

Transcript – Miriam (Mimi) Dale Pichey '72

Narrator: Miriam Dale Pichey
Interviewer: Sara Bochicchio
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Track 1

SB: Today is November 22, 2015. My name is Sara Bochicchio, Brown University History student, class of 2016. I am speaking with Mimi Pichey, Brown 1972, at her home in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. We are conducting an oral history for the Pembroke Center Archives at Brown University. To begin, can you just tell me a little bit your family and childhood?

MP: I was born in and raised in San Francisco, California, to a middle-class family. My mother was a pharmacist and my father was an engineer originally, but then ended up moving into building and construction and real estate investment. I went to a public high school, went to Lowell High School which was an all-academic city high school and [1:00] excelled, of course (laughter). I was interested in a multitude of different things and had a pretty interesting, rich life. Growing up in San Francisco was great because there was excellent public transportation, and I was able to be relatively independent at a very young age.

SB: Do you think that your mother having such a career influenced you as a feminist?

MP: Undoubtedly. Having a parent who was active in society other than in the home made me see that women—and my parents always told me that women could do anything. So, there was never a doubt that, for example, my sister or I would go to college. It was expected that we go to college. What wasn't expected was that we would go away to college. [2:00] I first found out about Brown when in high school because one of our teachers in that school was a Brown alum, and he invited promising young people to go to a big shindig up at the Fairmont Hotel. And

being a sixteen year old, and hearing about a Christmas party at the Fairmont Hotel that I was invited to, I thought, "Oh, let's go." And somehow, even though that it was totally social, it lodged Brown in the back of my mind. Not as anything I ever wanted to attend, but it was just a school.

And when it came time to apply for colleges the next year, my English teacher who was really my mentor, Mrs. Wallach, said to me, "Where are you applying?" and I said, "University of California, Berkeley." Because my plan was to go to Berkeley, and be a radical, [3:00] and get involved with the Free Speech Movement and the anti-war movement and all the things that were happening at Berkeley. And she said to me, "Well, you really have to apply somewhere else." Later, she said that this was just an off-handed comment, that she would have said to anyone, but I took it to be, "Mrs. Wallach told me I've got to apply somewhere else." So I went down to the public library, because in those days, that's how you got information, and they had these big directories, and I went through...I'd heard of Oberlin and Antioch, and some of the more liberal schools, and I knew about the Ivy League, and so on. So I sort of picked out the ones that seemed like they might be the most interesting to me, made up a big grid, and compared the qualities I was looking for. One of the things that was extremely important to me was that I have classes with men. I did not want to have a separate faculty. And most of... Barnard and Radcliffe and so on [4:00] did not have all their classes with men. There were a significant number of classes that were held separately. So that ruled out those kinds of places; I liked Pembroke because it did have all classes with men. And it was in a moderate-size city, it was on a coast...it seemed to me that it had a lot of advantages. And, so, I just picked it and applied. And I got in, got a partial scholarship that enabled me to bring it down to the same price as going to Berkeley, and ended up eventually going. My mother was extremely opposed to this, and she ran around grumbling, "The University of Minnesota was good enough for us; the University of California should be good enough for you!" But my father was more supportive, and I had gone back and forth on whether to go, and his position was, "You can go away and come back. It's a lot easier than waiting, [5:00] and then going." And so that's what I ended up doing.

SB: Did you have any particular expectations before you arrived?

MP: Well, I was of course petrified. I was excited...I think the usual freshman reaction. I didn't know what to expect. I'd heard that things were different on the East Coast, and that the schools were different, that the lifestyle was different, and people thought differently. And I'd only visited once; I'd gone to New York to visit relatives for the 1965 World's Fair. So I really had no idea what living in another part of the country would be like. I was fairly provincial; I'd never really been outside of California. I traveled once to Europe, the summer after I graduated from college—uh, from high school—which was a big dream of mine and I had saved [6:00] towards it, and so on. And that's what people were doing in those days, backpacking around Europe. I didn't backpack, that was a Eurail trip. But I was doing what all the other kids were doing, I was going to youth hostels and student hostels.

My expectation was that it was going to be a little bit stuffier than what I was used to in California, but I just had no idea how much or how little, and how I would get along with people. So I had a lot of intrepidation.

SB: And do you remember your first impressions?

MP: Oh, I certainly do! My first impressions after I took an overnight flight, and made my way with my big trunk and two suitcases across town from the airport to the bus station and then got on the bus and got all the way down to Providence...some nice Brown guy [7:00] was there to pick people up at the bus station and ferry us up and he helped get me into the dorm and get my trunk up, and so on. And I was the first person, I settled into my room, and waited for my roommate to appear, and waited for everybody else. And at one point, my roommate hadn't shown up so I thought, "Okay I'll go to the..." they had some sort of welcoming hour over at Alumnae Hall...sherry hour or tea or something like that. And I ended up going over and on my way I met Jay Fidler, who was an alumnus, with his daughter, Meg, who he was settling into the dorm, and he was so kind and so nice and so welcoming and told me I was going to love it, and (laughter) just sort of a nice, fatherly kind of guy, a big bear of a guy, and I'll never forget him, because he made me feel so welcome, and that it was going to be a good experience. [8:00]

Although, I will say, that my first impression was that it was as stuffy as I thought it was going to be. There were advantages of being in a college of...in a women's college in a larger university setting, but there were a lot of things that were disadvantages. Some of the things that I found very restrictive were they had a lot of bizarre, old-fashioned rules. I was coming from California, from a fairly liberal, open-minded community, and my parents never had restrictions on my going out. No curfew, or anything like that. And I never tested it, it was never an issue, because I was a good kid and I was not going to get into trouble. So there were no issues there. [9:00] But when I got to Pembroke, they had all sorts of things that I was, I will say, unprepared for. They had what's called *in loco parentis*. Which meant that the university was responsible for us, as a parent would be. So these were much stricter parents than mine had ever been. We had curfews and bed checks; they had a system of demerits, that if you disobeyed these things, you would be put on restrictions and then if you had enough demerits, you would have to be in your room by a certain time and they would have the resident assistant come and check on you to make sure you were a good little girl and you were in bed.

There were...they had things that were dining hall dinners that you were expected to be at every night, which were sit-down dinners, they had big tables of eight and waitresses, which was one of the jobs, student jobs, would bring large serving bowls and somebody would sit at one end and serve [10:00] everybody. There was...they had old-fashioned things like sherry hours, and convocations that you were expected to go to, and you had a card, that had to get punched, and they had a certain punch for each convocation...there was a star, a circle, or this or that, so you couldn't fake it (laughter). And you had to attend a certain number of these, or you would get demerits. And the convocations were lectures, and sometimes they were interesting, and sometimes they were boring as hell.

Women technically—it was still on the books—that women were not allowed to wear men's pants...women could not wear pants on the men's campus without a full-length coat. The rules still stated that in 1968, but nobody paid attention to it, that...but people just did their own thing as far as dress was concerned, but those were the kinds of things we were up against. I actually spent [11:00] my first night...of course, there were ways around these things. I spent my first night out outside the dorm with a man, not because I wanted to, but because I had—I won't say

had to, but I didn't want to get demerits. So I called my roommate and said, "Would you please..."we had a sign out system with a card and I had a red...my card was on the red side which meant I was out of the dorm, so at five to eleven or ten to eleven, I called her I said, "Look," it was election night, we were out demonstrating at the Democratic and Republican Party Headquarters, and I said, "Please, would you do me a favor, turn around the thing, I'm just going to stay out all night, and I'll see you tomorrow. I'm fine." So she did that for me, I didn't get any demerits, and I ended up sleeping in the guy's dorm room and he slept on the floor, and you know. (laughter) But, in a bizarre way, it forced the exact behavior that they [12:00] were trying to avoid. And had they just allowed me to come in, it would have been fine. I can understand their wanting to keep the dorm locked after a certain time, but you could have a bell, this would not be...and there were security guards, so it would not have been impossible for the security guard to open a door. At any rate. That's neither here nor there. But I found a lot of that stuff archaic.

Interestingly, I was at Brown from 19...I entered in 1968 and I left—in the fall—and I left in the spring of '71, because I accelerated and graduated in three years. In those three years we saw tremendous change, from this sort of staid environment to an open environment where anything and everything was acceptable. [13:00] After my freshman year, the next years, '69-'70, we were...they did away with the dining hall stuff, they did away with the curfews, and the convocations, all of that stuff went by the by. And by the time, the last year I was there, '70-'71, there was coed living, there was an experiment in co-ed living at one of the fraternities, and then by the next year, there were freshman co-ed dorms for the next year's entering class. So all of this changed in a period of three years.

SB: And you mentioned something about standing with books on your head...?

MP: Oh! Another one! Oh, goodness, there was another one, which was the posture pictures. And I'm sure that other people have described that. Oh, and no men in the dorms. Those were the other ridiculous things. [14:00] We were not supposed to have men in the dorm without having a door open and there were always, there was the "three feet" rule. We were always supposed to have—if there was a man in the room, there were always supposed to be three feet

on the floor. They did *not* want you up on that bed! [laughter] I guess you could have gotten around that by getting down on the floor, but I...people weren't thinking creatively. I guess they were, at certain points, but...At any rate, and all of that again went by the by at a later point. By the next year, men were allowed in the dorms, and nobody was checking. They used to have a switchboard system where somebody would come in to the front door of the dorm, and they would buzz up for you. And if it was a woman, I forget what they would say, but if it was a man, they would say, "You have a *caller*." [15:00] And the gentleman was supposed to sit in the lounge and wait for you to come down. So, those were sort of archaic things, and along with those was the posture pictures. Pembroke had, although all classes were held together, Pembroke also had some requirements that were different, that included a posture picture—every freshman was required to strip down to her underwear—and in bra and panties, get a posture picture, and then you were *graded* on your posture picture. And that was to be used to help you to...for better comportment. The joke was, of course, all the guys were always trying to get a hold of the posture pictures. Thank god they put those under lock and key! But nonetheless, that was...it was a very humiliating, [16:00] totally humiliating thing and then there was some sort of standard you were being held to, and to have to get in your underwear and be photographed, I mean, it was *really* humiliating. I have to say I got a C on my posture picture; I've never gotten a C on anything! I was like, "What's that about?"

But they had a separate physical activities department and this also included this special class which covered, as I recall, walking with books on your head to improve your posture, and teaching you about which forks to use, and how to set a table properly and I...I wish I had taken notes and had a diary at the time, because it was all this stuff that was out of Edith Wharton, practically. And I was really blown away by it because it was just so...the world was exploding around us, Vietnam was being bombed, [17:00] there were people marching in the streets, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing, and Martin Luther King was killed that year...and we're sitting there, walking with...learning how to use forks and walking with books on our head. It had no...it bore no relationship to the world...the outside world that I knew. And I was blown away by the archaic aspect of it, and not charmed at all. They also had a separate athletic department and I will say that I did learn archery and fencing, so those were two good things that came out of the P.E...the separate P.E. department, which I imagine they probably still have

those, or you would have access to those in an equal facility. There of course was no Title IX, [18:00] so there were no women in sports or varsity sports...there were no women's varsity sports except for the Pembroke Pandas and, I think, field hockey...there were a few sort of "okay" sports that women could participate in, but it was very minimal. And facilities, there were not very many facilities for women for sports.

SB: Among your freshman class, do you feel that most people immediately recognized these things as unfair, or was it sort of subconscious?

MP: I'd say it was a mixed bag. I would say enough people had been experiencing the real world and had come from more liberal backgrounds and those people found this bizarre and absurd. Other people were more accepting of it. I had a roommate who I believe was more accepting of these things, and didn't seem to chafe at them.

SB: How did you get along with your roommate?

MP: Erm...okay, [19:00] but not great. But at the end of the year, we looked at each other and said, "Well, we got along this year, let's do it again next year. But the next year I had gotten so heavily into political activities, I think she got upset. And at one point, she just told me she was moving out. So, half-way through the year, I got a double to myself. [laughter] And we did keep in touch in a friendly kind of way, you know, we would say "Hello" when we were on campus and would happen to run into each other, but we never, then, did anything together. But even when we were freshmen, we didn't do *that* much stuff together. I made my friends elsewhere.

SB: [Do you want?} to talk about that?

MP: And the way I made my friends elsewhere was by getting involved with politics. As I mentioned, we came to campus and there was this backdrop of immense social [20:00] unrest. The Anti-War Movement, the Anti-Vietnam War Movement was in full swing, as was the Civil Rights Movement and...things were happening. Any time anybody didn't like anything, they

were starting to take to the streets. And this was a huge sea-change from the way life had been in the 1950s in particular, after World War II, when there was a real back to the kitchens movement for women, getting them out of the factories, and a real clamp down on social protest and things started to pop again in the 60s, well, I mean, things were brewing of course in the 50s with the Civil Rights Movement, but in the 60s, there was a real explosion. And this was the situation—the context—in which I came to campus. [21:00] I, being of a radical mind...my parents had been anti-war activists themselves, and outspoken supporters of civil rights. So I had been exposed to those things at an early age and had been out in the streets already in California. Also, the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley, UC-Berkeley, was a huge thing in terms of radicalizing students. And I had friends who had older siblings who were at Berkeley, so all of that trickled down into my consciousness about what life was going to be like when I got to campus. So immediately I started looking for where are the radical elements. And the two areas—three areas—that I was really able to find were the Anti-War Movement, there was a group called the Student Mobilization Committee, the [22:00] ...although I think SMC wasn't quite...I think that came a little bit later; it wasn't there when I was a freshman...there was the Campus Action Council, which was a group of people, of self-styled radicals, and there was the New Curriculum, which was a huge movement on campus. Ira Magaziner and Elliot Maxwell had written some gigundo report, I think it was, I think maybe 350 pages long, it was huge, and it went into the need for a different approach to the curriculum. And when I arrived at Brown, the curriculum had a whole bunch of requirements. You had to take these distribution requirements, so I spent my freshman year trying to meet these various requirements. You had to have a language; you had to have something in the sciences; you had to have [23:00] a math, linguistics, or something else—I forget—that they considered to be sort of the same mode of thought. So there were various things, and you know, if you had a major or something that you were interested in, oftentimes you really couldn't even start taking the classes you were interested in until you were a junior, because you'd be spending all this time fulfilling your various requirements. Now there are some schools that still do this—for example, Columbia still has a core curriculum, and they spend pretty much their first two years taking a core curriculum, and there's a benefit to it, you can see that everybody gets a broad liberal arts education, and has some grounding in different modes of thought. There is a benefit to that. On the other hand, it's not [24:00] self-directed study. You don't necessarily get to follow your true love if you have a

passion and you know what it is early, you don't get to follow it as quickly as possible. So, there's pros and cons of course to everything, but the New Curriculum that was being proposed had a real vision to it and obviously we know from history in hindsight that that has borne out, a remarkable university setting and experience for every individual who has attended Brown ever since. But at the time, it was new and different and frightening to people. And...how will it be regulated? We're going to leave students' education to *them*? [laughter] That was a radical idea! [25:00] Maxwell had graduated by the time I got there; Ira Magaziner was still on campus...he had a woman who was high up in the New Curriculum group named Susan Friedman. Suzy Friedman was very active and I think...

So they basically lead the charge and mobilized students and faculty and we had to also get the Administration on board. So I went there and volunteered. I said, "You need people in freshman class to start being active and I'll help you mobilize freshmen." So I jumped in with both feet to try to do that. They had already made a lot of progress and they had dorm committees, and I believe probably there's some interview somewhere else that might discuss it a little bit further, but when I came in, [26:00] I was active as, I think I was a freshman volunteer dorm captain, or something like that. [laughter] I don't recall exactly. And we did things like, in the old days, of course, there was no such thing as electronic delivery of anything, there were no PDFs, so everything was hand done, on paper, and this 350-page report had to be collated and assembled and brought to faculty members. So I can remember parties at Sayles Hall where we would mimeograph—which is a form of printing reproduction—each page, put it on a folding chair, and we had 350 folding chairs, in a big circle around Sayles Hall, and people went up and picked up page after page after page to assemble these booklets, and then each faculty member was given a copy. We had rallies, and [27:00] we were eventually able to get the faculty to vote for it, and then the next—I believe that...again, history, I'm sure somebody has all the information...but my *recollection* is that then the big thing was to then get the Corporation to vote for it. And we had a very difficult time with that, and Ira Magaziner lead a sit-in at the Corporation in the fall of 1968, and I participated in that. And we sat in and said, "We're not going to leave until the Corporation approves this New Curriculum." And...maybe it was before the faculty voted...but, you know, and we wanted to have their approval. And they dug in and refused to do it, but, in typical Brown fashion, instead of having a confrontation, the Corporation just decided to

abandon [28:00] the meeting and adjourn and walked out. And the students were left looking at each other, and saying, "What do we do next?" [laughter] So that was something that we...we didn't know what to do but it worked out and eventually I guess there was enough pressure brought to bear on the Corporation and the faculty, and enough of the faculty believed that change was needed that it carried the day. So, that was my freshman year, and the New Curriculum went into effect the following year. Immediately, grades were abolished. You could take any class you wanted pass/fail. And I, of course, immediately took everything pass/fail. [laughter] And I know that that's not...these days, people don't do that [29:00] because they want to have grades so they can get into graduate school, and so on, but in that day, it seemed like a good thing to do. And I later went to get an MBA, and I had freshman grades where I'd been on the Dean's List, and I wrote some sort of stupid letter saying, "Yes, I only had freshman grades, but just think, later years, I was taking classes I was really more interested in, they would have been even better." [laughter] So I was, it was good enough for Boston University MBA program, and they admitted me. But, um, at any rate...

The curriculum immediately changed for freshmen, they started with Modes of Thought classes, and those were the first ones in the fall of '69, which were cross-departmental, inter-departmental, cross-disciplinary classes, and [30:00] we were so jealous, because we couldn't take them. They were only open to freshmen and we could not get into them. So it took another couple of years before more cross-disciplinary classes became available for other classes besides freshmen. And...but immediately there were things like...you had the ability to mold your own curriculum, you had the ability to mold your own majors, and so on. And I eventually ended up myself with a degree in Art and Archaeology, which I shaped myself.

SB: And were your parents and friends at home skeptical of the New Curriculum?

MP: I don't think so. Everybody was sort of sitting back to see what happened, but everybody knew that we were at...that I was at Brown [31:00] and I was going to get a good education, no matter what. There was always that guaran...it was a guarantee that I was going to get well educated as long as I took the number of cl...28, 32 classes, I would end up with some sort of good education. How useful it would be in the future would remain to be seen, but it was

something that I was responsible for, as opposed to somebody else telling me. I, however, was also interested in the other things that were going on in campus, and one of the big things that happened that fall was the black student walkout. There were very few African-Americans who were admitted to Brown. Usually, each class would have two or three women. And the class that I had...was in, I believe there was a larger proportion [32:00] of women of color who were admitted...African-Americans. I think there were somewhere in the range of ten to thirteen in that class. And somehow, I think the same thing had happened at Brown, and that wound up giving a momentum to having a mass of people, enough to have a discussion, and they had a Black Student Union and they started to compare notes, and realized what kinds of issues they were facing. And the biggest one had to do with admissions. And the second thing that was a huge issue was that not only once you admitted an African-American student, especially one who might not have had the same...from the same socioeconomic background as many of the other students, socially disadvantaged, to make sure that they were caught up and ready to go [33:00] and not behind the eight ball once the freshman year started. So, part of the...and that they received adequate support while they were at the University, academically and in other ways. So that was what the Black out...Walkout was about, as I recall, and obviously there are other people who have been interviewed who have much clearer and probably more accurate recollections, and I would go with whatever they had to say, but my...what I remember is that we...I was in a suite in Andrews, and in the other part of my suite were two African-American women from the Bronx. And they were participants in the Black Student Union, and they participated in the Walkout. And they went and they...off campus, and took shelter in a church, and basically said, "These are our demands, and we're not coming back to campus until we have these demands [34:00] discussed and met." And it put a lot of pressure on the University to do that, and eventually, the University did. In the meantime, other students who supported these demands gathered, rallied, leafletted, and tried to put as much pressure as we could on the Administration to have the discussions and get the students back on campus, and by meeting the demands. And, obviously, somebody else has talked to you about this in more detail, but it was, again, a radicalizing moment for all of the people who were on campus. And there...because of the racism in our society, there were elements who were not in support of this, and did not feel that this was an important thing, so it was a divisive issue in that sense. As were all the issues...I mean, there were people who were [35:00] pro-Vietnam War. It's not like the campus was

unified as an anti-war campus. That wasn't even until later, during the student strike of 1970, there was still a third of the students who voted against striking. So it's not...let us not say that that sentiment was unanimous; it was not. But it...there was an atmosphere on campus that allowed people to discuss these things. And so it was a vibrant time to try to do things and make social change.

In the fall of '68 was the elections, the elections in which eventually Richard Nixon was elected. So many Brown students threw themselves into political organizing, in particular for Eugene McCarthy. And I was with the group that was out radicalizing workers, we'd go out into factory gates and leaflet [36:00] for McCarthy, and so on. And on the election eve, a bunch of us went down to...Providence was not very big at that time, they didn't have more than one really great hotel there, and both the Democrats and the Republicans were holding their election eve events at the same hotel. So we marched down there and said, "No matter who wins, we're going to keep on organizing, we're going to keep fighting against the war," and a lot of activity on campus that fall was geared toward the elections.

The...that was pretty much the way it went for what I recall my freshman year. People organized to go down to Washington in the spring, the big demonstrations, there were two big demonstrations usually in a year, one in the fall and one in the spring, and I believe I went to both of them. [37:00] And then went home for the summer, came back, and during that summer, the summer of '69, Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, had met over the summer, and there had been a big split in the movement: Rim 1, Rim 2, and some other...Weathermen? I think the Weathermen. [laughter] And we had...some people from Brown had gone, and they came back, and the first couple of weeks held an informational session about what had happened. And I was looking for...as was everybody else...what was going on, and it just sounded like it was such a mess. There were over a hundred people who attended that first meeting, and we—I guess decided to vote go Rim 1 or some...one of the other factions, not the Weathermen, [38:00] and the second meeting had nine people, and as I recall, went way into the night, trying to figure out what to do, and I remember speaking up and people not paying any attention to what I had to say, and I, along with other people, I guess, just gave up on it and sort of walked away. And

SDS became at that point, like a three or four person organization on campus; it just dwindled to nothing, almost overnight.

So I was still active in the Anti-War Movement, there was a new group called “Student Mobilization Committee” that I became active with, and I became aware of a group called the Young Socialist Alliance. I had been aware of them in freshman year, a guy by the name of Peter Camejo came and gave a talk on how to make a revolution in the U.S., and I thought, “Oh, I’m not ready for this yet.” But, [39:00] in a year later, I was. So I went to a conference that they hosted in Boston, at MIT, that fall, and they said, “Do you want to join?” I said, “Sure! Why not?” and I became active. And the Young Socialist Alliance was focused on being the best anti-war activists, so they were very active in the Socialist...in the Student Mobilization Committee, and so was I. In the spring, however, they began to become aware of a feminist movement...I wouldn’t even say that, I wouldn’t say even the word “feminist,” it was...it was women talking to other women in gatherings on campus. And what they were were consciousness-raising groups. Where women would get together in somebody’s dorm room once a week and talk about what we had in common together as women. And it started [40:00] off at very basic level of talking about walking down the street and how you hated to have construction workers whistle at you, and then how that made you feel like a piece of meat. Somebody brought in a picture of a woman...naked woman with a cowboy hat on her head and had her divided up like a steer is divided up, for like literally a piece of meat, but with sexual innuendos about it. So we talked about how women are presented and how presented in the media; we brought in pictures of magazines...*Vogue*, regular media, and advertisements, and all of those kinds of things, and we started to realize how we were bombarded over and over by society with images that helped shape our self-image. And it was a very valuable thing. I was [41:00] actually sent in, to, if you will, “infiltrate” one of these women’s groups and I, for me, it was such an interesting personal revelation that got me involved with a new feminist outlook that I had not had to date. So that was the spring of ’70, and I was active through the Student Mobilization Committee in doing a “Women Against the War” demonstration. So I helped, along with a couple of other people, Toby Emmerich and [Mag?] Churgin, who were both class of ’72, organized a “Women Against the War” demonstration in downtown Providence. And we had a very hard time mobilizing women from these consciousness groups to come—consciousness-

raising groups—to come with us. Very few of them were interested in participating because they didn't really get [42:00] the connection. And we had more success, actually, mobilizing people from the community.

SB: Like the Providence community?

MP: Yes, from the Providence community. We were working with women's welfare groups, and other women's groups to do...try and get something done, and we had a demonstration of...I don't know, maybe a hundred people? I believe there's some clippings in the...from the *Providence Journal* in the archives that would cover that. In the summer of '70...so, people disbanded and went back for the summer...in the summer of '70, a huge thing happened which was May...August 26th, 1970. Thousands of women poured out onto the streets in New York, Boston, San Francisco...and had major demonstrations. [43:00] And this was the first time women had gotten out and taken over the streets, and started to formulate demands. Access to birth control, and abortion, the first time...this is the first time "abortion"...the word was actually spoken out loud. People did not talk about this; it was whispered. But it was never...the word "abortion" wasn't even used...oh, it was "taken care of." That kind of thing. All underground. And people were talking about child care, people were talking about equal pay for equal work, people were talking about lesbianism...the right...women's right to love other women. That was at that point a very small part of the movement and a very small voice, but there were all these issues coming to the surface that had never been discussed before. And women took to the streets [44:00] to yell about them! [laughter] And that made a huge dent in the conscious...the conscience...consciousness

...I can't say it...of people all over the United States. We came back to campus that fall and there were...there was a chaplain's office...Bev Edwards, I think her name was, the woman who worked at the chaplain's office, and I think faculty...she got together a couple of faculty, grad students, or staff, and said, "Let's form a 'Women of Brown United.'" Well, they didn't say a "Women of Brown United," they said, "Let's form a women's...let's call women together to discuss these issues." That was really what it was, it was just a...for the first call was let's... [45:00] "Are you concerned about this, this, this, and this? If so, come to this meeting." And over a hundred women showed up. And we realized we wanted to form a women's group on

campus, so we put together some committees, I don't know whether we came up with a name at that point, I think it took us a while, I think, but we formed some committees, we...and then we started moving forward. And we were having weekly...semi-...bi-weekly meetings...not bi-weekly, semi-weekly...every other week. Weekly...every other week...something like that...fairly frequent...to make progress, and then we realized we needed to have some committees. So we started...and we need a constitution, and so on. So we started working on all these things and pretty quickly that fall put together a constitution, got ourselves a name, came up with committees for equal admissions, child care—because at that point, it was a one to three [46:00] ratio. Pembroke had...there was one woman for every three men at Brown. Child care, Feminist Studies, there was a group independent study on *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, Communications Committee, and we had all sorts of ideas for trying to get facilities for women in the new athletic complex that was being built...I mean, that was something that wasn't...I know that sounds bizarre now, that you would not even... you wouldn't ever think about building a gym that didn't have, for example, a dressing room and locker room for women. But in those days, that was totally on the agenda. I mean, it's basic stuff!

SB: Was just the assumption that women weren't going to...

MP: That women weren't going to participate in sports! And didn't need facilities. [47:00] I...I...you know, that lack of understanding that...you know, today, would be unheard of. So, I mean, you have to say that there has been some progress made! You know, ideas like having a women's center, films on women...at that point there was a women's pre-law society being formed...all sorts of things were happening, and people were saying, "Oh, I have this issue, maybe somebody over there has that same issue, let's get together and do something about it." The most important in my opinion that took place during that period was we pulled together women to discuss abortion. And decided out of that first meeting to found something called the Rhode Island Coalition to Repeal Abortion Laws. The first meeting I attended along with...there about ten people there, was an extraordinary meeting. I will always remember it. We went around the room and talked about [48:00] our experience with abortion. And there were about ten of us, and out of that ten, three had had an abortion. And each one told her story, and for many of these women, it was the first time they had ever told anybody else, outside of perhaps

their partner, the story of what had happened. I remember clearly that one of the stories was a woman who was a graduate student or the wife of a graduate student who had gotten pregnant and wasn't at that point...she was a student and wasn't in a position, they felt, to have a child, and she had gone down to some...found around through the underground that there was somebody who did this [49:00] and got down there and the guy says, "Hop up on my kitchen table."

SB: Wow.

MP: And she wasn't sure that the instruments he was using were sterilized. First he said, "Give me six hundred dollars. In cash." And if you think about it, six hundred dollars in those days was the equivalent of...it's at least six times...I think there's been seven times inflation. So that would be like the equivalent of \$4000. This is a student coming up with \$4000 to get an abortion in today's money.

SB: Yeah.

MP: And fortunately, she was okay. The second person to speak was a woman who had three children and had been pregnant with a fourth, and just didn't feel that they had the family means and resources to do this and she ended up, I think, going up to Boston and getting...dealing with it. But I don't recall [50:00] her story exactly. The third one was somebody who'd had a legal abortion but... She was a student at RISD; she had gone back to Wisconsin to have...to her family over the summer and discovered she was pregnant. And fortunately her family happened to have a lot of money, and was able to handle it. They put her in...she had to go to the hospital; she had to stay there three days for this procedure. They charged over \$2000. In order to get the procedure, she had to go before a panel of three doctors and claim that she would go crazy if she was forced to bear a child.

SB: Wow.

MP: And she, of course, went through this and her parents paid the money, and she was fine afterwards, but the pain and the psychic pain that this caused her [51:00] was clear.

SB: Mmm...

MP: So, and you think about \$2000...was like—times seven—you're at \$14,000 for a legal abortion. And it's true, abortion has always been available to people who have money. In the old days, people...women used to fly to Sweden.

SB: Mm-hmm.

MP: But if you didn't have money, you resorted to doing things like this. My mother and her friend—I later found out, after I got involved with the abortion rights movement—went down to Mexico because the friend was pregnant with a fifth child and the family couldn't handle it. And they were taken blindfolded to a clinic...they were met at the border and taken blindfolded. And they had been given a phone number to call and these people came and showed up and took 'em away. And they went to a clinic that at least it was a clean setting, but...and then my mother drove her all the way back to San Francisco [52:00] from Mexico. But that's what women would do in the days when abortion was not legal. And, as we know, many women died, or they tried to do it themselves, or they went to quacks... There's many, many terrible stories out there. We put some of those together on a website called *Never Go Back*. Which I think you can find on YouTube, you can find the *Never Go Back* videos. But there's simply horrible stories out there, what life was like before the right to abortion. So it went around, and it was essentially, that what it's come out to be the percentage of women who will have an abortion at some point during their lifetime, three out of the ten. And it's approximately just the way it is in society. And we decided that we really had to do something about this. So we founded the Rhode Island Coalition to Repeal Abortion Rights [Laws] and we started to band together with as many other organizations as we could find. We went to the ACLU, we went to synagogues [53:00] and women's groups and Unitarian Church and we found wherever we could find allies. We pulled together people who would support abortion rights. And then we filed a class action suit against the State of Rhode Island. This is not too dissimilar from *Roe v. Wade*, it's...what was

happening was all around the country, women's groups were doing this. There were Massachusetts Coalition to Repeal Abortion Rights [Laws], California, and so on. And I am happy to say, proud to say that I helped file the suit in Rhode Island and I helped file the suit in California when I was with Women's National Abortion Action Coalition in the early in 1972. We rode up to Sacramento and filed papers and demonstrated. So it was just a question of which one was going to hit the Supreme Court first. [54:00] And *Roe v. Wade* did, and we know what the results are, and the aftermath of those results, which we're still fighting to uphold. The...and I would say, when I look back on my history, that is one of the best things that I consider myself to have done and that of my college career. To think that a couple...a few little pipsqueaks, 20-year-old pipsqueaks, could do this and help contribute to changing our society, in such a radical way, is something I'm very proud of.

We didn't have birth control in those days. Birth control was not available to women who were not married. We were very fortunate in that we had Dr. Johnson on campus and he, if you went to him, would fit you for a diaphragm or give you birth control pills. But it was... [55:00] in society, if you would just go to a doctor, especially in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, you could not get birth control. In fact, Bill Baird, who was a birth control activist, was jailed for handing out condoms at Boston University.

SB: How was Dr. Johnson allowed to do that then?

MP: I think he just did it.

SB: Oh, okay.

MP: I don't think...I think this was a "Beg for forgiveness; don't ask permission."

SB: Okay.

MP: And, I mean, it was not a...it was not advertised, it certainly was not a health service that out there advertised, but women knew that they could do that. And...at any rate, the Women of

Brown United did a lot of good work during that period, in that year of 197..that I was [56:00] there, 1970...'70-'71. And I ended up graduating, and I know that it continued on.

I will say a couple things, though, about the merger Pembroke and Brown. And, because that came up at the end of '71. And then I have to go back and talk about the student strike. Because I totally missed the student strike! [laughter] I got so carried away by how I got into the Women's Movement. But, and the Women's Movement did come of the heels of the student strike, so there is some progression. I sort of screwed up there. But...at any rate... [57:00] the Women's Movement was concerned about the merger. We had some general...we were in support of the merger, and felt that the...it was going to go in the right direction in terms of making things more equal for women. But the critical piece as far as we were concerned was fifty-fifty admissions. Now, I understand, it's sort of the opposite, that there's more women at Brown than men. But going from a one to three ratio, we wanted to go to a fifty-fifty, one to one ratio. And that was critical as far as we were concerned. We were concerned, as well, about placement. There were advantages and disadvantages of having a separate women's college. And one of the...some of them were [58:00] that we had additional counseling for job and career placement, and that was one of the things that we felt was important to ensure that we would be...that women would have continuing access to, and special training programs for counselors to deal with the special problems of women and to make extra, concerted efforts to help them move into higher positions rather than being placed into lower positions as was common at the time. We were adamant that a piece of the merger should include faculty hiring of women. At that point, we had a very small number of women on the faculty, and tenured women on the faculty. Women's Studies. There was no women's studies program at the time, and we called for the formation of the Women's Studies program. A women's center. And we took [59:00] positions on administration and housing and so on. So but those were some of the things that we felt were important to moving women ahead and not losing the gains and the positive pieces that Pembroke as a separate institution had provided. And, over time, I think a good number of those things did come to pass. But it took a while.

SB: Yeah.

MP: So let's go back for a minute and talk about the student strike. That was, I think for a lot of students, one of the...one of the high...who people who lived through it was a tremendous experience. What happened was in May of '70, Haiphong...Hanoi and Haiphong harbors were mined [1:00:00] by the U. S. and in reaction, there were demonstrations. One of the demonstrations was at Kent State, another was at Jackson State, National Guards were called out to quell the student rebellions and actually shot and killed students.

SB: [gasps]

MP: And in reaction to the combination of the mining of the harbors and the escalation of the Vietnam War, plus the killing of other fellow students who were protesting that, in innocent protests that were non-violent. Most of these demonstrations were non-violent, and I guess, probably hair-trigger reactions on the part of the National Guard killed these students. What happened was there was this outpouring of students [1:01:00] to shut down the universities, because that was the only place over which they had power. Shut down the universities and open up alternate universities. So at Brown, I was amongst the group, we went out and called...we were the Student Mobilization Committee, we went out and called for a meeting to consider a student strike. And it was supposed to be held at Sayles Hall. It was so big, we could not get all the people into Sayles Hall. So it was held on the Green, out in front of Sayles Hall, and we turned the loudspeakers outside onto the Green. And in the end of the day, people talked for and against, and in the end of the day, we voted and people...there were two—I don't know if they're still there—but there were two arches at Faunce House. One on the right, one on the left. And just in a twist [1:02:00] of irony, we decided to make the people who for a student strike go through the one on the right, and the people who were against go through the one of the left and there were counters there, so people lined up and they were counted. And it was two to one for a student strike. So that immediately meant—*immediately* meant—that all classes were canceled. And we arranged to get Meehan auditorium. I don't know whether that's still there. It was the big ice hockey rink.

SB: Oh!

MP: And it seated 5000 people. And we...I don't know how we managed to do this and how the Administration supported us [laughter] but they allowed us to use the ice hockey rink venue for a mass meeting and we had a loudspeaker system and used that, and so on. And we elected a steering committee of twen—I think there were twenty-four people on the steering committee. People were busy silk-screening [1:03:00] ...students from Rhode Island School of Design came up and everybody was busy silk-screening the peace symbol with a fist through it...

SB: Wow.

MP: And we were taking our shirts off and putting them down so they could be silk-screened and then putting 'em back on. It was pretty wild. And we also had a bunch of demands and we also decided to set and alternate university. So we set up and ran an alternate university for about two weeks. And we had different—again, I don't know how the University supported this! I don't know what the Administration was thinking! But we were allowed to use the classrooms, we used Sayles Hall, I think we used a couple of other halls for classes. We invited guest speakers...I remember we pulled up a guy from the Puerto Rican Independence Movement in New York, and [1:04:00] Women's Movement from Boston...all these people giving classes.

SB: So these are professors...?

MP: No, not necessarily! Some of 'em were fellow students or graduate students, or people who had interests, and outside speakers...some were professors...it was this whole...thing about radical topics. And anybody could have a talk...on any topic, there was a daily—we had the mimeograph printing press going, day and night. We had a daily update of all the classes that were involved with the PR for them, and we also had...we were feeding the people, we had massive peanut butter and jelly jars and loaves of bread at Sayles Hall...peop...lemonade...people were making sandwiches and giving them out! It was...it was...it was...and they also decided to suspend grades...

SB: Okay.

MP: ...during...for the...for those people who were taking any classes for grades. [1:05:00]
And also pass/fail. You were...up to that point, the work that you were graded...given a grade on based on the work you'd done up to that point, unless you wanted to go in and protest that. I guess you had options.

SB: Yeah.

MP: If you wanted to write a final paper, or take a final, or whatever, you could do that. But most people, including myself...especially myself!...decided that that was good, I was passing, that was good enough! It was...it was definitely an amazing time to be on campus. That eventually petered out and then it moved on to graduation, and I think that was the one at which Henry Kissinger was giving an honorary award, and the whole senior class stood up and turned their backs on him.

SB: Wow.

MP: I believe that that was the spring graduation.

SB: And how did you spread information? [1:06:00]

MP: Most of it—because in those days we did not have iPhones or texting or even emailing—most of it was done by word of mouth and flyers. We did an awful lot of posters and flyers and newsletters...those were the main methods of communication.

So, there was something else I wanted to talk about but I can't remember. Why don't I turn off the...

Track 2

SB: Today is November 22nd, 2015. My name is Sara Bochicchio, Brown University history student, class of 2016, and I'm speaking with Mimi Pichey, Brown class of 1972, at her home in

Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. We're conducting an oral history for the Pembroke Center Archives at Brown University, and this is part two.

So, you were very active in movements on Brown's campus and was there a difference being a woman as part of those movements, then as being a man?

MP: Yes. Absolutely. Women were allowed to lead on the Pembroke Campus...at that time, we actually had a separate student government that was on the Pembroke Campus, and we had separate representatives to Cammarian Club, which was the University Senate, or whatever you would call it, the University governance group. Women were [1:00] ...I won't say second class citizens...but their voices were not heard as loudly.

SB: Mmm.

MP: It was quite likely in a lot of organizations that a woman would speak up in a mixed male-female setting and there would be very little reaction. Five minutes, ten minutes, an hour later, a man would get up and make the same point, and everybody would be, "Yeah! Yeah! That's so right! Right on...brother!" [laughter] Which was rather discouraging for women learning how to lead.

SB: Mm-hmm.

MP: I think that was especially prevalent before the Women's Movement. After the Women's Movement, there was a sensitization on the part of males in the movement. Now, what's interesting is that may have not been sincere, but the peer pressure [2:00] forced them to keep their mouths shut and to be little bit more considerate whether they still would accept a suggestion, an idea, from a woman in leadership, from a woman as readily as from a man, is another issue. But at least it was not voiced in quite the same way. But definitely, there...women were not—especially in the pre-feminist period—were not viewed at the same level of leadership as the men. I mean, I remember, for example, Suzy Friedman, who was

active in the New Curriculum, and I always remember thinking of her, even I, as a woman, thought of her as second in command.

SB: Wow.

MP: Although I'm sure she...I know Ira Magaziner was certainly the leader, and he was the author of the paper, so you can't refute that...but I'm sure Suzy participated [3:00] in probably an equal share, but everybody always thought of her as second in command.

SB: Yeah.

MP: And I would say that that's sort of typical of how things were. And there was often a time when there would be—especially in the Anti-War Movement—the people out front, doing the speaking and the glad-handing and all the PR and all that sort of thing were men, and the people running the...doing the typing in the back rooms of stencils, and running the mimeograph, and handing out the brochures, the flyers, and posting the dorms, were the women.

SB: Mm-hmm. And how did people on the campus react to your involvement in the Women's Movement?

MP: It was met at first with...actually, a fair amount of hostility. And I would say that that came from both men and women. There were many women who did not really see what we were driving at. [4:00] They didn't see what the issues had to do with them. They...especially since at Brown, there were a lot of privileged women. So that "Equal pay for equal work" didn't really ring a bell with them. Because they came from privileged strata and money in their family had never been an issue. And it was just something they never really thought about. I'm sure many...I'm sure in later years, many of those women encountered prejudice in the job market and probably became more feminist in their outlook, but in 1970-71, that was something that was...they had not at that point encountered or thought about. And problems of society, like childcare, right to control your own body with abortion and birth control, I would say was a real driving force for most women, but because it was so hush-hush, [5:00] and people didn't talk

about it, a lot of these women either hadn't thought about it or because good girls didn't do it outside of marriage, or they didn't... they'd thought about it to resolve it for themselves...didn't want to discuss it, didn't want to make it a public issue. That was not what genteel ladies did. And I think that a later point, and certainly if it would come time, I'm sure most of those women would fight for their daughter's rights to have birth control. But at that time, they didn't really think about it. If they were okay, they really didn't think beyond themselves as a social issue. So...and there were a lot men who were downright hostile to the Women's Movement. They were very threatened...there was some bewilderment? It was a combination of bewilderment and hostility. [6:00] "Why do you need this?"

SB: Yeah.

MP: "Why do you need this? What do you women *want*?" was sort of the...the mantra. And then on the other side, there was this hostility, "There's only so much, and you're going to take it away from me."

SB: Mmm.

MP: "I'm a leader now. And you can't be a leader, too, because then I won't be a leader!" Whatever it is that people are threatened by, they were threatened. And I can remember walking into a room of some friends who had some visitors, some guys, and they... one of them said, "Oh! Here she comes! Little Miss Women's Liberation." Which then engendered a whole discussion about the issues, and so on, and so that wasn't so bad in that way, but my feelings were really quite hurt. To be labeled that way, and in a...it was not said in a friendly way. It was said in more of a hostile way, and it was by one of the women, not...

SB: Oh! [7:00]

MP: It was not...it was not the guys. Because I didn't know the men. [laughter] So it was definitely one of my friends, female friends, from my freshman year, not people I was working with in the radical movements and the feminist movement. So it was an idea whose time had

come and I was interested to see when I was looking at some of the materials in the archives, that by 1972, very... Women of Brown United had a mailing list of 190 people. And this is out of a women's group on campus of about 1200 women, undergrads. So, that goes to show that that's close to 20 percent, considered themselves "active" enough to want to receive regular communications [8:00] from the Women of Brown United. So there was a huge shift from that. Actually, the Women of Brown United, there's one thing I did not mention, was it started initially, if you look at the initial call to action, was called by the Chaplain's Office and some faculty and grad student-type people, and staff. And it eventually moved pretty quickly to a more of an undergraduate and graduate student group. So that it was fighting more for student needs than campus needs for the staff and faculty and...

SB: And did you receive support from the staff and faculty?

MP: Again, very mixed. It was very mixed. Some people were threatened by it. It's interesting how you have women faculty, for example, [9:00] who fought tooth and nail individually to get where they were and then would turn around and say, "I got to this through hard work and perseverance." As opposed to, and I'm not for any preferential treatment of women, and they'd turn that around and say, "I did it. You can do it, too." But it's interesting how the pressure for equal admissions and greater admissions does make a difference for women. When I was graduating, ten percent of medical students were women. My sister graduated from medical school in 1980...I think...'81? And 25 percent of her class was female. And I said, "Oh, that's good!" thinking of ten percent, and she and her classmate looked at me and they said, "No, it isn't. It should be 50 percent!" [10:00] And I'm like, "Duhhhhhhh! [laughter] Yeah, it should be 50 percent!" And changing those kinds of admissions makes a huge difference on what women can do. And yes, you can get in and fight and be one of the ten percent, but isn't it a lot better to be one of the 50 percent? And when you speak up, everybody just looks at you as a person, rather than as a representative of your sex.

SB: Yeah.

MP: So, let's hear it for equal admissions and things that keep advancing women, and I think this also goes for people of color, and minorities of any sort. It's that the more inclusive you can be, the less you start thinking of it as one individual who's made it, but just a person.

SB: Mm-hmm. Yeah. [11:00]

MP: So...

SB: Well, thank you!

MP: You're welcome!