

Transcript – Susan Friedman, class of 1970

Narrator: Susan Friedman

Interviewer: Mimi Pichey, class of 1972

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Mimi Pichey: Today is Friday, October 30, 2020. I am at the home of – this is Mimi Peachy – I am at the home of Susan Friedman, class of '70, interviewing her. Okay, so can you tell me a little bit about your families and childhood?

Susan Friedman: Yeah. So, my family was, both my parents are from the north, but when I was in third grade, we moved to Tennessee. I'm the eldest of five. And so, I grew up a Northerner in a small southern town, town of 10,000, where they didn't believe I was Jewish, because I'm – this is literally true – [1:00] they didn't believe I was Jewish because I didn't have horns. So, we were one of four Jewish families and in the, in the town. So, I grew up feeling very different. And my parents sent me to a private high school for my last two years of high school because they wanted me to be exposed to a different kind of environment. So I went to Memphis where I was in boarding school for, for two years. And that was an experience in and of itself. But it was at this school, the Lausanne School, where they had people come to encourage us to go to college and where we should go to college. And someone who is a senior, somebody who's ahead of me, who I really, really liked, had gone to Northwestern. But, also on campus was a lovely woman, and I still remember her as being really old. [2:00] I have no idea what that meant, but I remember her being really old, and she was recruiting for Pembroke. And I thought Pembroke sounded really interesting, also, for some reason. And so, I applied to Northwestern and to Pembroke and to Washington University, I believe.

And one of the questions was my first images of Pembroke. My parents took me up to Brown on a day that was typical, disgusting Providence weather. And it was wet, and it was rainy, and it was slimy, and it was disgusting. And I was dressed in a, in a, in a, in a very fancy coat and dress that matched because that's what you did back in 1965, '66. And we went on campus, and there were, there were kids, boys and girls slouched over, you know, out in the, I don't know, horrible weather, [3:00] talking intensely to each other. And I fell in love. I just

thought this is the place I want to be. This is great. And my parents were like, huh? But I just fell in love with, with the, the nature of the relationships of the kids with each other, right. And so, and remember, I grew up in a small Tennessee town so this was, this was great for me.

So I applied to Pembroke. I get on the waiting list. And I'm not accepted. So I miss, if I miss out. So I go to Northwestern. So my freshman year of college was at Northwestern. Northwestern, huge University. Evanston, Illinois. Really conservative town. I've never been so cold as I was my freshman year of college. I just froze to death. It was a very big fraternity sorority school. I didn't believe in fraternities and sororities. So, although I got into the Jewish one, I didn't join. And I was just miserable. I was like, [4:00] totally miserable. So, I applied to Brown again, and applied to Pembroke, again.

MP: As a transfer student?

SF: As a transfer student. And for the second time, got on the waiting list. So, I finally made it off of the waiting list and was accepted. So, I consider myself to be the person Brown least wanted to have as a student, because I was on the waiting list, not once, but twice. So that's my claim, one of my claims to fame with Brown is I consider myself to be the least wanted student they ended up having. So then I get, so then I get to, and then I get to Brown.

MP: This would be your sophomore year?

SF: My sophomore year.

MP: Beginning of your sophomore year?

SF: Beginning of my sophomore year. And I'm, I'm in a, I'm sharing a room with another transfer student from California. And she was interested in joining student government. I think maybe she had some experience with that. And they wanted Pembroke as part of [5:00] Cammarian Club, so somebody's –

MP: And Cammarian Club was what?

SF: Was the student government, the name for the student government. So, someone came to interview her about, you know, possibly running for Cammarian Club. And then I was in the room and I was talking with them also. And they found out I'd gone to Northwestern. And that was, you know, you know, it was this, this year, the difference between Brown and Pembroke was very much talked about, so that I went to a fully co ed school made me an expert on co ed school and like, there was really no difference. So, so for reasons I still can't fathom, they ended up wanting me to run for Cammarian Club, and my roommate decided not to run. So I kind of, you know, I don't even remember doing anything, I don't know, I think they were so desperate, they just anyway, I ended up being on Cammarian club. [6:00] So, through that, I, this was the, the magazine, Maxwell Magaziner Report was written and it was just being basically exposed to the larger campus.

MP: What was the Maxwell Magaziner Report?

SF: The Maxwell Magaziner Report was this humongous study that came out of an independent study group at Brown, that was the basis for the then new, now open, curriculum. And it was hundreds of pages long, it was quite the deal. And very well, very well researched, with a, so it was a history of education and higher education, and proposals, which it laid out. And so it was really the basis for the, the discussions about what Brown's curriculum needed to be.

Now this is, of course, going on at the same time that we have the [7:00] SDS organizing against the Vietnam War. You know, I remember the night that they announced the, you know, the numbers for who was going to get drafted. So that's happening. Other campuses, there's a lot of lot of, you know, sit ins and riots going on. And there was the beginning of, you know, a concern about how African Americans are treated on campus and how many there were and, and all of that. So, there were in parallel at this time, all of these kinds of things happening. My major time was spent on the, on the curriculum, but, you know, I was out there protesting with, you know, everybody else about everything else. And luckily, I had incredibly supportive parents, they just, it was like, go get 'em tiger. That was really quite wonderful for me.

Just to sort of [8:00] backup to that, so here we are in Tennessee, my father was a major employer in Tennessee and had to deal with unions who didn't like what he was doing. And he employed Blacks, which a lot of other people didn't like what he was doing. So, I grew up seeing

someone who, who, who used his, his position to help people. So, I grew up seeing how business could help people. He was taking people out of coal mines and giving them decent jobs and, and really helping to turn the economy of these tiny little towns in the mountains in Tennessee around because he put a shirt factory there. So, so I you know, I saw this and really kind of sucked all of that in.

So on to Brown. I'm involved with the new curriculum, we're protesting. Dad's, like, "You go girl," so that [9:00] was really, you know, very, very nice, very, I felt always felt very supported by my family. And so, Brown was just like, I mean. So, so I get involved with the new curriculum.

MP: So this is just an aside –

SF: Yeah.

MP: Did you did you do any academics?

SF: Yeah. Oh, yeah, I did quite well. I can tell my, my, my, the, the exam that I, that I, that I busted, was really the only C I think I ever got at Brown. So, I, I did fine academically. And ended up Phi Beta Kappa. I ended up Phi Beta Kappa, though, not so much because of my, I think I graduated *cum laude*, not so much because of my grades, but because George Morgan, whose courses I took, argued for me to be Phi Beta Kappa because of my extracurricular activities on top of having a decent academic background. [10:00] So I became one of the leaders of the of the movement for the curriculum.

MP: Yeah. I want to get back to that. I just want to clear some of the academic stuff up. What was your major?

SF: Economics.

MP: And did you have any particular favorite professors? Well, as I say, [Colosso?], just completely, you know. Oh, yes. So, so [Colosso?] was one of my economics professors who I

really respected a lot. So much so that when we had an exam, he walked over to me, and I think he like put his hand on my shoulder and said, “I know you’re going to do well,” and proceeded to completely blow my mind. And I completely flunked the test. I didn’t flunk the test, but I, I was, the test, I think I, I don’t think I’ve ever done as poorly on anything as I did on that test because he flustered me so well, because his [11:00] expectations for me were so high it was, just freaked me out.

Anyway. So Colosso was probably my favorite economics professor. Jordi was just somebody whose architecture course probably changed my life in terms of how I see the world in a lot of ways. And then I had a crush on my Russian literature professor whose name began with L, but I can’t remember it. I tried to remember, but I can’t remember his name. So those are three professors that really sort of stood out for me. But I spent a lot of my time with the administration because as the work on the new slash open curriculum developed, they formed a committee with professors, students, and administrators, that was known as the Maeder Committee, because Paul Maeder [12:00] ran it. Fabulous guy, fabulous guy.

MP: He was a provost?

SF: He was a provost, yes. He was just the best. He was great. And Dean Eckelman was another administrator that was just a wonderful person, and very fair and very open in working on this. So, I was one of three students on the Maeder Committee with Ira Magaziner and, oh god. I’m just – Robert Friedel, fabulous, fabulous, wonderful guy, who became a professor of the history of science. Fabulous guy, you should, he should be interviewed, too. So, so we then kind of became the student leaders of this, which meant everything –

MP: And this was immediately in your sophomore year?

SF: No, this would have been my junior year, would have been my junior year. In my sophomore [13:00] year there was just a whole lot of organizing going on. So we would hold meetings in dorms to talk about the report, we would go to faculty members to try to get them to, you know, support us because we knew if anything was going to happen, the faculty was going to have to pass it. We had the infamous Collation Mixer. Were you there at the collation mixer? Yes. So we

was, I think it was Sayles Hall. We put up chairs, because this was in the day of mimeographing, and so we mimeographed gazillions and gazillions and gazillions of pages, because this report was so big and we needed –

MP: I think it was 360 pages.

SF: Exactly. That could well be. So we had chairs out.

MP: I can remember the chairs going around and around in the spiral.

SF: That's right.

MP: And, and people could only do one sections, and then we assembled sections, and then the sections were assembled.

SF: It was quite the production line. And then I think we serve pizza or something afterwards. I still have a flyer from the [14:00] Collation Mixer to you know, to advertise for the Collation Mixer. So, of course, all of this is, was done without cell phones, without any kind of phones, you know, and, you know, everything kind of just, we figured out ways to just, we had links, I think in all the dorms. So we could, you know, kind of get the word out for everything. And that Cammarian Club office was kind of the, the hub there.

And so Meanwhile, while this was all going on, again, we had all of the, the war, the anti-war stuff going on, and I remember going, this may have been my senior year, I remember going to like, there's like a war college in Rhode Island. And a group of us students went and talked to, must have been a class of cadets there, about what we were doing and why and, and so, while we protested, you know, Brown really had a reputation of doing it in a very civil [15:00] way. I think we did, we did have sit-ins in the administration building, there was that, but that's as far as we want. And everything else –

MP: I remember that I was involved in the sit in. And I believe it was sixty – '69 in University Hall when the Corporation was meeting, and they got up and walked away, and we sat there and looked at each other and said, “Now what?” And we just decided to go home.

SF: Yeah, they were a bunch of wusses. Yeah, the, the President of the University was really, incredibly unimpressive guy, as far as I was concerned, and Tillinghast, who I think was the chairman of the board, was, I think, still stuck in the '50s I would, I would say.

MP: Can we back up just a minute –

SF: Sure.

MP: And talk a little bit about [16:00] the new curriculum itself, and what existed at Brown at the time and how was how was the new curriculum, so different? And why was it so radical, and so threatening to people on the Corporation, and possibly the administration, and possibly the faculty?

SF: Well, so Brown prior to the New Curriculum was like, pretty much every other school, you had grades, you had distribution requirements, you had humongous classes for freshmen, you know, and some for sophomores, and you had, you know, what interaction you had with faculty was pretty much, you know, pretty much up to you. And the approach to learning was very discipline based, right. And the method of learning was very, you know, I've got a bowl of knowledge and I'm going to pour it into you, and then you're going to write me a report saying that you swallowed it, you know, a [17:00] test to say you swallowed it. And so, you know, very, very traditional.

What was different about new curricula, a New Curriculum, at its heart was really about different ways of learning, and where the learning was more interactive, but also relied much more on the student. So, there was a much higher expectation for one to take responsibility for one's own learning. In terms of the curriculum, there was a, an approach that was one, much more, I'm going to say not interdisciplinary, but non disciplinary, that, that there were ways of taking on learning challenges that could mix many ways of thinking. I mean, I remember one

well like, one of the most, so, and as a framework for that, we, we recommended that the freshman year be made up of something we [18:00] called “Modes of Thought” classes, so that they were small, they were interactive, and they were, to use my phrase, non-disciplinary. And I remember one of them was sailing. And so you know, you were mixing, you know, learning about the sea, learning the physics of the wind, learning how to build a sailboat, learning, you know, where do you sail? So, taking an interesting topic, and looking at it from multiple perspectives, and then being able to integrate that learning, and then give it back in a way where you got much more feedback than a letter grade. So that we wanted to get rid of grades where you basically had professors critiquing the work.

So, so if you, if you just look at that, from all of that, from a faculty perspective, they may think that’s best for the student, but for them, [19:00] it meant you were going to have to reconfigure your courses, you were going to have to think differently about how you interacted with, with students, and you were going to have to assess them differently. So, it was a real change for a faculty member to rethink learning, and, and teaching. And it was going to be more work for, you know, more work for them. And, you know, Brown at the time, oh, well, first of all, just as a little aside, when I went to Brown, I didn’t know it was an Ivy League school. I mean, you know, I knew Harvard was Ivy League school. I knew Yale was, Princeton. I didn’t know Brown was an Ivy League school. So, you know, so, you know, I knew it wasn’t a party school. But, you know, I don’t know that the faculty thought their student body that they had then was up for this. Because this was [20:00] really, you know, this is really challenging, right? So, it was a very cha, nor do I know if the faculty thought they were up to it. So, so it was a real challenge, I think for the, for the faculty.

For the administration, you know, now as an adult, you know, I, you know, if I put myself in their place, I’ve never asked myself this question really before. First of all, it was student led which has got to freak them out, right? And then not knowing how the faculty is going to respond. And as we all know, right, the faculty doesn’t really consider that it works for the administrators, right. The administrators are there to, you know, support the faculty. So, I’m not sure that the administration knew what it was going to mean for them. And meanwhile, they just had a sit in in University Hall, there’s anti-war going on. I mean, this didn’t happen by itself. It happened [21:00] in the midst of major social change, I went to Brown with – my mother made me bring a hat and a pair of white gloves. When I graduated, I gave the graduation speech



in a cut off blue jeans skirt under my robe, much to the horror of my mother, but that's, you know, so. So, just as a visual, right, the change that happened in the, just the three years I was there, we couldn't go – freshman year, my sophomore year, we couldn't go on the Brown campus in pants unless we had a raincoat on. So, so, this, the, the new curriculum didn't happen in a vacuum, it happened in the midst of all of this. Would it have happened at another time? Who knows? You know, who knows? So, so, I think that you can't look at the new curriculum [22:00] as an isolated event that happened, it really was something that I think came out of that the times.

MP: So, you became involved, and became extremely involved as one of the three people on the Maeder Commission.

SF: Yeah.

MP: And tell, tell me about the organizing role that you played because I got the impression that you were one of the key, not just working with the administration and trying to do the, the work, the political work around it from a technical side.

SF: Yeah.

MP: But that you were really one of the people organizing on the ground with the students and, and building an organization. Because I know when I arrived on campus, in the fall of '68, I came to talk to you. And you had a whole dorm system with dorm captains. And you had, as you mentioned [23:00] earlier, there was no way because it was before iPhones, or any, any internet or any anything else, the old fashioned tell someone –

SF: Yeah.

MP: And posters. You had a whole way of getting out flyers and getting people to rally very quickly. Can you describe the work that you did on the ground?

SF: Yeah, well, first of all, there was really a group of us. There was, this was no, you know, this was not a one-person deal at, at all. And so, you know, I don't know if you've seen it, I'll show you. I got a beautiful plaque that they put together with the students for, for the 50th anniversary. So Ira and I were, were sort of the, I'll say the, the, the hub of a wheel with lots of spokes. [24:00] And so we really, you know, with some others, sort of created that that system. So, we had people in every dorm, but as you said, and that was sort of a major way of communicating. Plus, you know, Beth Hodgson, who was the editor of, you know, the *Daily Herald*. We were constantly in the *Daily Herald*, right, that was a major form of communication. We had rallies, we had lots of rallies on the, you know, on the green, again, as a way to, to rally support. I mean, if I think about it now, we were really able to create an environment where you had to join in on this thing. I mean, this was like the thing, right, it was like, it was like, you couldn't really be against it. Maybe you weren't that involved in it. Maybe you just went to a rally. [25:00] So, people had sort of levels of engagement, but we really created a movement that the students really couldn't not be involved with on one level or, you know, or another. So we bonded, you know, we bonded people with each other around this. Now, again, there was SDS, and they were had students and they were bonding around something else. So there was a lot of identity, right? So, so your student identity, right, could be I mean, the student, it's like, everybody seemed to be active in something. So, you're either anti-war, or you're doing the SDS, or you were, you know, the beginnings of, you know, the black movement at Brown. It was there, but it was small. You know, or you were involved with the, with the New Curriculum. And the New Curriculum, it was going to affect you, right. I mean, this thing got passed, your next year, you aren't going to have grades, okay, [26:00] so this was not, this, this wasn't something, you know, this wasn't about the war in Iraq, okay. This was about you next semester. So, so every, it was not difficult to engage people, because it really affected them very, very directly. The only thing that affected people more directly were the guys in Vietnam and whether or not what their number was, other than that this was –

MP: The draft lottery.

SF: The draft lottery. Yeah, sorry. Yeah, their draft lottery numbers. So, so this was, this was relatively easy. So, as I said, Cammarian Club was the hub. Joyce Reback, who is still one of my

best friends, was a secretary there. And so she was, she, she's the one who kind of did all that support kind of, kind of work. And we worked out of the Cammarian Club office. So, it was really through that. And so, so, you had a group of student government folks who were elected already. So that was the other thing, [27:00] right? We weren't, we weren't some group over, over in a corner somewhere, we were the elected representatives of the student body. So, we had, you know, we had validation as our position with the student government. We had an academic environment, an academic study behind what we were doing. And there were, because everyone, this is touching everybody, we had a very engaged, you know, student population. So, it was probably, I mean, I hadn't thought of it before, but this was probably the easiest organizing venture that I had, because all those conditions were there. You know, all those conditions. Were there.

MP: Just, just out of curiosity, did you and Ira play different roles? [28:00]

SF: He was more of the front man, for sure. And I considered myself as a buffer between Ira and a whole bunch of other people and other things. So, we would decide what to do. Ira would frequently be the front person, and Ira wasn't the most socially adept person. I will let it go that. And so I was kind of the, I was kind of the, the buffer. So, we would agree on what had to be done. You know, we'd each do whatever we needed to do. But I think the extent to which there was a difference, it was, he would, he was the one that talked with Gloria Steinem and got interviewed, not me. I was the one behind the scenes and doing a lot of the you the more, he was like the [29:00] CEO, and I was, I was like the COO. I was more on the ground and dealing with operations. Now –

MP: I will re-say that I remember coming to talk with you because I spoke to Ira and said, “How can I get involved?” And he said, “Oh, go see Susie Friedman.”

SF: Yeah. So, and I'll tell you, I, as you can probably tell, I have an ego. But I, I learned this from my father, I really think I learned this in my father who really had an ego, but he never needed to be out front. He knew that you had more room to move if you were kind of behind the scenes a little bit. And I've always been happy being there knowing, I mean, I knew what I was

doing. I didn't need to be talking to Gloria Steinem in particular. I needed to be more connected to the, to the work and getting, and getting stuff done. [30:00] Yeah, so I would say that was probably the main, the main, the main difference, difference, you know, that I can think of that I can think of now.

MP: So what were the stages of, you know, you there were all these things going on in parallel. How did the New Curriculum actually get adopted?

SF: Well, it was –

MP: From beginning to end it was about two years.

SF: Well, the report was written before I got to Brown. So that was written in '66/'67. Then '67/'68 was really, you know, on campus, getting it out there, getting support, the organizing, and then '68/'69 was the Maeder Committee. And then at the end of, of that academic year, the faculty voted on it.

MP: Yeah.

SF: And so –

MP: I remember that the, the assembly thing in Sayles Hall was to create [31:00] packets to give to each faculty member. And so, it must have been in winter/spring of '70.

SF: No, no, because –

MP: '69.

SF: '69. Yeah, because it passed, it passed in, it passed in '69. So everything was really geared, so we had the Maeder Committee meeting, right. And so then the Maeder Committee brings to the faculty, a proposal for the New Curriculum. So it was all about that faculty vote, which I

know happened in the spring, because I know exactly what I was wearing and it was, again, fairly short skirt. So, so yeah, so, so that's really so, so the first so '66/ '67 –

MP: I know there was a huge rally outside the faculty –

SF: Well, because, yeah –

MP: There were student observers inside the faculty meeting.

SF: Yeah, there were, there were very few of us who were allowed in the faculty meeting and they were they had speakers. [32:00] And so every, the students were all sitting outside listening to the faculty.

MP: It was broadcast.

SF: Yeah, it was broadcast outside. Yeah. And then I think I slept for three days afterwards, because I didn't sleep the three days before we were, you know, lobbying and organizing and everything to get it to get it done. So it passed in '69. And so, '70 it began to be implemented.

MP: So, yea, fall of '69 was when it was starting to be implemented.

SF: No.

MP: Yes, the first, the first entering class of fall, fall '69. Because [inaudible].

SF: That's right.

MP: And fall '69 was the first implementation.

SF: Correct.

MP: And I remember modes of thought classes, people trying to sign up for them and the lines went across the green.

SF: Yeah.

MP: Because of the interest and because there were not enough faculty members who were quite on board yet so there was a dearth of [33:00] –

SF: Right.

MP: Options.

SF: Right.

MP: So they were highly prized.

SF: And you could choose that year to get grades or not get grades.

MP: Only freshmen could take them.

SF: Yeah. Oh, yea, that –

MP: All the rest of us were very jealous.

SF: Yeah. Well, that's because that was a, that was the design of the curriculum was modes of thought class for the first year. And you could, you could sign up, you were, grades were optional. The other thing that there was great concern about was whether or not you were going to be able to get into graduate school without grades. That was a big concern. And so some people opted to get grades to do that. And it turned out to be apparently a non, completely non issue. But, but I remember that was a huge, a huge, it was, it was a reasonable, you know, concern for people to have.

MP: Yeah. So you were there for the first year of the implementation.

SF: Yeah.

MP: Can you speak to how, what your role was during that year? [34:00]

SF: You know, my senior year was like such a, such a vague haze. So IRA was gone. He was a year ahead of me. So, I think I must have continued to be meeting with the administration on just how it was, you know, how it was going, but I don't remember, you know, I don't remember big rallies, or I mean, I think it really had all sort of kind of passed into, you know, the faculty in effect taking over, right, because they're the ones that were going to have to implement it. And also, my senior year, Vietnam was really, really hot. And so, I think I spent as much time you know, around anti-war protests, as you know, as anything else.

MP: That's my recollection as well is that once it got adopted, students just [35:00] started doing other things.

SF: Yeah, exactly.

MP: I think because it was encouraging individual direction of their own education, people were encouraged to go to professors and do independent studies and independent majors, concentrations, and, and things just started to change.

SF: Yeah. I'll tell you one other little, for me, intriguing aside. So, Ira and I had gone to a National Student Leader conference. It must have been, it must have been that that summer of '69. And Ira said to me, he said, you know, "The next big movement is going to be feminism." This is 1969. And I looked at him like he was out of his mind. First of all, I mean, first of all, I, for me, personally, Brown was the place, my three years at Brown [36:00] was a place where I felt mostly myself, most myself. I mean, you know, not growing up Jewish in a small southern town in Tennessee, that was not good. But at Brown, I was really, who I, who I was. And so I didn't feel this male female thing at all. I would just, was like, completely, huh? But he, he

named it. I never forgot that. And then sure enough, it began to, you know, it began to kind of spring forth in the seventies.

MP: So just before we leave the open curriculum, 50 years hence, we're now celebrating the anniversary, actually celebrated last year. What are your views of the of the new, no open, curriculum?

SF: Well, first of all, let me say, so, last year, at Alumni Weekend, they had a special commemoration for this and they invited [37:00] all of us folks who were leaders. Elliott Maxwell came, Ira was there, I was there. Unfortunately, many more should have been there and couldn't, couldn't make it. But we were there. And we were shocked. I mean, Elliott, Ira, and I were shocked that 50 years later, this thing still defines Brown University. We had no idea when we were doing this, that it would have the kind of impact that it had. And people came up to me at that event, and it's happened before, saying "Thank you, you changed my life with this curriculum." And we had no clue we would have had the impact that we did. So let me just start off by saying it went way, we, it just never occurred to us that it would have such a, that it would, that would it have landed in such fertile ground, [38:00] you know, and, and taken root and, and, and, you know, and, and develop.

You know, did it do everything we thought it should do? You know, I think they're, you know, are the portfolios, still as great as they are? I'm not so sure. But I think the most important thing it probably did was that it attracted students who were attracted by it. And it changed the nature of who was on the campus. And it probably also changed the faculty for the better. So, you know, really, you know, the education was really about who you were getting educated with, right, and through. And so I think the greatest thing it did was, was that. Was in bringing to Brown people who wanted to think differently about their education. The rest is almost secondary. [39:00]

MP: Thank you. You mentioned the student strike in spring of 1970, after the mining of Hanoi and Haiphong harbors. There was a huge movement against the war and an upsurge on all college campuses. Kent Strike, the Kent State students rallied and unfortunately, four of them were killed. And in response, across the country, there was called for shutting down the



universities and opening them up as an alternative University. In other words, a student strike in May of 1970. Were you involved in the one at Brown and if so, can you describe what you remember?

SF: Well, the student strike I mean, we, there were no exams. My senior year, there were no exams. And so yeah, I guess we were, we were on strike. And, [40:00] you know, for graduation, we all wore armbands, right. And there were, you know, there were crosses and coffins on campus. And so, there was a lot of demonstrating about the war at graduation. And then prior to that, I think is when we went to the War College, you know, was, was that, during that period of time. But again, Brown, you know, nobody said anything on fire, you know, because and I think also, because we've gone through and changed the frickin' curriculum at an Ivy League school, people understood that, you know, they could protest and be and be heard. So, there was a lot of that. I was not an organizer of the strike. But I was certainly, you know, as a student, and I was certainly, you know, participating in it. I don't remember if Cammarian Club had a, a leadership role, and I don't, I don't remember any of that [41:00] happening. I don't think it was that, I don't think that's where it came from.

MP: The leadership came from elsewhere.

SF: Yeah.

MP: They elected a steering committee that included even faculty members.

SF: Yeah.

MP: And there was a huge meeting in the auditorium of about 5,000 students, people. And basically, it was opened up as an alternative university with, with classes on various liberation struggles and things like that. And there was community organizing, which I agree probably had to do with the War College.

SF: Yeah. I do remember doing a lot in the Providence community, going out and speaking. I did that, yeah. I was, yeah, I guess there was a speaker. So I would go out and talk to different groups, and, and you know, about the war and why we felt the way we want, we felt the way we did. Yeah.

MP: So you graduated [42:00] in that environment.

SF: I graduated in that, but I do have to say one thing, though, because I just, it really, I think it probably, gosh, I think I'm going to tear up probably means more to me than most other things that I've been lucky to have in my life. That year was the first year that that the students voted on who they wanted to be the commencement speakers. And I didn't, I didn't, you know, I didn't think about it. And somebody nominated me. And I was elected by the student body to be one of the commencement speakers. And that just meant a huge amount to me, really, it was just amazing. Just kind of blew me away. So I just needed to say that, and thank you to all those students out there who voted for me, because it was really beautiful.

MP: Do you remember anything that was included, [43:00] that you wanted to make sure, points that you wanted to –

SF: Well, I still have the speech somewhere.

MP: Well, maybe you'll donate them to the archive.

SF: Oh, yeah. If they don't have it. Actually, you know what? You're going to love this. So, there were two of us, there was a guy who was I think, like, the smartest person in the class or something. And me. And they, I believe, something happened, where it typically they print the speeches in the, in the *Alumni Monthly*, and they didn't print the speeches because they didn't bother to get a copy of mine, but they had his. I mean, it was something really not kosher, as my people would say. So, they never printed. I know they never printed my speech. So I do have it. So, if you'd like, I'll send it to you.

MP: Yes, I think that would be something people would really like to [44:00] have in the archives.

SF: And more or less what I said in the speech was, you know, find a way through your life to still be engaged, doesn't end here, whatever else you do.

MP: So, taking the lead from that –

SF: Yeah.

MP: Tell us a little bit more about what happened after Brown and, and how you implemented that advice to others in your own life.

SF: So after Brown Ira had gotten a Rhodes Scholarship, so he was in Oxford and I wasn't sure if I wanted to get a masters or something in economics and I wasn't ready to go to work because I didn't know what I was going to do. So, I applied to the London School of Economics to get in their master's program in economics. [45:00] So I went to London for a year as a wonderful opportunity to live abroad. I just got on a plane I didn't know where I was staying, living, anything, just got on a plane and went. And I'm still friends with my roommate, a Brit, who's still, we still, we still are friends after all of these years. And so I lived in, in London and went to the London School of Economics. But really what I was doing was organizing US Air Force men against the war with Ira and Vanessa Redgrave and some others. So, we, we, that's what we did. And we, there was a huge, huge march in London, of US Air Force men against the war that we organized. [46:00] And there are pictures of me in files standing outside US Air Force bases in Britain, you know, pick, you know, handing out flyers and getting US Air Force men to, to join in against the war. So here I am in London in this little flat and I had, there were three roommates, I had three roommates, there were four of us. Two were Brits. One, I will never forget her name. Her name was [Noushin?] [inaudible]. She was Iranian. She was studying over there. So here I am, the American, the two Brits, and Noushin. I'm having, I've got these, these guys from the Air Force sleeping on the floor in the living room, right, because we're writing pamphlets and organizing stuff. Noushin, by the way, so this is when the Shah of Iran is there.

She is this radical Iranian, and she is working [47:00] in London, with people who want to overthrow the Iranian government. So this little flat is full of all sorts of stuff going on. And I remember she, she flew back to Iran for holiday or something and she had hollowed out a suitcase and put in all of these books that you were not supposed to have in Iran. And we're like, and she'd get phone calls from weird people, and we have to be careful about how we answered the phone for her. So, so right after Brown, I was organizing US Air Force men against the war in London and, and helping Noushin do whatever the heck she was doing to overthrow the Shah.

So, so then, after that, Ira in Oxford, besides meeting, Bill Clinton, had also met someone who lived in Brockton, Massachusetts named Paul. And, [48:00] and Ira thought maybe something we could do was to go into a lower income community and do community organizing. So we talked about that in London. And we talked to some of our Brown friends who, you know, were also kind of either had just graduated, were seniors, whatever, and, and decided that we would become community organizers and we'd move to this town where Paul was from, Brockton. Because Paul's father was the football coach at the high school and his mother ran a hair salon. So, between the two of them, they knew everybody, and everything in Brockton. So, 15 of us, roughly speaking, the number went up and down, moved to Brockton to become community organizers. And they're, the core group were Brown people, [49:00] but then friends. So like, my boyfriend who I met in London, who was from Pittsburgh, he joined later. So, you know, people's, so we ended up with a cluster and we lived in Brockton for some of us three years. Some, there were some people who were from Brockton besides Paul, who joined who still in Brockton, and we became community organizers.

I worked as a bank teller and we started a food Co Op, we had a newspaper. We had a tenants union, we organized tenants. I also was involved in organizing healthcare, back before anyone thought about health care organizing. And we all had, most of us had day jobs and then we would meet at night and we would work out our philosophy of what we thought, [50:00] you know, society ought to be like and –

MP: Did local people from Brockton join you?

SF: A few. A few did. And in fact, one of them, so it was one person who joined us, his name is Pat Condon. Pat is now a professor of, I think he started out in like landscape architecture, but he

talks about the design of cities, professors in Vancouver. But his daughter is a council woman in Cambridge. Alanna, and Alanna, when she ran for office, Pat activated the Brockton group, we all supported her. And she told us all about how much Brockton changed her life through her father. Because he got active in [51:00] all these community acy, I mean, seriously, we had a newspaper, a food Co Op, a tenants union, right, we're organizing in healthcare. We were doing a lot. And so you know, when people were brought into that was a whole way of looking at the world, and what you could do on the ground, and, and it changed, it changed her father's life, and it changed her life. And that was another incredibly beautiful thing, you know, that came out of this. We didn't know we were affecting, Alanna, you know, and, and she gives us she gives the Brockton project, you know, a lot of credit for, I guess, sort of opening your eyes, I guess, to different ways of seeing things. So, so yes, we had other local people join us, join the core group is what I'm, is what I'm talking about.

MP: What was the population of Brockton at that time?

SF: Maybe 30, 40,000 people. [52:00] We, one of the reasons we picked it, to be honest, was because it did not have a big racial problem. But there were very, very large, different, and different ethnic communities. There's big Polish community there. And, you know, so, so we were we were up for that, but because we were, you know, all white kids.

MP: Isn't there [Zoren?] and Cape Verdean?

SF: Yeah, yes. But that was, that was, those were not issues for us, you know, for us. They really were, they were really income related, you know, issues, issues for us. So, so we had Brockton and we were there for two years. We ran a bunch of people for office. And nobody won. I don't know why I haven't thought about it, you know, for a long time. But anyway, so we decided then that we all needed to know more. So some people in Brockton in became attorneys, some became, we had one doctor, some of us went to business school. So, [53:00] and the thought was when we would all, we've learned, and then we'd all get back together and do it again, which I never thought that once we all went out that that would happen. And it didn't happen. We never got back together as a group. However, we've had some Brockton reunions, and some of my

closest friends are still people from that period of life and from, from Brown. So, pretty much every body, so like the attorney does labor law, right, the, the doctor became fairly high-level position in Medicare in the government. And you know, I work with a lot of nonprofits and do a lot of pro bono stuff. And two people, three people, four people, had very important positions in unions of one, of one sort or another. One, it was [54:00] housing developer, nonprofit housing developer. So, all of us – oh, two doctors, sorry. I just remembered another one.

MP: [inaudible], too, often did the children's work.

SF: Well, she started out as an accountant for the Electrical Workers Union, and then worked in a number of nonprofits and most recently has been involved, well, she, she was always involved in childcare. Always from Brown she was involved with childcare. And she was then heading a foundation in, in New Jersey, that funded that. Now she is working for a philanthropist and helping him spend his money on childcare related things. So she's still, she's still doing it.

MP: So you went off as part of the educate ourselves movement.

SF: Yeah.

MP: And got yourself –

SF: I got an MBA and, and, [55:00] and then –

MP: At Harvard.

SF: At Harvard, yeah. And then joined the Boston Consulting Group where Ira was and where Eileen Rudd was. So, we were BCG. And we worked, one of the projects we worked on was for the Swedish government. And we did industrial policy work, which actually is something that is coming back now after thirty plus years. But we went to work for the Swedish government and we took principles of, of business, applied them to industries, and then applied them to an economy. And we did a massive study of the Swedish economy through, this was through BCG,

which was really quite something. And the government did utilize the big parts of, [56:00] of that. And so that work, which was really fascinating and much more interesting than working, you know, for a soap company, which I've also done.

So that, so Ira formed with us, formed a, another consulting firm, to do industrial policy work called Telesis. And so I joined Telesis, as well and we did industrial policy work. And we did work for major corporations, as well. And you were talking earlier about some of your history and where you, you thought that everyone should be equal, and then you realized that was not what's happening. Well, that happened with Telesis, where [57:00] Ira insisted initially that everybody get paid the same amount of money, and we're all going to be equal. And this sec, literally, the Secretary is going to get paid what he gets paid. That lasted for, I don't know, maybe eight months, and then Ira decided for Ira, that didn't work anymore. And he began to change how that organization ran. And I'm sure he would tell you a different story than I would tell you. But let me just say that our ways parted.

And so I left Telesis and when out, went out on my own and started consulting. Joined, actually, when I left Telesis, I guess the first thing I did was, I – was that the first thing I did? I can't remember the order of things now. Well, one of the things I did [58:00] back in those days was I became, I worked for a commission that Dukakis set up here in Massachusetts, on mature industries, because this was a period of time in the '80s, when a lot of manufacturing industries were dying in Massachusetts, and they needed to have, they needed to do something. And I'd been doing industrial policy work and so I got hired on to basically be one of the people to staff that, that commission, which I did, and which was important in that it made it very clear to me that I wanted to have nothing to do with government, because I saw Evelyn Murphy, Secretary of Economic Affairs or whatever position she had, totally misuse that commission, [59:00] take full credit for the work that was done, and was just a horrible, horrible person in terms of how she acted as a political leader. So I decided I had to, I mean, to the point where she held up funding, so not only could I, did I not get paid for four months, but the secretary of the commission didn't get paid for four months, because she was having a tiff with somebody else and was using this as a card, you know, that kind of crap.

So that said, all right, so I am not going into government. And I joined a series of Boston Consulting Group spin offs for several years, and then went out on my own decades ago and have been very lucky in being able to have incredible clients. [1:00:00] I've done some, you

know, I've just worked with some of the most wonderful people doing really meaningful, good work. And I've been very, very grateful for, for that.

MP: So we have, we've just hit about an hour. Why don't you pick out one or two things of your field, things that you, projects, some of your favorite projects that you worked on that you'd like to share?

SF: Well, one thing that was really kind of cool, was I was working with an organization which still exists called the National Center on Education in the Economy, and headquartered in DC, and they, back in the '90s, this is in the sphere of K through 12 education. And they, this is the group that came up with a set of national curricular standards for, [01:01:00] for school so that by the time you were in the 12th grade, you should know this about math and that about English and yeah, and you know, and had a whole set of, of curricular guidelines for K through 12, and major subject areas. But not only was the federal government never going to accept that, individual states would have to do it. But they then realized where there were some states that were, were using these curriculum standards, there were no, there was no infrastructure for getting the books to, or the tests, you know, or the teaching supports to make that happen. So this nonprofit, the top guy, hired someone who we knew who was a principal. And she came in and she's one of most incredible women I've ever met, name's Judy Kotick. And Judy basically put together a whole school reform package, [01:02:00] which they went out and started offering to schools, and lo and behold, people actually started to buy it. And, and it was working, you know, kids were doing better. Well, they had been funded by grants. But this was during a period where people who gave you money, didn't want a regular funding proposal, they wanted a business plan. So these nice people in DC, they don't have a clue. They don't know how to spell business. They didn't know what a business plan look like. Right? So someone they knew recommended me to help them build a business plan. Well, over the course of the next, I don't know, six or seven years, what happened was, I helped them understand the economics of what they were doing. They had no idea what, how to price anything, what costs were, how to scale it up, if they change one model what would that do to another? So I helped them over the years, really figure out what this business, if you will, was. [01:03:00] It grew so big, that they couldn't fund it as a nonprofit. So they had to take this thing. And they had to create a for profit subsidiary of the



nonprofit, then they had to get venture capital to fund it. So I was their Chief Financial Officer for that transition. I helped them figure out, you know, how they were going to package it to bring in venture money. And then to help them again, understand the financial side where the finances and the operations and the business future overlap. That's what I help companies and organizations do. And nonprofits don't have a clue about their numbers. So they don't know if they change, if they change the model, how it will check the finances, or if the finances change how it's going to help the model. [01:04:00] And then how do they, how are they going to evolve that over time. That's what I help, that's what I do. So I helped them through that process. And they did bring in venture money, and they grew it. And then they ultimately sold it to a major publisher with enough money, that what was left has served as an endowment to support the National Center for Economics and the Economy, Education and the Economy, to this day. So being able to go from little more than an idea with this organization all the way through that process. I'm still in contact with them. And it was a wonderful experience for me.

The other one is that I've done a lot of work here at Children's Hospital Boston, where I'm working with physicians, and with researchers, who with academics have totally different ways of relating [01:05:00] to each other, and to their organizations. And if you don't understand that, you ain't getting anything done, period. And so somewhere along the line, I figured that out. So I've been able to have wonderful experiences with, with researchers and, and, and, and, and and docs. Right now for example, I'm on my fourth strategy exercise with a network of pediatricians, 400 pediatricians in 80 practices across the state of Massachusetts, and it's my fourth strategy exercise with them. So they knew, know me, I know them, I have seen this group grow and evolve and deal with massive changes in health care over time. And so I've just gone through the COVID crisis with them, as well. And now we're coming out the other end, and I'm helping them plan for the next few years. So that's also again, they have, they have a [01:06:00] sterling, sterling leadership team, made up of, they have, they have one MBA, and then the rest of Doc's, but they are just fabulous people. First of all they're pediatricians, so they're lovely people, right. And so they're really smart, or they're wicked smat, as we say, right. And they've just been great to work with. So I have just this wonderful, wonderful working relationship with them that's just been, you know, profoundly satisfying. So that's another professional project I'm working on that that's really been, and it has, has gone on for many years, because as I said, it's my fourth strategy exercise with them.

MP: It sounds like it's incredibly satisfying, all for what you're able to accomplish. And, and then, as you say that the interactive growth over time, with relationships that you have with these people.

SF: Yeah. And it's unusual for a consultant [01:07:00] to have that kind of long term relationships. I have, so I have, I'm really hugely grateful for, for that.

MP: Now, I just want to touch on a few other things before we wind up. One of which is, you mentioned that you do a lot of nonprofit volunteerism and I wonder if you would like to just talk to that for a couple of minutes?

SF: Sure, so –

MP: Pro bono work.

SF: Yeah. So, so first, ever since I was a little kid, I've danced. And so probably my longest term, volunteer, if you will, relationship is with Boston Ballet, which I was a student there. And then back in the '80s, somebody who knew me knew the new chairman of the board of the ballet who wanted to do a strategy exercise so we got introduced. So for 35 years, I ended up on the board of Boston Ballet, and I was chair for a period of time and, and danced, [01:08:00] took a class, took class until June of '90 when I couldn't anymore because I had a bad hip, which just got replaced. So, so, so that's been that was wonderful. So we used to say, at Boston Ballet, some people, some people dance on stage, but we all dance. So, so I dance behind the, behind the stage and, and worked as a trustee there, and I'm on many committees.

MP: Can I ask, did you, did you dance when you were at Brown?

SF: Yes –

MP: And if so, where?

SF: I did, but back then Brown had nothing dance related on, on campus. So I would go into Providence and take ballet classes just as a, at a studio down in Providence.

MP: Do you think that your involvement with dancing had an impact on your life in other ways?

SF: I, well, I think, you know, I believe everybody has [01:09:00] an art form that they're particularly sensitive to. For me, it's movement and line. And so I, and that's how I think about myself, I identify that way, I identify with movement, I can't listen to music and sit still I have to have some kind of movement. And, and, and as I said, I'm just, I'm very sensitive to line. I started drawing. I took a class two years ago, and, and I draw now. And I think it's again, I think it's about that sort of sensitivity to, you know, to, to line and to form, I guess. So that, I guess, would be the kind of connection that I would have.

MP: Oh, I was thinking perhaps in terms of discipline.

SF: Well, I will say that, that there is a huge amount of discipline that comes across with, with dance for sure. I don't I, I can't comment on my own I mean, I never think I'm disciplined enough for anything, so I can't, [01:10:00] you know, I don't know. It's all relative, I guess.

So, so the ballet was one major, sort of, I guess, pro bono thing. I've served on a number of boards for cultural organizations, and currently on the board of a, of an organization that supports research in MS. I'm also about to start a project for the Chelsea Collaborative. Do you know who they are, by the way?

MP: No.

SF: So Chelsea here in, in, outside of Boston, is a city of 35,000 people, about 70% of whom are Latino, and it has been horrifically hit by COVID, both, both medically and economically really hit. And they have there a group that was for many, many years ago, called the Collaborative Law club, [inaudible]. And they've done wonderful work in terms [01:11:00] of job training, English as a second language, immigration issues, all very, very important to that community. And they, because of the, because of COVID, they started a little food pantry, not part of their

mission, totally not part of their mission, no background in it, they started it in their executive director's backyard. They're now serving 3,000 people a week, it's humongous. They don't know what to do with it. They, they, you know, the city needs it, it's outside of their mission. You know, they're, they're, they're not doing a whole bunch of other things, because they're trying to do this. So, I volunteered and they accepted. I'm going to help them figure out a strategy for their food Co Op. So for me, you know, for me doing something like that, I think is more valuable than me stuffing groceries in a grocery bag. So, I look for opportunities like that, where I can do [01:12:00] what I can do, and, and apply it to situations like, like that. So I'm very excited and very, very honored, actually, that they want to work with me. And that, I'll help them figure that out. And the way I work is that I'm not going to tell them what to do, I'm going to help them figure out what they need to do. That's my job. I describe myself as a consultant, I describe myself as a Sherpa, because I'm going to help you get up the hill, but I got my own backpack, but you got, you got your own backpack. So I can't carry your backpack and mine, you got to carry yours. So I've made it very clear to them, when we're working together, they're going to be doing a lot of the work because, you know, it's going to be work I can't do that needs to get done, but I can help them get through the process. So that's a project I'm doing.

I'm very involved with ranked choice voting here in Massachusetts, and will soon be very involved doing it nationally. [01:13:00] I believe in systemic change. I'd rather you know, as I'm telling my friends, you know, I'm playing the long game here, not throwing all of my efforts into one particular election. I'd rather see the system change and have much greater, you know, much greater impact longer term. And I can, I can, I'm happy to invest for the long term for that. So that's something else that I believe in and that I'm really, it's something that I can, I can see how I can be helpful to this group.

MP: So you have taken your own advice in your, your graduation speech.

SF: I better.

MP: So, I just had one other question. And then you know, if there's anything we haven't touched on, that you'd like to speak about. Which is what has been your personal relationships

situation as you, as you've [01:14:00] gone along? Do you have a family or any, any other personal involvement along those lines?

SF: I have a significant other of 30 plus years, and we don't live together. And that works just fine for both of us. So we have a lot of individual freedom, we're very different people. He is a fair amount older than I am so he's at a different place in his life than I'm at. But he recognizes that and he knows that I need to be able to spread my wings. And he doesn't like to travel and I like to travel and he understands I'm going to travel and, and so there's, there's that.

Since I don't have children of my own, I'm pretty close to my nieces and nephews. And I think I mentioned I'm the eldest of five but I lost a sister to MS and [01:15:00] so I'm particularly close to her two daughters. My mother will be 98 in January, and she is a hot ticket, I can tell you. She still gets her nails jelled and she's a, she watches Rachel Maddow every night. And she's living in assisted living in Tennessee, and I am sure she's the only 97-year-old watching Rachel Maddow in Sumner County, in Tennessee. So I play a bit of an oversight role for, for her. So, I, and then being the eldest of five, so I have family support system, and I'm a presence in, you know, in a lot of my family's lives. And my father died many, many years ago, and I was a trustee of his estate, and so had a lot of work to do [01:16:00] and learned a lot of stuff I never thought I was going to have to learn about estates and wills and obstreperous stepmothers. So, so that was, you know, on the family side, as well.

MP: Is there anything we haven't touched on that you want to make sure it gets into this interview?

SF: Oh, I don't know. I think we covered a lot. I will just say I am, I am sure that Brown changed my life through the experience that I had there. And, and certainly the people that I met because they're the, they're still, they're still my closest friends. And so, I thank Brown for that. And I thank you.

MP: Thank you.

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