

Transcript – Ruth Sittler, Class of 1933

Narrator: Ruth Sittler
Interviewer: Joyce Tavon
Interview Date: February 2, 1987
Interview Time:
Location:
Length: 3 audio files; 1:23:33

Track 1

Joyce Tavon: [00:00] My name is Joyce Tavon, class of '84 and today I'm interviewing Ruth Sittler class of '33. The interview is taking place on February 2, 1987. I'd like to start out with talking a little about your life before Brown. Maybe you can tell me a little bit about where you come from and a little on your family.

Ruth Sittler: Well I was born and grew up and attended high school in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, which is near the Maryland and West Virginia borders, it's in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. I'm the middle child. My brother is three and a half years older and my sister is three years younger. And my brother – We in the summers had gone to Sebago Lake in Maine [01:00] when I was in high school and before, earlier than that. When my brother was looking for a college he visited all of the colleges in New England and he was very pleased with Brown. He thought it was friendly. So he decided, and my sister and I who were very fond of him, both decided to go to Brown too. All three went to Brown. So I didn't feel like I had much a choice. It didn't occur to me to make any other choice than to go to Brown.

JT: Had either of your parents gone to Brown?

RS: Neither of my parents went to college. They were eighth-grade graduates. My mother did a little bit of studying and she attended classes while [02:00] I was in high school but that was not uncommon, at least in the society that I grew up in.

JT: So what did you parents do?

RS: Well my father was in the roofing business and also owned real estate in the little town of Uniontown. Just before I went to college – my brother graduated from Brown in 1930. I was a freshman when he was a senior. Just before that, my mother and father separated. As a matter of fact, got their divorce, I think their divorce was final in 1929. My mother was unhappy about being in Uniontown. A divorce at that time was a great disgrace as far as she was unconcerned. So she rented our house and [03:00] moved to Providence, where we had a house on Roy Avenue, which was right near university. And I as a freshman – My brother had by that time had a job with the university, this was before his senior year, recruiting students, athletes, for Brown. He was quite active in university. Head of Cammarian club and he was quite active. And, so anyhow, I lived on Lloyd Avenue my freshman year and my mother – we had four bedrooms I think – and my sister was going to Hope High School, she's three years younger. [04:00] My mother had two or three, I've forgotten, fraternity brothers of my brother's, who came for dinners in the evening and who stayed. We had one who had a room in the house so that that was kind of an interesting, it was not the easiest way to get involved as a freshman at Brown for me, but it was a happy adjustment for my mother. I mean it helped her. We enjoyed having this many people in the house. They were quite pleasant. So I also had a job. My brother had had a job for two or three years [05:00] before I came. He had this job in a tea room up on Brown Street and he worked there evenings. And when I came, I shared that job. And so I was working too, so it was a tremendously exciting experience because there were so many – it was so different from high school where I knew everybody.

JT: Was it unusual given this small town you came from to go to college?

RS: No, I would say that I was in what you call the academic sequence whatever you call it. I have to search for words every so often. And most of the people who were in that group, not all of them, but a good many [06:00] of them went to college. Not too many, I mean it was West Virginia, (inaudible) was a good college nearby. Penn State was another. Most of the women that I associated with in high school went on to college, Rollins, Elmira, Connecticut College for Women. So it wasn't unusual. It was about ten percent of the class that went on to college. I was part of that ten percent.

JT: And how about your parents. Were they encouraging or discouraging?

RS: Well my father he was kind of upset with our need to go to Providence, need to go that far away from home. He sort of thought that the University of Pittsburgh was a perfectly good school. [07:00] He felt that it was going to be difficult financially. He was not pushing in the sense. I mean, he let us know that and I really wasn't as aware of it at the time I went to school. As I think back, I wasn't aware of very much at the time when I went to school.

JT: So why Brown?

RS: Well that – My brother just liked it. He was there for three years. Worked his way through school and did very well academically and socially. He was a swimmer and was on the track team. He was very active. He just loved it. He had a real difficult time when he left Brown – he liked it so much – getting adjusted to some other kind of work.

JT: [08:00] So you sort of had to follow on his –

RS: Yes.

JT: That's a tough act to follow.

RS: That's right. That's right. And he – My mother only stayed the one year. So I was kind of protected in some ways because I needed to help her some and it was a new experience as far as all the studying was concerned and all the associations with different people. Then she returned – she only stayed for one year and she returned. The next year I – see I've forgotten. I lived – I had a room on Thayer Street. I was neither a town student nor a dormitory student which I think was unfortunate. I felt [09:00] more associated with the dormitory students than with the town students, not all together, because I lived right there and I didn't have family there. I shared a room with a person in the sophomore class, I think she was. Her name was Bates. And I was just looking at – I've forgotten whether she was – I think she was president of the class ahead of me.

JT: Try back to your freshman year. Do you have any particular memories of the year that you associated with being a freshman?

RS: It seems to me that I have a very kind of exciting experience. [10:00] Associations at the Pembroke were very exciting for me. There were so many – I was fascinated, the courses were so interesting. I was taking mostly required courses I'm sure at that time. They made me take Biology which I got a great kick out of. Magel Wilder who was a Biology person who was a real character. We learned an awful lot of things by rote. I mean, that's the way you [did it?]. The fun thing in Biology was the laboratory, and the fetal pig, and the frog and all that sort of stuff and drawing pictures that was great. And then I don't remember when I had my Art course with Taylor and he was a great favorite. He had a little house down Thayer street, way down. [11:00] I can't remember exactly where it was but it was down toward Williams Street. We went back into his yard. Every class, there was so much material that I hadn't known anything about. Had these wonderful slides of Roman buildings. The early buildings of Greece, he would talk about those periods and then going out and trying to draw a flower or something. That kind of teaching, and that kind of more adult, sort of, what felt more adult, way of participating in a class was very exciting.

JT: Were all your classes with other Pembroke students? Did you ever had any reason to take a class at Brown with the Brown students?

RS: I majored in Economics so I took a good many courses at Brown, [12:00] but I don't think I had any courses at Brown the first year. The Brown professors came like Ben Brown, Crosby in Dramatics, they came, the Drama classes, they came to Pembroke, Pembroke Hall, we had classes there. My Math course was at Pembroke. And the most, I guess, my freshman year I got Economics 1 I think I took my sophomore year. The most I did on the Brown campus as a freshman or sophomore even was going to the John Hay Library. A lot of us studied at the John Hay Library. We studied also at the Pembroke Library, which at that time that time was on the top of Pembroke Hall, it's not there anymore, is it? It was across the street. [13:00] And the men didn't come.

JT: I'm mixing up Pembroke Hall and Alumnae Hall.

RS: Oh, it never was in Alumnae Hall.

JT: Yeah no, there is a little library on top. Pembroke Hall.

RS: Pembroke Hall. I suppose that actually the Brown, the Hay and the Rock, are as much as libraries – Well it is now, I mean it's Brown so they wouldn't have as much as a library at Pembroke.

JT: But it's used for studying.

RS: Yes. It was then too.

JT: So your freshman year you lived really with your mother and there were at least one another room or person rooming in the house as well. Did that help you get some contact with the students? [14:00]

RS: There was a freshman who joined the fraternity where my brother was. A man, I got to know him quite well. I never – Socially. We, you know, were sort of friendly but we didn't date. I mean, it wasn't that kind of relationship. I didn't go to parties with him. But the – And the other two men who came for dinner were – I was sort of goggle-eyed and entranced with them. They were both, one was a junior and the other was a senior or something like that. They were, you know, they kidded us. We had a good time. What was going on in their lives was very exciting. I don't remember – [15:00] That added another dimension. One of the – There was a young woman who was at Katharine Gibbs who lived at the house and she was sort of – We got to know her quite well. And she was more attract – I think that that was more with the two – Well, I don't know. She went out with the boys more than I did. She was older than I was and that, sort of, seemed to work out. She had someone visit, beside the point. But at any rate, as far as just being around or that close an experience with other college students I think was part of the

excitement. Of course they were there for dinner, the two that I was thinking of, were there for dinner, and I was away waiting on tables for dinner. [16:00] I didn't really see them sometimes as much.

JT: So between your studying and your working, did you have any time to get involved in any other activities?

RS: Well I was a swimmer and I think I was on the swimming team my freshman year. The pool was at the Plantations Club. I don't know if you know where the Plantations Club is. It's down on Weybosset Street, near the Round Top Church, do you know where that it? You may not. It may not even be there anymore. But that was where we went to swim. We had an Olympic swimmer in our class. (inaudible) We were good friends. And it was good swimming team. We swam with – We competed with Radcliff and Tufts. [17:00] I've forgotten the name of that – I don't know if there were any others. Those are the ones I remember. I was in swimming the whole time, all four years.

JT: And your brother had also been a swimmer as well?

RS: Yes.

JT: So then your sophomore year you lived on Thayer Street with what was the president of her sophomore class?

RS: Yes. That would've been my sophomore class so she must've been a junior. I mean I was a sophomore at that time so she must've been a junior.

JT: Was it at all unusual for you to be living sort of more out on your own at that time?

RS: It was a little bit unusual but there were an awful lot of, you know, there were an awful lot of town students. That's really – I think that's changed a lot. Even the town students now live at the dormitory. But at that time it was almost – [18:00] I think maybe half of the students were from

Providence or nearby, people who were not in the dormitories. What was it called, East House? I think they had a room for town students in East House. East House was a dormitory that was just an old house, and it was a kind of ramshackle place. East House and Sharpe House. I used to spend a good deal of time – I knew a good many people in East House. I don't know when I began to get involved in student government, or how. I mean, I don't know whether I was on the swimming team and I was on the hockey team. [19:00] So that made you a member of Question Club. I don't know if there's a Question Club anymore or not, which is sort of the heads of various social organizations. And then the student government, I became the secretary of student government when I was a junior and president of student government when I was a senior.

JT: And I assume it was just – there was a Pembroke Student Government?

RS: Yes.

JT: So what kind of – What kind of work did that involve?

RS: Issues that came up in regard to student programs or things that the students were taking exception to or wanted to make recommendations about.

JT: [20:00] Were there particular issues at the time that you recall?

RS: I don't. I'm trying to. I don't really seem to have very much recollection. The one thing I recollect is that we were – They have a national, and I think they still have this, student government, the organizations meet during the Christmas holidays. And we had this, it was called for New Orleans. And we went down there. We were there for a week. We stayed at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. That was quite an experience. You had – There was a program and you were sent out at the program to prepare the material. There were two of us went. I went as the president [21:00] and then the junior member on the board. I really didn't want to go by myself so I asked if she could go too. So we went together and we sort of shared the responsibility. We didn't take too much responsibility for participating in the, you know, in the large – except that we decided what sessions we would attend.

JT: And was it a mixed group?

RS: Men and women. I just draw such a blank which regard to – we must've had some minutes or something. It would be fun to go back and see what we did talk about.

JT: So I guess that there was no one particular heated issue of the time that stands out.

RS: That I was really involved in. You'd think there would've been since I went to New Orleans and got somebody else to go with me. I remember a lot about New Orleans but I don't remember an awful lot about the meetings [22:00] that we attended. Don't know that I had any burning issues to get attention to.

JT: How about academically? You said you majored in Economics? Was that unusual? Did it mean that – You said some of your courses you had to take at Brown?

RS: Yes. All, let's see. I think Shoemaker came for Economics 1 to Pembroke, but then I took second year I took on the Brown campus. I took Labor Problems on Brown Campus, and I took Banking on Brown campus, and I took Marketing on the Brown campus. So most of the – There weren't many – There was a large group of people majoring in Economics, or taking Economics courses, [23:00] particularly with Shoemaker who was very popular. Probably most of the students in the major were men.

JT: So in those Economic classes, there weren't that many other women?

RS: No, I don't think so. I don't remember. Shoemaker's classes was like 125 people in his classes, there were big classes so there were some women I'm sure. I suppose I majored because my brother majored in Economics. There wasn't anything else I was particularly interested in. He seemed to enjoy it. I don't know of any other reason. My sister was an English major, so she was interested in theater [24:00] so that was sort of natural for her. I just ended up in Economics. But I liked it. I did all right in it, except for Marketing. I had a hard time. I couldn't understand

what Marketing was about. That was only one semester course. I really enjoyed my academic work. I was not superior. I did my best work my senior year, my best grades my senior year. My sophomore year I had a room which a miserable room in an attic and I was supposed to take care of this seven-year-old, I guess she was, for a person [25:00] who was the head of the Christian Association. I don't know if there is still a Christian Association.

JT: No. I thought sophomore year you lived with this other person.

RS: This was junior year. That was really a miserable time. I really hated the living arrangement and I felt so isolated. So I spent as little time there as I could. I didn't work very hard.

JT: It was the kind of thing your room and board were free but you have to take care of their child?

RS: Yes, I got free board. But not board, but free room. I was still waiting on tables. I think I didn't even have breakfast there; I must've had breakfast at the University. I was allowed to – Well that – He was, [26:00] the head of the Christian Association was kind of a responsible person. The places I selected were not very suspect, but it was a very very – it was an attic room, it was almost an orange-grey aesthetic and it was just miserable. That's the year I spent a good deal all the time in the John Hay. And then because that was so miserable I was able to get a room right on Cushing Street and this charming woman who was the sister of the house mother at Miller, Metcalf, she was a Miller. So her sister had this lovely house, with maid and chauffeur, and I had a [27:00] lovely room on the third floor. I was so much more comfortable in my social situation, academically my senior year, than the rest of the time.

JT: Was it still a little isolated to live, you know, sort of alone?

RS: I suppose it was. I was really active in quite a few things. I mean in swimming and with student government. Socially I dated one man most of my sophomore year into my senior year. I dated him, not all together, not all the time, but at any rate I went to many football games out of town, I went to many games. [28:00]

JT: Was he at Brown?

RS: Yes, he was in my class. He was at Brown. Well, he was not in the band but he was the drummer in a band that played. So I got to hear a lot of music.

JT: What was the atmosphere like socially? How did the women at Pembroke meet men at Brown or even socialize among – with one another? Were there dances?

RS: Well, the dances were held. They had Alumnae Hall had been built. It was a new building when I went to Brown and it was really charming. We treated it with respect. The dances, [29:00] they always had the one at graduation time was always on campus, but most of the dances like our junior prom was in the auditorium of the Alumnae Hall. There were tea parties held in the Crystal Room. Crystal Room was quite elegant. When you first went to Brown there were not mixers, they weren't called that, but that's sort of where there was the opportunity to meet men. When I first went to Brown there was always talk about the Brown men didn't want to have anything to do with Pembroke's, they dated all their girls from out of town, but that really didn't seem to be true. There were lots of fraternity parties. [30:00] There was one fraternity party when you went from one house to another. You got with one person and another. Fraternities sort of went out of style, went out of existence for a while, or almost did I think. Do you have fraternities when you were there?

JT: Yeah.

RS: They weren't in houses, like old houses. [Phi Delta?] Fraternity was right below where the art building is now.

JT: Oh, at that time you're saying they were –

RS: They were just all down College Hill were fraternities. The Greeks were on the, across the street. And on Angell Street, there were several fraternity houses there. Now they're more apt

[31:00] to be in the quadrangle or something. I think that when that happened, when that change happened, I think they almost went out of existence for a period. They got a little rowdy I think.

JT: Yeah, I don't know the whole history. I think there were problems.

- End of Track 1 -

Track 2

RS: [00:00] One of the dances at his fraternity. Actually the fraternity I went to most was the one that, I've forgotten the name of it, but it was on Thayer Street. And it was the fraternity of the man that I saw most of, and I went to most all of those parties. But I went to most of the Pembroke affairs, Pembroke dances. And at that time that was before when the Biltmore was the hotel. And there was always a good band at the Biltmore. You went to the Biltmore occasionally. By knowing a musician, I got to places like where they would have big bands like Paul Whiteman and other [01:00] what's the name of the, out in the country, it's a big dance hall. I remember those. That was quite an experience to go out. Everybody stands around the orchestra – I liked to dance and these were all musicians and they just wanted to watch the orchestra.

JT: He was a musician in the Brown band?

RS: No, well I don't think he was in the Brown band. He was in a band they were a group of his fraternity brothers who had a band of their own. And they played at fraternity parties and at their own and others. He had been – I don't think he was in the Brown band. I don't think so. I don't know that he was. He probably had played in the band when he was in high school.

JT: How about socializing with other Pembroke students? Any memories of that?

RS: Well [02:00] Jean Bauer who was a very active person in Providence, she was the Rhode Island golf champion for one or two years. She was really very outstanding athlete. She was outstanding in all. She was in basketball. She was on the swimming team. We didn't have a golf

team. And I saw a good deal of Jean. She was a townie. She lived on Waterman Street. And I visited her quite often. Albina was another person that I got to know quite well. Because, partly because of our swimming trips. Because of swimming. [03:00] I was just trying to think how they – The associations with people on the swimming team and the student government and somehow it wasn't, I think our class was something like maybe 500, I was going to say 250. But it didn't seem such like a large class. I mean, you knew everybody in your class. You know, it was like that. By the time you graduated you certainly know most people.

And it's been interesting when I go back for reunions. I don't have close associations with – A lot of the people that somehow when you've known each other for four years, [04:00] you feel like you know them better than you do. I didn't have intimate – Suppose Jean Bauer was with, and Albina, and the gal that lived with me on Thayer Street. There were two – There was another gal Mary Jane Eshelman who's also from eastern Pennsylvania that I knew quite well. We went, for instance, one of the things I remember is a lovely weekend we spent at Miss – at the Dean's summer place. [05:00] It was down, I've forgotten where, but it was on the shore. A lovely little place. There was a wonderful beach. We spent a weekend there, just sort of enjoying her and her wonderful sense of humor. She really liked having us there, at least it felt that way. That group, who were the sort of Question Club, who were the heads of the various organizations at the school. We were just girls together in a way that was kind of fun. She let us help with the – She didn't – It was a simple cottage and –

JT: Do you –

RS: we helped with the meals and things like that. Dean Morriss.

JT: Dean Morriss? It's funny you were saying, before, sort of jokingly that your bother was sort of the big man on campus during his time. But it sounds like you were pretty active and quite [06:00] a student leader yourself.

RS: I almost had to be. I mean, I wasn't aware of it so much at the time, it seemed like that's what he did when he went to college that I was supposed to do. I don't know. You know, it's interesting and I had forgotten, that my sister was the president of the freshmen class. She was a

freshman when I was a senior and she was president of the freshman class. So it was really funny in a way. Not funny, but –

JT: Went with the family.

RS: Yeah. That's right. I don't know. And she, I don't know. She could've been president for two years. I have the '33, her picture. It's kind of interesting. I'll have to show it to you. Theater group.

JT: You know, you were saying that over four years you got to know all the students in your class, but [07:00] yet at the same time a lot of the students were commuters. So I'm trying to understand how there really could be this sense of class feeling and all of that given so many of the students didn't even live at the school.

RS: Well that didn't mean they didn't participate in a lot of athletics. The Komians was the Pembroke theater group and the president of that – I thought it was Ruth Hussey who was, you know, became a movie star. I thought she had been in the Komians, but she wasn't. It was (inaudible) who was a Providence girl. And that group may have been more Providence people, not necessarily all, but that would've made a difference. So there were little sort of groups [08:00] of them who had gone to the same schools, who knew each other. Then there was Elizabethans which was a real sort of elite literature, literary society and you had to be invited to be part of the Elizabethan Society. My sister was a member of that, I wasn't. I hardly had an English course when I was there. So - And I knew Rae Baldwin, for instance, was very active in all kinds of athletics and she was also on the Elizabethan Society, but she was a town person. I knew her quite well. I still feel like I know Rae [09:00] well when I go to reunions.

JT: Were there any sort of social requirements, any particular afternoon teas or Sunday teas that you had to go to?

RS: No, but if the dean had a party, you know. You had to go to Chapel twice a week, at least twice. But if the dean had a party – if you liked the dean, and I liked the dean – you made an

effort to go to her parties. Then Eva Mooar, who was the admissions person, was a great favorite of many people. I had a lot of contact with her because she and [10:00] Bessie Rudd – Bessie Rudd was the athletic director, I don't think they had a house together while I was in college but shortly after they had a house together [on the East end?]. And that was always a very pleasant place to go. That kind of personal association that I had, quite a few people, especially Bessie Rudd had a lot of, you know, people went on trips, to play with them in colleges and that kind of thing. You usually had some association with her in regard to that sort of thing. The only one I went on was swimming trips and that was through the year but there were other athletic programs too. And I suppose that there were other more [11:00] intellectual kinds of exchanges.

JT: And you said you liked the dean as well?

RS: Dean Morriss, yes, yes. She was a great. I've always felt raw boned, and enthusiastic. She was a lady so that was a good experience for me. I had tremendous energy that I could do anything. She was very available and I was able to talk to her and I never had enough money. I was working for my meals. I was getting spending money from my father but I didn't really have very much money. I got jobs like delivering posters, college posters [12:00] for various events.

JT: Was she of some help in your getting jobs?

RS: Somehow she left me know when there were jobs available. Especially in regard to the student government, I had a good deal of contact with her in relation to that. Some of the issues that came through from the school administration, it made me curious what did go on in student government. Maybe I'll have a chance to look into that.

JT: Any other memories of her? I don't know what her influence was on your time, or on the school, or her philosophy, or your sense of –

RS: She was a historian. And she was a – A little strange to say, she dated, but Theodore Francis Green, [13:00] who was, was he in the United States Senate? And he had a big house down on

John Street. He was really quite a character. We enjoyed that, we enjoyed her having a social life that was in the upper echelons.

JT: I take it this was a known fact?

RS: Yeah. Yeah. That's right. She was his escort. No, he was her escort to various parties. But she was very – She was a, she was really a role model I guess, a very good role model [14:00] for some of us. And she was very involved in academic standards. She had much to do with – I think Pembroke had better academic standards than Brown even at the time when Pembroke was joined with Brown – she had a lot to do with that. She was very active. I think was the national head of the women's colleges. Was very interested in that. Talked to students about that sometimes.

JT: Do you think she served as a role model for you at all?

RS: Oh I think she did. Yeah, I really – Even when she was 90 I went to visit her, she was living in an apartment over on Prospect Street. [15:00] I was very touched at how she still held her head up in the same way, her mind was very alert, and she was fun to be with. She was aware what was going on in Providence in the most amazing way. She was quite a remarkable woman. I think it was interesting that Nancy Duke Lewis, I think, followed Dean Morriss, I believe so. But Dean Morriss was dean the whole time I was there. No, the other woman the Biology woman who was there – no, she followed. I think Nancy Duke Lewis followed Dean Morriss and then the woman who – There was another person who followed. Who was there when you were there? [16:00] Who was dean? Or was there a woman's dean when you were there?

JT: No.

RS: There wasn't one?

JT: No. Well, the Dean of the college (inaudible).

RS: Oh she's there for the whole college, isn't she? She was there the whole time. She's quite something. My, did you get to know her?

JT: No.

RS: You didn't? She seemed so available. I met her for a weekend, 25 years ago. My word, she's an amazing woman. Did you get know [Gerald Scott?]?

JT: No, actually I didn't. (laughs) (break in audio) I want to ask you a little bit about what it was like to be at Brown during the depression.

RS: I've, you know, I've asked myself that and I really don't know. It was a depression in a lot of ways for me because I was, I mean [17:00] my family situation was kind of unpleasant, I mean made the most of it I think. My mother really – there wasn't an awful lot of money, she managed very well because she organized, is a good cook and was able to do all that. Then was satisfied and stimulated by the experience in knowing all these young people. She enjoyed that. But the prices I remember just at that time hamburger was \$1 a pound, which was amazing, you never heard it being so high. It's not high now.

JT: So you have to work you said all four years. Was it a bit of a struggle in that sense?

RS: Well it was the easiest job I could have because I had to be there at [18:00] 5:30 and I got through. I didn't have dishes to do. We served and that was a small tea room and sometimes they had 30 guests and sometimes they had 40. Usually they came from 6:00 to 7:00, I was usually out by 7:30. I just got tips. I suppose it wasn't much more than \$20 a week. I don't even remember how much it was.

JT: Your father you said still helped you with your tuition?

RS: He didn't have much money either because things weren't going well for him. He sold his business and so he wasn't doing very well financially. But he sent me when he could. And I had

a scholarship. Tuition was something like [19:00] \$400 a year. And then I had to pay rent when I was on Thayer Street. And then I didn't have to pay rent my senior year so – I didn't always have – I tried to make my clothes and I wasn't very good at it.

JT: it's hard to manage.

RS: It didn't seem, I wasn't distressed about it, do you know? I mean I never lived – I never had great wealth, never felt poor. The depression was just – most people had less money.

JT: Was there a sense of that at Brown with other students?

RS: [20:00] Oh yes. I think some of the town people particularly. Even car fare was the problem. And people dropped out. I think quite a few people dropped out of our class. I don't know whether it was more than other classes or not. I went to college in 1929 and I got out in 1933. I was just lucky that I was able to stay and that there were that many arrangements that I was able to – I was so busy and I was having lots of new experience. I had never been to college before, [21:00] I never had money before. It was kind of like I didn't know any better. That's how I remember it.

JT: Was there a dress code of some sort when you were at school?

RS: Well, we wore sweaters, cardigans, and skirts, and black and white shoes, you know, saddle shoes, tennis shoes.

JT: Anything about having to wear gloves?

RS: No. No. My sister-in-law went to Michigan and they had hats and gloves, and I always (inaudible), no. And I'm sure that there was earlier, that there may have been earlier. We did wear gloves with our evening gowns.

JT: Real formal.

RS: Daytime was just skirts and sweaters.

JT: And if you had to go to a social [22:00] event like a tea?

RS: You wore long dresses. I remember I had a really beautiful dress that was one of my aunt's and it was that was that gold lame but it was only about the upper calf of my leg, it had a circular skirt and it wasn't long. That was what I had to wear because I didn't have anything else, and I was really stressed about that. But mostly I, I was able to – I mean, I had an evening wrap and I had – those things I sort of managed, the things that were important, I guess.

JT: And did that mean you had to wear gloves?

RS: Well long gloves for evening, yes. At least in the early, whether we still were wearing them by the time I was a senior, I don't know. [23:00] I think so. I think all the time I was in college we wore gloves. I still have some. (laughs)

JT: What was your sense of what you were going to do after Brown? Did you feel that you were getting advice from the dean or some of the other people? Were you beginning to think about that your senior year?

RS: No. I wasn't prepared as far as my economics were concerned. There was no business to go into. I wasn't prepared to go into business. I got a job as a governess. While I was there I went [24:00] to St. Louis with a family in St. Louis, while I was there I met a perfectly delightful woman who was a sort of artist and she did the display windows at Scruggs Vandervoort and Barney which is a department store in St. Louis. I was just fascinated with the kinds of things she was able to do. She would be going to a party and she would take a hunk of material and make herself an evening dress. So I left the job of governess, I had three kids I was supposed to be looking after and I didn't enjoy it very much. I got a job working in a department store, I thought I wanted to be a buyer. That's as close as I got to coming up with something. So I worked [25:00] in this department store for \$14 a week. By this time, I had met an old Sunday school

teacher and I joined her and two other people in an apartment where we paid \$2 a week, each friend put \$2 a week into the food budget and we ate well. That was when the prices were low.

JT: Had you come to St. Louis alone? Did you have some other family or other times?

RS: I went with the family who had a summer place on Woods Hole. They were friends of Bessie Rudd who was the athletics person. When they went to St. Louis in October I went with them. I was with them until May I think and I took the job. By the time I'd been there for three months [26:00] I didn't want to be a buyer. So I went back to Pennsylvania and this was the time when the public welfare department was just being established. The Emergency Relief Act had been passed. And so the social work was the opening and I went into social work in a training program and that was in 1934 in Pittsburgh. My economics was as good a preparation, I had some sociology but that was not very related to working – doing social work.

JT: Did you have a particular interest in that field or was that just where the jobs were?

RS: It was mostly where the jobs were. I thought I would like that. I knew that there was a program called Aid to Dependent Children which in Pennsylvania started in [27:00] 1913 so that was kind of the elite, and that was the sort of standard setting agency. Through my mother I knew the director of the Pittsburgh agency, ADC. It was interesting. I mean, she had come to Uniontown and stayed at our house. Uniontown at that time was in Bay County which was a coal mining town and 75 percent of the people were on welfare so that was quite an experience to set up that program in that town. And this woman offered me a job in Pittsburgh came to Uniontown to help set up the program. That was [28:00] quite an exciting time. I think in terms of services and programs being developed and getting off. You get rent checks, you got slips that you took to the – there was no confidentiality at all. That was very exciting to me and to be a part of the program was developing in a way that – Well, I didn't have any experience with it but there had been no programs like that.

JT: Yeah, you were really involved with some of the early – Well, what are now lumped together as the early New Deal.

RS: That's right. That's right. I started I guess in September of '34. I stayed all my life. [29:00]

JT: Do you feel there was any connection between what you did at Brown or advice or anything that brought you in that direction? Was there even a sense that you should have a profession?

RS: Oh I'm sure that the thing that I associate with Brown is the excitement of learning. Tremendous feeling about that. I mean it was – Seemed very important to me to get a master's. I'm not sure I'd even think about a Ph.D. But I remember I had a job in a junior high school and the principal was a very nice guy. He was very nice to me. And I talked to him about getting a Ph.D. and he said, "What do you want a Ph.D. for? That's ridiculous." But it was just so, so out of, out of what to say, you know – Even with an [30:00] educator saying a young woman who seemed to be able to find more interesting things to do than go on to get a Ph.D. was kind of typical. But I do think that that was kind of the excitement of learning. Learning how to use the library, and finding libraries exciting places or interesting places to be. Things like that were – had a lot of meaning to me.

JT: Were there any kinds of pressures on women once they were seniors to become engaged or married or focused more on certain kinds of professions like teaching or things like that?

RS: There weren't many kinds of jobs for teachers. A lot of people went on to graduate work [31:00] because there weren't jobs. I was trying to think. I don't know to what extent it affected people's getting married. Quite a few people did get married. I mean I noticed in reading some of the material – It's interesting, I don't know what this had to do with '33 but in –

- End of Track 2-

Track 3

JT: [00:00] My name is Joyce Tavon, class of '84. I'm interviewing Ruth Sittler, class of '33.

This is the second part of the interview and today's date is February 2, 1987. I've lost my train of

thought, what I was going to ask you about. You were saying a little from there that you went on and stayed in social work, continued in Pennsylvania. Was there a certain kind of social work?

RS: Well I was with the department – the Aid to Dependent Children Program in Allegheny County which is Pittsburgh and after being there two and a half years and getting one year of my graduate training, I got offered a job as director of an agency in Mercer county which is in Sharon, Pennsylvania. It's about halfway between Erie and Pittsburgh. And [01:00] I took that job as head of the Children Program. Then a law was passed that consolidated the Emergency Relief Work called the Department of Public Assistance, and that included Emergency Relief Ward, ADC, Old Age Assistance and Blind Pensions. In the program I was in, ADC, Blind Pensions and Old Age Assistance had been part of the ADC program, so I was doing the ADC program in Mercer County. And at that time we had 100 pending applications – or 1,000 pending applications – for Old Age Assistance. Those laws had just been passed, so that we were busy getting those applications taken [02:00] care of and processed. And I was doing that for about three years I think when the Emergency Relief Work was added to it and it became one big agency. I became the associate director of – or the head supervisor, not the director but the head supervisor – for the program that included the whole county. And I still didn't have my master's degree so I stayed on. What did you ask me, I got lost?

JT: Well, a little about what kind of social work you were into.

RS: I stayed in public welfare and then I decided that I was – they had a training program at the state level and I thought I'd be interested to do that. And so [03:00] about what I did was to leave the – I stayed on with the supervisory job for about two years and then I went back to school and got my master's degree and then I went to the state department in a training program which was going from one county to another setting up programs or doing evaluations of their work and that sort of thing.

JT: So you got a master's in social work?

RS: Yes, from the University of Pittsburgh. And then I went to – Then the war came along and I joined the Red Cross and I was a Home Service Field Representative in New England: New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. And I did that for two years and then I went overseas as a field worker for a general hospital.

JT: [04:00] So where were you overseas?

RS: I was in Italy and France. I was in Peserta, I went to Algiers and then I was assigned to a hospital right outside of Naples, in Peserta which was the palace, next door to the palace. I was there until June and we were in the staging area from June until September and in September we went in for the southern invasion of France. We were in Aix-en-Provence and Dijon, I was in Dijon for almost six months, I guess.

JT: Did you do any medical related work?

RS: I was the field director. General hospitals have a social service unit [05:00] and the unit has a director who is a social worker, and another social worker, and two recreation workers, and a secretary. That was the program. And then I was with the same hospital the whole time, 32nd General Hospital from Wayne University in Michigan. And that was really quite an experience. I was with that hospital for two years. The hospital moved but I moved with the hospital. We went to Aix-en-Provence and then we went to Dijon. Dijon was – We had 3,000 patients. That was a hospital – That was the most unhappy time for the hospital because all of the patients were coming back from the Bulge. It might not mean that much to you but that was the real, that was toward the end of the war but there were lots and lots of casualties, American casualties. [06:00] And they came back and we were a zone of interior hospital. I mean, they came through us to go back to the United States and the doctors just had to see what other doctors had done and not be able to do anything but send them home. So that wasn't a very happy time. It was a huge operation. We had a lot of patients. We had German prisoners, Dutch prisoners, and French – they weren't prisoners but patients. And then we moved unto Garches which is not far from Paris. I was in Paris – I was in Garches when the war ended. I went in November of '43 and came back in November '45.

JT: Do you speak French?

RS: No. I had six years of French. I could talk [07:00] to the maid that took care of my room or my little place where I lived. She would be patient with me, she'd tried to slow down and not talk to fast but I didn't speak. I could understand, I could manage with her. You know it was a little American world in France or in Italy because we were very busy.

JT: Was it exciting or was it sort of depressing?

RS: Well you really didn't have much time to think about it. I was a basket-case when I got back. I was really, really worn out. I just hadn't really taken in. I mean there's so much, so much, you know – You had a hospital in Caserta. That was the most exciting time the hospital had. [08:00] The doctors – We were four miles from the front line and the doctors were getting their patients first. They had a large neurological service. They were working hard and they were playing hard. The superintendent's house, up where this great big hospital we had which, you know, tuberculosis hospital in Italy, was turned into the officer's club. So the officer's club had two bands most nights. And it was really – You'd be going to the officer's cub in the evening and the 88s would be screaming, you would hear them in the background. One of the recreations, [09:00] is this war, it's just awful, was to go to Caserta to watch the war, not Caserta but in the big cathedral, what the heck was the name of it, where they pounded and pounded and pounded. It was a monastery and it was up on a high hill. They just couldn't get the Germans out of it. So they were just stymied, I just can't quite remember the name. It's a very famous World War II battle. The nurses and the doctors, some of them would go up in Jeeps and go up to be around the outside circle and watch the war. [10:00] I couldn't go. Some of those bizarre, strange, weird, things that were happening –

JT: What were they really seeing? Just noise and lights?

RS: I don't know. They sounded like it was war. Hideous than it was in fact. But there were just so many, the little town where the hospitals located, there were no young people there at all.

They didn't have anything to eat. The GIs got interested in the families. And they got interested in the girls. When they got a girl to the party, they thought the whole family would come so they could get food to eat at the parties. [11:00] It was very easy to just work until you practically fell in a heap and then get up and work some more because there was lots to do. That's kind of how a lot of people (inaudible).

It was difficult when I got back. I really had a hard time pulling myself together. There were good parts, there were funny parts, there were all kinds of experiences. [12:00] I can remember the first time I wrote a letter for some young man who had his arm cut off by a propeller on the plane. We had a patient, I mean, you know, just individual patients that you just can't forget. It was very dramatic. That was a long experience but it was so much that I really have talked very little about it. I mean, it's one of those things that it's just uncomfortable to talk about it. I pulled together a scrapbook with a lot of pictures that I had taken. [13:00] I've hardly had that out. It's a funny kind of –

JT: I guess a lot of vets go through that.

RS: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure it is. I just kind of had a feeling that I never really – A lot of it I did. I mean, what I was trying to say was integrated it, taken it in, because I had a lot of different kinds of experiences. But that was –

JT: So when you came back were you in the New England area?

RS: I met [Joan Barber?] who was the Director of Social Services at Mass General Hospital, when she was the head of the Mediterranean Theater of Operations, the social service program of the Red Cross. [14:00] So she was stationed in Naples when I was in Caserta I got to know her very well. So when I came back, I got in touch with her in regard – I thought I'd like to work at Mass General Hospital. So I got in touch with her. Shortly after – Well, I went first, I went back and I was the Director of a county program in West Chester Pennsylvania, Chester County Public Assistance Program, and I was there for about four years. And then I didn't – What did I do? I left there and I decided [15:00] that I really wanted some psychiatric help so I had some psychiatric help for a while. And then after that, I worked in an agency in Pittsburgh for a couple

of years, a Jewish agency which was working with displaced persons from the war, from the German camps. Then I got in touch with Joan Barber and was offered a job at Mass General. So I went to Mass General in '55, that was almost ten years and I've been here ever since.

JT: You work in their social services division?

RS: I was a supervisor of the outpatient clinic service. [John Stockle?] he's still there as head of the clinics. Was the doctor that I worked with. [16:00] I worked with him for ten years. And then I became the director of the Boston Lying-in, I went there and it very shortly after became the Boston Hospital for Women because they incorporated the Women's Free Hospital and now it's become a part of the Brigham Boston Hospital. That's the new building in back of Children's Hospital. So I've been in Boston, I've been in Cambridge for about thirty years.

JT: Any other kinds of things that stand out? [17:00]

RS: You mean in addition to working?

JT: Work like that can usually take enough out of you.

RS: I've been active. I'm quite a nature person. I do a lot of – I mean I've always done a lot of skiing and swimming. I really like canoeing, things of that sort. I'm really interested in birds. I've been on birding trips and things like that. I'm not terribly interested in [18:00] – I know politics. I'm just on the edges of that, I really don't get into that. A couple of candidates I'm interested in. And even since I'm retired I've gotten into a program called Institute for Learning in Retirement at Harvard. That's been interesting. I've been doing that for, I guess, several years.

JT: Is it sort of a continuing education program?

RS: It's a program that – It's set up – It's called Institute for Learning in Retirement but the members who join and you pay, what, \$135 a semester which is the equivalent of an adult extension course. [19:00] And you can take an adult extension course and then the members, and

there are about 250 now, from those members, many of them have been teachers, in college, or had quite a lot of experiences, and they teach courses and they list the course and then you select any of their courses in turn. And they're really quite stimulating and the reading material kind of gives you structure to your interests and really getting into more depth than you would otherwise. And associating with your peers. It's hard to do that.

JT: So does that sort of bring us back to Brown? You said your interest in learning really was sparked during that time?

RS: I suppose it does. [20:00] Did you feel that way or did you have that kind of experience? Or were you already sparked when you went to high school? (laughs)

JT: A little of both. Well do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

RS: I think I've just added too much. I think that's plenty. I'm beginning to feel a little self-conscious about it so I think it's time to stop. You're certainly a good listener, my goodness.

JT: (laughs) Well I want to thank you for all you have to say on college and life experience. Very interesting.

- END -