

Interviewee: Nan Bailey '74
Interviewer: Emily Coe-Sullivan ('99)
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Emily Coe-Sullivan: It is Saturday, September 5th, 2015. This is Emily Coe-Sullivan, class of 1999 and I am interviewing Nan Bailey, class of 1974 in her home in Los Angeles, California. Hi, Nan.

Nan Bailey: Hi, how are you Emily?

ES: I'm doing well. I was going to ask you a little bit about your name—I noticed you go by your middle name. Can you tell me a little more about that?

NB: Yeah, it's a pretty simple story: my first name is Fereline, my middle name 'Nanette', my first name is the same as my mother's name and most of my childhood she called me Nanette. Registered me at school that way. I didn't know my first name was Fereline and I asked her later why she did that and she said that after she named me she decided she didn't want any confusion when people said the name—that Fereline was talking to her—

ES: —right—

NB: —Nan was talking to me.

ES: Right.

NB: So I started using the name later, you know after she explained that to me and when I knew it was my name. But that's why really the middle name has kind of stuck too.

ES: Did she tell you when she first registered you for school or were you confused on your first day?

NB: No, she didn't tell me, I just—I thought when I was very young that my name was Nan, Nanette. You know, it just never came up. No, she didn't tell me, she just did it.

ES: Right.

NB: And she did put an 'F' there, or something, but she explained to the teachers that this is what I was supposed to be called.

ES: Wow.

NB: So that's why.

ES: That is really interesting. Can you tell me a little bit more about your family and your childhood growing up?

NB: Sure. My father was a career army man.

ES: Okay.

NB: He rose to the rank of Master Sergeant, fought in a segregated unit in World War II. He also saw action in Korea, and because of his career, our family traveled quite a bit and lived in different

parts of the world: in Japan, and in France is what I remember through my elementary school years. Those were the times when the US military was very different. And today families don't travel with the military anymore.

ES: Overseas?

NB: Back then it was kind of a norm—you could bring your family if you wanted to. But now they've decided they need to trim down and have a leaner, you know, fighting machine.

ES: Right.

NB: So, I remember his being stationed in France for several years. So those were really my formative years as a child, and—

ES: And were you, did you need to learn to speak French and Japanese?

NB: Yeah, Japanese I was too young; I was just a toddler then. But French we did learn. And he always made sure that we lived in the community. We had the choice to live on base because there was army housing, or live in a French community. So we always did that so we could learn better. And we did pretty good—my sister did the best because she was too young to go to kindergarten, or nursery school at the army base, so she actually started her first year of school at a French School, and learned French better than all the rest of us because of that. But, we all learned, including my mother and father, you know, though the years of being there. My mother interrupted her studies to be a registered nurse to marry my father. They met at Hampton Institute, it's now Hampton University, but in those days it was an all-black, what do they call that? Like, institute—like a career college for—I can't find the word. Carpentry? Like a trades school.

ES: Okay.

NB: And after my father retired from the military, she went back to school and got her nursing degree. And then a Masters degree, and she became a nursing administrator and did that for the rest of her life.

ES: Oh wow. And when you say it was interrupted because she moved—

NB: When she got married, and started having children, she stopped her education.

ES: I see. Okay.

NB: So then she went back to complete it after we were grown and you know my father retired. So they were both kind of unusual people.

ES: Yeah. That's amazing. And where were you living when you were applying to colleges? Where were you living at the time?

NB: I was living at St Timothy's school, a boarding school, outside of Baltimore—

ES: Okay.

NB: —where my parents lived. I was the first black girl, in an all girls school, to go to that school in 1967. So the school was desegregated with a lot of initiative by the headmistress who was Jean Miller. And Jean Miller is the reason why I applied to and went to Brown. Because I didn't know

that that was her school but she really encouraged me. She took an interest in every girl and the classes were very small. So, to make sure we got into college and went to one that was a good fit. So she really encouraged me to go to Brown, which I didn't know much about, but I trusted her judgment and applied there. And that's how I ended up at Brown, that's where I applied from.

ES: Wow. Okay, well that's amazing. So, this is more of a generic question, but did you have any expectations before you arrived? Jean had probably told you a little bit about it. Did you visit before you went? Did you—

NB: I didn't visit, but I did some reading and I was pleased to hear that even in those days you could take courses pass/fail which I was interested in. And I also looked up, because I was very interested in social activism, and I read and, you know, researched that there was a student mobilization committee on campus, a Women's Liberation organization, an Afro-American Student Society. And all those were the things I was looking to find out more about and get into. So, I did find out a little bit and I liked what I found out about Brown.

ES: Wow. Okay. And do you remember your first impressions when you got there?

NB: I'd have to say no, not in particular. I was glad to be there, I jumped right into the organizations that I mentioned and there was a lot of activism on campus. So I feel so lucky to have gone to college at a time when that was going on, because it really gives you a realistic view of the world and what's going on beyond college, you know? Not just you, but people, and issues, and what's important. So we were in probably the deepest part of the anti-Vietnam War movement and so much of the campus was involved in that. So, I don't know, I was happy that what I was looking for was there, and spent about as much time on these social issues as I did in my classes.

ES: Well you mentioned that on your bibliography that you were very involved in Student Caucus and the other organizations you mentioned: the Young Socialist Alliance, the Women's Lib Campaign, can you talk more about—let's just start with the Student Caucus. That was one of the articles that I saw. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

NB: Okay well the reason I got involved in that was because of the Young Socialist Alliance. That was a group that organized around a lot of positive issues—the war, women's liberation, you know, black rights were some of those issues. But more than that, for a revolutionary change in the government in the US in order for the real interest of human beings to be the first priority, not money or profits. So, we had this little group on campus, we had an office and every election period, we ran elections, and that's how I started getting involved in the Caucus, as a Socialist with a different point of view, than, you know I explained, the other candidates had. And I wasn't the only Socialist who ran, there were others too. So I served in the Caucus for a number of years and then ran for president of the Caucus and was defeated, but that was an important part of my activity as a Socialist to do that.

ES: Do you want to talk a little bit more about that election? What I read just was that you ran against Curtis Blessing. Do you want to maybe talk a little bit about the differences of your campaigns, or just talk about your experiences a little?

NB: Well, yeah I'd have to think back and I really wish I could see his literature, but I could talk about the differences and who we were, and what we did. Curtis was a student who was just more reform-minded, you know, I felt. And me, because we both served in the Caucus before this election came up. But I would look for every opportunity to press the campus based on students. You know, supporting me to do this, to do something different and to get involved in social issues, like bettering the community or we often would have debates about money for buses to go to

Washington DC for a demonstration. You know, for the school to—for the Caucus to use part of its funds for that. You know, not just parties and you know other things that happened every year, but something socially conscious that would be positive. So it would cut the price of the ticket drastically, or even zero for students who really wanted to make the trip and represent Brown in the demonstrations. So, we debated many of these things. When the Women's Liberation Organization wanted to press some important issue or put on a program and get funding, I would support them and present it in the Caucus.

ES: I see.

NB: But there was always a debate in differences and the only thing I can say to be fair to Curtis is, I just remember his reform-mindedness rather than revolutionary-mindedness, which I felt I had. And which I felt was in the best interest of students at Brown is what made me decide to run for president of the Student Caucus. And offer a very different point of view than the campus had seen.

ES: You talked a little bit about also the Women's Liberation Campaign being a part of that. Was there tension between the two? Or were you, you said you were bringing women's voices to the Caucus more.

NB: Well tension between what two?

ES: Well, you tell me.

NB: Okay. Well do you mean the Caucus and the—

ES: Yes.

NB: I don't remember particular tension. I think not everyone on campus understood it. But the young women on campus who formed the group—I mean it wasn't small, it was popular—and they really were pressing for women's equality and for encouraging confidence and independence in women, which we were still on the road to trying to achieve that. We've come a long way. It hasn't totally been conquered yet, but back in the day when I entered Brown, and it was Brown because the merger had just happened, and I remember for the first time there were—I started in a coed dorm. And even though the floors were female/male, but it was coed and it was Brown University now and we all received our diplomas from there. And everything had been merged together, different than the old days of a unified coeducational university. So that posed challenges also, you know for women pressing for confidence and independence and being looked at, being treated equally to male students. It also dealt with professors, and women participated and brought in, I remember bringing in a lot of speakers just for educational purposes because it was a new issue for women to take up.

ES: New for everyone. So what was that like? Because that was really right when it happened. Right, I thought it was 1971, but...so that was really when it happened. When, what kinds of issues were there? Why was it so difficult to be integrated suddenly with men because they didn't treat you the same? They weren't expecting women to be smart? What was it that was—?

NB: No, I think it was just habit and tradition. I mean on the professor level, that's a deeper question. Or even teaching level. But it was tradition and a big a part, I find, being black and female, of overcoming oppression, you know, for the victim, is not being a victim of your own lack of self-confidence. You know, there's so many people I've met who've been conditioned by society to think 'I'll never do that', you know. And you can't accept that thinking that's been ingrained in you. You'll never do it if you don't try. So, these women were trying to bring out that attitude in the

new women coming in. So it was a combination of, you know, all of this: attitudes, and you know, subjective feelings and—I wish, you know that’s a very good question, I wish I could think of some of the issues we took up. I know having birth control readily available was kind of a fight then and at that time, when I entered Brown, abortion was not legal yet. That didn’t happen for a few years later so that was one of the issues that we organized around.

ES: Having access to birth control?

NB: That happened I think in ’73 so right in the middle of my school years at Brown. And there were large protests outside the campus too, nationally, you know, pressing for that demand for a woman’s right to choose.

ES: Right. Right, that was right in the mix of it all. And, one of the things you talked about in your bibliography was also about the Women’s Liberation Campaign, and your involvement in repealing the abortion laws.

NB: Yeah because when I went to Washington DC to, I think I had two stints there where I did independent studies. One of them was in 1972, and the other was in ’74. And in ’72, I was able to work as a volunteer for the Women’s National Abortion Action Coalition. And it was headquartered in Washington DC. And I was part of helping to organize educationals, put together leaflets, build demonstrations that led to the, not just in DC but all around the country, that led to the Roe vs. Wade victory in the decision from the Supreme Court that legalized a woman’s right to choose for the first time. So we did fundraisers, all kinds of things I learned how to do. And I was able to make it an independent study.

ES: Amazing.

NB: So it was real life, and you know, my professor believed me because I produced all of the literature that I helped to put together.

ES: Who was the professor?

NB: You know, I would like to look that up. Because I don’t remember the professors for any of my independent studies. I just remember, you had to talk them into it. And it was their decision whether to be your advisor. And I was so lucky because they took me as serious. You know, I would look up professors who were interested in this issue or that, and they interviewed me and I was able to convince them each time to give me a chance, work with me, tell me what would be expected, how many papers or how many, you know, what I had to do. And they did it. So I really recommend those independent studies to anybody who has the energy to try them out. And they’re best when they’re something you’re really doing.

ES: Well, and it sounds like your passion too for what mattered. For what, grassroots organizing was a part of probably what convinced them too, that you really—

NB: Maybe. I wish so much—that was a time in US history when there were so many issues and so much ferment going on. You know, for students to be passionate about? And that’s why I said, I’ll repeat what I said before, I feel so lucky to have been in college at that time, and I really do wish that all college students would have that opportunity. It’s been a long time since it’s come up. I think there’s more movements now getting to that level to inspire students like the Black Lives Matter, 15 dollars an hour for Wal-Mart, and other, you know, some of the fast food places. Things that are really critical social issues that students can be attracted to. Because it gives some meaning to your life, you know. As a college student to be part of things like that so...

ES: Want to see something outside of school that—

NB: Yeah, and which you're going to do. You know, you're going to have a life after college—that's what you're preparing for, so it's good to have a vision of some of those possibilities.

ES: Yeah. Tell me more about Brown of Women United. Was that separate from the Women's Liberation Campaign? Or were they very similar?

NB: Okay, now you're saying the names which I wish I 'd looked up. Was that the name of the group—"Brown Women United"?

ES: It was—you had mentioned it in your bibliography and when I was doing a little bit of my own research in the BDH, that name came up: the "Brown of Women United".

NB: Okay so that was the group.

ES: Okay. But that's separate from—it's separate or the same as the—

NB: The same. That was the Women's Liberation group on campus.

ES: Okay.

NB: Because it was an all-student thing where the officers were students, you know, the organizers, the volunteers. And we had pretty sizeable meetings. I don't remember the timeline of how often we met but it was a very popular organization, having educational and action discussions about things to do. Because at the same time there were demonstrations and protests and things going on outside of campus too, which the group linked up to.

ES: So was the group primarily focused on things that were happening, sort of, in the world—social issues, sort of broader social issues, or did it also focus on what was happening at Brown specifically—

NB: Both.

ES: —and having women's choices be a part of—

NB: Both.

ES: —that community? Okay it was really both, that's interesting. So what was (overlapping dialogue)

NB: —And now that you're peaking my memory, I'm going to look this up and maybe send you an addendum.

ES: Of course.

NB: Okay, so go ahead, what did you say? What was what?

ES: I was asking what were some of the issues that were actually on Brown's campus that this particular group was involved in, the Women at Brown United. Honestly just even running for the student Caucus as a black woman to give voice to black women's voices on campus. As, you know,

separate from the other issues that were happening outside of the community, but specifically at Brown to make sure that your unique specific needs were being met on campus. Does that make sense? (laughs)

NB: Yeah, but I don't think most people viewed it that way. I think most people saw me as a Socialist and, like I said, there were others. Not so much a black woman advancing those needs, but they knew I was active in, you know, all these organizations.

ES: I see. Did you see yourself that way?

NB: No, often I would be asked that question. Well you're doing this, this this, okay which is more important? You have to pick one. And I would say 'no, I don't want to pick one, they're all important'. Which is, it's kind of how I became a Socialist. Because I saw that s putting them all together, and you know, that I could, I didn't have to choose one, I could fight for our rights as women, as blacks, as students at Brown, as anti-war activists.

ES: Right, you didn't have to separate out the—

NB: Socialism accepted all that, together, yeah, was one interlinked struggle.

ES: Historically too, there has been tension, right? Between the Women's Lib Movement and black women's liberation or that tension between race and class. Historically, that has been an issue, controversial. Was it at the time? Was that a struggle for you? You said that Socialism sort of brought all of that, those pieces together.

NB: Well, I think there have been class divisions in all these movements. You know, not just women but also among blacks. So, I guess I was used to seeing it, but I did find then and now, you know they've gotten deeper I think, I always thought, and it always was confirmed to me that if you get together a group of working class women, or blacks, that you know, the similarities, you'd have less fighting. You know, because they were there for the same issue. And most are working people in those two categories, and so my focus has always been, including at Brown, to try to center it on them. The ones who need the liberation the most, and that way—and to encourage them not to let the upper classes in the Women's Movement or in any place else, take over, but to stand up for themselves. So, yes it was an issue to answer your question, and the way out of it that people who thought like me saw, was to encourage, mobilize and encourage, more working class women to be leaders. To step up, to speak up, and not let other people speak for us.

ES: Right. To have their voices heard too.

NB: Uh-huh.

ES: So can you describe, we've talked a little bit about some of your memories, but can you describe one striking memory from your college years? Is there something very specific that stands out?

NB: Just the, I would say the real overwhelming disapproval of the Vietnam War. When they're were different turning points, like big bombing campaign that was started, and I don't know if you remember, you're probably too young, but in those days, Vietnam was the top news story. Usually with audio and visual from the battlefield, you know where journalists had gone and joined, like they do today sometimes, the different fighting units. And when there were turning points, it was really easy to get, I don't know, many, many students together. Like I'd say a few thousand. I remember one time there was a big bombing campaign, I don't remember the details, it was in the

news. So, we, my little Socialist group, the Young Socialist Alliance, got up the next morning and decided to get a room, a big auditorium, and put up signs that said “Strike? Come and discuss what we’re going to do” you know about the bombing of Cambodia, or whatever it was. I don’t know if it was that, but whatever. And we went and encouraged other groups to join us, which they did. So we put they’re names on the flyer too. And that next day the auditorium was full—

ES: Wow.

NB: —and I was surprised. But whenever there were turning points, you know, the students were there. And not everybody agreed, but we would have these debates and discussions about what, you know, what does this mean? What are we going to do?

ES: Right. So you have this image of this full auditorium—(overlapping dialogue)

NB: Yeah, uh-huh. And how easy it was—just a few flyers. I mean that speaks to the social impact of this question and how much there was interest in it and upsetted-ness about it right there on the Brown Campus.

ES: Right.

NB: Because it would be very difficult today to put up a sign about anything and get a few thousand students out, but students cared just as much as society did and by the seventies as we got toward the mid-seventies, ’73 and ’74, we were getting closer to the end of the war and more and more people were just not seeing the worthiness of it—

ES: I see.

NB: —and wanted it to stop and so that included Brown. So, that’s one of my lasting images that I was really proud of students on the campus for being part of that.

ES: Right that they cared about what was happening.

NB: Uh-huh, at a place so many miles away. You know, it wasn’t affecting them directly, bombs weren’t falling on the campus, but they cared about what the US was doing to these people and wanted it to stop.

ES: Right. So on the flip side, what were the low points of your time at Brown? Do you have, sort of, negative memories? Something specific that stands out?

NB: I don’t know....I think mainly just not having enough time, sometimes I would be frustrated with the class that I didn’t think was the greatest, because I wanted more time to go and sell our newspaper, ‘The Militant’, which was covering the Young Socialist Alliances newspaper with the Socialist Workers Party. We were just the youth group, but it really covered all the turning points in the Vietnam War and what was going on in the class struggle around the world. So we would go door to door in the dorms to sell it and sometimes, you know, we did many other things, I mean by the time you add the Student Caucus, the Young Socialist Alliance meetings, the Brown Women United meetings, the (laughs) Afro-American Students Society-that’s a lot of nights, yeah.

ES: No time left. No time do you your work.

NB: And sometimes, if a class was interesting, okay. But if it was really boring me, you know, that was a low point. Like I just have to get through this. And I did drop a few because of that and went looking for something else so...

ES: Can you talk a little bit more about social life on campus?

NB: Now how do you mean social life? To me the social life was what I've been describing—that was my social life on campus.

ES: That was your social life?

NB: Yeah.

ES: So more specifically, you know, describe relationships between freshmen and older students, between men and women?

NB: Yeah I guess that wasn't so much part of my world because I saw in the world I was living in, you know, around these social issues? It, freshmen and junior, really went together. If you agreed on the issue that was the only important thing.

ES: Right.

NB: And nobody was looked down upon, you know, who got up to speak about something. So—

ES: Age wasn't a factor?

NB: No. So that was kind of my mindset and of many people participating. And I'd have to say for me, I know it was an issue for a lot of people, you know, coming to university for the first time, but like romantic relationships wasn't at the top of my list. And I was so glad—sometimes people would question me about it. You know, like a guy: 'Hey! Don't you ever go out? Don't you ever...?' And I just was not interested right then.

ES: It wasn't a priority.

NB: Yeah, I had other things on my agenda, yeah.

ES: M-hmm. And what about your closest friends? Were they (overlapping dialogue)

NB: I guess they were into the same things I was, so...they understood. Is that what you mean?

ES: Well I just meant—were your closest friends the people in these—

NB: Yeah, uh-huh. I would say the Young Socialist Alliance in particular because we really thought alike. But then in all these groups there were really outstanding people who became my friends because I respected them so much and really liked the kind of person they were, and what they were doing.

ES: Right. Also a more generic question—

NB: Okay.

ES: —but were female students bound by rules and expectations of proper dress and behavior?

NB: Not by the time I got there. I never—

ES: —you never felt that—

NB: noticed it. No. And never heard anybody complain. Any other women complain.

ES: Right. So you mentioned not remembering necessarily the names of your professors, but were there any specific classes, or professors you do remember that you found enjoyable or challenging? Favorite professors?

NB: You know, I know I had them, but I'm sorry to say I can't remember...

ES: Do you remember the classes?

NB: ...that far back. Yeah I liked a good history class on Japan and there was a class on Vietnam. You know, by a male professor, don't remember his name.

ES: Do you remember the department?

NB: Probably history, but I don't remember.

ES: M-hmm.

NB: I don't know, I guess I would say that the courses I liked the most were the independent studies.

ES: M-hmm. That's where you learned the most...

NB: And I need to really get a record of that and the professors because I'd like to see if they're still there.

ES: If the professors are still there?

NB: Probably not after all these years, yeah.

ES: You could probably request your transcripts?

NB: Oh okay, would that have professors on it?

ES: It should. Well, maybe just the name of the classes.

NB: Okay. So, we'll see, but that would be a start, yeah.

ES: Do you remember what your relationship was like with any of the deans or administrators? As a part of these groups, did you have any interactions with the administration?

NB: Yeah, but nothing positive. The main thing I remember is the president at that time was Dr. Honig who recently died, I saw in the Brown Alumni Monthly. And mostly I remember we just contested, you know protests, at his residence, about the Vietnam War, about—just about different things act students wanted. That we wanted him to—

ES: And he wasn't supportive of it?

NB: No.

ES: Okay.

NB: No.

ES: What was he like?

NB: What was he—I don't know, he was...always trying to calm us down and not to protest.

ES: Because he didn't agree? Or because he didn't want...to have these things happening on his campus?

NB: Yeah, that's a good question. I can't say that I took in what he said about that. I think he probably tried to explain it, but I'm not sure what his concern was. Just that he, he was opposed to us doing the protests, and that's all I cared about at the time so (laughs)

ES: Sure. And what about any of the deans? Was there any support on the administration side?

NB: Not that I recall. There might have been but not that I recall anybody going out of their way to speak up for us.

ES: M-hmm. So let's talk a little bit about diversity on campus in the student body. How diverse was it in terms of race, class, religion, geography?

NB: Okay, I don't know about religion. You know, probably diverse, but I don't know. Because you don't usually go around—it's different when you meet somebody black or something, or female. You know it's clear. But there was a lot of diversity in terms of females. And also blacks because a couple years before I came, there had been a protest that was part of a black's rights protest that happened on many campuses, demanding a higher percentage of African American students to be accepted at Brown. And the university complied with that and so, I don't remember the percentage, but I'll look that up. But when I got there in 1970, I felt like there were quite a number of black students to relate, to... Many, many of them were involved in the Afro-American Students Society. And that was an advance, I think for all students on campus, for that large number to be admitted. And I think, you know I've always looked at my admission as a part of that. You know, taking advantage of a wider window being opened, for a door being opened, for blacks to be accepted at the campus.

ES: I see. And you've mentioned the Afro-American Students Society again. What kinds of activities did that organization do? Sort of similar...?

NB: Yeah. I — I am sorry.

ES: It's okay.

NB: It was standing up for black rights. I think a lot of this was on campus, but I do remember there were also issues that went beyond the campus. Like I remember it was there that a defense committee was initiated for Angela Davis.

ES: M-hmm. M-hmm.

NB: And the group did a lot of work helping to link up with the African American community in Providence which was small, but you know, going out to communities, working with young students who needed tutoring, things like that.

ES: Right.

NB: Now, it's the on-campus issues that I can't recall though. Because there were those.

ES: Angela Davis was in California at the time though, right?

NB: Yeah, uh-huh, but this was, it became like a national movement of a lot of especially young people and blacks to defend her.

ES: M-hmm. Who saw her as an icon?

NB: Yeah, I don't know about an icon. But they didn't think the evidence showed that she was guilty. And I'm sure some thought of her as an icon, but it was like a defense committee supporting her legally and raising money for that purpose...

ES: I see.

NB: ...for her defense. Because people didn't believe she was guilty of what she was being charged with.

ES: Right. You mentioned being involved in other—in Providence, in the city of Providence. Did you, what other types of things did you do in Providence?

NB: In Provi—that was the main thing I remembered. I don't recall really going into town very much at all. Except to get on buses to go to New York or Washington DC for—

ES: Oh, I see.

NB: —an antiwar demonstration, or something like that.

ES: Okay. You also mentioned earlier that you lived in a coed dorm when you got to Brown. Do you remember where exactly you lived? [Where you think it was?]

NB: Mm...no, no, no.

ES: Was it on Brown's main campus? On Pembroke's campus?

NB: No, I believe it was on Brown's main campus and uh...

ES: All four years?

NB: I think I stayed in that building for most of the four years. When I was away, I didn't have a dorm room. When I did my independent studies. But, I'm trying to remember how it changed over the years because my first year I do remember what they called coed was like a woman's floor, a man's floor, women's floor, man's floor.

ES: I see. So it was done by floor.

NB: But I don't remember if that changed over the years. And I don't remember the name of the building.

ES: What was that like? Coming from an all-girls high school?

NB: Well, I was wondering how it was going to work, but it seemed fine. And I wouldn't have minded, you know, as long as we had our own rooms. Even, you know, what I think they got to later, you know, guys in their own rooms too on the same floor.

ES: Okay.

NB: So you, did you have a roommate?

ES: Yeah.

ES: Okay. Do you remember who your roommate was?

NB: Yes I do. I can see her face now. We were roommates for two years. Gay. Gay Parsdon I think was her name. From Maine.

ES: Are you still in touch with her?

NB: No, we lost touch after...I think we roomed together the first two years and then I don't remember, when I got into my independent studies?

ES: M-hmm. Okay.

NB: But then I was also friends with—there was another student from St Timothy's, where I had gone to high school who went there too.

ES: Okay.

NB: So...we—

ES: But you didn't feel like it was unusual to suddenly be living above or below men?

NB: No.

ES: It wasn't striking to you?

NB: No. I was wondering how it was going to work, but the truth is we hardly saw the guys, you know? They stayed on their floor.

ES: You were so busy doing other things.

NB: (Overlapping dialogue) Yeah, uh-huh. And it just didn't seem to interfere at the dorm and my life. We had out bathrooms on our floor.

ES: Do you have a, or did you have a favorite spot on campus?

NB: Yeah there was a little like, it wasn't a deli, but a little corner shop that had ice cream and I think hamburgers and stuff. But it was the first place I had a cabinet. So you know what a cabinet is?

ES: No.

NB: They called it that in those days. It was a milkshake.

ES: Oh.

NB: You never heard that?

ES: M-mm.

NB: Oh, I don't know, where did I get it from? (both laugh) So I would go there. I loved coffee cabinets.

ES: Okay.

NB: And I always thought it was so weird to call it that. Okay now I'm going to check to see if anyone else remembers this.

ES: I'm sure you're remembering it right. I just can't remember...

NB: I would tell my friends in Baltimore and elsewhere, 'you know what they call a milkshake? A cabinet!'

ES: They do have unique words for things in Rhode Island. That's what I always thought.

NB: Uh-huh. (Overlapping dialogue) So I love those cabinets, and I would go there as often as I could to get one. But yeah, I'm going to look into that. You're giving me all kinds of...

ES: So do you have any specific memories of Brown or Pembroke events or traditions? You've talked a lot about different protests and things like that. But what about—

NB: Well...

ES: —campus events or traditions?

NB: ...One event that I liked that wasn't political but just a relax and shoot off steam, was the ice hockey games because we never had ice hockey at schools I went to.

ES: Sure.

NB: So I liked the games, they were fun. I learned the school song and you know, just went there with friends sometimes. And enjoyed yelling and hearing the ice being scraped with their skate blades. And I think of all the teams, I heard this has changed over the years, but that was the only good team, athletic team, that Brown had at the time.

ES: Was their ice hockey?

NB: That actually won some games sometimes, yeah. (laughs)

ES: Was it all men?

NB: Yeah.

ES: Okay. No women yet. Were there any other sports events that you went to?

NB: No, that was the only one.

ES: That was it, okay.

NB: And other events? Sometimes they had concerts on campus?

ES: Concerts for the...

NB: I remember there were

ES: ...musicians? And—

NB: Yeah. They had one that I particularly enjoyed which was Livingston Taylor. What's his name...Taylor?

Both: James Taylor?

NB: James Taylor's little brother?

ES: Oh okay. And where would it be?

NB: It was at an outdoor area that I don't remember what that was.

ES: Not the main green, but...?

NB: Not the main green, no. But a smaller type green.

ES: A smaller field?

NB: Yeah, he sang outdoors.

ES: So going back to more gender issues, what do you think Brown or Pembroke taught you about gender and about women's roles in society?

NB: To tell you the truth, I didn't get so much education there. I felt like I got more at my high school which was the first time I went to an all-girls school. And I just thought the benefits of that were so positive. You know without parents, without boyfriends, to just think about yourself and your own goals in life. And where young women were always, you know, the president of the senior class, the head of the student government, the head of the hockey—the athletic teams. So, you know, it was all women so there's like no obstacle in the way of your confidence to go for what you could do. So I liked that experience and I think I learned more there than—so when I got to Brown, I knew it was coed, but it wasn't like a lot more teaching I got, I didn't think, on that particular question.

ES: I didn't realize you were a boarder at St Timothy's. Was it only boarders?

NB: In those days yes, that's changed.

ES: How far away were your parents?

NB: I think it was less than an hour.

ES: Okay.

NB: But it was a requirement at that time to be a boarder, yeah. Now they have day students also. But that was a good experience for me. And the first time I've lived side by side with women of all—young women—from all levels of society. And that was good for me to make the comparison and see that—

ES: All levels in terms of class?

NB: Class, yeah.

ES: Was it a religious school?

NB: No. Maybe originally it was, but that's not the...just an all-girls boarding school.

ES: I see. So you feel like that was more of your education of gender and gender roles?

NB: Life and gender and yeah.

ES: You've talked a lot about some of the political issues that you were involved in. Would you say those played the largest role in shaping your time at Brown?

NB: I think so, yeah.

ES: Specifically...? The Young Socialist Alliance? Or which...?

NB: See, again, I would have to say, I think the Young Socialist Alliance more than the others. Because it went farther with its views, and it enveloped the others, you know, it included them. The others I very much supported, but they were going for the one issue.

ES: I see.

NB: And point of view.

ES: And you felt like the Young Socialist Alliance was more comprehensive?

NB: Yes.

ES: Interesting. If you could, would you change anything about your experience at Brown or at Pembroke?

NB: That's a good question. Nothing I can think of right now.

ES: More independent studies?

NB: Well, maybe. The truth is, they were a lot of work. You know I think I handled what I could do because there was more than the two. I can't remember, maybe I did four, but it was a lot of work. Good work, you know, and I enjoyed it, but...I don't know if I would have taken on many more.

ES: Right. That's a lot. So, talking a little bit about your life beyond Brown, do you remember having any specific expectations about what your future would look like? Work? Family? All of your political activism?

NB: No, I just I knew that I wanted to continue the political activism. But in terms of work or career, I left without— as clueless as when I entered. You know, I had a major which was a Political Science/Afro-American History...

ES: Okay.

NB: ...which, they were just starting some classes on that. And that was one of the complaints of the Afro-American Society; that more were needed.

ES: More classes?

NB: Yeah, because we felt that there were some, you know, and that was good, but there really needed to be more. Today, is there a department?

ES: M-hmm.

NB: Okay, see that has really changed over time. That was at the very beginning.

ES: Yeah, and it's a specific concentration.

NB: Okay. So I couldn't do that concentration so I just had it as a secondary issue to my Political Science degree.

ES: I don't know what the representation is now, though. Like how many of the classes, what the professors look like, if you know, how broadly it is in the curriculum. (Overlapping dialogue)

NB: I'd be interested in what has happened over the years to the percentage of black students.

ES: M-hmm. In term of enrollment—

NB: Yes.

ES: —Or in terms of concentrations?

NB: Enrollment.

ES: I see. I definitely don't know those numbers off the top of my head.

NB: Yeah. Yeah, I don't blame you. I think probably few people do.

ES: You may've already answered this, but did you have any specific career plans when you came to Brown? You came with ideas but...any specific—

NB: Yeah, I did have a plan. I wanted to be a diplomat for the US Government.

ES: Okay.

NB: So, I definitely changed that point of view...

ES: Okay.

NB: ...you know, in the course of my years there in what I was doing.

ES: Right.

NB: So, I dropped that and I didn't have another substitute, just that I wanted to be a Socialist. And soon after I left Brown, I joined the Socialist Worker's Party, the group that is affiliated with the Young Socialist Alliance.

ES: The national group?

NB: Yeah.

ES: Okay. And what did you do for them?

NB: All kinds of things. I lived in many different cities, I helped to build branches, reached out in solidarity on a number of different issues from factory workers to—I had, really, a wonderful life before I had to slow it down, because of the oxygen. But I worked as a meat cutter in Des Moines Iowa, I worked as a garment worker in New York City...

ES: Wow.

NB: I did the same here in LA when I first got here. I worked as a manufacturer of parts for airplanes in Seattle. So it was fascinating. All this was part of our political work.

ES: Okay.

NB: And working to transform the unions and to win working people to our point of view.

ES: Right. A lot of grassroots organizing.

NB: Yeah, uh-huh. In the process, learned Spanish because it was really the only way to communicate with coworkers in meatpacking and garment too. And I, you know because of the party's work, I got a look at life really from the point of view of people who do these things, you know, that I wouldn't have gotten at all.

ES: Right.

NB: It's really given me a lot of confidence in what we're doing, and in the working class today, but I still have friends today here in LA when I had to stop, I could no longer work in the garment industry, but they keep in touch with me. And call me every now and then: Christmas, maybe another time. You know, 'How are you, Nan?'

ES: Right. Do you remember any professional mentors you had?

NB: Professional mentors.

ES: So, in the party, in the Socialist Party, was there anyone specifically who stands out?

NB: Yeah, I mean really there's a number of people, but in particular— (coughs) excuse me—I learned a lot from and really respect Jack Barnes and Mary Alice Waters. Two of the central leaders of the party who write some of our books, who really helped to lead and direct the Party's work.

ES: Right. They sort of helped shape your own career?

NB: Yeah, definitely.

ES: Okay. What was the best job that you had?

NB: The best? I guess I'll take best as meaning the most fun. You think?

ES: Whatever your definition of best is.

NB: Okay. It's a toss up. I really liked the meatpacking job, especially because, you know we were able to win over a lot of people, especially in meatpacking, it's kind of a macho-type of job. And they starting hiring women to do it and a lot of these guys didn't think women could do the jobs, keep their knives sharp and stuff like that. So to do that, and win their respect, you know, that was a very positive thing. And it was very good for the job and the union to have that kind of new relationship. You know, for men to see, it doesn't have to be your wife, it doesn't have to be your girlfriend or somebody you flirt with. You know, there are women who are worthwhile and intelligent, and good to have as friends. And just as smart as you yeah.

ES: M-hmm.

NB: So that was positive from that, and I had a really good experience in Seattle at this aerospace parts plant. Because I got there right as something was happening outside, just like, you know I described at Brown, which was there were so many devastating problems for women that they were getting really disgruntled. And the company was worried about it, and actually many companies, and so the union gave the go-ahead to set up women's committees. So we did that in our plant and it was just a great experience. All these women who had never even been to meetings before going to meetings, voting, and really advancing women's rights in the plant. Things like, I'll give you one example: this company was really strict about firing people for absenteeism, but the ones with the highest absenteeism who often got fired were women because they had kids. And they were the main ones responsible for it if the kid was sick. And I think this place said three times and you're out, if you miss or you're late and it's not accounted for, or it's not planned ahead for, and that was ridiculous. So, we were able to get them to change that and to give the women a little more leeway.

ES: And you said for many women, it was the first time that they were even sort of, organizing or attending these kinds of meetings—

NB: Yeah—

ES: —or committees

NB: We would have meetings on the lunch hour and I'll never forget we started discussing—oh lunch hour, 30 minutes, so we had to have a tight agenda and everybody voted at the end of a report on what to do. And I could see women just some were giggling, and some were just proud because they'd never been at a meeting taking votes before. You know? But they were deciding what we

were doing, and we did some wonderful things: strike solidarity, we had a great—one of our coworkers was killed by her husband, a domestic violence issue, and we had a great lecture and demonstration about domestic violence that hundreds of people came to from the plant. So that was an exciting experience, and all the Party played a big role in working with me, making that possible, and those are kinds of experiences we live for...

ES: Right.

NB: ...in the Party, to make that kind of an impact.

ES: Well and to take all your experience before, whether it was at Brown, or doing your independent studies—

NB: Yeah.

ES—to—(inaudible)

NB: Make use of it, yeah. And still build the plane parts in the mean time. And show up on time to...

ES: Sure. Right. Equally important.

NB: Uh huh.

ES: So in what ways has your actual path adhered to or deviated from what you initially expected?

NB: Okay, well where's initially?

ES: Well—

NB: At the beginning of school or...?

ES: Well, right, at the beginning of school. From before you entered to Brown, sort of what your expectations were, what you're life would be like.

NB: Well, okay, I think what I told you about my goal in life, when I entered Brown to be a diplomat and then ending up being a Socialist, and really just rejecting that course. What was the question? What was the difference?

ES: So how does your path adhered to or deviated from—

NB: Okay. So I think it's very much deviated almost, you know, totally turned around.

ES: Right.

NB: Where I thought I knew where I was going because my understanding of the world really drastically got changed and I'm glad for it. But it just shows, you know, if you really study an issue, you get involved, you're going to learn more. And I think I found out the truth, that I didn't know before. So I'm so glad I didn't get involved in—to be a diplomat, to represent the US Government, you know, somewhere in the world.

ES: Right. Right, that would have really changed the whole course of your life.

NB: Yeah. If I hadn't learned the lessons I learned in college because of the Young Socialist Alliance and all of those experiences, yeah.

ES: M-hmm.

NB: You know, I do—this is kind of out of sequence, but I do remember when I first went to Brown they still had some rules for women. One of them was to have a curfew—

ES: Oh.

NB: —but it really wasn't even implemented, you know, because...

ES: It was never enforced.

NB: ...Yeah not really but I guess it had been before the merger. So a lot of things with the merger just...went by the wayside, you know?

ES: Okay.

NB: But I was surprised to hear there had been a curfew for women. But not for men.

ES: I see. And was the—

NB: And it probably was thought of to protect them or whatever, but it really was discriminatory, you know?

ES: Right. A double standard for sure.

NB: You had to be back in your dorm at this time.

ES: Right. Just women.

NB: M-hmm. But that seemed to be discarded because some of us in the freshman class were shocked and then as time went on nobody...

ES: It wasn't fully...

NB: Implemented it.

ES: Enforced.

NB: No, no.

ES: Do you remember if it was in any of the literature? Like if there was—

NB: Yeah, uh-huh. That's because that's where—nobody told me, it was written somewhere.

ES: Okay.

NB: In a handout or a little pamphlet or something.

ES: So I want to talk a little bit more about the merger, as you mentioned it, were the activities that you were involved in—the Women’s Lib Society—did that, was that group sort of actively talking about the impact of the merger?

NB: You know, not really. They seemed to go straight for the social issues, you know, on and off campus. And it was Brown Women United, I think. The other thing was just my shortcut to describe it but I didn’t remember the name.

ES: I see. The Brown Women United, or Women at Brown United.

NB: Yeah, Women at Brown United.

ES: So you don’t remember that that was sort of actively a...

NB: No, I don’t because, like I said, when I arrived there, the merger was mentioned but it wasn’t really an issue in real life...

ES: Okay.

NB: ...that we noticed or...

ES: Right. It had already happened.

NB: It didn’t interfere with our lives or anything. Yeah.

ES: I see, okay.

NB: And so mostly what we knew about it, we had heard.

ES: I see, okay.

NB: Do you know when that merger took place?

ES: I believe it was July of 1971.

NB: Wow.

ES: That’s when I thought it formally happened.

NB: Okay.

ES: I did briefly look it up, but I should've written it down.

NB: Well I think things just started breaking down. But that would've been within—

ES: While you were there.

NB: —when I entered in the Fall of 70, that would've been that same year, the end of that year.

ES: Right, formally. It’s at the bottom of this, 1971.

NB: Okay.

ES: So can you talk a little bit about the atmosphere of Brown or Pembroke, how it changed during the time you were a student?

NB: If anything, I would say I entered and things were milder in terms of social turmoil. And it just got more heated and heated, which I liked, so like I said, those were some exciting years. Because I remember the organizations I mentioned, Women at Brown United, The Afro-American Students Society—I think that was the name of it, have to look that one up—the Young Socialist Alliance, just got more and more active and were still so the year that I left. Things started going downward in terms of activity I think after, as we got close to the end of the war, or as we got to the end of the war which is later in the 70s. And as women started to get recognition for some of the things they were fighting for, including that abortion as a right to choose. And a lot of the protest and actions around the abortion question also raised birth control, because I remember that was a big issue that young women on campus could not—it wasn't that easy to get access to birth control. It's something that became more and more easy, but....And the other issue that was raised by that movement was the forced sterilization of Black and Latino women...

ES: Right.

NB: ...which many of us knew about, you know, being told that they can only have an abortion if they agree to sterilization. Or some of them, I know it was in the news a couple years ago here, the state of North Carolina had to pay some women, 50,000 dollars is what they offered, for sterilizing them without their knowledge. And I was so proud of this one woman who's older now who said she was angry and she didn't want the 50,000. Because it's just blood money, and she's not going to accept it, you know, it was wrong what they did to her. And she wasn't well-to-do, so she really had some conviction and she was just so angry because what happened to her was, she just tried to have children and couldn't. And later it was found out, I don't know how, but not only her, but there were a number of others who were, you know, the doctor just did it without their consent or knowledge. So all those were issues that were wrapped up in the abortion/women's right choose issue (overlapping dialogue), yeah. And it's a whole different world today, you know because of groups like that campus group although they are trying to beat back on the gains they haven't been able to really overturn it ...

ES: Well it's amazing how cyclical it is too.

NB: Uh huh. Now how do you mean that?

ES: In that there, you know, the reproductive rights conversation is still happening and that it's, as you said, many advances, but still a fight. And depending on who's in office, how much things are attacked, and how much access people have. Different states cutting back funding from—

NB: And then payment is the other question. Yeah. We're still...Medicare and Medi-Cal will not pay for an abortion. I don't know about birth control, do you?

ES: I think it depends—I don't know—on the type of birth control.

NB: Oh, okay.

ES: Even ObamaCare, you know, the issues that are happening with ObamaCare, some places not covering birth control because they want the exemption because they're a religious institution or, you know hospitals not covering abortions because they're religious...it's still a fight.

NB: It's outrageous. Yeah, they're not a hospital, they're a (laughs), they act more like a church.

ES: Right. Do you have thoughts on the Brown or Pembroke of your day? And the Brown of today? Do you have much...

NB: Yeah just that I hope soon, and I think the possibilities are there, we can return to that time of the social issues outside the campus being very present on the campus. I think it's a better atmosphere for students, better to prepare them for life, for learning, for everything. It's just exciting, life, you know? Unlike what's happened in the meantime.

ES: Right.

NB: You know I can't imagine going to college without it, which students have done now for decades. So I'm really looking forward to returning to that turmoil, some would call it, but good turmoil to...

ES: Well, do you mean a time when students are more politically active or...? Tell me more (overlapping dialogue)

NB: Yeah I would say so politically or socially active. Because some people get that political word wrong, I don't mean in the elections of Democrats or Republicans.

ES: Right. You mean on the issues.

NB: But doing something to improve the world, yeah.

ES: M-hmm. Right. Socially active minded.

NB: Because I feel like I grew up quite a bit with all I learned in the social protesting in a way that you don't quite mature without it. You know, I learned a lot about the world and even what I told you about my change of thinking on the US Government. I think that was a pretty historical turning point for me and my life that I wouldn't have gotten probably without the protests happening. Forcing me to think about it and 'okay what is this government doing?', can I represent it?

ES: M-hmm. What do I agree with?

NB: Yeah.

ES: What do I disagree with?

NB: Uh huh.

ES: Have you stayed in touch with Brown since you graduated?

NB: With the college? No, I can't say I have. I have gone to a couple of activities here to meet like the new class—excuse me, I need to eat my croissant—to meet a new class going in. Sometimes they have summer events—

ES: Oh I see.

NB: — At a Brown graduate's home. Have you ever been to any of those?

ES: No.

NB: Okay. And they ask if anybody can help with the students, like mentor them. Which I've never done and I've never done the interviewing either. Maybe one day but—

ES: I did some interviewing when I was living in Boston.

NB: Okay.

ES: Not since I've moved here.

NB: Okay.

ES: Just a couple (overlapping dialogue)

NB: So then that's very minimal so I don't think—you know I read the Alumni Magazine, and I recently had to get in touch with Brown to send me a letter saying I was a graduate because my Triple A (AAA) insurance said if you're an Alumni you get a like 9% discount, so I wanted that for my auto. And when I called and told them I was they said, 'well you've got to have a card.' I said 'excuse me? I don't think my college has a card.' So they said 'well, mine does.' So I guess all these local colleges do, but I called Brown, they said no, they would just send me a letter so I took that. Yeah.

ES: I see. What about other family members? Did you have any family members who have attended Brown? (Overlapping dialogue) Are a part of the university?

NB: No, nobody else unfortunately. I tried to get my nieces to consider it but they're doing other things. They both go to [Towson] State University.

ES: Okay. So how did you feel about the merger? Sort of backing up. It was happening right at the time.

NB: Yeah, I really feel like I didn't notice it. So maybe that means it was very smooth.

ES: Okay.

NB: By the time I got there, like I told you, coed dorms, coed classes, coed dining—I never saw what it was like before. And so if it was finalized in July of '71, I guess I saw the implementation of it prior to it, and everything was commingling so...

ES: You didn't know any different.

NB: No. Not at all. And like I said, even the curfew wasn't enforced so...

ES: Do you think there was anything lost or gained...with the merger?

NB: I think only gained because why put women in a sequestered life? You know, that's not the way society is. And so for all the setbacks they might face, with the merger, not as much protection, I think it's a good thing because we don't get any protection in life either. So we can start on the college level to learn to fend for ourselves, or to fail. But at least to see what we're up against, and I think that's positive.

ES: And yet you talked about the advantages of being in an all-girls high school.

NB: Right because it's high school and I think—when did I go there, 16, maybe, I think I was maybe 16—it's such a different age. And I think there are some advantages to the sequestering there, especially if it's not a school within a school, but the whole school is girls. That's a description like boys still have their schools, although I understand a lot of them have gone coed. But I don't know, I think I would still advocate it because it's a different—for girls who choose it, you know, not to force them—it's such a different stage in life where your confidence is at a different level, and you're not necessarily ready just to face life as you're going to see it.

ES: But by college.

NB: By college, yeah you're getting to be an adult, and I have nothing against women who want to do the all-female colleges, but for the setup that Brown had, I think the merger was definitely a step forward for all students. And even for the men to get a better picture of life and dealing with women and learning to respect them. You know, whether they pass or fail on that, at least posing the challenge I think is good for all of society.

ES: Because ultimately that's what they'll face when they leave college.

NB: Exactly. And they need to learn to deal with it. So that, you know, college is their stepping stone to that and so the more the experience is real, you know, I think it's better for everybody involved.

ES: Right. Those are most of the questions that I have, is there anything else you want to talk about?

NB: No, I am anxious to look up a few of these things that you helped to jog my memory about.

ES: Okay.

NB: So, if I could get a hold of you about anything I want to add...

ES: Sure.

NB: You know I'd really like to do that.

ES: We can figure out how to do that, whether we do a follow-up or we change the transcript or however we do that. We can figure that out and talk to Rhonda or...

NB: Okay. I feel like these are such chopped up little answers to questions.

ES: No I thought it was great!

NB: Okay.

ES: I thought it was great.

NB: Because when I listened to Jean Miller's, and hers seemed to be longer commentary. But I guess everybody's different.

ES: To similar questions you mean?

NB: I don't know. I didn't really hear too many of the questions, but I understand—I don't know what section I heard—she did a really long one.

ES: Okay.

NB: And there were probably many sections so...

ES: Okay. They are all different.

NB: Okay.

ES: Different people, different lives.

NB: Okay. Yeah I believe you.

ES: But if you think of anything else, I'd be happy to follow up with you (overlapping dialogue)

NB: Okay, yeah, I'd like to get a few more of the facts, I'll see what I can do. When you got the copies of the BDH, how did you do that? Microfilm?

ES: I can show you. I did it online and it was—

NB: Oh yeah, just tell me the online.

ES: Yeah, I can send you the link or I can write it down for you. So why don't we conclude so we have this piece finished.

NB: Okay.

ES: Okay. Signing off. Thank you.

—End—