

Transcript – Susan Weatherhead, class of 1942

Narrator: Susan Weatherhead

Interviewer: Richard Randolph Patten

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Richard Patten: Dick Patten, class of 1991 interviewing Susan Weatherhead, class of 1942 on April 8, 1988. Tape 1.

I'm wondering a little bit about your...your family background before you came to Brown, and what...did your...did your father go to college?

Susan Weatherhead: No, he didn't. He went to a boys' school. He was English, but he lived in Barbados and went to a boys' school in Barbados.

RP: And was your...was your mother educated?

SW: My mother did the same. She went to a girls' school in Canada.

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: Yes.

RP: How did...how did they meet? That's interesting.

SW: I think they met through mutual friends, here, in...in Boston, I think.

RP: Uh-huh. Wow. And where was your hometown when you were growing up?

SW: In Barrington...

RP: Oh, it was.

SW: ...which is just eight or ten miles outside of the city.

RP: And you live there now, don't you?

SW: Yes.

RP: Wow, is it...

SW: In the same house.

RP: Really? [laughs]

SW: Yes.

RP: That's neat. How did you...well, how did you hear about Brown or Pembroke? I guess...well, how did you hear?

SW: Well, all my life I knew about Brown and Pembroke.

RP: Yeah.

SW: I came here for different things. And I always knew...

RP: You came to Providence?

SW: I came to the campus for different things.

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: And I knew about it and we heard about it in school, of course, and it's the school I chose to...want to go to mother had ideas that I might want to go to Wheaton or Wellesley, but I preferred Brown. My father's choice also was Brown because, well, Pembroke, really. Because I think the daughter of some of his friends had gone to Pembroke, and he thought that would be fine.

RP: Uh-huh. Hmm. And you didn't...you didn't like Wellesley or Wheaton because they were...I mean, why did you?

SW: I simply liked Brown...

RP: You just liked Pembroke.

SW: ...Pembroke better. And therefore made the choice to try to come to Brown.

RP: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And did you...were...how many siblings did you have?

SW: Well, I have siblings, any kind you want. I have two brothers of my own who are close in age to me and I have two half-brothers, and then I have a foster brother. Not any of that entire family lived together at one time, just myself and two brothers lived together. My own two brothers lived together at one time...

RP: Did they...did they go to college?

SW: One went to Rhode Island School of Design and the other one went to Brown.

RP: Uh-huh. Wow, so he's an artist...

SW: No. He is...he was in the textile business.

RP: Oh, really?

SW: He...they had at the time that he went a degree in textile engineering. My father had been in the textile business and he followed my father in the textile business, and at the time, they gave a degree at Rhode Island School of Design.

RP: Mm-hmm. And were there...were there any...sort of...were there any problems because you were...you were a girl—or a young woman—about going to college? Were there any...?

SW: None whatsoever. I had...

RP: There weren't. Everyone...supported you...

SW: There was no...there was no rivalry as far as that kind of thing was concerned in my family. I was given the same opportunities that my brothers were.

RP: Wow! That's terrific. In what...what...why did you...did a lot of your frien...girlfriends go to college?

SW: Well, yes.

RP: They did.

SW: The school...I went to the Barrington High School, which was a local high school in Barrington. And I think somewhere...about 80% of the class went to college.

RP: Oh. So you were sort of...were you...were you following suit when you went to college, or were you going there with a specific...pursuit?

SW: No. I was going to the college of my choice. I was the only one of that class who went to Pembroke, but one of the girls that I can recall—one of my close friends—went to...into music, training for music on an individual basis. A tutorial-type basis. Another went to the Conservatory of Music in Boston. Another went to Rhode Island...what is now Rhode Island College. Another went to the University of Rhode Island. Another went to Connecticut...Connecticut College, which was then Connecticut College for Women. And the men in the class went to...some of them went on to a year in prep school, but they also went to Brown and...I'm trying to think of some of the other...University of Rhode Island, MIT, and that kind of thing.

RP: So they all stayed pretty...they all stayed in New England, generally.

SW: Yes. The trend at the time was...was to stay closer to home than after the war, for example. That is, *truly* after the war, when people became more...much more mobile.

RP: Yeah. Right. Okay, once you...once you arrived at Pembroke, did you...did you have a roommate?

SW: No. I lived at home.

RP: You did.

SW: At the time, there was a shortage of dormitory space. You didn't really have an option of living on the campus if you lived moderately close. So my brothers and I had a car for our use [overlapping speech, inaudible]

RP: Wow. That's...that's...that must have been fun...to have a car.

SW: I...I could not live at...on the campus, unless there was an urgent reason, which didn't exist. Then in my last year, when there was a possibility of my living on the campus, I simply didn't want to make that kind of an adjustment. To begin as a freshman, so to speak, by living on the campus.

RP: Uh-huh. Did you find...did you find yourself a...you know, did you like you were missing out on anything, 'cause...

SW: At that time, there were many...girls around the city...around the state, who lived at home, and there was quite...it was perhaps a 50-50 split, or perhaps even more of a local split at...at Pembroke, and they were called...theoretically called "City Girls." That was not necessarily true, because many of them lived outside the city, but they were daily...they were commuters. And they had their own centers of attraction, and they missed very little. They...many of them had the use of automobiles and you could get back and forth readily. So that there was no real feeling that I was missing anything, because this was an entire group of...of people who did the same kind of things.

RP: Did you have...did you have any sort of freshman initiation that you had to go through in Pembroke?

SW: Oh, yes.

RP: [laughter]

SW: We had a hazing. It was called Scut Week. And I recall we had to wear a man's hat and have a black moustache. They were things I would call (inaudible). I'm sure we had other things. We had to do other fine things at peoples' requests. But the thing I remember most is that one of my friends had a father who was six feet tall and proportionately large, and had a large head. My father was not so tall; he was about 5'10" and was a typical English-type person with a smaller head, and his hat was small. So I

had his hat stuck on the top of my head, and she had her father's hat coming down over her eyes.

RP: [laughter]

SW: So every morning, we had to trade.

RP: Yeah? [laughter] And how...that went on for, like, a week or so?

SW: Oh, I...I think it was not a full week, I think perhaps five days (inaudible) so I don't really recall how long.

RP: Did you have a Senior Sister?

SW: Yes, I did.

RP: And...and did you...how did that...how did that relationship work?

SW: Fine.

RP: It did.

SW: Fine, we are friends to this day.

RP: Wow! Was she...sort of a student advisor, or...?

SW: She was kind of an advisor. She was very active in...sports; she was very active in dormitory life, and in many things on the campus. And she was an advisor if she needed to be. She was simply a friend. Very gregarious, happy, smiling type of person. And we are friends to this day.

RP: Did you...I saw...I...I looked through your yearbook; it was really interesting. And I...I noticed that a lot of the...a lot of the faculty were men.

SW: Yes.

RP: It...it appeared.

SW: Yes.

RP: And would...would...did that...was that...did you all get along well with them, or were they...?

SW: Yes.

RP: ...were they overbearing sometimes, or...?

SW: No. I don't...I don't recall anyone who was terribly o...one or two who were overbearing then, and in later life, I knew them, and they were still overbearing.

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: But...I don't recall...having a woman...well, I had one woman professor. A Miss Wilder, who taught biology. And she was a frail, intellectual type of woman, and that was the one woman that I had as a...as a professor. There were not a great many women professors. Most of them were men. And there were very few instructors who were women. I recall that a class after mine had a speech teacher who was—speech instructor—who was a woman. But I had missed her.

RP: Did you have a favorite teacher? In your yearbook, you...you

SW: Oh, George Downing!

RP: Yeah.

SW: Was the favorite professor of the...

RP: Was he an artist, or an art teacher?

SW: He was...he was my professor of art history, but he was in the Art Department. And he was the unanimous choice of the class as favorite professor.

RP: Yeah? For what reasons?

SW: Many girls took art history, for one thing. It was...he had a very popular class, and it was a very good class, and one that was very... As I look back on it now, it was a very rewarding class to take, and should have been a requirement, really. For cultural purposes. And he simply was a nice man who was a...was very popular with...with the girl students.

RP: The girls in...you know, I noticed that there were tons and tons of different clubs, you know, the Sock and Buskin, I think it was called...

SW: Sock and Buskin was the...the theater club.

RP: Theater club. And did you...were you involved in those clubs?

SW: I wasn't so much in Sock and Buskin. I did a little bit, but not too much. There was, when I first came, a women's group called Komians. And that fast changed into—joined with—Sock and Buskin.

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: So that by the time I left, it was all Sock and Buskin. And did a little backstage work, a little...

RP: Tech staff stuff?

SW: Odds and ends...production kind of things. But never to any great extent. But there were...there were selections of clubs you could join as you saw fit.

RP: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Were there...I saw that Pembroke was the only school that required...that had a physical education requirement.

SW: Oh, yes.

RP: And...did you...how did you partake in that?

SW: You had to attend gymnasium classes.

RP: Uh-huh. What was "gymnasium?"

SW: Well, this...gymnasium sports you had to attend gym classes. I think three days...three times a week as freshmen, three times a week as a sophomore, twice a week as a junior, and finally, at the end of your...the last half of your senior year, you were excused.

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: That was the absolute ultimate.

RP: Oh, yeah? [laughter]

SW: That was *it*.

RP: What did you do in gym class?

SW: We had a selection of things to do, you took physical exercise of different kinds, you played basketball...

RP: There were teams, right?

SW: ...horseback riding...you...there was some tennis...field hockey...

RP: So, you did a little bit of everything.

SW: You could...yes. You had...you could make your own choices among the...among the sports that were offered.

RP: Did they...were the sports...were the teams competitive? You know I know that the men's...

SW: Not particularly. (overlapping speech; inaudible) No.

RP: ...the men's sports were very competitive. They weren't...

SW: No.

RP: Was that by choice of the students?

SW: Well it simply wasn't...they had...they played some intramural basketball, but I didn't ever play basketball. And I recall when I was a senior, being in a round-robin archery contest with several other schools. But there was not the competition like there is now.

RP: And...and there was...there was not the competition that there was at Brown, the men's part of Brown.

SW: No. The men's part of Brown had their regular sports teams, chiefly they had the football team.

RP: Yeah. Yeah. Was that a popular thing? Did you...

SW: Yes.

RP: ...go to the football games?

SW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

RP: As a big social event?

SW: Oh, yes.

RP: Hmm. That's interesting. What were your...how did, you know, a...a regular day go for you? You...I...I know you had classes...you had, you know, tons of time that you spent in class, but was there a required chapel service in...at...in the morning, or...?

SW: No. There was a chapel service at 12:00 on Tuesday, and there was a Dean's chapel on Thursday. It was a kind of a current events matter, campus-related matter theme. Question Club, which was the leader of all...the presidents of all the main groups on the campus, conducted that sometimes and they...they had...the Dean would speak on community events and that kind of thing

RP: Is this...

SW: on Thursday

RP: Is this...

SW: and give notices and that kind of thing and usually was shorter. On Tuesday, it was approximately class length, that is, fifty minutes, and the...the...frequently had an outside speaker. And we had very good outside speakers; the selection of speakers was excellent. Chapel...everyone had an assigned seat in Chapel, and attendance was taken.

RP: That was just women, right?

SW: Just women. It was held in Alumnae Hall. And seniors wore their caps and gowns and marched into...into the chapel.

RP: Wow.

SW: And Margaret Morriss...

RP: She was the dean.

SW: ...was the dean, and she was very much the dean, and this was what her regulation was, and that's the way it was followed.

RP: Uh-huh. How was sh...was she well-respected and well-liked?

SW: Yes. Yes.

RP: She was. She was a good...

SW: If anyone had problems with her, she certainly wasn't, but ordinarily speaking, she was well-liked and well-respected. Not particularly friendly, she kept a distance. As befit a dean.

RP: Yeah. Right.

SW: But she was a nice woman, and her intentions, I'm sure, were very good. And in later life, she was very friendly and jovial and so forth.

RP: Now, was it President Wriston who was president of Brown at...at...

SW: Yes.

RP: ...during...? And was he...how was he regarded?

SW: He...I can't exactly recall the year that he came in to be president...about 1937, I think. He was very highly regarded. He was an excellent Chapel speaker, and a very popular man. Smiley, popular, friendly type of person, and very definite, as you perhaps have read, as some of the things he had to say, he was very definite in his ideas. He was very definite in what he had to say and he had a very high standard. He was a fine president.

RP: Was he President of Pembroke as well as Brown? How did that work?

SW: Pembroke...College was Pembroke College *in* Brown University.

RP: Right.

SW: It was the coordinate college of Brown and therefore was part of Brown University. We had all the advantages of being at Brown, the professors and the buildings and the use of the facilities and so forth. And he was president of the entire Brown University.

RP: Mm-hmm. Was...were there any sort of ridiculous rules and regulations that you had then, or did you...did you...did all the women seem to understand...?

SW: Well, I'm not sure we...I'm not sure we thought they were ridiculous, everybody thought taking gym was pretty ridiculous.

RP: But how about the dress code?

SW: And people who...who lived in dormitories didn't like the hours, the regulations for hours and that kind of thing, but that was pretty standard.

RP: Yeah.

SW: The dress code was not extraordinary. My mother used to say the worst dressed girls in the world go to Pembroke, when she used to come up to pick me up. However, they were pretty much standard: sweaters and skirts and socks. And saddle shoes or Spaulding golf-type shoes with the flap on the front of them. And that was pretty much the regulation. I remember wearing reversible coats, which...a coat that was wool on one side and cravenette on the other side, that was a waterproof material, much like London Fog, on the other side, and that was pretty much standard attire.

RP: Yeah. How...

SW: No one ever thought that there was anything wrong with the rules. I think people wore pants then, but not so much as they do now. And I believe we were not supposed to wear pants on the street, and if you wore them under your coat, you were to have the legs pinned up so it looked as though you had a skirt on. You were not to smoke on the street...

RP: How about in the dorms, and...?

SW: I don't think there was a restriction as far as smoking inside...

RP: 'Cause you were...in a lot of the pictures in the yearbook, women students were smoking. As well as the men.

SW: And there was a smoking room provided...with a Coke machine, and that kind of thing. Sort of one floor of the building. And there didn't seem to be any restriction as far as that's concerned. And Miss Morriss was fairly rigid about some things, she liked you to look respectable on the street and respectable if you went downtown, for any reason. And she didn't...you were not to travel back and forth between the field house and the gymnasium in your gym clothes. You were supposed to have the skirt part of your gym suit on. My...my gym suit did not have a skirt, but some of them had. Although mine was of the modern style of gym suits, it was not the old bloomer jobs that were around for some time.

RP: Yeah. Yeah. How...how...how about the men and women, you know, how much interaction was there? Was it all...was it all sort of Friday/Saturday night, or...?

SW: It was...it was a social interaction, not ne...not necessarily just Friday/Saturday night, but the men...there were men's classes and women's classes and men, as time went on, when you were a junior or a senior, you could be in mixed...some mixed classes. But the...the interaction was largely a social interaction.

RP: How about the Ivy Day and May Day celebrations and...?

SW: They were very traditional. And very picturesque, and everyone looked forward to them, they were big events of the...they were big events of the school year. And they were very pretty.

RP: What went on, exactly, at Ivy Day? I couldn't pick that up from the yearbook.

SW: Ivy Day, they...they carried...selected women wore white dresses, and carried the ivy chain, and more or less walked and made a...a pathway, so to speak, through which officials of the college, or a speaker, or whatever walked.

RP: Would walk.

SW: And this was quite an honor to be in the ivy chain.

RP: Oh, yeah? And how about May Day? What exactly was that?

SW: And May Day, the Sophomore Masque was put on, and...

RP: Which is...what...what...?

SW: Which was a masque...you had...part of gym was an interpretive dance class. There was a character who came to town and directed this. And it usually had a basic theme and then this kind of a dance performance that went with it. And then the May Queen was crowned, and freshmen presented their Senior Sisters with a May basket.

RP: Oh yeah?

SW: Mm-hmm.

RP: Huh. I saw in y...y...now, how many people were in your class, about 120, I think? If...I counted in the yearbook.

SW: In later years, I think I have counted end to end, and that is counting everyone who was a member of the class at some time or other, who did not necessarily attend through the entire four-year period, 149, something in that nature...

RP: Oh, yeah?

SW: 159. Something like that. Being W, my letter box was 103, and so, there were, perhaps, ten after me. And so that, probably, in the class at graduation time, there probably 115 or so.

RP: How did...why would these various people leave Brown? [Tape stops.]

SW: One that I can think of left to be married. Another one transferred to another school.

RP: Was she unhappy at Brown? Or did she move, or...?

SW: I think various reasons. Sometimes, they transferred because it was financially prudent for them to transfer. In other cases, one in my class transferred to Radcliffe. Nobody knew why. Various reasons of that sort. Some simply stopped going to college and went on to do other things. Some of them were on a two-year plan that they were going to college for two years and then perhaps went to Katharine Gibbs, or something of that sort.

RP: Mm-hmm. What is Katharine Gibbs?

SW: Katharine Gibbs was a business school, a women's business school which still exists here on the East Side. And I don't recall any other...once in a while, you had someone who left for health reasons, or something of that kind. You had a few who left for academic reasons...but that's usually...that's usually the answer.

RP: What...now...now...you were in a class of...

SW: Although I will say this. As we got toward the beginning of World War II, many left because they married and they...and...and went somewhere with their husbands.

RP: Oh, uh-huh. Now what...what...how do you think World War II, aside from that, affected Pembroke? And Brown, or...?

SW: Well, I got out shortly after the beginning of World...a full semester afterward. The classes had accelerated, so, World War II affected the classes...I mean, the College, in the respect that there were more women than men students, for one thing. The class structure broke down somewhat, because some people went two semesters, some people went three semesters, that is, they went through a summer semester, and consequently, they finished in two years or two and a half years or three years, rather than four. And there were several changes that way. And of course, after the war and the young men started coming back, and some young women were coming back to attend college, the college became larger. The classes began going into a more modern phase where there were many more mixed classes, there many more class times offered, and that kind of thing. And there were so many people who were coming back, and with the aid of the G. I. Bill were able to attend Brown...

RP: Right.

SW: ...who hadn't been before, and when you looked at it at that time, it...it seemed a perfectly normal thing to do, now, you look at it from this standpoint and think, "What a wonderful opportunity it was for so many people to be able to go to Brown, because of the G. I. Bill."

RP: Mm-hmm. Hmm. What do you...how...what do you think about the...the assimilation in 1971 to, you know, of Pembroke becoming...

SW: I thought then just as I feel now. That if that was going to move of progress, by all means, go ahead and do it. But don't be looking backward at what had gone by. Don't always be looking backward. Look forward.

RP: Uh-huh.

SW: And not backward.

RP: What is...what do you mean by that?

SW: Well, I mean, not to make Pembroke a monument to anything.

RP: Yeah.

SW: It was a...a school at the time that was very appropriate, and had all the benefits it could possibly have. We had some very good administrators. We had the best that Brown could offer in that particular situation, and if you wish to join and be a totally

coeducational college, let that be a forward movement, and not...not one that you were...it was breaking your heart to see Pembroke go.

RP: Right. Right. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Now, after Brown, what have you...what did you do right after you got out of Brown? Did you go straight into the, sort of, career...career world, or...?

SW: Yes.

RP: You did. And what...what...what did you do?

SW: Well, I did...I got...kind of got caught in a job that I couldn't move from for several reasons. When I graduated from college, my father was very ill, and...so that governed some of the things that I could do and some of the things that I did do. I went into a...an office to work, and also the office had something to do with...with war work, and so that you couldn't make too many changes at that time.

RP: Right. Right.

SW: Also it meant that I stayed home in my family house rather than going somewhere else, or going away to do something because of family kind of responsibilities.

RP: Did...did being a woman in the career world ever inhibit you, as far as you know, or did...was it ever a problem that you can recall? I mean, it sounds...

SW: I don't think so.

RP: You don't think so.

SW: No. I don't think so. Because I've had...I've had some...I haven't had a lot of jobs, but I've had some jobs that have been men...that have been jobs that men have had before me, and have not had a problem with. And I have been associated with the real estate business for a long number of years, and that...that was when most real estate agents and salespeople were men, and I had no problem with it. So I don't...I don't think so. I was also at one time, a member of John Chaffee's staff, when he was...when he was Governor. And I had followed a man, I took a man's job at that time, and had no problem with it at all.

RP: Uh-huh. Nobody...

SW: That has not been a big problem. I think I just didn't look for it to be a big problem, so it wasn't.

RP: Yeah. Now, when did you...when did you once again become affiliated with Brown? In other words, when did you start working for the University?

SW: When...when...John Chaffee was defeated as Governor. When I had prior to that time been in the real estate business.

RP: Which...now what year was that? That he was...

SW: 1969. And I came here. He was defeated in the 1968 election, so it was early 1969 and I came here because I did not want, in the middle of the winter, to go back to the full-time real estate business and kind of be floundering around for a while, plus I wanted to try something a little more structured. And I came here to the library, as a matter of fact, and then have stayed since then.

RP: Wow.

SW: So I've been here going on twenty years. And it...in two different jobs.

RP: Now, am...am I correct in that you're...you're not married, are you?

SW: No.

RP: Uh-huh. I think...I think that's it. Let me just make sure I don't have any more...any more questions for you. You feel like Pembroke...having a diploma from Brown—it was a Brown diploma, right?

SW: Yes.

RP: And you...do you think that helped you in the job world? Having a college degree?

SW: It's given me a great deal of satisfaction; I don't know whether...I think having a college degree is very important. I think having a college degree on this campus at this present time is very important. I have done a great deal of alumnae work and I do it even now, and I think that is a...is just a...a very rewarding kind of a thing to have, and it's...it's hard to tell where this helps and doesn't help. It guides your...it guides your life along certain paths, anyway.

RP: I think that's everything. Do you...do you have anything else you might want to add?

SW: I don't think so, I'm happy to...to cooperate, and hope that someone gets some satisfaction out of this kind of thing. I'll be interested to hear the tape played back.

RP: Yeah. Thank you very much.

SW: You're welcome. Thank you.

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