

Interview with Santina Lee Siena, Class of 1973

Interviewer: Linda Sweeney, Class of 1991.5

Date: April 12, 1988

Interview transcribed in June 2014 by Lorena Garcia, class of 2012

LINDA SWEENEY: Tape one. Linda Sweeney, Class of 1991.5, interviewing Dr. Santina Siena, Class of 1973. Can you tell me a little bit about your family?

SANTINA SIENA: Ok. I was born in New Jersey and my parents are still living there. Both of them are retired at this point. My father was an industrial engineer, a senior industrial engineer working for Western Electric for many years. My mother was a bookkeeper for a small firm. I have one brother, who's married, lives in Philadelphia, and is expecting a child any day now.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. And what about your parents' education?

SANTINA SIENA: My mom finished high school and never went to college. My dad finished high school, as well. Went in the evenings to college when I was a young child. A bachelor's degree. He took a few graduate courses and ended basically with a bachelor's degree.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. What town did you come from?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, I was born in Newark, New Jersey but I grew up in Maplewood, New Jersey.

LINDA SWEENEY: And where's your high school?

SANTINA SIENA: Columbia High School, which was school for Maplewood and South Orange. Actually a large high school. We had 750 people in my graduating class.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. Why did you pick to come to Brown- Pembroke?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, actually it was Pembroke at the time. I interviewed and applied to many colleges. And I liked the mixture that I saw at Brown, at Pembroke, actually at the time. I was interested in the science background, science career, and I liked the curriculum. I got a good feeling when I came for the interview. At that time, Brown was a very popular school. Not anywhere near the way it is right now. [laughs] And actually one of the things that interested me was that not everyone from my high school was going to Brown. And I wanted to- I was interested in going somewhere where I could be my own person. So actually there were only two of us from my whole class who ended up- Nan who ended up at Brown and myself who went to Pembroke.

LINDA SWEENEY: Do you remember how you first found out about Brown?

SANTINA SIENA: From a guidance counselor. My school was very aggressive in terms of getting people into college. We had a very good guidance counselor system and people were applying to all the Ivy League Schools. It was just one of the schools on the belt where you came on your interviews, actually, but I was very impressed. [laughs]

LINDA SWEENEY: Did your family know what you planned to do with your education like which way it was headed?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, when I first came to Brown I didn't really know which way it was headed. I knew I was interested in getting into being science, but at that point as a freshman, and even as a sophomore, I wasn't pre-med. I didn't really have any idea that that's what I'd be doing. And it wasn't really 'til about half-way through that I made that decision. So, again, that seems to be very different from what kids are doing now. I interview people—high school kids—and they all seem to know that they want to go medical school. I really didn't.

LINDA SWEENEY: You mean for high school kids for Brown?

SANTINA SIENA: Mm-hmm.

LINDA SWEENEY: My dad did that.

SANTINA SIENA: And a lot of them seem to have very fixed ideas even in high school. I didn't feel that way. When I applied, I just was interested in coming in and getting a degree. I guess, I couldn't really say a liberal arts education 'cause I was concentrating in science. But I wasn't pre-med in the beginning. I really was interested in taking courses and taking advantage of a lot of the departments at Brown. And it really wasn't until the last two years that I settled down to pre-med and started concentrating on the science courses. But my family was always supportive of that. They thought it was great and they were very encouraging from the beginning.

LINDA SWEENEY: How about when you first started there. Where did you live?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, I lived in Morriss-Champlin. 409 Champlin Hall. At the time, those were the new dorms. The dorms now on Thayer Street weren't built yet. So the old dorms were Andrews and that group and Morriss-Champlin and New Woolley were the new dorms. Of course, it was Pembroke so they weren't co-ed. It was only single sex dorms. And that was my first year. And my second year I moved into Emery and Woolley. Woolley, I guess I lived in Woolley the second year and that was a co-ed dorm. So this was the big break.

LINDA SWEENEY: What year was that?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, I was there- '69-'70 I lived in Champlin. So then I guess it was '70-'71.

LINDA SWEENEY: And that's co-ed?

SANTINA SIENA: That was co-ed. But it was very- one floor was male and one floor was female. We didn't have any mixing. [5:00] And then my third year, I moved to the Brown campus and I was in Diman House for the last two years. And at that point, the whole dorm was co-ed. [inaudible 0:05:10] But this was a big step from single sex dorms to completely co-ed in four years. Which was kind of amazing at that time.

LINDA SWEENEY: Yeah and that's a good [inaudible 0:05:19] happening. How about your social life?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, the first year that I was there when I was at Pembroke it was very clear cut. Pembroke was separate and Brown was separate. And although the classes were mixed, there was a huge strata between Pembroke and Brown. The dorms were all co-ed, we had a doorman, and the doors were locked at night. We had curfews and parietals, they used to call them, where there were only certain hours that you could have men in the building. There was someone, like I said, a doorman and someone at the telephone. And it was hard. I really didn't enjoy my first year as much as the other years because there was definitely a difference between what you did in class and what you did with the rest of your day. It was very formal. If someone was coming to pick you up for a date they had to come and someone had to call up to tell you that your caller was here. And they had a very [inaudible 0:06:20] a code system. So that if a woman was coming to call on you she was a visitor but if a male was coming to call on you that was a caller. So they would tell you. They didn't have to announce the name but you knew who was waiting for you downstairs. That was really a throwback, I guess, to the old days where things were much more formal. And so to go from that to a co-ed dorm was really a big stretch in one year. We had curfews and they would lock the door at night. And if you came in after a certain time it was hard to sneak in. So it was very different so the social situation was very different at that point. There was a big deal, the difference between Pembroke and Brown. We only had 300 women in my class and 800 men. So I think some of that also had to do with separating the two schools. If you only had a certain number of dorms that really set a limit as to how many women you could accept into your class. Once they let the whole place open up it allowed more women to come to Brown, which I thought was pretty cool.

LINDA SWEENEY: How about any extracurriculars, or anything like that?

SANTINA SIENA: Oh, it's hard for me to remember way back. [laughs] I should have thought about [inaudible 0:07:33] a little longer. I remember my first year I did work on the newspaper. There was a Pembroke newspaper at that point. Besides the *Daily Herald*.

LINDA SWEENEY: Yeah, the *Pembroke Record*.

SANTINA SIENA: Right, and I worked on that. It was hard for me to remember the name, but I did work on that. I had been the editor of my paper in high school, or one of the editors. So that was a good transition but I only did that for a year. Then I sort of lost the journalism bug.

LINDA SWEENEY: Do you have any particular memories about any of the faculty members having any influence on you?

SANTINA SIENA: Dr. Quevedo. Does he still teach there? Teaches Biology. You might not know. He was—he taught Bio 1, which was an extremely popular course. Well, of course if you were a science major you took it but most everyone—I wouldn't say most everyone— but there were a lot of people in that class who were not science majors. But I can still think of him as being a big influence certainly for my first year. My genetics professor, Dr. Hagey, was a major influence towards the end of my time at Brown. I guess it's more my science professors that stand out because they were the ones who influenced my future career but the two of these men were very important.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. This is sort of a tough question but do you have any best/worst memories sort of thing?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, my best memories of Brown—this is going to sound kind of corny, but it's my friends who came from Brown. That's really the reason that I live in Providence right now. I grew up in New Jersey and when I finished Brown I went back to New York for my training—medical school and my residency training. And now I'm back here in Providence and the whole reason that I'm here is because I went to Brown and I'm still friends with a lot of people that I met. And one by one we all came back to Providence. So it's hard for me to sort of say that this is my best memory but it's really the friendships I made that have continued until now. Worst memories? That's even harder. I think I don't have one worst memory. [laughs]

LINDA SWEENEY: Well, obviously, the relationships between male and female students changed while you were there. [10:00] It got much more comfortable, I guess.

SANTINA SIENA: Oh it was much much nicer. My first year I felt like I didn't really have very many male friends. You know because everything was very much a dating situation. Either you were dating someone or if you weren't it was very formal. By the second year when we had men moving into the building and either women were moving over to the Brown campus, things became much more natural and much friendly. Just more natural environment. That was a major breakthrough, I think, for those years. I know a lot of the older alumnae were not happy with the merger but certainly those of us who were there at the time were delighted. I don't think I knew anybody who didn't want this to happen.

LINDA SWEENEY: The men, too?

SANTINA SIENA: I think the men too. My friends did. You know people that I met the next few years didn't seem upset by this at all. I think it was much nicer for everyone because certainly for them it was much easier for them to make friends as well. I think there was a lot less pressure by having people living in a much more normal environment. In some ways it made it a lot more like high school where you just had friends that were men not just callers that came to your door.

LINDA SWEENEY: Did you have any kind of counseling? Like career counseling or even picking classes.

SANTINA SIENA: I vaguely remember they gave us an advisor my first year. That person was semi-helpful. I remember the first year being uncertain what I wanted to do. I'm sure you can relate to that. And people guided you to some extent. Now, of course, the year that I was there was the first year of the New Curriculum, which now is not so new anymore. I heard they're thinking about changing it again. But this was something that was very radical at the time. Certainly distribution requirements and things like that were relegated to the back burner and [inaudible 0:12:04] are interested in letting you shape your career. Or certainly shape your education at Brown. So there was counseling in that respect but I can't really say that anybody really stuck out at the time. That I would say, well that person was very helpful to me in choosing courses for the first year. Or for my friends either. People sort of—it's a lot of experimenting, especially the first two years and then everyone kind of settled down for the last two. By that time, you chose your own advisors and professors you respected who would help you out.

LINDA SWEENEY: Well, by commencement, everything was all together then. So that wasn't really these questions.

SANTINA SIENA: No, some of these questions really don't relate.

LINDA SWEENEY: That's for earlier.

SANTINA SIENA: Right. But by commencement, we were one class. And although it didn't really change the ratio of men to women. It was still pretty much the way it was although people did transfer in the middle and people left, of course. Certainly the mood was very different. I almost felt like I graduated from a different school than I came to and I was really happy about it. It was a move that made a lot of sense to me and to my friends.

LINDA SWEENEY: The questions here about chaplain convocation talks, was that at all part of your—

SANTINA SIENA: No we didn't have chapel at all. Convocations, I guess we had a few but it wasn't mandatory. Pembroke—the campus itself— was a lot more concentrated the first two years. We had gym. We had mandatory gym that we had to take. We had to take a certain number of credits as far as gym was concerned and those were all spent in the Pembroke gym or over on the fields. But they were just all single sex kind of classes. They had no other requirements except the language requirement and gym. Those were the two things you had to do. We had posture pictures, which sound so absurd now, where they took pictures of you to tell you if you had good posture or not. If you didn't, they wanted you to do certain things to fix that, and that was a big joke. And we had a swimming requirement also. When I first came you had to pass a swimming test or you couldn't graduate. But that was pretty much it as far as— we didn't have to go to chapel or do anything else on a more formal basis. I think that was all changed by the time I got there. Other things that were separate had to do with dining, for example. [15:00] The cafeteria. I think the merger was probably a disadvantage to the women because the food was much better at the Pembroke dining rooms than it ever was at the Ratty. Although that may not be the case right now but the Ratty was really sort of a wild place and Pembroke was much more refined. I guess before I got there they had more formal sit down dinners. By the time we got there it was more cafeteria style but the selection was bigger and the food was better. And I don't think I ever ate at the Ratty my first year. I always ate at Pembroke.

LINDA SWEENEY: I still always eat at Pembroke cause I live on Pembroke. Well, I was looking at the *Pembroke Record* around 1970 and one issue that seemed to come up a lot and it was asking if the University was molding people too much. I guess that was just indicative of the times.

SANTINA SIENA: Of the—mm—hmm. Yeah I didn't feel that way. I felt more that I had a chance to really grow when I came to Brown. A lot of my ideas were in the years I was at Brown. Not so much that the University was molding me but that I was really learning about myself and about the world. When I was there, we had a strike my first year. This was about the Vietnam War. So by the end of the

year, exams were put on hold and we had a strike. Also, a lot of my political ideas were formed during that time. But again, that really wasn't the University forming me it was rather the students who were coming together to actually try to change the way things work at the University.

LINDA SWEENEY: Did you study abroad or anything while you were there?

SANTINA SIENA: No. No I didn't.

LINDA SWEENEY: Well, you were in the sciences.

SANTINA SIENA: Right. I did everything separate.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. So after Brown you went right to medical school?

SANTINA SIENA: To medical school.

LINDA SWEENEY: Where was that?

SANTINA SIENA: Cornell – in New York City – Medical School. I certainly thought that my time at Brown prepared me well for medical school. It helped me I think to get into medical school.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. Did you find that you found any obstacles after [inaudible 0:17:27].

SANTINA SIENA: No. I thought that once I got to medical school—one of the things that I took for granted at Brown, I had to come face to face with like sexism, for example. I felt even my first year, certainly by the end, that there wasn't any sexism. Not that I could feel. I didn't feel it was any harder for me to get into medical school because I was a woman. I certainly didn't feel like this was a big problem in my classes. Although, of course in the science classes, especially at that time, there were more men than women in the classes. This was, I never felt was an issue. So it was a rude awakening to get to medical school and find out that the professors and some of the other students were very sexist. And I hadn't experienced that at Brown. This was a time when there was a transition going on as far as how many women were in medical school. When I first—my first year we had twenty-five women in my class out of a 100 and the fourth year class had five out of 100. So the school itself was going through a big change. Just as Brown had undergone a change when I was there, my medical school was also undergoing a change. By the time we left, the ratio was somewhere between a quarter and a third of the class. But certainly the first year, the professors and the other students— I expected more from the other students— but I guess a lot of them had gone to colleges that weren't quite as liberal as Brown in terms of attitude. But they weren't used to looking

out and seeing so many women and this was a big change for everyone. And I felt like when I had been at Brown, this wasn't a big issue. It was sort of taken for granted that it didn't make any difference if you were male or female in terms of getting into schools or getting along in your courses.

LINDA SWEENEY: Did you get a lot of emotional support from your family at this time?

SANTINA SIENA: Yeah. My family's always been very supportive. There was no issue or no problem about it. I have one brother and I think we were pretty much treated equally in terms of career choices and in terms of what we wanted to do with our lives. Especially my dad was delighted at my choice to go to medical school. And they were very supportive emotionally, financially, just in terms of everything.

LINDA SWEENEY: [20:00] You specialized in OB/GYN. Why did you choose that?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, actually that choice came to me even when I was at Brown. When I first was considering going into medicine, I thought even back then that I would be interested in obstetrics. And then throughout medical school I sort of tried to talk myself out of it because of the hours and just because of the way things were in obstetrics. I kept looking for reasons why I might rather be in Internal Medicine. In fact, I did an internship in Internal Medicine in Chicago. And I went back to OB which is what I'm doing now. I was interested in women's health care. I thought maybe I would make a difference I guess. It's something I did with like attitude but at the time, again, there weren't that many women doing obstetrics. It was much more of a male dominated field. And the same ratio change took place when I was in my residency also. The year I started, there were only two women in the whole residency program prior to that, and we had three out of five in my year. Next year was three out of six and the following year it was four out of six. So the ratios changed very much and I guess I felt like I wanted to be a part of that. Women's health care to women by women.

LINDA SWEENEY: You're not married, right?

SANTINA SIENA: No. Mm-mm.

LINDA SWEENEY: Is that by choice or?

SANTINA SIENA: Yeah, I guess I'd have to say that's by choice. Although, I'm never ruling out the possibility in the future. It's sort of hard to say why you choose the lifestyle you choose. I guess it was never a conscious decision not to get married. It's just that it hasn't happened so far. [laughs] But I'm comfortable with my life the way it is right now. Many of my friends, who I went through



school with, got married and are now getting divorced. So we're all ending up at the same place. We just went through by different routes. [laughs] So I think I won't limit myself in the future. I might get married but I might not and if I don't that will be ok as well.

LINDA SWEENEY: Ok. And children?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, that's more of an issue. [laughs] As I find myself getting older, I think about this more and more, especially because this is what I do all day long. I either counsel people who are pregnant, or I counsel them on how to get pregnant, or I counsel them on how not to get pregnant. So all day long I'm confronted with childbearing choices and issues. And I find as I get older, I encourage my patients as they're getting older that they can't consider that they're too old to have children. I've pushed up the age limit that I think is appropriate. [laughs] Luckily, in terms of medicine that's been changing as well. So it's not just one person's opinion. But I find that we're taking care of many of the women who are in their late thirties or even early forties who are getting pregnant and having successful pregnancies. So I haven't ruled out at all the possibility of having children. Whether or not I get married. I think that won't be the final decision that makes me decide to have a child anyway, even if I don't have a husband. That's probably not something I would have considered in 1973. [laughs] I'm not sure my family would be particularly supportive of that decision. [laughs] But maybe by the time you're forty it doesn't matter how supportive your family is.

LINDA SWEENEY: I guess your work probably takes up a lot of your time, huh.

SANTINA SIENA: It does. It takes up a lot of time and it certainly did more, I think, during the training period. When I finished Brown, then I went to medical school and then I did five years of residency— an internship and four years of residency training. So that did take a lot of time. I felt like that was definitely a prolonged adolescence. All the way up to age thirty. And you know, the living arrangements and especially living in New York City. The small studio apartment. It was a lot more like being a student. It took a lot of hours and the only difference was you got a paycheck at the end of the week. But it was a lot of hours and a lot of commitment. Certainly that didn't stop people from starting families and many of the women that were in my program got married and were pregnant during the training period. [25:00] Now my work still takes a lot of time. Not as much as it did then. It's a nicer lifestyle now than certainly those training years but the hours are still long and irregular. There's many nights when I work all night and then I come home and sleep the next day. Or I don't sleep the next day and work the next day. So it is an irregular lifestyle.

LINDA SWEENEY: Honestly, your field of specialization is really interesting. Has that changed a lot? I don't know maybe like the age of people who come to you or what they want?

SANTINA SIENA: Mm-hmm. It has. People – women – have become much more interested in taking a part in their health care. So certainly in terms of pregnancy, people read. They do a lot of reading, their friends have books, and then they take classes. And it's very different than even than it was when I was in medical school where people sort of said, 'Whatever you say doctor' or 'What do you think?' And now they sort of say, 'Well, this is what I think' and sometimes you have to just say well, ok, but let us keep in mind this and this and this. I think my practice has changed even in the five or six years since I've been here. I see a lot more of the older women getting involved now, which is nice. Certainly you expect younger women to be interested and read, but even the older women going through menopause now come with a list of questions. And it's obvious that they've thought a lot about what they expect to get from your visit and I think that's very good. The practice has changed a lot. I think to the benefit. I certainly think that the women who are coming in now get a lot more out of their visits because they come prepared to ask questions and to get involved in their health care decisions which is nice.

LINDA SWEENEY: I saw this thing on TV. It was like a talk show and this man was saying that they can even– this woman wanted to have a baby after menopause and they were kind of trying to take her back. I didn't think of that. That's kind of spooky.

SANTINA SIENA: Well, yeah. [laughs] I think that that's very extreme. Like I said, I've become much more encouraging to women as they get older and I think that if someone went through pre-mature menopause that maybe it would be okay to try to stimulate their ovaries with some hormones to help them to achieve a pregnancy. I think once you get past the normal age of menopause that there's other factors to consider too. That someone in their fifties, for example, may not be able to handle the pregnancy as well just in terms of hypertension and diabetes and other issues, stamina. But I think a lot of what you hear on TV is just very experimental. Nothing that's really being done on a non-TV basis.

LINDA SWEENEY: Well, it's the TV and they want to make it interesting I guess.

SANTINA SIENA: Right. [laughs] They make it sound like it's much more accessible than it actually is.

LINDA SWEENEY: Any plans for the future?

SANTINA SIENA: Well, I guess for now I'm just content with the way things are. I've just taken on more responsibilities within my office. I've become the department chair or the department chief, I should say, of the HMO where I work. So right now I'm concentrating on that to some extent. Expanding my horizons at my job. But I'm planning to stay in this situation over the next several years.

LINDA SWEENEY: You said you moved back here because you have friends from Brown and stuff. Do they ever do anything like this? Are they all involved with Brown?

SANTINA SIENA: Yes. In different ways. I have one friend who is involved in interviewing students, as I said earlier. Another friend who is involved in fundraising. And we all went to our tenth reunion in March together and this year coming up is our fifteenth reunion and we're planning to get together again. So people are— I think one of my friends stayed here after college, but the rest of us all came back. It doesn't just have to do with Brown. It has to do with living in Providence. I never thought I would say that in 1973.[laughs] When I moved back to New York I thought that was just it. But your needs change as you get older and one by one we've managed to come back. And we've all stayed very close to each other. We've been involved in each other's lives on pretty much a daily basis. [30:00] And it's interesting because the three women that I'm closest in friendship with we all met in freshman year. One was my roommate and we were roommates for four years, which might be a record. I'm not sure. [laughs] You know the computer matched us up and we've been friends ever since. And another woman I met at a Pembroke tea in New Jersey. A mother daughter tea the week before we came to school. And another lived at the end of the hallway. And we've all been involved in each other's lives since then. I've been bridesmaid for all three of them and I delivered one of their children, which was very exciting. These are things we never sort of thought could happen when we all met our first years. That we'd go through life together. So we're all involved in Brown in our own way and we're mostly involved with each other. And then there's other people, some of the men we had and some of the other women friends we had, although they don't live in Providence, come back. We've all maintained very close friendships over the years which is great. Sometimes I think that maybe you stay friends with the last group of people that you ever lived with but that's not true in my case. My friendships from Brown are a lot stronger than the one's from medical school or the one's from residency where we all were very involved in each others lives. And I still have some friendships with people from those areas but my friends from Brown are almost like family at this point, which is very nice.

LINDA SWEENEY: That's great. Anything else?

SANTINA SIENA: I don't know if I have anything else to say. I guess it's hard to put your feelings into words after so many years. And you know, sort of answering questions it's almost a little cold. But my feelings from Brown are so positive and so strong. Even more so in retrospect. At the time that I lived here and that I was at Brown, I was enjoying myself. But I think at that point I thought of it as a stepping stone to someplace else, an education, and a chance to grow. Looking back, I think that the years I had at Brown-

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[beginning of tape 2]

SANTINA SIENA: -my friendships, and the way that my thoughts changed. The way I thought of appreciating the world, understanding the world, so much more than just going to classes and learning chemistry and biology. But my whole way of thinking was shaped by the years I had at Brown. And that's pretty great. It's been wonderful to see how popular Brown has become and to watch the reputation grow. Sometimes the publicity isn't all that good. [laughs] That's the downside. When I was at Brown, I think the world wasn't quite as interested in Brown as the people who went to Brown were. Now when you're on top I guess everybody tries to shoot you down and make issues about things. It was very exciting to be there at a time when things were changing. Not so much to have a part of the change because certainly not one, any one person didn't have a big part in the change, but just to be there when all these things were going on. Like I said the curriculum was a big change at the time. Certainly the merger. And I just think Brown's a great place.

LINDA SWEENEY: And now people are worried because the changes are sort of going the other way a little bit.

SANTINA SIENA: Yeah.

LINDA SWEENEY: And you know a lot of it I think isn't really that important but like they had changed it to 30 credits instead of 28. That's official now for the class of '93, I believe. But other things too, they're talking about the RCs on the floor starting to play more of a police role and watching. Everyone's sort of really nervous about that because they think if this all changes then Brown would be the doormat of the Ivies again.

SANTINA SIENA: Which it would be terrible to see that happen. It's hard to know. Like I said, when I was there things got very much more liberal and I think people were frightened of that. Thinking something terrible was gonna happen. But it didn't and I would really hate to see the school become a police state or certainly even much more conservative. I think part of what happens when you're at school is that you learn to take care of yourself. And if

somebody else is trying to make decisions for you, you're not gonna- I mean, I think of college years as the time to really grow into your own person. It's time to grow up. You know you're not a child anymore, you're not living with your family anymore, and you have to be responsible and make your own decisions. Not everyone's gonna make the decisions that the dorm counselor might want them to. I think it was good to have a lot of responsibility. When they try to make things too strict, just people look for ways to get away with it. You know, how do you sneak in or how do you do this or how do you do that. If you can make your own decisions I think you learn a lot more about yourself.

LINDA SWEENEY: I guess that's all I have to ask.

SANTINA SIENA: Okay.

LINDA SWEENEY: Is there anything else?

SANTINA SIENA: I don't think so. I think we've probably said everything.

LINDA SWEENEY: Alright.

[end of tape 2]

[end of transcript]