school and I had to take a little more, I think, to get my final requirement in language and I loved it so much and I was so crazy about him that I stayed on because of him [00:22:00] in the French department. The art department, [Merky?] taught medieval as well as the survey. I specialized in medieval art because he was so wonderful. It's always been teachers who fired me and really, you know -- but as far as -- I was very agreeable. I was so happy in the atmosphere and it was you tell me what the rules are. I never had any great feeling of because of relating to people, being free, being this new person I had become. Incidentally, it took me about a year and a half of terrible, painful soul searching to come to the conclusion, you know, because it was like who am I? Am I really this brand new lively person and I was, I was just lively, or am I the [00:23:00] wall flower who is pretending? Which is the real me? I mean, all this breast beating, soul searching bullshit that you do in those years and it took me about a year and a half, two years, to come to the conclusion that I no longer knew who I had been, but whatever this was now, it was the real me. Even as different as it was it perhaps had started out as a conscious effort to change, but that whatever it was that was how I --

MP: So this was a very exciting period for you.

SRB: Oh, absolutely stimulating, wonderful, thrilling! I could have done junior year abroad. Partly I didn't do it because of Sid. Partly I didn't do it because maybe I was little scare, but partly I didn't do it because I didn't want to lose a year at Pembroke. I couldn't have thought of having to give up all these [00:24:00] things for the unknown. I just didn't want them. It's one of the reasons why I stayed engaged for a whole year when everybody said, gee, why don't you get married now? Because there were several people who did get married and then came back their senior year married, and I said, no, because these are my four years.

MP: Were you in any special clubs or --

(break in audio)

MP: OK, we're back on clubs and traditions, things like that.

SRB: All right, well, I didn't really belong to clubs and the traditions I simply took as a matter of course because a part of me is, was, and always will be a loner. Though I love people and I love to be with people, I'm a loner. I will join clubs, but invariably when I belong to clubs and groups -- if you see my resumes and stuff -- I do the jobs that [00:25:00] I'm not accountable -- that I don't have to do with people. I have been secretaries of organizations. I have been treasurers of organizations. I was the costume lady at my daughter's school; the kinds of things where I can work somewhat interdependently. And so I never did get too involved in clubs. I did theater. Theater, again, is a very individual type of thing. You're part of a group, which I loved, but you still -- you're yourself. So I never really tended to join clubs for that reason because they didn't appeal to me and traditions the same thing. I'd take what I wanted of them and beyond that didn't care.

MP: On a slightly different area of life at Brown and Pembroke, what was your experience as a Jewish student?

SRB: It [00:26:00] didn't bother me. It certainly was interesting. I grew up in a little town in Massachusetts until I was 13, until we moved to Springfield. We lived in this town and we were the only Jewish family in town. We were also the only educated, we were also the only ones with money. My father ultimately was employing people from the town when he started his own business. I was quite used to one, being a loner as a Jew. It's funny, my brother and I were the only kids in town who could play the piano. So we played Onward Christian Soldiers every morning for years and every hymn besides that. It was a very openly bigoted town so I didn't -- I was quite used to anti-Semitism [00:27:00] and I wasn't particularly bothered by quiet anti-Semitism because hell, I was used to the sort of thing that on Halloween we had to batten down the hatches because they'd try to tear our house apart. Therefore, quiet anti-Semitism, I didn't see it under every rock. I found it very annoying in later years to have Jewish friends who saw it under every rock and in every face. I had the more the feeling that people don't care by and large. I know a lot of people who will do very klutzy things simply because they know nothing about Judaism. And I have seen other friends say it's because they're anti-Semitic, but I don't see it that way perhaps because I grew up as I say, with non-Jewish people, and then moving to Springfield, though we had a large Jewish population, we still were in the minority, and I joke about [00:28:00] it now, New England Jews pass for WASPs, but I think it's true that at least in

my day, you downplayed your Jewishness. Though we were certainly part of the nouveau riche crowd. It wasn't with the same matter of fact we found Jewish -- and New York Jews nouveau riche to be terribly gauche, terribly gauche and pushy, and so we played down the Jewishness. I took it as a matter of course. I mean, I thought nothing of it. It wasn't until many years later when we were visiting up in Springfield again and one of my kids needed a Hebrew-English dictionary for a class and I went into the bookstore and I asked for it and the woman looked at me and I thought, I remember, I remember what it was like [00:29:00] now to play down your Jewishness so that when I got to Pembroke it was quite common to play it down. I went to Hillel. At Passover we went and had the Seder, but you simply didn't make a big thing of it. I think we were vaguely aware that every dorm had their Jewish quota just as they had the black quota and that they very neatly put Jewish girls together for roommates freshman year and they put the blacks alone because they only had about three or four blacks so they had one in one dorm, one in one dorm, one in -- you know, and they put them in the singles. They just simply did it, but we took it as a matter of course because that's how life was. And we didn't feel terribly put upon, at least I didn't. It is funny, though, because of course Sid came from a very Jewish community in New York, went [00:30:00] to a Jewish day school, and then we moved back to his community and I found myself because of my proper New England upbringing very anti-Semitic for a time because I found them so insular and so narrow minded about being Jewish and how they viewed the world. I guess I had grown up in spite of the bigotry that I had had in the town, hating bigotry, not hating Christians but hating bigotry and appalled to find Jews being bigoted not only against Christians but against each other who were not as religious as they were or whatever. But I took it as a matter of course until I went out to visit Nancy Bell, my senior roommate, for her daughter's wedding about five years ago in Minneapolis. And after the wedding [00:31:00] I'd stayed the whole week and we'd sit up all night until three in the morning yacking away and I was telling her about something because my daughter, though my son's had gone to Hebrew day school, we weren't happy with the education and by the time my daughter came along we didn't want to send her to a Hebrew day school but we didn't want to send her to the public schools which are the pits. And so we sent her to a private school that had been many years before the restrictive WASP school and maybe it's because of the New England and maybe it's because of I don't know what, but we passed in that group. Not passed, I mean, they knew we were Jewish, but we were comfortable in that group and they were comfortable with us and it really was very

funny because we had two groups of friends, the Jewish group and then the WASP group, both of which we were comfortable with and sometimes being terribly wicked. We would give great parties and invite both groups and then watch from [00:32:00] a sociological point of view who behaves. Let me tell you now WASPS are far better party goers. They have a sense of an obligation to their host and hostess to have a good time. And they circulate, they drink a great deal which may help oil the wheels, still they circulate, they are sociable, they are helpful. The Jews will come and sit in couples in one corner together all night long and wait to be entertained.

MP: So, to get back to Brown and Pembroke.

SRB: Anyway, so we were talking, I was telling Nancy Bell about all of this and she looked at me and she said, "You never talked this way when you were at Pembroke." You know, she was really very, I think, put out a little or astonished and her attitude seemed to be [00:33:00] that she was barely aware of my Jewishness and here we were talking now 25 years later and I was so obviously Jewish. And it created for us, 25 years later, a few moments of something in the air for the first time. It passed and we didn't talk about it again, but I thought, yes, I guess I did play down the Jewishness because it was simply the way you did. And I hadn't been nearly as aware of it until as I say, when I was speaking to Nancy Bell all those years later.

MP: So to ask whether there was any prejudice that you remember or teachers who discriminated in any way or deans.

SRB: No, oh never. Not in the slightest. The only special thing that I remember of teachers [00:34:00] and discrimination had to do with the couple of leech teachers who there was one who liked the girls to sit in the front row who would pace up and down in the front of the room with his hands in his pockets which pulled his pants tight across his groin so you could see his erection as he was pacing up and down. Or the one who if you went in in a very tight sweater, and of course in those days the brassieres that we wore, we called them titty bras because they came to a point, yes. And if you wore a tight sweater over a titty bra, there were certain professors you knew when you were turning in a paper or wanting to make points with him --

MP: So to speak.

SRB: Yes, I guess. I remember once when I had a paper that I hadn't gotten in on time and I had no excuses at all and I wanted [00:35:00] -- I don't remember -- an English course? Don't even remember now what course it was, but I wanted to get a delay on it. I deliberately put on my pointiest bra and my tightest sweater to go and ask permission to turn it in six months later or whatever.

MP: Did you get it?

SRB: Oh, you better believe it! (laughs) See, that, too -- I think though our education was liberating our heads all unbeknownst to us, our culture was still teaching us how to connive as women. And so though I was conniving as a woman, I was shrewd enough or educated enough to know how absolutely unfair it was. So perhaps we were more pre-liberation than we knew. And a part of us really did know that there was more [00:36:00] than just playing up to the teachers who needed to be played up to. And perhaps that's different than women older than we who only knew how to play up to guys and took it as a matter of course, but I think we were quite conscious of it.

MP: Let me ask a question. I don't know whether this is the appropriate place, I mean, if you'd like to move it back we can. I wanted to ask about figures that you might be using in your novel - - have used in your novels from Brown either modeled on people you knew there...

SRB: Hmmm -- that's interesting. I don't think so. I certainly use episodes. For example, for full posterity. Isn't this wonderful? One of my characters in my early book, Lisette. Lisette is very childish, very spoiled, very selfish. Basically [00:37:00] because she's insecure and nobody ever said sit down, shut up, I love you. And therefore she took advantage because she felt that was the only way she could get anything was by conniving because she didn't have enough of a sense of her own worth for whatever reasons. And I created her and then I realized that that was my mother-in-law. And every time Lisette would have to do something that was extraordinarily self-interested but covering up so that the world thought that she was doing it for them, I would think, what would my mother-in-law do? And she didn't see herself in it, but I would like to say that Lisette grew up by the end of the book. My mother-in-law is 83 and she still plays the games and doesn't [00:38:00] know that everybody sees through it. But that was kind of after the fact. And so I don't think I've ever consciously taken anybody -- certainly when I wrote Dreams

[Afleeting?] with the actors, I took bits of just the (inaudible). It's perhaps a little like actors do, the Stanislavski method. Sometimes I remember scenes and then I write my scene so that it's almost as if I'm putting my heart and my emotions into the mood. I remembered when I was writing scenes of my acting company together, I remembered the camaraderie of the theater and yet nothing in those acting scenes really is taken from my years in theater at Brown, except for camaraderie and conversely, I [00:39:00] once wrote an abortion scene and somebody said, "My God. Did you ever have an abortion?" I said, "No, but I had a very unhappy delivery once," and I remembered how awful I felt during that delivery and I thought of that and then I wrote the abortion scene and so the emotion was conveyed. And so I think that's perhaps what I do is more conveying the emotion of the times though I may in something I'm working on now, I have a character who is a little bit fey, who believes in magic but not quite, but perhaps does, and that may wind up being Pat Goodman my -- that strange roommate because she really -- Phi Beta Kappa and I'd come in the night before an exam and she would be sitting cross legged on the floor with a candle and magic spells [00:40:00] and only part of her thought it was a joke.

MP: Well, that sounds like an interesting character and could be based a novel --

SRB: But normally none of my characters are based on anybody except for feelings, moods --

MP: Inspiration.

SRB: Yeah and occasionally very specific little scenes of silly things that may have happened.

MP: Now what about things that you studied at Brown? How would you say that you've been able to draw upon those things in your novels?

SRB: Well, certainly --

MP: Because I noticed, for example, that *Stolen Spring* was pretty liberally laced with French.

SRB: Oh, yes, oh yeah. Well, it really started off -- because when I wrote *Mario*, which is the first one, I had been with a friend, we were talking about writing cookbooks and we started and it was boring and she went back to work and I said, gee, why don't we do something fun? And she said, "What?" I said, "You know how women write those romances that you and I stopped reading years ago? Let's do it." She said, "Oh, I couldn't." And I said, "Do [00:41:00] you

mind if I try? Maybe I can.” And she said, “Go ahead. I don’t care.” And I made up a plot. Now I don’t know whether we had spoken of it before -- now I used to dream up plots.

MP: No, well we really haven’t gotten into --

SRB: When I was a kid I would -- when I went to bed -- I would run a story through my head, act it out in my head. It might be a takeoff on a book I’d read or a movie I’d seen or something. And I would fall asleep, but again, I have a good memory. The next night I’d hop into bed again and I’d say, gee, where did I leave off? And I would pick it up and continue the story. And I found all my life that no matter what was going on in my head, no matter how terrible my problems or serious or anything, as soon as I lay down and said, where was I last night and picked up the thread of the story it would relax me, [00:42:00] I would do the story until I fell asleep and then pick it up again. Incidentally, I no longer fall asleep as easily because now when I do that I have to get up and write notes because it’s like, oh, gee, that’s a good idea for a book. And I can no longer use it for relaxation. So what I do now is rerun one of the books that I’ve written so I don’t have to change anything and that relaxes me.

MP: That’s your bedtime story.

SRB: That’s my bedtime -- anyway, so I had this vague plot and of course when you have a bedtime story it’s not set anywhere and then when I thought, well, this is a great plot, but if I write it I’ve got to have a historical thing, I’ve got to have a -- but because I knew very little about England and I knew a lot about France, I went to the encyclopedia and I read an overview of French history first. That is what set me on the track. I [00:43:00] can no longer by and large read French, though I still have my textbooks and I do sometimes read bits and pieces and do translate bits and pieces, but that’s how I first started writing about France and perhaps there is a difference in romances in the view of love and romance between England and France. England has the Victorian tradition and the bourgeois proper tradition. France has even today the mistresses, the liaisons that are treated so entirely differently and because I had read so much French literature, I had that feeling. My editor -- one editor said once to me, “You should always write about France,” she said, “Because you understand it so well. You feel it so well.” And I’m not conscious of it, but she sees it [00:44:00] and other people have seen it. She was least happy with *Forever Wild*.

MP: Which is the Adirondack one.

SRB: Which is the Adirondack one. She said, “Oh, they were so serious.” The only one she liked was the young artist, the one who went to Paris to paint because he captured some of the artistically light-hearted, and so I suspect that my studies had a much stronger influence on me than I was aware. It was integrated into my psyche so to speak, without my really being aware of it, but it’s obviously there and it comes out, this feeling for the French way of thinking of life and love.

MP: Why don’t we change the tape now? [00:30:00]

Part 3

MP: [00:00:00] With Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten, Class of 1955, interviewed by Mimi Pichey Class of ’72, in New York City, July 6, 1988. This is tape number two, side one. Now I had one more question for you before we leave the Brown topic because you are franker, I think, perhaps than most other members of your generation of that sex. I think that probably history and using the tape archive would be interested to know a little bit more, we talked about petting and making out and all that kind of thing. But a little bit more about what at least was your perception of sexual activity on campus?

SRB: It was not spoken of certainly. Perhaps [00:01:00] I’m interested in sex and I’m more frank because when I’m writing my books and I have to know about sexual practices and thinking, it’s maddening to go back and not quite be able to find what I want to know. Anyway. I don’t know how typical I am because I was quite prudish, quite uptight.

MP: I think you were very typical.

SRB: I don’t know because I’m always surprised after the fact to find today when I meet somebody and she says, oh, yeah, sure I was screwing around with my boyfriend and I think, you were? And so I sometimes think maybe I wasn’t typical. Maybe I certainly was buttoned up tight and very, very proper, but nobody talked about it. Nobody talked about it at all. There [00:02:00]

were whispers. We whispered about does she do it. There were some girls that we suspected, but we talked very little about sex at all.

MP: Do you think that by the time women graduated, or men, you could comment on either or both, graduated from Brown if they had a full sexual union?

SRB: Oh, men had had, but men were expected to. I can remember asking Sid at some point in our relationship whether he had had sex, and knowing I wanted him to have had sex because one of us would have to know -- incidentally, for posterity I was a virgin bride -- one of us would have to know what was going on and it was expected [00:03:00] and I think women, girls my age at that time really wanted the guy to have had experience, but the only girls who did it were the ones who guys didn't marry. Those were the tramps, those were the -- so we simply didn't talk about it. I'm sure there were girls who did have sex. I had a thought but I've lost it now about -- I don't know. Perhaps it will come back -- about sex.

MP: On a similar vein, where did people learn about sex? For example, when my friend failed me because she hadn't had sex and couldn't tell me anything about it, I ended up going to the Kinsey reports and reading technical things about how long [00:04:00] men could maintain erections and things like that and still had no idea whatever to expect when the real thing did happen.

SRB: But you see we weren't even supposed to ask. It wasn't even proper to show that we were interested and curious, so nobody asked anybody. We read -- when I'd been 12, 13, 14 we had read *Forever Amber*, though I think I already knew about sex. I don't have any distinct memory of exactly when, but having watched my children growing up, I don't think children necessarily do. They absorb it, then they disbelieve it, then they absorb it again and it can be over a period of a year, a year and a half. When you think they finally know and you're talking about it and they'll ask you a question and they'll say but don't you remember we said d-d-d-d and they'll go, "Oh, yeah, oh, yeah" because it takes such a long time. So I have no clear [00:05:00] memory of exactly, when exactly I absorbed it all. I do remember at 13 or 14 reading *Forever Amber* and being titillated and reading *God's Little Acre* and a few others like that. However, as long as we're talking sex I have to tell you a perfectly wonderful story of sex that I think is not necessarily atypical of -- because we weren't taught formally. Our parents usually were too

embarrassed to tell us. So we simply picked up as we -- but not usually until we were after 10 or 11 or 12 or in through there. We were much older. But I thought at one point, and I don't know when, after I'd learned about sex, I thought that it was something you did when you were asleep. Now it's quite logical and natural because of course we were taught [00:06:00] as children or taught today -- my daughter looked at me when she was learning and said, "Do you mean you did that disgusting thing four times?" Where we'd thought somehow that when you had sex you'd have a baby and nobody taught us any different. It was the way it was conveyed. You have sex, you have a baby. And this was obviously after I had learned about sex that I knew about the union of a man and a woman and then there would be a baby. But in our day we had oodles of movies and radio shows that had scenes like, "Hi, dear, I'm home." "Hi, dear." "What are you doing, dear?" "Oh, I'm knitting little things." "Knitting little things. Does that mean?" "Yes, dear. I went to the doctor today. I'm going to have a baby." And the husband would go, "Oh, really? Isn't that wonderful?" And I'd think, if they had sex and he doesn't know, then [00:07:00] it must have been that sex was something you do when you're asleep because otherwise, if he had known, he would have known that there was going -- I think that's very logical. Anyway. That's a sideline.

MP: We'll get onto that more. I think we should move along because you've finally graduated from these four wonderful years, married the man you dated the whole time and who you were very much in love with. He fortunately had had sex so you knew what to do to have your four children.

SRB: I know what I was going to tell you before. First of all, we did finally indulge in a little bit of heavy petting. I mean, after all, we were engaged for a whole year but I was still a virgin when we married. But you might be interested, and history might be interested in the rules because what do you do when you're a couple who after all for three years we were going together. He didn't have a car. We [00:08:00] necked in Roger Williams park and he bought me more scarves because my ears would get cold and I'd say, "I have to go in." So, we necked and we petted. We petted. And he would buy me scarves to keep my ears warm so we did stay out longer. But occasionally there would be parties in the dorm -- in the men's dorms -- and the rule was if the man and the woman were in the room together, the door had to be ajar, and feet had to be on the floor.

MP: All feet or was it three out of four?

SRB: Three out of four or one out of four. And somewhere in my collection, I do not know where now, but perhaps someday if I find it I'll give it to the archives -- because of course you crack the door about an inch and a half. And [00:09:00] somebody came in on us -- it was quite innocent, quite innocent and took a picture and I am kind of lying on my back with the toe on the floor. A very funny picture, but technically we still had one foot on the floor. Anyway. And we also necked. [Deanne?] Lewis who was a southern belle and very proper, very, very, proper. You know about the rules of Pembroke. A Pembroke lady does not smoke on the street and we had to roll up our jeans and our slacks under our raincoats, which I believe was the genesis of Bermuda shorts on college campuses because the women of the '50s could not wear slacks on the street and you'd go around in the dorms in either not jeans, dungarees we would have called them, I don't even think we called them jeans.

MP: Pedal pushers?

SRB: Pedal pushers or slack -- pedal pushers was the length. You could have dungaree pedal [00:10:00] pushers made out of denim and you could have any kind of pedal because that was the length. But you would have it under -- you would run out to the gate, say, and you couldn't have your pants showing and you'd have to roll them up and they always --

MP: I thought it was only when you went onto the Brown campus, onto the men's campus.

SRB: No!

MP: It was even on the women's campus?

SRB: Yes! It was just out on the street and therefore -- I mean, if you went into the gate you were going into a shop, so to speak. You could go from one dorm to another quick, quick, quick across the terrace, but otherwise, oh, no. And I do think that these rules probably applied on all Ivy League women's and that's why Bermuda shorts became popular because you didn't have to roll the damn things up before you put your rain coat on and go out. Anyway, [Deanne?] Lewis was very proper and we didn't smoke on the street and of course we had our dressed dinners and learned décor. Many [00:11:00] years later when I was poor and at some very elegant function, somebody turned to me and said, "Oh, you do that so well," and I smiled and said, "It only cost

my daddy \$20,000.” But, anyway. So [Deanne?] Lewis called the girls together because 11 or 10, no, it would have been 12:25, 12:25 every night in the dark corners of Andrews Terrace there was the recalcitrant five percent who met and I liked to say that Sid and I were for two years the very recalcitrant five percent in the dark corners.

MP: I was the last year I was there and the first year I was there was still in effect, but then by my sophomore year that was out.

SRB: Yeah.

MP: One other question on this, were you aware of anybody becoming [00:12:00] pregnant or abortions on campus?

SRB: No, no, I look back now and I wonder if I even knew what abortions were.

MP: It’s quite possible you didn’t.

SRB: Yeah, it’s absolutely quite possible. I’m thinking --

MP: It was a word that was whispered back corridors.

SRB: And I’m thinking of things like friends of my mother’s friends and their daughters and -- no. When, you know, here was my daughter in high school and a girl took off six months and everybody knew it was to have an abortion or at least suspected, yes, in high school.

MP: Six months?

SRB: Well, she took off, you know, she dropped out of school and then came back six months later because she’d missed --

MP: You mean to have a baby?

SRB: No, to have an abortion, but she took -- I don’t know. Whether it was a baby or an abortion or anyway, the idea being [00:13:00] that in high school even if it didn’t happen it was the first thought that the girls thought about in my daughter’s age, but I cannot remember. You know, I’m thinking of friends now who did drop out of school for a time and I have no idea why, but it

wouldn't have occurred to any of us, I think, to wonder. So perhaps I didn't know about abortions in that day and age, no.

MP: OK, well, at any rate. We may go back and clarify. So you got married and then what?

SRB: Got married, dumb of me, I had thought that I wanted time to catch my breath before the wedding, so I planned the wedding for three weeks after my graduation little realizing that all the preparations went on during final exams. Oh, that [00:14:00] whole month. However, Sid had come out of school and started law school and this was still when they were drafting for Korea. They weren't sending them to Korea because Korea was winding down in '54, but they were still drafting, and he started law school and got a draft notice and they told him that they could only defer him one year, which meant he'd go through the whole year and he would still be drafted again. So he figured the heck with this, better to get it over with, and he applied for the draft so that in December of my senior year he was drafted and thank heaven it was because in January they cut off the GI Bill and when he came out of the service he was able to go to law school on the GI Bill. So we made it by that much. Anyway, so the last six months I [00:15:00] wrote letters to my boyfriend in the Army every night, which letters -- I still have a few of them somewhere. Anyway, so we got married and he played baseball, played for Brown, and he always got the blankets, never the sweaters, so I never got to wear my boyfriend's sweaters. He got one sweater and he wore it himself. Anyway, he played baseball for the Army team and they had led them to believe that if they had a successful season that he would do his two year tour of duty at Fort Dix New Jersey. He was already looking around at Fort Dix for an apartment for us to live in. He called me a week before the wedding and said we must have beaten the team of a higher ranking officer than our officer. The team is getting [00:16:00] broken up. We're getting shipped to Germany. We couldn't even have a honeymoon because we got married on a weekend pass, we were due back at Fort Dix, New Jersey the following morning 6 a. m. Oh, great fun. I could write a book about that week alone! That was real life intruding on, you know, here I had my -- all brides in those days had filmy white nightgowns and peignoirs, a bridal set, and I put it on in some motel on the way down to Fort Dix and he looked at me and said, "What the hell is that?" And of course there I was in guest house number two in Fort Dix, New Jersey and I could not wear this filmy thing because the bathroom was down the hall, so I had to wear the ubiquitous raincoat that all we wore in those days as I went -- anyway. At the end of my --

MP: Were [00:17:00] you shipped out to Germany?

SRB: Yes, yes, well, he shipped out alone. I drove home from my honeymoon alone and in those days it took weeks, it took me five weeks to get my shots and my passports and all the processing and I joined him. We lived in Germany for a year and a half where my first son was born.

MP: And you did some theater while you were there.

SRB: Yes, yes, for the service corp. When I was seven and half months pregnant, I did unloved Laura in the Glass Menagerie. We did it in the round and so was I, but not too round. I carried very, very small and I wore floppy clothes and the only problem was the kid got stage fright and kicked every night and since we were right next to the audience, I thought they're going to see my belly jumping. And we did it in the service club and we did it in several German-American clubs around. And then we came home with number [00:18:00] one son and moved back to Rockaway and Sid then went to law school on the GI Bill. And we had two more sons and never enough money and I got very good at -- well, I was a child of the Depression, though, my sister being younger I always said she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth because by the time she came along it was boom times and upwardly mobile times, but I had remembered the Depression so I'm fairly thrifty and I got wonderful with leftovers. And I was really burdened. There was no real conscious effort to live, to do, you simply existed. I was doing what I was supposed to do. There was discontent, however, because of [00:19:00] the fact that I had spent four years first of all being my own person and I was back to -- well I tried to be my mother until after some years I discovered I'm not my mother. And poor Sid, because I suddenly started changing the rules, but I discovered I could not be the agreeable anything you say, dear. But (inaudible) I was always being told I had a mind and then all of a sudden there I was with coffee klatches because Sid was in law school and because he was struggling as a young lawyer, we were not traveling with our intellectual peers, we were travelling with our financial peers, most of whom didn't have much education. Same thing was true actually in Germany because he was a private and the few privates whose wives came over [00:20:00] there were so few of them, and the educated women who had come over were the wives of the officers and they didn't fraternized. So I'd meet them and we'd hit it off and it'd be terrific and they'd say, "Where are your quarters?" and I'd say, "We're living on the economy," which meant we had to find our

own quarters, our own private lodging, not on the post, which was quite wonderful, super landladies.

MP: Probably much more interesting living on an Army base, but still that wasn't status.

SRB: It had nothing to do with status. They weren't allowed to fraternize.

MP: Oh, really?

SRB: I was a private's wife and they were officers' wives.

MP: And they were not allowed to --

SRB: Absolutely not. As I say, the few -- Sid finally made sergeant which was not bad for a two year draftee and Jewish besides, but he made sergeant and then we went to the NCO club and that was even worse [00:21:00] because most of the wives there were women who hadn't had shoes on until their husbands got in the service. From the hills of wherever. So, but I'm a loner as I think I said before, and being alone was simply something I did, but the lack of intellectual stimulation I --

MP: Plus with three small boys. I think a lot of people go through that -- women go through that with small children. Even people (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

SRB: I would not have had somebody look after them while I went out to work. Partly because it rubbed me wrong that I shouldn't do that, this was my job. Partially because a part of me was scared probably, but partially because as frustrating and as empty as it could be, this was my job and it was so exciting to [00:22:00] give them what my mother had given me which was the joy - - Julia, when she went off to Washington University called me the second semester almost in tears. I said, "What's the matter?" She said, "There are too many good classes to take," and I thought what an embarrassment in riches. But I think that that was what I was consciously trying to give to my children. That same sense of all that's out there and I didn't want anyone else to fill them but me. There was a peculiar ego I suppose involved, but, yes, I can remember when we were in Germany. Particularly because it was lonely, I mean, no family, no nothing, no friends. We just had a couple of friends because there weren't that many, as I say, there weren't very many privates whose wives had come over. There was one couple who were a dear, dear

[00:23:00] friends long gone now. Dear, dear friends and stayed friends for years. But besides that nobody to speak of and I can remember reading in the International Trib that Thornton Wilder was in Paris and I had for one of my English classes we had to read about four or five books by one author and I had done Thornton Wilder. And I can remember, I see myself now, scrubbing that damn floor in Germany which was an awful floor to scrub. It took an hour and a half scrubbing it while I was having a dialogue with Thornton Wilder, and these are the things that I got involved doing -- crossword puzzles and double cross sticks at that time.

MP: In Germany or later?

SRB: I started doing them in Germany. I started making them up in Germany.

MP: So you composed them?

SRB: I composed them. I don't think [00:24:00] I submitted until we got home again. Now I may have submitted my first ever cross stick when we were still in Germany, but I don't remember. But I started doing that and doing all kinds of silly things, making miniature houses out of Kleenex boxes and stuff. Obviously, I was leaning towards my decorating without even knowing it. And doing a lot of embroidery because they had those wonderful crewel kits, crewel having yet become popular in this country, and all over Germany they had crewel kits. So I was creweling and just doing my things. Anyway, so we came back and, yes, I stayed with the kids and got more involved in the crossword puzzles.

MP: You started selling them at that point?

SRB: Yeah, yeah.

MP: And how did you go about doing that?

SRB: I simply wrote to the Times. I wrote first because I did cross sticks first and I wrote to [00:25:00] them and they said you can't sell to the Times because it's only -- it was Middleton then, it was (inaudible). It was the only one who was allowed to do them, but I could submit to books. And so I did submit to books and I've had several double cross sticks in the cross stick anthologies and then did a couple of the big ones, but they are so hard and not worth the strain on the eyes and they pay almost nothing.

MP: How much -- just out of curiosity --

SRB: They paid me \$85 and when my father was in Paris he saw it in the International Trib. Eighty-five dollars for worldwide and five years later they paid me another \$15 to reprint it in a book.

MP: Yeah, so a hundred bucks.

SRB: Yeah, and it took two weeks alone just to work out the puzzle and then another two weeks to set it up and to type up the things [00:26:00] and then I sent it in and they said, "Oh, this is going to the printer so could you please redo these things and redo this -- and you had to justify every definition. I mean, tedium. And I did it and I said, "OK, you did it. You showed you could do it."

MP: How long did you do that for?

SRB: I had only the one big one published. I made up a couple more but then I thought this is stupid. And by that time I was involved -- I think I was involved with the cultural society which was when the National Endowment for the Arts and stuff got started and they started having the state council of the arts and stuff. And so we got involved with a local group and I look back now and I think I don't believe it. There were maybe five of us -- Sid and I and three other people. I mean there were more involved but [00:27:00] may be five of us who were the impetus. We did a street festival for 20,000 people. I look back now and think -- and again, this was before street festivals were really being done.

MP: This was in the early '60s?

SRB: No, this was -- oh, no, oh, no, the street festival was not until the early '70s. We have to go back to the '60s?

MP: We don't have to go back to the '60s. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

SRB: The '60s were raising children --

MP: I just wanted to know when the crossword puzzles were while raising children --

SRB: The crossword puzzles were while raising children and Nancy Bell, who only had one child, and I -- she was the flip side of me -- and she had one child and a career and she sent me a copy of *The Split-Level Trap*, which was the precursor to Betty Friedan of women who were going slowly crazy in the American dream and I thought she had it all and then of course she hit [00:28:00] 40 and divorced because she couldn't stand her life anymore and looked at me and said, "Oh, I envy you staying home and doing all the things." So, we were always the flip side of each other and she was the one I bounced off and she bounced off me. And she sewed, which was wonderful because we both sent -- I sewed always -- and we sent clippings and sketches of the fabric and then the drawing and the letters were yay thick always. Anyway, no, the '60s were very difficult. Sid was in school because he didn't go back to school until '59, I think, and he was in school then he got involved in politics. He ran for district leader and lost and it was something he shouldn't have done and we were in the hole a small fortune, so we never had enough [00:29:00] money and he was involved in politics and he was involved in trying to get a practice started and it was awhile, again, financially and people who say that money doesn't count, don't know diddly squat because many of our college friends, particularly his college friends, were doing very well and so the friends who became our friends were a slightly lesser level. Didn't bother him because he could still relate to lawyers, but it drove me crazy and the others were political affairs. But again, I was dutiful wife doing it. It didn't occur to me --

MP: So your life revolved around --

SRB: Revolved around his. I did go to -- took art classes, took painting classes at night but felt constrained [00:30:00] to cook a full meal and then come home at 11:00 and still wash dishes even though --

MP: Now, he would babysit during those times.

SRB: He would babysit, but if the kids raised hell and messed the house he wouldn't clean the house because it didn't occur to him either. But then it didn't occur to me to ask him. This is where we get into the women's movement because so many of my friends divorced and I guess a part of me knew that yes, he was male chauvinist pig, but unless I said the rules will change, why should they change? And I took up classes. Then I did -- remember you draw this -- the matchbooks you draw this and they came and they said OK you can take these correspondence

courses and we will make you a famous illustrator. I had after all taken life drawing with the idea of maybe being a fashion illustrator, but the kids came and the [00:31:00] life changed and it didn't occur to me to go out and do anything with it. And then suddenly this was the chance and he looked at me and he said we can't afford it and I said OK and that was the end of it. I remember feeling very bitter, but it didn't occur to me, again, to be independent about it. Then we lost a baby, which was not only financially devastating, which it was Rh-negative and in those days the insurance companies did not pay out until the kid was 30 days old. Our third kid was an Rh and of course all the transfusions are in the first few days and that all we had to pay for -- we couldn't afford it and we wound up having to pay and then I lost the next one, but all those hospital bills were in the first 24 hours and insurance didn't pay in those days. So, I mean, I look back on my 20s and think it was pure misery. [00:32:00] We could not relate to each other, we couldn't talk, we couldn't -- I was trying to be the good wife and therefore he was doing what he wanted to do. And I was blaming him and then with the baby dying there's always emotionally blaming each other -- always. You know, it had nothing to do with logic, it's there. And I got into my 30s. I think we came very close to separating and Julia, when I got pregnant with Julia, I think that was very much our reconciliation. And then she was born, a living child and a girl -- the one who died had been a girl -- and it turned things around. And I suddenly realized in some dim corner of my mind. I mean, I'd been --

MP: What year was she born?

SRB: Sixty-eight. I had [00:33:00] been feeling like here's the women's movement and it's too late for me because, I mean, there I am with not enough money and too many kids and a relationship and a life that's screwed up and I don't know what to do and it's all his fault and, you know, all those things you go through. She came along and it restored balance.

MP: Now the women's movement really didn't get started until '69 or '70.

SRB: The Split-Level Trap was written in '64 or five. So --

MP: The Feminine Mystique was I think '65, '66, I think.

SRB: So there was all -- there was the stirrings already. But, as I say, I was thinking what good is it for me?

MP: But you were aware of those things already?

SRB: Oh, very much so, but very bitter. Turned 30 and the bitterness of looking back to my 20s and thinking I let it all happen to me. But as [00:34:00] I say --

MP: But these are revelations that came to you individually?

SRB: Yeah, but in some dim corner of my mind, however, I knew that it was not his fault, whereas, as I say, most of my freshman dorm, probably 20 out of the 24 divorced the first husband and then turned around and said now what? And in some dim corner I think I knew that he wasn't the primary reason. That it had to come from me. And the first thing was after Julia was born, he had by that time -- he'd been in the DA's office and suddenly got a job -- the law assistant to a judge -- and our income almost doubled overnight. And we bought a house. We still weren't rich but what we did -- I mean, we had money. We bought a house and I went in and I said, OK, we're going to do this and this and this and this. And six months later [00:35:00] people said it looks like you said it would. And I said, "Of course I saw it. Doesn't everybody?" And they looked at me and I thought, aha! It was a little late to be a gopher in the garment district. I had long since given up my dreams of a fashion illustrator designer. Those had always been vague dreams anyway. I'd really never known where to take them. I had the opportunity to do Vogue. In those days Vogue had a competition for college students. Do they still do?

MP: I think they do.

SRB: I started it and then didn't even pursue it. Whether I was afraid to try and fail because I didn't have the confidence in college. Whether I was lazy, whether I -- I do not know why, but the dreams of the fashion illustration had all been very vague and nebulous because you get married and have kids and I had never -- certainly my mother was not an example of crystalizing [00:36:00] your thoughts and my father sent so many mixed messages, I want you be a queen or princess. I want you to be wonderful, rich and famous, but you're just a woman so let me knock you down. I mean, I didn't know so life just happened to me. And the bitterness when I got into my 30s looking back and I think I knew suddenly that whatever else happened I never again wanted to regret doing nothing. I thought if I make a mistake, I'd rather make a mistake than look back and say I didn't make any decision at all because it just happened. When I look back -- my husband says, "Oh, it's revisionist history. You weren't as unhappy as that." I don't know.

MP: And he wasn't in your skin either.

SRB: Well, certainly there were a lot of good times and perhaps I'm speaking from the anger and the bitterness I felt in my 30s rather than when [00:37:00] what I felt in my 20s, if you know what I mean. Does that make sense?

MP: Well, yes, I mean, it's more -- it's something that perhaps you feel remorse.

SRB: Yeah.

MP: (inaudible) then when you were in there.

SRB: In there --

MP: It was satisfactory.

SRB: There were hard times, there were a lot of unhappy times, there were a lot of difficulty times, but, yes, perhaps you've put your finger on it. Perhaps it was the sense of the time and the waste and therefore I look back from my 30s and again, feeling like how dare the women's movement say but it's too late for you. We've changed the rules on you that here you did all the things you were supposed to do in your 20s, you weren't particularly happy but you did them because you were supposed to and now here you are in your 30s and they're saying, hey, you did dumb things and you know you did dumb things. I mean, I didn't need the women's movement to tell me, but at [00:38:00] least society was telling me in my 20s when I was unhappy that I was doing the right thing. And now suddenly they were saying, ha! Not only weren't you happy, but you did dumb things besides (inaudible).

MP: And your perception of this was gained through reading the New York Times, going to consciousness raising groups, going to --

SRB: I did (inaudible) oh, never. Nothing, nothing.

MP: How did this perception filter to it? How did you gain this perception?

SRB: I didn't read the Times that much because it took too long and I'm a slow reader and I found I didn't like to -- so I read newspapers but didn't watch too much television. I wrote to Nancy Bell and she wrote to me and I just picked it up all over. I didn't go to any groups. I didn't

belong to any clubs. I just picked it up all over and I'm a pretty good reasoner, I think. And I did begin --

MP: It seems to have hit you like a ton of bricks. [00:39:00]

SRB: No, no I don't think so. I don't think so. It was a combination of passing 30. It was losing the baby, which I was 28 or nine and those years were so difficult. It was all the angers. It was simply seeing. It was looking around. It was -- I don't know.

MP: So it was an individual revelation?

SRB: Oh very much so --

MP: At the same time --

SRB: At the same time. I certainly was aware I had read things, I knew that it was going on, but it wouldn't have occurred to me to go to a consciousness group and I don't remember any of my friends being that involved with any of it. It simply was something that -- and I wasn't particularly militant about it. Again, it was more the sense of changing within myself and being aware that [00:40:00] this is also what was happening with the women's movement that this whole thing. And I think we spoke about it once before and I say which is why when I meet particularly young people, women who are fearsomely militant, I want to laugh at them and say, "You don't know what you're liberated from." Particularly in the era when they were so militant. It's like, you don't know what it was like to automatically take the mashed piece of cake because he gets the good piece without even thinking about it. Now I'm aware of it. I was on the plane with my husband. Two weeks ago we went up to Toronto for our anniversary and he's a leftie and I'm a rightie and we were sitting side by side and we're both eating. And I'm eating like this with my elbow tucked in so that his left hand will have room [00:41:00] to eat. And I suddenly looked at him and I said, "Did you notice that we're bumping?" and then finally I said, no. First I thought, I'm not going to do it. Just for the fun of it. I didn't mind eating with elbow because I'm used to it, but I thought, just for the fun of it I'm going to see how much we've changed since -- see, I play with it. A part of me, as much as I go through it and did go through it, a part of me always stood back and watched very intellectually. And so I deliberately -- I stopped tucking my elbow in and simply ate normally and our elbows were clunking and

clunking and clunking and I finally said to him, "Are you noticing what our elbows are doing?" And he said, "Well, a little bit. It's uncomfortable." I said, "Would it occur to you to tuck your elbow in to keep it out of my way?" He looked at me and said, "Are you out of your mind?" [00:42:00] And I said, "You know, that's a residual of your upbringing and mine." At the same time from that moment on I could say to him, "Do me a favor, move your elbow a little," because, again, the impetus had to come from me, but not belligerently. But anyway, this is what I began to see. Particularly after Julia was born and we were able to deal with so many problems that for the four years since the death of the baby -- it was four years between the death of the baby and Julia -- that we had not been able to talk about because we were hurting so. We were able again to sit down -- incidentally, and as a sideline, we were super parents. As bad as our relationship could get, and part of it [00:43:00] was because I didn't know who I was and I was trying to be what I wasn't, which was mother, and because of so many things. As bad as it could be, we were super parents because we both were aware -- again, very rationally, very clinically -- of all the terrible things our parents had done and very consciously saying, no, this is how we are going to raise our children and so we could put aside us and raise them as a team. We were a super team with super kids. There it is. That's for posterity. They're super kids. Anyway, so we were able after Julia was born and it somehow wiped away the pain of the four years to begin to work things out. But at the same time, now I knew, because I [00:44:00] could picture a room, why can't I be an interior decorator? That I can do and still be a mother. And this time I didn't ask my husband. I said, "I've checked out the school, I'll go at night, this is how much it'll cost. I think we can swing it. I want to do it," and he said, "Terrific." And I thought, schmuck! All it had needed was for me to get my head in the right place and then again, I look at all my friends and so many of them divorced at that stage figuring it's his fault and then they were still back where they started unless they knew who they were.

Part 5

MP: [00:00:00] With Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten, Class of '55, interviewed by Mimi Pichey, Class of '72. This is side two of tape two.

SRB: So, I went in and got my card. Interestingly, again, it goes back to point of view. I was going off to night classes and I was cooking full dinners and coming home late and washing dishes even though he said, "Leave it, don't bother." And I would come back and the dishes would be there and he wouldn't have washed them, and I would be angry and he would be annoyed and, again, it was my perception and it took me years to be able to say, "You're in charge [00:01:00] of supper," and walk out. And he was happier, because he didn't have to feel obligated to wash dishes that he didn't want to wash. But it's this funny perception that we put ourselves into that was as much my fault as his because here I was out of my sense of guilt was cooking a full meal and then somehow hating him because he didn't wash the dishes afterwards. Whereas when I began to say, "You're in charge of supper," he loved it. He'd come home, he'd order in pizza and I'd come home to a clean kitchen. But, again, it was me not him and I think that this is something that you work through whether it's because of the women's movement, whether it was because I was in my 30s, I do think a woman in her 30s anyway [00:02:00] goes through a tremendous amount of soul searching and revising and refining and unhappiness; yeah, tremendous unhappiness. I knew suddenly how things had to change. I also knew that if he couldn't change, I could leave him. Whereas in my 20s I'm sure we both said maybe we ought to get a divorce, but neither of us meant it. At least I didn't and he knew I didn't, so nothing ever changed. But suddenly when I said it in my 30s, obviously I knew I meant it and obviously he knew I meant it, and his feeling was -- he was terrific. Things simply changed because I wanted them changed and because I spelled it out instead of sitting around thinking what a rat he is and why don't things change and it's all his fault and all the things [00:03:00] that women do, which is why it's so funny that marriage still seems to do -- I think we also spoke about this. I had an editor who was late 20s, early 30s. Career woman from the word go who was suddenly sick for a week and her husband said, "I'll take care of you," and she said to me, "What is it about the institution of marriage that I kept seeing the dust mites under the bed and he didn't?" I don't know what it is, but women do that to themselves and then dump it on the man. Anyway, so I became an interior decorator, freelanced. Mother first, still mother first, but it was satisfying and I was getting involved more and more with other things. The costume lady at Julia's school, the bulletin editor for the boys' school, the high school --

MP: Do you feel differently about paid work versus unpaid work? I [00:04:00] mean, was there more satisfaction derived for getting money (inaudible) --

SRB: Paid work didn't -- oh, I loved it, I loved it.

MP: I mean, you liked getting a check for your work?

SRB: I loved it, but it wasn't very much because I didn't do it very much because I still felt mother first and it didn't occur to me to do more. Again, I suspect there still was scaredness.

MP: Was that the first money you ever earned?

SRB: I'd worked as a counselor at camp, but that's fun and easy, and I'd worked for my father; other than that, yeah. That's the first money I'd ever earned because I went from school to marriage, zip, zip, zip. And because I didn't know how competent I was because who tells you when you're a housewife and mother? And certainly when I was growing up my father never told me and, you know, if [00:05:00] I did anything too good he'd knock me down. All the time I was in theater he never saw me in anything ever. He saw me once up at Pembroke and only because it was father-daughter weekend. And he came up and I felt guilty because I had to let him go to the banquet with a friend of mine and I felt apologetic that I couldn't go with him because I was in the play. Yeah, isn't that funny? So, there was never any reinforcement for what I was doing, but as I began to do volunteer work -- I didn't get much from the decorating I did because there was not much feedback and I did so little, so there wasn't really much comfort. And Sid looked at me -- I'm sure he was trying to be helpful -- but he said things like, you sure don't do things that make you feel very good, they're all loner things. Meaning that there wasn't much feedback, and [00:06:00] he was right of course, but perhaps it was not in my nature to do the kind of things -- as I said, when I volunteered it was always I was the secretary, I was the treasurer, I didn't have to go to all the meetings as the treasurer, but I ran things behind the scenes but I was on my own. I'm the costume lady. I was in charge, I ran it, but I didn't have to worry about all the involvement. But the feedback got better and better from the more I did when I stage managed at a local theater group. At that point I'd been a mother for years and these were all young actors who'd done off Broadway stuff, who said, "Oh, my God, where'd you learn to stage manage?" And I said, "One, from Brown University and two, from being a mother." And I began to think, you know, what happened? How did I get so competent and nobody ever told me and I didn't tell myself? By [00:07:00] that time I was in pretty good shape, but by that time I was getting up to my 40s and 40 is -- oh! Forty is super, 40 is wonderful.

MP: Good. I have something to look forward to.

SRB: Thirties are absolutely the pits! Twenties, you don't know what's happening, you're so young. Thirties are thinking back and it's killing you. Forties, you have earned the right to thumb your nose at the whole world. Forties are super. Well, I hit the forties running except by that time Sid had become an assistant to the mayor here in New York, so for four years I was a political wife and the best damn political wife around! Hi, there. Sylvia Baumgarten. I mean I could go to any party anything and have a ball. He was the darling of the Broadway Association, we went every opening night. We went to [00:08:00] the Tony Awards. We watched the Bicentennial with Princess Grace on the (inaudible) and I got her autograph, too, besides. I mean, we lived it up for four years. For the first time our social life was something that I loved. Up until then it had been politics -- I mean, in the beginning it was the friends who were no great thrill and then it was the political -- the local political people who -- deadly, deadly that I was the good political wife. Suddenly, I was the good political wife in my own. I mean, I can remember in my bitter days looking at him and saying, "Where are my peers?" feeling absolutely desperate. Out in the suburbs, suburban America is the pits. This is one reason I got involved in the Cultural Society because I thought [00:09:00] bring us culture, bring us -- I couldn't afford to go in all day to a museum -- give us a museum, give us this -- but as the time went on I was expanding and we were expanding and we suddenly had a social life that was thrilling to me and to him, too. He didn't need it as much as I did because again, he had his peers in the courtroom, but that was thrilling to him. So when the time was done, the four years were over, suddenly we had been going to the opera because we would get tickets through the city, and I said I'd always wanted to go theater, to the opera, and it was either a question of money or if it wasn't a question of money it was no, no, no we can't because I have an appointment and I have a political this and the political that and the political -- and I was allowing him to do it. And suddenly I said, you can give up [00:10:00] this political thing if that political thing comes along. Therefore, I'm buying tickets for such and such and you're going to put it in your calendar and if the political thing comes along, you're going to say, gee, I can't. I have tickets to such and such. And he discovered, yes, we can do it. But, again, I was the one who had to say these are the changes I want. I don't hold it against him. I could only kick myself that it took me so long to see that if I wanted changes, I had to make them. We now have subscriptions to the opera, to the Circle in the Square, to the Roundabout and when originally when he didn't want to go to Circle, I made a

date with a friend and said, do you want to do it? We got a subscription and went in together, drove in together. I began to come in when the kids were in school to go to the museum and get back in time. Again, we had more money and that good God knows it has everything to do, but I began [00:11:00] to expand our lives and he loved it. Right about that time, however, I was beginning to lose the rhythm of my days. Children, if they do nothing else, give you a rhythm, give you a reason, give you a pattern. They were all grown and gone. Julia was the last one at home and I was beginning to fall apart. I was beginning to dribble away my time because I couldn't get into gear and that was when a friend was between jobs and said, "Let's write a cookbook." And that's when she couldn't -- didn't want to and went back to work and I said, OK, and I started to write a book. And I wrote [Mariel?].

MP: And where did you get the idea for (inaudible)?

SRB: As I say, [Mariel?] was one of my stories. It was just --

MP: Bedtime story.

SRB: [00:12:00] It was a very vague romantic plot. Obviously, I have a great wide romantic streak because they were usually romantic plots that I ran through my head and I was always the heroine and childhood fantasy grown up and then had a rich fantasy life every time I went to bed. That sounds very suspicious.

(laughing)

MP: Wait a second. We explained that earlier. Because the people who are listening at this point just go back to the previous side.

SRB: Right. Anyway, it was so --

MP: So that was around 1980 or so that you started writing?

SRB: No, I started Mariel, I started fooling around with it in the spring of '79. That's when she and I were writing the cookbook. And I kind of had the idea in the spring of '79, it was just kind of diddling in my head. And then Sid had his 25th reunion and Tom McCormick [00:13:00] who was the Chairman of the Board of St. Martin's Press, was the President of St. Martin's Press, Tom and I were in class together in an English course and I was just about to be engaged to Sid

at that time, and Tom was kind of trying to talk me out of it, I think, though we never really got anything going because I was already on the verge of being engaged and a part of me didn't want to start all over again with complications. Besides that, Tom didn't seem anything I wanted at the time and Sid did. But he was great fun, great friend, and we had a super fun, fun relationship and ran into him a couple times through the years because he used to come out to the beach club and sneak into our beach club to the pool, and so saw him just a couple of times with his kid. But [00:14:00] it was all very vague. Suddenly see him at the reunion. Hadn't seen him for about 10 years. He said, "So what are you doing lately?" I said, "Funny you should ask. I'm fooling around with this -- " [00:14:00] He said, "Send it to me." I said, "I'm not sure because I don't know the market. " I said, "But I have the feeling this is probably a soft cover." He said, "Send it anyway." Well, that was OK.

Up until then maybe it had been fooling around, but it was like, you dumb schmuck. You'd be a fool now. Here's somebody who says send it. I spent all summer researching and when Julia started school in September I sat down to my typewriter and started -- no, no, I wrote it. I started writing July 1st when she started camp. And then there was a lull. I wrote for about a month and a half. You can see it in the first book because I didn't know what I was doing, but in the meantime I was reading romances for the first time and I was researching [00:15:00] and I can almost spot it at what point in the book I picked it up again because then I had to reread it and it suddenly takes off from that point. Up until then it was strange. You may not be able to see it unless you have the first draft. Oh, I ought to give the first draft to them. Come to think of it I ought to give the first draft in.

Anyway, I picked it up again and got into it, finished it probably in the spring of '80 and called Tom, sent it to him, and he had it forever. And I think, frankly, that he viewed it as middle aged lady indulging her fantasies and gave it to a real smartass editor who was more interested in [00:16:00] impressing him -- fresh out of Harvard, incidentally, because she left her name on the paper and my son, who was also fresh out of Harvard said, "Oh, I knew her. Smartass English lit." And she went on about, "Can you imagine still being concerned with your virginity? My God. Frankly I found it a turn off." Now that fact that my heroine was a 17th century French Catholic didn't seem to bother her because she wanted to show him where she was coming from

and she thought this was a wimpy heroine. “Are they still turning out heroines like this? My God!”

But it took him about eight months to send it back and I think -- in retrospect I thanked him -- but in retrospect, son of a gun, I think he sent back that cover letter to hit me between the eyes because it really was not helpful, it was cruel. But I pulled myself together and sent it out again [00:17:00] and sent it out a couple of times. Sent it out finally because I met somebody at a book party who, young man, and I was complaining about this and he said well, you send it off to so and so at such and such a house he said because by this time I realized it had so much to do with who you hit at the publishing house. He said, “I happen to know for a certainty that she was still a virgin at 27.” And I sent it off to her and she called me. She said, “I love it, but we’re not buying, but please be in touch,” because she could relate to it whereas that one couldn’t.

And by that time I realized maybe I’m on the right track and now I was writing and I was getting no support from them because I’d always been mother and for the first time I was putting them aside to write and I was getting flack [00:18:00] from all the kids. When they’d come in in the summer time and stay over every weekend and I wasn’t putting myself out for them. And Sid was not particularly helpful either.

MP: Were you on your second novel by that time?

SRB: Yeah, there’d be --

MP: So you hadn’t yet published the first --

SRB: I hadn’t even shown them.

MP: But you were encouraged to start on the next.

SRB: To start on the next so I, having done the research, (inaudible) a continuation although they stand independently, but I figured once I did the research I might as well use some of the same characters, you know.

And I remember there was time when he was very angry because there was a bill that needed to be paid and I was hassling him about it and he made some comment about, if you’d, you know, get a real job instead of fooling around, or something unkind like that. He apologized

afterwards, but it was out of his frustration and out of his sense of what the hell is she doing? And I guess I had a very good sense of myself because I think I called him a very [00:19:00] nasty word and kept on doing what I was doing. Whereas perhaps five years before, it would have been enough -- or ten years before -- would have been enough to knock my confidence. And I remember when one of my sons came in and I had not taken a phone message properly because I was in the middle of writing and he said, well if you didn't take (inaudible) and I turned around and I said, "Fuck off!" and he went (inaudible) and came back and apologized because I -- living gives a woman a sense of self, damn it! The world does not; at least not for a woman who stays home and raises children.

And I suspect it was just as true today because I have a friend who was a career woman until she was 35, had her first kid and you should hear her fall apart. And I'm saying to her, "How can you be sounding like I sounded when you have had a career? [00:20:00] How can you be that way? I (inaudible) that way because I had no place to test myself in the world. All I had was raising the children. I didn't know that being able to pick up the phone and argue with a service man and have him then come and refix the machine and charge me nothing was a skill. But you've been out in the world for 15 years. How can you be falling apart now that you're staying home with your kid? How can you be doubting yourself? How can you have so little confidence?" I could not get over it; how little confidence.

So I think perhaps it has more to do with the fact that a woman has no support system at all whether she's been a career woman or not. She has not support system at home and she was running her household [00:21:00] like a majordomo and not knowing that she is doing the toughest goddamn job in the world because when I started to get out in the world as a writer and look around and see young career women -- hot shots -- and I think to myself, God, are they dumb? God, are they helpless? We've got in this building career women who come fluttering to me, "How do I get somebody to do my windows?" And I think, and I envied you? And I envied -- I look back now -- with the envy when I hit my 30s and I looked at young career women who weren't getting married, who weren't doing the dumb things I did in my 20s and I think, good God, they were as helpless as I was. They just got a better wardrobe to do it in. It [00:22:00] really was an astonishing revelation and I think --

MP: So you changed dramatically during those years?

SRB: No, I think I had already changed. I suddenly when I became a writer -- I suddenly became aware of all the things I had always had going for me. But no, there was no great change once I started writing (inaudible). No, it was simply a natural progression. The only change was suddenly being aware that after my 30s when I began to get it all together, I had it all together I just didn't know -- perhaps it's a little bit like, what do they say when you're in college? When you're a freshman you know nothing, but don't know it. When you're a sophomore you know nothing and know it. And that's your 20s and your 30s. When you're a junior you know everything and you don't know it, and when you're a senior you know everything and know it. And [00:23:00] so perhaps in a way it's the stages of your life, too. In my 20s I was deaf, dumb, and blind. You know, happy go lucky and unhappy, and in my 30s I was aware of my stupidities and suffered, sophomore slump and coming into my -- although it's not 10 years because coming into my 40s I was already coming out of it, but coming into my junior year, if you will, where I was competent and in charge but not really aware of how much until I began to then get into the next stage which is sheer smugness. (laughter)

MP: So tell me about how your first book finally got published.

SRB: Well, because I didn't know how hard it was to sell, I simply went to the library and looked up [00:24:00] the names and addresses and phone numbers of publishing houses that seemed to publish soft cover because when Tom sent it back he said, "Frankly, I think it's soft cover." I used him a little bit. He said, "Send it to Avon."

MP: Soft cover, but did you know the genre (inaudible).

SRB: No, good God, no. I wished I had, I wished I had, but, again, I'm a loner.

MP: You just wrote it.

SRB: I wrote it.

MP: And then it was --

SRB: I had a little trouble selling it because there was a rape in it. It was not a romantic rape. Well, I didn't know it was a no-no. I didn't believe in romantic rapes anyway. It was rape by the villain and then the heroine became frigid and the whole plot is basically how her husband, the

hero, warms her up after having been traumatized by the villain. But this was in '81 and Middle America was a little shook by that sort of ugly rape scene. It would be easier to sell it today. They [00:25:00] will accept that because Middle America has evolved, but she had sex with more than one man. Even if it was against her will. Middle America is allowing a little more today and of course Middle America is very much the romance market.

MP: But back then you had no idea of markets. You were just writing a story that was in your head.

SRB: And the idea of the psychology of a woman who is raped -- particularly raped before her own marriage, she's married, separated, they both think each other is dead. She is abducted. She has never had sex, is raped and kept as a sexual play thing, if you will, by the villain. Then the hero finds her, does not know. She doesn't want to tell him she's so horrified at what has happened to her, but suddenly when he goes to touch her she is so traumatized that she freezes. He -- because she has a miscarriage -- figures she has deliberately been unfaithful [00:26:00] to him, and the play of it, it seemed wonderful, wonderful. How do people find each other again having been through this? So this basically was the situation.

Anyway, so I just kept sending it out. When I got this editor who said I'm not buying, but you know, keep in touch when I wrote the second book. I was still sending out and each time getting phone calls, getting personal letters, I knew I was on the right track. Wrote the second one, called her and said are you interested? She said I'm not buying because glitz was in. It was '81, glitz was in and historicals were out, she said but send it anyway. She called me she said, "I love it. We can't buy it. May I send you to an agent," which I had not been able to get because in those days -- today you can get an agent much better if you [00:27:00] aren't published romance writers. A lot of agents will read and take on if they think you have something. But then it was a catch-22, what have you published? She said, "May I send you to an agent?" I said, "Please do." She sent me to the agent the agent said, "You got two, give me an outline for a third and I'll sell it as a trilogy," and she did.

MP: And so third was *Delphine*.

SRB: So the third was *Delphine* which was sold in outline. She sold the three because Pocketbooks was coming out with a line of historicals and *Marielle*, which was my first book,

launched the tapestry line. They came out with two titles a month and it was one of the two titles. And the three -- the books are up there, you can see. Then they sold the three to England and so the three books are there both in the American editions and in the [Coronet?], which is the English edition. Meantime, my editor, I had written the outline for *Dreams So Fleeting* and [00:28:00] she didn't like it. By that time I first found the support groups -- the romance support groups because Tapestry was having its first birthday and they said come to the book signing at the romance convention. I said, "What romance convention?" Went and discovered the RWA, which is the Romance Writers of America and discovered that this was a real support group for romance writers. Now when people call me and say, gee, I'd like to get started, what do I do? I say come to our meetings because boy, did I wish I had had that support group. We read things to each other, we support each other. There are more unpublished than published authors in the RWA and it super to have it. Anyway, *Dreams So Fleeting*, I had written the outline -- oh, anyway, so I went to the Tapestry romance and that's how I found -- the Tapestry birthday.

MP: Can I --

SRB: Oh, OK. [00:29:00]

MP: I wanted to just back up for a minute. You wrote as Ena Halliday and I wanted to ask you about why you chose that name to --

SRB: Ena Halliday was my grandmother. It wasn't my mother's name because Granny married again a Scotsman named Mac Halliday and I like the name and I thought because Baumgarten, Sylvia Baumgarten has no cache on a book where the heroine's dress is cut down to there, and they liked it and we went with it. Now, I'd written three. I'd written the outline for *Dreams So Fleeting* because when I was researching *Marielle*, I think, yes, *Marielle* took part in a court ballet. So I was researching 17th century French theater and came across the life of Moliere that he was a strolling actor and stuff. I [00:30:00] kind of had it in the back of my mind so after the trilogy which takes place from 1629 to 1641, I then wrote the outline for *Dreams So Fleeting*, which takes place in 1616 thereabouts and my characters meet in Moliere in their travels. And my editor said, "I don't want France again," and I gave her just a one page precis for *Forever Wild* and she said, "There isn't enough to go on, give me an outline." Now, in the meantime I had gone to the birthday party of the Tapestry line and I felt that I was getting shunted aside. I

suspect it had something to do with that they had stuck their necks out and (inaudible) in *Marielle* and gotten a little flack. Therefore, *Marielle* hadn't done as well as they wanted and they weren't as happy with me.

[00:31:00] And so I said to my agent, I don't know if they're trying to dump me by refusing France again or is it that she doesn't want France. I had lunch with her. I just got bad vibes. I said, "What'll I do?" And my agent said, "I like the outline for *Dreams So Fleeting*." She said, hold back on submitting because once they refuse the option material -- because they have the option on your next book -- once they've refused the option material, basically I'm a free agent. I can go back and submit again and see what happens or I can go elsewhere. So my agent said, "Let me see if I can sell *Dreams So Fleeting* elsewhere." She had nibbles instantly; Warner, New American Library, a few of them, and she went with Warner because it was the best offer at which point [00:32:00] she said, "Do you want to stick with Pocket?" I said, "No." I said, "The editor and I -- really I'm getting bad vibes. They don't treat one well." You know, on the galley proofs you have a day and a half to go through, they change things. Just everything about it; I wasn't thrilled. And I figured as long as Warner wants me, I'll go with Warner.

That's why I changed my name because though supposedly Ena Halliday -- normally the nom de plume stays with the publishing house. I crossed it out of my contract and said, look, this is my granny. The name comes with me. And they said fine. So when I went to Warner I said, look, Ena Halliday belongs to me. How do you feel about it? They said, "Well, if you'd had a big splash, then maybe we'd want you to stay. But how do you feel about it?" And I said, "Well, frankly, I've had more people saying, is that Edna, [00:33:00] is that Eva, is that Halliday? It doesn't have the name recognition for some reason or other." And I said, "Then I'm going to change it." And they said, "We would prefer that anyway."

Louisa Rollings was my great grandmother. I have her picture somewhere. The 1880s with the tight little bun and her husband he was -- they were English -- her husband, as they called them in England, the Picadilly weepers -- the big bushy side whiskers -- standing with his hand on her shoulder. She looks 20 years older than he because of course all she did was cook and clean and all he did was go out to local and heft a pint, no doubt. Even then they were male chauvinist pigs.

MP: Especially then.

SRB: Anyway, so that's how I got to be and changed to Louisa.

MP: Let me ask a question and you may not want to answer this. I'm curious and I think probably other people would be too, how much is paid [00:34:00] for a novel?

SRB: The broad, broad spectrum depends on the house. I'd got for the trilogy \$22,500.

MP: For all three books?

SRB: For all three, but it was scaled out. It was seven and well, five and seven and 15 -- I forget. Anyway, which was considered very good, very good, particularly for a first. Depends on the house. Harlequin, for example, is terrible. Harlequin pays maybe \$3,500 - \$4,000. However, Zebra pays maybe \$1,500 - \$3,000; however, Zebra has distribution that the rest of us would kill for and therefore, you make it up in royalties above and beyond [00:35:00] your advance whereas *Dreams So Fleeting*, I got an advance of \$15,000, but I haven't made any royalties above that. Whereas on the trilogy I've gotten more for *Forever Wild* and more again for *Stolen Spring* and I'm going to ask for more on the next one for sure or else. But the trilogy has to this date earned out probably about \$45,000 for the three books.

MP: So you get the residuals?

SRB: Yeah, I've gotten above the \$22,500, I've gotten above that. So I've earned altogether \$45,000 on the trilogy, which is, again, about \$15,000. Fifteen thousand is respectable. [00:36:00] But I've asked for more each book because my feeling is I can get \$15,000 anywhere at this point, and if Warner wants me, I want more.

MP: I'm worried about running out of tape. I may have to come back and tape another interview just on the actual writing process and some of the things I'm interested in and I assume that some of the people listening to the tape may be. I guess I do have some questions though. Maybe we could talk a little bit about the kind of research you do. I noticed in one of the -- and where you get your ideas from. Those were two major things I wanted to ask about. One of the articles I was reading about -- you talked about having to do research on 17th century underwear for

example. And I imagine there's quite a few odd pieces that you have to gather to make it seem realistic.

SRB: Underwear certainly, when you're writing romance because you've got to undress your heroines. [00:37:00] Anyway, for romance I find it's particularly important to undress them; to know what they're wearing. Some authors don't. But I feel that, first of all, as I said before, I love facts. I've got a head full of facts. Oh, I didn't mention that I've been on quiz shows for heaven's sake. I was on Jeopardy and I was on Who, What and Where? Mostly because somebody looked at me and said, "You know so many things, smartass, why don't you get on Jeopardy?" So I did.

MP: When was that?

SRB: In '68 I think.

MP: And how'd you do?

SRB: Obviously, I'm a fighter. They threw me up against somebody who was going for a fifth win and there was no way in hell they were going to let me win because of course by the time you go on those shows they know exactly what you know. [00:38:00] They have tested you so often they know what you're weak in and they know what you're strong in and so the categories probably they can steer. And when somebody's going for a fifth win, they want that person to get a fight, but they really don't want that person to lose. So I think they can probably steer the categories. The other thing is that person because you tape more than one show a day, therefore, that person is working on adrenaline by the time they're going for the fifth win and there's no way in hell that you are going to -- I mean, I'm sure it's done, but I gave them a good fight and I did fairly well for myself, but he went.

And then some years later, the same producer came out with a show called Who, What and Where, which is the same sort of quiz show and they called me and said would I please be a contestant. And again, I was thrown up against somebody [00:39:00] going for the fifth win. I guess I'm a competitor and they know it. I guess I fight cheerfully and fiercely, but again, there was no way I was going to beat him, but I gave him a good run for his money. And then I signed a paper saying that that was my last NBC show because they don't like professional contestants.

I tried out once more for Pyramid, which was CBS, which was one of the few shows that was doing here in New York, but it was when Sid was with the city and here I knew -- I was an actress long enough to know when you got them in your hand -- I knew they wanted me and then when I filled out the form and it said husband's occupation and I wrote assistant to the mayor, I thought I just blew it. You can't get on and they'd say, you know, she got on because of her husband. They don't do that. So, anyway, where were we?

MP: We were talking about research.

SRB: So you know I love garbage. Sid [00:40:00] calls me a garbage head. I love facts. I love stuff in my head. The research I do for the sheer joy and because I feel the readership ought to know. So, I can't just have -- as some writers do -- she wore a very confining gown because she doesn't know what the hell the gown is going on and whether there are stays in the dress or if she's wearing a separate corset or what. Just a confining gown or the most magnificent gold gown she ever saw. I cannot do that. After all, I was going to be first of all a fashion designer. So long before I was a writer I could sit at the opera and say to my husband, "I don't care if the program says 1830, those sleeves are 1850." And then when I studied to be an interior decorator, I could say the same thing about the furniture.

So I already had those and being an art major, [00:41:00] you really have to have an overview of history to know the what and why and the how of art. So I had all these things going for me to begin with and then to discover that you have to do research was great joy. Though just once I blew it. I was writing a scene in *Marielle* because I hadn't realized -- I had them on a hunt because the hero was supposed to find -- this was how he was supposed to know she was alive. He was going to find her ring and I thought, he can't just find her ring. And I thought then I'll have the king -- Louis XIII -- go from Versailles, which was a hunting lodge at that time. Go with the hero on a hunt to another chateau where he will see a servant wearing the ring that he had given Marielle and find out that she had given it to somebody and that's how he's going to find out she's alive.

[00:42:00] So, I thought, isn't that great? I had pictures of the hunt. The women went in closed coaches so they wouldn't get sunburned. Can you imagine careening through the woods in a closed coach? Or they wore masks. I knew what they wore. I had pictures of them. I had the

falcons, I had the hounds and the bears and the this and the that and off they go through the woods. And it's three a. m. and the scene is wonderful and I'm feeling good and wide awake and just figuring I can write for the next 24 hours and I suddenly thought, oh, my God. This is the middle of July. I don't know what they're hunting. I don't know how they're hunting. I don't know how you falcon. I don't know whether they're going to use hounds if they falcon. And I thought, I can stop and I can go to the library and spend a day, but all I have to do is get him to the next chateau to get the stupid ring. And I'm cooking. Luckily the hero was a bit of a leech. And he suddenly spotted a woman that he had had an affair with. Now you see, he still thought his wife was dead so the readership allows you [00:43:00] -- allows him to have a little fooling around if he thinks she's dead. So he took her off for a little bit of a love episode and by the time they got to the other chateau, the hunt was over and everybody was saying how wonderful it was.

But that was the last time I allowed myself to go into a scene without thinking it through. And occasionally I would think about the scene and I would think, do I really want to do the research? Does it really matter? And then I'll just fudge it. But if I do then I'll do the research. I have as you saw a good library. I get catalogs from used book stores constantly and from scholarly bookstores and anything that triggers I will get. And of course the research itself triggers plots [00:44:00] in many, many cases.

When I wrote *Lisette* I had had them in *Marielle*, I had them since they were in the [Bouvet?] region -- it seemed a nice region -- doing wine. And then I researched the [Bouvet?] wine which was even more interesting and had them talk about it. Well, *Lisette*, because it's related to *Marielle* because it was the trilogy, also takes place nearby and I thought, OK, now what am I going to do? And then I read about that the nobility could not indulge in trade. They would lose their titles if they did. There's a French word. I've forgotten it now, but it means stepping down from your class in order to do something and therefore you lose your title. However, they could do things if it involved, which is why they could sell their wine, because it was from their own lands. So I thought, why not [00:45:00] bottles? And I had -- I read up on glass making and I had *Lisette*'s husband bring in a glass blower to use because it uses the sand, it uses the limestone from the cliffs along [Noir?] and it uses the pot ash from the forests and have a whole glass blowing operation going, which then became very, very interesting.

Now, I knew there was going to be some sort of tragedy that was going to trigger an emotional thing. Well, as soon as I started researching glass, I discovered that one of the greatest things that could happen was that the glass house could burn down. So that became my tragedy where people got killed and this triggered -- and this is the sort of thing that triggers the plots. That when I do the outline, and of course [00:46:00] I just sell the outline, I then as I begin to nail it down and research more closely, I mean, in the outline say he goes from here to there. Then when I discover what had happened in that particular year, I say, oh, he goes from here to there because this is going to happen and it feeds the plot.

MP: Well, I see we're running out of tape and I think I'm going to tell our listeners to go to the next one where we're going to talk a little bit about where you do your research on sex.

Part 5

MP: [00:00:00] This is an interview with Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten, Class of '55, interviewed by Mimi Pichey, Class of '72. The date is July 26, 1988. We're in New York City. Sylvia, we talked a little bit in your last tape about some of the things that got you started writing and how your family took it and so on, and you talked some about the inspiration, the way you would make up stories before you went to bed and how that was the start of your first story. Could you talk a little bit about the kinds of inspirations that you found for topics since that first story?

SRB: Well, I'd love to say I have some special key to it, but I don't. I happen to have, I think, a very active fantasy life and stories hit me [00:01:00] all the time and I have a large file that is marked "current ideas". And something may just trigger it, it may be a relationship I see with people, it may be something I heard about history, it may be I can see a movie and I can say well, what if instead of this happening, that happened? And that begins to trigger it. And I will then write a note to myself and say, what if such and such and such, and put that in the file. Then I can be working around the house, I can be driving. Every one of my handbags has little notebooks in it. And when I used to live in the suburbs and drive I used to pray for red lights because the head simply keeps going and I can -- suddenly [00:02:00] one of the plots will come back to me and if it keeps coming back to me and I begin to write more and more notes, after a while I give it a working title because I have decided oh, this one has enough going that I can

begin to consider this something special not just a fleeting idea. And so I will write the working title on it and then put it in the file cabinet.

Every time then I have a new book to consider -- at this point, I think I told you before, I don't write a book before I sell it, I simply write an outline about 10 -- 15 pages -- so, every time I'm ready to work on a new book I will go through the file cabinet and I will separate out and read all my notes and see which ideas have developed the most fully and I may pull out, oh, say 10 or 12 ideas and rethink them a little more [00:03:00] and then I'll have a meeting with my editor and say, look, these are some of the ideas I have. What do you think of this, what do you think of this, what do you think of this? And she'll usually say, oh, I can live with this one or that one. And I will then go home and simply as I'm living it's which idea begins to flower. And that's the one that ultimately goes into the outline.

The one I'm working on now -- to give you a good example of how this can happen -- the one I'm working on now has to do with an architect in 17th century France about the middle of the century when the bourgeoisie became quite rich and began to either reconstruct or rebuild or build a new chateaus for themselves. It was also the classical period according to [Racine?] in writing [00:04:00] in the French theater. So there was a whole new interest in the classical orders.

Now, when I was researching for *Dreams So Fleeting*, I think, I had come across this particular book and I used it because it has floor plans of rooms and it was wonderful to use it for the names of the rooms and how they were laid out and everything. But at the same time it kind of stuck in the back of the mind, gee, wouldn't it be fun to write a book about an architect who was building or reconstructing with all the classical orders? And that kind of went into the file. And then I was reading something -- I'm on the board of directors of the Queens Botanical Garden and so I get all these mailings on gardens and stuff and in one of these garden magazines, there were several [00:05:00] about the formal French gardens that went along with these things and there was also an article on mazes. So I thought, gee, that might fit in with my architect and I can have somebody, maybe the villain or the villainess, being brought into the maze by the hero or the heroine and being forced to come clean or they would never let them out, you know. Something like that. And that got scribbled on a note and got put into the file. So this is how it would happen. I probably started that one two years ago. And every once in a while something

would happen and I think, oh, I could use that for the architect. Why don't I use this, why don't I use that and when I finally worked it out, there was enough there to make a whole book.

Now, once I have enough notes that seems like a whole book, there's [00:06:00] enough of a plot, then I begin to run the plot through my head so I have a general idea where it's going. I don't write anything down necessarily. I may write a couple of notes to remind myself of what the general outline will be, but I haven't really written that much down yet except scenes. I will suddenly say, wait a minute. The scene where he meets her, it's going to be such and such and she will say this, and I'm -- this goes back to Brown. The old (inaudible) days. Once you've done theater you think in terms of theater and I run the scenes in my head just as if it was a play. And I play the parts in my head and if the dialogue sounds right I will scribble the notes down writing on the top "architect" because by this time the thing has shaped up enough so that this book is going to be called, at least working title, [00:07:00] "architect". So, this is the conversation "architect". I will run the scene and then I will run the whole book this way.

As I'm running the book through my head I am beginning to do research. Now as I'm doing research it's making the book richer so that I think, OK, up until now when I ran the book in my head, I had this scene and then I had this scene, but I haven't any idea what takes place in the interim. But now that I've done some more research, suddenly the research feeds that middle scene. For example, when I wrote *Marielle*, and I did it this way the first time without having any idea how one should do it, it just worked for me. I decided that in order to feel the part, I had to know where in [00:08:00] France they lived. And so I said, OK, if I knew that the battles would take place in the south of France because that's where they were taking place at that time, I knew I wanted it to take X number of days to ride from here to there and that wonderful research you suddenly say, but how long does it take and you have to go look that one up to ride from here to there, and I thought, well, this is a rich nobleman, I want him to live in the in the (inaudible) valley with his chateau and I kind of put my finger on the map of France and said there. I put my finger down on the map near (inaudible) and [Bouvet?] as it turned out and I thought, wait a minute, what goes on in Bouvet?

MP: Wine.

SRB: Wine! So then I thought, well, in that case then wine can be part of the plot. I can have the harvest scene. [Bouvet?] has the caves which are quite interesting [00:09:00] and quite peculiar. They have the little troglodyte houses carved into the stone of the caves and you'll just see a chimney coming up at the very top. We went to [Bouvet?] after I wrote the book. I researched from my reading and then we went to [Bouvet?] and I stood there like a fool and cried because it was all the right thing. And so the caves became a part of the story and when I then said, well, they're going to go from here to there and then I discovered that something was happening over there historically, and I said, well, then that's why they're going. That's why they're traveling. And that became a part of the story so that the research feeds the plot and the plot leads to more research. It really is a back and forth ongoing kind of thing. Is this awfully vague?

MP: No, I think it starts to get [00:10:00] into where I want to go next which is the question of research. You mentioned of course that you travelled to [Bouvet?] after having written the book and having done the research. Do you ever travel in advance and make plots around --

SRB: I never make plots around the travel. It's just the feeding of the plots that the travel does. It depends. It depends on the book. First of all I was an art major and a French minor. I have, which people who are listening to this cannot see, but you can, a rather large collection of art books that I have collected through the years because I wanted to. I had the cleverness to buy encyclopedias for my children, and incidentally, if you write historical there is nothing better than a set of encyclopedias and you don't have to buy a brand [00:11:00] new set for hundreds of dollars, you can buy a 20-year-old used set because you're writing about history anyway. So you can buy a very cheap set and have at your fingertips tremendous amounts of information. I saved all my French books, so I have that.

MP: So you use a lot of your own library?

SRB: I use a great deal.

MP: And then do you supplement that?

SRB: I supplement that but because I tend to keep them out from the library for so many months -- I think I've paid the New York Library hundreds of dollars in late fines -- I tend to buy -- get a book that I think is absolutely wonderful. I have catalogs that I get from used book houses and I

tend to order them to own them myself because I find the good ones I can use again and again and again. The book I used for [00:12:00] *Stolen Spring* was called -- a textbook, matter of fact, that I got out of the library. I loved it so much that I ordered it from the University Press.

Provisioning Paris, which was the milling trade in the 18th century and I used it for how one mills. I used it for wonderful names because there was a very detailed book on different millers who had done different things. I used it for some of the most wonderful curses because several of the millers sued others for slander, it was a very litigious society 17th and 18th century France, sued one another for slander and here were these marvelous old French curses, much of which I could not translate for my romance readers. I could only suggest without literally translating [00:13:00] what they said. That sort of thing. And I will probably use that book again and again and again in different ways.

There's a chapter in there, for example, on millers being rather prosperous and the furniture they usually owned. If I am now writing a book and I want more specific descriptions of country furniture, I'll go back to that book again. Because I have a good memory I remember that it's in there. I don't know what I would do if I didn't. I know some writers have complicated filings and research tools and aides. If I couldn't remember what I had read or at least where I had read things, I don't know how I'd look it up again.

MP: How would you say your Brown training affected your research abilities -- impacted upon your research?

SRB: I suppose it had an effect. I [00:14:00] don't remember it directly. You know, I don't remember researching in Brown specifically and translating it to this. I do know that I was an inquisitive student and so I would sit in the stacks.

MP: One of the things you said about in your last tape was that you were talking in terms of your father saying that he knew lots of facts, he knew lots of things, but he didn't know how to put it together. And part of that is like learning how to research, how analyze and synthesize.

SRG: It's not conscious. I know I do it just as I know I can write. But I never knew how I was doing it and I still don't. I didn't consider myself a writer even though in my housewife days, I think we spoke about this, I could write the letter to the company owner that would get a personal [00:15:00] response, but I never considered myself a writer. I never took that many

writing courses at Brown. I just knew I could write and when I write a book what I'm conscious of more than anything else, if I can bring in Brown, what I'm conscious of more than anything else when I'm writing is my theater. That's what I'm conscious of. I'm not conscious of learning to analyze, learning to be orderly in my thinking. I knew when I wrote papers at Brown -- at Pembroke, I shouldn't keep saying Brown. It's Pembroke, the good school! I would keep, you know, I would write and outline when I would write, but then I always did that when I wrote letters to friends because I'd think, oh, I have to remember to tell them this and this and I would write a note to myself before I wrote a letter to a friend. So I guess it's what I've always done and therefore it just -- I don't know how I do it. I would love to be terribly helpful. I can read it afterwards and say, "Hot damn, I know what the page is doing," but I don't know how it occurred to me to do it before.

MP: OK. Well, let me ask you another question. We had signed off on our last tape saying I was teasing you about where you did your research on sex and I did want to pursue that a little bit more. I noticed that the sex scenes in *Stolen Spring* I thought were very modest and not heavy duty sexual activity and I was just wondering if this is something that the genre calls for --

SRB: Absolutely.

MP: And so therefore you really don't have to delve deeply into sexual mores and --

SRB: But I do.

MP: You do?

SRB: I do. I do. Again, because I have to believe it.

MP: So where do you find out about sex in the 17th, 18th century?

SRB: Well, Reay Tannahill wrote *Sex [00:17:00] in History*, which is the one that almost everybody uses now, but there are so many books. When I wrote *Lisette* it suddenly occurred to me, gee, with all this fooling around, how come they're not all pregnant? And so I went to the library and I looked up contraception and the history of contraception and came away with pages and pages of the most fascinating notes. In India they used rock salt and if they used it too often the woman would get sterile. The thought of that makes you cringe. And I believe the Egyptians

used tampons made out of rotting papyrus and lint, which had the proper alkaline property to be -
- for a contraceptive and all kinds of fascinating things.

I also discovered [00:18:00], for example, that in the 17th century particularly, though the Church frowned on it, they kind of looked the other way. It wasn't really until they began to be concerned about losing souls, I guess, that the Church became more uptight about abortions. But in the 17th century abortions were absolutely one of the most common methods of birth control. There's a wonderful account of some woman driving her carriage through the streets of Paris shouting out the window, "I just got rid of my latest baby." But when I tried to use that in *Lisette*, because Lisette was afraid of having children and therefore I decided that she would have an abortion because Lisette was a bit of a bitch anyway, my editor was horrified and said, "Oh, Middle America will not go along with that." And so I wound [00:19:00] up calling my gynecologist and I think we wound with a ruptured ovarian cyst because the whole point of it was that Lisette wanted an abortion and she should be sick afterwards and her husband finding out should think she had an abortion, but she didn't really have to have had an abortion. So that's how we got around that.

But it's interesting because you really find out -- first of all the editors are horrified. I had a scene in *Delphine* where her husband raped her. Now he had been an absolute son of a bitch up until now, but I had to have something happen that finally made her run away from him because up until then she was staying because of her child. And I had to have a reason finally. So he comes in in a drunken rage and he knocks her down and he takes her curling iron [00:20:00] and he burns her neck with it and knocks her out and rapes her and my editor said, "This is too heavy." At any rate, we talked about it and she said the scene, she's seen it in the outline, but she said the scene once I wrote it was too heavy. And I said OK and we renegotiated. I said, "Can he knock her down?" "Yes." "Can he burn her with a curling iron? Just one little touch -- it wasn't serious." "Yes." "Can he then threaten to rape her?" "Yes." And when she looked at him and said now I'm going to watch you and laugh at you all the while and make a fool of -- he grabbed her head and he banged it on the tile floor -- they had tile floors in the 17th century -- and knocked her out and then carried her to the bed, in the original account, and raped her all the while [00:21:00] he was just drunk in rage. And she woke up the next morning and discovered what had happened and realized she had to leave him. And we negotiated and ultimately we

settled for everything but penetration. That he was allowed to knock her out, put her on the bed, undress her, and then jump off the bed and instead of raping her, which is originally what I had, tear her nightgown to shreds all the while he was yelling bitch, bitch, bitch, you see, which is originally what he'd been yelling when he'd been raping her because she said not too heavy. And so the next morning when she woke up, she thought maybe he had and realized that the fact -- it didn't work as well -- the fact that she knew he was capable of it made her realize she couldn't stay with him any longer. So, this [00:22:00] was the --

MP: But this was too sensitive. The rape scene was too sensitive to put in.

SRB: The rape was a little too sensitive to put in.

MP: Now, do you think that things have changed or do you think that's still the case?

SRB: I think it depends first of all on the editor. But if it gets too heavy -- no, I mean --

MP: The sexuality.

SRB: The sexuality, if it gets too heavy -- Middle America wants to get tremendously titillated but they don't want it too close to reality. *Marielle*, the whole plot was that she was raped by the villain and then was frigid and then her husband who had never taken her to bed, now has to awaken her so to speak. And there was some concern because they actually got a couple of letters from readers saying -- now, I did not glorify rape, I don't believe in [00:23:00] glorifying rape although that was a convention in the past where the hero would sweep her away and rape her and somewhere half way through it, she'd say, "Hey, he's terrific, I love him." And somewhere along the line when women decided --

MP: In romance novels?

SRB: In romance novels, oh, that was a -- I mean, look at Rhett Butler sweeping her up the stairs and she wakes up the next morning grinning like a cat. And if you read *Gone With the Wind* when she wakes up the next morning she thinks things like he had done things to her that she would not have believe possible, and blah, blah, blah. Et cetera. But somewhere along the line -- probably about 10 or 15 years ago, with feminism came the idea that is not a healthy fantasy and that rape is not romantic and some [00:24:00] houses, some of the lesser houses, have printed

guidelines and one of them, wonderful, and the printed guideline says there shall be not love at first rape because they said absolutely that was a no-no. Well --

MP: I'd say that's one way that the women's movement has affected (inaudible) romance novel.

SRB: Oh, very much. And yet at the same time, I knew that I didn't need anyone to tell me. I didn't believe in that to begin with. So Marielle was raped by the villain and it was not a happy scene and I did get fan letters saying even the rape scene was done tastefully. But there were several letters saying that they were horrified because she had sex with another man. Now that was in '82 because there were still, again, in Middle America a much stronger feeling that the woman should have sex with no one but her [00:25:00] true love in the romance. Even if it was through rape, in the old days, it was still only with one man. And yet two years ago, one of my fellow authors came out with a book with a woman who was forced to be a whore, had been raped as child by her stepfather and was a whore and then met a Spaniard -- it was old California or something like that -- met a Spaniard who wanted a virgin and she had reconstructive surgery in order for him to think he was marrying a virgin. It wasn't until the very end when he finds out about her past that they are reconciled again. But that sort of plot even eight years ago would have been unthinkable that she could have had sex with so many other men. But Middle America is beginning to accept [00:26:00] the fact -- I'm considering in the architect book, I'm considering having her have sex with more than one man. I would have in the past have had her almost had sex, but not. Now I'm considering actually having her have sex with somebody else and having it affect her relationship with the hero, whereas in the past it was simply that he thought she did or misunderstood, that sort of thing.

The other convention that was very popular in romances, and probably still is, and I don't relate to it and never did, was that a woman leaves her head on the night table. I cannot relate to recreational sex and I suspect that even the most avid feminist who set out in the '70s to have guilt-free sex has discovered, alas, that a woman is not made that way. Maybe I'm old fashion, but [00:27:00] I absolutely do not believe that a woman really can have recreational sex the way a man can to the same extent. And therefore I cannot write the kind of book that was also very popular, and still is, to have this sexual tension between the man and the woman where they hate each other during the day, but at night he kisses her a few times, caresses her a few times, and in

spite of herself she melts. That's semi -- as far as I'm concerned -- that's semi-love at first rape. And that's a convention I simply cannot go along with.

MP: Well, it certainly doesn't take into account the question of anger which has affected many sexual relationships.

SRB: Yeah, particularly in women. Men, I think, are probably a little more capable than women in operating from the waste down. I do not think a woman is [00:28:00] capable in the slightest. Again, I probably would have to talk to a lot of younger women who went in for casual sex in the '70s and find out, but I suspect that they could not really get into bed for any length of time with a guy without after a while bringing all that emotional garbage that women bring to relationships and that men can avoid so nicely. I cannot believe that women can do that and therefore I can't write books like that. But that's a popular, popular convention is it because it keeps them fighting, but then you can write 25 sex scenes.

MP: Now what about the voice? Are most people writing in the third person? (inaudible) the first person?

SRB: Yeah, usually it's not done, though, several of the better known romance writers in the last couple of years have done so. One of the funnier [00:29:00] ones is a book that shall be nameless, that was done in the first person by a man who is gay, who is flamingly flamboyantly, hysterically gay. When he comes to the conventions and comes swooshing in, he's absolutely delicious and delightful, and the fact that he of all people would write a very sexy romance in the first person would give a psychiatrist pause I suspect. But, no, it's usually in the third person. It's usually mostly from the heroine's point of view if it's a shorter romance, but you can [leave?] the contemporaries, the Harlequins that may be 200 pages or so. That's usually just from a woman's point of view. But in the longer historical that I write, you can't maintain [00:30:00] a level of interest as easily. I did it in -- I think I did it in *Stolen Spring*, totally. Simply because there were so many secrets going on with it because it had the spy plot, it had the man who was not what he seemed to be, that I could not bring in his voice without giving it away and I couldn't bring in the villains voices without giving it away that they were villains. Since she was central to the plot it was easy enough to do it. But generally editors prefer you to have more than one voice in a longer historical simply to keep the interest going and I found the book that I just finished -- that

will be out next year, *The Promise of Summer* I think we're calling it. As long as we started the *Stolen Spring* (inaudible). The architect one I'm calling, since my heroine is going to be building the maze and working in the gardens, [00:31:00] I think it's going to be called *Autumn Flower* because she is going to grow and learn, starting out very young, and immature and growing and being so much better for it at the end, so I thought *Autumn Flower*. Anyway.

In *Promise of Summer*, the one that will be out next year, at first I wanted the hero to be mysterious and somewhat possibly villainous because this has a gothic element to it where there are attempts made on her life and I wanted -- the readers of course are never really fooled -- but I want to bring them along with me. So in the beginning it is all her voice. As we are learning more and more about -- and at first she hates him because he's really rotten. This is my -- he was a pirate in his younger days and [00:32:00] oh, he's wonderful, I love him. He's dashing with a hole in one year and larcenous streak and all the rest of it. So that in the beginning she doesn't like him and he really comes across as a meanie and his friend is so much nicer, but as we learn a little bit more about him, as she learns a little bit more about him, I begin to put in scenes from his point of view more and more and more and they get larger and larger as we get to know him better so that the reader likes him more and more.

That's one of the things that if you have a scene from the hero's point of view, the readers like him better because they know him better and they really do enjoy that sort of thing. There was another thought about point of view -- oh, I know. The thing that [00:33:00] distinguishes the men from the boys in the romance field, although some of the top writers do this, too, is that the point of view shouldn't change. It should be consistent per scene.

There are some writers who are some of the top writers who -- that much I've learned in my reading and writing -- who will write a love scene and he will touch her there and she will feel this and think this and then she will respond by touching him here and he will think and feel this, so she's changing points of view with every paragraph. What he thinks, what she thinks, what he thinks, what she thinks. I think I did that in my first one a little bit because I wasn't aware of it and then I think that my agent pointed it out to me and I suddenly realized that he's right. But I went back to the first one and realized that although I didn't keep a consistent point of view, I mostly did because I was really thinking [00:34:00] per scene from the point of view whosoever -- back to theater again -- whosoever scene it was. I mean, in the theater there's a scene

and I remember old Ben Brown saying, “Watch the ball bouncing because the ball is bouncing from one character to another.” Who has the ball now? And it doesn’t have to be the one who’s speaking who has the ball, but you just have to know where the ball is. And I guess without being conscious of it when I was writing *Marielle*, not knowing about voices or concentrating on points of view, because the ball was most often with the heroine, it was most often her point of view without my really being aware that that’s what I was doing.

MP: Why don’t we talk a little bit about some of the physical aspects of writing. For example, do you work on a word processor, a typewriter, how long [00:35:00] do you work a day?

SRB: Well, I work -- I know what I wanted to talk about. Can we go back to something first because you were talking about how I write and I was talking about making up all these notes. And I thought it would be more interesting to tell you this that by the time I actually sit down at my typewriter, I may have run the book through my head 50 times and each time I’ve run it through, another scene gets spotlighted and suddenly gets clarified and the dialogue comes clearer or the scene -- something in the scene or some detail that I haven’t really begun to work out -- suddenly comes clear and I will write notes on that. By the time that I sit down to my machine, I have a stack of notes probably four inches high on little four by six papers. I then very quickly [00:36:00] write a loose outline figuring how many pages each chapter is going to be and thinking well, that’s a good place to end the chapter and that’s a good place to end that chapter and everything and then it is simply a question of collating all these notes and doing my transitions from one scene to the next because in effect by the time I sit down the book is written. It may change because I may then do a little research and it will clarify or a character -- when I wrote *Marielle*, for example, I researched the life of Richelieu and Louis XIII and Richelieu being the well-known figure was going to be in the book, he was relegated to half a page sitting there stroking one of his cats because when I found out how fascinating Louis XIII was, he became more important.

So, though I have [00:37:00] a pretty good idea, it still changes, but the point being that those these notes are there, they’re just scribbled notes and when I’m going through a scene I will go through all the notes on that scene and I’ll suddenly say, oh, this is no longer pertinent. Throw out the note. Because by the time I put it down on my machine it is almost locked in and I do not do revisions by and large because it’s written and it’s locked in and the scene plays and

there's almost nothing that has to be changed, which is why when I turned in the manuscript for *Stolen Spring* that was 35 pages above what I was supposed to, and my editor said, "Oh, my God, they'll never allow this many pages, " and I said to her, "Then cut it." And she said, "I can't." She cut three pages she said because it's tight, it's integrated, you used as many pages as you had to. And because by the time I [00:38:00] sit down and put it down, then it's locked in. And that's why I don't write it right away because I want to keep it fluid with my notes, with the rethinking until I'm absolutely sure I know where I'm going because once I put it on the paper, even if it's half baked, it's very hard to go back and erase it all and start all over again.

MP: So do you use a typewriter?

SRB: I used to in the old -- I'm a two-finger typist. I'm terrible, never learned how to type. I used to in the old days would type it with my two fingers, pencil in my corrections, and then because I was such a slow typist and an inaccurate typist, I would send it out to be typed. Which cost me but there was no other way to do it. A couple times in the early books Sid had clients who were secretaries who said, "I can't pay the fee but do you have typing to do," and he said, "Funny [00:39:00] you should say that." So they typed it for me.

When I finally decided to do something about it I did not want a word processor. First of all, I don't like looking at the screen. Second of all, I like hard copy because I like to pencil in the corrections, I like to walk around with the pages reading it aloud almost halfway playing out the scenes before I pencil in and make my changes and stuff. So what I got was a memory typewriter with an expanded memory. The typewriter itself holds about 24 or 25 pages plus an attached disk drive and of course each disk holds about 100 pages and that way I'm basically working exactly the way I always did. I type it, it goes onto the paper only it also goes into the memory. And I go around holding the paper, reading it, penciling in my corrections, the difference being that instead of them sending the chapter off to my typist, I call [00:40:00] back the chapter and put in my corrections and then when I'm ready to finally feed the paper in and then call the whole thing back and say the machine do it.

MP: Let me just clarify one thing. The difference between corrections and the rewrite, corrections are minor changes?

SRB: Are minor changes.

MP: And a rewrite is a structural --

SRB: And a rewrite is the whole thing. For example, I may get to the end of the chapter and suddenly say, wait a minute, if she's wearing that purple dress that's so important, I forgot to put her into it at the beginning of the chapter. And so I will go back and put her into the purple dress that is going to be important. Or one of the favorite things you do, and I know other writers have the same thing, the next morning you read what you've written and you discover that you have fallen in love with a word, and you may use it 10 times in four pages, that you have suddenly fallen in love with the word and then it simply becomes thesaurus time. But [00:41:00], no, no major changes because by the time it gets put into the machine it's pretty well set.

MP: And when you start working, how long does it take you to write a novel and how do you work? Do you work day and night, 24 hours a day or do you discipline yourself to work from nine to five.

SRB: I don't know. I don't have a regular schedule. I used to say, when people would say how long do you work, I used to say as long as I can because in the early -- when I first started -- and I hadn't even sold and didn't know if I was on the right track, I was still wife and mother first and I would sometimes get done the dishes and sit around and it would be 10:30 at night and I would turn to Sid and say, "If I don't get to that typewriter today I'm going to die!" and I would go in and work until four or five in the morning because it would suddenly gush out of me. Again, it always gushes out because by the time I sit down it's bursting [00:42:00] to be told because I've run it so often and I honed it and perfected it in my head so often it is bursting to get itself down on paper. So when I sit down the actual typing process is as many hours and when I can, but the actual typing process takes me for about 500-600 page manuscript, which is about 150,000 words, 135-150,000 words -- takes me three months, but that is just -- I am consumed by it, absolutely consumed. A television show goes on that I had to see six months before and I say, "I don't need that," and I pair my life down and a [00:43:00] friend that I've been dying to see calls and says let's have lunch and I'd say, gee, maybe next week because I really don't want any distractions and I pair down to such a point that when a book is done I suddenly say, "How did I used to fill my time?" because I have suddenly -- you know, as the months have gone on I've persuaded myself that nothing matters except pouring out this book that's dying to be told.

MP: It sounds almost like giving birth and I was wondering what you do after you've given birth to this manuscript. How long does it take you to recuperate until you're ready to write another book?

SRB: Well, I begin to diddle around and I begin to drag and I begin to -- it's one of the reasons that I'm trying to get books at two publishing houses because Warner buys a book from [00:44:00] me once every year or so and the research takes me three months. I'm doing research, incidentally, as I'm doing the writing, too. Doing finalizing research for the chapter ahead and, incidentally, I'm still running as I'm actually writing. I'm no longer running the scenes that I've written, but I am still running the scenes in my head that are yet to come. And so I'm still writing notes to myself and I'm still keeping the succeeding chapters fluid so that the research that I'm doing while I'm writing is keeping the succeeding chapters fluid. But the heavy research, the preliminary research, takes about three months. You know, running around to museums and I sit there with pencil and paper saying let me see, is that a red garter? Are those tulips on the table in 1629? Are those [00:45:00] -- so reaching museums and in my art books the same way, picking out very specific things which incidentally will trigger sometimes a whole scene because I'll suddenly say, oh, gee, I didn't know that they had these in (inaudible) why don't I use that?

Anyway. What I would like to do is have two books sold to two different publishers so that I could go from one right to the next one because it's the lull and the gearing up again and then selling the new outline and, you know, you write up the outline, it takes a couple of weeks, you write up the outline, you send it out. It may be a month or two before they say, OK, yes, we'll go with it, and then they give you a deadline that's nearly a year later and so you say, "Well, I don't have to start writing again because I have plenty of time." Yeah, and then suddenly I wake up one morning and say, "Oh, my God! I don't have plenty of time," and I hate that, I hate that, ups and downs. So I would love -- it's what I'm working on now, is possibly having two books going at two different publishers so I can take a few weeks, catch my breath, but have something ready to go again that I have already done enough thinking about so that I'm right back into it.

MP: And then would you then publish under two different names?

SRB: It would depend on the publisher. I'd have to look at my contract and see if Louisa Rawlings -- Louisa Rawlings belongs to me as does Ena Halliday. I put that in my contract because that's my granny and my great-granny's names and though usually pseudonyms belong to the publisher, I said no way, Jose. But the pseudonym may belong to the publisher for as long as I'm writing for them.

Part 6

MP: This is side two of Sylvia Rosen Baumgarten, Class of '55, interviewed by Mimi Pichey, Class of '72, July 26, 1988.

SRB: All right, as I was saying, Warner might say as long as I was writing for them that nobody else could use Louisa Rawlings. I'd have to look at the contract. The other thing being, however, that when I left Pocket as being Ena Halliday, Pocket didn't like the outline of *Dreams So Fleeting* and I could have submitted a new outline, but once they had refused it, then I was free of the contract basically, because the option clause gives them first refusal and once they refuse, they didn't want it because they didn't want me to do France anymore, and [00:01:00] at the time my agent said, "Well, I like the plot of *Dreams So Fleeting*. I'm going to see if I can sell it elsewhere." And she said to me, "How do you feel about Pocket?" And I said, "Eh, I wasn't, you know, thrilled about being with them, so if you sell it to somebody else, I don't feel like I want to go back to Pocket necessarily." So when she sold it to Warner then as far as I was concerned that was it for Pocket that they'd been nice but enough. At which point Ena Halliday became mine and I said to my editor at Warner, "Do you want me to continue to be Ena Halliday?" and she said, "Well, if Ena Halliday had been a best seller, then terrific. Otherwise we would just as soon feel like you are our very own. So think up a new pen name." And since people had said to me is that Eva Halliday, is that Edna Halliday, is the Holiday, I thought there isn't a good recognition factor [00:02:00] there and so I -- that was Granny -- and so I chose Louisa Rawlings, which was my great-grandmother and knew at once it was a better pseudonym when somebody said to me before my first book came out for Warner, "Oh, Louisa Rawlings, of course I've read your books." (laughter)

MP: Now let me ask you a question about working with your editor. Is there anything you would like people to know about what your relationship is with your editor? How much do you go back and forth with her or him after you've done your initial writing? They approve the outline --

SRB: They approve the outline, then I sit down and I write the book. Now, my editor at Pocket had -- in this case she had bought -- the first two books were already written and she bought the third book because it was a trilogy, she bought the third book on outline [00:03:00] and then after the fact, she got a little nervous about the abortion and we had to change it and that sort of thing. And with Warner, the first book I had to write an outline and three chapters. But since I find, because of the way I work obviously, that if I write three chapters, I have to write the whole book. And finally after I had done that once and done a great deal of research and had written the first three chapters and there was a certain amount of hassling, they finally accepted it, but a certain amount of hassling, I said to my agent, "No more. You put it in my contract with Warner that they accept on outline -- on the option clause that they accept the next book on outline alone. No more three chapters." Because, as I say, the way I work I might [00:04:00] as well write the whole book because I have to spend months getting geared up and working it through my head in order to write three chapters.

MP: So, but the time between -- the time they accept the outline and the time you hand in a finished draft --

SRB: Is dependent on what they want.

MP: Right, but you have contact with your editor?

SRB: Oh, yeah, we talk about it. We say, you know, first of all we decide when they want it. She says, "When can you get it in?" And I say, "When do you want it in?" She says, "Well, probably we won't come out with it for a year, but when do you want to get it in?" and I decide when I can comfortably get it in. I am usually not in contact with her then on that book, but I am usually in contact with her on the last book. She'll occasionally say, "How's the new one coming?" but she has great faith [00:05:00] in me and she gets the book in on time and that's it. Then she'll call me and usually because I write a very clean book there's very little that has to be done.

First of all, she will go through it and edit it for sense. In *Forever Wild*, for example, because I had four major characters plus a villain, I had five points of view and I separated them, you know, separated the sections in the chapters and after a while she said she thought she liked it, but one of her readers found it confusing to have these sections. So instead, she said I'm going to eliminate them and write lead in sentences so that I'd write, he [00:06:00] said to -- he thought to himself, da-dum, da-dum, da-dum, and then she would write at the same time he was thinking this, so and so was over here thinking that in order not to have the spaces and because --

MP: And she has a stable of people she passes your manuscript on to?

SRB: She has, first of all, she has several readers who just read to see whether they like it. Then she will read it for clarity and what have you. Then she passes it on to a copy editor. Now, at Pocket the copy editors I suspect were young English lit students, fresh out of school who did not know what they were doing but seemed to feel that they had to justify their money -- and every writer will tell you this that they've had these horrible experiences -- that they had to justify their money by making changes -- so he would say fiercely and they would cross it out and put savagely; that [00:07:00] sort of thing. Or one of them decided to change my 17th century French or one of them decided because I occasionally put before the title as in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, they'd put de Bergerac and I had put de-so and so. My editor had decided she didn't like that so she had said to the copy editor take out the "de's" where it says "de so and so said", only this copy editor did not know what she was doing so she took out all the "de's" so it was Jean Smith instead of Jean de Smith and this sort of thing drove me absolutely crazy because I did not see any of these changes until I had the galley proofs and I had two days to go through the book with my manuscript on one side putting the "de's" back in and tearing my hair out [00:08:00] and changing the French -- and she even had when I had [Anne of Austria?] speaking with her voice (inaudible) the tones were of her native Spain and this one crossed it out and put Austria and I crossed it out and put Spain. She was born in Madrid, you could look it up. So Pocket's editors were of that ilk where they change absolutely frivolously every page.

Warner's editors, the copy editors, the line editors I think they're also called, freelance and absolutely crackerjack. They flag a manuscript a hundred flags saying, "Justify this place name, please," or "You used this term before. Do you want to use it again?" or "I've made a change in the punctuation, OK?" Flagged everything. Leave [00:09:00] it almost completely

alone except for that and my editor, as I say, she is the one who has to cut, but she doesn't like to cut because she doesn't find things to cut. And so there's almost nothing, almost nothing, changed. Occasionally I will call her up and I will say after there was a scene in *Dreams So Fleeting* where it was awfully close to the old love at first rape scene where it was a very violent first sex scene, but I wanted to indicate that she was with him all the way and that he knew it and she knew it and I didn't know how to do it and I called her up and I said, "You know, how are going to do this? See if you can come up with ideas." She, as it turned out, wrote a line where he said, "Tell [00:10:00] me if you want me to stop," and then she put in a line that said something like, "I take no woman against her will," and when I got that back from her I called her and I said, "I can't go with that only because it keeps reminding me of Orson Welles saying I drink no wine before it's time." So I used that idea, but he simply said something else besides that.

But Warner, after the whole manuscript has gone through all these -- both the line editing, the punctuation, spelling, justifying place names, what have you, and the regular editor who makes sense of it and giving it to her reader who gives her feedback, I get the whole manuscript. So I don't have to sit there with my copy and a finished galley proof wondering what have they changed, why does it sound different, and having to look back at my manuscript to see what they've changed because I [00:11:00] get the whole copy edited manuscript with all the flags and I have a month to go through it and make any more major changes then that I want to do because of course after that changes are money, which they all remind you. And I make in re-reading, because this may be six months after I turned it in, in re-reading I will suddenly see a klutzy sentence or I'll say, wait a minute, it really doesn't explain why and then I will write it in but I will flag back to her saying is this OK with you? And sometimes she will go with the original and sometimes she will go with the changes. We don't talk about it, but if I were to insist if when I then get the galleys months later and have a final say and said to her, "Wait a minute, I really wanted it this way," I'm sure she would change it back. We have a wonderful, wonderful working relationship and [00:12:00] what few changes have to be made, we work it out together.

MP: And who decides on cover design?

SRB: Do not ask me. That's a sore spot with all romance writers because the cover is what sells it. Everybody has the stories of the distributors who line the books up on the floor knowing

nothing except they know the bestselling names, but after that they line all the others up on the floor, go that, that, that, that, that, that, that, based on which covers leap out at them, and yet the author may not even see the cover until the book comes out.

MP: Does the editor take charge of that?

SRB: The editor has only so much say. She sends information up -- now I send information, I send photos, for example. There's a gown that my heroine is wearing in *Promise of Summer*. I said, "Do you want photos of the print that I took it from?" -- it was a [00:13:00] Bouche painting. And she said, "That'd be terrific," and I sent it along. The artist may then decide to put her in this gown that she is wearing that I had described, but I have no real say on it. She sends up the book to the art department, descriptions of the characters, a précis of the book itself, this sort of thing. The art department works with artists, they pose models and photograph them, which is why they say please don't give your characters beards and mustaches and (inaudible) strange hair-dos if you can help it because most of the models are today's models and then if the guy needs a beard and unless they can get a model with a beard who looks like he's supposed to, they have to put a phony beard on and the artists generally paint from the photos and though they're extraordinarily talented, they aren't very originally creative and their [00:14:00] hands paint what their eyes see and if it's a pasted on beard in a photo, it's going to look like a pasted on beard in the drawing. It's a very specialized type of artist to make these characters look wonderful. Well, you've seen my cover *Stolen Spring* he's a master and I will insist on him if I can for my next book. I'm hoping that I can make loud enough noises and that my editor has enough clout because the chain of command in the book business is enough to make you die. The publicity people and the art department and the distribution people and I was talking tonight to Roberta Gellis who's a very well-known romance writer, writes wonderful medieval stuff, and we were saying why is it that the bestselling books are the ones who get the most publicity? Which is what they [00:15:00] do. The more money they give you up front for an advance, the more they spend to justify what they've given you up front. And yet it is the lesser people who need to be brought up. Why do you have to take out four pages to say that Lawrence Sanders's new book is coming out? The distributor is going to buy it in mass quantities without even seeing the ads and the minute the distributors buy in mass quantities, that means that the day the book comes out officially, it is already on the bestseller list based on the numbers that the distributors

have bought, and the minute that it's on the bestseller list, every book store is going to have it in the bestseller rack, so why do you need to put four pages in Publishers Weekly saying that Lawrence Sanders's new book is coming out? But it is the nature of the business and every author goes absolutely berserk.

And the same is true with covers. We have no say. I can say I hate it and my editor will say, "Gee, I'll see what I can do," but [00:16:00] I really don't know. It's peculiar because the nature of the business is the covers that attract. Zebra, which writes probably the most formula historical, they still love at first rape. They still have the love-hate relationship. They still have, you know, the most ordinary of romances they write, but they have holograms on their covers and they have a distribution system that you could kill for. My daughter says that her college bookstore, only the Zebras are the only romances that are in the college bookstore because they are aggressively marketed, they have holograms that catch your eye, and they may not be the best books, and they pay their authors badly advances I gather at Zebra, but [00:17:00] the books get distributed.

MP: Could you comment on the role of the agent in the process?

SRB: Well, the agent, first of all he sells the book, he pushes to sell it to whomever will buy it, get as good a price as they can. He negotiates the contract with the best terms possible. Besides which he's the bad guy. If there is something that I am particularly upset about, rather than because I've got to have a good relationship with my editor at all times because we're working so closely through the life of the book and if she is in my corner, she will go to a staff meeting and say I want this one to have ads, I want this one to be top of the list, I want this one to have the best artist, I want this one. So, it is to both our advantages [00:18:00] to keep a happy relationship, but sometimes things will happen that really get to me and then I can call him and say, "I am really mad about this. I want you to do something about it," and then he can call up and be the heavy and push a little harder. When with one of my contracts I didn't like how much they were offering me. They were not offering me as much as I wanted because *Dreams So Fleeting* had not done well. Now *Dreams So Fleeting* had not done well because the cover was vile. They told me so themselves. They said, "Gee, that was an unfortunate cover." It didn't sell well at all. It really was a bad cover and my editor wants to someday possibly republish it with a better cover because she loves the book, but it never did well. And they say to me, we can't you

give more because of the -- you know, my agent called me and said this is how much they're offering because *Dreams So Fleeting* didn't do well, and I said to him, "*Dreams So Fleeting* didn't do well, damn it, because they [00:19:00] gave it a lousy cover and they told me so themselves and they knew that." I said, "I'm absolutely furious." I said, "I will not take a penny less than this or else the hell with them; the hell with them. If I have to feel like I have to start all over again from square one, I might as well go to a whole new publishing house." And he went back and in effect said, "No, she has to have this," and they gave me that. But the next time I spoke to my editor it was all sweetness and light because whatever ugliness had to be done, he did.

MP: Does he get a percentage?

SRB: Yes. He gets ten percent. Some agents get 15 and I gather more and more agents are taking 15. He has also kept out foreign rights though he has not sold them abroad and I think [00:20:00] I'm going to start leaning on him. You see, I can afford to be heavy with him. I don't have to --

MP: That brings up another question I had about in terms of foreign rights. Is this genre one that exists in wide acceptance outside of the English speaking world?

SRB: Oh, good heavens, yes.

MP: I'm very interested in this.

SRB: Good heavens, yes. I was speaking the other day to a woman who wrote Regencies who said she just got a copy of one of her Regencies translated into Japanese. I found that my first three books were Pocket. Pocket had the foreign rights and they resold them to England and so I had English editions of my first three. And I was talking to Roberta again about this tonight because when I then signed with Warner, I had a new agent and my new agent [00:21:00] he retained the foreign rights. The trouble is he's never sold them overseas and Roberta says if you let the publisher sell it overseas you get I think only 50 percent. They keep 50, you keep 50. They give you very little but at least they get published overseas. If you let your agent handle foreign rights, you get a much larger percentage, but in most cases you get a larger percentage of nothing because -- so I may speak to him and say for the new contract either you see what you can do or give them back the foreign rights because what good does it do me if you're not selling

it overseas anyway. Yes, romance is a tremendous worldwide market, particularly in England. But the Japanese I gather...

MP: What about France?

SRB: Well, that's the thing of it. I don't know what the market is in France [00:22:00] and I would like to say to him already, what about France? I write about France. I write historically accurately about France, then what are you doing? I haven't explored it, I haven't pushed him, but I'm reaching that point because, yes, what about France?

MP: Now I have a question on a totally different subject which is what do you read in your spare time for pleasure when you're not doing research and other things?

SRB: I read occasionally the competition, the best ones, because I want to see what the better ones are doing. But I haven't read romances in years, not since I was probably in my early 20s. In those days they were written by men anyway and they were called swashbucklers and they were romances. I read history books. I read the classics. I am forever coming across a classic as I used to in my kids' rooms and I'd say, "Gee, I [00:23:00] never got around to reading that in school," and I read that. I read books that are hard to read. I love books that are hard to read. I spent weeks and weeks and weeks and weeks on *The Name of the Rose*, got through it, and wished I had the time to go back and read it again and have just ordered a book -- it just came in yesterday, called *The Key to the Name of the Rose*, which is a book which translates all the Latin passages, which explains all the esoteric references. I am dying to -- I can't allow myself to open that until I finish writing my new outline. I'm dying to read that. I am reading *Perfume*, which is a historical, but it's that wonderful European thing and that's marvelous. I will occasionally read the swash and buckle books [00:24:00] that I read as a kid, not in my 20s but as a kid. My father had read -- got me interested in Sabatini and Jeffery Farnol who both wrote wonderful, wonderful swashbucklers. Farnol's well known in this country, but he's well known -- my father born in Canada of course he was an Englishman and therefore they did know him in Canada. Sabatini of course wrote *Captain Blood* and (inaudible) and stuff and I occasionally come across in these used book catalogs old books by Sabatini and Farnol and I get those and I read them. These are books that were written just turn of the century. Maybe 1910 or 1920 was -- Sabatini was still writing into the late '20s I think. So I read those. All kinds of stuff.

I like sociological [00:25:00] books, the book I think I was telling you about the new McGill report on male intimacy which I read partially to get a handle on how men think so I can call into the minds of my heroes, but partially because I find books on psychology and stuff like to be interesting.

I used to read for a very long time for lighter reading Agatha Christie until I saw three in a row and then I made one up in my head during one of my pregnancies. And I made up the whole thing up to and including reading a play because a murder took place during the play and I had to find out how much time they'd -- and I read it aloud timing it and then of course as soon as the kid was born I decided -- because I still didn't think I was a writer -- so this was fooling around time and though I had notes on it, I didn't take it seriously and as soon as the kid was born, I don't remember which one [00:26:00] it was, I put the notes away and said well that was a fun diversion for a few months, wasn't it? So mysteries used to be though I haven't read a mystery in many and many a year, but obviously I like crossword puzzles, which I've had published. I think we talked about that, and mysteries. Somebody once said, the kind of mind that likes mysteries is the kind of mind that likes crossword puzzles and I guess it's also the kind of mind that likes writing a novel because I love bringing in as I'm developing the book, bringing in more and more extra characters and working them in. And it is like a jigsaw puzzle or a crossword puzzle. Yeah, there's whatever kind of mind I have it likes that sort of thing.

[00:27:00]

MP: Let's switch a little bit to the world of romance fiction. I know that I don't know very much about the subcategories of the genre and I was wondering if you could comment briefly on those.

SRB: Well, there's Roberta Gellis, who's my friend, writes historicals because though they are romances, the history -- remember, she's the one who writes the medieval things -- the history is the most important. The romance is just part of it. I write a cross between -- well, the other kind is a historical romance, which is the romance is almost like what they call a costume novel where the romance is superimposed on the history. Because I like research so much I write probably [00:28:00] a cross between the two. The romance is paramount, but the history is much stronger than in most -- in a large number of historical romances. But it depends. These categories are very fluid.

There are a lot of writers who write with a lot of history who like them. A lot who write with almost no history and what history they write they fudge. There is a contemporary -- what would they call it? The category romance, this would be mostly Harlequin, Second Chance at Love. These are very short books, 70,000-80,000 words where the heroine has some interesting career and meets the hero who also has an interesting career. It's interesting because in the past a Harlequin romance had him difficult and moody and rich and [00:29:00] she much younger and today to reflect the new -- to reflect feminism, he doesn't necessarily have to be rich and they don't have to end up very rich at the end. But then I'm writing historical like that, too, where they don't automatically end up in the castle the richest people on the block and the age difference isn't as great as it used to be. So that's the contemporary. That really bears very little relationship to today in real, as my kids used to say, in real. But is the fantasy of today.

There is the Regency romance which takes place in Regency, England and is by and large a comedy of manners where the romance [00:30:00] I very light and frivolous, where there is no sex at all, there may not even be a kiss until the very last page where this very light dueling between the two characters is the most important thing. Jane Austin was the original Regency writer. That's a very specialized field and has a very specialized readership but it involves a bath and (inaudible) and the whole [prinny?], the Prince Regent and his circle. That's very specialized.

There is the Gothic Romance although, again, you can bring in the gothic elements. *Promise of Summer* has a gothic element where, again, the original gothic was -- think of not the original gothic, but Jane Eyre, for example, or I dreamed last night I went to (inaudible) -- what is that? Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* is a gothic where usually [00:31:00] there's the forbidding house and danger in the house and maybe it's his fault and because he's so dark and brooding and moody. That's a gothic romance. Gothics are having a resurgence at the moment; there was a lull for a while.

There's the glitz and glamour, which is Danielle Steele, which is a little more main stream or Judith Krantz where it's conspicuous consumption -- it's all in its Hollywood, Paris, Rome, London, diamonds, jewels, you know, that sort of element fantasy.

But romances are really changing. I think probably they're going out. It's only a gut feeling but only because so many elements are coming in. The element that's coming in is the fantasy romance. Future travel or past travel where they go back in time and find the girl [00:32:00] of their dreams or the boy of their dreams or they go forward in time or futuristic romance is becoming very popular. There's the Western of course, the Western romance, which is more likely historical romance, but there's a whole bunch of fans who will just go for the Western romances who like the -- another thing which couldn't have been done 10 years ago -- where the hero or the heroine can be part Indian, where you can now have a mixed breed romance. Very much more freedom to do things that you couldn't do even five, or six, or seven years ago.

One thing that's interesting because you were talking about sex and how I do my research, I do my research by reading of course sexual practices of the past and also by reading other authors, but partly the readership really wants modern practices, but they want to be [00:33:00] titillated, they don't want anything clinical. It's not easy to write an oral sex scene, mind you, euphemistically and still get the point across. I can't do it. Partially I can't do it because I refuse to believe that in centuries where they didn't bathe from year to the next and all of my research has indicated that they simply did not have oral sex. They did certainly in the Victorian era and in *Forever Wild* I kind of, sort of, danced around that because they bathed in the Victorian era and therefore it was a much more popular practice, but modern America doesn't care about historical accuracy. They love to be titillated because Middle America, I suspect, is still discovering [00:34:00] -- talk about feminism -- is still discovering sexual practices that we've been seeing on our X-rated channels for years. I suspect that that's still filtering into the hinterlands. Therefore, they really like the titillation of a little lively sex but it has to be done not to disturb their sensibilities and it is very, very funny to do.

The line from somebody's book who shall be nameless where she decided to have an oral sex scene, but she didn't quite know how to do it now -- somebody in the future is going to be on the floor when they hear this -- where the heroine wiggled her way down his front and then the line was -- because how are you going to describe it -- the line was, "She caressed him with her throat," at which point I started laughing hysterically and I could not finish [00:35:00] the book because it kind of destroyed the romanticism of this wonderful scene. Anyway. (laughter)

MP: Now you described a wide range of settings and premises, what are the things that you consider to be the hallmarks of the style that tie them all together that they all deserve in some way the title “romance”.

SRB: Snobbery, as a matter of fact. Partially among the less well-skilled writers, purple passion, lots of adjectives, lots of adverbs. But there are a lot of romance writers now who are writing tight, hard, terrific prose, but they didn't hit the right editor or the right agent. Karleen Koen's book *Through a Glass Darkly* is a very long, very complex romance, but she took [00:36:00] it to an agent who didn't know from romances, who took it to a hard cover house that didn't know from romances and said, “Wow, this is the greatest book since chopped liver,” and they published it for \$25 in hard cover and she made a fortune, but basically it is just a romance. Susan Isaacs' latest book, though it's hard cover because Susan Isaacs has made a name for herself and will now always sell bestsellers -- a review I just read of it said it's just a soap opera. You know, so many of them -- *The Thorn Birds*, wonderful book, marvelous book, but except for the fact romances -- traditional romances -- have to end happily ever after. Except for that, *Thorn Birds* doesn't, it's a very long, very beautifully [00:37:00] written, very complex romance. But again --

MP: And a romance has elements which are a hero --

SRB: A hero, heroine, adventure or love -- the difference being usually in romances they live happily ever after. That is probably the main difference and the accent perhaps is more on the romance, but sorry, it was on the romance in *the Thorn Birds*, too. For all the other stuff thrown in, it was still basically a romance, but because the publishing world snickers, and I do think seriously it was a sexist thing when men wrote trash nobody said, “Oh, God, I can't stand this.” The New York Times will review science fiction, soft cover, Westerns, mysteries, original [00:38:00] soft cover mysteries, but they will not review romances, and I am absolutely convinced that the day they realize that these were being written by women and for women rather than by men, for men and women, was the day that the snobbery began.

I had a review of *Delphine* by a reviewer of the Los Angeles Times who had never read a romance but somebody had called him from Nightline and said, “Let me speak to your romance reviewer,” because I guess Nightline was doing something, and he felt so ashamed that they

didn't have a romance reviewer that he decided to read a romance and as luck would have it, he picked up *Delphine*. He gave it a wonderful review, he loved it! He said things like, every night when I crawled into bed with Delphine -- the book, not the girl -- he loved it and then spent the [00:39:00] last paragraph saying, but of course, you know, it's just a romance like all the others and I'll never pick up another one. And I wrote to him three pages defending the genre saying basically, you were just afraid that somebody would go shame, shame, you like a romance. I said, well I'm going to send you my next one. I said, "In a plane, brown wrapper." I said, "Read it at night under the covers. I'll never tell," because I really do think that half the reason that romances are treated differently is because it was decided that this was just too teeny for words. Possibly because it isn't only men, it is younger women who although they read them also say, but of course I wouldn't read them. The same college students who will tell me about loving to stay home from classes so they can watch [00:40:00] soap operas, you know, Radcliffe girls have told me this, will also snicker at a romance.

MP: Now what percentage of the market is a number of books sold in the US for example are romances?

SRB: It has been, I don't know this year, but it has been in the past couple of years about 40 percent of the whole book market is romances and yet they are still treated like step-children. Isn't that fascinating? And, as I say, it is not only men, but it is women, too, but usually career women who seem to think that to confess that they read romances would make them -- perhaps it is a feminist thing to take the attitude that to somehow be interested in traditional values of love and romance is beneath a modern woman, and yet they do read them. They just somehow think that to confess they read them is something terrible. I [00:41:00] don't care how liberated a woman is.

I think women did in the past and do now and perhaps always will relate to each other as women, relate to each other in relationships and romances are so much about relationships between men and women. They are about, in some ways, about the way we wish men could be. Or as my daughter said -- "Where do you find men like that?" -- having read my last book and I said, "In your mother's imagination," because they are, I suppose, everything that the feminists want in a man, which is why it's doubly peculiar that they sneer at them because these are the sensitive yet tough yet strong yet -- I mean these are wonderful, perfect, marvelous -- that you

create in your head. They're wonderful to write them and I create [00:42:00] in my head these marvelous men that I can fall in love with, and of course you do while you're writing. You have to be in love with these men while you're actually writing because you have to believe it and they are just divine men.

And why there should be this mindset against them, I don't know, but I do think the lines are beginning to blur. I do think romances are beginning to be taken more seriously. The last few romances from the top writers have had non-bosomy women on the covers. They've had lace and flowers and some of the top -- (inaudible) Spencer for one, has been fighting for non-pictorial covers for a long time and has been getting them because her attitude is I want to be taken more seriously. And again, the genres are blurring, the categories are blurring, the types of books are blurring. As I say, I'm finding myself [00:43:00] in the architect book I think she will have sex with somebody else and I probably am going to get away with it.

MP: I think I had one last question, which is about what kinds of writers groups, support groups, you mentioned a convention --

SRB: The best one -- the one that I belong to -- is the Romance Writers of America. It is probably less than half of the membership are actually published writers and we have expanded because we do see that the market is changing and growing and stretching so that we are dealing with all kinds of pop-fiction and people come in and they read things that may be a romantic suspense or a gothic or a romantic mystery or a main stream, and read bits and pieces and we discuss the markets and we have editors and agents who come in and discuss what they're looking for.

MP: Is this on a weekly basis?

SRB: It's monthly [00:44:00] and then the yearly convention also, which is probably --

MP: How many people go to the monthly meetings in New York?

SRB: The monthly meetings -- the New York group is fairly small because of distances to travel and we have a membership -- and we're also fairly new -- we have a membership of about 30 and we probably have about 10 or 15 per meeting. But the Jersey group, for example, is much better organized and very large and they have a mini-convention every year that I go to just for a

day where they have much -- we did -- our New York group had our first mini-convention in the spring and we had about 40 people came in where we had about five editors we brought in and several agents. The Jersey convention had about a hundred people. The national convention has about [00:45:00] 1,500 -- a huge convention. It's almost too big. I don't get to meet and see all the people I want to because of course the networking is what's so absolutely fabulous to know what's going on in the market, to know who's buying what, to know which editors are difficult, to know which agents are helpful, to know -- just super, super! I wish I had n of the group when I first got started because sometimes it was so lonely not knowing what I was doing and not having anything or anybody to bounce back and forth on it. A marvelous group! So when I had people call me and say, "How do I get started in the romance field?" and I say, "Even if it's the pop-fiction field, find out if there's a chapter in your area of the RWA." Because it's a great group and it's one of the few groups that takes unpublished. As I say, I know the authors guild is only published and the mystery writers, I think, is only published and the Western writers is only published, but the RWA takes unpublished and --

MP: Well, I think our tape is running out. Do you have any last words?

SRB: No, I think I've said all that I can possibly say.

MP: Well, I'm sure you can say more, Sylvia.

SRB: Yeah, the next time.

MP: It's been a delight and I think very informative. Thank you.

SRB: Thank you.

- END -