

Transcript – Diane Straker, class of staff

Narrator: Diane Straker, Pembroke Center Administrative Assistant

Interviewer: Amanda Knox, Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist and Mary Murphy, Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist

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Track 1

Amanda Knox: Good morning. This is Wednesday, November 13. It's 10am. I am Amanda Knox, the Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist, and I'm here today with Mary Murphy, the Nancy L. Buc '65 Pembroke Center Archivist, and I'm here with Diane Straker, who is the Pembroke Center's Administrative Assistant. We are getting her oral history today. You've been with Brown for 20 years?

Diane Straker: Not quite -

AK: Almost?

DS: 16 now.

AK: 16. Okay.

DS: Yes. [laughter]

AK: For 16 years. So we're really excited to have your story today.

DS: Thank you.

AK: And I guess we will just start from the beginning if you are okay with that - the beginning of your life, not your time at Brown. [laughter] Where, maybe where you grew up, a little bit about your parents, their education, your education, things like that.

DS: Okay. [1:00] Actually, I was born in Bronx, New York. My dad was a New Yorker. He was kind of migrated there from Barbados, because his mother and father and siblings they, well they will all from Barbados. So my dad was from Barbados, his family moved to New York. And my dad was in

the Navy at Newport, Rhode Island. And that's where he met my mom. Because my grandmother, my mom's mother, migrated to Newport, Rhode Island, when my mother was about 10 years old. And there's history - there's history behind that.

AK: From Barbados?

DS: Yes. [laughter] My grandmother's husband, my grandfather, who I never knew - my mother's father - was in some way or another mixed up with not too, [2:00] some kind of like dirty dealings, I should say. [laughter] He worked, we think for the mob at that time.

Mary Murphy: Where?

DS: In Philadelphia.

MM: Okay.

DS: I'm getting off to - my grandmother - my mother was born in Philadelphia.

MM: Okay.

DS: Okay, that's where my mother and my grandmother was, in Philadelphia. And unfortunately, he was found dead on the railroad tracks in Philly. And, of course, we think it was probably kind of like a mob thing. So my grandmother was very afraid, because she felt that they might have thought that he might have confided in her with some things. So she picked up my mother, who was 10 at the time, she didn't pick her up, but, and she fled from Philadelphia, on a boat, in the middle of the night, and ended up in Newport, Rhode Island. And that's where my mother was raised [3:00] in Newport, Rhode Island. And that's where my grandmother lived for some time.

When they got there, they, she knew absolutely no one - my grandmother. And a family - gentleman from the boat, who lived in Newport from the docks, told her about a place that maybe she could take her child and stay. And they took her in and since then we've been family, ever since that time. So -

MM: What era was this? What year?

DS: This was, my mother was, oh my god. My mother was 10. She, she was born in 1926 so this

was like '30, 1936 -

MM: Wow. Okay.

DS: At that time. So my grandmother, my grandmother was a domestic all of her time. That's how she made her money. And my mother went to - she graduated out of Rochester High School in 1944, my mother did. And she met my dad there [4:00] when he was in the Navy. And right after graduation they eloped. Wilmington, Delaware. And, of course, my grandmother was very upset about that. [laughter] And he took my mother to his home in New York City. And that's where my brother, I have an older brother, he's two and a half years older than I am. And that's where we were born. So, but after, I guess I was about four years old. My mother said to my father, "I'm not raising my children in the city." So -

MM: Again, at this point we're, what year are we at?

DS: I'm sorry, I was about four and I was born in '48. '52. Somewhere around in there, yeah. 1952. So-

MM: So New York City at the time is going through urban renewal.

DS: They were. I would believe that at that time, I don't have too much history about that. I was young, and we [5:00] lived in the Bronx in the projects and -

MM: Yes.

DS: And all I know - and my mother was an at home, a stay at home mom. I'm not quite sure what my dad did in New York to make his living, but -

MM: Can you describe - do you have memories of living in the housing projects?

DS: I do.

MM: Can you tell us about that?

DS: We lived on the 10th floor in the projects.

MM: Do you, did you have a specific building? Do you remember the name of it?

DS: Oh let's see it was, oh god, and I sometimes right off the cuff I can call it. But it was, you know something I really, right now, and I just can't really call where it was.

MM: If you remember it email us and we'll add it.

DS: I will. Yeah, I will. It was like 112 Street, but I can't remember what they the first numbers of it what's like, I don't know if it was 10 [6:00] 112 Street or whatever. I don't even know if the projects is still there, you know.

MM: Were they the high rise?

DS: They were the high rise.

MM: Yes. Okay.

DS: Yes. They were the high rise buildings.

MM: Were they, and was it in the dense, those dense super high rise?

DS: Yes, dense super high rise. A bunch of high rises around one another.

MM: Yes.

DS: And of course it was like a project, you know, in the Bronx. And they all, they had like playgrounds there for the kids because of course, there was loads of children, but it was like in front of the building, or around the side of the building. I don't remember grass or anything. I remember concrete, you know, maybe some equipment, equipment like swings and stuff, but it was built into the concrete, you know, ground like they, they used to have.

And, of course, my mother wouldn't let me [7:00] play outside by myself. But as long as my brother was going, he could go out. He had the friends there and I was younger. So he had his friends so he would bring me down stairs and, and watch me. My, I have a great Brother, you know, looked over me. Shouldn't be telling this I'm not sure, but instead of bringing me back upstairs to go to the restroom [laughter] all my snow attire, he would just, [laughter] you know, that kind of

brother. [laughter]

MM: Take care of it.

DS: Yeah, yeah. Do your thing. I'm not going back upstairs again. You know, like, but anyway.

MM: Sounds like most siblings.

DS: Yeah. So I don't have too much of - there was a lot going on in New York, and not a lot of good things going on in New York, you know, at the time. And my mother just was afraid to raise us there.

MM: Did you feel that fear from her?

DS: No. [8:00] Because at that age I didn't, you know, I didn't feel - I had a wonderful childhood life. I didn't have any fears at all. But she had, I guess she had fears, you know, she wanted a better life for us. If we could live in Time Square or somewhere down there, that'd be fine, but living in the Bronx, you know, that was, it was kind of rough around there. Although they had a lot of friends. They would hold, years ago, they would have like, rent card parties. So if people could not come up with all of their rent, they would have card parties and raise the money that way so that, and give it to whoever, you know, and I mean, these card parties could go on all night.

MM: Was it, card parties, you mean like poker?

DS: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Poker. Probably, mostly Big Wisk.

MM: Okay.

DS: Yeah. African Americans -

MM: Yeah.

DS: Well, Blacks in those days, and even up until [9:00] I was, even up until maybe about 10 years ago, 15 years ago, they were still playing Big Wisk.

MM: Yeah.

DS: Yeah. So, you know, things like that. And so my, my house had, had always been an open door. People would come and go. New York, Rhode Island, and you know. My mother was an only child and so and she had a lot of friends. So that's, that's how I grew up there. What else was I going say about New York though?

MM: Do you have any kind of Polaroid moments of living in New York as a child, like kind of flashbulb memories?

DS: Only really what my mother has told, what my mother has told us you know. And that's, I don't, I got back there [10:00] kind of often because my, my father's family was there. Being from a Barb, from Barbados, the matriarch of my dad, my dad's mother, she was into boys. She had three boys and two girls, well forget the girls. She was strictly into her sons, which, which made her very much so into my brother. And she did mention once to my mother, you can go live wherever you want. Leave your son, I'll raise your son, you know. But, of course, my mother wasn't going to do that. But that's the way she you know, grew up. And recently I looked them up on the web, trace, kind of like family history and Barbados, and there they were. Florence and Archibald Straker, which was my grandmother's and grandfather's name.

MM: Wow. Yes. [11:00]

DS: The children, my uncle Kyle, my uncle Archie, my father, my aunt Pearl, and my aunt Thelma.

MM: Okay.

DS: Those are all the children, and then I didn't go any further with that, but I saw them listed in Barbados, you know.

MM: And you still have relatives in Barbados?

DS: You know, I, I, we probably do. At one time my mother took a trip to Barbados with some friends because my mother liked to travel. She traveled a lot. And she did. When they left the airport, they had a taxi. And when they found out that her last name was Straker, he said, "I'm going to get you to your hotel and then I'm going to come back for you and your friend," my mother had a

traveling girlfriend, “and I’m going to take you around and meet, and let you meet some of the Strakers in Barbados.” And they did and there’s loads of Strakers in Barbados. They’re in Grenada. Granada. They’re just all over that area. I have never been and it’s, and it’s one of my, I have to get there one day.

MM: A goal. Life goal.

DS: Yes. It’s a life goal. Yeah. [12:00] To get there.

MM: So tell us what happens. Your parents, your mom decided New York no more.

DS: So she decided to move to -

MM: Was there a moment? Like, was there an event -

DS: That, that made her -

MM: Yeah.

DS: Not really. One thing wasn’t a bad thing that happened to her anything, but I guess at one of these card games, someone had challenged her to see if she could get a job at the telephone company in New York. At that time, they weren’t hiring any Blacks or anything like that. So she took on the challenge, she went down, and lo and behold, she got the job. But that was my mother. I get a lot of my personality from my mother only she out -

MM: Out personalited you?

DS: Oh my god. Did she ever. [laughter] But she did get the job. So she started working for the telephone company there in New York. But I don’t think there was any particular moment. Her children were getting a little older, she didn’t want them to go to school there. [13:00] My grandmother had since moved to Providence from Newport, bought a three story tenement house, and it was called the West Elmwood section of town, which is almost like the West End. And it’s, I think I spoke about this before. And so my mother decided to bring her children and she thought we could get a better education coming to Providence. And she left, she left New York. And my dad followed a little after. [laughter] You know. Didn’t want to leave his mother. But anyway, [laughter]

grown man, right? Yeah.

But anyway, so she took us and my grandmother lived on the first floor of the tenement, and we lived on the second and my grandmother rented out the third floor. And that was the best thing that my mother could have ever done because my brother and I, and everyone [14:00] in that small community had such a great childhood life. It was just wonderful. I mean, we the whole community there, we were family, you know, and every parent watched after every child you know. It's not like today where you can't say that your children did something that they shouldn't have done and you know, everybody was like everyone on the block. Fe- mothers were our mothers and fathers were our fathers, you know. So it was just wonderful. And I, Brown had a group and I should have researched who they were, had a group of students who did a, they looked up our, that history of the West, the community of the West Elmwood section and they really dug up a lot of things. I was involved [15:00] with, I got a call from some friends that were in that neighborhood and told me about what they were doing, and would I be willing to share and I shared with them. They interviewed a lot of us because we're all still in Providence, and we're still all very good friends, still very close, you know. So we all got together and we shared our history with them. And everyone that they spoke to had the same story about growing up in that community. And so I don't know if you know, it's where the Huntington Avenue area is right across that Huntington Arrow Expressway, where the industrial park area is -

MM: Yes.

DS: That's where we lived.

MM: So tell us about that. So, that was it is industrial now.

DS: It is industrial now.

MM: So that means that there was clearing [16:00] of that neighborhood at some point?

DS: They took all the houses. City came through.

MM: And, and that would have been I bet in the mid '60s?

DS: That was, yes.

MM: Yeah.

DS: Yeah. Yes. And they did not of course give, purchase, pay my grandmother for the worth of her property. We were the only ones that had a three story tournament. Others were maybe like two stories or single family homes. But they didn't give us any -

MM: Do you remember that process of when they notified your mother and your grandmother that they, that there was like planning underway like did you have any sense of like your family being Concerned?

DS: They were concerned, they were upset, you know, like they had been there all those years. My grandmother had put money into the you know, her house.

MM: How many years were you there? Do you remember?

DS: Let's see. [17:00] I left, my gr, my mother brought me there when I was four. And then I was in junior high school when city came through and took the property. I was going to, I went to Vineyard Street School and I completed that which is elementary school. And then I was going to Gilbert Stuart, which was a junior high school, and that's when they came through and they took the property. My grandmother bought a house right across the, on the other side of the industrial park area.

MM: Okay. Yeah.

DS: In where there was a residence, a resident neighborhood. And it was a cape.

MM: Okay.

DS: Okay. House and she bought that house and we moved there.

MM: How did she, so they took the property? They didn't pay for it, they took it.

DS: They took it and they tore [18:00] it down to make, you know to build the, to build the factories, you know.

MM: Right. And they paid her very, like very little?

DS: Very little.

MM: But somehow she was able to scrape together to actually get you -

DS: My grandmother had a thing with money. She could, she managed her money very well even though she was the domestic, she did ironing, you know, for a living. She was a cook, but she knew how to manage money. She, she, she was, she dressed like she was a rich woman with a poor pocketbook. You know, but that's, that's how she knew.

MM: What neighborhoods was she, was she working like on the, at the time would that have been like -

DS: On the East Side.

MM: On the East Side.

DS: On the East Side right here.

MM: And so she would take, did she have a car or did she have to take -

DS: She would take -

MM: Street car?

DS: Public transportation. She would come over here and she would do some ironing some for some people, and she would do some cooking for some people, and, and I remember sometimes coming [19:00] with her, you know, and, and then take public transportation back.

In the meantime, my mother, what was she doing at that time? We're a working family. We always worked. When I was going - my mother was a nurse. She was an LPN. She had gone to school to be an LPN. And so I'm not quite sure if she was an LPN when we were there. I think it was after we had moved on the other side that she became an LPN. So I'm not quite sure what my mother did and it's a shame she's gone I can't even ask her.

MM: So you had in the neighborhood as it was demolished, basically -

DS: Yes.

MM: Because I think all of those families-

DS: All the families had to move.

MM: Were experiencing the same thing.

DS: The same thing. We all had to move. [20:00]

MM: And then were you, you were in conver- was the community also focus based around a specific church by any chance?

DS: Yes, we were. As a matter of fact, when I was young, there was a chap- when we lived in that neighborhood. There was a chapel at the top of the hill. And most of the kids, we all, we went to the chapel. It was called Calhoun Avenue Chapel. And then when we left the chapel, after we could recite all the books of the Bible, and this and that and everything, [laughter] we went to our family church, which is Ebenezer Baptist Church, same church that I'm with now. So, Ebenezer Baptist church when I went was on Dodge Street. And that's where, I don't know if you know where Wiggins Village is?

MM: I do.

DS: Do you know where the Banister House is? I'm not sure. Yeah. What is it Codon Cord Projects, not projects, but -

MM: Yeah. [21:00]

DS: They're there.

MM: Public housing?

DS: Public housing is there. And right across that street -

MM: Yeah.

DS: From the housing -

MM: Yeah.

DS: Was a little church.

MM: Okay.

DS: And that was the church that I got baptized in. That was Ebenezer Baptist Church.

MM: Fascinating.

DS: Yeah. So and my grandmother was a member and my mother, my father they sang in a choir, they were members and so that's, that was our family church.

MM: Interesting.

DS: Yeah.

MM: Okay. So was there solidarity? Do you like, did you, do you have any memories of the families, I don't know, commiserating about the fact that their community was -

DS: Broken up like that.

MM: Yeah.

DS: Yeah. You know, something it wasn't, my grandmother was a very strong woman. It was sad and we were upset about it. I think all the families were, but all the families remained in the same kind of like community. They didn't, they didn't move that far from where we were, you know? So we were all [22:00] able to still go to school together, see each other. We all went to the same high school, you know, so everyone kind of moved within another community not too far from where we were. And that's the community that's off of Cranston Street. You have Hanover Street, you got [inaudible] Street. We were all in that area. Potters Avenue. Yeah. So we were all in that area. So it's

a lot of years, a lot of history, you know, and we still are still all very good friends, you know. And we see each other not as often as we did, but we do see each other still. Yeah.

MM: So tell us, so move forward. So then you enter your high school years.

DS: I entered, well, when I, when we had to move I had to change to, my mother moved my brother and I away - we didn't live with my grandmother at the time when she bought the cape, the house. Okay. My mother and my father, my brother, and I moved [23:00] to Hartford Avenue projects. It was on Hartford Avenue and we lived in another high rise. Number two Wayland Road, I'll never forget it. [laughter] I'll never forget it. And we moved there. And I was very unhappy because I didn't want to go to Oliver Hazard Perry.

MM: Okay.

DS: My brother went there, that was junior high for him. And so I moved back. They, I was allowed to move back with my grandmother to continue going to Gilbert Stuart.

AK: Why didn't you want to go to the other school?

DS: Being I guess at that age, you know, I miss my friends and I just didn't want to make, I wanted to be with my, the friends I grew up with you know. My brother didn't have a problem. You know, he didn't have a problem. So I moved back with my grandmother, and continued going to Gilbert Stuart. And then my mother and my father, [24:00] I believe split up after 16 years of marriage.

MM: Oh wow.

DS: And so my mother took my brother and moved, and moved back with my, her mother. So we're all back together again. And my brother went to Central High, bro, my brother and I went to Central High School with all of our other friends. [laughter] So that was a great experience also. But of course, back in those days, I graduated in 1966, and back in those days, they weren't, you know, concerned about teaching young ladies anything but you know, getting married, having children, and things like that. And my mother wanted me to go to college. I struggled, but I was I was kind of smart. And she wanted me to go to Classical. I told her if she sent me to Classical I would flunk out, I'm staying at Central. So she left me at Central. [laughter] I just didn't want to go to a, to me it was a little uppity type. [25:00] I wanted to stay at Central. So I stayed at Central.

MM: What was the integration level of the high schools at that time, around race.

DS: We were, you know, something, I think it was like an even mix. It really was.

MM: Okay.

DS: And we were all very close, you know, the blacks and the whites.

MM: '66 is a volatile time in our nation's history around race.

DS: Yes, it was. Absolutely, yeah. But we were, we were all very close. And even, I would say, the last time someone contacted me from the high school, it was a friend, she was white, a friend. We met over Facebook. You know, through Facebook. And we're always trying to get together, but you know. But at least we kind of keep in touch with some folks that way.

MM: Yeah.

DS: And we still have people that we still know that we're in touch with from Central High School. And that's when the classes were on, [26:00] they weren't half years, but my brother, like would graduate in January, I graduated in June, that type of thing, because the, the, I guess the, the student population was so large they kind of split. Yeah. So, and that's where I met, that's not where I met, I met my ex-husband in junior high school.

MM: Oh my god.

AK: Oh wow. [laughter]

DS: Yeah. So, right, right. And then we both went to high school together same homeroom. [laughter] And that's when we really started dating is what, like in high school at that time, you know. So, but that was great also.

MM: Can I ask, can I ask another question?

DS: Sure.

MM: We were talking about the West Side and the times. It's the '60s, right, so the issues around, the issues around the mafia would not pick up steam until the '70s and the '80s, in that area.

DS: Well -

MM: Is it our, do you have any sense of that?

DS: Oh, yeah.

MM: I mean, I know you're like a high school student, but like next door, [27:00] and like right in that same neighborhood, it's pretty rock and roll with the influence of the mafia in that area.

DS: Yeah, it was as a matter of fact, I don't even know how old I was. To us, the Mafia have been around for forever. For us, you know, they might have come to light a little later, but they were always there. But not too much was going on in our circles, you know. If you owned a business, things were going on there. Because I remember we used to frequent a club down on Eddy Street. God, can't even remember the name. But the owner disappeared and was never found, you know? So they, they were having their, Mafia had their hands in a lot of [28:00] businesses, you know, around there, but it wasn't so -

MM: It was kind of, it, yeah.

DS: Yeah, it wasn't so prominent.

MM: Okay. So take us back. So you're in high school, and you're doing your studies. Your mom's urging college. So where's the story go next?

DS: The story ends where well school ends at, I graduated from high school. I don't know how I got distracted, or my mother got distracted, or how we got distracted, from the college thing, but I was looking through a magazine one day I had not graduated yet, let's put it that way. I had not graduated from high school because that I graduated in June of '66. And I say maybe about in July I was looking through, before then, I was looking through a magazine, *Seventeen Magazine*, you know, one of these girly things. And I saw something that said, "Hartford Airline School." And I said, "Wow, I think [29:00] I'd like to do that," you know. So I clipped out the clipping, I talked to my mother about it. I'd have to move to go to Harvard because they had a dorm there and so in, I

don't know if it was July, I, my mother moved me to Hartford, Connecticut, and entered me into, I got accepted into Hartford Airline School -

MM & AK: To be a flight attendant?

DS: They, to be a flight attendant, but they taught everything. They taught you how to be a ticket agent, a reservationist, a flight attendant.

MM: Cool!

DS: They taught you, they taught you everything. I could look up in the sky and recognize what kind of plane was flying over. That type of thing. And it was a four-month course.

MM: Oh my god.

DS: Yes.

MM: Was it connected to a specific airline?

DS: Nope.

MM: Okay.

DS: No. After you know, when you're in school, some of the airlines would come in, or you would, and have interviews with you [30:00] and things like that, you know. But, and a lot of, mostly lot of women, girls went to work for different airlines as ticket agents, reservationists, flight attendants.

AK: Do you remember any kind of, like kind of gendered expectations of that? I have a family member who was a flight attendant and they required that she be a certain weight and height and -

MM: Oh, god, yes. It was really strict at that time.

AK: Okay.

DS: Not now. [laughter] Very strict at that time. You had to be a certain weight, you had to be a

certain age. I was a little bit below the age. I think, well I was maybe 18, and you couldn't fly at that age. I don't, if I, if memory you know, so a lot of the ladies were picked up as reservationists, ticket agents, and, and then they got, when they turned a certain age then they could go to flight, or be a flight attendant. But, yeah, but they were very strict with weight and everything. [31:00] Yes, very strict weight. You know, so and you had to maintain it. You know, and if you got off than you were -

AK: Did they weighed people?

DS: Oh, they weighed in. Yeah, no, no. Yeah, they did. They would weigh you because you had to go through certain physicals at certain times to make sure that you maintained your weight, especially when you're flying and things like that. So I never had an opportunity to be a flight attendant. You know, life has a strange way of taking turns. So when I was there, I felt ill. I don't know if I, I used to catch pneumonia a lot when I was young.

AK: Were you married at this point?

DS: No.

AK: No. Okay.

DS: No, no, no. And he was very upset that I, no. He wasn't upset that, no. That was another story.

AK: Okay.

DS: Moving on. [laughter] He was glad that I went to airline school and him and my mom would drive up to see me or they would drive up and bring me home on the weekends or whatever. My grandmother at that time had gotten a job in Greenwich, Connecticut, [32:00] working for a wealthy family who owned Burlington Hosiery.

MM: Oh, yeah.

DS: Yeah. So she worked for, her name at, as a matter of fact, she was married to a Brown president once. Her name, when I met her she was an Applegate. But from what I understand she was married to a, I don't know which one. But anyway, they lived in Greenwich, Connecticut. And my grandmother started cooking for them. And that's all she did. She was their cook.

MM: Lived in?

DS: Lived in. Yes. And they had they, my grandmother was with them for 20 years. They treated her very well. She had her own little apartment, she had a bedroom, living room, her own bathroom, in part in part of the house, so. And they had four boys.

MM: Whoa.

DS: Yeah. So, but anyway, she was looking for a long time. But going back to airline school, I got ill. So I had to come home for about a couple of weeks or so. [33:00] And then they wouldn't let me come up. I got well, but I couldn't go back because my mother now, the whole four months was \$1,000, but at that time, that was a lot of money. My mother was behind payments, but she, I don't know how she did it, but she got it together and she paid them and I went back. And when I went back I was kind of lost on where I was, you know, they had a lot of people, airlines coming in to interview and this and that. And then we were doing a lot of testing. So I did some test and one of the tests that I did that I did not know at the time was to be, to work for the CIA. Because they all, they also tapped girls from the airline school. Because the etiquette you know, what we've learned there, you know, the customer service, the, all that kind of stuff. And so the next thing I knew, after we [34:00] had all gotten our wings and graduated and I came home, I got a letter in the mail saying that you are to report to duty on January, [laughter] January 7, Washington DC, they gave me the address and I says, "Oh, okay. Looks like Mom, you're going to have to take me to Washington. I got a job there." So she did. [laughter] She, she took me to, I reported to Washington when I was supposed to. And I, new employees had to go through five weeks of training before they were designated to a job. And so we all, CIA had a building in Washington to house all the new employees and you had to live in this apartment building, mostly studios and you shared it with someone until we were done with our training. [35:00] And of course, we had a curfew and of course, all the rules and regulations and stuff like that. That's when my boyfriend at the time was very upset because he got drafted into the service –

MM & AK: Oh.

DS: Into the Army and here I am moving to Washington and he wanted me to stay home, you know.

MM: While he went?

DS: While he went, you know, wanted -

MM: And so now what year are we in?

DS: We are in 1967.

MM: Okay.

AK: So was that, not Vietnam? Yes? Korea?

DS: That was Vietnam. Oh, it was Vietnam. Yeah. He wasn't very happy. He wasn't a service man kind of guy anyway. [laughter] You know.

MM: The draft was going on at that point.

DS: Yeah, right. Yeah. No, he wasn't into that.

MM: Does he remember where they pulled his draft number? Did it come in the mail? Did he have to go -

DS: I, I think he, I think it came in the mail.

MM: Yeah.

DS: At that time they mailed it [36:00] to you.

MM: I know they announced some on college campuses at the time.

DS: Yes, right. Right. Yeah. Absolutely. And he had to go because he was, he was the middle child of five. He had two older brothers and he had two younger sisters. And you know, there was no way that he could get out of it. He had to go. Yeah. My brother on the other hand, he enlisted. My father was a Navy man.

MM: Okay.

DS: My brother wanted to be a Navy man. And so he enlisted, but that's another story too. But anyway, getting back to where I was, so he was very upset that I had moved because he thought that maybe things were not going to be right between us with me gone and whatnot. But I should have felt that way about him because it wasn't. [laughter] You know what I mean? But anyway, so I went to Washington. I did, we did, and I met some great folks who, you know, friends, there. And we went through all five weeks of training [37:00] and then we were allowed to go out and move anywhere that we wanted to.

I was, I was, had gotten orders to report to Langley headquarters, and that's where I would be working. So there was four of us that were really close, four girls that were really close. So we decided to move to Falls Church, Virginia, on the other side of the Potomac, and to be closer to, to Langley.

MM: So that must have been, so at the time, so 1967 you're working for the CIA during the height of the Vietnam conflict when protests are insane across Washington, DC.

DS: Right. Right. There was a lot going on.

MM: Did you feel that like this is such a weird place to be at this time? Or, or were you were you political about the Vietnam conflict at all?

DS: No. Well, not, not as, I wasn't really that political. I knew that it existed. I didn't know why we were there. I knew that [38:00] I lost quite a few friends there and I don't think I was into, myself, the politics and things at that time.

MM: My mother says the same thing.

DS: Yeah.

MM: It was just sort of there.

DS: It was just there. You dealt with it, right. Now my grandmother was involved with, and my mother, World War, I believe, Second World War. And my grandmother worked for a torpedo plant at that time. And you know, at that time women went to work and because the men were gone, and so she worked for a torpedo plant at that time. And my –

MM: In, in Newport?

DS: In Newport, around there. Probably well in the Quonset area or whatever.

MM: Yes. Yeah.

DS: My mother entertained the troops. She, she, USO. She would sing. She was a singer and a kind of like a dancer and she, she would entertain the troops. [39:00] She had that kind of personality, you know? So they were all –

MM: Participating in some way.

DS: Yes, yeah. In some way or another, fashion or another. Yeah.

MM: So you begin your job.

DS: I began my job. And it was great. My boyfriend and I split up. At the time. I was devastated. Because he had started seeing someone else. He did come to Wash - he did come to Washington to see me. When I was in training, he was allowed to be there. He couldn't stay there, but -

MM: Yeah.

DS: But he was allowed to be there. And he saw me a couple of times, but anyway –

AK: And was this they boyfriend that was supposed to turn in to your ex husband over time or was this –

DS: He was supposed to be my husband. We went together for eight years.

AK: Oh wow. Okay.

DS: Yeah. I will never date a man that long. [laughter] If you're not ready next week, you know, you can to hang it up. I will never date a man that long. It was just, it was just too long. We should have been married. And maybe if we had been then I wouldn't have, I would have been home.
[40:00]

AK: It would have been different.

DS: Yeah, right. Yeah. But, you know. But anyways, so I was devastated for about a year.

MM: Oh really?

DS: It took me a very long time. I never got over, well, that's the first part. It took me about a year to start date because I had a roommate, the four young lady, there were four of us. Two of us shared an apartment and the other two shared an apartment, and we lived in the same apartment building. And then we met another lady who was working also for the CIA. She was a little bit older. So she kind of watched after us, you know, we were in our early 20s maybe -

MM: Fun!

DS: And she was maybe in her, her 30s and she was having a great old time. [laughter] But she kind of looked, you know, looked after us to make sure that we were okay. And so my roommate was saying, "You need to date," and she was dating a man from Quantico. A Marine. And so he had brought up a friend of his and so I saw him, [41:00] you know, started dating him. I'm going to tell it because, I'm going to tell it. Anyway, un - I shouldn't say unfortunately, I got pregnant. Okay. And that's where Kelli came in. It was the first time I had ever had sex, but anyway. [laughter]

MM: It happens to a lot of people.

DS: It happens. And so unfortunately, I was with the CIA for about a year and a half and then I needed to leave. I called my mother and I says, "Mom, I got something to tell you." And she says, "You're pregnant aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I am." She says, "Come home." I packed my things.

AK: Did the CIA require you to leave or did you make that choice?

DS: No. No. They didn't even -

AK: They didn't have enough time to know.

DS: No, no. I just resigned and you know, which I'm wondering where I would be now and if I had

not, you know what I mean, but anyway, you know.

MM: Because, can I just did on that a little?

DS: Yes.

MM: Because there was, there was just no, not like there's support [42:00] today for a single woman with a child, but there was just no -

DS: No.

MM: But it was your, if you could kind of put our listeners into that era for a woman?

DS: Okay.

MM: Facing that -

DS: Facing that -

MM: Question.

DS: Right, right. Absolutely. Like what do you do? I'm a young girl. I'm 20 years old. I had my daughter when I was 20 years old, you know, like, I didn't know what, what to do. I couldn't get any support from him. Because the night that I was getting ready to go home, my girlfriend and her boyfriend were going to drive me home from our, from Falls Church, and we were waiting on him because he was going to come with us. He never showed up. Okay, the man that I got pregnant by. And so she says, "Do you want to wait and go tomorrow or do you?" And I decided no. So at midnight at night, her and her boyfriend and I got in the car. They hitched on a little trailer to the back with my stuff, and they drove me to Providence. And they didn't even stay long. They stayed for breakfast or something. They turned around and went back [43:00] to, to Washington.

Come to find out, this man was already married and had two children in Detroit. Yeah. Because when I first told him that I was expecting, "Not to worry, you know, okay, we'll get married." Blah blah this, blah blah that. So.

AK: So you were able to get back in touch with him. He didn't drop off the face of the earth.

DS: He got back in touch because I didn't want to be bothered with him really anymore. But he was in touch when I went home. And he did come to visit after Kelli was born. She was four months. Now, the man that I should have married, the one that I went with for eight years, he met Kelli when she was two months old. And right then and there, he said, "This is my child." And he stepped in, you know, to help raise her. And then the other one came when she was four [44:00] months old. And after he left, I never heard from him again. But I did get a letter stating that my mother and my grandmother, you know, were kind of like very cold towards him. Well what did they expect? [laughter] Or what did he expect? You know, like -

AK: Yes they were. [laughter]

DS: They were just - but evidently his wife found out because I got a letter from her wanting information about Kelli, you know, you know, what's her name? You know -

AK: Did you, you don't have to answer this, but did you reply to her?

DS: No.

AK: No.

DS: No. Because I didn't know what she had in mind. So I did not and I never heard from either one of them again. Which is, you know, which is too bad. And Kelli tried to find him when her kidneys failed to see if maybe -

MM: A match.

DS: Right.

AK And no luck?

DS: But anyway.

AK: She didn't find him?

DS: I think she found [45:00] maybe three and she started making phone calls, but nothing ever.

She might have changed her mind. Nothing ever materialized about. So I came home. I had my beautiful daughter. I was off for, I was out of work for eight months. And then I went to, applied at CCRI, for a job. Got it. Rhode Island Junior College. And I went to work there.

MM: As an administrative -

DS: As, as an administrative assistant.

MM: You made the switch. Okay.

AK: And what year is this now?

DS: This was in 19 - so Kelli was born in October of '68 so this was in '69.

AK: Okay.

MM: Wow. Do you remember what was it like becoming a new mom? Like what was that time like?

DS: At first -

MM: Do remember having her? Do you remember being there? [laughter]

DS: No, I don't. I don't remember having her. I know when I went into labor. And I went to Women and Infants which wasn't there. It's now the nursing facility [46:00] that Women and Infants changed into. I can't remember the name, and it's still around. And I went, my mother, my mother was talking to her best girlfriend that she travels with and I says, "I think I'm having labor pains." I waited no, that's me. At that time I waited for her to get off the phone before I told her. [laughter]

AK: Yes, of course. It's the polite thing to do. [laughter]

DS: Yeah, right. That's, yeah, I waited until she got off the phone before I told her. And she says, "Okay, let's get dressed. I'm going to drive you to the hospital." And she, we, I did, and she drove me to the hospital, and she got me all settled in. And the doctor came in and says, "It's going to be a while." So he says, "You know, why don't," he said to my mother, "Why don't you go home and,"

mother had to work the next day, “and go to work and I’ll promise, I’ll call you when it’s time.” And so she went, she left, and I wasn’t there that long and, and the nurse started offering me medication [47:00] to, for the, I - it wasn’t necessary because I don’t think that I was that bad yet, but they, they insisted.

MM: Yes.

DS: And they, and it knocked me out.

MM: Out.

DS: I don’t remember anything. I have a like, I thought I was dreaming, sitting up saying, you know, “I got to go to the bathroom.”

MM: Yeah.

DS: You know, but, but it was all very foggy and so I really don’t remember.

MM: And sort of doctor knows best at the time.

DS: Right -

MM: Just take some more medicine.

DS: And not to be bothered.

MM: Yeah.

DS: Do you know what I mean? So, I remember they gave me the epidural you know, but and the doctor says, “Your baby’s,” the, he called my mother. He says, “I want you to get in your car and I want you to drive very slowly and, but your daughter’s about to deliver.” So she did come. When she got there Kelli was here. But anyway, and he said to me, “Do you want, your baby’s about to be born. Do you want to see?” [48:00] And you know how they have those big lights with the metal around it you can kind of get a glimpse through the metal. [laughter] I told him to leave me alone.

AK: Yeah, exactly.

MM: Yeah.

DS: I was too tired. I'm going back to sleep to the point where the nurse had to help push because I was, that's because the medication again. But anyway, I heard a little whimper. Not much. And they rushed off to, now it's NICU, but the incubator because the cord was wrapped around her neck a couple of times and if, if, and I was two weeks early. If I had waited those two weeks she would have been still, stillborn. So anyway. I know it. Yeah.

MM: So this beautiful baby arrives.

DS: Yeah. The beautiful baby arrived. My mother went to see her. She said to the nurse, "What's that dot over her eye?" The nurse said - "What's that dirt over her eye?" The nurse said, "That's not dirt that's a mole." [laughter] [49:00] So when I came out of everything my baby had been named.

AK: Oh no!

DS: She named her Kelli.

MM & AK: Your mom did?

DS: Yes! [laughter] Yes. Kelli Marie Straker.

AK: No.

MM: Oh my god! I hope you like it.

DS: Yeah, right, right, [laughter] I'm glad now. So, baby had been named, you know, and I said, "Yeah, isn't she something," but I could not see her. They couldn't bring her to me because of the respiratory was up - I had to go to the nursery, of course to see her. And at that time, it wasn't so that you can go in and hold your baby and things like that. I had to look through the looking glass, you know. So, but she had gained, she had lost weight, and then she had gained weight, and to the point where when it was time for me to bring home, and at that time, they kept you in the hospital forever when you had a baby, you know. So I brought her home and it was kind of a little traumatic in the beginning. [50:00] But I had, my mother was there, you know, my

grandmother was working with the Applegate's because they, she, they lived in what did I say?
Connecticut?

AK: Greenwich.

DS: Greenwich, Connecticut. Yes. In the summer months, and then they had a house in Florida, Palm Beach, in the winter months. So they went down there. But my grandmother would come up -

AK: She went with them or?

DS: Oh, no, no, no, no. We were all in her house. My grandmother's house. She left the house, you know-

AK: Yeah.

DS: To us, to the family. So anyway, yep. So but I had a good support system.

MM: So then how long - so then you, you head back to work, basically?

DS: Yeah. After eight months. I took eight months. Yeah. And in that eight months, I learned how to drive because I wasn't driving. [laughter]

MM: That's important.

DS: Yeah, yeah, right. And it's a good thing I did because the Warwick campus was the only one that was opened at the time. It was Rhode Island Junior College at that time, now it's [51:00] Community College of Rhode Island. That was the only campus available and I had to drive to - right now they have campuses all over the place. Yes. So I went to, I went to work there and I was there until from '69 did I say? Kelli was born in '68. I was there from '69 to '71. No, I'm sorry, to '81.

MM: Oh wow. Okay.

DS: I was there a very long time.

MM: Wow.

DS: Yeah.

MM: And then what? And then you, did you come to Brown after that?

DS: Oh, no, there's been a lapse.

MM: Okay.

DS: 1981 my brother got married. And well, before 1981 when I was working at CCRI, the controller there, we had become friends. He says he left and he was going to move. He moved to Georgia. And he contacted me, he says Diane I need a budget analyst, because that's what I did. At CCRI. I worked for Helen Allen Fisk. She was my boss. And we did budgets. So I was the [52:00] statistical typist at the time you know -

MM: Pre-excel.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: Yes. Pre- yes, right, pre-excel. [laughter] And so he says, "I have a job if you like it, budget analyst. I need one." I said, "Okay." So it was the 4th of July of 1981. I went down, my mother kept my daughter. My mother was working at Butler Hospital at the time because she became a, she was like a psych nurse. And my mother kept Kelli. And I went down there and worked and I had to come back up for my brother's wedding, which was in August. So I came up and went to the wedding. And I got my daughter, and my car was still up here. And my mother said, you know, and then my mother said, "I'll drive back with you." So the three of us got in the car, we drove back to Georgia [53:00] with my car. And then my mother, you know, flew home. But shortly after that she decided she was moving down there. [laughter]

MM: Where in Georgia?

DS: I was living in Dekalb County -

MM: Yeah.

DS: I was living, I lived with my girlfriend until I got my apartment in August. It must, must have been September or October. And I lived in Stone Mountain, Georgia, which was at that time the Klan was in Stone Mountain. But anyway, I had an apartment -

AK: Did you have -

DS: I lived - I could walk to Stone Mountain Park, which was great, but we didn't have any problems or anything like that. No. Right. Yeah. So and my daughter started elementary school there. Or was continuing elementary school there. So. How much time do we have? [54:00]

MM: I'm just checking - okay. We might have to do this in two sessions.

DS: I know!

MM: This is really getting good. Would you mind if we did two sessions?

DS: No, not at all.

MM: Okay, so let's see if we can find, let's see if we can find a good stopping point.

DS: Okay.

MM: Okay. So how many years were you in Georgia before Brown?

DS: I was in Georgia for, my first stint in Georgia was for like, seven or eight years. Then I, and my mother was there. My grandmother got sick. She had moved back to Philadelphia, had to leave her job. She knew when she was getting upset because she couldn't remember the ingredients that she was putting in food. So the family, because that's where my grandmother's sisters lived, all in Philly, and they were taking care of her but then it got kind of tough because my grandmother developed Alzheimer's. So my mother moved to Philadelphia to take care of her mother. And I was still in Georgia. So I left Georgia in [55:00] after Kelli graduated from high school in '87. So that's when I was there. From '81 to '87.

We moved to South New Jersey, my mother had gotten a townhouse there. And we could just go over the bridge, she had to place my grandmother, because she needed, my mother needed to still work. And she couldn't take care of her work and, so she had to replace her. And so I moved to,

and Kelli moved to South New Jersey, with my mother to kind of help her with my grandmother, you know, moral support, things like that.

MM: Heavy lift.

DS: Right. And so, and then Kelli went to the Art Institute of Philadelphia -

AK: Really?

DS: For, and got a degree in fashion marketing. And at that time, that's when we found out that she had had health issues.

MM: So I think that's where we should pause - [56:00]

DS: Okay.

MM: Because I know that's a major -

DS: Yeah.

MM: Part of your life.

DS: Yes.

MM: So why don't we stop? And if you don't mind, we'll schedule another -

DS: That's fine.

MM: Interview and we'll pick up part two and pick up about -

DS: Sounds great.

MM: With your daughter, so

DS: Okay. We may have to have a part three. [laughter]

MM: Diane, thank you so much.

DS: Well thank you for inviting me. I really feel really great and privileged for asking me to do this. I really do.

MM: Of course. Well thank you. Our pleasure. Okay, we're going to stop the recording.

Track 2

Amanda Knox: Good morning. My name is Amanda Knox. I'm the Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist. It is Thursday, December 5, it's 10:15am and I am here in Alumnae Hall room 205 with Diane Straker to continue the second part of Diane's oral history. So Diane, before we get started, I know that we kind of missed a period of time in you're, the first part of your interview. So I'd like to jump back to, to the gap you'd like to fill in.

Diane Straker: Okay, Amanda. Good morning, first of all. And I think the gap that I missed was when I had an opportunity to live in St. Thomas for a couple of years. And that was I believe, between 1972 and 1974. So I have to say that in our first session [1:00] that I thought that I was working at the Community College of Rhode Island at that time. But I started working at the Community College of Rhode Island after I returned home from St. Thomas, which was sometime in 1974. So, around 1972 I guess I had been - oh, and this will also lead to the fact that at some point in time, I did marry my, my old boyfriend that I was with for -

AK: The longtime boyfriend. [laughter]

DS: The longtime boyfriend. My daughter Kelli was two years old. She was born in '68. So we got married in 1970. So as you can tell with the time span of '70, '70 and '72 our marriage did not last that long. So we, we split up and I really got into a depressed state. You know, I was I was working and I was you know, living okay. But of course, I was just very kind of depressed about [2:00] the separation of my husband and I. And my mother knew. My mother used to be a psych nurse so she picked up on everything. [laughter]

AK: Not good for keeping secrets.

DS: Which was, which isn't good at sometimes. Right. Right. Absolutely. So she said, "Why don't

you just take a vacation go away for a little bit.” And so of course she got my brother also to go. He needed a vacation. She had a girlfriend that she used to travel with a lot who had moved to St. Thomas. I don’t know how many years she had been there. But we got in touch with her to see if it was okay if we came and could stay, you know, at her place. And she said, “Definitely she would love to have us.” So my brother and I packed up and we flew to St. Thomas, and it was like a two week vacation for us. So we put into our jobs for two weeks’ vacation and we left and we went there and had such a good time.

We fell in love with the place and [3:00] I believe it was a week before my, we were getting ready to come, we had another week. And by that time my brother said he was not going back. He had found a job. He was an offset pressman printer. And I said, “Oh, geez, well I don’t think I want to go home either.” So I think it was about maybe a couple of days before the vacation was up. I had found a job working with the local government, because of course, it’s the USVI, but I worked for the local government. My boss’s name was Alfonso Christian. He was the Commissioner of the local public safety. So I worked with him. The time that I was there.

AK: And what were you doing there?

DS: I was, actually, I was his administrative assistant. I did a lot of transcriptions. That’s the way he would do things. He would record his letters [4:00] or meetings and things like that, and I would transcribe them and put them in, you know, into notes for him. And I also, in order, the, the people living in St. Thomas the, the people who were raised and born in St. Thomas their home, it seems like every one had a taxi license there because, and you could apply for a taxi license. You just put the cone, the taxi, sign up on top of your own vehicle. So they had to come through the Commissioner’s Office of Public Safety to apply for their taxi licenses. And when they came in then I was there to take the applications and if they were approved, distribute their certification or whatever it was, and give them their license to drive a taxi on the island. And like I said, [5:00] god, there was so many taxis over there because everybody got a taxi license. So that’s what I did for him. He was a really great boss, I loved him to death.

And so I called my mother and told her that I was not coming back. And my brother wasn’t coming back. And I asked her if she would just call my job and terminate my employment. At that time, I was working for the payroll company, we made the company that made, did the payroll for smaller companies. And she called them to let them know that I will not be coming back from St. Thomas, terminate her employment. And I told her to bring me my daughter. And my daughter was about three years old when, when she brought her to, she waited until like school was over, like she was in like pre K or whatever. And then she brought me my daughter over in June. And of course

the trip was in May, so I wasn't away from her for that long. And so I had been living [6:00] in St. Thomas at that time in the '70s was like being on a two-and-a-half-year vacation, even though you were working. Everybody was very laid back. You could take a swim in the ocean before you went to work. You take two hour lunches or so. It was just wonderful.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And I made quite a few friends. One of my best girlfriends that I made, I met there. She was from New York, but she had married one of the Islanders, and they lived on the islands. So her and I were very close. We kind of hung out together and I really, it was really a party for me for two and a half years, you know. So and then my daughter started, she continued on with her, her daycare and schooling there. And then it was when it was time for her, like when she turned five, the schools here I thought about her education and the public schools [7:00] there were not very up to speed and it was too much money to put her into a, a, a private school, which I could not afford. And housing was very difficult there also to get. And I was on a list for a very long time. So I decided when she turned five at that time, which was two and a half years later, that we it was best for us probably just to move back home. And the weird thing about it is because I left the Department of Public Safety, and I was looking for another job before I had made a decision to move back to the States. And they were building a hotel. And I can't remember, it was, I believe it was a Hilton. It sat on top of a mountain. It was one of the largest resorts that they had built on the island. And I remember going for an interview in my hard hat - they gave me a hard hat to put on [8:00] because -

AK: That's always a good sign. [laughter]

DS: Yeah. And I was going to do the payroll for the employees that work there. And I did get the job and I said, "Well, I wonder what would have happened. If I was able to stay," you know. I probably still would have been there by now. But anyway, I had decided to come back home, so.

AK: And at this point, you are no longer married?

DS: No, yes. As a matter of fact, I was no longer married. As a matter of fact, while I was there, I divorced my husband. I contracted a lawyer there, she wasn't an Islander, she was from, from the States. I don't know if she was from New York or wherever. And, and I went to her and told her that I was married. I had met someone else and I thought maybe there was going to be a possibility there. Said, so let me clean up my past and get a divorce. And so I did do that. We went into, she

said, "Of course, we'll have to advertise the [9:00] divorce." First of all, they would have to send the papers to my husband filing, that I had filed for divorce and then they would have to put it in the paper in Rhode Island, just in case he didn't get it for thirty days.

AK: In the newspaper?

DS: Yeah, they put it in the paper.

AK: For every - where everyone -

DS: For everybody to see.

AK: No!

DS: For thirty days.

AK: Really?

DS: Yes, Yes, they did. Back then that's I guess, that's the way it was done. Just in case. But he was served, and I had to wait 30 days for him to respond. And he never did respond. So then we went into court, and the judge granted my divorce. And one of the things the judge said to me after he was finished, he says, "I'm sorry for, you know, the circumstances why you're here," he said, "but I enjoyed taking, hearing your [10:00] case because it's not too often I get in intelligent speaking person in court who understands what I'm saying to them and able to respond."

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: Right. You know, so I said, "Okay, thank you." [laughter]

AK: Yeah. I guess that's good. [laughter]

DS: So my lawyer and I, we left the court room and when we got out in the front of the courtyard, I said, "Oh my god," I said, "I forgot something." She said, "What is it?" I says, "I wanted to take my maiden name back," because my daughter was a Straker, and I didn't want to keep the, my married name. And so she says, "Well, come on. Let's go back in." So we went back in and she went back

into the courtyard, and she excused herself and asked the judge, you know, if she could have just a second. You know, “Mrs. Wallace,” at the time, “Would like to have her maiden name back. Could we add that to it?” And he says, “No problem whatsoever.” [11:00] So.

AK: Oh, good.

DS: So yeah. And so I was divorced and then [inaudible] the relationship that I was having there, in St. Thomas kind of fizzled out.

AK: Of course.

DS: Of course. They all fizzle out. [laughter] So I packed my daughter up and she and I came back home. My brother stayed for a while. I don’t know how much longer he was there after me, but he stayed. And I came back home. And that’s when I put my daughter in school. As a matter of fact, she started in Vineyard Street School in Providence, but I was able to get her into Henry Barnard at Rhode Island College. And so that’s where she spent a lot of her elementary school life until I moved her to Georgia. Moved this kid all over the place. Poor baby. [laughter] So, and that and that’s when I went to work for the Community College of Rhode Island, [12:00] formerly Rhode Island Junior College. And I think we had talked into I think we had already spoken about how I got to Georgia.

AK: Yes. I think so.

DS: I got a job offer from a friend that I met at CCRI.

AK: Right.

DS: Yes. Okay. Yeah. So that was it for my St. Thomas adventure. Yeah.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yeah. So where should we go from here?

AK: So were you, I don’t know why Pennsylvania is sticking in my mind. Did Pennsylvania come after Georgia or before?

DS: Pennsylvania came after Georgia.

AK: Okay.

DS: I was in Georgia from 1981 to '87.

AK: Oh. Okay.

DS: And then I moved to actually South New Jersey because we have a large family in Philadelphia.

AK: Oh, so that's what I was thinking.

DS: Right.

AK: Okay.

DS: And my grandmother lived in Philadelphia. And even though my mother lived with me for a while in Georgia the second time, she needed to come to Philadelphia to take care of her mother who had developed Alzheimer's. [13:00] And the family watched after my grandmother for quite some time, but then it got to be a little bit difficult. So my mother decided she needed to come home and take care of her own mother.

And then the doctor, my mother's, my grandmother's doctor, met with my mother and said that, you know, "It's difficult taking care of an Alzheimer's patient." Number one, my grandmother was very combative. She would try to leave the house in the middle of the night. And my mother would hear the door close and she would wake up and my grandmother would be heading towards the elevator. And she said, "Mom, where are you going?" and she was trying to get back to her old house from where she lived when she was a child. But she fought my mother. You know, my mother had to kind of get her back in the house and the doctor said, you know, "You need to place her." Yeah, because, and my mother had to work also. So you know. [14:00]

AK: It's too much.

DS: It was too much. She would be safer, she would be fed, you know, and things like that. And so, as much, as hard as it was my mother placed her in, but was there to visit her quite often. But it was

kind of a, it was a very stressful and that's why I decided to move in that area, to be supportive to my mother and you know, and my, and my grandmother.

So, my mother, after my mother placed my grandmother, my mother found a townhouse in South New Jersey, Willingboro at the time. And so when my daughter and I left Georgia, we moved into the, the apartments. Had a three bedroom, upstairs and downstairs. We lived with my mother there. And she had found that place because she knew that we were coming, you know. So, and it only took what, 15 minutes to get across the bridge if that, so, you know. We could go back and forth and visit my grandmother.

And at that time I was working for [15:00] Warehouse Paper Company. The headquarters is in Seattle, but I was working in Georgia at Warehouse Paper Company. They made corrugated boxes for different companies. And I, oh, what did I do? Oh, I was in customer service. And I kind of and then when I got tired of customer service, I went to accounting.

AK: Comes quick.

DS: Right. I went to accounting. And then after I got tired of accounting, I went back to customer service.

AK: You don't like to be in one place, do you?

DS: No, I don't. No, I don't. I like change. [laughter]

AK: Yeah.

DS: So, but anyway. So we lived it, and my mother was a psych nurse. No, I'm sorry. She was a psych nurse, but she worked, when we were in Georgia my mother worked for Grady Hospital as a psych nurse. And so my mother did not have any difficulty finding a job when she moved to New Jersey. So the Rancocas Hospital, I believe it was, [16:00] which it was a psych hospital. And she worked there for a number of years. I worked, I was transferred. I was able to get a transfer from the warehouse in Georgia. They had a Warehouse Paper Company in Barrington, New Jersey.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: Which wasn't that far from there. So I was, I managed, I actually had to resign in Georgia and then when I came up and interviewed with them, I got picked up in New Jersey. Same company.

AK: Yeah.

DS: So, which was great.

AK: Yeah, that worked out.

DS: It worked out really well. And my daughter had graduated from high school. So she decided that she wanted to follow her grandfather and her uncle. They were both Navy men and she wanted to go into the service. And so she started proceedings and she passed the testing and was all set to go she had to have a physical and it was the Navy that found out that she had too much protein [17:00] in her urine, and her kidneys had been affected.

AK: Wow.

DS: So they told her they could not take her unfortunately. And her life went into a whirl spin because you don't like, what do I do now? Yeah, you know,.

AK: That's a serious -

DS: Do I college?

AK: Right.

DS: You know, I can't go into the Navy.

AK: Right.

DS: So basically, of course, they told you that we needed for her to see a nephrologist at the time.

AK: And what, about what year is this?

DS: This was in, we moved there in 1987. So it had to be so '88. It was shortly after.

AK: So she had to have been about what 20?

DS: Oh, yes.

AK: Okay.

DS: Oh, she was in - actually, she wasn't even 20.

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: Because she graduated in '87. She was 18.

AK: Oh, okay, so she was young.

DS: So she was, yeah, she was about 19 when she found out, but then it kind of went - she was I guess in denial and we didn't know what we should have [18:00] done.

AK: Right.

DS: Ignorance, you know? So -

AK: And there were no symptoms or anything beforehand?

DS: No, that's the whole thing. Right, you know. And she was urinating.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Fine. There was no symptoms or anything. And so we did not go directly, I don't know did we see a nephrologist at that time? Not a nephrologist, neurologist?

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: It almost sounds like it has to do, I don't know, but anyway wasn't a nephrologist at the time. But I'm not quite sure if we waited a while. And I think probably we did go see one. And I think he couldn't figure out why she was, you know, she had this problem. Still no symptoms or [19:00] anything.

AK: And the problem didn't really have a name at this point? Like -

DS: No.

AK: You just know there's too much protein and something's not right.

DS: Right. Right. Your kidneys may - we didn't know how badly they were going to be damaged or anything like that. So we did go to, he recommended the doctor in New Jersey, recommended that we take her to University of Penn. They had a medical facility there? Or was at Penn State? I'm not quite sure which one it was. So we did take her into Philadelphia. And she was, they were looking for lupus because we still had no idea. They finally figured out what had happened. Evidently, she had had strep throat, sometime in high school or whatever. And she knew she had it.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Because I didn't know when she had it. [laughter] Because she was too busy having a good time.

AK: Of course.

DS: And she doesn't know how she got through it because her throat [20:00] was so bad.

AK: Yeah. Strep throat's not fun.

DS: No. It's not fun. But she was having a good time. [laughter]

AK: She was occupied in other ways.

DS: She was occupied. And then I guess the symptoms started going away. But the infection never left her body. It settled in her kidneys.

AK: Oh wow.

DS: And that's how she came down with the kidney disease.

AK: Wow. No way.

DS: Yes. But we didn't find out, nothing was actually done. She had going to - she decided to go to the Art Institute of Philadelphia and she took up fashion marketing. It was it was a two-year class, course, and she graduated from that. And she started working, of course, in the retail and she was decorating trees for Macy's -

AK: Oh how fun!

DS: And things like that while we were in Philadelphia. And I guess it was when was it? [21:00] We lived how long in New Jersey? From 1987 to 1994. Things going along like, like it was normal.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And then my brother and his wife in the meantime had a sick child, their middle child. My godchild.

AK: Was this the same brother who was in St. Thomas?

DS: Yes, he's the only brother I have.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yes. He had moved back home, they had, we had gone to the wedding before you know. Their wedding in 1981 before we moved to Georgia the first time. He had moved back home. He had a son, Marcus Junior, my nephew. Then he had another son, David Christopher. And then he had a daughter. And the daughter was she was still young, an infant. And we were at a family reunion in Rhode Island and David got sick, [22:00] the middle child. And they took him to the doctors. And she was always taking David to the doctors for some reason or another. But they told, they thought that she was just neurotic, you know, mother, nothing's wrong with your child. Well, she took him this time and refused to take him home until you let me know what's going on with him. Come to find out he had, he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma. It was a tumor that was attached to four major organs and it was cancerous now.

AK: Oh no.

DS: So here goes the, you know, situation with David being sick. We're in New Jersey, living, even though we sponsored the family reunion Rhode Island, and they're in Rhode Island of course. And David spent many, many a days, he was two and a half years old. He fought it for two years.

AK: Wow.

DS: In the hospital, the hospital chemo, the whole bit. [23:00] And they were just getting ready to get him set up to go to St. Jude's hospital for a bone marrow transplant and he didn't, he didn't make it.

AK: Wow.

DS: He was home. And they had him set up in the living room, you know, hospital bed, things like that. And my brother, and of course, my sister in law, slept in the living room. And she woke up and she went over to David and David was awake and he said, "Mommy, I'm sorry, but I can't," he's four years old, "I can't get well." And so she says, "Oh it's no problem, David, you know, it's alright, you're going to get better," whatever. But he knew. She didn't. But he you know.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: He knew, you know, at that age, and she said that she fell asleep on the couch just for a few minutes and when she woke up again, he was gone. It was 4th of July.

AK: Oh god.

DS: 4th of July. [24:00] And so of course we all went up there. And we were getting ready for another family reunion. [laughter] And his, his viewing - and she was having him cremated - was on the weekend, or a day or so before we were getting ready to go to a family reunion up in Lancaster, Amish country up in that area. And so we drove from New Jersey and of course went to the funeral. And they took him to have him cremated. People hung around until he came back. They at that time, they had to send him to Boston.

AK: Oh wow.

DS: We could not wait because we had all, and the family in Philadelphia was all at the funeral. We

all had to leave and you know, so we all, we all left and went to the family reunion. It's kind of bittersweet, but you know. So, but getting back to, [25:00] getting off of that story now. Where was I with my daughter? Oh, so my brother and his wife and the other two children decided they could not live in Rhode Island after that. So they decided to move to Georgia.

AK: Oh. Okay.

DS: [laughter] Oh my god.

AK: How convenient.

DS: So we said, well, you know, since then my, my grandmother, my grandmother passed away a month before David did.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: A month before on a Sunday. They both died on a Sunday. And she died June, I can't remember the date. But it was four weeks to the day that he left. And we knew at that point, she went to wait for him.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Because he was coming.

AK: Yeah. That's beautiful.

DS: So, yeah. So my grandmother had passed in Philadelphia, and David had passed in Rhode Island. My brother and his family [26:00] decided they can't live there anymore. We decided why don't we all try to live the state, a state together again as a family.

AK: So what was the draw to Georgia? Did you have family ties to Georgia at all? Or did everyone just like Georgia?

DS: No. When I, when I went down there to live the first time David wasn't even my, we had a New Year's Eve party. And my brother and his wife and their first child came down.

AK: Okay.

DS: And for Christmas and the holiday, and they liked it, you know. So I don't know what the tie was, you know, it was my friend that hired me to get down there.

AK: Exactly, yeah.

DS: And then of course, my mother, she doesn't want to be that far. Oh, not especially from her granddaughter, my, my daughter, and away from me. So she moved down there. And I said, oh my god, I just can't get away from my family.

AK: Yeah. [laughter]

DS: So when they decided to go there, we decided that –

AK: Why don't we go back.

DS: Why don't we try – Yes. And they had just bought a brand new house in a new community in Conyers, Georgia, and we just kind of [27:00] piled in their house, which we probably shouldn't have done. But they said, "it was all right," you know.

AK: Right, yeah, of course.

DS: So we were with them for a little bit. They wanted my mother to stay with them, but my mother and my sister in law, they, well, none of us really go along with her. [laughter]

AK: Yeah.

DS: We do now. [laughter]

AK: That's how it goes sometimes.

DS: Right. Yeah. So I had gotten an apartment. [coughing] Excuse me. I had gotten an apartment. And, with my mother and of course, my daughter. We were all living together and my mother

decided I don't want to be here anymore. I don't know how many years after that. It wasn't that long. Maybe 18, I think she was there only maybe for 18 months. She says, "I want to go home." She was getting a little older and she wanted to retire at home. And it was very difficult in Georgia to, [28:00] to make friends like you have especially at her age, even for me, it was difficult. You know, you just socialize with, I socialized with my girlfriend who was married to the gentleman that brought me there. We were very close, you know, but it was very difficult. They have a tight knit, you had so many transient people coming in. And it was like a very tight knit groups going on there and it was hard to infiltrate them. So, but of course, I was younger, I hung out with people at work and you know, and things like that. So my life was full, but my mother decided she wanted to, she was going to go, come back to Rhode Island. So she came back to Rhode Island and, and got a place and, you know, got back involved with the church again, and she was very happy with that which was great. I was happy for her.

And so my daughter, [29:00] what did she do? Oh, that's when she woke up one evening. I should, like I said she was working in retail and stuff like that. She woke up one evening and she told me that she was not well, every time she laid down she couldn't breathe. And so I says, "We need to go to the emergency room." She was, find out she was in congestive heart failure. And we went to the emergency room, and I'll never forget it. Dekalb Community College I mean, sorry, Dekalb County Hospital. The doctor that was treating her had no bedside manner whatsoever. He kept asking, you know, "Well, what is it?" We knew that she had a problem with her kidney, but we couldn't quite and he was like, badgering her. And she broke down and started crying and here I am. And finally [30:00] another doctor came in. It was a nephrologist. And he spoke to us about what was going on and what was happening. And about the strep throat. He knew exactly what it was.

AK: Wow.

DS: And he named what the disease was. And I made him write it down for me.

AK: Get it in writing. Exactly.

DS: And I kept it in my wallet for years until it faded and I couldn't see it anymore. But I can always find it by looking it, looking it up. I know exactly what it is.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But anyway, so Dekalb Memorial Hospital couldn't do anything. They were not specialized in

kidney failure. So they sent us to – oh my god. Isn't this terrible? It'll come to me. Begins with the P. Oh, god. It's terrible, but it'll come. They sent us to a hospital in, in the city -

AK: And had they done anything for her congestive heart failure at that point?

DS: Yes. [31:00] Well, that's what they did first.

AK: Okay, so they did handle that.

DS: They did handle that. And then they transported her.

AK: Okay.

DS: God, it's terrible. It's right on my, at the tip of my, how could I forget that hospital? Then they transferred her to the hospital in the city who did put her on dialysis.

AK: Okay.

DS: They did immediate dialysis.

AK: Which city are we in?

DS: Right in Atlanta.

AK: In Atlanta. Okay.

DS: Yes. Oh my god, I'm going have to look it up while we're talking.

AK: Yes, please do. [laughter]

DS: And I don't know why it's just -

AK: It's one of those things. It's just, you're going to be hung up on it until you remember it.

DS: Right. Yeah. So, they sent us there because they, they took very good care of her. And then we

knew that she had to go on dialysis and they recommended that she go on home dialysis. She was so young, and she could carry on a normal life. All she had to do was hook herself up at night to be, as long as she got in 6 to 8 hours then you know, go on with your normal day. [32:00] So, oh god, I'm just -

AK: Take your time.

DS: I'm sorry. Hospitals in Atlanta, Georgia.

Siri (cell phone): Hospitals around Atlanta? Sure.

DS: It's just going to, it's just going to come to me I know it is. Well Street, Cancer Services, Neuro - Just give me the hospital. Piedmont! Piedmont Hospital.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yeah. [laughter] So they were excellent. And there was two nurses that was her, her mentors and they took her through the whole process and they took me through it too you know. And they had to put, in the meantime, my mother came when she found out, down. In the meantime, they had to put like a tube in her stomach -

AK: Oh wow.

DS: For her to be dialyzed through. And of course, you know, wait for that to heal and in the meantime, they just did it from the, the chest [33:00] area. They could do it from -

AK: Yeah.

DS: From that area. So, which is the best area because, but it, they said that they could not leave it in there because it's, it's the prime spot for infection, you know. So anyway, we kind of got settled in to this fact that you know, she's going to be on dialysis and of course they did a work up because she was young to be put on the list for a kidney transplant.

And, but in the meantime, she had to do this at home. So my mother came down and well, I'll never forget it because when they took her in to put the, the tube in her stomach it was like a, like a one-day procedure type thing. And they brought her out, my mother and I went in to see her

while she was in recovery and, and we were talking and we kind of always kind of uplifting and light, you know, make her feel better. And of course, it makes may feel better. [34:00]

AK: Right. For sure.

DS: And all of a sudden because the machine was beeping, you know, which is normal. You know, like you have these heart machines that run the lines and beeps and, and then all of a sudden the machine stopped beeping. And my mother and I are sitting by each other and she's in the bed there. And we look at her. And then both my mother and I kind of looked at the machine, it was like out of a cartoon whatever, movie, and then we look back at her, and all of a sudden she says, "Don't just look at me! Go get somebody!" [laughter]

AK: So she was feeling better.

DS: She said, "I could be dying here!"

AK: Oh no.

DS: And instead of us getting someone my mother and I just started busting out laughing. Oh my, it was the funniest thing. And then I dragged myself up and I went out to see if there was a nurse there. She was there, she's like, "Everything is okay." Oh it was just so - but my daughter was so upset with the two of us. [35:00]

AK: Yeah.

DS: But anyway. So we got through that and she healed and then we had to go to Piedmont Hospital almost like every day. But anyway, she healed and she started doing her dialysis at home. And they taught me how to hook up her machine also so that being in retail the hours are crazy -

AK: Right, right.

DS: So if you get home late at night at least I could have that hooked up for you.

AK: Right.

DS: And so I start, and of course when you hook up the machine you have to be masked, you have to wear gloves, you know the whole bit.

AK: Oh my god.

DS: And so, and the supplies. You wouldn't believe the supplies. Her, she had one closet, thank god we had huge closets, there was a walk in closet. All, everything in there was nothing but boxes of supplies and they would deliver the supplies to the apartment. So, but anyway, that went okay. She got into the, she really, I have to say, I have to give it to her because I don't know if I could have done it.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, but [36:00] she really handled everything very well. She was compliant with everything. Medications, you know, making sure when, they taught her how to do manual dialysis in case she couldn't get to the machine at certain times.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Working in retail, sometimes she would decide not to hook up, she would do a manual one in the morning at home. She would take a set, put it in the car.

AK: Oh my god.

DS: So on her lunch hour she would go to the car and she would hook yourself up and dialyze herself in the car.

AK: Oh my god.

DS: And I like I said, I just don't know how she-

AK: Yeah.

DS: Handled all of that.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, but she went through a lot, you know. And she never talked about how she felt about that until later than I felt really ugh. But anyway, and then I remember that I was, she was at work at one of the stores and I [37:00] was getting my nails done. I guess it was my day off or whatever. Oh, it was a Saturday or something. And she, I got a call from her, having my nails done, "I have to take this." And she says, "Mom, Piedmont Hospital called me. They have a kidney for me."

AK: Oh!

DS: I said, "You're kidding. Oh my god." I said, "What's going on?" I, she says, you know, "I'm going to go." She says, "They want me to bring in a few things." She had to go home and she had to bring in one of the solutions from her, you know, dialysis machine thing and a couple other things. And then she says, "They told me to get there, you know, as quickly as possible." So -

AK: Yeah. And this is about what year again? Just to kind of set ourselves -

DS: Oh, I'm sorry.

AK: No, that's okay. No.

DS: Yes, my god, I'm losing years here.

AK: I'll just keep asking you.

DS: No, that's all right.

AK: Around about is good.

DS: So we moved there around '94. When was the Olympics? Was the Olympics in '96?

AK: Oh, I don't know that.

DS: So it was the year of the Olympics.

AK: Okay.

DS: Because we all [38:00] went to the Olympics.

AK: Yeah. [laughter]

DS: And it was in the, I think it was in the winter, was it in the winter? Or maybe it was in the spring? And it was the year of the Olympics I'll never forget. So it had to be like around, I'm going to say '96. Might be '95.

AK: Okay.

DS: Right before they -

AK: Thereabouts.

DS: Thereabouts. I can't remember exactly. It was either '95 or '96. I don't know. But in that, in that -

AK: That's close enough.

DS: Yes, right.

AK: And so how, how do you feel now? Like, you're in the nail salon and like, you get this call.

DS: I get this call.

AK: And you're like, "Oh my god."

DS: And it was like, it was like eight months after she had been diagnosed. They had a kidney for her. So I get this call -

AK: Is that a long time? Or is that?

DS: That's good.

AK: That feels fast.

DS: Yeah, because the last time she was on it for 14 years.

AK: Oh.

DS: Yeah. So that was, eight months is good.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: You know being on dialysis and then having a kidney. [39:00] And so I'm in the nail salon having my nails done, said, "You got to hold up."

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, I says, "I got to go." I said, "My daughter's been on dialysis. She's just, she just got a call, they got a kidney for her." I says, "I got to go." There was a woman there also having her nails done. She says, "I want you to calm down." She says, "I had knew of someone that got a call that had a kidney transplant." And she says, "And it's going to take them a while to get her prepped and everything for, for surgery." She says, "So you need to calm down." She says, "Finish having your nails done." And, and then she says, "Take your time and head down to," so I did.

AK: Okay.

DS: Took my time. And Kelli didn't as a matter of fact, Kelli didn't go home first. She went directly to the hospital. She asked me if I would pick up the solution and bring it.

AK: Okay, yeah.

DS: So got my nails done. I went home, [40:00] I picked up solution and whatever else she needed and then I went down to Piedmont Hospital. And she had to be of course, she had to have dialysis before they did the surgery. And that's what that tubing was for. And I says, "I can't believe this." And being on dialysis is not of course, it's not good for your body, but your complexion turns really dark.

AK: Really?

DS: Oh, yes. So she had this dark kind of complexion. And I don't know if you met her?

AK: No, I've never met her.

DS: Before - You never met my daughter?

AK: No.

DS: Because she's dark complected anyway, so being on dialysis no. I mean, it keeps you alive, but-

AK: Yeah.

DS: Takes a toll on your body.

AK: Yeah, I'm sure.

DS: So anyway, I called my girlfriend April. Since then, she had left her husband, the guy that I worked for.

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: And that was another big story, but we're not even going to go there.

AK: Yeah, yeah. We'll call her for her oral history. [laughter]

DS: Yeah, right. She married another friend that I didn't know that well, but he had married [41:00] a neighbor's daughter that I knew. But anyway, I called them and said, "Kelli got a call for a kidney, you know, we're down here," and they said, so they didn't come down right away. They came down later. Kelli was in surgery when they came.

AK: How far out of Atlanta did you live? Were you like right outside or was it -

DS: I was -

AK: a trek to get in there?

DS: No, I was in Conyers, Georgia. And I would say we were maybe like about 30, 35 minutes outside of the city.

AK: Okay.

DS: Which wasn't bad -

AK: Right.

DS: Because in Atlanta, you know, you could be traveling for days.

AK: For, yeah exactly. [laughter]

DS: You know, just go to work you could be on the road for two hours.

AK: Yeah.

DS: So, but anyway, it wasn't bad. So I went down, I waited with her and I sat with her and they got her all prepped and everything. And then when they came to take her, it had to be maybe like about two or three hours later. Then I went into the waiting room and I waited and then my girlfriend and her husband showed up and says, [42:00] "Well, let's go have a bite to eat," because I hadn't had anything to eat.

AK: Yeah, I'm sure.

DS: Have a drink.

AK: Right. Or two.

DS: Right, right. So we went out, we had a bite to eat and because I asked, "How long would the

surgery take?” And the doctor said, “Oh, maybe about three hours or so.”

AK: Wow.

DS: I didn’t expect it, I thought it was going to take longer.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But anyway, when I got back people were waiting and I had to ring because I found out that she had come out of surgery. They were trying to find me and here I was out -

AK: Out drinking with your buddies! [laughter]

DS: Yeah, right, right. Having lunch and drinking with my buddies. And my, my girlfriend’s husband is the one that found out where she was. And he had gone in already and seen her.

AK: Oh my god.

DS: [laughter] So eventually I was able - I said, How’s she doing?” He said, “She’s doing good.” You know, she was kind of awake.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And so I went in, they, they left [43:00] and I went in to see her and she looked great. The complexion had come back into her face -

AK: Really? That quickly?

DS: That quickly.

AK: Wow.

DS: So it’s so important to get rid of the toxins in, you know -

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: In your body. The complexion had already come back and the doctor came in and she said, "Doing really well. Her complexion looks great. The kidney seems to be functioning well." You know, and I said, "Oh, okay." So, did I stay there? I don't think I stayed there that night. I went back the next day when they had moved her into a, on the renal floor to monitor her. And of course she was going to be there for, for a while because they wanted to make sure that things were working well. And things did work out well. And she was released. But we had to go she had to be at that hospital every other day for procedures or whatever or just to check this and whatever, you know. So I took her back and forth every other day and I was [44:00] still working. So I don't know how I did all this. You know -

AK: You do it.

DS: It becomes a blur -

AK: Right.

DS: After a while. How do you, how do you do this? You know, how did I keep my job?

AK: Right, exactly.

DS: Things like that. Yeah.

AK: When you need to do things, you do it.

DS: You do it.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know?

AK: Yeah.

DS: So, but anyway. So then she was ready to go and she went back to work. And in, when did we leave there? We went back in '94. The Olympics came. I think it was in 2006, I believe. We had a

friend that came down from Rhode Island who had bought tickets. He did not want to go to all the events. So he started passing out tickets that he wasn't going to.

AK: Nice!

DS: So, which was very nice. We had my girlfriend's husband, the new one, well, they were living together, but anyway, he was, he was always involved in civic things going on in the community and whatnot. He was, had the honor of being selected to be one of the torch bearers.

AK: Wow.

DS: So, [45:00] so of course, we got to see him do his run. And then we were all invited to the opening dress rehearsal of the Olympics. We didn't even have to -

AK: Wow.

DS: It was great. The opening night.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But only this was the rehearsal -

AK: Yeah, even better.

DS: The night before. That was, oh, it was so spectacular.

AK: Yeah.

DS: It was wonderful. And then I got to go to, I couldn't go to track because our friend wanted to keep that ticket, but what did I - I went to diving. It was at Georgia Tech, which was very, it was good. That was great. And I think I went to a softball game. And did we do gymnastics? I think we did gymnastics also.

AK: That's so cool.

DS: So we got to see a lot of venues. But instead of the venue, the mood in Atlanta was just so great. [46:00]

AK: Really?

DS: There was people from everywhere. It was just, it was just a wonderful time.

AK: Yeah.

DS: It was a wonderful time. The only problem that we did have was I believe is when they had the bombing.

AK: Oh.

DS: Do you remember?

AK: I don't think I do. I would have been pretty young I think.

DS: We were - oh that's prob, I'm sorry. [laughter]

AK: No, no. My apologies. [laughter]

DS: Oh, no! But we were down at a Piedmont Park. No, it wasn't Piedmont Park, Olympic Park, in the city which they had built for the Olympics. And a lot of things went on there. They had a, they had like a lot of bands that came in, jazz bands, rock bands, all kinds of things. There was always something going on down at the Olympic Park. So we all had taken a train in because they had MARTA which was great also, and to be out and celebrate in the park, you know, and socialize, and they had food venues and, they just had everything down there. [47:00] And there was, I think one particular band that we wanted to see. So we went down that night. And as we were getting ready to walk back to the train station to catch MARTA to come back home there was a pile of people in the walk through, it was like a tunnel type area. And we said, you know like, "What's going on?" You know, "Why is all these people here?" And come to find out right after we had left a bomb had gone off in Olympic Park.

AK: Wow.

DS: We had not even gotten to the train yet -

AK: Yeah.

DS: Because it was so backed up. So they had shut down everything. The trains and, and that's why all these people were standing there. I just oh my god, we could have been in the park at that time. And that's when I think one person, I think one woman was killed and then another [48:00] person had a heart attack -

AK: Oh wow.

DS: And died. So, but anyway, that was a big thing.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And that wasn't even, I think the Olympics was over at that time, but of course -

AK: People were still lingering.

DS: People were still, yeah. Yeah. But in any case, so that was the only thing that happened so. Well, I shouldn't say "only thing that happened." And then after that you just hear about bombings everywhere, you know.

AK: Right, right.

DS: But anyway. So we just had a good time during the Olympics and that was in 1996. So in the year, at that time, my - '94, 18 months, no. At that time, you know, everything went back to normal. Kelli was working. I was, and then I said to Kelli, I said, I said, "When I retire, I want to move back home." Oh, even before this, I'm sorry. Getting all these things messed up. [49:00]

AK: That's okay.

DS: After Kelli had her kidney transplant, she knew that she probably would never be able to have children because that's -

AK: Oh, right.

DS: Carry a child after that.

AK: Children quite literally suck the life out of you I hear.

DS: Yes. Right, right, right. And weighing heavy on your kidneys anyway. So but she wanted to have a, have a child, you know. And she wasn't married, no one in particular, you know. She hadn't, didn't have a boyfriend at the time. Well, at that time of her life, Georgia Adoption Agency and the state of Georgia got together because they had so many children in foster homes and that needed adopting. So they combined together and they opened it up to single parents. And, oh what else did they open it up to? Well, anyway, it was a great [50:00] opportunity where Kelli could qualify to adopt a child. And I says, "Well, you know, I'll back you whatever you want to do, you know. I'll be your support system here." And so she got a counselor, she got in touch with the counselor, and you know, they were in touch for a while, and they kind of asked you, you know, "What are you, what are you looking for?" And she says, "I want a boy and I want a toddler." And so they found her a boy and a toddler. He was two and a half years old. And so, and that's Eric, my grandson. So she, of course, they had interactions for a while, because you can't adopt right away, and I think it's a year after -

AK: Wow.

DS: You could adopt, you know. And so things went well and then [51:00] it was time to make it -

AK: Official.

DS: Official.

AK: Yeah.

DS: So we met with some of his family, not his mother or his dad. But we met with an aunt who had, who was fostering him who had him in the first place. And we met with her and Kelli asked the aunt, and there was others in the room. Kelli's, you know, Kelli asked her, you know, "Why is it that you're not adopting your, your sister or your,"

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: "Husband's family, child, this child anyway?"

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: And come to find out, no one in that family, well, no one in that family could, I shouldn't say no one in that family, the two of them, the aunt and the uncle that were married, couldn't adopt him because they, [52:00] there was kind of abusive marriage. I think he used to beat on her or whatever. And she broke down and she cried. And she said, you know, she would have liked to but, you know.

AK: It just wasn't possible.

DS: It wasn't possible. They wouldn't let her and him do it. So, which we felt bad about.

AK: Right.

DS: But it was going to be an open adoption, where as if Eric wanted to see any of his siblings, or if he wanted to see his aunt, you know, we were open to be a part of his life, you know. So, we did adopt him and Kelli always stayed in touch with them, you know.

AK: Even still?

DS: Even, even still.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: Because Eric has -

AK: And how old is Eric now?

DS: Eric's 24.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: I know it. Huh?

AK: Oh my gosh!

DS: Eric's 24 years old. But Eric started communicating when he got older with his sisters. [53:00]
All of the kids that this mother had, [coughing] excuse me, were adopted out.

AK: Adopted.

DS: Yes. And there were some family members that adopted some of them. That's what they couldn't take Eric too, you know. So he's in touch with, the sister that he kept close contact with, within the last maybe five or six years passed away. She had sickle cell.

AK: Wow.

DS: The family had sickle cell going through, going through the -

AK: Yeah.

DS: Fortunately, because Eric has been tested several times. He did not develop the trait.

AK: Wow.

DS: You know.

AK: Wow. That's awesome.

DS: Right. So she, and he was really sad about that. He has been in the company of his mother, because even while we were still there, Kelli use to give birthday parties and things like that. And his mother would show up.

AK: Really?

DS: Not saying that, he didn't know who she was because [54:00] at the time she abandoned him he

was two years old.

AK: Right, right.

DS: But, eventually I think Kelli told him that, “Do you know who that person was?” You know. She said, “Well, that’s your mother,” you know. But he never had any, had any dealings, you know?

AK: Yeah, yeah.

DS: Yeah, with her or anything. But the bulk of his family, he was, his, his name was Huxley. He was Eric Christopher Huxley. No. Oh, I can’t remember. I don’t know. Was it Huxley? Something like that. Began with an H.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Humphreys! That’s what it is. I’m sorry. Humphreys. Yeah. And then he became Eric Christopher Straker. So of course I was at the adoption and the counsel was, and the judge was. And it was a good day.

AK: Yeah.

DS: It was a good day.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And then she threw, she, she threw him a welcome home party. And we had it at my brother and sister-in-law’s house in Georgia. And I just, we invited coworkers, and just [55:00] friends and everybody put all these gifts and he was just so overwhelmed at two years old, you know.

AK: Yeah. Right, right.

DS: So, yep. And now he’s 24.

AK: Wow.

DS: But it was a rough road.

AK: Yeah?

DS: You know.

AK: I'm sure.

DS: Because when he got older, they say that children I guess, they do remember, you know. He remembered the fact that he had been abandoned. When they found him, he was at home, I guess his mother was out. She was on drugs, you know. Her and the, her husband. And he was at home by himself, and sour milk in his bottle, and just in his undershirt, and you know, like. So he had a, he had a rough going, and so I guess somethings do stick with you.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Because when he got to be, go into daycare and things like that, and elementary school. God was it a rough road. [56:00] And so Kelli thought that maybe she would like to move back to Providence. And I says, well, because this is her home.

AK: Right.

DS: She was born here. And I says, "Well, maybe," not raised because I moved so much. [laughter]

AK: Right. [laughter]

DS: I says, "Well, you know, I always wanted to retire at home." I says, "Well, I'll make the move now."

AK: Yeah.

DS: So we, Eric, Kelli, and I, moved back to Rhode Island. Of course, in with my mother -

AK: Yeah, right, right.

DS: Until I got my own place, which usually didn't take that long.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And Kelli got a job opening up, she's one of the founders of the Highlander Charter School.

AK: Oh, really?

DS: Yes. Her and Jim Donahue opened up that school.

AK: Wow.

DS: And she was of course, in the office administrator. You know, she did all the ordering and everything like you know, for the classes. [57:00] And that's when Eric started because it was time for him to go to school.

AK: Yeah right. How convenient. [laughter]

DS: That's where he was. Right. And so -

AK: I just want to interrupt you briefly.

DS: I'm sorry.

AK: No, we're coming up on the hour.

DS: Oh my god!

AK: I, I'm open if you would like to keep talking, if you're available, or we can schedule a part three, which it has been done, I'm working on an eight-part interview right now. [laughter]

DS: You know something, Mary told me about that. I know. Well, you know, something, because we haven't gotten to Brown yet.

AK: Right.

DS: I think we're going to have to do a part three.

AK: You want a part three? Okay.

DS: Yeah.

AK: That's absolutely fine.

DS: What time is it? Did you shut that down?

AK: It's 11:11. Nope, we're still going.

DS: Okay.

AK: So if you want to keep chatting we can or we can use this as a stopping point.

DS: What don't I close, yeah we can close this out.

AK: Okay.

DS: With us moving back home.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Eric went to school. Kelli was working at the school. And I believe, of course, I started working for Brown. [58:00]

AK: At that point? do you know what year that was?

DS: 2000.

AK: 2000. Oh, okay.

DS: I came in as a temporary through Randstad staffing, which I don't think they use anymore. As a

matter of fact, I had gotten all my jobs through Randstad. Even in Georgia.

AK: Oh, really?

DS: And even in New Jersey.

AK: Are they like, what do you call it? Like recruiter, a recruiting agency?

DS: Yes, yes. A recruiting agency. Yes.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yeah, yeah. They are. And every time I moved from somewhere, I'd hit Randstad for a job.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And generally would get -

AK: It seemed to work out.

DS: Yes. They would send me someplace; it would work out.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And I would get on permanent -

AK: Yeah.

DS: Wherever it was, so. So it was Randstad. And they sent me here in the year 2000. And here, and I'm still here.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But I'm -

AK: And not retired I'd like to add. [laughter]

DS: Yes. I did retire, but came back. But we'll get into that. But when we moved back here, I think it wasn't long after we got back, six years, let's see, [59:00] six years Kelli had her kidney for six years. And when we got back here, maybe three or four years after, that kidney failed.

AK: And so did you know going into it that that like, I don't mean this to sound -

DS: No, right.

AK: Not serious, but like do other kidneys have like a shelf life so to speak? Like were you aware that you might need another one or was the intention for this to be the permanent kidney?

DS: This it, was the intention to be the permanent -

AK: Okay.

DS: But people never know.

AK: They, okay.

DS: Yeah it's a day by day, it's a catch draw, you know, thing.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You just never know -

AK: Okay.

DS: With a kidney.

AK: And so she didn't need to be on dialysis or anything when she had the new kidney or did she still?

DS: No, no. So six years she was off dialysis -

AK: She was just operating -

DS: Right.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yes, and that kidney was from a cadaver, a cadaver.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Cadaver. From a male. He was 22 years old.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: And they used to have in Georgia, after she got his kidney, [1:00:00] they would have like, some kind of gathering for the recipients and the parent of the lost, yes, so we did get a chance to meet -

AK: Really? Wow.

DS: His, his family.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, so. But anyway, after we got back here, you know, six years later, her kidney gave up. And that's when she went on dialysis for the long -

AK: For the long haul.

DS: Haul. And it's it all depends on the area that you're in. Georgia was more likely and more quickly to get a kidney down there -

AK: Really?

DS: Because of the population.

AK: Oh, okay. I see.

DS: Of people, you know.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Up here, very small region.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, so and that's why she had to, and plus, the antibodies from the first kidney made her levels high. So to get a match for that was difficult.

AK: Still hard.

DS: So, but anyway, we'll go, we'll go -

AK: We'll pick up with that.

DS: We'll pick up with that -

AK: Yeah, next time.

DS: Because she went through some things with that. [1:01:00]

AK: Wow, well -

DS: Oh my god, I can't believe this.

AK: No, I'm, this is absolutely fascinating.

DS: Oh my god.

AK: We'll close this out. Thank you so much for coming back.

DS: Well, thank you.

AK: And we will start here at part three.

DS: Sounds good to me. Make a note where we left off.

AK: Right, exactly.

DS: Thank you

Track 3a

Amanda Knox: Good morning. This is Amanda Knox and I am here again on December 16. It's 10:15am. I'm here with Diane Straker to do part three of Diane's oral history today. Go ahead.

Diane Straker: No, good morning, Amanda.

AK: So we left off part two in the year 2000.

DS: Yes.

AK: You had just moved back to Rhode Island.

DS: Yes.

AK: In a halfhearted attempt to retire. And I know Kelly's kidney started failing again.

DS: Yes.

AK: And you also began working at Brown. Did those both happen at the same, around the same time?

DS: No, they did not. I started working at Brown first. I started working at Brown in the year 2000

when I returned home to Rhode Island. I always got my jobs, I think I mentioned before, through [1:00] a temporary service and it was always Randstad. And even in Georgia I had gotten my jobs through Randstad and was always put on permanent at the time. So I did go to Randstad here in Rhode Island, and I had an idea that I wanted to work for Brown. You know, there was a lot of people that I knew in Rhode Island that did work for Brown. And coincidentally, they, they had a position. They needed an administrative assistant in the, at the time, development office which did fundraising for the, for the university. So I accepted, well I, I did start with Brown.

The funny thing about it is that I started right after commencement. I started right after commencement in the year 2000 and they sent me [2:00] to, I think it's 20 Benevolent Street, which advancement or development was located at that time. And so I went I don't know if it was the day, I think it was the day after commencement that I started. So I, I took a dry run first of all, and I went there, and so I could find my, you know, where I was supposed to be. And then the day that I started working, I went there, and the doors were locked, and I waited, and I waited, and I waited. And I even asked people that were passing by, do you know what time this building opens? And no one could, could answer me, you know, no one had a clue. So I finally decided, yeah, well, I need to leave because no one is showing up here at this at this building. So when I got back home, I didn't have a cell phone at that time. [3:00] When I got back home I called Randstad and I said, "I went, you know, to my appointment spot and the doors were locked and no one was there. And no one came." And she says, "Oh," she says, "that's really strange." And then she looked up on her files. And she found out first of all, they had moved to the jewelry district –

AK: [laughter] Oh my god.

DS: Like maybe a couple or a few weeks before and the new address is 110 Elm Street.

AK: Nowhere near Benevolent Street.

DS: Nowhere near Benevolent Street. And, and she said, "but the good thing is that I had you there on the wrong day. You were supposed, you need to start the following day."

AK: Oh! Okay.

DS: So, which was good. So it was not like I was a no show, you know, which was wonderful. So I says, well, that worked out, but my god. They had forgotten they had moved, right.

AK: Yeah. Had you interviewed with people at Brown or didn't you just, you strictly went through Randstad?

DS: Strictly with Randstad. [4:00] And so I did I did a dry run.

AK: Yeah, again.

DS: To 110 Elm Street, which was fine with me because it was kind of closer. You know, I had crashed my daughter, my grandson and I crashed with my mother in her senior apartment, one bedroom, until I until I got an apartment. So, and it, so it was clos, the jewelry district was much closer for me. So I went the following day, and I started working. It was on the first floor. And I started working with Lynn Frazier who was at the time maybe the director of the Brown Annual Fund, or something like that, as her administrative assistant.

AK: Bigtime fundraising.

DS: Yes, right. Big time. Yeah, fundraising. But then she, then, [5:00] and I'm met a lot of people at that time, who I am totally friends with today. And since then quite a few of them have retired so they're no longer there. But anyway, bonded with a lot – that was the greatest group of folks to work with at that time.

AK: Really?

DS: For the whole 13 years. So, but I did move into four different cubicles while I was there.

AK: Did they at least give you notice before hand? [laughter]

DS: Oh, yeah. Everybody goes on, right. Everybody was kind of moving around there. So, I know, I remember vaguely that Lynn was going to be going she had already scheduled a vacation or a trip somewhere. I don't know if it was a business or regular vacation. And here I am the newbie. You know, she gave me instructions about, you know, this and that what was going on, and if I needed help, I was to ask, check with [6:00] Laura Sullivan or Lisa, Lisa LeBlanc. They were my two people who were kind of like mentoring and training me there. And Lisa is still there, by the way. So, so I was a nervous wreck, you know, because if anybody needed anything from Lynn, they were going to come to me. And so one particular thing happened was that the vice president needed

something.

AK: Oh, no!

DS: And it was like, gathering data and, and this and that. And so, I did go to Laura Sullivan to get a head start, you know, where can I get this information? And so I got it, and I did it and I gave it back to, I went above and beyond. Don't ask me what I did because I can't even remember. And I gave it back to the vice, vice president and she was very pleased with work. And when Lynn got back she was just amazed [7:00] that I was able to do that and to go beyond what the President had asked me to do. And at that point, she offered me a permanent position with her.

AK: Oh wow.

DS: And, yeah, which is great. And that was in, let's see. I started May, that was in August –

AK: Wow. Good for you.

DS: Of 2000. May, had to be August because I started in May of 2000. That might have been like in August of 2001? That's no, it wasn't over a year. It might have been August of 2000. I'm thinking, you know. So I started with her as an administrative assistant then. And everything worked out well.

By this time we had moved to the second floor. And I believe the VP, who had changed at the time, [8:00] had wanted Lynn, the new VP who came in, wanted Lynn to kind of think of another step to the level of fundraising that he would like the direction to go. And he had asked Lynn, if she would try to create some kind of a program, a fundraising for alums who had the capacity to give \$10,000 and above. And so Lynn and I together created the Annual Leadership Program. And it was for anyone, any alum, who could had that capacity to give \$10,000 and above. And it became very, very successful. I think every year we added to, because all funds would go to the Brown Annual Fund, and I think every year it added maybe like \$2 million –

AK: Wow! Oh my goodness.

DS: On top of what was already being [9:00] raised, you know. So we were very pleased with the program.

AK: Yeah.

DS: We're very, and we took it to a lot of heights. We've had, we had big, high end fundraisers in Boston and we had one at one of the museums in New York.

AK: Wow! Cool!

DS: Which was very nice. And I just had an opportunity to go along with all of this and, and that's how I met a lot of the alumni and, of course with the Leadership Council, I mean, with the Leadership Program, we had to have – Lynn had created and invited alumni to be a part of a council. And so I think we started out with maybe six or seven council members, and what they would do is they would go to their class and they would raise [10:00] the 10 and above money from their class members. And a lot of those council members became trustees, so I had an opportunity to meet and work with our trustees of Brown University, which was, which was great, you know, because I kind of know them all. And some of them still remember me. Nancy, well, Nancy L. Buc was a member. I don't think she's on the – I'm not quite sure if she's a trustee or on the board or anything like that.

AK: I think She's listed as an emerita.

DS: Emeriti? She probably is.

AK: I think so.

DS: Yes. And I met you know, I knew Jerome Vascellaro and his wife Mary, and I just knew so many alumni that were trustees and fellows on the boards and it was just a great opportunity. It really was a great opportunity.

So after, [11:00] or during the time that we were doing this, of course, I was promoted to Annual Leadership, not – Associate. Yes, Annual Leadership Associate. And I believe that happened in the August of 2001. And so, and it just rolled from 2001 up until maybe like 2012 or 2011. I was always in fundraising. And of course, then the title changed to advancement because we took the alumni – Maddock Alumni Hall. Yes. They came under the advancement umbrella. So it was the fundraisers and then – I can't even remember what the name of that department [12:00] is now.

AK: The words are all so [inaudible]

DS: I know it, I know it, huh? And you know something, I printed off a copy of my resume. Of course it's in my bag at my office, you know, but anyway. We became under one umbrella. So we

worked very closely with them. Yeah. So and so far the 11 years or the 12 years I was at, it was, it was very, it was great. We were a family. We would stay late at night to get things accomplished, and mailings out, and, and we would be there sometimes on Saturdays, and, but everybody worked very well with one another together. Yeah. So we were kind of like a close knit family. Yeah. And we celebrated.

AK: Yeah, right, right.

DS: [laughter] You know, we celebrated all the holidays and if someone was leaving us we, [13:00] there was a choir in advancement, they're still singing sometimes, now that Laura's gone I'm not sure if they'll still be doing it. But we used to call ourselves The Not So Good, whatever, because it was few of us and, and Laura Sullivan would take top hits songs and she would just change the words to, to, to what we were into and what we were doing, and the person who might be leaving was doing. It was just, it was just, it was just really a fun time. It was fun time. Yeah, great group of people. So and that was also the time the era that Ruth Simmons, President Ruth Simmons was here.

AK: Right, right.

DS: So we had I had an opportunity to work closely with her when we had meetings, council meetings, for the Annual Leadership Program. Of course, she would be there [14:00] for the updates and everything that's going on, so wherever it was held, I was able to be in attendance there. And when she arrived, I would escort her to where she needed to be and things like that. So, yeah, so it was great.

AK: Do you have any more specific memories of Ruth Simmons or her presidency, or anything like that?

DS: Her presidency, oh, geez, with Ruth – I remember once, I was so embarrassed too [laughter].

AK: This sounds like a good story. [laughter]

DS: Well, I think it was, we were having something that was during holidays and it was at the Athletic Center, the old one. They had not even built the Nelson Fitness Center yet. Pensatola, or, yeah, Pensatola building. Yeah. And I was up in the stands [15:00] and I was working with Rochelle

Ives who still works there, she works in the accounting department. And her, one of her daughters had twins. And so her daughter brought the twins to this thing that we were having. And I ran down the bleachers, to the floor to see the twins and I just kind of burst in there, like I always do, and who was standing there talking to Rochelle, and looking at the babies was Ruth Simmons. And I kind of, because she kind of just looked at me. [laughter] And I said, "Oh, sorry," you know. That's one memory. [laughter]

Another memory was they were having a meeting and I kept being reminded, "Don't forget to go downstairs to meet Ruth, she doesn't like to be, to walk in and not know where she's," And I didn't forget, [16:00] but I got tied up with one of the trustees. And when I got ready to go down, Ruth was already up and walking towards the, and I apologized. I says, you know, "President Simmons," I said, "I'm just so sorry that I wasn't downstairs." She says, "Don't worry about it." She says, "I'm a big girl. I know my way around," you know like, so everyone else was kind of like on pins and needles around her about you know, like, make sure, but she was she says, "I'm a big girl. I know where I'm going," you know. But when the VP found out that I was not down there, he just made a little, made a little remark, which wasn't, wasn't a bad remark, but he never got any backlash from Ruth about me not you know, not being you know, not being there or anything like that. Who is now, [17:00] Oh my god, I wish I had brought my, it's on my phone. He's the President of the Rhode Island Foundation, Neil! Neil Steinberg.

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: Neil Steinberg. Yeah, he was one of our VPs at the time. Or our Associate VP. At the time. Yeah. And I loved working with him. He was great. Yeah. So.

AK: So you were with them for 12, 12 years, you said?

DS: I was, I was at the fundraiser, that office for 13 years. I was with them for 13 years. And I'm trying to think of high points that maybe have happened or but I think the high point for me was just helping Lynn build this Annual Leadership Program, you know, that we did so well with it. And I worked with Tammy [Brodeur ?], which I'm sure is well known by lot of [18:00] alums and, and trustees, and things like that. She took over the Brown Annual Fund when Lynn and I started the Annual Leadership Program. Yeah. And so what else is there about Ruth can I mention?

AK: You don't have to, I just thought I'd ask.

DS: Well she did a lot, she did a lot of things here, you know, like she did the she, she started the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, which I believe last year was their fifth anniversary –

AK: Oh wow.

DS: Which has been growing. And I did work there, but this is after I had left and come back. [laughter] And the VP at the time that I was there at the bulk, you know, that I was there most of the time was Ron, oh God. [19:00] VanDen? Oh geez, let me look him up.

AK: Yeah, go for it.

DS: Vanden Dorpel. Ron Vanden Dorpel, who was great. He, he was a military man, which was the way he ran things, but, but he was just such a wonderful leader. And we all worked very well with him also. And I know every year in the summer he would give a cookout in his yard. He lived in Rumford. I think he's still there too. For the, for the building, you know, for the staff which was which was a wonderful thing. It was him and his wife's name was Diane.

Speaking of Ron, when they first appointed him to be the VP of the fundraising department, advancement, the whole thing, [20:00] I remember him, he, before he started working there, well not working, before he started his job there. He came to look over at the building on Elm Street, him and his wife, you know, and I guess he was showing her his office, his offices and things like that. And they were on the first floor and on the first floor is the break room and the kitchen. And they also have the copier room down there, the facts and all that kind of stuff. And it was on a Saturday. And for some reason or another, I was there. And I kind of walked out of the copy room and I was going to get a cup of coffee in the break room and he and his wife were walking through. And he, he introduced himself as the new VP, you know, and I introduced and he asked me, I introduced myself, you know, "Where do you work? What your the job?" And I told him, "I work with [21:00] Lynn Frazier and we are, we do the Annual Leadership Program," and things like that. And he says, you know, he was just surprised to see a staffer working on a Saturday, or doing something there. And he made a comment about it, you know, and, and ever since then, his wife knew who I was.

AK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [laughter]

DS: And he knew kind of who I was also. So that was a great way to meet him, you know, instead of being introduced in a, more of a larger setting with all the staff and I had an opportunity to meet him, you know, one on one. Yeah. So I think that's it for that part. And then when Ruth Simmons

left people started leaving [22:00], you know, when you have a –

AK: When the head changes people retire.

DS: When the head changes, right, everybody else starts to either retire or change. Because being in fundraising, it's usually a the turnover is very, very heavy in fundraising. Most people who come in just to do the typical officers job, or, they usually give it maybe a couple of years and then they're gone on to something else.

AK: Wow. Yeah.

DS: They may end up coming back, but usually the turnover is like two or three, two or three years. And so people were kind of like in and out and we were always getting new staff in. But at the, at my level, not so much the high, higher up level. [23:00] They were you know, they were always there. So where was I going with this?

AK: Ruth Simmons was leaving.

DS: Oh yes, Ruth Simmons was leaving so there was a lot of the higher ranking positions, they were leaving. And they brought in, she appointed someone to my, our vice president Ron Vanden Dorpel left also, and Ruth appointed another VP in that position, and it's just unfortunate that he and my boss Lynn Frasier – who had moved to major gifts at that time and I no longer worked directly with her, I worked with Michelle, [laughter] this is so bad. Michelle Loff. [24:00] She became Lynn's next person in line and Ruth had appointed another VP. And Lynn had been with Brown for 32 years.

AK: Wow.

DS: Most of those yes were in fundraising. And the person that Ruth assigned came from the athletics area. He was like, I don't know what his title was of athletics, but he was on Brown University Sports Foundation side of things and unfortunately it just didn't work. And, I shouldn't say this. Can we pause it for a second? I'm sorry.

Track 3b

Amanda Knox: Alright, so we're back from our brief pause.

Diane Straker: Yes. Right. So, after, like I said, after Ruth left quite a few people in the higher ranks started leaving. And I guess maybe it was a couple of years or a year or so after that, my boss left, Lynn Frazier. And she left and she was able to take a year off. She had a daughter that she had adopted, and who had children. So she took a year off to kind of help her daughter before she started looking for another position. And now she is currently at a Providence College.

AK: Oh, really? Cool.

DS: And she's been at Providence College for about maybe what, six years now. And she's doing the same thing as she did at Brown, but on a smaller scale and she's trying to build them, their fundraising up, you know.

AK: Sounds like they were very lucky to get her.

DS: They were very fortunate to get her. [1:00] Yes. And so of course I missed her. Lynn and I became very close, which got to be a little awkward. Because she had an adopted daughter she adopted at six years old. My grandson is adopted, and we just kind of talked about the things that we were going through, you know. My daughter's, my grandson and her daughter and, and so we had a lot in common. We were both single women. So we were, we talked, we bonded, we built a really good friendship. We're still friends today. I am godmother to two of her grandchildren.

AK: Really?

DS: And we see each other often and we talk to each other often about the difficulties that we go through. My grandson has got things kind of straightened out.

AK: Yeah, yeah.

DS: My daughter went through a very difficult time with him. [2:00] And of course she went and is still going through a very difficult time with her daughter. But things seem to be going well on both ends. So we get together, we have dinner often, I go to her house, she comes to my house, you

know. And so that was a friendship that built out of me working in the –

AK: Another high point of your time at Brown.

DS: Yes, it is. Yep, absolutely. Like I met some very dear friends and Lynn is almost like a sister now. You know, so when it came to the point where she did get promoted to, to work for major gifts, I think she was like the executive director of the major gifts department, and she was kind of head of all of the major gift officers at that time. It was kind of a good thing because it was not, it got to the point where we did not need to be working in the same department together. [3:00] I mean, she was still there, but with a different department, you know, so which that worked out, that worked out very well.

So, after Lynn left, then I went to major, major gifts, because I was kind of, I felt uncomfortable with the Annual Leadership, the Leadership Program. Only because they were bringing in the younger, you know, younger, which is great, bring in new blood, young blood, you know. Maybe they have different, they could add something different to our mission. So, but I felt very uneasy with the younger, with the young crew, and I don't know I just had a difficult time working with them. So I moved to major gifts. [4:00] They still had a few seasoned folks working there. And I started working with Rick Marshall. He's the one that helped with the engineering building –

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: Raising money for that building. So I started working there with him and a few other people. And it was, it was nice. I started working with very strong personalities. Sharon Rosen, God bless her soul. She, she was a tough person to work for a lot of people said, but her and I got along on our level, she'd yell at me, I'd yell at her, you know, that kind of thing. So, so we got along. We got we got along really good. And unfortunately, while I was working with her we got a call one morning from a neighbor who wanted to speak with Sharon's boss. I had answered the phone. [5:00]

AK: A neighbor of one of her –

DS: Of Sharon's.

AK: So like in her life –

DS: Where she lived.

AK: So not like a neighbor of Brown University?

DS: No, not a neighbor of, yeah. Sharon, this is Sharon's neighbor who lived next door to her. Sharon had a condo on, on the east side here somewhere. And evidentially she was having some work done on her condo. And the workmen, she was usually there when the workmen men arrived and then she would come to work. And this time when the workmen arrived, they could not get in. And so I'm not sure if her neighbor had a key to her condo. But when she went in, Sharon had passed.

AK: No.

DS: During the night and she was calling Rick Marshall, who was Sharon's boss, to let him know that she had found Sharon.

AK: Wow.

DS: Yeah. And so –

AK: Suddenly it sounds like. She wasn't ailing.

DS: Right, right. She was, she was healthy, she was in her 70s at the time, you know, she might have been like around [6:00] 75, 76 years old, but she was healthy and a spitfire. And so I transferred her to Rick and she must have told Rick the story, then Rick called me in the office, and another person that worked with him, Jen Harris, and told us what had happened – they had found Sharon. We didn't know what the details was, were, but I think sometime during the night, I don't know if, I don't know if she was eating something, but she asphyxiated on whatever it was that she was eating. And, you know, like, it's kind of weird.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: Strange anyway. So, of course, we had a memorial service for her, her family came. They, she, she didn't have a close relationship with her, her family because like I said she was a, she was a spitfire [7:00] even with her own family. And they came and we had a memorial service at Manning

and the people that worked with like myself and Jen Harris and Rick, we were kind of like the ushers for the memorial service. And then we had a reception downstairs, in a room downstairs for her and yeah, so that was kind of like a low moment.

AK: Yeah.

DS: For a lot of us. Yeah. And she was the top fundraising, major gifts, fundraising person on that staff.

AK: Wow.

DS: She pulled in more money. And she hardly left her office. She didn't travel a lot. Which I wish she had. Would you go somewhere? [laughter] But, but she did most of her fundraising via phone.

AK: Really? Wow.

DS: And she was the top fundraising, high level fundraiser [8:00] in the advancement office. Yes, so we lost a really good person. Yes. And then I worked for Sharon Lloyd Clark is no longer there. Sharon left and she went to work for Sofia Academy. And after that, I don't know where she went but I still run into her occasionally and we keep saying we need to have lunch or you know, get together and go out, but we haven't been able to do it sense. And I worked with a Shelley Roth. And these are all major gift ladies. Shelley Roth. And Shelley is now they have this, like Darcy is to us as far as [9:00] helping raise money for the Pembroke center. Shelley was helping the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, raise money for the center. And of course, I just found out after I had retired and, yeah, [laughter] we're getting up to that. So anyway, I think after they had a mass, they were asking people to retire. You had to be there for 10 years. And you had to be a certain age and had to be there for 10 years. I had the age. I was 22 days short. Because they were offering a fantastic package.

AK: Yeah.

DS: I wanted it. You know, I said, this will be a great time for me to retire –

AK: Right.

DS: – from Brown. They would not give it to me. I went to all levels.

AK: Yeah.

DS: They said if we give it to you, then we're going to have to give it to someone who has 15 days left, two days left, yeah. [10:00] So they couldn't give it to me. So a lot of our, the folks there, took advantage of the package and left me. [laughter] So I think it was shortly after that I just went ahead and decided, it could have been maybe, I don't even know if it was a year after that, to go ahead and after 13 years to come out of fundraising, and, and just, and retire. And my mother was up in age and she was failing somewhat in health and it was a good, it happened at a good time. Because before I even, no I did, I went back to work before she had to be placed into a nursing home. Yeah, I did. I went back to work. But anyway –

AK: So this retirement would've, was about 2013?

DS: It was 2013.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yes, yeah. Had a great –

AK: And –

DS: Yeah?

AK: Was it in this period of time you got your bachelor's degree as well? [11:00]

DS: Oh my god, how could I forget? Yes. Thank you for reminding me!

AK: So you were going to school while –

DS: While –

AK: You were working at Brown?

DS: Yes! Yes, I graduated –

AK: Raising all this money –

DS: Right. Yes. Right. While, I was raising money. I had everywhere I lived, I attended college. And I just took classes just took things that I wanted to take. No rhyme or reason or anything. And I don't even know how I took economics. My girlfriend in Georgia, because this is when it happened, she was taking economics. I said, well, I might as well go ahead and take it. So I did.

AK: You take the classes that your friends are in.

DS: Right, right, right. Absolutely. So I took economics one and two. I always liked the accounting field because I was a stickler about balancing my checkbook. I don't, I don't know who does that anymore now, but anyway, so I took accounting and thought, well, maybe that's the field I might like to get into. And I was good at accounting. And in my on and off jobs working for one [12:00] particular company, customer service and then accounting, and customer service and accounting. But anyway, I took all of these classes and when I got back to Rhode Island I said, I need to, before I die, I'm going to have my bachelor's degree. So I don't know what year it was. Maybe it was like 2006. It could have been, yeah, it could have been about 2000, maybe 2006 or so, I decided to go back to school and take some classes. I needed to take two classes in order to be reimbursed, you know, by Brown. Their EEP I think it was called, no it's not EEP. What is their – tuition reimbursement program? So I went to Bryant University and I started taking [13:00] classes there.

AK: What made you pick Bryant?

DS: I don't know.

AK: Okay. [laughter] That's good enough.

DS: I don't know if I knew someone that was going there. I don't know. So –

AK: But I mean, I guess if you were into accounting, Bryant is the school –

DS: Business, right, yeah.

AK: Exactly.

DS: Business, I think because I think I was headed towards a business degree.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And I started there and Bryant was great. It was nice. I enjoyed it, except for they did not have a continuing education program. All the classes were in during the day. I did, I, I was able to take a couple classes during the day but that wasn't good because I've worked you know. So I know quite a few people who went to PC and they have a SCE – School of Continuing Education. So I transferred from Bryant and I, and I went to PC so I could take my classes and finish.

Great experience. I love PC. It's my alma mater. I graduated from [14:00] PC. I wanted to, I decided I didn't want business. And I says, "Well, what about communications?" and I sat with an advisor, an advisor, and she looked at my transcript. And she said, "You got a lot of credits here." And she says, "What we can do is we can accept all your credits." Of course, I would have to go through some of their other core. She says, "We'll accept all your credits. All you need is to," I don't know how many more credits I needed. Enough for a year and a half, going taking two classes at a time or whatever, you know, and so she says, "But if you're on a fast track, Liberal Studies would be the best way to go." Because I wanted communications. I didn't want communications as far as, I wanted to, public speaking, motivational speaking, that kind of communications. So she said that would take me [15:00] much longer because they had core programs that I would need to, you know, complete before I got into that. So, so I said, "I'll take the liberal studies."

AK: Right, right, right. Cut your losses. [laughter]

DS: I'll take that. And so I graduated in 2009.

AK: Wow.

DS: I was 61 years old. I wasn't the oldest, but I think I might have been the second oldest of my, of of that class. And it was a great experience. I had a great time at PC.

AK: Yeah. What was it like to be working, and doing the night school, and having your family?

DS: Difficult. [laughter]

AK: Yeah.

DS: But you know, when you're going through it –

AK: You just do it.

DS: It doesn't seem like it's, you know, you just, you handle it, you do it, you know. I was up late at night doing studying and doing papers, doing research, you know. I'm a night owl anyway. [16:00]
As a matter of fact, my eyes didn't close until 4 this morning.

AK: Oh, god. [laughter]

DS: I know it. Right. And by 2 o'clock this afternoon I'm going to be a zombie.

AK: Right, yeah, yeah. [laughter]

DS: But anyway, it, it, yah, it was, it was difficult. And at that time my daughter and, where was I living? Of course, I had moved from my mother's house. My daughter's kidney had failed.

AK: Okay. Do you remember about what year that was?

DS: Yeah. I think that was about 2000. We came back in 2000. I think that was like around 2001.

AK: Wow.

DS: Yeah.

AK: So while your daughter's going through that, you still go back to school.

DS: Right, right. Absolutely.

AK: Were you working full time or was it, or were you like a 10 month –

DS: I still working full time. I was working full time. My daughter lived – when she was younger, before we had started moving around, we lived in West Warwick.

AK: Okay.

DS: And so in the [inaudible] apartment. My daughter went [17:00] back and lived there with her son. When my daughter moved back here she met a gentleman who was beginning to open up a charter school. And it was the Highlander Charter School. And so my daughter and him, through the Met Corporation or whatever, opened up that school, and it was located off of Branch Avenue on Greeley Street. And it was wonderful because John, what's his name, Donahue, that's his name, and my daughter. He took care of all the financial and hiring of the teachers and stuff. My daughter furnished –

AK: Yeah.

DS: Furnished the school. So my daughter worked there. My grandson went to school there.

AK: Okay. Very good.

DS: And which was at a difficult time [18:00] because Mr. Donahue would go to his classroom and carry him out under his arms because he was acting so badly, you know, but anyway. [laughter]

AK: Sometimes, you know.

DS: So it was a great time for her and him to be there because she had a great support system. And it's not like if he had gone to another school, public school, they would have kicked him out.

AK: Right.

DS: You know?

AK: Sure.

DS: This way. And so he graduated out of Highlander.

AK: Highlander.

DS: Yeah, Highlander school. And from there he went to School One on the east side. So, but anyway, in between that, when my daughter was working there, it could have been longer because her kidney started failing. And she was out sick, she had to go back on dialysis.

AK: How does she know that? Are there signs that your kidney is starting to fail or did she have regular doctor's appointments to monitor things?

DS: She had regular, well was monitored. [19:00] I think this came as a – how did she know? I think she went into congestive heart failure.

AK: Oh, wow. Okay.

DS: And that's how we found that first time.

AK: The first time. Right.

DS: And of course ended up in the emergency room and come to find out she was still trying to work around it which was all well and good, but when she was out sick once she had been hospitalized, they were doing dialysis, and I guess she was transitioning from – she tried home dialysis again like she did the first time. That wasn't working out. She had met someone and she just did not feel comfortable having to hook up at night. So of course she wouldn't dialyze herself and when she didn't for a while she got really weak and sick and she had to be rushed to a hospital to get you know, young. [20:00]

So, anyway, during that time, Eric was still in school there. They had decided, Mr. Donahue, and I don't know what went on there, but they had decided to merge her job with another job with another gentleman. That was so of course he was still there. He got the job while she was out sick. I said, "Kelli, you should have fought that." They're not supposed to do that.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Not supposed to do that. And to make up for it, some of the staff there – and I don't think just to make up for that because they really liked Kelli and they think that that was done not in a right way. They did a fundraiser for her.

AK: Oh nice.

DS: And, which worked out you know, very nice, but you know, you go through life something you know, things are not done the way they, they should be done. So she was out of that job, and she had to go on, [21:00] of course, SSI and, and Section Eight in order to, you know, in order to live. And she decided to do dialysis three times a day.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, so.

AK: That's a lot.

DS: So it, yes. And she did it for 14 years and I don't know how she did it. I really don't because I don't know if I could if I was in that position. And she kept going. She would leave dialysis and she would be busy doing things. And sometimes she would work part time, you know, at a place in this and that, but she, she kept going and she, she did it, you know. And of course dialysis makes you very tired, but she net never let on that she was tired. She just kept moving. And of course, she still had her son.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, so. Yeah. So after that 14 years –

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: But anyway, going back to where I [22:00] was –

AK: You were I was at PC.

DS: I was at PC. I graduated from PC. My mother and my daughter threw me this fantastic –

AK: Yeah.

DS: Graduation party.

AK: Good.

DS: And it was at the, I don't know the name of the hotel now. It was the Radisson and it used to be where India is – India Point you can see hotel there.

AK: Yeah.

DS: That, that was there and it had an outside porch also. So they rented a room, if the weather was nice, we could use the porch also that which was included, they rented one of their own party rooms, whatever. And it was during the day it was right after graduation and PC graduates out of the Dunk.

AK: Right. Yeah.

DS: You know, all their basketball games are in the Dunk.

AK: Right.

DS: So, so many people like my family from Philadelphia came, my girlfriend April came from North Carolina, my girlfriend Cheryl came up from Warner Robins, Georgia, [23:00] I just had so many people. And then everybody at Brown that knew me and worked with me were there. And plus a lot of my church folks that I, that I'm close with and just it was just a do-drop-in, in and out people, you know.

And someone that I did work with at Brown, she worked for us on a temporary basis, she was into stationery and things like that. And my mother and Kelli and I went to her house, she lives in North Providence also, and she had booklets of flyers of you know, save the dates, invitations, thank yous. And, and because PC is black and white colors I did all of my stuff in black and white. And so I sent out loads of invitations and save the dates. And it was just it was just great. And, and my daughter and my mother did some secret thing. We had Big Nazo, are you familiar with Big Nazo?

AK: Yeah.

DS: Well, we know someone who's one of the [24:00] fills in sometimes with the Big Nazos.

AK: Oh really? Yeah.

DS: So he had on his thing.

AK: Oh, cool! [laughter]

DS: And then we had –

AK: This was a very Providence party.

DS: Oh it was! [laughter] And we had a DJ there who my daughter knew. He was there and he was great. And it just everything was just wonderful. And we ate, and danced, and I have a friend who worked at Peak, they just let her go as a matter of fact, I mean at Brown. She was in the education department, Carin Algava. Her maiden name is [Gao?] Gao Algava. And no, sorry, backwards. Carin Algava [Gao?]. Mouth full. But anyway, she worked in the education department. She was with them for 17 years and they just let her and another woman who worked there for 36 years ago. So, Brown.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But anyway, and I just saw her because her sister used to [25:00] work with Kelli at Highlander. She was one of the teachers there. And her sister was home. It was her birthday. So we just a couple of weeks ago, went to Flatbreads and they had a birthday party for her sister so I just saw her. But anyway, why did I mention Carin? Oh, the party!

AK: Yeah.

DS: She brought her, he was the only child there. She brought her son. And now he's, god, what, nine years old, eight years old? Well, but anyway, he was little. And he danced the whole afternoon. [laughter] It was so funny.

AK: [inaudible]

DS: Right, right, right. So the party was great. I graduated. I miss not being a school. I really like going to school.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Sometimes I think about going back for my masters. And then it would just be for me, you know, it wouldn't be to work towards – [26:00]

AK: Who else better to do it for?

DS: Yeah, I know it, but the thing about it, and it's so much money though, you know.

AK: Oh god, yes I do know. [laughter]

DS: So you know, get even more debt before I finished paying off my school loans. I'm going to be dead.

AK: Right.

DS: You know, even with my bachelor's.

AK: You and me both sister. [laughter]

DS: Right, yeah, I'm telling you, you know. But anyway, that was a great, great time. Like I said, I enjoy going to school. So I really, when I was in school, I got into photography. I really love photography.

AK: Really?

DS: I do. And I took two semesters of photography. And when I graduated, the instructor even called me and said, there's an opening here if you'd like to come in, because I met someone else who had come back, and she just did her own thing, but she always liked to use the dark room and I really wanted to be able to do that, but it was like \$800 and I just could not justify it, you know. So and I still love photography. So who knows? Maybe after this.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: When I'm at eighty, I'll get back in, I'll go to photography school. [27:00] Right. Absolutely. So I did that while I was working at Brown, which was a plus, you know.

AK: Yeah, for sure.

DS: Which was a great thing. And, and Brown has done well by me.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, they really have, it's a good place to be, you know, good place to work.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Was then. I don't know about now.

AK: Yeah, right. [laughter]

DS: Anyway. Scratch that. Yeah, no. [laughter] But anyway, I'm enjoying my job here. Yeah, yeah.

AK: Well, so you had retired in 2013.

DS: I retired in 2013.

AK: It was a good time to call it quits.

DS: Yes.

AK: You had, you had gotten your undergraduate degree.

DS: Yes, I had.

AK: And your daughter was still having kidney problems.

DS: On dialysis. Right, yeah.

AK: So how long were you pretending to be retired for?

DS: Well, forever. [laughter]

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: But after a year, I mean, how much can you do? [28:00] You know there's, I always never owned a home. Every now and then I thought about maybe, you know, it'd be nice to have your own place, but I moved around too much so. And then I thought about it. Single woman, own home. That's a lot of work. Yeah. You know, like when things start going, you know, roof needs to be replaced, the furnace needs to be replaced, you know, like, I just couldn't get into it.

AK: Yeah.

DS: So. But anyway, so I, I stayed out about a year. I went to Randstad, and they sent me first to Care New England, to their corporate office, in their purchasing department. And they were switching over, they were, they were getting into a new data, they had a new database that they were starting up and things from the old one needed to be moved to the new one. And that's what I did. I was with them, [29:00] I thought it was only going to be six weeks or eight weeks. So I think I was with them for about maybe four months and they were out in Warwick. And then after I left there Brown placed me at the med school.

AK: Oh, I didn't know that.

DS: Right there in the jewelry district. And I was replacing a woman who was going on maternity leave and so worked her, her office while she was gone and ironically enough, when she came back another person was going out on maternity leave.

AK: Oh, that's convenient.

DS: So I moved down to, was more like on the Dean of the Faculties office. Cyr was her last name. C-Y-R. She was the faculty member. And well anyway, I worked for here, her, and ironically enough when that person was coming back [30:00] from maternity leave someone else was going out on maternity leave.

AK: Oh, don't drink that water. [laughter]

DS: Yeah, so – I didn't. [laughter] So I moved into her spot. But I was only in her spot for maybe about three weeks to a month. I didn't particularly care for what I was doing and I get he didn't particularly care for, you know, what I was, which was fine. It was a mutual thing. So, Randstad then placed me – I left there, Randstad had an opening at the Pembroke Center.

AK: And this was 2014 still?

DS: This, oh god.

AK: 2015?

DS: 2015 let's say.

AK: Okay.

DS: 2015? No. Because I came out in 2013, 2014 I went back to work. This had to be 2016 –

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: Because I was with Care New England and then the three months I mean, the pregnancy things, they were like, they had to be, [31:00] they're out generally how long?

AK: Oh, I don't know.

DS: I can't, I don't know. This had to be like 2016.

AK: Okay.

DS: I think.

AK: Okay.

DS: And I was placed here at Pembroke, at the Pembroke Center. And while I was here, I only worked, was it two days? Actually, I wasn't just at the Pembroke Center. I was placed at the Pembroke Center and they also asked me, can I do two days here and two days at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice. And I, and it had never been done, a person split being split between

two departments at Brown yet. And it was kind of like a trial thing. And I did it. And I enjoyed it. I liked, I liked both. They're both my families.

But the Center for the Study, CSSJ, let's put it that way. [laughter] [32:00] They, they were just starting up, they were getting ready to go into their fifth year. I think I joined them in their fourth year, excuse me, they were building things for, it was growing. They needed to really have someone there. They needed an administrative assistant full time. And I talked, I kind of talked them into that, you know, I said, "You really need someone here, because two days is not enough for what you need done." You know, and they asked me if I wanted it, and I said, "No, no, I don't want to work full time anymore." You know. So they did hire someone there, which was great.

And I stayed with Pembroke and Pembroke added on another day. So I'm here three days a week instead of two, and I'm a ten month employee. And which works out, is the great retirement gig. It really is. [33:00] And I love working at Pembroke. I love working with all the people that are associated with Pembroke. I like the lectures, I like doing the events, helping people with the logistics of getting here and getting home, and if they're foreign nationals it's a challenge, but I don't mind doing it, you know.

So and in my spare time, Randstad still has me on the books because in the summer of last year of this past year, I should, yeah, of this past year, people wanted to take vacations at different companies. So when I was off and they knew that I was off, they would call me and say can you fill in two days here?

AK: Really?

DS: Or could you fill in two days, I've worked at Navigant.

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: And the day after in, what road is that up by Lincoln, Smithfield?

AK: Mineral Spring?

DS: No.

AK: No.

DS: Smithfield, [34:00] they're around the corner from Bryant, down, you know with the Lincoln

Mall is?

AK: Yeah.

DS: At the end of that road.

AK: Yeah, yes. I know exactly what you're talking about.

DS: Yeah, right. Yes. I worked there. I worked there before, I worked there that day after Thanksgiving.

AK: No! Oh my god. [laughter]

DS: I did. And then –

AK: So when you're gone, quote unquote for summer, you're not gone –

DS: I'm not gone. [laughter]

AK: You're not like, off in Jamaica somewhere the way I imagine you are.

DS: No, no, no, no. I'm just working. But I do let them know that if I have a vacation scheduled –

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know, I won't be able to work, yeah. And then they sent me to another place out in East Greenwich that I enjoyed working at also, but so that's, that's what I do.

AK: Yeah.

DS: You know.

AK: So at what point then, well, I guess while we're talking about Brown –

DS: Yes.

AK: Do you have any other like super highlight, super high points or super low points of Brown?

DS: At Brown?

AK: Up to this point, or?

DS: After, after retiring and coming back [35:00] to Brown I have no low points with Brown. Everything has been high points.

AK: Good.

DS: Everything's been great working here. Everything was great. Also when I worked, after I left CSSJ and was working at the Pembroke Center, a new department was opening up. What is it? The Policy Lab!

AK: Oh –

DS: Department. They're located in the science library building.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And so I was asked if I could work a couple of days, then I was working full time. Three days. I was working there on Tuesdays and Fridays to help the gentleman, the director of that lab, get it, kick it, kick it up. And it was just he and I. And then there was a grad student that was doing some things for him, you know? [36:00] Until they hired somebody and then I guess it was about, I don't know if I was there with them for about a month or so. They hired, they, he asked me if I would help him interview. So I helped him interview.

AK: Oh, cool.

DS: And we both chose the same person and she's still with them now.

AK: Oh, nice.

DS: Which is great. Yeah. So that was a, that was another highlight because I got to see and learn about different things that he was doing, which is very technical. I don't know if I could have lasted, lasted there. [laughter]

And, and the other thing I helped, but I only did it for one day is when the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, their person left, I was asked to go and help them until they hired someone else. But I was only there for like one and a half days. And evidently, there was also a young lady who was, who got transitioned out of her job who worked, was working well. That would work well at CSREA, so she kind of, kind of moved right over in that, so it was fine.

AK: You've seen all corners of brown

DS: Right. That's right. That's what I love about it. You know, I love about it. As you can see, I move around a lot. So I don't like being in one spot for a long period of time. I think my longest time on, well, my longest time at my job has been now it's what? 16 years because they continue to count, I wasn't going that long, so it round, picked, it still counts. I picked up my time, which is great. So I've been with them now for 16 years.

AK: You should get like a watch or something right?

DS: Oh god, every year. Well, what did I get this last time? [38:00] At, my favorite –

AK: When do they do it? Do they do like 5, 10, or is it? Y

DS: Yeah, they do 5, I think you just, you get a pin.

AK: Okay. Fancy.

DS: I don't know what you get at five years, you get a pin. And then at 10 years, there are options. They give you a selection. Not too much of a selection, maybe three, three, three or four things maybe. And 15 years the same thing and I chose a, oh my goodness, I already have a blanket, a throw. So I didn't need that. It's like a is it mic, not microphones, but it's a cube thing. What do they call it? It's a Sony cube speaker.

AK: Speaker thing?

DS: Yeah, right. That's right. Thank you. My age. I don't even know. I haven't even looked it up yet. It's a Sony cube speaker thing. Yes. And I need to hook it up because I haven't done that yet. So At 20 years, [39:00] I don't know what you get. At 25 I think it's a captain chair, or one of those mirrors. Do you think you'll be working that long? Oh, God, I don't know.

AK: You may as well just for the mirror. [laughter] Get a mirror out of it.

DS: You know, I'm going to do it like, I should do it only one year at a time, but I'm hoping to be here for 20 years, which would make me for, I would be 75. That would be a good, good, time.

AK: That would be a good time, yeah.

DS: But we'll wait until we get there.

AK: Yeah right, and see.

DS: You know, and see. So yeah.

AK: You could end up in four other departments by ten.

DS: That's right. Absolutely. Absolutely. But I would not mind working. There's nothing else to do but to work. And I like being in the work world, you know, being around colleagues and sort of being home. Mind going dead.

AK: Right.

DS: So was there anything –

AK: So then at, during this time, your daughter is still in dialysis. [40:00]

DS: Yes.

AK: And she has, today she has a good healthy working kidney.

DS: Yes, she does.

AK: And it took her 14 years to get it?

DS: It took a 14 years to get it. As matter of fact, she was on kidney dialysis for a long period of time. And the renal team that she's with here in Rhode Island, suggested that they wanted to send her to Baltimore, Maryland, to Johns Hopkins, because they felt that she was just too young to be on dialysis for so long. And the reason why she was on dialysis for so long, I don't know a lot of the health things about it – she could be a nurse and I don't know why she isn't going – is because the previous kidney that she was given, each kidney has their own, you have your own antibodies, and that antibody because she had another kidney there, her antibody levels were very high. And it was very difficult to find a donor –

AK: I see, yeah.

DS: With that level.

AK: Wow.

DS: If they had put a kidney in there where she was a match, [41:00] but her, but the antibodies were not at that level, then it would be just a wasted kidney and that would have failed. So that's why it took so long for her to get another kidney. But evidently, three years ago, three years ago this past February –

AK: So around when you started at the Pembroke Center then?

DS: Yes.

AK: Okay. Wow.

DS: Yes, it is right. Absolutely. The, that kidney failed.

AK: Wow.

DS: I'm sorry. She got a call –

AK: She got the new one.

DS: She got a call from Baltimore. First of all, we went down there and we got a work up. She got a work up, I went with her. And, of course, when you are in need of a kidney, you have to meet with different specialists, a lot of different specialists because they want to make sure that you're going to take care of this kidney. You're going to be in compliance. You're going to make sure that you're healthy enough to carry the kidney, so she had to meet with a lot of doctors. And also a psychiatrist.

AK: Wow. Really? [42:00]

DS: Yes. Because that you're in the right mind. They don't want to give someone a kidney that's not going to comply.

AK: Right.

DS: And it could have been given to someone else.

AK: I see. Yeah.

DS: So, so we went down there for the work, the work up, I don't know, if we were down there, we were only down there for maybe three days or so. We stayed, did we stay in a hotel? We did stay in a hotel at that time. And then we came back home and I would say it was about a year or so later, not two years, but a year or so later, they called her and it was in February, dead of winter. And they told her that they had a kidney for her and she would need to be down there within the next 48 hours, no later.

AK: Yeah. [43:00]

DS: So, of course, I told her I was going with her and she was glad that I was coming with her. And we took the train down. And we went directly to Johns Hopkins. And we were used to the train because we would get in, we would take it at night. We would leave like maybe 11 something at night, or 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night, and we would get in at 6:30 in the morning. So we got in at 6:30 in the morning. We got a taxi or Uber and we just went directly to the hospital. And they checked her in and she had, she had packed up some stuff, you know, clothing and things, you know, things like that. And I stayed I was allowed to stay in her room for a couple of days after she had had the transplant in the hospital room. And so I stayed with her then. And then I went to at that

time, my brother and his wife were living with their daughter. [44:00] They were in Baltimore.

AK: Oh, really? Okay.

DS: So I went and stayed with them and while she, like for about a week or so, but of course she could not come home. I had to come back to work, I had to come home and check on things and come back to work. And so when the, everything kind of worked out fine, but this Kennedy was kind of tricky. They managed, they let her go, I don't know after how long was it. She, she stayed with them, but she had to go to the hospital every single day so that they could check to see if she was making urine and things like that. And so they weren't that far from Johns Hopkins. So either somebody drove her or you know, or she took Uber or whatever. And then she came home maybe after a month or so. [45:00] They didn't want to let her go. They let her go. Yeah, you can go home. But you have to come back once a month. So, a couple of times I came back with her. We would get in at 6:30. She would have a blood, her blood work done first, she would see the renal folks, they would get her blood work, she would pick up her prescriptions, we would be on the next train out. Same day, you know, but that's like this.

AK: Wow. And does she still have to do this?

DS: No.

AK: Okay.

DS: They released her. They didn't want to let her go, but they released her to the renal team here. But even though she's released here, she has to have bloodwork done at least once a month. And they get it down at Johns Hopkins. And they get it here. And if anything, if the level is not right, Johns Hopkins is the first one to call and say you need to increase this or this. Not the renal team here, but Johns Hopkins does. Yeah.

AK: Interesting.

DS: Yeah, so it's, this February's three years. [46:00]

AK: Wow.

DS: Yeah which is wonderful. And like I said, it's been touch and go because they've had to do, adjust her medication to get it to a level because we didn't think it was going on you know. But before she got that kidney transplant they tried, they, she had to go for infusions to see if they could get the body, antibodies down. Oh god we went through so much so it was almost like having, it's like almost given blood only that they're flushing some kind of solution into your body to try and get the levels down. And that was, oh God where was it? Was it the – I guess that's part of East Providence. Wampanoag Trail is out there somewhere. But anyway, we used to go to an infusion place and she would have to have [47:00] an, almost like a three hour it's almost like having dialysis.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: It was a three hour, three hour process for her, you know. So yeah, so I've sat with her many a times.

AK: Yeah, right, right.

DS: You know things like that. But right now –

AK: Knock on wood.

DS: No that's metal –

AK: Still metal. [laughter]

DS: Everything seems to be working out well.

AK: Good, yeah.

DS: I'm still here at Brown, have no intentions of leaving.

AK: Yeah.

DS: At the moment, unless they let me go. [laughter]

AK: We're not going to let that happen. I won't stand for it!

DS: You won't stand for it, right. Yeah, so every, everything is good. Life is good.

AK: Yeah. I know your mom has been a very important part of your story.

DS: Oh god, yes.

AK: So I would like to just kind of touch upon that, if you don't mind.

DS: Oh, I don't mind. My mother was a wonderful person. I didn't realize it until after she had gotten older. I mean, because we, I am nothing like my mother, but my daughter is, you know. [48:00] That's where she got it from and that's why they were so close. My mom has just been, and I'm sorry that I didn't realize it when I was younger, but she was, she's a fantastic person. She was a very outgoing person. She was very, she was an intelligent person. She did what she wanted to do when she wanted to do it, and she found a way to do it. She was a strong woman. That's, that's one of the things that we think that's why my daughter, my mother, and I never, could never find another man. [laughter] Because we're too strong. But my mother had her boyfriends.

AK: I don't think you're "too strong." I think there isn't a man strong enough to deal with it.

DS: Thank you. [laughter] But my mother was very – my mother was an only child and very outgoing. She would bring parties home to the house, and she would call my grandmother and say to her mom, [49:00] "Mom, I'm bringing some folks home, could you get up and make some coffee?" And my grandmother would get up and she would make some coffee and she would bring, my mother would bring – we have met celebrities this way. My mother would be out where, I can't remember the name of this pianist, he's a pianist, very well known, and she was there, you know, when he was performing and being her. She got friendly with him, the next thing you know, a party was going to the house and he was among them. She always had lots of friends. We had an open door policy for a house, when we lived, where we will living our doors were never locked. People were in and out of our house like Grand Central Station. And I think that's one of the things that I kind of, because at that time, I was kind of like an introvert.

AK: Yeah.

DS: And I just I think I was mad at her, you know, like [50:00] –

AK: Like, get the people out of my house.

DS: Right, yeah. I was always referred to as, “Oh, you’re Elaine’s daughter,” you know that that type of thing I was living in her whatever, shadows or whatever. And, but she has, she, I mean she’s, I met a lot of people through her. And even my church members, one woman said that, “I would not be a member of this church if it had not been for your mother,” you know. And, and even my pastor because my mother was always saying, “Pastor you have no men in this, in, in this church, you know, I, I’m getting old, I need to get married.” And the pastor says, “Well there’s plenty of men here,” and she says, “Yeah, but the men here are just too old.” So you know, that kind of – she, she was that kind of a person. And people today even tell me that they, they miss her, you know.

AK: Did she end up with a male companion where you had placed her? Am I remembering [51:00] that correctly?

DS: Oh, yeah, I think she, she hit on every man. She, yes. She, she says, “Oh, he’s cute. I think he likes me.” Yeah. She kind of ended up with a male, kind of like a companion.

AK: She had friends. She was friendly.

DS: That’s right. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. She was always a no, she had no shame. [laughter]

AK: Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

DS: She was very vocal. Even when something was, someone was not good, she would you know, she had no qualms about speaking her mind, you know? Good, bad, or ugly. You know? Yeah. So and that’s why people liked her because she was very honest and opened.

AK: Yeah, you knew what you were getting.

DS: Right. Right. She would not let anything hold her tongue. You know if it needed to be said she would say it.

AK: Yeah. And she had Alzheimer’s? Is that –

DS: My grandmother is the one that really had the Alzheimer's. My grandmother passed from – My mother had dementia. At her age, [52:00] she was 91. So she had dementia coming in, but I wouldn't say that she had full –

AK: Okay.

DS: Alzheimer's. She was not like my, like my grandmother.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Yeah. My mother, she was a three time cancer survivor.

AK: Wow! Really?

DS: She had cancer in one breast and that's the one that she had to, she had chemo and she had radiation. She recovered for that. Then she had colon cancer. She had a tumor in her colon the size of a small, like I would say an orange and, but it was, it was localized in one spot. So she didn't have to have any treatments after they removed it.

AK: Wow.

DS: And then her last bout was cancer in the other breast. And all she, she didn't have to have chemo, but she had to have radiation. And when she went through her first breast cancer, the rough one with the chemo, [53:00] she used to always say, she would always say, she was saying like, you know, "why me?" like a lot of people do, you know. "Why did I have to be hit with that?" And then all of a sudden it dawned on her, "Why not me?" You know, "why should this be placed on someone else? Who am I not to be, you know, afflicted with this disease." And she had a, she had such a positive, always had a positive attitude. And she was very uplifting and I think that's what got her through that bout. She had a very positive attitude. She didn't let anything stop her after she got over the "why me" you know, type thing.

Cancer Center was very good to her. We went to the one down at Rhode Island Hospital. And, and after her second cancer in the other breast her blood, blood level used to drop [54:00] so she would have to go and get an injection of something to bring her level up. And so they would check her blood, like every couple of weeks. And if she was low, she would stay there for the shot. And if she was okay they'd let her, they'd let her go. But yeah, she made friends there too.

But then my mother was a nurse also. So she used to work at Rhode Island Hospital for, for some years. And she used to work at Butler hospital for some years. And she used to work at the Medical Center, which is really no longer in geriatrics for some years and I remember I went to her job with her at the Medical Center once and she worked with geriatric patients. And she says, “Come with me. I want you to see something and it was someone who was getting to transition – [55:00] pass away. And she just felt that it was something that I needed to, to experience at that time. So we went very quietly in a room. And my mother kind of nursed her and helped her transition to the next life and I was there to see it. And I was young.

AK: Yeah.

DS: I was young. Yeah.

AK: What was that like? Are you glad that she had you there?

DS: Yeah, you know, she has just, she just has given me so much in my life, you know, you know, something like that. It wasn’t disrespectful. I don’t think the woman had a family or anything like that. You know, it was just a very quiet, quiet moment. I met all the people she worked with at Butler Hospital. I used to go out caroling with them during the Christmas holidays. My mother used to, some of the nurses there had apartments there. She had an apart- like, a small apartment [56:00] in there at Butler Hospital where the, sometimes they would have to stay over. And she would bring Kelli there for the weekends sometimes to stay with her. And my mother just has introduced us to a lot. She really has. She was a remarkable woman, you know? So, and sometime I asked, you know, “Mom, why’d you have to leave me?” “Oh, God, why’d you take my mom?” But let’s face it, he kept her for 91 years.

And let me tell you my mother was a heavy drinker. She, I would say that, yeah, she would call herself an alcoholic. But she was a functional alcoholic. You know, she didn’t let alcohol miss a day of work. Or anything like, anything like that. And she was –

AK: And did you notice that your whole life?

DS: Oh, yes.

AK: Or was that like as you get older?

DS: Oh, no. What's that?

AK: Was that as you get older, I'm sorry.

DS: That she was a? [57:00]

AK: An alcoholic. Like, did you experience that your whole life?

DS: Oh, my whole life. Yeah. My mother drank.

AK: Okay.

DS: And my, my dad and my mother drank a lot all their lives. Yeah, yeah, you know, but my mother realized it. My mother knew. She knew what she was doing. She knew that she was an alcoholic, but she, but she knew that she was a functional alcoholic, because she had friends that would drink and could not get up and go to work. She married, her second husband was an alcoholic.

AK: Oh, I didn't know she remarried.

DS: Yeah, she remarried. And they weren't married for long, I think 18 months, because he was an alcoholic, but he was not functional. You know? So she had to let him, let him go. He was a good man. He was a he knew the Bible inside and out. He was a good worker when he could work, you know, but she just couldn't live with him so she had to, had to let – And that's what she, she, her last name [58:00] is Isom.

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: But when she passed away I had –

AK: Whish was in – last year?

DS: Last year.

AK: It was in 2018?

DS: Yes it was August 4, 2018. And I had I put on her stone “Elaine Straker Isom” because people still knew her as Elaine Straker. You know, it’s funny.

So, but yes she was remarkable, remarkable woman and she and my mother. – she and my grandmother, her mother, had a love hate relationship I would think. [laughter] She didn’t think that her mother loved her, but I know that my mother, my grandmother was a very strict stern woman, you know, and my mother was just she doesn’t know how she birthed that one because my mother was a crazy woman. [laughter] But anyway, [59:00] she took care of her mother. She loved her mother, you know. And my grandmother was married four times.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: Legally.

AK: Really?

DS: And divorced or widowed.

AK: Okay.

DS: Yeah. The first one was to my mother. Okay. And he, of course he was murdered. And then the second one was Uncle Billy. That’s what we used to call him, me and my brother, but he was a grandfather and he was the best grandfather you could ever, you could ever have. I just kind of vaguely remember him. And he was a truck driver, trailer truck driver, and so he was gone back and forth and things like that.

And then she married an albino man who was abusive. Second husband passed away too, my Uncle Billy. [1:00:00] Who was it? He was like – He was an abusive man. So she had to let him go. So she divorced him. And then she married another gentleman who was a family member to the people who lived next door to us after we moved from across that bridge area. And I think, I don’t think he was an alcoholic, but when he drank he became very aggressive. So she let him go. So. So.

AK: So then the only other person, your brother –

DS: Oh, my brother

AK: You are going to go visit him in California for Christmas.

DS: Yes, I am. And I can't wait.

AK: He's in San Jose?

DS: Yes, a week from today. Well, we should be in, what time is it?

AK: Right it is 11:42.

DS: Well, it'll be cat, yeah, close to, close to California. We're leaving at 6:30, my daughter and I, are leaving at 6:30 in the morning out of, [1:01:00] out of Boston, and flying out to San Jose, California. It's always been my brother and I. And I think I told you some of the things he made me do when I was young. But we, I think we've always been close, you know? Because it's just the two of us. We've gotten closer as we've gotten older. We're only two and a half years apart. And I miss him.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Yeah. So I got to go see him.

AK: You got to go see him.

DS: Yeah. And he, he's got my mother's humor. He's, yeah, he's got personality. He's always had a lot of friends also. So I can't wait to go see him. So I'm more like my grandmother. Very subdued. Well, and I don't know when I became an extrovert because –

AK: I was going to say I would not identify you as an introvert.

DS: Oh! Oh I was. [1:02:00] I would not open up my mouth for anything. I was shy. Oh yeah. Yeah. I don't know when all this came out. You know, but anyway, yeah. So I'm looking forward to seeing my brother and, and his wife, and my niece and her husband. And, and at some point in time I'm going to have to go see my nephew who is still in Georgia.

AK: Oh, okay, great.

DS: Yeah. With his family because I don't want them to feel deserted. I'm like, in between –

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: You know, we're both on the East Coast anyway. So I'm going to have to go see him. Yeah.

AK: So do you have any final words about Brown or anything you'd like to leave in your oral history that you haven't touched upon yet?

DS: I don't. I'm not sure if there is. Brown, like I said, I love Brown. You know, every time. It's just like a magnet it just keeps drawing me here, you know. I love to work. I love working here.

[1:03:00] Continue love work working here. I loved my years here. I love all my colleagues that I work with. I was so blessed to be able to build friendships from a lot of the people that I worked with. And I ran into one the other day, Carol Drews, who left us to go work at Trinity. She's, and she acts also, she acts. So she just left Trinity because she wants to get back into acting. She couldn't do it. She was doing fundraising raising for Trinity. But we, the Mixed Magic Theatre, the exalt choir, who I'm a part of had a concert on Saturday, we had two performances, one at two and one at seven, and Carol was at the 11 o'clock show so it was so good to see her and you know, so it's just great. I love Rhode Island. Yeah, you know, this is home.

AK: Are you going to move out of Rhode Island?

DS: I hope not. [laughter]

AK: But who knows?

DS: I hope not. I know my daughter would love [1:04:00] to, to move to California, probably. I am not a West Coast person. I shouldn't say that I really have not lived there. But I would miss my seasons. I think I just, you know, it's just so hard in the winter time. But what I would like to do is when I get to the point where I'm not working at all, I would like to spend my summers here and spend my winters there.

AK: Somewhere else.

DS: Right. Where it's warm.

AK: Yeah, right.

DS: And if they're in California, it would be great to do that. You know, spend some couple of months. I have a friend who's like family in Newport and she spends her summers here in Newport and she spends her winters with her sister in San Diego. So right now I have to be in touch with her right now. She's going through a cancer, breast cancer thing right now, but anyway, yeah. Brown is great. All of my direct supports have been great. [1:05:00] All the VPs that I've worked under have been great. The only president that I was I felt close to is President Simmons. I don't get to see too much of President Paxson. And it's just a wonderful place, I think. Yeah. I think the students are wonderful. I kind of get depressed when they're not here in the summertime. You know, it's so quiet. Then after a while it hits me. Thank god they're gone.

AK: Right, yeah exactly. [laughter]

DS: You know, especially with the traffic and walking across the streets and stuff like that. But I love it when they come back. So yeah, it's it's, it's good. Everything is good. I hope I haven't missed anything, especially with Brown. I wish I had brought my resume with me to go through certain things, but I think, I think I've kind of touched on a lot of things. I touched on more of my outside life than I did on Brown. [1:06:00]

AK: But it sounds like it's been a fascinating, I've been fascinated by this journey with you.

DS: Well, thank you. Yeah, it has been a fascinating. Yeah, I have to, I was really blessed with a great life. I really have been, you know. My whole family has been, you know, great, great parents. Even though my mother and father were divorced. I was always Daddy's little girl. He used to fix my hair, used to do my hair when I was younger. Yes. But I feel I was very close to my father. And even though he and my mother had split, he was always very close to even my mom, you know, he would come and visit us wherever we were. He would get in this car and drive to us and spend a few days. He did it once when he had remarried. "We got to send you back home." "He's well, he's okay, you know." So he's all, he's always [1:07:00] considered my mother, my mother, his one and only wife, you know, at the time. So it's been good. It's been good.

AK: Well, I want to thank you so much for doing this.

DS: Well thank you.

AK: And then Pembroke Center is extremely lucky to have you. I hope that your only next move is into a very happy retirement.

DS: Oh, thank you, then I would have to leave you guys, but thank you. This has been such an honor. And I thank you guys for allowing me to share my story.

AK: Of course, of course.

DA: Well, it's been wonderful.

AK: Yeah. For us too, so thank you.

DS: Thank you.

Track 4

AK: Good morning. I am Amanda Knox, the Pembroke Center Assistant Archivist. It is Wednesday, January 15. And I am here with Diane Straker, it is 11am. We've had several parts of Diane's oral history, but Diane has been such an important part of Brown University and been involved in so many different things that I want to make sure that we're capturing all of that. But before we get there, I know we left off by talking about your mom and her alcoholism.

DS: Yes.

AK: And so before we get to the end of that story, I do kind of want to ask you what, do you have kind of childhood memories of that? Or a moment where it kind of you realized that your mom was an alcoholic?

DS: No, but first of all, good morning, Amanda. We're here again.

AK: I'm sorry, I'm so excited. [laughter]

DS: Thank you. And yeah, I just wanted to do a little recap about my mom. [1:00] I had mentioned that she was a functional –

AK: Right.

DS: Alcoholic. I really didn't realize that until I was older. It seems like growing up, everybody drank. You know, so, but even my mom had mentioned later on in life that she was a functioning alcoholic. And she knew it. And to me it just, I just thought, you know, she just liked to drink. So I don't really have memories of that in my childhood because it wasn't so, it wasn't really out there. You know, she would have friends over, they would all be drinking. It wasn't like that she was drinking constantly day, you know, 24 hours a day, day in day out. There was no abuse or anything like that. My father also drank. I just thought it was a part of –

AK: The way it was. [2:00]

DS: The way it was, you know, like I said, nothing, nothing abusive. She worked every day and she was a stickler about working. She felt that everyone should work. And she was stickler about being on time. And she always said, "Whatever you do, make sure you do it to the best of your ability." And that's where I picked up my work ethic, ethics, is from my mother. And so I don't think she really, it really wasn't a problem. It became a problem as when she got older, I don't know how old. I don't know if she was in her 60s or 70s. The doctor did mention to her that if she did not stop drinking, she would not live another 10 years.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: Which was and I don't know what was going on at that point. I know at one point she had a [7:00] heart attack and this is when I was living and working in Georgia. And I had to rush home so I don't know if that and the fact that she was a smoker probably attributed it to that to that heart attack. And so when the doctor told her that she stopped just like that, stopped drinking just like that. No program, no, you know, yeah, she just, she just stopped, she stopped drinking. And she had stopped drinking for God, she passed away at 91, I would say she's it was a good 25 years. So that she had not had, had a drink. And she also quit smoking. Not both at the same time. I believe she quit smoking before she quit drinking. And God, my mother, she smoke Pall Malls, no filters, [4:00] all her life. And so she did quit smoking just like that. You know, I'm sure she went through her wardrobes or whatever, but it was nothing that affected anything else. She still continued to work

and things like that. Of course she gained the weight. [laughter] You know, but hey, but then she, she got very healthy. And for someone, I truly didn't believe that my mother would live to be 91 years old. But, you know, God bless her. She did you know, she was healthy. She looked good. And she did not age, age much, you couldn't see the age in her, you know? So, yeah. You know, so she did quit drinking and smoking. And, like I said, nothing, it really never affected anything that she did.

She was always a good mother and [5:00] very knowledgeable and very, very sharing. I think we had a great, my brother and I had a really great childhood. You know with a great mother and father even though they split after 16 years of marriage, he still stayed in our lives.

AK: Is he still alive?

DS: No, he's not. He passed away. I believe it was in 1997, '96. Somewhere, somewhere in there. Yeah. Yeah. So he died when he was in his, when he was in his 80s. And, but his my paternal side of the family, my dad's side of the family, they had very long lifelines. I can't, I'm sorry that I did not keep in touch with my two uncles that were still living because they had to be pushing 100.

AK: Yeah. Wow. [6:00]

DS: You know, when they passed away, and I'm not even sure I know that one has passed away, but I'm not sure if the other one has passed away, you know, so I need to try and get in touch. I have a cousin, who is the daughter to one of my uncles, and she lives in Alaska. She's been there ever since they started the pipeline up there many years ago. She worked the pipeline, and she just never moved back home. Yeah. I have seen her maybe a couple of times since she's been gone, but and sometimes we do touch base with each other. But she still, yeah, yeah. So yeah, my mother was a functioning alcoholic, you know. And I think there are so many other people that are out there that are like that. You really didn't know.

AK: Right. There was no way to know.

DS: You really didn't, didn't know. she just loved her scotch and soda.

AK: Right, yeah. [laughter]

DS: You know? [laughter]

AK: There are worse things in the world.

DS: Right, right. She loved her scotch and soda. Hey, maybe that's what [7:00] pickled her to live to 91 years old.

AK: Exactly! Right! We should all start now.

DS: Right, right. Yeah, so I just wanted to clarify.

AK: Yeah, sure. So then I know going back to your professional life, that you were involved in so many things aside from just doing your job you have gone above and beyond for Brown, including serving on SAC.

DS: I was on the Staff Advisory Council. Yeah.

AK: Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?

DS: That was like, between, and I didn't even I didn't even know someone had nominated me, but my, my supervisor, my boss nominated me to be on SAC.

AK: So you can't volunteer yourself, someone has to nominate you.

DS: You have to fill out an application.

AK: Okay.

DS: And she kind of nominated me and she told me and she says, "I want you to go and fill out the application." So it was kind of a kind of a dual thing. So I did, and I was accepted. And because she thought it would be a great experience and it kind of helps you learn about the university [8:00] and the community and things like that. And I think you serve I was on it like from 2005 to 2006. And then you come on with, I think it was 10 other people or 12 other people and then you're on it with, your're on it with the split group. And I can't even remember how it works has been so long ago. And then the, the 10 or 12, who had served their term will rotate off and you would go on with the remaining 10 or 12 and that's, and that's, and that's how SAC would work and it was great. We met

I believe it was once a month. I know that, my God if I could remember his name. I see his face [9:00] Who kind of over, he was the faculty person. Walter, Walter, Walter was his first name. Was it Hunt? Walter Hunt? It might be. I'll have to Google and look him up. But I think that's who it was that he was one of the faculty members. Because you always have a couple of faculty members that kind of over, oversaw the group.

AK: Keeps everyone in line. [laughter]

DS: Right. And then of course you had your chair and your vice chair and your secretary. I don't think, there was not a treasurer because there was no, not necessary for there to be a treasurer. And you met like maybe once a month for which took you out of your day to day work. I think it was like a couple of hours a day and they were like a luncheon, luncheon meetings. So you had lunch while you were there. And you kind of discussed the things that were happening around Brown. You also brought to the [10:00] table any concerns of any staff members who had questions or that they would like to have answered. They filtered it through SAC.

AK: So what kind of questions would potentially be answered?

DS: Well they would have some, they would have some concerns.

AK: Like, are they like university wide problems or they like I'm having a problem with my boss or is it about recycling?

DS: Yeah, yeah. That kind of things. University wide.

AK: Okay.

DS: Concerns. Some were, I know that one of the concerns that I had had was that the monthly payroll was a killer for me.

AK: So you get paid once a month?

DS: When you're exempt.

AK: Really?

DS: Yes. When you're exempt, you get paid once a month. And they started at grade 8 [11:00] which I was a grade 8. And to me it wasn't enough of a salary to be, to have to wait.

AK: Right.

DS: For pay on a regular basis.

AK: Right, then you have to be serious about your budget for that kind of thing.

DS: Thank you. [laughter] And I just had a really difficult time with that. So that meant, you know, like, of course, for me, everything came out of the first of the month.

AK: Right.

DS: We got paid, it was the last day of every month. I think it's the same now, for monthly employees.

AK: I didn't know that anybody even did that. That's just torture.

DS: Oh God, it is torture. It was torture.

AK: So like, as soon as you get it's gone the next day.

DS: It's gone because you have to pay everything, because you're not going to get paid for another month.

AK: Right.

DS: And then of course, you have to be careful because there are things in between that you're going to need. Your gas –

AK: Groceries.

DS: Groceries. [12:00] You know. Right. Perscriptions

AK: Right.

DS: Just things like that. So it was, yeah it was torture.

AK: So did you get that fixed?

DS: No.

AK: Oh.

DS: I was told that I needed to properly handle my, my, my budgeting better. [laughter]

AK: Oh God. I wonder what benefit that has to the university to pay people that way?

DS: I don't know because, because it's really weird because it gives you like three different payings. You've got your weekly, your people who are weekly.

AK: Right.

DS: You have your anyone that was a grade 7 and below were bi weekly, and then you have exempt grade eight and above your monthly. So I don't know why that would be.

AK: A weird workflow it seems to me.

DS: Yeah, I don't know. And I'm sure it's still the same. We can ask Mary, "do you can get paid once a month," but I'm sure it's, it's the same. [13:00] You know, I think bi weekly is just great.

AK: Yeah.

DS: But some people loved monthly you know, but I think when you're 10 or grade 10 or 12 sure.

AK: Right.

DS: That's fine. But when you're just on that cusp, it's difficult.

AK: Enough, but not quite enough.

DS: Right. It can be difficult, but things like that.

AK: Yeah. Okay.

DS: You know. And so we kind of filtered the, you know, staff would filter thing, things through us and, and then we would take it to actually to the president because I think like I don't know how often we met with, was President, of course, Ruth Simmons at that time. But maybe like every six weeks or every other month, and of course there were minutes of the meeting that was always given to the President. The concerns were brought there. Yeah.

AK: Was there anything, [14:00] do you remember anything that you successfully rectified? That was like, something particularly important or memorable?

DS: You know, as a group? No, no, I don't, you know, I, I don't. You know.

AK: Are you glad you served on it?

DS: I am glad that I served on it. I mean, I did get some things done. We also were involved with you know, how can we serve all staff better and I'm always on the activity side of things and not so much the problematic side of things. So I do remember that I did suggest that why don't we have a staff movie night? Oh, not even a movie, I'm sorry. It wasn't a movie night. Why don't we get the staff to support the arts and performance there? And so if there was going to be a play that [15:00] was going to open up we opened it up – SAC was to reach out to staff and say SAC is sponsoring this night at the play that tickets will only be maybe like \$6 whatever. And, and I did do that once. I can't remember what the play was, but we did get a lot of staff that came to see the play and they enjoyed it and then we kind of socialized afterwards. We had some like hors d'oeuvres and things like that. We didn't have wine or anything like that, but you know, some sodas and waters and some finger foods and stuff like that after the, after the play. So, and I think that happened, I, I started it once and I think it happened once after that, but I don't think they do that anymore.

AK: Really?

DS: Yeah.

AK: Did you get a good reception for it?

DS: Yeah, it was good. Yeah, it was good. It was nice and [16:00] a lot of people did state that it was nice to get out like that. You know and just to support the theater and the arts, the performance arts. Yeah. So, and the play was, the play was good and it was Brown students. So I mean, what else can you, you know?

AK: Right.

DS: So that was good. So, we were always, we were also involved with once a year, there was a, an organization that would go out to the communities and kind of fix up things like, like if properties, nursing facilities needed to be painted or fixed up, if there's some gardening that needed to be done. Like we did, what is it the Groden Center? I think that's at North Burial Ground. They have a garden out there. [17:00] So different things like that. We went and painted and fixed up a house that housed battered women and their children. So, that's the other things that I am going to have to try to remember what the name of that organization was. They would always tap Brown, or SAC. SAC would put out a blast email: We are doing such and such please come join us. You can join for half the day or you can join for the full day. And I remember going to the banister house and we did some painting in the banister house. We also worked on the outside, they had a small patch area where we could cultivate and garden out there and just to help pick up the, the community and help out [18:00] places that could not either afford to have it done or, so SAC would go out. And it was wasn't just a SAC, it was other companies that all joined in on this one day and it is usually on a Saturday. And we started at maybe seven, eight in the morning. And they, they gave us lunch, you know? So it was a great accomplishment to be involved in the community to kind of help out and at different places like that, you know. So that was one thing that SAC put out there. I believe they are also very much involved with our, what is the day that we have?

AK: Like community service?

DS: Classes. It was like what we did was, I'm sorry, what we did was community services was going out to different organizations. [19:00] But the day that we have in the summer. It's usually around, it's the first week in June and they are for classes or, oh my god, it's terrible. What is it called? They offer different types of classes and things in the morning and in the afternoon. And

then after – you probably, I don't know if you've attended?

AK: I've probably gotten the email. I've not attended, but I probably get emails about it.

DS: And in the afternoon after we go through some sessions, you have morning sessions and afternoon sessions, you can choose which ones you want to go to. And then after this, they have the big lunch in the afternoon before the second session. And then after that, we just we have it every year. [20:00] Day on Campus or Staff Development Day.

AK: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DS: Do you know? Oh my God.

AK: I remember there were tours at the Hay Library and things like that.

DS: Yeah, right, right, right, right. Staff Development Day. So SAC is very much involved with putting that on, you know, and it's a great day. And at the end of the day, they'll either serve Dell's lemonade or they'll have an ice cream truck outside on the green or, and but they usually have something like they would do on the, where people were performing, singing or whatever they were doing, like a – what's wrong with my mind this morning. They weren't auditions but people would go out karaoke –

AK: Oh, okay.

DS: You know, and things like that. And people would get involved and they would have the little groups and they go out and it's fun. I remember a couple of years in a row [21:00] they had, was it Wheel of Fortune? No, it was Family Feud.

AK: Oh God! [laughter]

DS: I'm like and it always took place in Solomon? Yeah, always to place in Solomon.

AK: One of my favorite TV games.

DS: Oh my God, but and I think the group, the technical group because they had it set up exactly

like it was on TV.

AK: Really? Wow.

DS: It was unbelievable. And that technical group got an award during BEAR day because of the job that they did with setting up, you know, and then of course the audiences, you know, they get your groups together, a group of five you know, if you wanted to be on stage and to compete, you know, for this. It was great, you know. So people, I think a lot of those ideas come out of SAC and they take it out to their departments and things like that. [22:00] So, yeah, so Staff Development Day is a good time, what they did. So SAC does a lot.

AK: Yeah.

DS: I think it does a lot.

AK: So, are there any other organizations that you were part of? Groups? Maybe even personally? Do you do like community service or anything in your personal life?

DS: I did. I used to do community service. I'm looking at my –

AK: Your cheat sheet.

DS: I used to volunteer a lot with – Yeah, my cheat sheet. I used to volunteer a lot with the Cancer Society.

AK: Oh really?

DS: I did because my mother was a two time, three time cancer survivor. And –

AK: Was it breast cancer or was it something else?

DS: Both. Both breasts and colon.

AK: Oh, wow.

DS: And so she and I [23:00] and I used to also be involved with Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and have been to was able to go to one of their retreats, which was great. It was great to go to. And I used to walk a lot for the Cancer Society. And I would, my mother spoke a few times when they used to have their big conference, Cancer Conference. My mother was an ambassador for the, the Cancer Society, she had an opportunity to go to Washington DC, and meet with the senators and there was a group of them that went. And so I was involved with that. With work – what did I do? [24:00] Everything – I think I signed up for everything that they put out there for work.

AK: Really?

DS: I did.

AK: How come?

DS: It, because I just like doing stuff like that. You know, you know, community wise things. I just, I just if anything went out emails saying we're looking for people to do such and such thing. I would always join them. I was, I did do, I was a mentor once for the ALANAAA – a group. ALANAAA is the Asian Latin American Native American and African American. Had a group here on campus of, for diverse students, and I did was a mentor.

AK: For a student?

DS: I signed up and to mentor a first freshman student [25:00] which was great. We met maybe like, once a month personally, but we kept in touch with one another to see how she's doing. And I took her to my church once and you know, and if there was anything going on outside in my personal life, I would invite her to go with me.

AK: Are you still in touch?

DS: Recently no, but we were in touch until she graduated from Brown.

AK: Do you know what year she graduated?

DS: Oh God. [laughter] No!

AK: You don't have to know. It's not important.

DS: I can barely remember her name now because it's been so long, but I'm sure that I could. I could track her, track her down even within my emails and things like that. I'm sure I could track it down. Yeah, they assigned, they thought that we would be a good match. So.

AK: And you were it sounds like.

DS: Yeah. And we were. Yes, so that was a great experience. [26:00] What else did I do? I went to the, like I was saying a little earlier, was off the record here to the Summer Institute, an education in fundraising at Dartmouth College, which was a great experience and being coming into the fundraising business, I had never fundraised before. Knew a little bit about it, but that gave me and others that, who had attended a great background on fundraising. So advancement does, once a year, they will send their new employees to this schooling. You know, I still have my great big binder and all that because I never get rid of anything. I still have everything.

I did complete the Brown University Supervisory Development Program. [27:00] At the time, I was at a level where, yes, I could be involved in that program. And actually, they had, I never got to the second one. And then before I could, they had changed the criteria for it. And it was more of a managerial thing. So I didn't get to participate in the second portion. They even changed the name of it. The second or third portion of it, but that was a good thing. And, and I guess, you know, just being here and getting, being able to get my bachelor's degree at another university through their educational employee tuition program was great. Yeah, so.

What else? Attended training at Brown Session and Performance [28:00] Development Planning Best Practices and Managing Up. They used to have, Brown used to hold a lot of training sessions for development, planning, and managing up, I guess, to work your way into managerial positions. But it was something that I really wasn't you know, I like being where I was. I didn't want to be a manager or supervisor or you know, or anything like that. I just wanted to do the work.

AK: Right. And have all that extra volunteer time.

DS: Right, right, right, right, right. Yeah. So I would have all that extra volunteer time. Outside of work I was a member of the Urban League Guild, which is part of the Urban League. And then I think I was active for about a year and then I became inactive. Have not gotten back into that. [29:00] I volunteered at St. Elizabeth's Nursing Center, which was way before my mother. Because it was just a nursing center. It wasn't assisted living. So I did volunteer there and would play bingo

with the seniors, you know, the residents there and things like that. And I also when I was in Georgia, I volunteered at the Boys and Girls Club, because I am a sole believer in the Boys and Girls, Boys and Girls Club nationwide. I have not been involved with it here. Well, I'm getting older too. So I don't know if I want to deal with children. When I was younger, it was better. You know, so but anyway.

AK: Maybe just make a donation. [laughter]

DS: Right, right. But I think the Boys and Girls Club is a great organization for kids for an after school program or for summer [30:00] camp or, you know, anything like that. Yeah. So I've been busy.

AK: Yeah. It sounds like it.

DS: I've been busy. Now I'm not too busy, but I'm getting antsy, but now I concentrate on singing with community choirs.

AK: Yeah.

DS: Yeah.

AK: That's good. Something for you.

DS: Right. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. Something for me. So I don't know.

AK: Is that really it?

DS: I think that's it, you know. I think that's enough. [laughter]

AK: It's not insufficient. [laughter]

DS: Right. Right. Right. You know. Yeah. I think I still you know, as far as being active, I still like walking. I do the walk for CVS every year. And then of course, they changed it this past year, but I still walked you know, and every year I will do that in the City when they have [31:00] I think it was – what's the name of the group? Is it – ITG sponsored the, the walk, the 5k. The walk this year

downtown and I don't know who's going to do it. That was last year. I don't know who's going to do it this year, but I'll be there, you know. See if my time gets a little better. Or slower. But anyway, yeah. I like being active and doing things. Like being out there. And I love working. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And they're doing a lot on campus. They're always asking for people to volunteer or to come out and help with this and that but you know, I've gotten to the point where I say to myself, I'm not going to do it. With my church and singing in the choirs, I think that's enough for me right now.

AK: The power of no.

DS: Right, yes. So I don't get involved [32:00] with what's going on, activities at Brown so much, anymore. Said let the new folks do it, you know the younger folks do it. Yeah. So, but that's it. Yeah.

AK: Well, Diane, if ever you feel the need to add another part to your oral history, I would be more than happy to keep speaking with you.

DS: Well, thank you.

AK: And until then I will say thank you and I look forward to getting this online for everybody to hear about your extraordinary life.

DS: Thank you. It's been a really a great experience.

AK: Good.

DS: Yeah. I'm looking forward to hearing it myself.

AK: Good, good.

DS: I think. [laughter] Well, thank you, Amanda.

AK: Thank you.

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