

Transcript – Alita Bosworth Cameron '14 and Rowena Sherman '14

Narrator: Alita Bosworth Cameron and Rowena Sherman

Interviewer:

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Alita Bosworth Cameron: Alita Bosworth Cameron of the Class of 1914 in the Women's College at Brown University.

Q: And what was your degree?

AB: Ph.D. I came without any classical studies or entrants and I took the Ph.D. course.

Rowena Sherman: I'm Mrs. Joseph Rowena Louise Sherman. I was in the class of 1914. Came from Classical High School 1910 and there were about eight or ten of us from Classical High.

Q: And you got a degree in what?

RS: AB or BA.

Q: In what? A particular field?

RS: English.

Q: Well as I said the first question I'll ask you is how it was that you wound up going to the Women's College in the first place.

AB: Mixed reasons. [01:00] In high school there were no professional student counselors on the teaching staff but some of the teachers were kind and interested enough to advise the students who wanted to go onto college give them information and generally encourage them. The head of the German Department was Edith Williston who was an early graduate of the Women's College in the Class of 1896 and she was a close friend and classmate of Emma Stanton who was Registrar at the College. Miss Williston urged me strongly to enroll [02:00] at Pembroke to take the necessary courses to prepare for teaching and after I got my teachers certificate to come back and teach in the high school I had attended.

Q: Which high school was it?

AB: That was the technical high school in Providence and I did that. I taught German and her supervision until the war caused the superintendent of schools to withdraw that subject from the school curriculum and then I switched to English I think it was then. But long before she influenced me I had been thinking about the Women's College. It's reputation had spread

considerably [03:00] since it was first started and beyond the local communities in Rhode Island and the neighboring states then too the numbers had grown, the numbers enrolled had grown, and it seemed worthwhile to be a member of a college that was part of the University -- a separate part but -- it was long established and reputation was first class. Also the faculty would be the same that taught the Men's College and the diploma received would be in the name of the University. [04:00] All of that was the reason. I suppose the final and decisive reason was the fact that I lived in Providence and by commuting to classes I could be spared the cost of dormitory living although Miller Hall was new that year just opened and certainly the rooms there were very inviting. It looked like a domicile that would be convenient and very lovely to be in but aside from the saving in the dormitory costs, there would be only the tuition to think about.

RS: And tuition at that time was only \$150.

AB: \$150 a year (laughter). [05:00]

Q: Did your family encourage you also to go to school?

AB: Oh yes, yes. I had three cousins that were graduated from the Men's College and one who -- well a classmate in high school -- who was interested in me somewhat (laughter) but I didn't see anything of him after he went to Brown. There was kind of separation between the two.

Q: How about you, Mrs. Allen, how did you?

RS: I went to Brown because of my mother would be all over, my father was a traveling salesman and he went all over the country in his business so there was no question that I should go to Brown at all.

Q: But your mother encouraged you to go to college?

RS: I was very much (inaudible) but the family [06:00] from school.

AB: I think about 4/5 of our college were living at home.

RS: Yes, I think so.

AB: About 19 or 20 were dormitory, or lived in homes other than the dormitory.

RS: There was a few houses where some of the students stayed. They were not in a dormitory. One was right side of the college and the other was down on Brook Street, wasn't it somewhere down there?

AB: I can't remember.

RS: Well I know they didn't stay in the dormitory. Most of us were Providence girls.

Q: It must have been unusual in your day for girls to go to college.

AB: No, no, no. Wellesley and Smith. I don't know about Radcliffe those days. I guess it was there but it wasn't affiliated, [07:00] was it?

RS: There weren't many from the English High School who went. It was mostly from Classical where I graduated and some from Tech like Mrs. Bosworth...Mrs. Cameron. Classical High School we were all prepared for Brown, for any college for that matter.

Q: All the girls in your high school were prepared.

RS: I didn't hear that.

Q: I didn't realize that the people who went to Classical High School were being prepared to go to Brown.

AB: Oh yes.

Q: That was the purpose?

RS: You had your choice of Latin, Greek or German and we had to take Latin. I chose Greek and it was a bit division of our several class members who went into the German division. And then one of them was Miss Alice Worthington. She is tremendously successful.

Q: I didn't realize that.

RS: But she couldn't talk to you now [08:00] so you have to go and see her.

Q: OK. You both were talking before about the fraternities and I didn't understand what you were --

AB: Well I thought they were abolished and we ended in the fall of 1910 and I thought for that year until the following June they were pledging but I don't know if anyone in our class that --

RS: Well (inaudible) did.

AB: But I didn't know going in.

RS: Freshman year we were expected to join in our sophomore year. Dean King asked us to sort of take a broad view of them and by sophomore year she had done away with them.

AB: But Dean King had been prejudiced against them and she thought they were too exclusive, undemocratic and President [09:00] Faunce joined her -- I think it was in our sophomore year in banning them from the Women's College.

RS: Well they went in our sophomore year, I know. But I'm not sure now what Dean did have the right idea.

Q: Whether what?

RS: Well she did have the right idea about fraternities because certainly the class as a whole was very united. All of the girls were familiar with the others and it might not have been that way with the fraternities or sororities, either one.

Q: Was there a difference? Was there fraternities and sororities or it was just the different name?

AB: They called them the sororities, fraternities --

RS: Fraternities is the Latin word for men and sorority would be for the women.

Q: But I thought that at the Women's College they still called them fraternities.

RS: Yes, they did.

Q: Do you remember some of the ones that they had?

AB: [10:00] Oh, let me see. Here's some (inaudible) book and there are somewhere in here. Oh here (laughter) are their pictures of -- that's Edith Williston, that's Miss --

Q: -- Stanton.

AB: Yes.

Q: Miss Williston was your teacher?

AB: What was it?

Q: Edith Williston was your teacher?

AB: She was the head of the German Department in high school and she was the one who urged me to go to Pembroke.

Q: I've seen this picture before and I think these hats are so funny.

AB: And there's the Ivy Day procession of 1914 in that, too.

Q: That's right. Are you in this picture?

AB: I couldn't recognize any of them. My eyesight isn't good enough.

Q: Couldn't you? I noticed that all of the pictures in this book that I've ever seen and I've also seen some pictures in the Brun Mael and newspapers and things like that -- all of the girls at the college look so refined [11:00] and are all so pretty.

AB: We were supposed to be circumspect in our dress and behavior particularly.

RS: Here's something you might be interested in. We were not allowed or it was not supposed -- we would go to the John Hay library without our hat and gloves on. And we put it in a song -- wear your gloves and veil and hat, always do remember that; because you are a Pembroke girl.

Q: Do you remember any other songs or things that you used to say when you were in school?

AB: We had a song contest -- was it in the --

RS: Oh yes.

AB: It was sophomore year. We won a couple of times, I'm pretty sure.

RS: Yes we won. I had (inaudible) --

AB: I don't remember -- one of the old songs I still remember.

RS: I still remember the songs.

AB: Wear your gloves and veil and hat; always do remember that because you are a Brown girl.

RS: Pembroke. Yeah, Brown. [12:00]

AB: Oh, Brown.

Q: Do you remember any of the other songs?

RS: I've got them somewhere.

Q: Do you remember any?

AB: We were both in the choir and I think that was started -- the glee club was in existence but I think the choir was started our freshman year.

RS: I don't remember. I know we always had a pianist and the chapel exercise of the top floor of Pembroke Hall. And then certain ones of the choir that sat round the piano and the rest of them sat (inaudible) --

AB: Main floor (laughter).

Q: But you don't remember any songs or --?

AB: Well I remember, let me see. Jerusalem the golden with milk and honey blasts -- that was one of the favorite songs.

RS: (inaudible) [13:00] I think I could write some of it for you.

AB: There was one that was set to the tune of the Austrian National Hymn (laughter). That's pretty far back.

RS: Will you shut that off?

Q: Just a second. You said you remembered part of a song.

RS: When 1914 the brown of brown, a jolly class are we. We meet all our troubles with never a frown, ever the (inaudible).

Q: You don't remember that?

AB: No I don't remember that. If I remembered the music, the words might come back to me, but I don't recall.

Q: Well I hope that one won first prize.

RS: (inaudible) [14:00] 1914 brown and brown -- that's all I remember. There were quite a number of others.

AB: I don't know whether the classes preceding ours had had senior advisors but we did. Each freshman was assigned to a senior. Mine was Alice [Hildrith?] who was head of the student government association and she was one of the nicest persons, wasn't she, that you could want to meet and became very friendly and a long-lasting friend.

RS: Do you have senior advisors now?

Q: No.

RS: We did.

Q: Every freshman went to a senior?

RS: Yes. And were assigned to a senior.

AB: Although some of the seniors [15:00] must have had more than one freshman because the senior class was many, many -- well I don't know just how large it was but it was (inaudible, overlapping dialogue) ours was the largest up to that time, I think.

Q: When you were seniors, did you have freshmen assigned to you?

AB: I don't remember that I did.

RS: I did, her last name was "Shaw." Florence Shaw I think it was. But she never came to me and I had her at the house and I was more friendly with members of my own class. I used to have them over to the house then.

Q: I have been told that some of the things that freshman, seniors, other things they had to do was -- the freshmen had to hold the doors for the seniors, things like that? No?

AB: I don't recall that. [16:00] I remember that when we came into college there were certain customs that had become quite well established over the years, became traditions and our class automatically followed along with them. One was that we were expected to accept as class color that that the preceding senior class that graduated in June had had and our color was blue. Lovely color but it was also supposed to be the color that we used to choose our class flower and the florist didn't have too many blue flowers.

RS: We had Canterbury bell.

AB: We had a hard time deciding on the Canterbury bell. I think it was because it suggested a theme for the mask. [17:00] The class flower was presented in the sophomore year at the mask.

RS: And the mask was written about the English -- the Canterbury tale, of course and as it happened it was written by one of the daughters of the professors who was in my class -- (inaudible).

Q: Really? Can I see the --? I don't want to embarrass you but I want to look at your pictures here. What was your major?

RS: Perhaps you'll find something that will be interesting to you.

Q: Now what was your maiden name?

RS: My name was Rowena Sherman.

Q: Sherman. I see.

AB: Was that the 1914?

RS: That's '14. I brought the others but I --

Q: Here you are. Let's see. You did a number of things. Glee club, social committee, executive board athletic association -- what was that? [18:00]

RS: The what?

Q: The executive board athletic association.

RS: What association?

AB: You were Christian Association.

RS: I was President of the Christian Association the last year but you say the Executive Board?

Q: Executive Board Athletic Association.

RS: Oh yes, Athletic Association.

AB: Were you in the Question Club?

RS: Oh yes.

AB: All heads of the organization were in the Question Club.

Q: Now this says, "It must have been a grey day when she confessed the cynical ambition to do others before they do me."

RS: They had a long question (inaudible) and gave each one of us that and you answered as funny as you could at the time.

AB: I didn't answer some of those questions (laughter).

RS: Well I wished I hadn't. I was surprised that Mary Bosworth put that in.

AB: Yes, Mary Bosworth wrote mine too -- [19:00]

Q: Was she related to you?

RS: No. she was a very bright English student. We always thought she was going to be a writer, but she died.

Q: Mary Bosworth? When she was younger? What happened to her?

RS: She died.

Q: When she was younger?

RS: Oh she taught in Technical.

AB: She did what?

RS: Mary Bosworth taught school.

AB: I can't remember what she did but she --

RS: She taught. I know she taught.

AB: Where?

Q: Now let's see what this says about you.

AB: The less said the better (laughter).

Q: "She is a lass with a delicate air." That's what they said about you. Let's see -- I wonder who wrote this about you. "She loves oranges and little boys. [20:00] On the subject of big boys she is silent." What does that mean?

AB: I don't know. I think I used to bring to the lunch room sometimes an orange that had been peeled and cut up into sections and I think she got that from there.

RS: By the way, do you know we had a great many of us who were not in the dormitory took our lunches up to Pembroke although we could buy things like Jell-O or soup or something of that kind -- but there was a lunch room then.

Q: Where did you buy the food?

RS: We didn't buy it. We took it.

Q: Did you say you could buy things like soup?

RS: There was a counter right in the lunch room.

Q: Where was the lunch room?

AB: On the basement floor of Pembroke Hall as you go in from the back entrance it was the first room on the left.

RS: [21:00] Mrs. Wilson had it.

AB: And the locker room was beyond and (inaudible) room over on the other side.

RS: We kept a lot of things in lockers.

Q: I was just looking here at a picture of Miss Bates.

AB: Oh she was the Athletic Director.

Q: How come everybody always laughs when I mention her name?

RS: What is it?

Q: Everybody laughs when I ask about her.

RS: She was obsolete, too.

AB: We had in the first year Mrs. Payne and she taught the dances for the mask.

RS: She taught also the dances that we held there so the girls would learn to dance. I remember that.

Q: Did you say that Miss Bates was asked to leave?

RS: I don't get it.

Q: Miss Bates was asked to leave?

RS: [22:00] I think she was. She was slightly German favored. She didn't stay too long.

AB: I don't remember how long.

RS: I wouldn't use that at all (laughter).

AB: You've got your machine here --

RS: I wouldn't want that to go from -- now in the back of that there's a calendar -- in the back of the book -- of what went on different days.

Q: Yeah, I see that here.

AB: She was M. Elizabeth, wasn't she?

RS: M. Elizabeth.

Q: Did you go over to the Brown campus very much?

AB: Well we all did with a class that required a laboratory, but otherwise you were supposed not even to walk over there.

RS: Oh, no, I never even crossed the campus. But I had botany over there one year -- in the basement of one of the buildings.

AB: I had to go for chemistry and then in senior year Middle High German.

RS: I didn't take that; I took Greek.

Q: Did you have much contact with Dean King?

RS: Much contact with --?

Q: Much contact with Dean King?

RS: I did because I happened to be the head of some of the things there and it was not too enjoyable. She was (inaudible; overlapping dialogue) woman and she did a really good job but she was not friendly with the girls.

Q: That's what I had heard.

RS: No. She was not.

AB: She was a fine administrator and a very strict disciplinarian but not [24:00] overly friendly. I went to see her once at her home to ask her indulgence in forgiving -- remember Ella Gordon -- she was in trouble and Miss King was adamant.

Q: What was that situation?

RS: Don't mention that.

Q: OK. Even after this many years you don't want to --

AB: She had done something that was absolutely not permissible and --

RS: Well Dean King was right in not allowing her to stay.

AB: And in those years one of our classmates -- this was senior year --

RS: Oh, Ella left before the senior year.

AB: Well one of our classmates married and she was expelled.

RS: And she wasn't allowed -- and she went on and became -- [25:00]

AB: She went to --

RS: -- a physician.

AB: Columbia I think? Or Colgate? Which was it?

RS: And she was a physician. Is that the one you mean?

AB: Yes.

RS: And then she was a chief doctor in one of the big women's -- what is it college or private school?

AB: I don't remember.

Q: I guess you must read things today in the magazines -- these magazines.

AB: I've got a half-dozen of those Brown magazines with some article or interesting piece that I wanted to read and I don't find the time to -- I live here alone, and I try to do --

RS: one thing about that magazine -- they don't put in anything about the early classes of the Women's College.

Q: You mean in the back?

RS: In the back. [26:00] Very seldom is there anything. Cook, Peterson or two or three magazines back, but there are lots of things that could be put in and those of us who read it would be very interested to know about our own class but they don't put a thing in. Very seldom is there anything in about the early classes.

AB: Well you remember when we had reached our 60<sup>th</sup> was it -- or was it the 50<sup>th</sup>? 60<sup>th</sup> reunion, I think it was -- we decided to discontinue as an organized group.

RS: -- it was the 60<sup>th</sup>.

AB: I was the secretary; you were the vice president -- no you were the nominating committee chairman and you didn't put in any slate. [27:00] So we have no organized class now, no offices and when they send out notices from the college -- please attend this study group or --

RS: I don't get any of those. Except the classes --

AB: They keep us -- Ruth and me -- on the mailing list.

RS: And they also look for money.

AB: They also what?

RS: Ask you for money.

AB: Oh, they ask everybody for money. But they won't accept the fact that I've turned over all the material to the archive or the associated alumni.

Q: I was just looking here at this picture of the whole class here -- do you see this? There's someone here holding a doll.

AB: That's our class mascot.

Q: What is this?

RS: Maid Marion, from Robin Hood.

Q: Did every class have a mascot like that?

AB: Yes. That was our senior year, wasn't it?

RS: No, sophomore. Oh that was our senior year, there, with the mascot. The mascot came out of the sophomore year.

AB: I thought it was our senior year. If you want to turn that light on, I'll show you. This is the kind of hats we wore then.

Q: What is this book? A scrapbook?

AB: This is a photograph album. There -- there's the mascot.

Q: These are wonderful pictures. Is this you?

AB: Yes.

Q: And these are the girls --

AB: These are at a house party. Do you remember that one down at West Barrington? [29:00] Here I am in front of Sayles and let me see --

Q: Do you have other albums like this or just this one?

AB: This is the only one with the class. There's Harriett Baxter, there's Marion Bates, Edith Holden, Ella Gordon. There's Edith -- Edith Holden -- she was my close friend. Let's see, here we are. Oh here I am on the balcony. That was Ivy Day when we gave the addresses from the balcony of --

Q: And this is the new tunnel for the buses?

RS: Ivy Day was always a beautiful day. I mean [30:00] with the girls.

AB: That was one of my classmates who lived down at Plymouth -- Marion Bates summer home.

RS: We used to always have in our class a meeting every month practically. I think we were about the only class that did. We went to the different homes and that one there was Marion Bates down at Plymouth. She usually had us in July or August.

AB: I thought we brought out the mascot that spring of the senior year? Well, I can't remember and you've got a better memory than I have.

Q: Well you must have been pretty -- it sounds like the whole class was very close.

RS: It was a very closely-associated class.

AB: Well you see most of the group [31:00] either came from Hope or Classical. Did you interview by any chance Marguerite Appleton?

Q: Tomorrow.

AB: She was the first President.

RS: She was Professor Appleton's daughter and she was.

AB: We had two daughters of former -- John Appleton wasn't at college but he had been our professor at Brown.

RS: Yes he was there then.

AB: When we entered?

RS: I think he was there just the freshman year but Marguerite will tell her tomorrow.

AB: But Professor Daly was -- we were all required to take his class.

RS: And his daughter was in our class -- Harriett.

AB: [32:00] And Hilda Bronson was daughter of Professor Bronson, but she wasn't in our class.

Q: Did many of the girls in your class have boyfriends?

RS: We all had plenty of partners for the dances.

AB: I don't know (laughter). If we didn't we had friends of friends would supply us with someone.

Part 2

Q: I was thinking with all of the girls being so close and then if they had been off -- with wondering if they were so close with the other girls.

RS: Yes we were. You see the college wasn't big enough so you didn't practically know everybody in it. There were two or three in our class who were very quiet but they've come back to reunions ever since.

Q: But that was something I always wondered about -- if the class was so small and everybody was such good friends, but then there was also the --

RS: Well the dormitory girls were more or less -- well a close group among themselves, but the whole class was very close. We tried all through the four years to choose people from dormitory and from the city girls. [01:00]

Q: To choose them to do what?

RS: Anything in a social line. And we were all on the basketball teams, bowling teams, all those things. But we really tried to know everybody in the class and of course with only 50 you could (inaudible) university classes anyway. I don't think there was anybody in the class that we didn't know. That's quite unusual; of course but with a small class you could do it.

Q: Did you ever go over to the dormitories?

RS: Surely. Yes, indeed. They used to invite us personally. There wasn't much that was college plan, but some of them would invite us over there for Sunday dinner or evenings or something of that kind. But not as much as the city girls.

Q: [02:00] What was it like over at the dormitory?

RS: Beautiful. They were very -- of course the first year it was open -- the first year that we were in college.

Q: That was Miller Hall?

RS: Miller Hall. That was the only dormitory there. It was brand new that year and Miss Ross was the -- what do you call her?

Q: The house mother?

RS: The house mother. And then she went on to -- up in New York State -- but she stayed there for quite a number of years. Everybody liked her; she was awfully nice.

Q: Do you remember any of your favorite professors? Special professors?

RS: Well we had Richardson, and we had math and there was Professor Deely [03:00] later on. And Billy Mack -- he was a history professor, and Everett -- Professor Everett in philosophy -- and Professor [Coleman?] in all of the education classes that the teachers took, and Professor Jacobs, too. We had Dean King for our freshman year and I had to take either Latin or Greek. I dropped the Greek after high school and took Latin but I took Greek but passed (inaudible) too. He was a fine gentleman. I passed all of my classes in the first year and then we all had to take math, we all had to take English and then with sophomore year -- we had compositions to write [04:00] three times a week if not more. There are boxes in the basement. Had a lot of fun with that. You see a lot of them waited until the very last minute, too (laughter).

Q: Did you have typewriters? Did you have to --?

RS: No typewriters. No.

Q: You had to write it out?

RS: All written. They didn't have to be -- for instance they could be a big page, but usually they were always something on the side or another piece of paper. But there was a big (inaudible) there was (inaudible) that we had to have.

Q: I'm trying to think. I usually write down some things here. Let's see. What did you do when you [05:00] left college?

RS: When I left college, I was a teacher.

Q: And where did you teach?

RS: I taught at [Mercy?] Street Grammar School. I was going to be (inaudible) for critic; I was under -- well I suppose she was a critic herself, but I wanted to be with the younger children and I had one year and then I went straight under her and I taught until I was married. And a lot of teachers were high school teachers. Of course they used to go away -- several ended up in Vermont; one went to Massachusetts. I guess she stayed (inaudible). Then there were some that were at Hope Junior High School under student teachers they called them.

Q: How did you happen to become a teacher? Did you go to school intending to do that?

RS: [06:00] How did I --?

Q: -- become a teacher?

RS: I wanted to be.

Q: You did want to be?

RS: Yes. I wanted to be.

Q: I guess a lot of girls wanted to do that.

RS: I think at that time they went in there -- especially -- what could you do? That was about the only thing that you could do was to teach (laughter). Very few did anything else but teaching. I used to have a system where the (inaudible) -- I guess it was a state affair -- they had several -- three or four students -- who were chosen and were teaching in the high schools in the first year out under a (inaudible) teacher. That's why I had (inaudible) because I was in the grammar school. [07:00]

F1: (inaudible) Just a minute I'll push this over.

RS: You take the plate and I'll take the books.

F1: Put these over here for the time being.

RS: I have the other three books that will come out.

- END -