

Transcript – Helen Elizabeth Butts '28

Narrator: Helen Elizabeth Butts Correll

Interviewer: Mary Renda

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Track 1

Mary Renda: [00:00:00] This is Mary Renda, and I'm interviewing Helen Butts Correll, of the class of 1928. Okay.

Helen Butts Correll: (inaudible) to ask a question?

MR: Yeah. Why don't – now, you said that you received a master's from Brown in '29. But maybe we could start out with your undergraduate years. If you could just talk a little bit about what it was like to be at Pembroke as an undergraduate.

HBC: Well, of course, the one thing that impresses us now to see the seniors marching down the Hill is the rented gowns. Because in those days we owned our own gowns, or we bought them from somebody else, and wore them almost every morning to chapel. Or, at least, certain mornings we wore them. I was president [of the?] Christian [00:01:00] Association in my senior year. So I had to introduce the speaker very often. So I remember definitely wearing my gown to chapel pretty regularly. But we had many occasions during the year where the seniors were dressed in cap and gown. So I think everybody in 1928 owned their own gown.

MR: Was that true for Pembroke and Brown or mainly Pembroke?

HBC: Well, I don't really remember. I can't tell you that. But I do remember that I wore my cap and gown many times so that we didn't have to have just special ones for graduation. I also remember that chapel was something we had to attend. And attendance was taken. [00:02:00] So

we had our own seats in chapel. And attendance was taken. There was some advantages to that, because it was a place where announcements could be made and where you felt you were part of the whole student body. I know things are very different now. But sometimes I think it wasn't too bad an idea to have an assembly where you felt that you really were a part of what was going on.

MR: Everyone together. In other words, in classes you were all separated, and –

HBC: Yes.

MR: – this was the one time when you got together.

HBC: Was one time when we, almost all the student body, got together. Of course, we met in Pembroke Hall for my first few years. Alumnae Hall was finished during that time. So I believe we were the first class that had – [00:03:00] I don't remember if it was junior prom or senior prom – in Alumnae Hall.

MR: In Alumnae Hall.

HBC: So we felt that we had [to?] attend a very special privilege.

MR: When you attended classes, were they all separate from Brown classes or were some of them (inaudible)...?

HBC: I would say that in my day, if there were enough students to have separate classes, they were – in fact, almost all freshman classes were separate. But in some of the advanced classes where there were only a few men and a few women taking the classes, they were together. And the women definitely did have classes on the Hill. I don't think men ever came to –

MR: Pembroke.

HBC: – Pembroke. But we did go over there for special classes. Now, in biology, which eventually became my major, [00:04:00], we had all the classes over there.

MR: All the classes were at Brown?

HBC: All the classes were on the Hill. And freshman biology was in the - Metcalf over there. Is that – what is it they call it?.

MR: Yes.

HBC: Well it still is the biology building, although there are several others. Because the thing that interests me is that the J. Walter Wilson building and the Herbert Walter building and all those – are for people with whom I studied, under whom I worked. So those were very special people to me. I was also here at an interesting time because of Dr. Mead, who'd been in the biology department, became Dean Mead, I believe in my senior year. And then Dr. [00:05:00] Young came in to take his class in embryology the year I was a graduate student there. So, he was a rather interesting teacher. And we who had him felt very fortunate to have had him as a –

MR: Oh, good. When you say “we” –

HBC: – teacher of embryology.

MR: – were there many other women in the classes? Were there many other women from Pembroke who were taking biology classes at that time, or were you...

HBC: Yes, there were some. Of course, we were required to take science courses. So many people took biology. One, [in the first class?], as a required course. But then other people went on. And my experience was this: I went to Silver Bay at the end of my freshman year, which was the – you probably don't even know about Silver Bay. Silver Bay is a place on Lake George where they held a conference of [00:06:00] all the Christian Associations of all the various colleges. Usually right after college was over in June. For some reason, I don't know why, I was

elected as freshman representative. And one of the girls there was Gladys Holmes, who was majoring in biology. And she was so enthusiastic about her courses and especially about Dr. Walter, who was the teacher of comparative anatomy, that when I came back – I don't now remember what course I canceled, but some sophomore course that I was planning to take I dropped and took comparative anatomy. And from then on I was...

MR: So that was when you made your decision.

HBC: That's when I made my decision, was really at this summer conference. Because of Gladys Holmes, [00:07:00] who was so enthusiastic about the work she was doing.

MR: And Gladys Holmes was another student at Pembroke?

HBC: She got her PhD in 1929 from Brown, when I got my master's degree. And yesterday, (inaudible) I was invited to stand up at the division of biology presentation of degrees. I was wearing the robe that was originally hers, for her Brown degree. Nowadays, of course, they have Brown robes. But they didn't then. And she went on to teach. But finally she was married, and they made her robe –

MR: Oh, that's wonderful.

HBC: [and I?] got around again [PhD?].

MR: So she was an undergraduate also, while you were an undergraduate. Is that right?

HBC: I think she must – I can't quite remember [00:08:00] her class. But I think she must have been a senior when I was a freshman. Or –

MR: So anyway, you –

HBC: – she was going into her senior year when I was going into my sophomore year.

MR: – so it was when you were going into your sophomore year that you made that decision –

HBC: Yes.

MR: – to go into the sciences and to go into biology.

HBC: That's right. And then of course I took bacteriology and physiology and comparative anatomy. And eventually, was an assistant to Dr. Walter in comparative anatomy. And then I got a position, when I got my master's degree, at Smith College, and taught mammalian anatomy over there. So it was very interesting. Really got to working on the thing that I had [changed to teach – to do?].

MR: What were your classes like, when you were taking all of these higher-level biology classes at Brown? [00:09:00]

HBC: As I remember, they were all mixed then. I mean, we were all taking – men and women were taking classes together. Actually, of course, we were doing advanced work all the time. Nowadays, I'm sure they teach entirely different things in physiology than they did then. But everybody seemed to be well-satisfied with the type of things that – Dr. Mitchell, as I understand, was sort of later referred to as pH Missile – Mitchell – because he was so interested in getting the pH of everything and he was sort of gearing his courses to the pre-medical. But those of us who weren't pre-medical didn't resent it at the time at all. [00:10:00] But we thought we were getting good zoological physiology too.

MR: Education, yeah. Good.

HBC: And Dr. Walter had such a wonderful sense of humor. Everybody adored him. He was very nice. And Dr. J. Walter Wilson always made us think. He was wonderful in seminars, because we had seminars in the evening, oftentimes at his home, and we'd walk back discussing

what we'd been talking about. Never any little frittery talk, because we were all so excited about what we'd been talking...

MR: About the subject.

HBC: Yes. I definitely remember that. It was a very exciting thing to go to the seminars.

MR: It sounds like you had a fair amount of encouragement from professors and from this other woman.

HBC: Oh we did. And of course, you [00:11:00] realize, in 1929, that was the beginning of the Depression. And to be presented by my [majored?] professor with a letter saying they're looking for an instructor at Smith, I think you do – when you go up there...

MR: That's wonderful. How did you find out about that?

HBC: Well, he prese– that's what I'm saying! He wrote to him. And he – I didn't even have to look for a job. Well, I had to go up and interview. But he said, "I think you would be the one that would answer the description of the person they're looking for." Because they wanted somebody to teach mammalian anatomy as well as freshman zoology. So I went up there and I got the job. And, of course, that was very – Oh it's just like now, when jobs are hard to get. So I was extremely lucky, because they depended on this [00:12:00] department as being one who would produce somebody that they could rely on. What should I say? It wasn't because I was particularly good, but because at Smith they thought that somebody that Brown recommended would be the sort of person...

MR: Right. But Dr. Walter must have thought that you were good at that [point?]. (laughs)

HBC: Well, anyway. So I was there for two years, and then I decided, if I was going to teach in college for the rest of my life, I needed to get a PhD. So I eventually went to Duke. And then I

found that botany was interesting. Well, I hadn't – I'd been a nature counselor and, you know, I knew about plants (inaudible). And so I minored in botany. That's where I met my husband.

MR: At Duke.

HBC: From – practically – well, I taught at Wellesley afterwards, [00:13:00] in zoology, but I felt I was beginning to be a botanist from that point. And then I took time off to have four children, and...

MR: That was after you finished your degree at Duke.

HBC: And taught for five years at Wellesley.

MR: And then taught for five years at Wellesley.

HBC: Yes. We were married during that time, and my husband was at Harvard, doing graduate work.

MR: While you were teaching at Wellesley –

HBC: Yes.

MR: – he was at Harvard?

HBC: And then he got his degree – it was a very funny arrangement. I don't know if they did it before or have done it since. He had a scholarship, or a grant, from Duke and from Harvard to work at Harvard, to do his research there, under Professor Ames. Although he was taking his coursework at Duke – for his PhD, I'm talking about. He had a master's. And it was sort of [00:14:00] a toss-up as to whether he would get the degree from Harvard or Duke, because they were each honoring the other work, you see. But he finally got it from Duke. Because he really had more coursework there. And then, he was appointed to the staff of the Botanical Museum of

Harvard. So Harvard honored this by appointing him to the staff. So, of course, we – all those years we've got the Harvard alumni publication. And lately they sent a thing, you know, checking up on the status. Well, it's pretty hard to explain. He was a graduate student, but he had no Harvard degree. But he did his work there, or lots of it. So that was very nice. And then we had four children, and eventually I went back to work with him.

MR: So it was after you'd been [00:15:00] teaching for five years at Wellesley that you took some time off to have your four children? And that's...

HBC: Once I was old enough for that. (laughs)

MR: How old were your children when you started to go back to work, when you started to...

HBC: I didn't really start back full-time, except for one semester that I taught in the University of Maryland system, because they called me in to substitute for a few weeks, and it was always messed up. And then they asked me to come back. But by that time we'd decided to go to Texas.

MR: How old were your children then?

HBC: And fortunately my sister was living next door. So the youngest was in kindergarten, but could come home to her house, you see. So it worked out all right. But then we went to Texas, and I didn't work full-time until he was in school all day. And then I worked – well, I didn't really work full-time. I always got home before the children got home from school. But when they were finally in high school, old enough to take care of [00:16:00] themselves, then I worked full-time.

MR: And you were collaborating with your husband at that point?

HBC: In botanical things. And he was the author, or co-author, of 10 botanical books, you know, scientific books. And another one on adventures on the Alaskan highway. But I was not author, except until the latter years. And I was co-author of the last two books. But I did –

MR: With him.

HBC: – you know, I – yes. I was doing a lot of things behind the scenes. I contributed chapters to the *Manual of the Plants of Texas*. But I worked right along in the botanical laboratories –

MR: Kept with it.

HBC: – good many years. Well, my young son is 32. I started when he was (laughter) through grad – you know, through the fourth grade –

MR: Preschool.

HBC: – to work full-time.

MR: Well, I see. [00:17:00]

HBC: I'm still working, you see. I'm still working on this latest project, coordinating the other botanists on the flora of Florida. I'm doing sedges and other people are doing other big families of the monocots, which is grasses, sedges. I don't know how much botany you're used to.

MR: Not a lot. (laughter)

HBC: But we hope to get the first volume of this out, sometime in the next year or so. And I'm coordinating the work of the other botanists in Florida, who are working on their specialties. It will be a cooperative effort. But my husband had said –

MR: [Nice?] project.

HBC: – we would start it, get going and – after he died they said well, we'll keep on, and coordinate it. [00:18:00]

MR: So you're carrying on his work.

HBC: So I have no time to retire.

MR: No, it doesn't sound like it. (laughter) Keeping yourself quite, quite active.

HBC: Well, when I was called about this, I said, "Well, the interesting thing is that, in our day, when we discussed women careers, you know, there were relatively few women who really had careers and families." And Mrs. Gilbreth was always pointed out as one who was outstanding.

MR: Who's Mrs. Gilbreth?

HBC: Oh, don't tell me you don't know about the Gilbreth family. The house was up here on Brown Street, and I've been trying to think exactly where, whether it was the corner of Angell or (inaudible). Where the new building's now. The Gilbreths were famous [00:19:00] for several generations between you and me because one of the sons wrote a book *Cheaper by the Dozen*, I think.

MR: Oh, Okay.

HBC: There never were 12 children all at once, because one of them had died before the twelfth was born. But there were 10 in the family when they lived up here. And I knew one of the girls very well. And used to go to the house. Mr. Gilbreth had been one of the innovators in what they called – oh dear. Energy saving. Well, it was some other word. But it meant have things arranged so kitchens, for instance, have all the counters the right height, and things [00:20:00] arranged in the order you would use them, you know. Having the refrigerator door open the right way and all that kind of thing. And, of course, he had done this in business – efficiency! He was an efficiency expert! That's what they called him. And it was an innovative thing in those days; people had never thought about planning things so that they would run efficiently. But he went

into industries, and he told people how to rearrange things so they'd be more efficient. And after he died, she carried on his work. But the fact that she had had 12 children, 11 living, was...

MR: Had they worked together when he was alive? Had they collaborated?

HBC: Somewhat, yes. [Not a lot?], You know, at lunch time. (laughter) Having 12 kids.

MR: Twelve kids.

HBC: Oh and one right after the other.

MR: So she was held up as an example.

HBC: She was held up as *the* example.

MR: By whom?

HBC: Well...

MR: By teachers, or...

HBC: Whoever. We'd talk about careers, you know? Women could have careers! [00:21:00] In my day, it was a career or a family. It seemed to be – you had to make a choice. But then, there were these few people who had had both.

MR: When you say “in my day,” do you mean when you were at Pembroke?

HBC: I mean, 50 years ago. Fifty years ago. Fifty-five years ago, actually. So there were relatively few women who could be held up as, well, “See? You can do it. You can do it.” And so, I remember all of us said – some of us thought – “Well, who wants to anyway?”

MR: Do both, you mean.

HBC: Well...

MR: “Who wants to do both?”

HBC: “Who wants to do both?” And of course we wanted to be career-oriented and all that.

MR: You did?

HBC: Yeah. But lately, I thought, “Well, ha, ha, ha. I wasn’t even thinking about it.”

MR: And it happened.

HBC: But I’ve had a career. And I’ve had a family – and a very happy, good family. And a wonderful husband. [00:22:00] For 45 years we’ve worked together. I hadn’t thought about it all these years, really.

MR: Well, that’s really interesting. So when you were in school, you thought you wanted to have a career.

HBC: Yes.

MR: You didn’t think about it in terms of juggling.

HBC: Because I – “because,” I should say, not “becuz,” but “because I was introducing the speaker once a month, you know, in chapel, I was always cast as the dean in any of the, you know, skits and everything. And I think even in my write-up they said I was probably slated to be a dean. Dean Morriss often wore long beads (inaudible), and I had some, and my mother had some. So every time we had the skit I would put on these long beads and...

MR: And play [00:23:00] Dean Morriss.

HBC: And it was a joke. I was going to be a dean, be a dean. So I think I came back for my tenth reunion, and somebody said, “What? You’re not a dean yet? What’s the matter with you?” But I never did get to be a dean.

MR: Well, you mentioned Dean Morriss. I was wondering if you had any contact with her while you were here, as an undergraduate, or in your year doing your master’s.

HBC: Well, what do – you mean, contact with...

MR: Was it, like, individually or was it [relationship?]...?

HBC: Oh yes. She was really very close to the – do they still have a Question Club now?

MR: No.

HBC: Oh no. Well, do you know –

MR: What was the Question Club?

HBC: – what Question Club was?

MR: No.

HBC: The presidents of all the organizations – student government; Komians; senior class, I guess; Christian Association – what else did they have – (inaudible). [00:24:00] What was that (inaudible)? Oh, I can’t think. There were 10 senior presidents of our organizations. Were – well, it was sort of like the clubs they have now, for club presidents, where presidents get together and they discuss things and then take this back to their own organizations. So, the Question Club consisted of the presidents – the seniors, presidents of all the organizations, the class president.

And I would say that Dean Morriss was really in good contact with Question Club. And all the presidents felt that they were free to go to her and discuss things. And I always felt [00:25:00] that I was on easy terms with her, if you know what I mean. I mean that as, I didn't hesitate to go ask her something if I wanted to, or explain something to her. I was (inaudible).

MR: Oh good. So that was helpful?

HBC: Yes. She was – I liked her very much. I thought she was a very good dean. So I was flattered when my classmates always –

MR: Cast you as –

HBC: – cast me as the dean.

MR: – Dean Morriss.

HBC: But I didn't ever get to be a dean.

MR: Well, you certainly did quite a bit else. You said before that “we” – “we thought of ourselves as having careers.” So you mean other women that were in your class? Other women that you were in school with at Pembroke?

HBC: Yes, I think there were several people who wanted to be college teachers and wanted to go on and [00:26:00] do something in the line of a career. Of course, there were, I think, a lot of people from our class who were already engaged when they graduated and hadn't thought much about that sort of thing. But in those days, couples usually didn't marry until the man had a job or some way to support things. Of course, much later, if the girl graduated and had a job, she might support her husband through graduate school, and that sort of thing and I'm sure it was reversed, eventually, many times. But in the '20s and '30s, in the time of the Depression, you really didn't do that very much. That came a lot later.

MR: Right. So when you were a junior and a [00:27:00] senior you were still at Pembroke, and you knew that you were going to be – you knew that you were majoring in biology, in sciences. Did you have any sense that it was difficult for a woman to be in the sciences at that time? Did you notice any sense of the difficulty, or...

HBC: No, I don't think so. Actually, I don't think the number of women getting PhDs in biology has increased as much as it has in some other fields. Now, I have no statistics to prove this, but I think the number of women in mathematics and some other fields – and I'm quite sure of this in the south – has increased much more rapidly than in the field of biology. Now, I may not be right about that, but [00:28:00] as I think about it, it seems to me that in my early years teaching and all, there were a good many women in biology. But there aren't many more women in proportion now. Now, I may be wrong about that.

MR: Well, that's interesting, though. That's how (inaudible; overlapping dialogue).

HBC: I mean, as I said, I have no statistics. That's just a feeling I have.

MR: Going, right. Do you have a sense, over the course of your career as a biologist, that there have been times that have been easier for women in the sciences or times that were harder? In the sciences or else in general, any sense that it got harder at times? It sounds, from what you're saying, that when you were at Pembroke, there were other women in science.

HBC: Oh yes. There were other women.

MR: Did that change?

HBC: And a good many of the people who did major in biology [00:29:00] were going on to teach summer course in women's colleges. Because there were several women's colleges where they had a majority of women teachers. And maybe in industry there were relatively few. And I think there were probably relatively few chemists, women who were chemists. Fewer than there are now. I don't know. I have a niece who's a chemist at DuPont and has an excellent

position. Has three or four secretaries under her. Under her division. And I feel like that wouldn't have happened soon after I was in college. Now again, I may be wrong, because I have no statistics on this.

MR: But you – just from your impressions.

HBC: Yeah. [00:30:00] But I am very glad that I went to Brown and did what I did. One thing I say would have been different if the time had been different is that I went to Cold Spring Harbor after my junior year, for a summer course. And I went to Woods Hole after my senior year. And I was very much interested in oceanographic sciences. Well, women weren't going into that. In fact, there was no oceanography as there is today. It's just a combination of various fields. And I've often thought over the years that had this started sooner, that's something I really would have liked to have done. But it's a field that has developed much later. And plus, a lot of the women in that aren't sure. And I've [00:31:00] thought sometimes, "Well, if I had been beginning now, I would go into this field." So I think that has changed tremendously. The whole field's changed. So women – or men?

MR: There's definitely talk now among women who are in the sciences as undergraduates or graduates of the difficulty of being a woman in the sciences, and fields where there are a lot of men in the field and not a lot of women who you can look to and say, "Oh, there's a woman who's successful in the sciences." You're one of them, but there aren't – it seems now a lot of them.

HBC: You see, that's what I'm saying. I don't think the proportion of women has increased. And of course one thing – as I said, in my day, a woman – if she looked [00:32:00] forward to teaching in college, perhaps expected to teach in a women's college. And of course you're getting fewer and fewer all-women's colleges. So that has changed somewhat.

MR: Is there anything that you would want to say to women students now who are in the sciences? Anything, looking back over, you would tell them?

HBC: Only that very few people can say, when they're a junior in college, "This is exactly what I want to do." It doesn't always work out that way. And sometimes, what you really want to do, some – I mean, what you think you really want to – let me put it differently. What you *think* you want to do, you'll find is not what you really want to do. And maybe 20 years later, you suddenly realize, "Now, I love it! This is doing – this is what I want to do." [00:33:00] And it might be something entirely different. So what I would say to students is don't get discouraged if in the first year or second year or even tenth year, you haven't attained the goal that you sort of set as a senior in college, perhaps. Because things can change, and new things are coming in.

MR: Did you have that experience over at – you said you decided you wanted to be in biology in your sophomore year.

HBC: Of course. Of course. I thought I was going to be in the field of zoology, and turned out to almost drop zoology and go into botany. So I changed my orientation, shall we say, quite drastically. Well, not drastically, but –

MR: Somewhat.

HBC: – different. Another thing that I would like to say to the younger generation is that just because [00:34:00] somebody passes 50, or 60, or 70, don't think they don't know anything. They haven't dropped out entirely. I must admit, that until just a short time ago, I went along with all this computer – revolutions, and we're thinking, "Well, this is – I'm too old for that. I can't keep up with this." But now, when we're working on this – and we don't have a big computer system at (inaudible) [gardens?], but I have friends who do their writing on a word processor all the time. And I have many friends who are talking about computers all the time. My daughter is very much into them. And another young friend who's knee-deep and eye-deep, whatever, in computers. [00:35:00] But one of the young men who is working on this project with Florida flora said, "As an adjunct professor at a local college, I have access to three different systems." He said, "I would like to know which system you're going to use to put these things on disks. And then I will try to use a system that is compatible so that I can do my disk and it will be all ready to go into the one that will go to the printer." So I suddenly thought to

myself, "I've got to know more about computers!" So when I visit my son, there tomorrow, who's in electronic engineering, and my daughter, who works with computers all the time, I'm going to suddenly open my mind and learn something about all these. And even though [00:36:00] I don't have access to a computer where we are, I'm going to know about this so I can be intelligent about advising our people. And who knows, I might buy a word processor. And if I do, I want, again, to get one that will be compatible with the system that's being used in Florida, the system in the university.

MR: Certainly keeping up with all the...

HBC: I suddenly decided, "How stupid to sort of put that out of your mind. You've got to go along with the times." And, as I said, I'm not very good at it right now. But I'm going to learn!

MR: You sound determined.

HBC: Think how old I am. I'm past my seventy-sixth birthday. So, my message is, you know, don't think we're all over the hill, going down, down, down. We still have interest in what's going on.

MR: You're certainly a lesson in that.

HBC: That's the thing [00:37:00] working where I am. All the people are much younger. And they sort of looked at my husband and me as grandparents. But they don't treat us as somebody who's too old to know anything. I admit too with some of the more advanced biology now, we know what's going on, but we couldn't give a talk on it. The DNA, genetic splits, and all that sort of thing. We understand what they're doing, the diagrams on the board, we give a talk on that. But we try to keep up with all these things that have come in in the last 10, 15 years. Since we were in school (inaudible). So I'd like to tell young people it's fine to learn all new [00:38:00] things, but you've got to realize that some of the older people (inaudible).

MR: On a slightly different note, I wonder if you can recall anything over the course of your time as a biologist that you saw as an obstacle or a problem. Specifically related to your being a woman. Do you know?

HBC: Well, I'm sure the salaries for women were less than for men in equal positions. Instructor in college, women got less than men. And this is true in many instances now, although they try to say it isn't, still it's true. And I am very adamant about that. I think that women [00:39:00] should have equal pay for equal work. Now, I know that there are some positions that men maybe can fill better than women, and some others that women can fill better than men. In some ways, women relate to people better than men do. I mean, supervisory positions where you have to deal with another group, I think sometimes women get along better than men. And I'm not saying there are not differences, and there are not some positions that men should probably do – are better at than women. But I'm talking about for equal jobs, whatever – I mean, whether they're positions, salary, hourly pay – that women should get the same as men. [00:40:00]

MR: Is that disparity in salaries between men and women something that you were aware of, say when you were at Wellesley or –

HBC: Oh yes, I think so. I think all along, we realized it.

MR: – Smith?

HBC: I remember, oh, nearly 20 years ago, when I was working in Texas, I had a position that nobody else had. I mean, I was doing things there was no comparable position that men were doing. And I guess it was Brown who sent out – somebody. Some organization was studying this and sent out a questionnaire, and there was one saying, “Do you, as a woman, get a salary equal to a man which is doing the same job?” Now, there was no man doing the same job I was doing. So I went to a chemist, who was a woman, and discussed it with her. She said, “I've never gotten equal salary.” [00:41:00] And she was pretty upset because there was a younger man...

MR: And when was this?

HBC: The twenty – well , this was...

MR: You were in Texas then?

HBC: Tex – yeah. We actually weren't in Texas. I mean, my husband was with USDA for a while. Ten years. And then we went to the Texas Research Foundation. And he wrote, with the professor at the university, *Manual of the Plants of Texas*. There had never been, you know, never been a manual of the plants. And I was doing the background, helping collect (inaudible)...

MR: Was this in the '40s?

HBC: No. No. We went there in '56. So it was '56. (inaudible) this is the time I'm talking about. So it was probably – oh, like, '65. I'd say about 20 years ago is exactly when it was. [00:42:00] And she was very upset about this. I mean, I didn't know when I asked her that it was an extremely sore point for her. Because she had a master's degree and she'd been doing this chemical analysis in agriculture, plant science work, and she was very upset that the women were getting much less for equal work.

MR: So it was something that was discussed...

HBC: I mean, I wasn't conscious of it personally. Because, as I say, I had no male counterpart. But when I got in contact with her, she was very conscious of it. Well, I date that, from that particular experience.

MR: I wonder if you could talk a little more about your years in graduate school, and what that was like, at Duke.

HBC: Oh, at Duke?

MR: Yeah.

HBC: Oh, well. [00:43:00] Again, I started thinking, when I went to Duke, that I was going to work in animal behavior. And I did take some courses under the professor who was there. But then I did work in cell physiology. And the professor I had there was a younger man who was not – didn't have as good a reputation as this older man who'd published so much. But every time you'd go to class, he would pose some question. And in fact, you may have missed part of a lecture. Because you were thinking of this thing. Well, now, if that's so, how does this work out? And so, you'd suddenly jump back and say, "Well, what is he saying now?" But he [00:44:00] made his students think so much, you were fascinated by all these possibilities, that I ended up working with him in cell physiology. And worked with [Marina Levy?]. I was fascinated by – you could go so far, you could control so much, if you presently knew what we're controlling, I mean, you know, temperature, light, all those kinds of things. Acidity and stuff. And yet, all this behavior would change. I mean, obviously there was something you didn't know how to control. And it was always such a challenge, that I – as I said, I got my degree in cell physiology, because he was such a challenge. So that was something I realized, that... And afterwards, this other professor [00:45:00] said something about, "How did you ha – " He said, "What did you – " He said, "I was looking over some things, and apparently you came here to work with me. How is it you've changed?" I said, "Well, for one thing, Professor [Pierce?], you never acted like you wanted a graduate student." It was sort of, "Oh, sure, I'll take you if you want – I'll take you if I have to" type of thing. Whereas this other man was always throwing out all these ideas, and you'd talk to him, and he would say, "Well, now, have you thought of progressing along this line? Of seeing what you could do with research here?" He was so challenging that I didn't...

MR: Did other graduate students feel that way also?

HBC: Well, he had –

MR: About those particular professors?

HBC: – he had several graduate students –

MR: And about Pierce?

HBC: – who did – well, no, he was well-known. [00:46:00] And he had a lot of graduate students. But I guess, maybe he felt he just didn't – well, he said something to me once. "I never wanted to take graduate students away from anybody else." In other words, he never went out of his way to attract them. People were attracted because he had a reputation, but he never went out of his way to take. And – so that was the reason I changed, really, because I felt much more challenged by this other... But that was a really interesting experience. Because I had so many times when it made me think. Because Professor Currier in astronomy, at Brown, had that same faculty of throwing something out and you begin to think about it. And it would take your mind off in a tangent. And, you know, you'd think, "Is that [00:47:00] (inaudible)?" But I remember having that experience with him too. Not that I intended to go on with astronomy ever, but his –

MR: It made you think.

HBC: – approach to astronomy made you think. Well, J. Walter Wilson was sort of that way too.

MR: Same way, yeah. That's what you were saying.

HBC: He'd throw out things that you couldn't answer. And you'd feel, "Well, then, how would you answer that? What kind of research would feed into an answer (inaudible)?"

MR: Either when you were at Brown or when you were at Duke, was there ever a time when you felt that your being a woman presented any kind of special problems in working with your professors? Or that they had a different attitude toward you?

HBC: I don't think so. I had a challenge, in that there was a woman [00:48:00] a year ahead of me.

MR: This was at Duke, or...

HBC: At Duke. Who would've been – of course, Duke had become a university relatively recently. It was a very old college, Trinity College. But the Duke money had promoted it into a university. And I was there when it was growing and they were building the chapel and all these beautiful buildings. But the woman a year ahead of me was to receive her PhD in zoology in June. And she would've been the first woman to get a degree in zoology. But, for some reason, she either didn't complete her thesis or she was ill, I don't remember what it was. But she did not get her degree. Now, I often wondered – and I think my husband checked this out once. Then the next year, I got – I was the only woman to get a degree in zoology. There were two men. [00:49:00] Or three men. But I was the first woman at least to be presented with a degree. Because if she'd got it in between, it was in absentia-type. And I think my husband checked, and she didn't get it, until after I did. I mean, it was something that I couldn't absolutely say. But with this exception and the explanation, I really was the first woman to get a PhD in zoology there. So it was sort of a challenge, you know. But there were other women in the department.

MR: In biology.

HBC: Yeah. There were a few.

MR: Were there others who got their degree (inaudible; overlapping dialogue)?

HBC: Not too many, actually. But there were a few.

MR: Well, what was that like? Did you think of it at that time, that you were one of the very few women who were advanced to that point where you were getting your PhD?

HBC: Well, of course, the situation at Duke was similar to the situation at Brown. [00:50:00] There was a women's campus and a men's campus. And I was teaching at Duke. See, I'd been teaching at college for two years. So it was a teaching fellowship.

MR: This was when you were a graduate student.

HBC: At Duke. I was a fellow at Duke. Which, of course, doesn't mean the same thing as a fellow at Brown. (laughter) But I was teaching full-time as an instructor of – well, at least one course, while doing my graduate work. But I was – why did you ask me this?

MR: Oh, I was asking what it was like to be one of the few women...

HBC: Oh, what it was like. And it was the same situation there. It was women (inaudible) campus. And the classes that were large enough for women alone were separate, were held on the [00:51:00] women's campus. And the classes for men on the men's campus. But then, as you got into the graduate work, and there were fewer students, and maybe only one class at the university, then the men and women together. Sometimes the men had to go to the women's campus, if the class happened to be taught there for some reason. Scheduled. But it was the same situation. So I was sort of used to the situation there.

MR: Oh, I see. Because you'd been doing it here.

HBC: And then, in the graduate school, the men and women [weren't?] on the same level. So I really didn't have to orient myself to the situation. They're not too many universities that were that way, actually. But that was quite easy. But I was the only woman in zoology to get a PhD. At the time that I got it, there were several men.

MR: Needless to say, then, you must not [00:52:00] have had any women professors. If you were the first.

HBC: Now, wait a minute.

MR: Did you have any teachers?

HBC: I think there were none in zoology. I can't remember. But there was a woman professor in botany. And she was ranked as assistant professor. And there were women in other departments.

There was women in psychology, women in philosophy, and a woman in art department. So there were women professors there, yes.

MR: Did you have any contact with them at all, or mostly it was within your department?

HBC: The very interesting thing about Duke was they had an Explorers' Club. Which was purely a fun thing to do weekends for people interested in the outdoors. [00:53:00] But the thing about the Explorers' Club, the president came sometimes. Deans of...faculty, graduate students, undergraduates. So you got to meet people through this Explorers' Club – which was an outdoor, fun thing – in all levels of the university. And my future husband and I were both very active in this, and went on a good many trips. In fact, I guess we met on these trips, really. Went on a good many of them, and many of our friends were Duke Explorers. So that was a wonderful organization, in that you got to know people in other departments, in other levels of the university. And [00:54:00] somehow you felt a part of the whole thing that way. I've forgotten how you started your question. But the answer is that through this Explorers' Club –

MR: You did...

HBC: – which, of course, was only a small majority of the people in the university – but it was the people who liked the outdoors, and...

MR: So did you have contact with other women professors through that also?

HBC: Oh yes. And through that I met the woman who was head of the physical education department and one of the women who taught in another department. And some of the young assistants who were working, as I was, in zoology, in other departments. So it was a wonderful way to have contact. In addition, one of the professors [00:55:00] who lived right off the campus had open house every Sunday night. And, again, that was a somewhat different route. But I remember the dean of men came regularly to that. And several other people who were very active in the university. And it was a wonderful – you never knew what was going on in these evenings. Sometimes it was like, packed with – foolishness. And other times it'd be very deep

discussions. But Sunday night at the Cunninghams was something you didn't want to miss after you got used to going. So, there were several things that enabled you to meet people outside your department and outside of your level of [00:56:00] academic activity.

MR: Getting back to Pembroke a little bit, was there anything comparable that helped you here at Pembroke?

HBC: No, I wouldn't say so. I don't think so. Except, of course, if you were active in Komians, you got to meet different people. Or, some other things. But I wouldn't say there was anything really comparable to that here.

MR: What was your year as a graduate student at Pembroke? Now, that was at Pembroke, as a graduate student, not...?

HBC: Yes. It was a very –

MR: What was that like?

HBC: – a very busy year. Because I had some advanced credits toward graduate work. Because I used my Cold Spring hour credits after my junior year toward graduating, which was perfectly good. And during my senior year, I took a graduate course. So after [00:57:00] I graduated, or when I graduated, I had graduate credit. Plus that year I went to Woods Hole and got credit for that. So I got it in one year.

MR: It was a two-year program.

HBC: Because I had – yeah. I got my master's degree. Helped Dr. Walter. We had labs. Corrected papers and printed lab work and stuff. And also wrote a thesis. Did my own research. But I could do it, because I only had to take – well, three courses or whatever.

MR: Because you'd done the other work.

HBC: Because I had two credits.

MR: Were there other women who were receiving masters' in biology at that time? Were you, again, or before then, the only one?

HBC: There was one other woman that I know. We worked together as graduate [00:58:00] assistants. I really can't say. There may have been somebody in bacteriology. But I really don't remember. Do you have anybody else listed?

MR: No. No. Not that I know of. I'm just wondering if you were – you had mentioned that at Duke you were the only woman in zoology, and I wondered if it was a similar situation at Pembroke.

HBC: Well, there was one other woman, I'm sure. Her name is slipping me. You know, if she should walk in the door, I'd remember her [face loopy?]. I haven't seen her since then. But there may have been somebody else who was working in physiology. So I won't say [that?] the two of us were the only ones.

MR: There weren't very many.

HBC: No, there weren't many. There were maybe four, or something like that. Probably (inaudible) No, we were in the [00:59:00] majority here, and at Duke. But...

MR: You *weren't* in the majority.

HBC: What?

MR: You weren't in the majority.

HBC: Oh, yeah, I say, we *were* – the women were – were *not* in the majority (laughter) is what I'm saying. Were *not* in the majority, either here or at Duke. In other words, back way of putting it. We were definitely in the minority there.

MR: I know we're skipping around a little bit. But I wanted to go back also to your undergraduate years at Pembroke, and ask a little bit about what relations between the men and women students were like. Do you recall about that, either as an undergraduate or in your years at graduate...?

HBC: Well, because – there are a few of the girls who definitely dated men. But in planning this '28 reunion, they asked if the '28 men [01:00:00] – I mean, oh – 1928 – would like to sit at the same table as the women. The women said, "No!"

MR: The women said no.

HBC: The women said no! In other words, "They wouldn't pay too much attention to us in those days. Why should we pay any attention to [them?]" Well, of course, in spite of them, some of them married. You know. And it was sort of a joke. Because at the women's tables, there were some husbands who had been at Brown at the same time. And at the men's tables there were a few women who had been at Brown, maybe not in the same class, but at the same time. And we certainly dated – as a matter of fact, I dated, as an undergraduate, I dated a young instructor, and I can't even remember his name. Isn't that awful? He – we went to [Childs?] after a dance, and he ordered a dozen eggs.

MR: A dozen?

HBC: A dozen [01:01:00] eggs. You know. Scrambled, or something or other. He was tall and thin, and it didn't look like he put on much weight. But he had a tremendous appetite. Everybody laughed about it. So, Childs, I guess, went long before you were here. But Childs, downtown, was open all night. The only place. So after the dance or fraternity things that lasted late, we'd go to Childs to eat. And I remember one [evening?] this young instructor ordered a dozen eggs.

Anyway. I dated him a while. And I dated a graduate student in chemistry. But I never did date undergraduates. Really didn't. And then eventually I dated a bout of men, and so I didn't worry [01:02:00] and pine, but we were not exactly friendly in those days.

MR: The men and the women?

MR: The men and the women. Well, they sort of resented us, I think. We said, "Okay..."

Track 2

HBC: "...house. Everything is always in confusion, and the children hadn't been put to bed, and she's supposed to go out at 8:00, you know; she's not even dressed herself, and nothing's ever ready." I said, "Oh, that just happened once, Patricia. Don't worry about it. That doesn't happen too often." Well, I was going to do something with Georgina one time. I guess maybe that was after her husband got back (inaudible) was leaving the children. And I stopped by Georgina's house on a Sunday, like, at four o'clock or so. And the dinner dishes were still on the table – everything *was* in confusion in her house! And she was always like, "Oh, I never know how to organize. I never know how to do anything." And I saw what Patricia meant. And I began thinking about it. And I thought, "Well, I gue—" because I never – [01:00] well, not that my house is perfect. It sure isn't. But I never went off and left the dinner dishes on the table, or planned to go out and have a babysitter come and didn't have – wasn't ready myself, or had no evidence of preparing anything for the children. So I began to think, you know, maybe it is a good idea not to be married before – she didn't go to college, but I mean, right out of high school, and start in with a family before you've had any business, professional experience, or learned to do anything for yourself. And I thought of that many, many times. I guess I was lucky that I had my so-called career first. And then, of course, again, as women were getting restless because they were housewives, I thought, "Wow. [02:00] I could be in – have a career if I wanted to." But I didn't want to, until the children were grown. So I think –

MR: So you think she was right, maybe?

HBC: – I think maybe Patricia had something there. (laughter) And – oh, she was saying, “Well, I’m not going to marry when I’m young and try to have a family when I’m too young to take care of them.” And I think a lot of the uneasiness of women who think they’ve got to go out and go to work, even if their husbands don’t want them to, or they don’t need to, financially, I think is because they are sort of bored because they – and they don’t have the feeling, “Well, I could do it if I had to, or...” I’ve done it. I’ve experienced it. And now I enjoy doing this. And so I feel that I was really very lucky that my life progressed as it did. [03:00] Not that I planned it that way, maybe, but as I look back I feel I’m lucky that I’ve led a dual life and had the best of both. So that’s all I’ll say. So with this women’s movement of “Push, push, push,” I’ve never been – well, I believe in ERA, as I say – equal opportunity and pay and all these things. But I sometimes think that we’ve been overdoing some of these things. Like a lot of this joking about, you know, women not wanting men to hold the doors. Well, (inaudible), as a friend who’s here says, she never got over when my husband came up to visit, before we married. And I wasn’t feeling too well. So he went out with her. She was my [04:00] next-door neighbor and good friend, and she had some deliveries to make or something she was doing. It was Christmastime. So he went along with her. And he opened the door for her to her car, and he (inaudible). She’d never had anybody do – because he was a southern gentleman, brought up (inaudible). And she couldn’t get over this. But he’s done it all his life. Even, I think the last time he sat at the table, he was so ill, he pulled my chair out for me. And he always has. Well, I’ve never resented it as a woman, that I – I mean, I’ve loved it. So, as I say, I just have happened to have the best of both worlds, in a way. And maybe I don’t need to fight for equal opportunity all the way around. But I sometimes think that sometimes women are overdoing it. Why not let [05:00] your boyfriend, your husband, your father, whoever, be a gentleman and treat you like a lady? It doesn’t mean he doesn’t respect you. For instance, I’ve always done the income tax. I mean, a lot of things I’ve always done around the house. In fact, now, it’s not so difficult for me to be a widow, because a lot of things I’ve done. He’s always expected me. He’s never thought I was too dumb to do those things. (laughs) Write a check.

MR: You’re not.

HBC: You know. So maybe I've just been fortunate. But I think a lot of women feel like, you know, pushing at this time. And I feel like saying, "Relax. Enjoy life. You can get more out of it if you do." So I'm not very good to push [06:00] for NOW – is it NOW...?.

MR: But...

HBC: I'm all for them being treated equally. But with respect, (laughter) if I'm putting it across right.

MR: Yeah. I think I understand. You seem to have touched on a number of points, though you were talking earlier about the part about equal salaries and equal pay for work. And that's something that sounds like you were talking –

HBC: And respect.

MR: – about 20 years ago.

HBC: Equal respect. But I do think there are still some things that [have been?] much better than women. And to do it just because you're a woman... I sort of cringe at women driving these [07:00] huge gears and great tractor things and all. I'm not quite ready to accept... As a matter of fact, my husband and I were traveling somewhere, and I don't even remember exactly where it was. And we had sort of skirted a city. And we thought, "Well, first thing we know, we'll be out of the city." And we did want some lunch. So we stopped at one of these truck-stop places. It was really a truck stop. And we were surrounded by truckers. And the table next to us were some women truckers. And they were sort of telling about some of their experiences and whatnot. We [couldn't hear?]. And I thought, "Oh boy. (laughs) Maybe that is not the best job for a woman." I mean, I felt like she was being so sort of pushy and aggressive, and [08:00] I was sort of laughing up my sleeve. Not out loud. When we went out, my husband said, "How would you like to be a truck driver?" I said, "No thanks."

MR: A botanist, but not a truck driver.

HBC: That's not for me. So. Not that there's anything wrong with truck drivers, but I think that probably to handle one of those big rigs is not the best job for a woman. Anyway. And I felt like her talk was a little bit rough for a woman. Ah, well.

MR: [Times change?] Well, thank you very much. That's very enjoyable. It was a lot of fun.

- END -