

Transcript – Rochelle “Shelley” (Miller) Bleeker, Class of 1964

Narrator: Rochelle “Shelley” (Miller) Bleeker

Interviewer: Amy Frisch

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Track 1

Amy Frisch: [00:00] Amy Frisch. I’m in the class of 1990. I’m interviewing Shelly Miller Bleeker of the class of 1964 on April 20th, 1988, at Shelly’s home in Providence.

(break in audio)

AF: [00:10] I guess to start out, why did you come to Brown?

Rochelle “Shelley” (Miller) Bleeker: It was recommended to me by my high-school guidance counselor, and I couldn’t afford to go out of state. My other choice was URI, and everyone told me I should go to the better school.

AF: You grew up in Rhode Island, then?

SMB: I grew up in Rhode Island.

AF: And where did you go to high school?

SMB: Hope High.

AF: Okay. And what can you tell me about your family background?

SMB: Well, my mom and dad also grew up here, born here and neither one of them got out of high school. I really don't even think my mom began high school. My dad did go to Classical High School for a while, because he mentions playing football. But they both left to work. And so, they had absolutely no ability to help me through the college process, except to encourage me to get good grades, because of course I would go. [01:00:00] And I did.

AF: And so, were they working class?

SMB: Mm-hmm, working class. My dad, shortly after they were married, I think bought a delicatessen in South Providence that he had been working in. I think he managed to buy it, and it did real well through when I was very, very young. And then, urban development intervened to make South Providence whatever they were trying to make it. Anyway, what they did was closed down a section of that area, basically Prairie Avenue, which was the way to get down to Willett Avenue, and my father's store. And he lost the business. It went into bankruptcy. Almost everybody's business went into bankruptcy up and down that street. We lost our home eventually. By then I was living in Cranston for a while, and then back to Providence when we lost our home. [02:00] So I ended up back in Providence, where I really had started school. My dad had a heart attack in my senior year of high school, which was a reason, also, that I wasn't going to get out of town. And he ended up working for other people for the rest of his life mostly – he's still alive – for the rest of his working life. First foods, and then other things. He made a living.

AF: Okay. And were there any difficulties about going to college because of your gender? You were saying that they were supportive but –

SMB: Not in my family. Not in my family. No, that's interesting, because I'm Jewish and, actually, I was brought up Orthodox so even the religious background would not have supported a woman going to college, but not my family. My grandmother always gave me a little extra when my report cards were good, [laughs] so it never occurred to me that –

AF: So was it always assumed that you would go to college?

SMB: It was always assumed. [03:00] Always.

AF: Okay. And what did they expect? What kind of an education did they expect you to get? Were there expectations, or...?

SMB: Interestingly, I mean, I don't know if they knew the difference between liberal arts and something else. But they expected me to go to a four-year college, and they never talked about my training for a profession. So I guess college was, like, the Oscar. I mean, if you could get there you could do anything, was pretty much their attitude.

AF: What do you remember about your freshman year and your first day at Pembroke?

SMB: Oh, God. I remember that we sat in a circle at West House, which, of course, became my dorm. And, by the way, in case we don't mention it later, I can't bear that there's no commuters' dorm. [laughter] Because at West House, I made a lot of good friends. And we sat in a circle introducing ourselves, and I remember thinking for a moment about what my best friends [04:00] at high school had done with my name – Rochelle: “Rocky Rochelle,” a bunch of stuff like that. And I said, God, I don't want to go through that again. And so, I introduced myself as Shelley, and that was the first time anyone ever, ever called me Shelley. And that sort of stuck with most of the people who knew me back then.

I remember the women. We made friends so fast, and I find that really interesting, given that I now work in a high school and I see how difficult it is for teenagers to make friends. Maybe it was because we were all going through this incredible experience, you know? We had the handbook with pictures on one hand, [laughter] and everybody's feeling – We had to bring clothing. Well, I guess it's like moving into a dorm, but we were moving in very impermanently.

AF: This was – West House – was this a commuters' dorm?

SMB: West House. We got three days a week if we wanted. But a lot of people didn't want, so we would trade. And some of us stayed [laughter] more than three days. And I lived really so

close – I lived right off of Lloyd Avenue with my folks – [05:00] that I could go back and forth. Anyway, I remember talking about what parties we were going to, and taking the tests. Do you still do that?

AF: Placement tests?

SMB: I don't know what they are. I mean, I don't, because nobody ever said I couldn't take this course or that course. What I'm told they were, were a prediction of how you would do. I mean, I had a feeling it was much more research-oriented. And I remember things like the multiphasic (inaudible). I can't even remember it anymore. It's all we talked about in (inaudible). Some psychological test that –

AF: No, we don't have those anymore.

SMB: – I could use in my profession. But I have such bad memories of it. I can't remember the name of it, but anyway, “Do you love your mother or a rock?” You know questions like that. [laughter] I remember it being very difficult to party, to meet new people, and then to sit for hours on end doing these [06:00] tests.

AF: In the commuters' dorm, then, did you have a roommate or any kind of a relationship like that?

SMB: I don't know how that – I can't remember how that worked. I mean, we were so happy to have a bed – we were called townies – that whoever slept in those rooms we slept with them. It wasn't anything permanent. You never knew who was going to take three days, when.

AF: Okay. And was there any kind of initiation as a freshman?

SMB: I don't remember that. I mean, guys wore beanies. I don't remember us doing anything ritually.

AF: Okay. Or did you have a senior sister then?

SMB: I saw that question. No, no. If I did, she never met me, because I don't remember her.
[laughter]

AF: What was the relationship between the townies and the residential students?

SMB: Well, there wasn't a lot of interaction. I mean, unless you were in a small enough class with somebody to get to know them, there just wasn't a lot of interaction. [07:00] Until I met a gal who was, actually, a year ahead of me at Pembroke. She lived in the dorm across from the Pembroke Library, across from Andrews, in the big quad there – the women's quad, as I call it. And [Hillary?] and I are still friends now. And there were two other women, both commuters. And somehow Hillary – maybe because she'd been an army brat, so to speak, although I think it was the navy, and she moved a lot – she understood us. We were moving a lot, even out of West House, and sometimes staying in friends' dorms. And somehow three of us who were townies and Hillary, who has family here – she didn't have family in many places, but she has some aunts and uncles here – we became best friends, the four of us, straight through to our weddings.

AF: So you were in West House all four years? That was the only commuter dorm, or...?

SMB: No. Okay, let me see if I can get this straight. First – I wrote it down, but somehow my writing is little. [08:00] During my junior year, early in junior year somewhere after Homecoming Weekend, I really, really wanted to get on campus. I really, really was feeling that there was a whole lot I was missing, and that I hadn't done any separation from my folks. And I had taken some time away – a long long weekend away, and missed history class. And I don't know why – I have no memory except maybe she sat in a lecture hall with me – a gal younger than me, graduated a year later, Barbara Garbus – that's her married name, married someone in my class, Dave Garbus...I went to her, because I must have known her from this big lecture hall. Professor Hedges history class was, like, 400. Everybody had to take American History. And I went and asked her if I could borrow her notes, and she wanted me to sit and talk. And that was interesting, because I never [09:00] dropped into the dorms ever, except my friend Hillary. I

mean, you never knew when somebody was studying or whatever. It seemed like a different thing to me. But she gave me the notes. We talked. And I guess I might have talked about not having been in the dorm, and how nice it was. They were nice. They were quite nice. [laughs] They were luxurious to me.

AF: Were these like Miller and – Do you remember?

SMB: This was Andrews Hall. Anyway, Barbara's roommate had just left school for a really interesting reason. You're probably going to – I'm sure if you're doing these interviews you've got a lot of laughs ahead of you. [laughter] Barbara's roommate had signed out. I don't know what she put down. I expect a relative. That's where people in the dorms signed out to, to visit a relative or whatever. What she really did was go across the Pawtucket line 10 minutes away and have a party. She didn't have it. She attended a party at a motel. [10:00] And she was asked to leave school. And Barbara was real, real lonely. And she said, "Why don't you room with me? Try to get into a dorm." And I went to Gretchen Tonks – Dean Tonks – and spoke to her. And apparently she had been a commuter when she went to college, and she had a lot of sympathy, you know, for my need to separate. And so, I ended up spending the rest of that year in the dorm with her. I got a loan. Dean Tonks helped me to apply for a loan.

I went back home my senior year, and I'm not quite sure about all of it, whether I didn't want to take on more money. I think Barbara's roommate was coming back, and I didn't want to push that issue. (inaudible) loved her roommate. Didn't want to push that. I also think I realized I had the best of the both worlds: my mother cooking for me. [laughter] All the guys I knew wanted to come home and be with my mother and I, [11:00] and eat food. I had no curfew. I had use of the car when I was home. I now had a really large group of friends on campus, easy to see. So I went back home. It was quieter, too. I was a very serious student at that time, [laughter] and I couldn't get anything done. There was always somebody screaming, "Let's do something."

AF: You were talking about how Dean Tonks was so sympathetic. What were the women faculty like? Did you consider them strong role models, or –

SMB: There were almost no women faculty. I mean, when I sat down to write about it, it really, really made me sad. I think I was so thrilled with Brown the whole time that it wasn't until something happened in my junior year – I think my junior year. One of the Poli. Sci. professors – that was my major – was on sabbatical, and they brought in a woman to fill the position. [12:00] And I was very, very close to the people in the Poli. Sci. Department. And the guys didn't like her, and I expected the worst. I mean, they were cats. They were absolute cats, "Meow, meow," just like the teenagers I work with.

And this lady – I tried desperately to remember her name, it's something, some like [Rosenberg?] or something. She maybe even had a husband that was coming to Brown. She was wonderful. She was a good communicator, as we say. Whatever Poli. Sci. it was that I was taking, she was wonderful. And I understand from everything I heard that I was really lucky to have missed this guy that went on sabbatical, because he was boring as a post. And I remember arguing with some of the people that I liked a lot in the department. And they just – they had no reason. And I will never forget that.

The only other woman teacher I ever had, and that was for about 10 minutes. [13:00] In my freshman year, I went into French because I had loved French in school. So I chose a French literature course. The most beautiful woman teacher – I mean, she could have been in movies, she was so beautiful and gentle, and she had a really good French accent. I didn't stay in that course because people who went to Brown frequently traveled to France, and I hadn't gotten out of anywhere. So my high school French, just forget it. They were all reading in French, and discussing a book in French, and so I got out. Dean Tonks helped me with that. I went to her and asked for a class change.

AF: Was she the dean of women?

SMB: Dean of women. And what I really wanted to study, with a certain Poli. Sci. teacher – and I didn't know it, but she knew him and she liked him – and I guess I'd gone and sat in in the class, and she let me switch out. In fact, I suspect she did something about a language requirement. [14:00] I don't know. Looking back, there was something. That would have been a half credit, or a half a year's credit – worth of credit, but I didn't get penalized. I don't understand that quite.

AF: Did you – was there a lot of interaction between her and the women students? I mean, did she know you by name, for example, and –

SMB: Not really. She sort of led the women down the aisle at Convocation. You know, both times I'd go into her with a problem that I needed solved, and both times had long chats. But no, I didn't interact with her at all. Rosemary Pierrel was dean then, as I recall, for part of the time I was there. And I never knew her. I didn't study with her in Psychology when –

AF: Were their offices in University Hall, or were they on Pembroke?

SMB: Pembroke. They were on Pembroke campus, yeah.

AF: [15:00] Okay. What was the greatest – what was the most important influence on you at Pembroke?

SMB: I would have to say a teacher in the Poli. Sci. Department, where my major was – Peter Magrath, who I hope is applying for president, [laughs] because he always wanted to be president of Brown, and he's been president in a lot of places. So I hope he's looking at this opening.

AF: Okay, do you remember – so until you had that woman Poli. Sci. professor, do you think you really realized at all the real gap of female role models? Or do you think you even realized then as much as you might now, looking back?

SMB: Looking back, it's almost a farce. And yet, when I thought about it backwards, I said to myself, well, look, you grew up in a world where women's [16:00] self-confidence was basically confirmed and affirmed by men. And so, I got, like, double doses everywhere. I was surrounded by men everywhere. We weren't using words like "role models" then. I was getting educated in the world of education at that time, except in the women's colleges, were basically male-educated. There were no women's studies. There were no Afro studies. I mean, American

Civilization was the newest department when I was there, and I thought that was really interesting.

There was another thing that went on at Pembroke at that time, a whole lot of things. You know, we couldn't help being compared to Brown men, okay? And one thing that was always clear was that [17:00] the messages we were getting was that Pembroke women were just smarter than Brown men. Now, you know, what does that mean? It means that we did better on some tests and better on grades, and we continued to do well in class. But the one thing – and we were special, you know? When a woman spoke up in class, and if what she spoke was appreciated by the teacher, the teacher knew her. There was no way you could just be a name. There were so few of you compared to the Brown men.

On the other hand, at the same time that I think male professors – some, my favorite ones anyway; others I didn't much notice – at the same time, male professors were seeing us as exciting. I think it was exciting to some male professors to see women alive, you know? [laughter] Male students were very sure that one ought not to date a Pembroker. They went wholesale to Wheaton College [18:00] for, I guess, whatever kinds of mixers Wheaton had. Took us out a lot, but then when it was Homecoming and Spring Weekend, brought in their Wheaton or other – Smith was, you know – I joke with men who have married Smith and Wheaton, which some of my real good friends have, because that's who they would bring in for big weekends.

And also, at the same time, and I will never forget this: Wherever he is, I wish I could say hello to him today – Bob Ebin, class of 1962. He and I, standing in front of the Economics department, I believe. He was headed in for an economics class. I was headed across the street to the Poli. Sci. Department. Him arguing with me that no woman could ever be president because we were too emotional, and we just didn't have the rational equipment, as if we were somehow deficient. And I remember arguing with him, and knowing even then [19:00] even though I'd had no female role models or anything that Bob Evan was nuts. He had come up with some theory of female evolution that was absolutely wrong.

So all those kinds of things were going on, that women were different and, you know, if they were intelligent they were not be dated. And I know a lot of senior men, in their senior year, wishing that they had dated a Pembroker because that's who they should marry.

AF: So where did that leave you in terms of social life or dates then?

SMB: Oh, that was no problem because there were lots of guys outside of campus, and some on. And also, I had a really incredible situation, and I don't quite know how it all happened. But I did make friends in that class of '62. Bob Ebin was my first date. I met him Freshman week. Remember exactly what I was wearing. And we carried on a friendship for two years, and dated, and studied together, and never went together. It was never a romantic anything. [20:00] I think that I was fascinated. I mean, he was, to me, the model of what lots of men might be. But he was the only one I knew at the time who really thought women ought not to be there, or something. Or if they were, well, that was fine for four years but you didn't expect them to go on and do anything.

He was friendly with a whole bunch of guys that had a suite in Hope College. And that whole bunch of guys – five total – became my very, very best friends when I wasn't with my friend Hillary or [Leona?] or Barbara Horvitz – the townies and Hillary the dorm person – and when I wasn't with my roommate, although my roommate that year ended up dating one of the guys in the five. I was with them constantly. They really are responsible for getting me on campus. They saved me a seat in the John Hay, especially during exams. I never went home except when they came home with me to eat. There was never a time where I didn't go [21:00] to a social event because I didn't have a date because – I won't mention their names – I mentioned Bob, but I always had a friend to go with. And recently, one of them – Sam [Okoshken?] – we hadn't seen each other since he graduated in '62. And a couple of years ago, on my 20th wedding anniversary, Stan and I went to Paris – April in Paris, April vacation. And I had a reunion with Sam Okoshken, and it was like yesterday. It was like we were standing outside of the mailboxes at Brown, when all of these guys got their notices of whether they were going to law school or graduate school. So, if saw another one of them – [Alan?] who dated my roommate – didn't marry her, but dated her – it would be like yesterday. We were inseparable. We were inseparable. It was weird.

AF: But you did keep in contact with the women, whereas you didn't really with the men?

SMB: I kept in contact with the women, yeah. The men dispersed all over the place, plus they marry. My mother used to say to me, [22:00] “A daughter you never lose, but a son gets a wife.”

And it's kind of like that. I never lost my girlfriends. I mean, I was just at Hillary and her husband Steve's, last Saturday night. I don't know. Girlfriends have no trouble, just because they now have a husband, staying in touch with girlfriends. But men do go off and do (inaudible) stuff.

AF: What is your best memory of Brown and Pembroke?

SMB: God, there were so many wonderful memories. There were so many. I wish I could think of one.

AF: Do you have a particular bad memory, or –

SMB: Let me see what I wrote down under that question, if you want to put the tape off for a minute, and I'll (inaudible) this.

(break in audio)

SMB: I guess what I finally decided to jot down here [23:00] for the best memory was the experience of doing my senior honors independent program – project, project, under Peter Magrath, my favorite teacher.

AF: What do you do it in?

SMB: I did a thesis on miscegenation, miscegenation laws. And it meant intimate contact with Peter. I mean, it meant being with him a lot. I thought he was the most exciting person I'd ever met in my life, and my head was filled. That was the class I went into, that I changed out of French. I guess nobody had ever asked me to think that way. The summer that I started thinking about what I was going to do, I must have emptied out [24:00] the Hay and every other library that I could. Because I remember my dad helping me to bring all the books home, because I was determined by the end of the summer I would go into Peter and say, "This is what I'm going to do," because we had brainstormed some ideas. I never read that many books in my life. I mean, I

never read so much stuff in my life, like that. They were piled high. My dad used to worry about me, that I was lost up there, [laughter] because my bedroom is on the third floor of this crazy kind of house. And, I mean, I never, I never – I guess I had never done independent study before. I mean, what do you do? You go all through high school and all through college, and they give you the syllabus, and they give you the book list, and you don't dare, hardly, choose a whole lot of other things to read. You just do what you have to do. So here I was, exploring a whole lot of stuff. And that meant picking and choosing a whole lot of stuff. So then I got to, you know, I got to see him a lot, writing the project. [25:00] And at the end, I mean, I had never written anything like that. The thing was a book. The thing was an absolute book. And then, I had to defend it, and I had never sat in front of a group of teachers having them ask me questions. And I did it. And after which, Peter took me out for coffee and said I could call him Peter. And that was really incredible, because I wasn't nervous about any of it. I got a really good grade, and I was really proud of myself. It also led to a lot of other things. Peter arranged for me to be a TA with Elmer Cornwell, who was then head of the department.

AF: He's still there. [laughter]

SMB: Still head, I know, I know. I see Elmer all of the time. In fact, I have to call him about something. And so, I was a TA.

AF: So did you do your thesis your junior year then, or –

SMB: Did I do it my junior year? No, I guess when I started talking with him, with Peter, [26:00] about my thesis, it was in the junior year. I can't remember when. I must have had my TA – I know, my TA was also in my senior year. I was right. And I met a gal not too long ago – her parents still live in Rhode Island. She's out of state. And her mother introduced me to her saying, you know, "My daughter went to Pembroke, graduated shortly after you, a couple of years." And she said, "You were my teacher." [laughs] I was a TA, you know? But people did respect me a great deal, and I had a lot of fun sharing what I had learned.

AF: Was that unusual, for a woman to be a TA?

SMB: I have no idea. I have no idea. I mean, so many wonderful things happened to me – it never occurred to me – and also to my friends. And I'll tell you about another incident in my senior year. [laughs] My senior year was incredible. I was surrounded [27:00] by women doing wonderful things. Many of them, who have done many more wonderful things than I have, [laughs] and I can't wait for my reunion because some of them are in Hollywood and New York, and doing great things. So I have no idea what most kids were doing, whether it be getting jobs like this [one?].

I'd had Peter, remember, freshman year. In my junior year he invited me into – No, I had Peter my sophomore year. That's when I dropped the – I don't remember. I don't remember this. He invited me, in my junior year, to be in his graduate seminar. I mean, that was incredible. That was incredible. Now, mind you, I do not remember any of the women. I remember all the guys. I think there was a woman, a graduate student. They treated me like one of them. And the next year, I was a TA. [28:00] That's what most of them were, you know? I don't know, it was just, you know, it was sort of incredible.

AF: Okay.

SMB: The other thing about my senior year and other gals – I don't know how we got this notion. I was really friendly with [Judy Clapton?], who was also a Poli. Sci. major. And Judy and I, as we went into that wonderful flow, you don't have comps now – I don't know what your major is going to be, but there were comprehensives then. And I wasn't all that worried about comprehensives, but it seemed pretty stupid – especially those of us who had gone through with good grades – to have to take comprehensives. And I guess some other department was getting rid of them, or part of them – it was a two-day affair. Judy Clapton and I did a sit-in. We found out, because we were very friendly with the secretary by now. She was typing all of our recommendations to graduate school. We did a sit-in on Elmer Cornwell's desk, and we didn't move, I don't know, a day and a night. I don't know [29:00] what they did about the nighttime. All I know is that they voted to get rid of one day.

AF: Just the two of you did this sit-in?

SMB: Yes. [laughter] I mean, no one was doing sit-ins. This was the early '60s, you know? I remember the professors walking by us and just shaking their heads, you know?

AF: That's great.

SMB: Crazy. You know who isn't competent, if they've been majoring. And the next year, the next day went (inaudible). So I think we didn't have to do the objective day. We just did our essays. So that was fun.

- End of Track 1 -

Track 2

AF: [00:00] Do you have another?

SMB: I don't have bad memories, you know, one kind of thing. But one thing that happened all the time, and I know that I must have been really down about it because my mother remembers it – this is about being a townie. Come vacation, everybody leaves you, and you're still there. You're standing right there. I never – I guess the friends that I made, the women, were mostly Rhode Island-based. So I didn't go home with any of them. Plus, when students are far away from college, they tend to need to reunion with their folks, so I was always left. And, like, I was doing all these extra things, like the summer that I was planning my honors project. The campus is so different when it's empty. I mean, I don't even much love to walk up there now in the summer, because it must be the memory of that. So there was a sense that somehow [01:00] I was not in rhythm with the rest of the students. And –

AF: Do you have any idea about what the percentages were of townies? Or was it about the same for men as it was for women, or was it more likely for women to be –

SMB: I think it was about the same. The sense I got from looking at who was over at Plantations House was the same. There were lots of Rhode Island students then. There aren't so much now. As a matter of fact, five years later when my brother went in – he's class of '69 – they made all the arrangements. He got full money to live on campus. They didn't think it was good for some students to be so far away from campus life, and I felt really, really jealous.

So that was the bad memory of really not being part of that life. Also, that memory lingers. I mean, I got a call the other day from a guy in my class, [Chris?]. [02:00] Chris – I don't even remember his last name. I should. Anyway, he asked me to help raise money – someone else had called him – for our class reunion, our class gift coming up. And he said the only reason someone got a hold of him, because he'd just been back in Rhode Island a year, was that our children all go to school with [Lani Goff?], who I never knew in the class. Anyway, we all talked about the fact that we each only knew five people. He was also a Townie. [laughter] I think I just named the five – there were five guys, and they all graduated in '62. That was the worst. That was the worst. It was the same situation. When those five guys graduated in '62, I almost didn't recover, because, you know, I didn't even know how to walk to the library alone. I mean, I didn't recover. And Peter Magrath and my project and all that, you know, did fill the void. But it took me a long time to recover.

Anyway, so, I knew those five guys, [03:00] and I knew my four friends, and Barbara Garbus. And part of it, I think you really don't get to know a lot of people. Now, I'm told by people who have lived on campus, that they only end up knowing their five closest friends too. But I don't think I would have been like that. I think I would have known a lot of people if I'd lived on campus. I never went to one fraternity party. Never. I went to parties. I went to – there was, then, an organization that was basically the Jewish men's answer, or non-fraternity answer, to social life. And that was Tower Club. And it was on Thayer Street, and it was wonderful. And that's where all my five friends belonged. So I was always there, and with good people.

AF: Was Jewish life very close knit at Brown then, or –

SMB: I don't know, in the sense that I didn't go to Hillel [04:00] a lot. I went. The Jewish people that I was friendly with, I don't know how we all found each other. And I'm thinking about that now, because I have a daughter who's dating someone, and he's not Jewish. And I know she

feels bad. And my husband and I, we don't know how it is that we found Jewish people. It wasn't anything Brown did. [laughter] It started long before that, in South Providence, with my parents.

Why didn't I go to Hillel? My daughter won't go to Hillel now. I don't know. It was warm and friendly. I think the then-director of Hillel – I think I knew him a bit. God, I don't know if he's alive or not, so I don't want to dwell on this. But that was not a warm person on campus. There was no reason I would go back there unless I wanted bagels, or the program was good on some morning.

AF: Is your daughter at Brown now?

SMB: No, she's at URI.

AF: Okay. Just wondered if it was the same (inaudible). [05:00] What – were women restricted at all in classes, or were you encouraged to take certain kinds of classes or certain kinds of concentrations, or –

SMB: I do not remember having – I mean, I know there was an advisor, because I remember first year speaking to someone. I don't know who he is, or what department he was in, or anything. I don't ever remember getting help planning my program again. Do you have advisors now?

AF: They're basically concentration-based. You have an advisor freshman year.

SMB: Okay.

AF: So you go into a concentration, (inaudible).

SMB: So there was no one advising me one way or another what courses to take. Basically, you found out what courses you wanted to take, you know, within the requirements. We had distribution requirements, and then your own major, your concentration requirements. Kids, I mean, you knew what classes to avoid if you could, and what classes you wanted to take.

AF: [06:00] Do you remember any feel for that being gender-based at all, or...?

SMB: No.

AF: No?

SMB: No.

AF: What do you remember about their rules and regulations?

SMB: [laughter] I cannot believe them. I mean, I absolutely cannot believe them. We could not wear slacks across Angell Street. We, of course, had to sign out. When we were in the dorm, we could not have male visitors unless the door was open. We couldn't go into guys' dorms except for certain hours, and then their doors had to be open. I never knew whether it was a joke or not, but two feet on the floor. The dress code, then, except for the slacks business, was pretty much determined by the world, the community. And so, in contrast to probably now when women [07:00] are quite comfortable in slacks, I was in a skirt. Like I said, I remember what I wore to Freshman Week.

AF: Okay. Do you remember the movement, at the time, to get people – get women permission to live off campus? Were you involved in that?

SMB: The first time women – people lived off campus, my friend, Bob Ebin, got an apartment before he graduated in 1962. I think it was his senior year. And he invited me to dinner. And I thought that was so interesting. I had to bring my own silverware. He had chairs. No one was living off campus. A lot of guys, then, moved off campus, and maybe some women did, but I don't remember that.

AF: What do you remember about the traditions? May Day and Ivy Day and –

SMB: I only remember Convocation. [08:00] What day besides Ivy Day did you just mention?

AF: We had May Day or Ivy Day, or the Sophomore Masque, or Spring Day, or –

SMB: None of these mean anything to me. None of these.

AF: Okay. What do you remember about Convocation?

SMB: I remember, about Convocation, particularly freshman year and sophomore year, looking at the women in the robes – they were seniors – and just wondering if I was, you know, not believing that I would get there, because it seemed so long off. Not believing, also, that I would be a college graduate.

AF: Was it a separate Convocation from Brown?

SMB: Oh, yes. Yes. But there's only one Convocation that I remember where I can even tell you what it was about, because it was partly about me, in part. I was an Elisha Benjamin Andrews Scholar, I think, in my junior year. I think I was it twice. I can't remember. [09:00] But at this particular year, Barnaby Keeney was doing the honors. And we'd get this award, or whatever.

AF: Was were the requirements for the award? Do you remember at all?

SMB: Oh, just getting a 3.5 several semesters in a row. And so, those of us who made that, you know, got that honor, qualified for that, went up and got our little certificates, sat down. And he talked about us, and he talked about women in general. What he said at the beginning sort of turned me off. I don't know what else he said. I don't know if it turned me off. That's not fair. Looking back, it should have. All I know is that I remembered it. I have never forgotten this. He told us to hold onto the certificate, and when we got our diploma, to hold onto it. Because some day, when we were raising kids, and kids, like all kids, [10:00] called us stupid, we could whip out our Pembroke diploma and our Elisha Benjamin Andrews Scholar certificate, [laughter] and

we could show them we weren't stupid. And isn't that sad? I am so sad, because Barnaby Keeney was considered, you know, in the avant-garde of education.

AF: Yeah, that's very sad.

SMB: And I never bounced that off anyone, because there was no one then. You know, who was I going to bounce that off of? I don't even know who the other women were that got the Elisha Ben Andrew. You know, we were – I didn't know them. I was surrounded by men.

AF: Did he say that just about the women?

SMB: He was only talking to women.

AF: Was your Commencement coed, or –

SMB: Yeah.

AF: It was the whole class?

SMB: But you know something? I guess we walked women together, and men together. We were Pembroke and Brown. It wouldn't have gone alphabetical, heterosexually. And I remember nothing, [11:00] because I was secretly engaged. [laughter] So I remember nothing. Pembroke and Brown, except that Commencement. I told you that I had really, really appreciated Dean Tonks. I liked her as a person, and she did – I mean the two things that she solved for me turned out to be real major things for me, getting me on campus and letting me switch those courses.

Do you still have the tradition where each class elects honorary faculty, one woman, one man?

AF: As far as I know, they don't. But that doesn't necessary mean that they don't. [laughs]

SMB: Okay. Somehow, I guess because I knew those guys in '62, and my other friend, Hillary, was '63, I was aware of senior traditions. And it was my feeling that Peter Magrath had to be one that our class would want. I mean, in my little world, I didn't think there was a teacher as wonderful as him. And the sense I got, [12:00] because unofficially I was also a TA for everyone taking Constitutional Law after that, because they all knew that I did well and went into Peter's graduate course and all. So they'd come to me in the dorm, and that was great. And I said he has to be it. And I also checked off Gretchen Tonks. Those were my first two choices, and they won. I mean, of those whole four years, the two people who I thought most important were also considered, you know, most important by a majority of students. And so, here I was, calling Peter, Peter, and going to dinner at his house, and babysitting his daughter, and, you know, having my thesis accepted, and getting the best grades ever in my senior year, in spite of the sit-in or sit-down or whatever Judy and I did. [laughter] And getting accepted to a lot of graduate schools, and secretly engaged. And so that was Commencement. It was, you know, total, total joy. And all of my aunts, and my mom and dad – and my dad had had a heart attack my senior year freshman year – [13:00] and they were all there, and my name was everywhere in the booklet. And the saddest thing about all of that is, there a lot of questions here (inaudible). There are a lot of questions here about what kind of help they gave you in planning the rest of your life. None. None. And I went into a typically women's profession, where I have done well by myself and my clients. And I am struggling, clawing to get out of it and make a midlife change. And I will. I'm back in school and I will do something about that. And I think that my memories, therefore, of Commencement – my husband blames him, but that's wrong; I didn't do it just to get married. But who knows? We all make our decisions.

Peter Magrath did everything short of screaming at me about, you know, he didn't want me to get a master's in social work. He wanted me to go law school. I know that the LSATs, just like the SATs before them, sort of did me in. But, you see, nothing [14:00] that went on, like that Freshman Week testing – nothing that went on – I mean, it should have. But nothing – the whole world out there was, you know, your grad recs and your LSATs, and Harvard still wasn't hardly letting any women in. And most law schools were – I say Harvard because I didn't get in. I applied to go to get my PhD in Poli. Sci. I didn't get in. If they didn't take me, they weren't taking any women. I mean, I just know that. In terms of Poli. Sci., I was qualified, and you didn't

need grad recs, so they didn't have that to hit me over the head with. And people say that, lots of years since: they weren't taking any women in Poli. Sci. except maybe one of their own.

Nobody at the time – I mean, I feel like there has been nothing like Brown since Brown for me, or Pembroke. I practiced calling it Brown, [15:00] and it also seems better because nobody remembers Pembroke. Nobody helped me to direct my energies in a place where I would have been happiest. I went 100 steps backward. My graduate education was Mickey Mouse bullshit, and I told that to them. I mean, I'd practically get A's without doing anything. They weren't even professors, basically. They had, in some of my classes at Simmons, rotating professorship. A psychiatrist would come in and talk to you, and then, two weeks later, a different psychiatrist. They didn't even check up on what the other psychiatrist had talked about. There were a lot of female teachers – horrible role models.

AF: Did you go straight to get your MSW?

SMB: Straight, straight.

AF: And you did that where?

SMB: Simmons.

AF: Is that in –

SMB: Boston.

AF: Boston.

SMB: Yeah, yeah, considered one of the best, considered one of the best and a women's school. I mean, I thought that would be wonderful. [16:00] It was horrible. The quality was horrible, and the women who were there – I mean, there is at least one woman I want to go back to – I don't even know if she's alive – and say, you know, "how dare you teach a class at the graduate level?" I mean, she was just – she must be what we all talked of: the woman who sort of goes all

the way up to professorship, and they're just horrible role models. You know, at least a couple. [laughter] The three women I knew at Pembroke were wonderful.

AF: What encouraged you to go into social work? Do you remember at all?

SMB: I don't know. Yes, I do know. And between my junior year and senior year, I think it was, or sophomore and junior year, whatever, I was job hunting. I was always job hunting. And the Rhode Island Conference of Social Work – and I don't even know if it still exists – advertised jobs for people who think they might like to go into human services. [17:00] And I had worked at the Institute for Mental Health. That's out, out in Cranston. Do you know that area?

AF: No, I don't really.

SMB: It's the big state hospital for people with emotional illness. I had worked there right out of high school, that summer, again, on a government program, good money. I'd worked there another year in between one of my years, in sophomore and junior year. So this was definitely junior year and senior year. And I was placed, in this Rhode Island Conference job, at Bradley Hospital. You know Bradley?

AF: Mm-hmm.

SMB: And had a really wonderful experience under a guy, Mr. [Scott?], regarding – he did group work with kids. And so, it was always in the back of my mind that I had done really wonderfully. I have really good people skills. I mean, I have that. I was born with that. I don't [18:00] why, or whether it was cultivated in my family. I had a family that always did good for other people. When my father went bankrupt, he still told people he wouldn't wipe out his bills, he would pay them. And I'm sure he did.

When I was applying to schools, it was clear that I didn't know what direction I wanted to go in, because I applied to law school. No, did I? No, I didn't, because of the LSATs. I didn't.

AF: Did you not take the LSAT, or you took them and they were just –

SMB: I took them. They were horrible. They were horrible. I remember exactly – I remember I was walking [a hall?] with [Eddie Halbret?] to take them, and Eddie fed me a lot of chocolate. I always blame it on Eddie. But I'm not good at those kinds of tests, and so I scored something like low 400s or something. And that was humiliating, and I didn't want to go through that again. My SATs weren't good. And so, I applied for a couple of PhD programs. Harvard turned me down, but Brandeis gave me everything in [19:00] American civilization. Oh, my God, that was a very early program in American civ. The teachers were the writers of now your textbooks, probably, and my textbooks back then. It was a four-year program. They gave me money. They gave me money. Keep in mind that I was going to be married. They didn't know that, but if I had a spouse they would pay for him, some living expenses, a stipend.

But I said no to Brandeis, because by the time it came to acceptance, I was getting a lot of feedback, particularly from guys that I was at Brown with. I can remember one of them. Another one that has – he graduated high school with me, and he hasn't been back to reunion. And if I see [Elton?] at the 25th reunion, I will say to him, "I want to step on your feet." He said to me, "What are you going to do? Well, what are you going to do? Are you going to accept?" I'd been accepted at Simmons and Columbia to get my master's in social work. [20:00] "Are you going to pursue this PhD stuff? Are you going to pursue law school?" Because Peter Magrath said, "I'm going to make a phone call, go to law school." And I said, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do." And Elton said to me, "We don't need any more lawyers. We need social workers." (inaudible) Elton is a lawyer, and so was just about every guy [laughter] I went to Pembroke with. He actually works in a human-service kind of lawyering in Massachusetts Department of Human Services.

But, you know, I kept getting that from everyone. It was the '60s, you know? And I was too early to do a lot of things that people were doing in the '60s, because I was busy getting a college degree. But that was definitely out there. That way, you know – nobody was talking about making big bucks. Nobody was talking about it, and [21:00] nobody was getting MBAs. It never occurred to me. You know, I hadn't gotten out of Rhode Island yet. Where did I think I was going to go pursue some great career? I definitely was going to get married. That was definitely of influence. When Peter Magrath found out that my husband-to-be was a law student,

he went crazy. “You’re going to marry a law student?” He went crazy. He went crazy/ He thought that was bad news, bad news. But we’re still married.

AF: Did your husband go to Brown?

SMB: No. I didn’t know him there. We met my senior year, my senior year. He was actually making a career change. He did engineering at Brown, which is why, even though he was on campus, he knew nobody. I mean, he knew the five people that we keep seeing at his reunions, because engineering students, they didn’t leave that part of the campus, [laughter] because all of their classes were there. [Stan?] had been an engineer for a while. He hated it. He was the class of ’60. [22:00] And he got Westinghouse to pay for him to take some business-law courses, and he loved them. And he went back to BU to get his law degree. And my girlfriend Hillary again – who had stayed on at Brown to get her MAT; she was class of ’63 – she said to me, Steve, her then – who she was engaged to, boyfriend Steve, now husband – she said there’s this real interesting person, this guy that Steve grew up with, and he’s going to room with Steve in Boston because he’s going back to law school, having been an engineer. And she knew how much I was interested in the law. And so, I met Stan, and we dated my senior year. And so, we now have all this in common. We do reunions together.

AF: [laughs] That’s funny. Was your family supportive of you going on to get your MSW, or –

SMB: My family couldn’t do enough for me. Anything, anything. My mother never asked me to wash a dish. I realize now, [23:00] even though I fight with my kid. [laughs]

(break in audio)

AF: So your family was –

SMB: They would support anything, anything. If I said I wanted to go into the Peace Corps, they would have –well – [laughs] They would support anything.

AF: Yeah, okay. Did you go – as soon as you got your MSW then, did you go straight into work?

SMB: Straight into work. I was working probably the minute I got out. I think I took a week or two.

AF: What was your first job?

SMB: My first job was – the agency doesn't exist anymore as it was, but it was called the Providence Child Guidance Clinic. And it was up near Butler Hospital. A lot of agencies used to be on that big Butler Hospital campus. It was an outpatient agency where social workers tended to do evaluations with parents, psychologists tended to see kids, and we did sort of team family therapy.

AF: [24:00] Is that – and how much has your field changed, or your involvement in the field? Is your job now (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

SMB: Well, my job is in a school system, and I'm totally out of the clinical-medical model in the sense that my team is very different. I mean, there can be a doctor on the team, but most of the time there isn't. And my job – luckily, because I would have clawed my way out earlier. Maybe unluckily. I don't know. The job I have now and have had since 1979 has pretty much been of my own making. I got into the school system when the special ed. regs said you have to have one social worker per 2,500 students.

AF: You're in Cranston?

SMB: I'm in Cranston. So every single school system had to hire social workers, psychologists, speech and language therapists, to satisfy special ed. So here, you know, [25:00] social workers land in a school, and nobody knows what to do with them. I mean, they know what to do about special ed. evaluations. Those are pretty straightforward. And that's pretty much similar to what I was doing back in the '60s when I got out of school. And family histories, trying to determine what are the problem areas and what kind of help do we need to give the student and the family –

the youngster and the family. But there's a lot of other things I do, and that's principally because of the director of guidance at the high school, which is one of the schools I cover – a Brown graduate, [Rick Harrison?].

They were wowed by social workers. I mean, all of them are women. All of them are well-educated. And they had just never met anyone like us. I mean, there wasn't anything we couldn't do. [laughter] And I was running around fixing problems, and one of my problems with the job, in fact, is that I just do so much. And, you know, I mean, even my husband says to me, "You could be running General Motors." [26:00] [laughter] You know? But it's just called social worker. So that's part of the reason I need to claw my way out, because, you know, my profession has never been accepted. I'm sick of it all. I'm sick of, you know, proving to the world that we have really good skills.

AF: So what is it that you're going to be doing?

SMB: Well, there's a couple of things on my mind. One, sort of staying in the field, is I probably want to do supervision and administration, something that I never wanted to do for a lot of years, partly because I'd been raising a family the whole time and working part time. And I really feel that, to be a good administrator and supervisor, you have to give a lot of yourself, including time. And while I was always giving a lot of time in the field, I could say, "Look, my kids need me," you know, that kind of thing. But now I'm a little freed up from that. So I may stay in the field. It depends. [27:00] I'm talking to people about that.

But, I went back to graduate school this term, as a matter of fact, in January, to a program at UMass in dispute resolution. And dispute resolution is sort of an umbrella term. Under it is mediation, arbitration, and some other creative things like court-appointed judges. So, something like Judge Wapner. No, no. [laughter] I'm no Judge Wapner. But it's happening at a very interesting time. And so, maybe this was the right time to do it, but this isn't why I went into it. I went into it because I talked to people first, mostly men. In fact, people have asked me that: "Why do you want to do something that mostly men are doing?" But it turns out that, on the larger scale, mostly women are doing it. But in Rhode Island, men are doing it. I didn't know that [28:00] states were passing mandatory mediation everywhere. I mean, I'm just absolutely

amazed. This is a certificate program, and I'll be really ready. I'll do private practice or group practice real soon, and then maybe I'll totally get out of my field.

AF: So you'll be basically in the business world then, doing that?

SMB: Well, I suspect not, but I don't know yet. Interestingly enough, the teacher I have for mediation now – and that's only one course so far – his specialty in private practice is human services. So now I'm seeing the application of this process, which makes so much more sense than all of the psychiatric kinds of things I learned, to human services. And that excites me. However, I am going to take a course – an extra course – it's not in the program – this summer at URI Extension, with a lawyer here who's a mediator even though he's a lawyer. And his experience [29:00] is almost all in the business world, so I'm open to that. I don't know.

Because the other part of me just no more wants to deal, now, with the crap I would have dealt with when I got out of Pembroke. I just don't care about breaking down the doors to a man's world. I just want to do what's good for me. And so, I mean, it's clear to me that some things haven't changed at all. Men are very threatened by well-educated women. I mean, that is so clear to me. And it's clear to me because key men in the system where I work feel that way. And I didn't want to see it that way. I think maybe some of the same rose-colored glasses I was wearing when I was at Brown, that everything was really great for women. I mean, there were a lot of us, and they loved us, and all. For years, I've felt that there was a lot of hostility. It wasn't about me; it was about the bureaucracy. But I work with four wonderful women on the social-work staff, and a couple of psychologists. [30:00] And over the last couple of years, I've been really doing some thinking and, in fact, bringing some issues into therapy of my own.

And men just hate us. They can't stand – Not all men. That's ridiculous. But many men climb up the ladder, such as men do in a school system, do not want to look right below them and see and hear bright, energetic women. They just don't. And aren't you excited [laughter] now that you're going out into the world? But, no, you know, there'll be so many more of you. I mean, there's hardly any of us still. There's hardly any of us. The only women in the workplaces where I have been – this is each and every place – the only women who have made it up to be a boss at whatever level of administration are either single women or difficult women – difficult to

me; obviously, not difficult to the boards who appointed them. [31:00] And that's really, really sad.

- End of Track 2 -

Track 3

AF: [01:00] – marriage and raising children really affected – It sounds like you were able to overcome a lot of those obstacles by going right into school. Do you think that it seriously affected your career?

SMB: Everything I did professionally was planned knowing that my children needed me a great deal of the time. My husband was in a traditionally structured male environment. I mean, not only did he go to work 9:00 to 11:00 if necessary, [laughter] or 7:00 to 8:00, he did a lot of community work, because that's what attorneys have to do, you know, or because that's what he wanted to do. And so, while he's totally liberated [laughs] – I love it, he really is. He is the most liberated guy I know. The fact is, in 1969 when we had our first child, you know, [01:00] he didn't go near her. [laughter] I mean, he finally did after a while, but it was in '72, when I had my son. When we had a second child, I put him in Stan's arms and I said, "This one's yours. I'm tired." [laughter] So a lot of his liberation was sort of theoretical until I helped him to help me.

It never would have occurred to me to do what was good for me professionally first. Because if I had done that, I would not be where I was. I mean, I think I wouldn't be where I was now. I mean, (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

AF: So how long had you been working before you had your daughter?

SMB: I worked two years, and a little over. I had her. I stayed home with her a few months – probably three to four months – and then went back one day and then two days. I was really, really lucky. I was working, by then, the second place. And an old friend – childhood friend – also, I think, [02:00] in my husband's high-school class – was the director of the Pawtucket

mental-health clinic where I worked. And, you know, he felt fine about that, “raise your children, and I want you here one day, two days, whatever.” And so, then I stopped and had my son a few years later. So the whole time I was raising them, I was working, at the most, two days. Sometimes doing other projects, sometimes temporary, another day here, another day there, a little private practice. Always that came first. I wouldn’t know how else to do it.

AF: Okay. Have you done a lot of volunteer work?

SMB: Yeah, I’ve jotted down some things. I almost do none now. I can’t even believe I said yes to the reunion stuff. [laughter] Actually, I said yes a lot. I guess I decided that the way to get through you’re 25th is to join [laughter] everybody and do it together. I did a couple of things [03:00] early, early on. I joined Hadassah, a women’s organization. In that, I mean, just by the nature of what they do, there’s a lot of voluntary work in it, raising money for Hadassah Hospital in Israel.

I didn’t like what was going on in the Jewish Community Center regarding children’s programs, so I spoke up and found myself on the board of the Jewish Community Center for a couple of years. Couldn’t stand it. The guys on the board, the men on the board, God bless them, argued for hours on end whether it was cigar and cigarette smoking – both ought to be outlawed in board meetings or just cigar smoking. I mean, that wasn’t – So, I took myself off of it two years later.

Not a lot of volunteer work, no. Actually, my husband did more.

AF: When you were at Brown, was there any emphasis on doing that?

SMB: Uh-uh.

AF: [04:00] No?

SMB: No, no.

AF: Okay. In terms of your – going back to your career, would you consider it to be peaking now, then, that you're redeveloping it? Or if you were going to speak of it in that way, now that your children are raised and that you're shifting gears?

SMB: I think, see, there's no ladder to go up in social work. That's not to say that some people don't, but that has not been an option for me in the agencies where I work. They are just now discussing having a coordinator supervisor of social work. You know, that's not the way school systems think. I mean, up until now that's not the way school systems think. So, basically, in terms of peaking, what that means to me is that I finally realized my own competence, [05:00] because there's no one to tell me that I have it or don't have it. And I think that, yeah, I would have to say that I not only realized it in the last year or so, but I asked myself, well, what else do I want to do with it? And that feels real good, because I know I will do something else with it. I mean, even if it's just to get out and go retire and eat bonbons by the sea or something. But I think I probably don't want to do this forever.

AF: Okay. And what are your feelings about Brown today, now that it is Brown and not Brown and Pembroke?

SMB: Well, having married a Brown man, and being surrounded by lots of Brown men in the school system where I work, it feels okay. It didn't feel ok when it was happening. I really hated the merger in terms of the name change and all of that. But [06:00] I didn't do anything about it, and I've never been involved up on campus with Pembroke activities.

AF: Do you think – were you against it because of what it would mean for you, or because you wanted to see Pembroke continue?

SMB: I wanted to see Pembroke continue. I think that there was a lot to be said for the sense of community, that you are a woman in the Pembroke community. Yeah, I guess when I think about it, I mean, I know that it's real good because the world is coed. And we were. We were classes together. But I can't imagine having gotten through those years without having my girlfriends on the Pembroke campus. I mean, mostly there weren't a lot of guys on the Pembroke campus. Oh,

some loved to study in the Pembroke library. This was a nice library. But there was something totally [07:00] relaxing about knowing that, from Angell Street to Bowen Street, it was mostly women. I mean, we were really there for each other. And I don't know how it works in coed dorms and all, because you have coed dorms. I mean, not only is Pembroke gone, but there's also a lots of coed dorms.

AF: Okay. Do you have any other thoughts or stories?

SMB: No, I was just thinking, regarding me and the merger, I mean, the fact is that when Brown started to become a school of choice – maybe not where you come from, [laughs] but everyone here wants to go to Brown. I mean, they're bus-loading it in from California and New York. I mean, they're not busing. They're flying in from California to look at Brown. The fact is that there'd be no point in my walking around saying I graduated Pembroke in '64. I mean, [08:00] when you say, "I graduated Brown," you get all these looks. So I'm going to enjoy everything of that. [laughter] Why not? Nobody knows that, back then, they took something like 15 percent Rhode Islanders.

AF: Great. Well, thank you.

SMB: You're welcome.

- END -