

Transcript – Ruth Wade Cerjanec '33

Narrator: Ruth Wade Cerjanec

Interviewer: Jennifer Smith

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Track 1

Jennifer Smith: [00:00] – Cerjanec was made on November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1982, in the Maddock Alumni Center. Mrs. Cerjanec graduated from Pembroke College in 1933, received her master's from Simmons College in 1960, and currently lives in Central Falls, Rhode Island, where she has lived all her life.

(break in audio)

JS: – parents' names, and what did they do?

Ruth Wade Cerjanec: My father was John T. Wade and my mother was Susana McDowell Wade. I come of English and Scotch-Irish parentage. And both my parents were born on the other side. My father was a smart boy. He got a scholarship to go to what they call a public school there, which is our private school. I still have the certificate. Then his father died. His mother was left with three children. [01:00] She brought the two younger ones to this country and the older boy had to work his way across on a cattle boat because he was over 16. They settled in Central Falls and my father went into J&P Coats Mill and worked his way up until, by the time I was born, he was a superintendent in the mill. I was the child of the second wife. I was an only child of the second wife, but I had five half-sisters and brothers. He was not probably dedicated to education for girls, but my mother was a liberated woman from way back. She worked for the vote for women and my father said to her, "What good will it do? All the women will vote the way their husbands tell them." And she said, "Not this woman." But she confided to me [02:00] that she really did, but she didn't want him to know that.

So, when the Depression came in our freshman year, it meant nothing to us. My parents didn't have stocks and bonds. My father was, by this time, the city treasurer, and I didn't think the Depression would ever affect me. However, in 1932, the Republican Party that had appointed my father treasurer was tossed out because of the Depression, the Democrats took over, and he no longer had this job. And so, he said, "Ruth will have to leave college," and my mother said, "Over my dead body." So, he did get a job as police commissioner and I continued on through college. But I always appreciated the fact that my mother was a feminist, which made me a feminist, later on. [03:00]

JS: Did your half-brothers and sisters go to college?

RWC: My half-brothers didn't. My half-sister went to what was, I think it's still in existence, Kinyon's Commercial School. Girls had to learn secretarial and bookkeeping skills, in those days. So, she did go in that respect to a commercial school, but my two brothers didn't, no. And they both died at 33, and so when I got to be 33, I was a little worried. [laughter]

JS: Did you always expect to go to college?

RWC: I always expected to go to college. In fact, when I was a kid, my mother used to walk me around the Brown campus and she used to say, "This is where you'll go to school someday." Well, I didn't think too much about it because when I got to high school, in those days, they didn't have scholarships the way they do now. They had one scholarship, the Overton Scholarship to Brown, [04:00] but every four years, they had a four-year scholarship to RISD. And I used to go to classes Saturday mornings at RISD, and I said, "Oh, that's for me." So, in my senior year, the – we didn't call her the dean; she was called the senior advisor. She was my Latin teacher and I loved her. I said, "I'm going to apply for RISD." "Ruth," she said, "you can't possibly. You've got to go to Brown." And since I adored her, I said all right. [laughter] So, I got the Overton Scholarship, which was the magnificent sum of \$125. Imagine.

JS: So, that was not even half of the tuition?

RWC: It wasn't – our tuition then was \$350, I think, so it paid part, and the Masonic scholarship paid the rest. And I worked like a dog because [05:00] I was so afraid I would lose that Masonic scholarship, and if I did, I wouldn't be able to go. And I worked very hard all four years, and I didn't have that much fun because I worked very hard, and then I was commuting, and I was younger than a lot of my classmates. I was barely 16 when I graduated from high school. So, I guess I didn't know that I wasn't having fun.

JS: So, well, tell me about commuting between Central Falls and Pembroke.

RWC: I think in my sophomore year, my mother relented and realized I had a little more experience driving, but the first year when I was driving, the first day of snow, I got into the street car tracks and it pulled the tire off. And I went to a payphone and I said, "Mom, I've lost a tire." [laughter] And [06:00] the two girls I was giving a ride to, they never forgave themselves afterwards. They saw a streetcar coming and they said, "Goodbye, Ruth," and they got on the streetcar and I was left alone. I panicked. But we had to get in for, I guess it was nine o'clock, because we had chapel every morning excepting Wednesday. And so, when I drove, it was easy, but when I went on the streetcars, I would take a streetcar to Pawtucket and then have to change to the Hope Street, and that was a long trip. But you always met a lot of your friends there because very few people had cars. They thought I was really exceptional and I wasn't, but they used to love to ride in my rumble seat. [laughter] So, commuting wasn't fun.

JS: There was a big difference between students who resided on campus and students who commuted?

RWC: That's right. They had a lot of [07:00] advantage that we didn't. We had a cafeteria, which is now the Ivy Room, is it? Or no, not the Ivy Room, the – what do you call it?

JS: The Gate?

RWC: The Gate. And money was short, and I remember my mother used to give me a quarter every morning and say, "Buy your lunch." We used to get a great big bowl of cream of chicken

soup. It was the best chicken soup I ever had, and that was for my chicken soup, and she would put up a sandwich for me. Well, I needed money for gifts and different things, so I used to just eat my sandwich and not buy the soup. The other girls would say, “Ruth,” and I’d say, “I don’t really want it.” I really did want it, but I had to save the money. So, the cafeteria was really a wonderful place for the city girls. We all sat around and exchanged ideas. Now, the dorm girls, never having lived there, I think they had something special because they [08:00] lived together for four years.

JS: How many students were city girls and how many lived here?

RWC: I think the larger proportion was city girls, yeah. There were an awful lot from Providence.

JS: So, were most of them pinching pennies, too?

RWC: I don’t know, but I think they were. You know, in our freshman year, it wasn’t too bad. But as time went on, I think it was harder. But we didn’t really think we were badly off. You know, we didn’t think it was a worldwide catastrophe. We had a good time, we enjoyed ourselves, but as I say, it would have been nice to stay in the evening sometimes, and we had to go home.

JS: Why do you think most students came to Pembroke?

RWC: Well, it was the outstanding college within commuting distance, and in the first place, being my mother’s only child, she wouldn’t have let me go away to college. [09:00] No talk of that at all. But it was outstanding. We could have gone free of charge to, it was then called – what was it called? – I guess it was called Rhode Island College of Education, then. There was no charge, then, and you would become an elementary teacher. But I didn’t want to be a teacher. I didn’t know what I wanted, but I didn’t want to be a teacher and I didn’t want to go there. I had aunts and cousins who went there, but Pembroke was a part of Brown, and that meant something.

And of course, my teacher influenced me. She was my Latin teacher and I decided I'd be a Latin teacher.

JS: Did you keep touch with her when you were still going to Pembroke?

RWC: She died a week before I graduated from high school. It just devastated me. It devastated me. She had helped me work on my graduation speech, and oh, I was devastated, yeah.

JS: That's awful. [10:00] What did you expect Pembroke to give you when you came here, and why did you want a college education?

RWC: Oh, there was never any question in my mind. My mother, anyway, I was going to college, always. And this teacher whom I adored took us and a teacher from Pawtucket High School took her students in May, and we had a tour of the Pembroke campus and we were all thrilled. Alumnae Hall was brand-new then and we thought it was just gorgeous. And you know, in Alumnae Hall, we were never allowed to walk on the hardwood floors. They were in chapel, which was the auditorium, it was always covered with a heavy canvas, the tarpaulin. The only time that came up was for dances, and the same was true of, well, we were never allowed to go into the Crystal Room. [11:00] They had beautiful rugs, but –

JS: What was that used for?

RWC: Oh, well, for a high tea or some very exclusive musical that the dean might be having for a small group of people, but we were not allowed to go in there. And we respected the floor in Alumnae Hall. And since we had to go to chapel every day, we were there, we'd have attendance taken. You were allowed, I think, five cuts, and after that, you were penalized. Then, when we were seniors, we had to go every day but we also had to wear our caps and gowns. We weren't penalized if we didn't wear them, but we were strongly urged by the dean to wear those caps and gowns, excepting on Wednesday. And they were a darn nuisance.

JS: Do you remember any debate about wearing caps and gowns?

RWC: We never questioned it. We never questioned it. It was the [12:00] tradition and we accepted it. We were not a questioning group. We weren't like the young people today – we weren't as aware of the world around us as you people are. I think television and the different mores have changed that, but we were adolescents. We weren't mature at all.

JS: Yeah, and you were so young, too – 16.

RWC: I was young, yeah.

JS: Did you skip grades when you were in high school?

RWC: No, not in high school. In the lower grades, I skipped a grade. I've never regretted that, excepting when I got out of college, I was barely 20, and gosh, for the rest of my life, I worked. [laughter]

JS: Tell me about jobs you had during the summer.

RWC: Well, my father, at that time, was city treasurer. So, I had taken typing test classes in [13:00] high school, so I typed on and on and on. And I used to see cars of the young people dashing off to the beach. I felt very sorry for myself, but I needed the money, so I worked for the three summers. Then, in my senior year, we all realized we had to be prepared for something – we weren't prepared for anything. I had concentrated in French, Italian, German, and some Spanish, and I wasn't prepared to do anything. You had to have 350 hours of education, and we didn't have them. So, we would skip over to the Rhode Island College of Education at four o'clock and take a two-hour course over there, in our senior year. And the professors did not like the Pembrokers. He thought we were snobs. Sometimes, we'd get in late, and one professor, Tuttle, would start to say, [14:00] "We're going to have to stop the proceedings for the girls from the Hill." [laughter] I did take two semester courses in my senior year at Brown, but I hated to waste good courses on education because education was an awful bore.

JS: Those were classes to train you to be a teacher?

RWC: Train methods and so forth. And so, by the time I had graduated, I was able to get a temporary certificate. But at the same time, there were no teaching jobs. There just were no teaching jobs, so a woman whose daughter was a year ahead of me was the head of Americanization in Rhode Island. That meant teaching foreigners English and how to become citizens.

JS: Oh, and you knew all your foreign languages.

RWC: I knew the foreign languages, but it was mostly French and Syrian and Italian. I couldn't speak Syrian, very little Italian, I could speak French. But you weren't supposed to speak the language to them. [15:00] Well, we would take a course every morning at eight o'clock with Mrs. Jinks and during my senior year, she would ask me to drive out to Woonsocket and teach a class of Ukrainians English. You had a textbook. You were not to speak – well, I couldn't speak Ukrainian – you were not to use a word of their language, only English. You would go to the window and say, “This is the window. This is the door,” and they would repeat it. And they learned, and they learned enough to pass their citizenship papers. And then, when I graduated, there were no jobs. I had gone to the superintendent of schools in Central Falls and he said, “Forget it, you'll never have a job.” I cried all the way home. I thought I worked so hard and no job.

Well, Mrs. Jinks got me a job teaching English on a daily basis to foreigners in Central Falls [16:00] at \$15 a week, and I thought I was lucky. Fifteen dollars a week. I used to have to go into their homes, some of the Syrians would serve me hot Turkish coffee in little tiny cups. And I didn't realize how thick it was – the first drink I took, I thought I'd lost my front teeth. And one woman said, “Oh, Ms. Wade, I don't want a lesson today.” And I said, “Come now, Mrs. [Moany?], you've got to have a lesson today. The other ladies are here, you've got to have a lesson,” and the older women began to giggle. I was very stupid. I left the house at 11:30, left their house, after giving them the lesson. At twelve o'clock, she had her baby. I didn't even know, this was how dumb I was. [laughter] But I survived that year, and then, in 1935, in February, I did this for about a year and a half, [17:00] and in February of '35, I got word that

some woman teacher of French was leaving. And so, I had to ask my father to approach all kinds of politicians – that was the only way you got a teaching job in those days. He hated doing it, but my mother said, “She’s got to have a job,” so I finally got appointed to the faculty and I taught French in Central Falls High School. And I taught there until 1943, and then I went, I had taken library courses, I went as librarian – head librarian, eventually – at the Quonset Naval Air Base. And I got my master’s in library science and I had a nursery school when my children were little.

You don’t want to hear all that, but it wasn’t easy getting a job, believe me. If we got a job, we either became social workers – there were a lot of social workers because [18:00] Roosevelt’s program was going through then – social workers, librarians, teachers, and secretaries. That was about the only jobs that were open to us. Only jobs, and lucky to get them.

JS: Did you think that most women your age went to college, or were you an exception?

RWC: Well, we were exceptions. Most, if they graduated from high school, they went on to jobs, but we were exceptional, yeah.

JS: Well, I was wondering, let me see, what kind of a relationship was there between the faculty, the students, and the administration? Did you know the professors very well?

RWC: Not too well. We knew the women professors. For example, Madame Landre, there was a couple, Monsieur and Madame Landre, and they had a lovely house on lower Angell Street. And they [19:00] entertained us as – they were sponsors of the French Club, and they were very nice to us. They had no children. And they sort of treated us like their children. I met Madame Landre – Monsieur Landre was killed in World War II – about two years ago. She was visiting someone in this very room. And she hadn’t changed that much. But the men, I was young and I couldn’t be friends with those men teachers. I mean, I respected them too much. They were way above me. So, I really can say that there was a big gulf between the faculty and the students, yeah.

JS: What did the French Club do?



RWC: Oh, we sang French songs, we ate French food, we played games. We tried to improve our conversational skills, [20:00] which weren't that great because in those days, they didn't emphasize conversation so much as reading and writing. I think I had about one or two conversation courses. It was mostly reading and writing. But it has stayed with me.

JS: Yeah, I'm sure it does.

RWC: But when I went to Paris in 1936, oh, I found out how out of it I was. When anyone would say anything to me, I was lost. So, it wasn't that good conversationally.

JS: Well, I was reading about how freshmen kind of got the low end of the deal, and you were telling me they had to wear pink glasses? What was the story?

RWC: Yes. Every class had a special little gimmick. That was our senior class. You know, each freshman had a senior sister, and then when you got to be a sophomore, you had a freshman sister, when you were a junior, you had a freshman sister, and when you were a senior, you had your freshman sister. It was the senior class that decided [21:00] what they would do. It was sort of like the fraternities' hazing, and ours was a very simple form of hazing. And we had these – they had no glass in them, they were just pink rims. And we couldn't walk in the front door of Pembroke Hall, we couldn't walk in the Crystal Room door, we had to go in certain ways. We couldn't precede an upperclassman, we had to let them go. It was very simple little fun.

JS: And you said you got caught doing something?

RWC: I got caught. [laughter] I don't know what the punishment was.

JS: What did you do wrong?

RWC: I didn't have my pink glasses on and I went up the Crystal Room door, there. Was wrong and I was nabbed.

JS: That's so funny, wow. One thing I always wondered was how did you pick who was going to be the class flower for the sophomore (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

RWC: It was automatic. Our class color [22:00] was pink. Well, we could have had a rose, we could have had something else – I think we voted we'd have a rose. The senior class, I think it was blue, and sometimes, they had iris, sometimes they had cornflowers. But the color was always traditional, and that went with the sophomore mast, then. And was it sophomore mast that we presented our seniors, or was it at the Ivy Day thing? We had to present our seniors with a May basket. That must have been at Ivy Day. And some seniors had two freshmen and they got two May baskets. That was fun, though, we liked doing that. And then, our seniors would take us to the outing house for a weekend. You've never heard of the outing house?

JS: No, tell me where it was.

RWC: It was a house out in Seekonk, not too far from where Eileen Darling's is now. [23:00] And Pembroke was left it by some alumna who had died. And so, we went off for a weekend and we made our own – we had done the shopping first and it was all very simple, little pleasures. We made our own meals and we sat around and told stories and we thought it was so wonderful to be with our seniors. And then by the time it came for us to take our freshmen, they had sold the outing house, so we couldn't take our freshmen anywhere. I don't think we did anything for our freshmen. And, well, times were so hard, then.

JS: Yeah, you went to school during the Depression.

RWC: It was hard.

JS: And how do you think it affected life at Pembroke?

RWC: Well, I don't think it affected it that – well, I can't really judge because I didn't know it before the Depression, and then after, when things were getting better, I wasn't there. But I think for the first year or two, I think things were [24:00] on the same level. The only way it changed

me, I had planned to go and to spend my junior year abroad at the Sorbonne. That was out, and Madame Landre was very sorry. So, then when I took my final honors exams, there were only two of us. Marie Catalozzi was majoring in Italian. She grew up in an Italian household and spoke Italian fluently. I was taking mine in French. I wasn't that fluent. And the four or five boys that all spent their junior year in France. So, here I was, I clenched my fist so hard, I was so nervous, that when I got out, I had cut through my hands. But I got the final honors.

JS: You did?

RWC: Yeah, I got them. And one of the men became a – [Wilbur Frohart?] – he became a professor, head of department and everything. So, they were very smart boys.

JS: What kind of relationship was there between Brown and Pembroke?

RWC: Oh, goodness. [laughter] [25:00] Well, when I talk to my two sons, who graduated in '71 and '73, I said to myself, "Things haven't changed that much." I remember Derek [McDowell Cerjanec '73] once saying, "Mom, don't tell my roommates that you're a 'Broker," because that was something not to be proud of, to have a mother who was a 'Broker – Pembroker. The men, well, there were exceptions – several of our class married Brown men. In fact, I married a Brown man, but I didn't know him, he wasn't in college when I was. Usually, they didn't want any part of Pembroke. They went outside. They went to Wheaton or they invited girls down from Wellesley or Smith, but the Pembrokers were out of it.

JS: Why do you think that was?

RWC: I don't know why. I know from my boys say that Pembrokers think they're so smart – maybe they thought we were, you know, [26:00] the New Woman.

JS: Threatening?

RWC: We had a lot of classes out in the Hill, you know. Our psychology class met in Manning Hall, it was a classroom then, Manning, the chapel. And we would walk over and all the Brown men would be lined up and we'd look straight ahead, neither to right and left, at least, I didn't. Maybe some of the other girls would flirt, but I was too afraid of the Brown men. And we took those classes there. I lived a lot of my life at Marston Hall because of languages, and there were men in those classes. But usually, if it was a large class, the Brown professor came over to Pembroke. For example, the math classes and the history classes, I think psychology, geology, biology, those classes were all on the hill. But the rapport was not good.

JS: So, who came to [27:00] Pembroke dances, then?

RWC: Well, you had to invite whomever you wanted, and I invited nobody from Brown. And we had little dance programs, you know? You signed up the name –

JS: Oh, for each dance?

RWC: Right, yeah. You knew exactly who you were going to dance with.

JS: OK. As a woman, how did you feel, going to college? Was that something daring or was it run of the mill?

RWC: No. It wasn't run of the mill, but it was something that I had always assumed I would go on after high school, and so, I expected. But I think that there were only two girls from my class who went to Pembroke, maybe three or four others went to college, a couple went to Rhode Island College of Education, one went to URI. I had a very small high school class – there were only 50 people in it. And the Latin course [28:00] only consisted of about 10 people. That was the college course. So, that there were only about five girls, I guess, that went on to college, and about five boys. It was accepted that girls didn't go on. So, we were unusual.

JS: Yeah, I'm going to have to change this.

- End of Track 1-

Track 2

JS: All right. What do you think was the difference between going to Pembroke and, say, going to Brown?

RWC: Now, you mean? Going to Pembroke then, going to Brown now?

JS: No, when you were there: what's the difference between a women's college and a men's college then?

RWC: Well, we always said, of course, that we had the best of both worlds because Pembroke was a coordinate college. The dean always said, "You have all the advantages of a women's college and yet, you have the faculty at a men's college, you have the classrooms when you want to go there." We had the best of both worlds, so that I really think, and I suppose this is anathema, I really think that Pembroke lost a lot. I think the girls lost a lot. We had the chance to be editor of the newspaper, editor of the yearbook, head of the student government. Leadership training, plus the fact that [01:00] no matter how you slice it, a girl is more self-conscious when she's in a class with men. She's not as liable to give her opinions. When we were all together, we could speak out and argue. We were much more quiet when we went over on the Hill. We let the men speak out. The men, of course, they haven't changed. I mean, their opportunities are still as great now as they were then, but everything else at Brown has changed, so it's different for the boys now. But the one difference I know is so much more is offered to you people. I mean, you have opportunities in so many areas. We had a very confined little world, like a math club and a language club.

JS: I guess the curriculum changed, though, just the year after you graduated?

RWC: Well, we had what they call a core curriculum – you had to take certain things. You had to take math [02:00] or argumentation. Knowing what I know about math, I'd rather take argumentation. We had to take so many credits of English. We had to take history. We had to

take social sciences. None of that is required, now. But in retrospect, judging from my own sons, well, in the case of my oldest son, was in engineering, he had to take certain things, but my youngest son, he took courses all over the place, and I felt that when he got out, he knew everything and nothing. At least we did have a concentration that was quite narrow. But, of course, it didn't provide a vocation for us – that was why we had to go out and take education courses.

JS: What were the most popular concentrations?

RWC: Oh, English. Everybody took English, everybody.

JS: Was Mrs. Minx? – the woman you were talking about earlier, or Jinks, was she –

RWC: Mrs. Jinks. [03:00]

JS: Was she the English teacher?

RWC: No, no, Mrs. Jinks was the state supervisor of Americanization, but we did have a Ms. Jinks at [NKS?]. In our sophomore year, everybody had to take public speaking, and it was a horrible – it was in the auditorium, the chapel, and the acoustics were terrible. And Ms. Jinks, I think it was her first year, I think it was her last year, I don't think she cared for it very much. We had to learn to project our voices and I always remember the line from *Hamlet*, "He wore his beaver up," she said, "Don't say that – you've got say, 'He wore his beaver up.'" And we had to go over these. And so, it was only, I think, once a week for a number of – maybe 10 weeks.

JS: And you were given set things to recite?

RWC: Yes. And we had to pass that, [04:00] or else. Then, we also had to take a test in the college songs. We had to take a test in the college songs, and we had to pass a swimming test. We went down to the Plantations Club. We weren't allowed to go to the men's pool, you know.

We went to the Plantations Club and we had to swim, I think it was the distance, I almost drowned but I made it. And of course, gym, oh, gym was my bugaboo. I hated it.

JS: Really? Why?

RWC: Oh! Well, I wasn't athletic. You had to take it so many times a week. You were only allowed so many cuts, and a friend of mine had taken so many cuts that I think she spent the last month of her senior year every day in gym, making up all the cuts, or she couldn't graduate. At least I kept within the law, but I was no good at climbing ropes. Oh, I just [05:00] couldn't do it. And every spring and every fall, I signed up for tennis. And poor Ms. [Ruth] M'Coy would say, "Miss Wade, not again." But some of the wealthier girls took horseback riding, which was nice, but that was expensive. But I was back on the tennis court every spring and fall.

JS: Would they call you Miss So-and-So (inaudible) your first name?

RWC: Oh, yes, you were Miss So-and-So, right, which was a change from high school because I came from a little high school and we were called Ruth and John and Mary by the teacher. Then you came and you were a lady when you came to Pembroke. And being townies, that the dorm girls dressed in saddle oxfords, sweaters, and skirts, and so forth, but the townies, we were commuting, we wore hats, coats with fur collars in the winter, or a fur coat, if you owned it, your gloves, and your handbag, [06:00] with your books. You were very formal. We were not the typical college girl.

JS: You know, I was reading about a psychological test that you had to take when you were a freshman, first time around.

RWC: I don't remember that. To enter Brown, certain high schools were considered highly qualified, and this will surprise you, knowing what Central Falls is now, our high school and Classical High School, I think, were the two high schools whose graduates did not have to take entrance exams to Brown because their curriculum was so good.

JS: You didn't have to take an entrance exam?

RWC: No. Our principal, Mr. Overton, who died, whom the scholarship was named after, Ms. [Chaffee?], and all of the teachers were Phi Beta, and they were such wonderful teachers, and of course, were strict. In fact, I found Pembroke [07:00] much easier than high school. We had five subjects in high school; we only had four when we came to Pembroke. And I thought, "This is, you know, a snap." But we did have a placement test for English, to know which level you went into.

JS: Now, you were elected to Phi Beta Kappa when you were a senior?

RWC: Yes.

JS: Was that a real big deal?

RWC: I thought so. We all, we wanted it badly.

JS: What did it mean?

RWC: You mean how did they arrive at it?

JS: Yeah, how'd they do it and why was it a prestigious thing?

RWC: Well, in the first place, I know I think you had to have 175 or 180 credits, like A equals so many, B equals so many, you couldn't have any mark lower than C. And it was a small group, very small group. And it meant a lot on your résumé. [08:00] Here we were, going out into a world where there were no jobs, and golly, I remember going to the personnel person in Providence and he looked at my report, or what do you call it, transcript, from Pembroke. And I had As and Bs, and then I had, from gym, I had all, I don't know, Cs or Ds. Gym didn't count for Phi Beta Kappa, fortunately. And he looked at it and he said, "How would you like to teach gym?" [laughter] I would never have made Phi Beta if it had been counted.



JS: (inaudible) gym.

RWC: Phi Beta was important, and of course, the girls who were in science or math, usually those who made Phi Beta, if they took science and math, also made Sigma Xi.

JS: And did that serve the same thing?

RWC: Yes. It was pretty important. When you were getting a job, it was very important, yeah.

JS: Well now, you had been class secretary since [09:00] 1957, right?

RWC: Earlier than that – I think it was '53 or something like that.

JS: Wow, OK. And so, you've kept in touch with what your classmates are doing. What did most women in your class do when they graduated?

RWC: Most of them, as I say – well, an awful lot of them were social workers because that was needed, then. There were all these welfare programs. Very few of them went on, maybe three, went on to graduate school. Not like nowadays, so many girls go on to graduate school. But there was no money and a graduate degree wasn't required, really, in those days. I would have liked to go to Simmons then, but they were only giving a bachelor's for an extra year. I waited till they changed their course and I got a master's in library science later. But the large majority, I think, became either social workers or teachers. Actually, they weren't – [10:00] what other jobs were open to women? There weren't, no.

JS: And you just didn't expect...

RWC: You had no expectations of being anything other than a teacher or a social worker. I had wanted to go into a bank to use my languages in the foreign department. Oh, I think I must have written 250 letters when I got out of Pembroke. Thank God the postage was three cents, I think,

then. I wrote letter after letter after letter. Some people were nice, they answered. Some didn't even bother. But there was just nothing, just nothing.

JS: What about marriage? Did the ideal Pembroke student want to get married?

RWC: Oh, yes. It was expected that that was your fate in life. You could either be a "career girl," quote, or get married and have children.

JS: It was an either/or, though?

RWC: But marriages were not taking place because the men didn't have jobs. [11:00] They couldn't afford to marry and raise a family. Very few of our girls got married, until the forties, when the men were going to go be drafted, you know, they got married fast. And then during the war, there were a lot of marriages. So, we found that all of our children were born during the forties, I would say, because marriage was delayed. Not because we didn't want to get married, like nowadays, they delay marriage because they don't want to get married young. But it was for a different reason, yeah.

JS: Back to the Depression, do you think that you have any sense of values or attitudes that have stayed with you now because of the Depression?

RWC: Yes. Well, I just got out of a lecture where the professor said [12:00] we are becoming less work-ethic-oriented now. We were very much work-ethic-oriented. I mean, it was catastrophe if you didn't have a job. The people who went on welfare were devastated. They felt that they were really humiliated. I mean, nobody took money for nothing. That was why they thought that the WPA and work projects were good, people were doing something in return for their money, but we were a very work-ethic-oriented people, at least among the people I knew. And I think it was good that people didn't expect to get handouts. They wanted to work, even if it was selling apples on street corners or digging ditches. So, I think that has remained with our generation, and I don't think it's too bad. When you look at some families who have been on

[13:00] welfare generation after generation, they expect to be on welfare. But these people who were on welfare, it was no fault of theirs. Very proud people were.

JS: Well, if you could describe the atmosphere of Pembroke during the time you went there, how would you do it?

RWC: Very happy atmosphere. We were one big family of girls. We really enjoyed ourselves. The Depression didn't bother us at all, really. It was disappointing in many respects, as I said, I would have liked to spend my junior year [abroad?], but we were happy. We had a good life. We didn't think the world was coming to an end. The Depression didn't really affect us, I don't think. I've talked about this to my classmates in anticipation of our fiftieth, and in view of what's going on now, and we've all said we really didn't feel the effects of Depression. We didn't know it was a world tragedy. [14:00] Maybe it was our youth – we were always high-spirited. I guess that was it. But you people are more aware of things, now. You're aware of economic pressures, you're aware of what's going on. You're much more aware. Now, whether it's television, changing teaching methods, or your parents influencing you, you're much more aware of things than we were. We were rather naïve, I think. Yeah.

JS: Well, what else? If you could pinpoint one thing, I mean, you obviously look back on your Pembroke days in a positive way, if you could pinpoint one thing or two things that Pembroke gave you, what do you think they would be?

RWC: I thought you were going to say what they didn't give me.

JS: Well, you [15:00] can answer that.

RWC: What they didn't give me, I think they do much more – I don't know, I'm not sure of this – I think they counsel you more on your future plans. I don't know whether this is true or not. Do they?

JS: Oh, in a haphazard way.

RWC: Well, it was haphazard in those days. Nobody really gave us any guidance on our future, probably because there wasn't much of a future in the work world. But I always felt that if some administrator had, in my sophomore year, said, "You've got to look forward to getting a job, do something about it," but it was my senior year when I had to come up with it myself. What they did, pinpoint one thing, I can't single out any one particular thing. I just enjoyed, I really enjoyed all of the classes with the exception of, say, [16:00] math and gym.

JS: Gym. [laughter]

RWC: And I wasn't crazy about geology lab classes. In fact, everybody took biology in my class because there was an outstanding biology teacher, Ms. Wilder, Ms. Magel Wilder. Brown was renowned for its Biology department, but the lab fees were \$25. The lab fees for geology were \$10, and I didn't want to impose this extra \$15 on my parents, so I took geology. But when I go out in the woods, I know what the rocks are. But I wasn't crazy about geology lab. But I enjoyed classes. I made so many friends. I had a lot of fun. I can't pinpoint any one – and of course, they gave me a liberal education. I could never regret going to Pembroke. I loved it. It was wonderful. [17:00]

JS: That's so good. Do you still keep in touch with the friends you made there?

RWC: Oh, yes. Of course, they're dying off. My best friend, always sat next to me in every class, of course, she took a lot of French and language classes, so she sat next to me in chapel. I was Wade, W-A-D-E, and she was [Margaret] Ward, W-A-R-D, and she died last October and it broke me up. She became a social worker and eventually ended up in Hawaii as head of a large federal agency. Three of our particular group – our group were the groups that sat around the cafeteria table. The Cranston girls had a cafeteria table. The Providence girls had a cafeteria table. I was with the Pawtucket girls. And maybe three or four of them have died, and it's heartbreaking, yeah. But we were cliquey. We still had our cliques, really. You know, sororities were outlawed long before we got there, but we still had little cliques. [18:00] And when I made Phi Beta Kappa, I was the only one in my group, and the girls all said to me, "Ruth, you can't sit

with us anymore – you’ve got to go over and sit with the intellectuals.” [laughter] But we had fun.

JS: Did you look forward to graduating? I mean, when your class graduated –

RWC: We were sad. We were sad – we knew it was the end of four happy years. We were really sad. And we marched, for the baccalaureate, we had to march down... what’s the street where the back of RISD’s dining room, what’s that street? Angell, Angell Street. We had to march down Angell Street to the church. We didn’t march down the main thoroughfare with the men. But then our commencement day, they did let us go through the gate. We got out the gates the right way.

JS: How do you look upon the merger in [19:00] ’71?

RWC: Well, as I said before, I think colleges like Mount Holyoke, which has stayed all-female, have the advantage. The girls here now don’t realize the advantages we did have because we had all of the advantages of Brown, and yet we had our own little cozy college. I think they lost – I was against it. The older classes, classes older than mine and in my class, they’re very bitter. We’ve become reconciled, but many of the older classes still won’t merge in the alumnae and alumni reunions. I keep just waiting, my class, for the past two years, we have met at one function with the men. Now, this June, I think we will meet at a function, but most of the women are against it. They think I’m [20:00] controversial, but you know, what the heck, the college is merged, what’s a little alumni reunion? But they’re very bitter, many of them.

JS: What would you want a granddaughter, what kind of college would you like to see her go to?

RWC: I have a granddaughter. I would like her to come here, but I know she won’t. I can’t talk about that.

JS: OK, I’m sorry. Would you like me to turn this off?

RWC: No, no, no. But I would suggest to anyone's granddaughter would do well to come here.

JS: If you had had the choice during the time you went to college, would you have rather gone to a coeducational school, do you think?

RWC: No. I was a timid girl. People that know me now, they say, "How could you ever have been timid?" I was timid. I think that Pembroke was a shelter, in a way, for me. I would have been lost. I would not have liked the University of Rhode Island [21:00] because it was coed and it was a big – not bigger, numerically, but spread out. I would have been lost. But I think in retrospect that I did lose out by not going to a college and living away from home. I think you get much more out of it when you live away from home.

JS: Really?

RWC: Oh, I do. I had to decide for my sons – my husband died about two months before my older boy graduated from high school – and at that point, we had not decided whether Nick should live at Brown or commute. Well then, things came to a head and I talked to – I've forgotten who the advisor was – and he said more than ever now, he should live because he needs to be among men. And I realize how much they got out of living on campus that I missed. So, I would think that all girls should live on campus.

JS: Well now, I was reading that you had organized a group [22:00] called Women Educators?

RWC: Oh, how did you read that?

JS: I was reading the files from 1970. And tell me about that.

RWC: Oh, golly. Well, as I told you, I've inherited my mother's feminist attitudes, and I, during my career, I eventually ended up, in 1966, as a coordinator at the Rhode Island Department of Education. We had a new commissioner – maybe you better turn that off. [laughter]

JS: OK.

(break in audio)

JS: OK, you were telling me about receiving your gym outfit.

RWC: Yes. About a week before we entered Pembroke, this big box came from this athletic company which was quite famous, and there were two lovely quality white short-sleeve blouses, a v-necked brown sweater, these voluminous bloomers, [23:00] a pair of sneakers, and for our class, white socks with pink cuffs on them because that was our class color. And we wore those for the four years.

JS: But you were really proud to get them?

RWC: Oh, we thought they were beautiful. But the year after us, or two years after, they had much cuter costumes. They had little short skirts, and those were the uniforms that our gym teachers wore, and we felt they were cuter. They were really darling, yeah.

JS: That's so funny.

RWC: And one thing that really, being an only child, my half-sisters and brothers had gone by the time I grew up, and had been sheltered, and the first time we went to take showers after gym, I was shocked. I didn't say anything, but here were these dorm girls running around nude, and I was really shocked. I would always wrap a towel around me. [laughter] [24:00] So, I was quite [afraid?], but –

JS: That happens to people in junior high, now.

RWC: Right. Oh, dear, but gym was... Then, we had bowling downstairs. Do they still have bowling lanes down in Lower Sayles Gym?

JS: Sure do.

RWC: We did that. We didn't have too much choice. They had archery and fist ball, and that was about it. Horseback riding, tennis, and there wasn't too much of a choice.

JS: OK. And you said that Pembroke, did Pembroke want to produce ladies or –

RWC: Ladies, not athletes. They were ladies.

JS: What did being a lady mean?

RWC: Well, when you went downtown, you wore gloves and a hat. And Wednesday noon was a lot of fun. We had classes Wednesday morning, but we had a half-holiday, Wednesday noon. We had classes Saturday morning, too. And we had the most wonderful bargain, Wednesday noon, [25:00] we used to love it. We'd go to the Port Arthur restaurant, it was a Chinese restaurant, it was on the second floor in a building opposite where Cherry, Webb & Touraine is now on Weybosset Street. And for 35 cents, there would be five or six of us, we would have chicken chow mein, a dessert, coffee, and a floor show. And the floor show used to really thrill us. There would be adagio dances, or Apache dances, you know, a couple, always a couple. And we were thrilled. For 35 cents.

JS: Save up two quarters from chicken (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

RWC: Right, right. Once in a while, we would eat at the Minden Hotel. The Minden is now part of Johnson & Wales, I think, there on the corner. But it was a really plush hotel, residence hotel in those days, [26:00] and the prices were expensive, so we didn't eat there too often. And then, of course, for 15 cents, we could go to the theater downtown. We didn't go that often because mostly our classes were combined, but I used to have to wait, from one o'clock to four o'clock, for a class. So, I would go by myself and it wasn't much fun. You couldn't really laugh too much by yourself when you were alone. But we would see two movies plus vaudeville.



JS: Really, for 15 cents?

RWC: I remember seeing – for 15 cents in the afternoon. Horace Heidt and His – whatever they call them – band. It was really amazing. But there were some theaters you didn't go to – I mean, you wouldn't go to Fays, which was they had sort of burlesque there. I would have loved to, but I didn't dare. [laughter] They might have raided the place, found a Pembroker there.

JS: You know, you were talking about programs that Pembroke students participated in, teaching foreigners English, were there any other interaction [27:00] between Pembroke and the community?

RWC: The Christian Association had some purpose. I don't know – I didn't belong to it. They must have done something, but I really don't know. They were more of a world unto themselves, Pembroke was. I think that the community would have looked askance at our efforts. They would have considered us like Junior Leaguers trying to do good, so we really didn't. Unless the Christian Association did something, I don't recall that they did.

JS: OK. Well, I'd like to thank you very much, get an idea of what Pembroke was like. So, I'll stop.

RWC: [laughter] That was fun. I enjoyed that.

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