

Oral History of Susan E. Geary

Interviewee: Susan E. Geary '67

Interviewer: Lisa Colasanti '91

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Note: The first two pages of transcription contain the dialogue exactly as it was spoken. The rest of the text has been slightly edited for flow and understanding.

Lisa Colasanti: This is Lisa Colasanti, Brown class '91, interviewing Susan Geary, Brown class of 1967, on March 21<sup>st</sup> 1988, in the Brown Annual Fund Building. The first question is: Why did you come to college?

Susan Geary: Well, I'm not sure I can really remember a specific reason. It was just always assumed that I would go to college. I mean, somehow it was, I mean it was not a discussion about it. It was just well, what college are you going to go to? And, I'm afraid I was so dumb at the time, I had no idea how difficult it was to get into Pembroke. Ah, I had a friend whose older sister was here, and I came and toured the campus with her and went to classes, and I said, Oh, that looks like a nice place. And I applied early decision and I got in never realizing how special that was until people started to tell me how special it was. So I had never really considered too many other places.

LC: So Brown was the, one of the only schools you considered?

SG: Yea, I would, I had also looked at catalogues for places like Smith and Wheaton and other co-ordinate women's colleges, and probably a couple other local colleges, but I had come here and I really liked the atmosphere. I liked the people that I met, and it just seemed like this was a good place to go.

LC: What was your family's influence on your decision?

SG: I don't, I can't really remember. As I said there didn't seem to be a whole lot of discussions about it. I mean, my brother had gone to college, and it just seemed natural that I would go to college also. Um, he had wanted to go to Dartmouth and the, he's much older than I am, and they didn't have scholarships since, or as many then, and so he was accepted but could not go, and ended up going to URI. So, I think my parents made an extra special push for me to be able to go to Brown.

LC: What about your parent's education backgrounds?

SG: Both of them finished high school, but did not go further than that, although, I had to say in those days a high school education meant a lot more than it does now. But that was their highest level.

LC: Okay. How about your high school in your hometown?

SG: Well, I grew up in the town of Scituate, Rhode Island. I went to the high school there. I think the high school was maybe built four years before I started there. Before that the town was so small it didn't even have it's own high school. Ours was the largest graduating class. We had seventy-two people – that was really big.

LC: Did you attend Brown with other women from your high school?

SG: Um, they usually took only one person per year from our high school because it was so small. The friend's sister was still here. She was a Senior when I came in as a Freshman, and I think, as I progressed through, there was one fellow who came a year after me, and there was another woman who came, I think, as I was a Senior getting ready to leave.

LC: What were your family expectations about what you would do with your college degree?

SG: Ha! Well my parents wanted me to do something that would be very safe and secure and there was some discussion about whether to send me to college or to art school because I was very interested in art. They finally thought it was always sort of assumed that I would go and become an English teacher. That seemed very safe, very genteel, very secure. And they almost got their wishes! (laughs) I came very close to it, but decided I didn't really like teaching that well.

LC: What about? Okay, now think of being here at Brown. What was your first day at Pembroke like?

SG: It was God awful! Ah, ha ha, they used to put the freshmen through just an incredible routine, and I think that is probably part of my worst memory here too. Although we had to have this physical exam before we came in, and I can't remember if this was the first day, but certainly was the first week, one of the things we had to do, and this was famous, is you had to go through a series of doctors for a health exam and the dentist and all that. You wore this sort of little poncho thing that left nothing to the imagination, after which you had to go and have a posture picture taken, in which case, you were stood up sideways with nothing but your shoes on, and I guess, your underpants, and someone took your picture. And then later they discussed it with you about how your posture was lacking here or there and what you could do to improve it. And, I think that was probably everybody's worst memory.

LC: And that was one your first day?

SG: I don't know if it was the first day. It was certainly the first week. The first day I just remember going to, I think we had tests. They used to give us all kinds of achievement tests and psychological exam. We had discussion groups with some of the deans. We had our house counselors. I mean it was a, I just remember it was an exhausting day. I remember going home after the first two or three days and saying, I don't think I can take this. I meant it was just so, every minute was scheduled with something and it was, I don't know, I think its better now than what we were doing.

LC: Was there like a Freshman initiation type program?

SG: Well, it wasn't really initiation. That was actually one of the things I liked about Pembroke is that we didn't have to wear beanies and do silly things. I gather they had done that in earlier periods, but when I came in '63 there was none of that sort of initiation stuff. People were really very nice, they were very friendly, they were very helpful. I mean, in that sense you felt comfortable here, I think.

LC: Where did you live your freshman year

SG: I was a commuting student all four years. So I was driving back and forth between the campus and Scituate every day.

LC: So you didn't have a roommate or...?

SG: Well we had a dorm, it was a sort of dormitory where you could stay over a few nights a week. You paid a fee annually and then you had to pay so much each night that you stayed, up to a maximum of three nights. So we had a place, and you could use the lounges and things during the day, so we did have a place to hang out and, you know, we met people that way.

LC: Which dorm was that at?

SG: It was called West House. It's on the corner of Brown and Meeting Street.

LC: Okay, great. What courses did you take your freshman year?

SG: Well, everyone ended up taking Freshman Composition. I remember taking that. I had to take French 3. I took Astronomy 1. And I think my other course was Psychology – I was thinking at the time of being a Psych major. So, it was the introductory psychology course.

LC: So you were taking courses with the men also?

SG: Oh, yes.

LC: Okay, great. What do you remember about the social life your freshman year?

SG: You know its funny, I don't really remember a whole lot about my Freshman year. I mean probably because I came to graduate school here and my graduate school memories are very strong. I assume my social life was the kind of thing that everybody did. I mean, I can remember they had things like mixers where, and that was really God awful too! I mean, I can remember walking with some of my friends into the big hall in Alumnae Hall and it was absolutely full of men. And there were maybe a few dozen of us who got there early and you really felt like you were being looked over. So, that was the freshman mixer. And there were other kinds of mixers like that where you went without a date and people would ask you to dance, or not ask you to dance, and maybe you'd date them afterwards. I remember meeting one guy in my freshman class and we dated for a while; I think we had two of the same classes together. There was

someone else that I think I started dating later that year, but again met in class, more than these mixers. Once in a while the fraternities would have open houses and they'd invite, say, a particular dormitory, someone's dormitory to go. But those were kind of like cattle calls.

LC: Did you feel that there was ever a problem meeting students not being one of the residential students?

SG: Yeah, I think there was, but I think part of it was me because many of my friends did make friends with people who were residential students on campus. I had kind of burned myself out in high school as an overachiever and I was in so many organizations I said, I just can't deal with this anymore. I want time to myself. And I also used to study 20-25 hours a week. So, I would hang around with people informally, you know, whether the Gate or stuff like that. But I didn't really want to get involved in any activities that were real organizations. And I think that was a terrible mistake, in retrospect, but that was not how I felt at the time.

LC: So, were you involved in any organizations?

SG: Not on campus. At one point I was involved with the Rhode Island Young Republicans, pretty heavily, from about the time I was half way through my sophomore year until I graduated. In fact, I held office at the state level, so that was pretty time consuming.

LC: What were your feelings about the faculty members at Brown?

SG: Well, I loved some, and I didn't like some others, and some others were just okay. But I don't think I remember most of them. I know my freshman year the man that I loved the most was the man who taught astronomy at the time, who was Professor Charles Smiley. And he was just a wonderful man. You had to take a hard science course at some time and he knew that most of the English and History majors were taking astronomy to satisfy that requirement and he made it very enjoyable. It was a lot of fun, and you still had to learn a lot of stuff, and you had to plow through the material, but he really made it so interesting. And I remember that quite vividly.

LC: Were most of your professors male?

SG: Yes, I think I had, if I can recall, two women professors. I might have had one course where there was a woman as a teaching assistant.

LC: That's in all four undergraduate years?

SG: All four undergraduate years, yeah.

LC: Okay, so what were your courses your sophomore year? Do you remember?

SG: Oh boy. Well I remember, I had started out thinking I might either major in psychology, anthropology, or English, and I decided after my first year, maybe I decided later. My second year I'm sure I was taking anthropology. Some courses, I think I had a course in religious studies, which ended up being sort of a minor for me. I think I took five courses all together.

English courses very definitely, and I am trying to think what the other one would have been. I might have been taking, at least first semester, two courses in religious studies. But I was generally in the humanities, literature.

LC: Did your courses last just a semester or were they all year?

SG: Some of the courses were year courses. I think I was also taking psychology that year too because I remember taking a lot of courses in psychology. Yeah, some of the courses used to be called dash courses which meant that your grade second semester was retroactive to first semester, which was an interesting thing. (She laughs) And some of them were set up to be sort of in sequences even if it was mandatory that you take the whole sequence, so it kind of varied.

LC: By your junior year, had you decided your major?

SG: Yeah, I definitely had decided to major in American Literature and so I still had some, we used to call them distribution requirements, to fulfill. In other words, you had to take a broad spectrum of courses. The way they were defined was kind of odd. Odd so that like you could take linguistics, philosophy, or mathematics. And, unfortunately, I had a real math anxiety and some of the experiences of my friends in the math courses were not too great, so I ended up satisfying that requirement by taking philosophy and linguistics. And I, again in retrospect, am kind of sorry I didn't brave the math courses because I've always been pretty good at them.

LC: And by your senior year?

SG: I was mostly taking courses to finish the requirements in my major because an English major had a lot of required courses. It was like twelve or thirteen courses I think you had to take. I had a course in philosophical analysis of ideas in literature. That was the year I took the \_\_\_\_ year course in linguistics which turned out to be very interesting. I was sorry I hadn't started earlier so I could have taken more linguistics courses, although it was a very challenging course. The rest of my courses, I'm almost positive, were all English courses.

LC: How did your life vary socially from year to year? To your sophomore year?

SG: Well, my sophomore year was a great year – nineteen was a very good year for me. (She laughs.) I was dating a guy that I liked quite a lot and we were going out to a lot of parties and things like that. I hadn't really thought too far ahead about what was going to happen to me when I got out of college. I was just basically kind of enjoying myself. My first two years at Brown, I have to say, I wasn't as academically oriented as I had been in high school, so my grade point average was kind of up one semester and down the next semester, and then it would go back up again and go back down again. And I kind of steadied out in my junior and senior year, and I finished off, I think it was *cum laude*. I think when I was, certainly when I was a junior but maybe I started at the end of my sophomore year, I was dating someone who was a student at Providence college who I had met through my Young Republican Activities. And we pretty much went out steadily for two years, so I didn't really, I meant we went to events on campus, but I was not really tied into the social system on campus.

LC: I was reading that Brown men did not date very many Pembroke women. Is that your experience?

SG: Well, it was a funny kind of situation. For certain big weekend events it was often common that women would be imported from other schools like Wheaton or Smith College or stuff like that. At the same time, I mean there was a fair amount of dating that went on, but there was kind of funny social atmosphere on campus. Maybe this was my experience, but I think plenty of people had this same experience. You were dated and you were taken out on the weekend but the rest of the week it was like you sort of didn't exist. I mean, you would pass each other on the street or whatever. I think, probably, as people moved into their Junior and Senior year they spent more time getting serious and studying together because it was very common for women to marry, you know, the weekend after they graduated from college or that summer. You know, so it was a funny atmosphere. I mean, yeah, there were times when we felt sort of rejected and you were only loved for your course notes and there were other times when basically Brown men tended to marry Brown women. So, I don't know. The first two years, I think, were the worst from that point of view. And the sixties had a very funny, I don't know, social ambiance somehow.

LC: What did the ration of men to women seem to be?

SG: I think it was something like three or two men to one woman, as I recall.

LC: Right. What about the counseling and advising services for the Pembroke women? Was that satisfactory to you?

SG: I don't really think so. On the other hand, I was the sort of person who didn't seek out counseling until, you know, something really major happened. But I know my academic advisor, who is still on campus, and I won't mention his name, was heavily involved in a sex-discrimination case several years later and I don't think he really gave me good academic counseling. I mean, for one thing, I was someone who might prospectively be a major in his department and I didn't feel he spent any time talking to me about it or giving me good advice about some other classes. The Pembroke deans, I think, were pretty decent. I know Charlotte Lowney, in particular, one time gave me some real counseling and help when I was very upset about something.

LC: Okay. But the deans that were the non-Pembroke deans, like your academic advisor, was he an advisor for men and women.

SG: For men and women, yeah.

LC: What was your perception of Rosemary Pierrel?

SG: That's a hard question for me to answer because I'm friends with her now socially, okay. The dean was always kind of up there somewhere. I used to enjoy her when she spoke because she's a very articulate person. I'm not sure I really ever understood what she was talking about when she talked to us about the advantages of a liberal education. I think I had very limited

horizons and perspectives when I was an undergraduate basically from having grown up in a very small town with not too much experience outside that kind of environment.

LC: What was the most important influence on you at Brown?

SG: I don't think I can point to any one thing. It seems to me it was kind of the general environment. I mean, for one thing you were encouraged to try and excel intellectually, and I had experience being the smartest kid at a small country high school where smartness of that sort was not necessarily highly esteemed. And so it was one of those things where I guess the ability to come into the environment where, God, there were people here that were smarter than me even. And where it was expected that you would study hard and you were to express ideas and do things like that. I think that was very important. At the same time it was kind of a double standard because, although you were encouraged to excel, in fact, Pembroke at that time was even more selective than Brown. I think they took one out of eight students and Brown took one out of five. That did create social problems on campus because a lot of the men would recognize that a lot of the women were smarter than they were, or at least had better grades anyway. And I don't think anyone had a real clear idea of what they were going to do with their education after they got out. A career was not simply an automatic assumption. I mean, lots of people, you know, you might go out and work for a few years while you were engaged and then you settled down and brought up a family. Now I had always thought I would have a career of some kind, so, you know, I just kind of moved right ahead. But, I was sort of in a double bind. I mean, you were supposed to excel at the same time it wasn't wholly supported by the environment, I guess is what I'm saying.

LC: What role do you feel that Brown and Pembroke played in your feeling of what was appropriate for you to do as a woman in your life and education in your study at Brown?

SG: Well, I think they sort of reinforced the typical stereotypes of what women's careers and life path should be. I mean, my parents wanted me to be a teacher, society said, "Oh, it's a good thing to be a teacher." I decided I certainly didn't want to teach high school which is probably what prompted my application to graduate school. But, by the way, I attended graduate school at Brown, but this is not where I applied originally. I left and then came back. I'm not sure, again it may have depended on what your parents were like and who your academic advisors were as to whether you had a perception about going out and doing something else. You know, but as I look at the women who graduated, I mean they're all doing women's jobs—you know, social work, or social service agencies, or teaching by and large.

LC: What was your best memory at Brown?

SG: My best memory, boy \_\_\_\_, You know, I think there are so many layers of memory now that are overlaying that I tend to sort of have certain experience and to kind of forget whether they were when I got here as an undergraduate or as a graduate student, whatever. I think in some respects the commencement was very special. I had never been to one; I had no idea what it was like, and to this day I think the commencement experience to me was just a wonderful experience.

LC: Your commencement?

SG: Well mine and also just at Brown in general. I mean, I have gone virtually every year since I graduated either as a spectator or participant in some respect. And I think it's got all the pageantry and all the tradition, yet it's such a wonderful happy time and it's got lots of spontaneity. It had less spontaneity then because actually used to award our degrees to us, each one at a time at the podium and the women had to march, all the way down from the Pembroke campus to the Brown campus, down to the church, file into the seats, file back out, back up the hill, into the right seat on the campus so that they would actually get their degree in hand. So in that sense it was a moment of feeling I had really achieved something and yes, it was all worthwhile. I mean I had lots of other good experiences, but it was one of those moments where it was just sort of a peak.

LC: Did you walk through the gates? I know that now there's a tradition of coming out through the Van Wickle Gates. Was that tradition a then?

SG: Yeah, I can't remember. I really can't remember. For the women I don't know, we certainly walked down through them when we left. I can't remember if we came up- I don't think we did come up through them because we did all our registration and our first week activities on the Pembroke campus. So, no, I don't think we did.

SG: Boy, that's a good question. We were certainly seated separately, I think. Yeah, we had to have been. But I can't remember whether we were in the front, or in the middle somewhere. Really I don't remember.

LC: Okay, we pretty much covered it, but we'll talk a little bit more about relations between male and female students, like in the classrooms.

SG: In the classroom, I mean, it was pretty much the same as in high school. I mean, you know, it was mingled sitting, people would talk if they felt, or not talk if they felt. You know, I had some courses where groups of us would get together to study together afterwards. There was one course in particular that was very difficult and we used to get these huge take home exams. It might have twenty questions and the actual exam would only have three of those questions. And we'd split up and each person would research a certain set of questions and we'd get back together and discuss and hammer out answers and stuff. So those were mixed-groups. You know, it wasn't like we were totally separate, but I mean on different occasions you had sort of different levels of mingling.

LC: Out of the classroom, how much mixing would you say there was?

SG: Not a whole lot.

LC: Did the men come over to the Pembroke campus?

SG: Oh, sure, sure.



LC: Okay, How did you feel about the career counseling?

SG: I don't think I had any. (She laughs.) I mean, possibly there was some but I was kind of, probably by my Junior year I wanted to go to graduate school and nobody gave me counseling about that either. But, I really liked the college environment and I could sort of see myself up there when I saw my professors up there and, it was really funny, it didn't matter that they were all male. You know, I've never really had a problem in a way seeing myself in a male role even when I used to read adventure stories and stuff when I was a kid. I mean, I used to like to play with my brother's trains. You see, my father encouraged me a lot so that was one of those things where I could sort of see myself doing that.

LC: So, do you feel that your counseling wasn't as much because you were a woman or just because it wasn't something that you sought?

SG: I think it was because I didn't really seek it out. You know, I had one professor that I used to go and talk to once in a while, but it was really sort of never stuff like that. It was just more personal chatting and whatever. And part of the thing was just the role expectation didn't seem like, no one had ever suggested to me that, gee, maybe you ought to take economics or something and go into a career in business. You know, it didn't enter into any of the discussions I ever had with high school counselors or with my academic counselor here or any of my friends. I mean, it was really amazing.

LC: What about the rules imposed on women, as far as dress?

SG: Well, it wasn't that there was a dress code per say, but we were not allowed to wear slacks or shorts if we came down into the Brown campus, except for exam week and if it was really cold in the winter then you could wear slacks but you had to wear a coat over them. I always thought it was rather silly and I didn't understand. Dress code – well, there was a kind of an unassumed dress code. I mean everybody knew that you dressed in a sort of preppy way, whatever that was then. I can sort of recall, penny loafers were very big and sweater sets on Pembroke. Toward the end, for some reason I got into this feeling that I wanted to dress up more and I started getting very frilly. I'm not sure, I think that was just me.

LC: Was there a dress code at meal time?

SG: Yes, I believe there was. Well, certain nights, I think it was Wednesday nights, there was a dress code; you had to come properly attired. I think the rest of the time it was fine.

LC: Were you on meal plan?

SG: No, I wasn't.

LC: Oh, ok. Great. In your dorm when you did stay, you stayed sometimes up to three nights a week?

SG: No, I wasn't.

LC: Oh, okay, Great. In your dorm when you did stay, you stayed sometimes up to three nights a week?

SG: Yup, yeah.

LC: Did you have rules on signing in and out?

SG: Oh, yes. I forget exactly the hours. You had to be in earlier on weeknights than you did on weekends, and I think when you got to be Senior you could stay out later. Earlier in the dormitory they had had adult people as housemothers or whatever you want to call them. We actually had seniors who were the basic head-of-houses, as we called them. And the seniors all had to take turns when they were in the house being the one who watched to see that everybody else came in on time and nobody was missing. And I can remember one night some poor Freshman girl, I don't remember if the clock stopped or what, but she came in maybe twenty minutes late, and I had even turned the clock back so I couldn't look up and say, "Oh look, you're not quite late." But, unfortunately, even with that, she came in late and I had to report her to the house council and I can't even remember what kind of punishment there was, I don't think it was anything major if you didn't keep doing it. And I can remember coming in late one night, and I was a junior or senior, I think I was a senior, and my friends were the heads-of-the-house and they treated the whole thing like a big joke, but they made me go through the whole process of explaining why I was late, and wow, what were they going to do with me? But at the same time it was a good system because if for some reason somebody didn't come back, I mean, somebody would be alert to the fact that maybe they were in trouble.

LC: Did you ever break the rules and not get caught?

SG: Well, I didn't have to because I always had the option of going home. I had my own car, and my parents were much more lenient about my staying out late than the University was. So, I always had the option, if I wanted to stay out especially late or something, I would just go home instead.

LC: How far was the drive for you?

SG: Somewhere around fifteen miles. At night it took maybe twenty minutes.

LC: How did you feel about the Brown traditions like May Day, Ivy Day?

SG: I don't know if there was May Day when I was here or not. I've seen pictures of it and maybe they did it and I just never went. I mean, I can't ever recall seeing a May Day procession. Ivy day, I guess that was when we had, we used to have Tuesday convocation and when we were Seniors we had to wear caps and gowns and the juniors were the ones, I think, who had to carry the laurel chain or something. There was some little ceremony which, I mean we sort of all lasted out. I really don't remember it very well.

LC: Did you do a sophomore mask?

SG: I don't remember that either.

LC: Okay.

SG: A lot of that stuff, the class of '67 and '68, in particular, I think were very funny years to be on this campus because a lot of the old traditions had died but we hadn't gone over to the New Curriculum and the whole new system. And you were sort of betwixt and between. So, people appreciated the fact that this was a place with a lot of traditions and very nice ones. At the same time, a lot of the stuff you sort of laughed at. You know?

LC: What about homecoming?

SG: Homecoming was a big deal; it really was a big deal. I mean that's when you agonized for weeks about whether you'd have a date. And I mean we used to go to football games absolutely dressed to the nines, in high heels and good dresses and coats and \_\_\_\_\_ a corsage of flowers and things like that and it was a real major weekend.

LC: It was a whole weekend and then a dance at the end or...?

SG: Well, I think we'd usually start, like on Friday night there'd be house parties and stuff like that and usually you'd go out to dinner. There might be other kinds of activities, I can't remember now. The football game was a big deal. I don't know if there was ever a big dance per say. It was mostly, I think, house parties, but dressy house parties.

LC: House, like fraternity house?

SG: Like a fraternity house or a male dormitory house.

LC: Okay. What about your Junior and Senior skits? Were you part of them?

SG: I don't think I was either.

LC: Okay. I read about that in the papers, like those of 1967, I think. How often do you have convocation?

SG: Every Tuesday?

LC: Was that chapel and convocation?

SG: It wasn't really chapel. I think for the men it was at least earlier, had been chapel. For us it was really, either we had a speaker of some kind or sometimes it would be dramatic presentation. I remember how the actress Helen Hayes spoke.

LC: Was attendance mandatory?

SG: Oh yes.

LC: Do you remember any talks on the role of the liberally educated woman?

SG: Oh, I don't know. We probably had one of those a semester or so. (She laughs.) I don't remember anything specific about them; we used to kind of tune that stuff out.

LC: The people weren't really into it though?

SG: Well, I don't know. Some people probably were, but... (She laughs). My friends weren't. (She laughs.)

LC: Ok. Did you have any female role models here at Pembroke and Brown.

SG: Yeah, I think that Dean Pierrel was definitely a role model, in particular.

LC: How accessible was she?

SG: I don't know. I never really tried to have access to her. She seemed like a fairly jolly sort of person. In fact, she was a jolly sort of person. I don't think her life here was particularly easy, by any means. And I think I have more of an appreciation of what it meant for her to be dean of the college. Basically, she was told, I am led to believe by someone else, that it was put to her: "Well, you can either be dean of the college or you can be married, but you can't be both." And she was also a teacher and a scholar doing academic research. So I think, not even knowing everything that I know today, yeah, she was definitely a role model.

LC: Was it expected that most women graduates would go on and get married later after college?

SG: I think there was a high degree of expectation about that and certainly a lot of my classmates did do that.

LC: Do you feel this was what they wanted or something put upon them?

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SG: I mean, part of it is, you want to do what society expects you to do, and also you have, I think particularly then people were much more afraid of being kind of left behind and not being married. I mean, being a single woman wasn't the greatest thing in the world, at least as far as we could tell. So, we were all brought up to be very obedient, submissive women. I mean, that was part of how it is and you kind of wanted to do the right thing. And of course, it was something that, yeah, you wanted it. I was probably lucky I didn't get it right away because I would have been absolutely miserable.

LC: Do you feel Brown kept up with the general atmosphere, the feelings throughout the country of where women belong? Was Brown with those feelings or different from them?

SG: Gee, I don't really have a feel for that.

LC: Okay. How much effect of all the protesting that happened in the sixties- how much of that spilled onto the Brown campus and the Pembroke campus?

SG: when I was here you were just beginning to see some of that kind of, not even heavy protest, but certainly people who were very socially concerned and very liberal. I can remember one of the guys I dated was certainly very much into protest. But, again, it seemed like it was a small handful of people rather than a kind of more general thing. It became much more general later on. It was interesting to come back here for graduate school and be here in the later sixties and early seventies when the whole environment changed almost overnight, like from one year to the next.

LC: What was your role during your undergraduate years?

SG: I was very conservative, very conservative. I was a Goldwater girl \_\_\_\_\_ and actively campaigned for him.

LC: Okay, how did you feel about the merger of clubs and classes?

SG: I thought it was great. I think it should have been done sooner than it was, but again, the environment just wasn't there for it.

LC: Okay, what about the general merger of 1971? Even though it wasn't during your undergraduate years, were you anticipating it at the time?

SG: I don't think I was anticipating it and I wasn't like totally tuned into that because I was very involved, at that point, in getting through my graduate degree. I think I was probably studying for my comprehensive exams. Sure, I thought it was great. I mean, I realized there would be some losses because women, by having their own organizations on campus like the yearbook and the newspaper, and their own student government, had a chance to perform in leadership roles that they would not have had otherwise at the time I was here. But on the other hand, it seems to me that since then women seem to have an equal shot at many of those positions anyway and they're doing it in the kind of environment they would face in the outside world. So I think it's better, you know, it's not a sheltered environment I guess I was saying.

LC: Do you think that Pembroke's of your class shared this opinion that the two schools should merge?

SG: I'm not really sure. My classmates are a tough bunch. I seriously thought of maybe allying myself with a different class because the men tell me the same thing too, that they tend to have a love-hate relationship to Brown and Pembroke and some of the experiences women had weren't that terrific really. I mean, you got a good education and there were lots of times when you had a

good time, but I think as people moved into and through the women's liberation movement they began to look back and say, well, gee, you know, look what happened when we were in college. And so, it's kind of funny when you talk to people. So, I mean, a lot of people are still very gung hoe and whatever, but when you're trying to deal with them sometimes like trying to get people to do volunteer work for our class, I mean, I'm a class officer. I have two jobs as class officer because they couldn't find anybody to run. John Robinson, who is one of the deans on campus, is the class president. I mean, I think we got picked because we're here.

LC: You're presently a class officer?

SG: I'm presently the Vice President and Secretary for the class and I don't even know anybody. I mean, I'm the wrong person to be doing that job but nobody else wanted it.

LC: Were you part of the student government when you were at Pembroke?

SG: No.

LC: What was your feeling on SGA [Student Government Association]?

SG: Well, I don't know. I sort of looked at it thinking, what is the purpose of all this? Does it really matter? Nancy Buc was the head of the student government at the time and as I recall, she's now a trustee, and I can remember Nancy very well as an undergraduate. And she'd kind of get up and make speeches and try to get us all involved and I think that not many people really even appreciated what she was trying to do. Plus, it was a very strange time to be in college.

LC: Were you at Brown during the birth control pill scandal?

SG: Oh yeah.

LC: What are your recollections from that?

SG: Well, I can certainly remember that when the story hit the front pages of the student papers and the local papers, I mean, of course, everyone was talking about it. But in fact, I knew one of the women who was a Senior who was receiving birth control pills.

LC: What was the story as you remember it?

SG: As I recall the story, it had all been kept very quite. And basically, the Pembroke health services had been with women who I guess they were of age or old enough to know what they were doing, twenty-one I guess, were, in fact, giving them birth control pills. Now in some cases, I think, they were taking birth control pills to regulate their menstrual cycles. In other case, I'm sure, the women wanted birth control pills to control birth because they were actively having sex. I believe the story we got was that all these women were engaged to be married, so this was considered premarital sex as opposed to sex promiscuously. But it had been kept very, very quiet and when the story broke there were all kinds of ripples about it. I don't think any of us felt it

was a terrible thing for people to be having birth control pills, but it had been so quiet – really, really quiet.

LC: I was looking through some of the old Pembroke Record papers, I think. I noticed that, for sure in February of 1967, it said that you were on the Dean's list. Was that a very important thing in your life and for Pembroke's?

SG: Well, it was one of those things if you achieved a certain grade point average, you made it onto the Dean's list and it was a nice thing. You know they wrote home to your parents and said, isn't that good, you know, Susan doing so well and whatever? I think, among some of the women I knew anyway, it was a real matter. Like some of the people would hang there just actually waiting for these lists to come out to see if they made it on it, who else made it on it, and comparing where they stood on the list and all that kind of stuff. I thought it was nice to be able to make the Dean's List, but that was never a primary motivating factor for me.

LC: Did you decide immediately after Brown that you wanted to go to graduate school?

SG: Oh yeah, I decided before I left Brown. I mean, you had to because you had to get all your recommendations together and take the Graduate Record Exam and all that kind of stuff.

LC: What was Brown and Pembroke's role in encouraging you to go on to graduate school?

SG: I don't know that anybody exactly encouraged me. It was just something I felt I really wanted to do and so I did it. I don't think that many women at that time actually went on to graduate school, to be frank.

LC: You did not attend Brown?

SG: Well, I did not apply to Brown. The way I ended up at Brown graduate school is very interesting because, I can't remember all the places I applied, but I was accepted at, and decided to attend, Rutgers. I got to Rutgers, actually I was there maybe a week early, and I had the feeling I was being ram rodded into a lot of courses that I didn't necessarily want to take. I wanted to be a, they had a good department for American Literature there which was what I was interested in and the course they put me in was a year-long introduction to American Literature. I said, this is crazy. I have read everything which is on this syllabus. Besides which, at Brown, I had already arrived at a point where, I mean, I know I had done all the reading, but I was really ready to do something a lot more advanced than just sit down and reread all these books again and talk about them in class. So I was really just disappointed with that. I was disappointed with a course they gave us on how to do literary research because it just seemed like it was total Mickey Mouse. And there were a couple other courses I was just put in without any discussions – you're taking this course. And I said, you know, I had more freedom than this as an undergraduate and nobody's asking me even what is it that I want to do? And so I stayed for a few weeks and I said, I really hate this. So I quit. I didn't even know where I was going to go or what I was going to do. I came back to Brown. I talked to some of the faculty I'd studied with here, including Elmer Blistein; he taught Shakespeare, and he said, why don't you go talk to Hyatt Wagoneer, who was kind of a top guy here in American Literature but somehow I had

never studied with him. Maybe he only did graduate courses, I'm not sure. And he listened to my sad story and he said to me. "Well, it sounds to me like you want to be in American Civilization. Why don't you start going to class and I'll talk to the dean of the graduate school?" Next thing I knew, I was here. And I really enjoyed American Civilization. Because it wasn't just literature, it was other things and because it was a program, not a department, I don't know, it seems like it was a more free wheeling bunch. I know the other students who came in while I was here were just wonderful. I mean, very interesting people – good sense of comradery with each other and a lot of supportiveness and we used to have a good time together besides working very hard. So, that was kind of how I ended up back at Brown. When I had left here as a senior, I didn't want to come back here until I went anyway to another place and realized how good Brown was. (She laughs.) Then I said, "Oh my god, I really didn't know." I really started to miss it, madly.

LC: Were you still commuting from home while you were in graduate school?

SG: The first year. My first year because I was too late to do anything about living, really. My second year I lived in the graduate dormitory, the graduate center, which was the first year it was open. In fact, they hadn't quite finished constructing it, like they didn't have telephones or anything installed when I first got there and it was sort of strange.

LC: Did you do your Masters and your Ph.D. work consecutively here at Brown?

SG: Yeah, Brown's graduate school does not encourage people to come just for Master's degrees, per se, and in American Civilization they had changed the requirements such that you did not have to write a Master's thesis. You could still get the Master's if you had successfully passed the comprehensive exams for the Ph.D., which is how I got the Masters. It was kind of, well you might as well pick up a degree while you're here hanging around working on your dissertation or something. So that's basically how I got the Master's. It was very funny because the man who then was the associate dean of the graduate school sat me down, and I'd studied here or there with him too – gave me recommendations for graduate school, and he'd say, "Well, you know Miss Geary I'm constitutionally disapproving of unearned degrees, but I guess it's your right to have this so I'll find the paperwork." I thought yeah right. (She laughs.)

LC: Now the reason he was resisting was because...?

SG: He thought you should have to write a masters dissertation?

LC: Okay. But you did write a thesis for your Ph.D.?

SG: Oh yes, I sure did.

LC: Okay. What kind of obstacles in your life after Brown, including job and work, have you encountered, especially as a woman?

SG: I think a lot of the obstacles were in my own mind rather than obstacles per se. I think in some ways I kept assuming that certain conditions would hold, so, therefore, I didn't even try to test them. And I think I was never brought up to be a real risk-taker and a problem I still have is



that I'm really afraid to take risks. So that's something, in a way, society inculcated in me, but my parents, in particular, I think, did. I can't say that I ever felt particularly discriminated against in any of my jobs because I was a woman. And again, being in an academic environment which tends to be a lot more liberal, despite all the cases that Brown has been through. I don't really think there were obstacles as a woman. The one thing that I think got to be an obstacle for me was it took me a very long time to go through and get my Ph.D. and I guess I was thirty-one when I finished and at that point the economy was terrible. Literature (?) teaching positions had shrunk enormously and I had to ask myself, well, do I want to go through this business that so many of my friends are doing where they would have a one year contract here and a three year contract there and they were constantly moving, trying to teach all kinds of courses, trying to get publications, trying to make connections in their fields, trying to get tenure. And I said I could be thirty-eight or thirty-nine years old and I don't get tenure, what am I going to do then? But there weren't even any jobs around that were particularly attractive, so, by the time I had finished my degree I had actually decided that was not what I was going to do anymore. And that's a hard thing to give up. It took me several years, even after I got out of the academic field to kind of put that behind me. Now I mean it's almost too late. I've got too much catching up to do.

LC: So when you were finished with all your studying, did you come to work for Brown?

SG: Not directly. I finished all the work basically for my Ph.D. in March or February of 1976 and I had applied for a job with the State of Rhode Island, Department of Education. They had gotten some kind of grant from the federal government to hire unemployed teachers and you had to be a Rhode Island resident and there were certain, I don't know, restrictions on it. So, I applied for this job and I basically forgot about it in the rush of finishing my dissertation and everything else. And I got a call about a week after I finished offering me the job. And I said, well this is great because I am absolutely rock bottom poor. I mean my wardrobe consisted of nothing but jeans, turtlenecks and I had maybe \$140 in the bank and I said, you know, wonderful, I'll take it. And I was there for like a year and a half. But that was not something I had envisioned- it was not meant to be a permanent job. It wasn't something I had envisioned as a permanent job and I certainly wouldn't have stayed. It was God awful. But it gave me a year and a half to look around and think about what I wanted to do. And I said, you know, I really liked being on a college campus and I like the environment. And in the meantime, again this is what is so funny, it came around – my tenth reunion at Pembroke and they needed a reunion gift chairman. Someone suggested me. Now why they suggested me... because I never made a contribution larger than five dollars because I never had any money while I was in graduate school? I hadn't been that active in the class. But someone said, oh Sue. And I said, well this is a chance to see if I would like to do fundraising and I had been thinking about development anyway. And I said, this is a real hands-on experience for me, and at the end of that year I said, yeah, I can do this. And the person who was my staff contact for the Brown Annual Fund left at the end of the year and the job came open, so... I applied for it and I got it. I mean, it just all happened all of a sudden very nicely for me.

LC: Okay. Did you work during your educational years?

SG: Oh, yeah. You mean as an undergraduate, yes.

LC: What kind of work did you do?

SG: Well I worked summers. One summer I worked as a bill collector, believe it or not. I worked in my high school library one summer – it was actually a pretty nice job. Two summers I worked at Brown for what was then Educational Measurements. Now I think they're called Institutional Research or something like that. And what we used to do was take the incoming freshman class' College Board scores and recalibrate the percentiles because everybody fell at the upper end, so you know, the educational testing's percentiles didn't discriminate very well. And, since freshman all had to take these other tests, you spent two days taking tests, we would, in September, score all those tests and whatever. And then the rest of the year you'd be doing percentiles and analysis of the results and various kinds of statistical work.

LC: Right. Did you ever marry?

SG: Yes, late in life.

LC: Late in life?

SG: Forty-one years old.

LC: Okay, great. How did your marriage affect your career?

SG: I don't know. I was already established in my career and my husband, who is older than I am, is well established in his career. He's on faculty at Brown. Although, I knew him for quite a long time before we married. I mean, when I went to put the marriage announcement in the *Providence Journal*, the woman asked me, "How long have you known your husband-to-be?" and I said, "Oh, fifteen years," and she almost fell off her chair. (She laughs.)

LC: You've kept your maiden name?

SG: I kept my maiden name, yeah.

LC: Do you have any children?

SG: I have no children.

LC: How about volunteer work?

SG: I don't know. I have done some, not a whole lot because the job I have here, or now, which I've had for the last ten years, involves doing an awful lot of stuff at night and on weekends which is when you would normally do volunteer work. And so it's very hard to make a long-term commitment to somebody because you have to miss so many meetings. I have done some stuff. I was involved at one point with Opportunities Industrialization Center. You know, now I'm a class officer. At one point, I was the head class agent for my class. I mean it was kind of like a bus man's holiday. I mean you're doing as a volunteer what you're doing for your job anyway, which is rounding up people to make telephone calls.

LC: What about when you were in college? Did you do volunteer work?

SG: As I said, for a couple of years, I was heavily involved in politics, state politics, so that was, I suppose that's volunteer work. I can remember at one point volunteering for the Lippitt Hill Tutorial Service, but I didn't last very long. I didn't know what I was supposed to do with kids there. I had, supposedly, to tutor. I mean we had no training or preparation, really. But I could see it, you were just sort of brought there and you ended up with either six or eight little kids who were all kind of bouncing off the walls, and so I pulled out of that because I felt I wasn't really being effective particularly.

LC: Were other students volunteering a lot when you were at school?

SG: Oh, some were. I don't think there was as much sense when you were a student to participate in public service, but of course, after people graduated that was part of your life expectations \_\_\_\_\_ to the community somehow. And I sometimes feel guilty, I don't think I do my share really for the community.

LC: What impact has your education had in your life?

SG: Well, I guess I wouldn't be who I am without it. (She laughs.) I think it's given me a kind of intellectual toughness. I'm not by nature a tough person. But I think, intellectually, I'm tough; I can face a lot of things. I certainly have a strong analytical ability that will get me through situations even if in the beginning I kind of throw up my hands and say, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" You have to grab yourself mentally and sit yourself down and say, okay, now let's look at the situation. So in that sense it does give you that, which gives you an enormous amount of self-confidence. And I started out with very little self-confidence. I use to be actually quite shy. Its funny that I'm in the business I'm in because I used to be absolutely petrified at picking up the telephone and calling a stranger, and now I sort of do it without even thinking about it.

LC: You're the Associate Director for the Brown Fund?

SG: Yeah.

LC: You guys raise money for... Brown?

SG: Well, we raise money for Brown. Basically what we're trying to do is get money for current operating expenses, which means it's already in the budget; it's being expended while we're sitting here talking about it. It's kind of the bread and butter. I have had occasions to raise money for other purposes- special projects and things like scholarship money or library funds, stuff like that.

LC: Great. I think we've got it all.

[End of interview]