

Oral History with Joan Hoost McMaster, class of 1960

Interviewee: Joan Hoost McMaster '60

Interviewer: Wendy Korwin

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Interview Location: Pembroke Hall, Brown University

[Begin Part 1]

Wendy Korwin: Okay, this is Wendy Korwin. I'm the Pembroke Center's archivist.

Joan Hoost McMaster: I'm Joan McMaster. I'm a member of the class of 1960, coming up on my 55th reunion.

WK: It's Wednesday, May 13th, 2015 and we're in Pembroke Hall. Well thank you for coming today.

JM: Thank you for inviting me. I'm really delighted. [laughter]

WK: I know we're going to cover a lot of ground, but I want to start by going backward.

JM: Okay.

WK: So I understand you were born in Brooklyn?

JM: New York.

WK: And raised mostly in the suburbs?

JM: Right. Our family live in the suburbs, Sayville, NY.

WK: Okay. Is that on Long Island?

JM: Long Island. It's about 15 miles out on the south shore. Right on Great South Bay. Lovely.

WK: Okay. What did your parents do?

JM: Let's see, my dad was a professor [at] NYU. He was a CPA and he also had his own practice. My mom graduated from Adelphi and she was an antiques dealer.

WK: So both of your parents had gone to college.

JM: Oh yes, graduated. Yeah.

WK: And was it expected that you would go on to college?

JM: Oh absolutely. But it was my expectation too. I was looking forward to it.

WK: And how did the college process go for you, as a teenager in the '50s?

JM: Well, of course we had a guidance counselor at our high school, but it was a fairly new position so that I think our family was more up to speed about colleges than she was. The girl across the street went to Pembroke. A very good friend of mine went to Middlebury. My dad had very high academic expectations for me and he wanted me to go to an Ivy League school. So that was sort of the primary area of exploration. My sister also went to an Ivy League school. She went to Cornell, and she went to the hotel school. So we did the college visitation tour and my dad was very keen on Pembroke because he thought: Here's a women's college -- it's the late '50s, you know, we still think about in parent locus [loco parentis] protecting women -- "but it's attached to a very large academic, highly respected resource. So I don't just want my daughter to go to a second-rate women's college, as he thought, but one that it is affiliated with a first-class university. So he was very strong in hoping that I would go to Brown -- Pembroke.

WK: And when it came to the final decision, how was that made?

JM: Well, it was a family decision. I sort of liked Middlebury because my friend went there and I thought it was a nice co-ed university, not too big, a little bit off in the hills and whatever. My dad really thought it was important to go to a first-rate academic school, and I really deferred to him. And I'm glad I did! [laughs]

WK: So do you have any very early memories of arriving to Brown?

JM: Yes, I remember actually we were staying at the Wayland Manor. And I had corresponded with my to-be roommate, and she and her family were also there. So we met for dinner the night before Freshman Week would begin and sort of got acquainted. And then the next day we went to Whittier House, which was our dormitory, and we almost felt like old friends because we'd spent the evening together previously. It was a wonderful experience. There was so much going on. There was so much energy on the campus. We had a small dorm -- 22 people. And we became a very cohesive group very early on. So much so that when the year was over, we moved as a group to a sophomore dorm, Snow House. And that was a little bit unusual.

WK: And how was the house set up? Did everyone have their own room?

JM: No, no, it was doubles and singles. One or two triples.

WK: And you had a house mother that lived with you as well?

JM: We had a house mother. We had two junior counselors as well.

WK: So they were undergraduates.

JM: Yes, juniors. Actually. [laughs] Junior junior counselors, yes, right.

WK: And did you take your meals in the dorms?

JM: Oh no, we went over to Andrews. That was the primary dining hall at the Pembroke campus.

WK: And where is Whittier House?

JM: Whittier House is no more. It was on Meeting Street opposite Pembroke Hall, and it was torn down when they put up the medical school.

WK: So all 22 of you moved to Snow House --

JM: Yes, we did.

WK -- the next year.

JM: The next year.

WK: Where is Snow House? [5:00]

JM: Snow House is on the other side of Brown Street, also on Meeting Street. Maybe 100 yards.

WK: Okay. So it sounds like some of your strongest friendships were probably forged in your living situations.

JM: Oh, absolutely, yes. Absolutely.

WK: What kinds of things would you do in the dorm?

JM: Well, let's see. I think we had... We didn't actually have a dorm TV, so it wasn't as though we had popcorn parties in front of the TV. But we had charades night. We had different, Mardi Gras night, things like that. Not on a regular basis because we were all doing other things too, but you know, maybe I once a month we'd have like a party night. Plus, living so closely together, you know, you would meet people in the hallway or on the front steps or whatever. It was very informal. Nice.

I did want to bring up about the PDQs.

WK: Who are the PDQs?

JM: Yeah the PDQs are no more. [laughs] They're like ancient history. The PDQs were a double quartet. They were modeled on the Amherst DQs. So it was eight women, a cappella, and during our Freshman Week a lot of different organizations came through the dorms and talked about their missions and whatever. And the PDQs were one of the groups that came and they entertained, and they said, "Gee, if anybody would be interested in auditioning, we'd love to have you." So I had sung in high school and I do like singing, and I liked the group. They were very... sort of more modern singing. You know, not the traditional barbershop. And so I made an appointment for an audition and I went. And then I went for a second audition. And I was selected. I was very happy because I do love singing. It was a wonderful group of women. We spent every day from 5:00 to 6:00 in rehearsal. Every day. Not once a week, not twice a week. Every day. In fact, when I told that to President Paxson, her eyes got really big. She said, "Every day?" Truly. Learning new music and just harmonizing. And then on the

weekends we would give concerts either on campus or to community groups. And so over four years, we became very very close. And those people are some of my closest friends, even today. You know, we were in each other's weddings. We were godparents for each other's children. And we still keep in touch. It was a wonderful experience.

WK: And you first found out about them during your Freshman Week?

JM: Yes.

WK: Okay, so what was Freshman Week?

JM: Well, Freshman Week was a way to orient new students to the campus. So yes, we had academic consulting. We had visits by groups on the campus. I think there was some testing, too. I don't really recall. And then on Saturday of that week we all went out to the Haffenreffer and they had, like a field day. It was fun, with a barbeque. It was very very nice.

WK: Do you know, did the Brown men also have a similar program?

JM: Perhaps, but it was separate.

WK: Okay.

JM: Yeah.

WK: And you were also in the Glee Club, is that right?

JM: Oh yes, I was President of the Glee Club.

WK: Okay. What was the relationship like between the Glee Club and the PDQs?

JM: There was no relationship, really. Just separate organizations. A lot of the people from the PDQs were in the Glee Club, but they were two separate organizations. The Glee Club was run by the Music Department.

WK: And the PDQs were entirely student-run?

JM: Yes.

WK: Would you do your own arrangements?

JM: Oh absolutely. Yeah. [laughs] You know, we had composers in the group, we had arrangers in the group. And then we would do other things too, like things by the Australian Jazz Quartet, or George Shearing, we did some arrangements by him. Let's just say a little bit more modern than the barbershop. That was part of the fun of it.

WK: And did you have a faculty advisor that worked with you at all?

JM: No.

WK: Was it a self-taught sort of group, or did people come in with arranging and composing experience?

JM: It was self taught, but I think each year, the selection process, because we were graduating, usually maybe two or three, and bringing new people in, if we were losing a composer and arranger, we wanted to make sure we could fill that spot. But you had to sing in order to be in the group.

WK: Sure, sure.

JM: Right.

WK: [10:00] Let's go back a little bit to your life in the dorm. I'm curious about, you mentioned in loco parentis, and I'm curious about the restrictions that you had. Or guidelines that you remember, for coming and going in the dorms, or dress codes, or anything like that.

JM: Oh yeah, sure. Well of course it was an honor code. And we did have curfews, which meant that you had to be back in the dorm at 10:00 during the week, or I think it was 1:00 during the weekends. And there was an official process. You had a card. You would sign out where you were going, and when you came back, you would sign back in. It was pretty standard, I think, for those days.

WK: Did anyone in your dorm have trouble with the rules, or was it generally --

JM: I mean, it was generally accepted. It was part of being here and there was a very community feeling, so... and people respected the rules I think, by and large.

WK: How would you describe the relationship between the women of Pembroke and the male students of Brown?

JM: I don't think you can generalize, really. I mean, we did have classes together. Our organizations and our eating and our living we all separate. I really, I don't think there was any tension, particularly. When we were in classes, everybody was respected. Nobody was shouted down. People were allowed to finish whatever it was they were saying. So I think there was a great deal of respect.

WK: And your classes we co-ed.

JM: Yes they were.

WK: How did you decide to concentrate in American Civilization?

JM: Well, I wanted something a little bit different. Originally, I had thought I might be interested in English, and I am. But I really like American history. I took a lot of very interesting American history courses here. But I didn't want to major in History, either. So American Civ offered an opportunity to sample American courses throughout the curriculum into sort of a synthesis. So American architecture, art, history, literature, philosophy. It was a fun major. I enjoyed it.

WK: Were there particular classes or teachers that you remember now as being important?

JM: Well I do remember my Philosophy professor. He was quite ancient at the time. Oh, I don't know, 75? [laughs] And he had been at Brown for a long time. And Carl [Curt] Ducasse was his name. He was quite well known. He'd written a couple of books. And taking his course was really mindblowing to me because it explored so many assumptions you take for granted. The course was The Philosophy of Religion. It had to do with motivations and assumptions, ideas. We did a lot of outside reading. He wasn't particularly dynamic as a teacher per se, but he was able to draw out the class, which I think is equally important. And I still remember it. I enjoyed the class.

WK: Where did you do most of your studying?

JM: Well we were lucky to have the Pembroke Library, which was the top floor of Pembroke Hall. And it was a full service library. It wasn't as big as the Hay, but it had all the things we really needed for our courses. And so I did most of my studying there.

WK: And what was the library like?

JM: It was lovely. It was all paneled. There were wing chairs in front of the fireplace. In the winter at night the fire was on. I think they even served hot chocolate, if you can believe it. [laughs] But it was a very welcoming place, and a lot of us liked going there rather than going all the way down Brown Street to the Hay in the dark in the winter. So it really suited us very well.

WK: What else was in Pembroke Hall?

JM: Well, let's see. Pembroke Hall in those days... there were classrooms in Pembroke Hall. I believe that, oh the Pembroke deans were on the second floor. I don't recall how many there were. And then there was a bookstore downstairs. It was a very abbreviated bookstore, mostly gift shop. It was tee shirts, mugs, stuff like that. And the mailboxes were down there too.

WK: Did you keep your same mailbox for all four years?

JM: Oh I think so. Yeah, I think so.

WK: [15:00] Do you remember Dean Lewis?

JM: Oh yes, she was the dean when we were here, and even beyond, I think. She was a lovely southern lady. She was a scientist. A great role model. Very very bright, and yet she had the elan, the graciousness, of a southern lady, which is a very nice combination. So we really looked up to her. She was very bright, she took no nonsense, she gave several chapel talks while I was here, and she was venerated so much by the students that later on -- I don't know who -- donated money [so that] there is now a Nancy [Duke] Lewis chair. As a way to thank her for her service.

WK: And she was ill while you were a student?

JM: She became ill while I was a student. When we arrived, she was hale and hearty, but over the years, she became ill. In fact, she was the dean from 1950 to 1961, and so when I arrived in 1956, she

seemed to be just fine. But then she went into a decline in the later years. She did not give up the deanship. I think someone else took over some of the more public responsibilities, but she remained dean until she passed.

WK: And was it public knowledge that she was sick, amongst the students?

JM: I think people were aware, only that she was not as visible as she had been. And then later on toward the end, it was generally known. Yeah. And people felt very badly because they really admired her. She was quite young, probably in her 50s when she passed.

WK: Let's see. You've talked a little bit about the singing groups that you were in, but I want to know about the Question Club, because I understand you were a President.

JM: Oh yes, the Question Club was made up of seniors, and it was the people who were the head of the different organizations on the Pembroke campus. So I was the President of the Glee Club. We had the person who was the editor of the newspaper, the editor of the yearbook, all of the different women's groups on campus. And I was asked to be President of the Question Club, which basically had the mission of helping to run Freshman Week, orientation. So we arrived early, and we helped to coordinate the activities during that week. It was very fun because we got to meet the new students.

WK: So you got to do the same things that had gotten you involved in PDQs.

JM: From the other point of view. Yeah. To organize it.

WK: And four years later, do you remember -- I mean, did the new group of students seem different?

JM: Different why? Different from my class?

WK: Well, I just wonder. I mean you graduated on sort of the cusp of the 60s. You know, and so by the time you were leaving, these students would have been in the class of '64. And so it seems like sort of a transitional period.

JM: Well we were aware that they were quite young. They all seemed to be about 12, of course they weren't but that was our impression. But there was no, if you mean was there any rumbling underneath because the '60s were coming, you know there was none of that feeling at that time. I think probably a couple years maybe, '63, '64, it might have been more apparent but they just seemed to be like a regular group of kids. Really happy. Delighted to be here. Anxious to give their all, and a great deal of enthusiasm, and of course we met that with our enthusiasm. So it was a really fun time. I enjoyed it very much.

WK: Did the Pembroke campus absorb much of the politics and outside current events, or did you feel like you were slightly sheltered here?

JM: Well we did have speakers come in every now and then, brought in by Student Government. People probably who were on the cutting edge of new thinking. But it was sort of foreign to our atmosphere here. I mean, we were polite, we listened, asked questions, but we were sort of a self-

enclosed cocoon basically, concerned with our own everyday tasks and friendships and whatever.
[20:00]

WK: Yeah. Do you think that being in your own little world, what kinds of opportunities did that give you while you were at Pembroke?

JM: Well, it was a fairly small school There were only 800 women students. And so before long you got to know everybody, not just in your own class, but in other classes. In fact, for a while, Pembroke was as on a five-year offsetting reunion plan, so that when you came back, it wasn't just 05, 10, 15, 20 but the classes that were closest to you also came back. Because you might have friends in sophomore, junior, senior classes. And under the newer plan, you never get to see those people because they're not on the 05 plan. So that was very nice, because the friendships were allowed to continue over time. And I really miss that. It was a wonderful idea.

WK: And you met your husband while you were in college here, is that correct?

JM: Oh yes.

WK: How did you meet?

JM: I think it had something to do with music. He played the trumpet and he was in this brass quartet. And we were also singing. The Glee Club was also singing in the concert, I think it was in Alumnae Hall. And I think we met afterwards at the reception or whatever.

WK: And you didn't get married while you were a student.

JM: Oh no.

WK: No. Did any students get married at Pembroke?

JM: There were a few, but I think there was one girl in our class, I believe she had to leave school. I don't recall the particulars, but I just don't know. There were very few, if any.

WK: So after graduation, how soon after you graduated did you marry your husband?

JM: Let's see, about 18 months afterwards.

WK: Okay.

JM: So I was teaching school. He was an ROTC student, so he was finishing up his ROTC obligation.

WK: And you were back in New York teaching?

JM: I was back in New York, home, teaching second grade, yes.

WK: Had you come into college thinking that you might become a teacher, or how did that come about?

JM: No I just sort of had an open-ended future. I knew that I really liked the world of ideas. I liked studying. In another time I might have gone onto graduate school right after graduate. But that wasn't really in my planning. So I had this very open-ended degree, American Civ, and I was thinking about what I would want to do with it and a friend of mine who had graduated from Mount Holyoke with a liberal arts degree was teaching in a local school. And she said, "You know, they're looking for liberal arts graduates. You don't need to be an education major or be certified to teach at our elementary school. Would you be interested?" So I said, "Sure." [laughs] And I went for an interview and they said, "Oh, how would you like to teach second grade?" And I said, "Oh, that would be fine." and so that's how that's how it happened.

WK: And did you feel prepared for it?

JM: Well they seemed to think I was prepared. I had taken one education course. And the deal was that, yes we like you, yes we will hire you, but you will have to work towards getting your teaching certificate. And that was fine with me. So at the same time that I was teaching second grade, I was taking courses at Adelphi at night in Education. It worked out very well.

WK: And then you ended up teaching some other grades after that.

JM: Right. Once I was married and we moved to North Carolina I was teaching fourth grade gifted. And that was really fun. I really enjoyed it. The kids were so eager. And you couldn't give them enough information, knowledge, because the more you gave them more they wanted So way beyond the curriculum. As a teacher, that's really exciting.

WK: So how did you end up in -- is it, it's Greensboro, right? How did you end up in Greensboro, North Carolina?

JM: Well, my husband finished his obligation to the Navy and then we were married that summer and he had a new job in Greensboro with Container Corporation, and so we went there. And I went to the school administration and I said, "I'm a teacher. I'm wondering if you have any vacancies." And it was just before school began, and they said to me, "Well you wouldn't believe this but just today our fourth grade gifted teacher came in and [25:00] said she was leaving because she had another job and now we have a vacancy and school's coming up next week. Would you be willing to consider that." And I said, "Oh certainly, I would." And so that's how it happened.

WK: Had you spent any time in the south before this move?

JM: No, no.

WK: I know this was a while ago, but do you remember your impressions? What was it like to come from the northeast to Greensboro, North Carolina?

JM: Well I taught in a very elite school. It was Urban Park, and in those days, Cannon Mills was really the major player there. And the students who were in my school were all Cannon Mills executives' children. So it was a very thin layer of society. They were all very nice, they were all very well spoken. One incident that I had with one of the children was, he came in one day without his homework and I said, "David, you don't have your homework." And he said, "Oh, my maid forgot to pack it."

WK: So that was the [laughs] school that you taught at.

JM: That was the mentality. [laughs]

WK: Okay.

JM: Yeah, that was the mentality, and it was -- these people were very wealthy, they did have maids, And that was part of the family dynamics, I guess.

WK: But it was a public school?

JM: Oh yeah.

WK: And did you have any experience of sort of racial tensions or activism while you were working there? How did you experience the city?

JM: Well there were definitely two cities. You know, there was the black Greensboro and the white Greensboro. Most of the people who worked in the school, in say the lunch room and the janitors and whatever, were black. It was, I think it was just an accepted way of life, as far as these people were concerned it was their history. And it was what they were all used to. It was before the Civil Rights movement per se. And most of the people that I taught with were southerners. You know, I was the only person who wasn't. The first day of school after the children went home one of the mothers came in. She said, "My son came home and said he had a Yankee for a teacher, and I didn't believe him, so I decided to see for myself." So that was sort of the attitude. [laughter] I was a little bit taken aback, but I just laughed, and she laughed, and it passed, and she became one of my biggest supporters. So I didn't beforehand what it was going to be like. My dad was more upset that they had no American flag in the school.

WK: Really.

JM: So he sent me an American flag. [laughs] And I put it up on the bulletin board. Yeah I thought that was really amazing.

WK: So you were only there for, was it just one school year?

JM: Two school years.

WK: All right. And then where did fate bring you?

JM: And then my husband changed jobs again, and was working for Providence Lithograph Company, which is a very old esteemed printing company here in Providence, which has since been bought out by another company. And so we moved to Rhode Island. So we were back in our college atmosphere but a few years later. And very easy to reconnect with Brown and a lot of friends, so that was very nice.

WK: How did you reconnect with Brown when you moved back to Rhode Island?

JM: Well I joined the Pembroke Club and the Brown Club, so a lot of my friends are part of that. And then I joined a bridge group and one thing and another.

WK: And you've done a lot of volunteer work over the years too, right?

JM: Extremely. Yes. Right.

WK: What has that entailed?

JM: Let's see, well after I moved back to Providence and reconnected, a lot of my friends were part of the Junior League. And so they asked me if I would like to join, and I said, "Sure." That's a volunteer organization for women. And I just had the most wonderful time. I went right up the career ladder of all the different committee chairs, offices, whatever, I was selected to serve on the regional area, HAL. And that meant that four times a year we went to the Waldorf and we we stayed there for three days and we had council meetings like we have with the [Pembroke] Associates Council. And it was just a wonderful experience. I loved it.

WK: What does the Junior League do?

JM: The Junior League are the training organization of women, and what we do is set up demonstration projects working with other groups like Amos House, The Autism Project, different things like that. And we train and supply the volunteers. [30:00] It's very rewarding.

WK: It sounds so.

JM: Yeah. And I'm still a member. I still enjoy it.

WK: So where all in Rhode Island have you lived?

JM: Let's see we moved back. We've lived in Eden Park, which is part of Cranston. Joined the Baptist church there, became very active in the choir and board of education and raised our children in the church. More recently, I have lived in Barrington, which is where I live now and I lived for a few years in Middletown because I was very involved with the AAUW, which is down there. And the Newport Art Museum. And so I was there for about three years. I really loved it. I was very connected to the community and whatever, but then when I was asked to be President of the Kent [County] Club of Pembroke, and had more and more obligations in Providence, I really felt I couldn't keep going back and forth to Middletown. It was just too far. So I moved to Barrington, and it's the best of both worlds because I'm half an hour from Newport, half an hour from Providence.

WK: And your children --

JM: Are grown. [laughs]

WK: Three kids, right?

JM: Yes. Who are grown.

WK: Where did they end up?

JM: My daughter went to Gaucher and then she went to Duke to get her MBA. She and her husband live in Colorado, Denver. My other daughter went to URI and she's a nurse and she and her husband live in Providence. My son went to Roger Williams, studied computer science, and he and his wife live in Massachusetts and he works for Atheon.

WK: So two out of the three are relatively local.

JM: Two out of the three are, yes, are relatively local. Right.

WK: But none went to Brown.

JM: No.

WK: Were you hoping?

JM: No. Really, I wanted them to have their own experiences. Yeah.

WK: Let's see. So let's transition a little bit and move forward. You mentioned being part of the Kent County Pembroke Club. Which is -- is it still a Pembroke club, or is it a co-ed?

JM: No, it's still a Pembroke club. It's one of a very few in the country. There are only three.

WK: When did you become involved with them?

JM: Actually, not too long ago, because although I'd been a member for a while, I was always on the board of the Providence club. And then, as I say, I was doing these other things in Middletown and was the President of the AAUW, and one day they called me up from the Kent Club and they said, "How would you like to be the President?" [laughs] And I said, "Whoa, wait a minute." And they said, "No, really, you know, you've been recommended by a lot of people and we'd be very happy if you'd be the President." And so I said, "Well, let me think about it." And I called the woman back the next day and I said, "Okay! You know, it sounds like fun. I'll do that." And so I did for four years. I had a wonderful time, because it was very open-ended. The Kent Club likes to go out for lunch. That's what they do. [laughs] They're all retired teachers and they just love to go out to lunch, so every meeting is a lunch meeting. But they really hadn't done much future planning, and coming from the background that I have, to me it seemed like an open-ended opportunity to sort of plant some ideas, do some future planning, open up some windows. And so they let me do that, and we had some very wonderful programs during that time.

We did a fabulous program with the Medical School, Healthy Aging and Older Women. And we worked with a gerontologist, Dr. Lynn McNichol, and opened up to medical students, and they could come too. Three of our members were panelists and talked about medical problems they had had as they were aging. And then Dr. McNichol talked about strategies for aging well and we had a luncheon. It was the top floor of Pembroke Hall. We had about 50 medical students too. It was a wonderful program. And I just liked having the opportunity to take an idea and go with it and develop it and see the result. So [it was] a very fun, very fun four years.

And then our capstone program was welcoming the new President, President Paxson. She came for our 65th anniversary. [35:00] And we honored her, we gave her a brown bear, and she gave us a nice talk. It was lovely.

WK: It was your 65th anniversary in 2014.

JM: 65th anniversary in 2014. Correct. Yes.

WK: And what year did you spearhead the creation of the Pembroke banner?

JM: I believe that was 2005. That was after the brochure. And the first year we marched, it rained. I had a new pair of Pappagallos on. [laughs] Totally ruined. But we were just so happy to be there.

WK: So tell me about the banner and how it came to be made.

JM: Okay, the banner came about because after we did the brochure --

WK: Well then maybe we should stop. Tell me about the brochure that you worked on. [laughter]

JM: Okay. All right, well I was concerned that the new students wouldn't know anything about Pembroke. And so I was then the Recording Secretary of the Providence Club and we talked about it and decided it would be a good idea to do a history that we could give to the new students, and I was asked to chair that committee. So I did work with the archivist and [at] the end of the summer -- this is 2002 -- we put together a six-fold brochure with a history of Pembroke, basically in 500 words or less, which is no small feat, and included a couple of pictures so people could see what life was like. We gave a chronology of all the Pembroke dates and a listing of all the Pembroke deans. And met with the administration and asked if we could meet with new students every year and pass this out as a way to keep the name of Pembroke current. And we were pleased that they agreed. And then more recently, as I've done this every August/September, I've talked to Christy [Law Blanchard] and she's given me Pembroke Center materials, so I could talk about "This Was Pembroke," and then, "This is legacy of Pembroke, Pembroke Center." We include a few of the older yearbooks on the table so people can kind of leaf through and see what life was like.

WK: And in your experience, how much do the incoming students, over the last 10 years, know about Pembroke College?

JM: Well if they're living on the Pembroke campus they know about it, only because that's where they are. But beyond that, unless their alumni legacy students, and then they know because their parents have told them about Pembroke. So we feel like we're doing a real service.

WK: What kinds of things do you single out to tell them about? What do you feel are the most important pieces of Pembroke to share with someone who comes up to your table in their freshman week?

JM: Well the most important thing to say is that without Pembroke there would be no women at Brown. Because for very many years, women petitioned Brown to attend. And the people at Brown said, "No, we're a men's college. We like life the way it is, go away." And in the meanwhile, colleges like Wheaton were established. So here Brown is, you know, they have no women's school, they're not interested,

and finally over years of pressure, President Andrews agreed to entertain the idea of having women here at Brown, but they would have a separate school. They would not be connected at all to Brown, sort of off there on Meeting Street. "You'll have to raise the money for Pembroke Hall because we're not going to give you any money." They made it as difficult as they could for women. So the fact that these women persevered, and they did raise the money, they weren't working, you know, they didn't have jobs so they had to get the money from their dads and their husbands and their brothers or whatever, says a great deal about the perseverance of women for higher education. So we think that's really important.

WK: You were a relatively young alumna when Pembroke and Brown merged.

JM: Yes.

WK: Yeah, you're 10 years out at that [point].

JM: Right.

WK: Do you remember your reaction to hearing the news? Did you know it was coming?

JM: We knew something was coming because there was a study committee, but we really did not... I was a member of the Pembroke Providence Club. We really did not know the scope of what might happen. And so when the results of the study were issued, it was a big shock that Pembroke was actually being dissolved. I mean, that's really what was happening. Instead of two administrations, [40:00] two admissions departments, two campuses, two whatever, two student bodies, suddenly it was all merged into one. And the idea was sold to us with the thought that the current students wanted to go to a coed school, so we're accommodating them. Nevermind that it's really a financial decision because we're chopping this in half, and this is the way it's going to be. So we had no say. Nobody said, "Do you like this or not? Do you want to vote on it or not? Would you like to appeal it or not?" It was just handed down. And so to this day, there are a lot of older Pembrokers, myself and others who are much older, who are still unhappy. We still feel that it was a railroad decision. We don't like it. [laughs]

WK: How did it impact your life as an alum, your reunions and other things?

JM: Well each class had to vote whether or not they were going to merge. So some of the older classes still have their separate reunions: Pembroke reunions, Brown reunions. [taps table] Our class was sort of arm-twisted into merging, which we didn't really like, but I mean that's how it happened. And some of the newer classes merged automatically, so they have merged reunions. But beyond that, I mean, we're not on campus, we're not in school, so it doesn't affect us day-to-day.

WK: What were you concerned would be lost with the merger, for incoming students?

JM: Well we always thought of Pembroke as a very supportive, very nurturing place. The fact that you could be in chapel and see that the head of all the organizations on the entire campus were women gave us role models for leadership. So no matter what organization you're talking about, there's a woman at the head of it. And I think that was very telling and very long-lasting, sort of gave the message of empowerment. You know, you can do whatever you want, there are opportunities open to you, and go for it. I think that has been lost.

I want to bring up a little bit about the Pembroke banner. After we did the brochure. Along the same lines of making sure that current students know about Pembroke, we decided to commission -- this is the Pembroke Club of Providence -- an authentic Pembroke College banner. And we did. We contacted the Brown banner maker, Mrs. [Barbara] Pelletier and she made us a banner. And then we thought, "Gee, wouldn't it be great if we could be in the Commencement procession, and so I went over to Brown and I worked with Bill Slack, who is in charge of the procession. And they said, "Oh that would be fine. We'd be happy to have you do that this year." And so we did. And then we thought, "Well gee, [unclear] part of the permanent Commencement procession." And so I worked with Rogeriee Thompson, who was a trustee at the time and an alum, and she brought the matter before the Corporation, in a motion. And President Simmons seconded it, and it was passed unanimously, so we have the authority now to march in every Commencement procession. Which we do, and we enjoy it.

WK: Who is the "we" here? Is it the Pembroke Club of Providence? Is it any Pembroke alumna? Who has the banner?

JM: Okay. The Pembroke Club of Providence bought the banner. Betty Socia paid for it and so it belongs to them, but we have a place in the parade every year, so we encourage everybody to march with us.

WK: And you had to research the graphics and everything.

JM: Yes, the logo, the graphics, colors and whatever, the size and so it is authentic, and we're very proud of it. Very much.

WK: How many people usually march with you?

JM: Well the first year, it was raining terribly. We didn't have too many. We had about six or eight. But on a given year, we might have 20, so we extend the invitation to both the clubs, and who's ever able to march and wants to is welcomed. We noticed that when we march in the parade, the President always salutes us as we come to the gates. And then, you know the way the procession separates so that [45:00] the alumni march through the new students, the new students march through the alumni. So by the time we get to the bottom of the hill, we're marching through the new students, they're all screaming "Pembroke!" I mean it's just this wave of sounds. It's so wonderful. I really enjoy it. [laughs]

WK: Will you be marching this year?

JM: Well I'll be having a reunion this year so I'm marching in my class, but usually I do, yes. Yeah.

WK: I also want to touch on your involvement with the Pembroke Center Associates. When did you become involved in that organization?

JM: Well let's see, we have to count backwards. I think I'm on my third consecutive term. So each term is three years. And I'm in the middle of this one. So I would say [laughs] maybe eight years ago or so, give or take. I've always been interested in the Pembroke Center, but until I was selected for the Council I had sort of a limited representation there.

WK: And what have you been involved in during your time on the Council?

JM: Well I've been on the Program Committee, and also on the Membership Committee. I enjoy the Program Committee very much because in almost all of the organizations I've been in, programming is really my forte. I really like doing programming and I really like pushing the edge of the envelope, coming up with new ideas, implementing them, whatever. And so that's why I enjoy the Programming Committee so much. [unclear] what we do. [laughs] That is our job.

WK: What are some of the programs that you've worked on?

JM: Let's see. I didn't work on the Louise Lamphere [exhibit and events] per se.... trying to think back. Probably a couple of years ago we were doing one on women in the judiciary. I brought in Rogeriee because she is, you know, a judge in the Massachusetts Superior Court. And that really interested me because although more and more women are going to law school, not that many of them end up as judges. So it's really important, I think, to get in the pipeline. And I'm very active in the Women's Fund of Rhode Island, so that's just sort of extending empowering girls, empowering women, which is probably my manta. [laughs] I've been at it long enough. It's very enjoyable.

WK: So what else is your typical day consisting of, these days?

JM: Well these days, you know, I am in so many organizations, and I've had to cut back. For instance, when they asked me to be President of the Kent County Club, I had just begun the presidency of the AAUW, and they're both very time-intensive positions. One is in Middletown, one is in East Greenwich, and I just felt like I couldn't do justice to both. And so I did resign as President of the AAUW. However, I had been in charge of the Women Authors Program, which is an annual luncheon for women authors. And so I sort of adopted that into the Junior League, and I've been doing that program for the Junior League. We just had a Women Authors luncheon in April in Middletown. Eve LaPlante, who is a historian, and is a direct descendant of Anne Hutchinson, Samuel Sewell, and Louisa May Alcott, has written biographies of each one of these people. Because she's a direct descendant, she has access to diaries, letters -- a fascinating person. So she was one of our authors. And then the other one was Mary Jane Begin, who is a Professor of Illustration at RISD, and she writes children's books. So we had a wonderful turnout, we had a great program. It's something I enjoy doing.

WK: I did want to ask about your business, that you started.

JM: Okay.

WK: And this was -- well, I'll just ask you: how did you come to [it]?

JM: [laughs] Well as you know now, I've been involved in a lot of organizations, and sometimes people will approach me and say, "Gee, we'd like some help with mission statements, or succession planning, strategic planning. You know, would you be willing to give us some time to do that, to work on it?" And so it grew out of my nonprofit work where I would consult with groups about particular topics. [50:00] It's not full-time, it's part-time. It's per diem, depending on the project, but it's a way to use some of the experience I've had over the years in another way. So I enjoy that. I keep it under control, you know, it's not that much time, but I enjoy it very much.

WK: What are some of the projects that you've been able to become involved in?

JM: Well, I've worked with the Girl Scouts in empowering girls. You know, when I was a Girl Scout, it was still a fairly prescribed role. And now, of course, Girl Scouts can do anything. You know, they are empowered. And I think that's really wonderful. It's important that there's access, I think, for all girls, and that's one of the issues that the Girl Scouts is dealing with now, because it costs money to be a Girl Scout. It's not so much a membership fee, but you have to buy a uniform. You know, it's quite a bit of money if you want to go to camp, and what have you. And so that's really what we're focusing on now: how to provide the access. The Girl Scouts nationally have a lot of money, but the local councils do not. So whether you would think about scholarships, you know, how to get that money to the people might really need it.

WK: And what about looking to Brown? What do you think are some of the most important or pressing concerns facing Brown and women who attend Brown today?

JM: Well I think the sky's the limit as far as women attending Brown today. Not getting into Brown, but the opportunities that are open to them once they are here. There is a Women's Launchpad, and I've thought about joining that. And that is a mentoring program where one alum will team up with one undergraduate and sort of mentor her through education and career opportunities. I've thought of maybe doing that. It could be that these women are so qualified, they don't really need mentoring. I really wouldn't know because I haven't been that close to it. But I think it's important, as I said before about Pembroke and its demise, that women do feel supported in what they're doing. I don't know if in the organizations today, student organizations, are the women the Presidents? Are they the Vice Presidents? Are they relegated to the Secretary role? Do they have equal opportunity? I don't know. I have no way of knowing.

I think that the Pembroke Center can play a large role in terms of gender studies, for the women here today, not just academic knowledge but actual on-the-ground knowledge. And I think that there is a feeling -- I don't know if I'm talking out of class, or what -- but there is a little feeling on the current Associates Council that perhaps so much of the work of the Pembroke Center is academic, that we might not be reaching people where they are. This is only talking with different Council members, people voicing this, and whatever. I'm wondering, we have to be on two tracks. We have to be on the academic track because we have to be generating new knowledge. But at the same time, we have to be supportive of women students and make sure that they have a place where their concerns can be understood and worked with. Now I don't know enough about the future planning of the Pembroke Center to know if this is even on the radar, but I know that some of the Associates members are concerned about it. You could tell me more about that. [laughs] You could tell me more about the future planning than I know.

WK: Well I definitely think that meeting people where they are is a very smart way of putting it. And I think some of the projects that inspire the most enthusiasm, when you see the student projects or the postdoc projects, are the ones where you can see the, you know, "real life" isn't quite the right way to put it, but --

JM: -- See the connection, somehow.

WK: Yeah. Where the connections are more explicit, and they're more immediate. [55:00] So I definitely agree with you there.

JM: Well that would be my hope, really. I think, you know we all know that the Pembroke Center does wonderful academic work, and I think that there is a little bit of frustration, too. I think Jean [Howard] has mentioned it a couple of times, and also Nancy [Buc] that it's so great that you are doing the oral histories, because this is real people, where they are. You know, how has this impacted you. And I think that's really important that as we go forward with the Feminist Theory Archives, we also keep pace with the oral history archives. And I'm glad you're doing that. I'm sorry you're going to be leaving. [laughs]

WK: Well, it's right along the lines of you making the brochure, and setting up your table, and meeting where they are on their first days of campus, and talking to them about your experience, but sort of more broadly.

JM: Oh more broadly, absolutely, yes.

WK: But otherwise things that like you said, if they weren't happening to live on the Pembroke campus, might not sink in.

JM: Exactly. In fact, I've even said to boys, when I'd be talking to them and I'd say something [about] Pembroke and [they would say] "Oh well, that's girls." And I'd say, "Wait a minute. Where are you living on campus?" "Well, I'm on the Pembroke campus." Well, then you know it's part of your history too. So I'm trying to make them see that it's not just an issue about women, it's an issue about education. And they get it. [laughs] They do get it.

I've been very fortunate, I've had a lot of very wonderful experiences. I've had very strong friendships. I've really been blessed by my time at Pembroke. And I really feel that it's not that I have to give back. I enjoy giving back, and it sort of reinforces my own feelings. So I'm very happy about it.

WK: That's great. Well thank you.

JM: Well thank you so much. I enjoyed our conversation.

WK: Thanks for coming in.

[End of Part 1]

[Begin Part 2]

JM: There is another Pembroke initiative I want to talk a little bit about, and that is the Pembroke tribute garden. Pat Shea, who was the class of 1933, was the prime mover behind this garden. It's located on the side of Pembroke Hall, near the terrace, probably oh gee, 10 [or] 12 years ago, Pat got this idea that it would be nice to have a Pembroke tribute garden. And she did speak to the administration, and they said, "Well fine, but you women will have to raise the money for it." Sound familiar? [laughs] So she and Martha Joukowsky and Mary Holburn and a couple of other older alumnae got together and they met with an architect. The administration said, "We'll give you some space on the side of Pembroke Hall, but you'll have to design it and pay for it and whatever." So they met with an architect and a landscaper and whatever, and they surveyed the site, and they came up with a garden design, plantings and whatever. And then, they went to Development and they said, "We have to put together a

campaign to raise money for this garden.” So Development worked with them. They came up with brochures, a mailing list, whatever. Well within a very short time after the mailing was sent out, money just started pouring in, I mean just literally pouring in. They could not open the envelopes fast enough. To the point where Development finally said, “Stop sending in money. We have more than enough money to take care of it.” I believe the price tag around that time was about \$100,000. I don’t know exactly.

But then, the project came to a halt, and the idea was that they were building a pathway from Meeting Street over to Waterman Street in connection with the new building, and so there was no point in putting in a garden at this end of Meeting Street until the pathway was done. And so the money sat there probably for about five years. Accumulating interest, we hope, while this pathway and building was done. To the point where Pat Shea, who was the originator and lived to be 100 years old, died before the garden was ever accomplished. And everyone was very sad about that because she felt so strongly and yet she couldn’t be there for the implementation. Well finally, the building was done, and the pathway was done, and President Simmons, after many delays, was encouraged to complete the process. So she gave the word to go ahead, and the garden began being implemented. And within a very short time, it was completed, and we had a ceremony in Pembroke Hall celebrating the opening of the garden. Very lovely. We had a tea, and then we all went out the garden and had our picture taken with the plantings and the inscription. It was very, very nice. It didn’t need to take that long -- probably ten years, start to finish? -- but it means a lot to the older alumnae that it’s there.

WK: That’s great.

JM: So we’re happy to have it.

[End of Part 2]

[End of Interview]