

Transcript – Elaine Barbara Frank, '39

Interviewer: Jane Lancaster

Interview Date:

Interview Time:

Location: Pembroke Hall, Brown University, Providence, RI

Length: 1 video file; 33:20

Jane Lancaster: [00:00] Elaine, what class were you?

Elaine Frank: I was in the class of 1939.

JL: That is a long time ago.

EF: It certainly is a long time ago. We've had many, many reunions.

JL: So why did you go to Brown?

EF: Well I'm a transfer. I graduated from LaSalle Junior College – it's now LaSalle College.

JL: Where is that?

EF: That's in Auburndale, Massachusetts. And I took a dramatic course because I was always interested in dramatics and I was persuaded by the English teacher there to go on. So I came to Pembroke.

JL: So you did two years at LaSalle?

EF: Yes.

JL: And then two more in –

EF: Well it was a little more than two because I hadn't taken college courses.

JL: So how long did you do at Pembroke?

EF: Two and a half years. [01:00]

JL: And you graduated in?

EF: In May, I guess, of 1939.

JL: And the subject was?

EF: English.

JL: English.

EF: English Literature.

JL: And you were active in the dramatic society?

EF: Yes. Yes, I was. I was in – well, it started off with elocution at the age of six and I just have always continued in drama, and in high school I was in many plays, and I was in Komians and Sock & Buskin. And then after LaSalle, I went to a summer theater, Lake Shore Players, but I realized I couldn't keep selling myself and that wasn't the area for me to be in, and so I trained to be a teacher and I took a graduate year after '39 and I was one of the first graduates of Hope High to go back as a student teacher. [02:00]

JL: Did you do your graduate course at Pembroke?

EF: Yes. At that time, they had a year after graduation in which you took student teaching and educational courses.

JL: What did you teach at Hope?

EF: I taught Public Speaking and Dramatics. (laughter)

JL: How long were you there?

EF: I was there a year and then I was married and they did not hire married teachers. But for a time I was a substitute.

JL: When did they start hiring married teachers?

EF: I really don't remember exactly what – what year it was.

JL: So did you teach somewhere else after that?

EF: No, I didn't teach any place else but – except at Brown. [03:00]

JL: And what did you do at Brown?

EF: In '49 – '45, I was assistant professor in English and I taught Spoken English. At that time all sophomores were required to take a course in Spoken English to improve their speech and their ability to give speeches.

JL: So that was '49 to '55?

EF: Yes, 1944 to 1945. And by the end of the year I was very pregnant. (laughter) And then when my third child was ready to go to kindergarten, the city of Providence needed a speech therapist, but I didn't have a master's degree so I matriculated at Boston University and got my master's degree in Education, specializing in Language and Speech. [04:00] I did my clinical training at Meeting Street School and stayed there for 25 years.

JL: Wow.

EF: But while I was there – while I was there, a number of years I worked part-time and the other time I was a speech therapist at Henry Barnard and I had the title of assistant professor at Rhode Island College. But then Meeting Street wanted me full-time and I had to give it up.

JL: Can I go back to Brown for a minute?

EF: Yes, certainly.

JL: You said you were in Sock & Buskin and the other –

EF: Komians.

JL: Komians. Tell me about what you did there.

EF: [05:00] Well, in Komians, I acted in various plays. Pembroke always had a play going it seemed and I played in many, many of them. And I enjoyed that very much, and also another thing that I did while I was at Pembroke, I represented Pembroke at a declamation contest at Mount Holyoke.

JL: Tell me about that.

EF: Well, various colleges sent representatives – I think there was one from Rhode Island College – and we gave narrative poems, and it was very interesting that Pembroke was interested in sending someone. [06:00]

JL: And was Komians just a – simply a Pembroke dramatic society, or was it Brown men and women?

EF: No, Sock & Buskin was Brown and was men and women, and we had Brown students playing the men's parts –

JL: Within Komians?

EF: Within Komians.

JL: But it was a Pembroke organization.

EF: Yes, yes.

JL: Did you grow up in Providence? Yes, if you went to Hope High.

EF: Yes, I did. I did.

JL: When you went to college, did you expect that you would end up in Brown, or – ?

EF: No, I had no idea that I would end up at a four-year college.

JL: Because?

EF: Well, I wasn't that great a student at the time. (laughter)

JL: Well you must have been somehow. [07:00]

EF: Well I might have been a late bloomer. (laughter) I know one of my children were very late bloomers. (laughter)

JL: So what did your family think about your transfer to Brown?

EF: Well they were – they, I think, were very, very pleased. Very pleased. My mother never went to college, but when she graduated from high school she said she read so much she practically gave herself a college education. So she was always interested.

JL: Did your father go to college?

EF: No.

JL: No? Were they – how long since they came to the United States?

EF: Well my father was born in Providence and my mother came when she was an infant.

JL: From?

EF: From Lithuania.

JL: From Lithuania?

EF: Yes.

JL: OK. When you transferred, did you have to do an interview to get here?

EF: Yes.

JL: Did you – who interviewed you? Do you remember that?

EF: [08:00] I think – no I don't exactly remember who did interview me. I can picture her though.

JL: Go on then.

EF: Very – well she was an attractive woman. She had short, brownish hair. Maybe her name was Metcalf, but I don't think so. But I remember Miss Rudd, the gym teacher.

JL: Tell me about Miss Rudd.

EF: Well I didn't want to take gym. I didn't – I wanted to spend my time doing something else, and she said just because you slept last night didn't mean you didn't have to sleep tonight. So I had to take gym. (laughter)

JL: What was she like?

EF: Well she was a very rugged woman, very strong looking. [09:00]

JL: And the dean you talked about might have been Miss Morriss?

EF: Yes, it was Miss Morriss. At least I got the M right.

JL: You did.

EF: Yes, yes. It was definitely Miss Morriss.

JL: Can you tell me anything else about her?

EF: Well I remember she was very pleasant, very acceptive, and she was a good listener and she made me feel very comfortable so that I could tell her, you know, my desires of what I was interested in. She was very easy to speak to.

JL: And did she interview you in this building in her office?

EF: Yes, she really did, downstairs on the first floor. At the right –

JL: Okay. What was her office like?

EF: I don't remember except it was light and there was a plant somewhere. (laughter) [10:00]

JL: And did you have classes in this building?

EF: Oh, yes I did. I did have classes in this building.

JL: In this room?

EF: I mu- yes. In fact, in this room I had a wonderful course in Shakespeare.

JL: Tell me about it.

EF: Well, the professor's name – last name – was Brown and he was really an actor. I think he did play probably with the Barker players and he just acted out the scenes and really made Shakespeare come alive. In fact, I don't have any notes left but I've never thrown away the notes from that course, and I know just where they are in my home and I treasure them. I've never looked at them. I was very disappointed when my children had courses in Shakespeare that they weren't interested in my notes at all. (laughter)

JL: [11:00] Do you remember the library upstairs?

EF: Well not exactly. Not exactly. Because I think I visited so many libraries in our travels that I've gotten them mixed up with other ones.

JL: Well it's got a very big fireplace at either end, and sort of a pointy, very high ceiling. But clearly you didn't use that one, maybe you used the Hay?

EF: No, no, I think I used this library, yes. Yes I did. Yes.



JL: So what – where else do you remember particularly on campus where you had classes or where you went?

EF: Well I had some classes also at Brown.

JL: Brown, where?

EF: Brown – which building? One of the old buildings. I had a class in Poetry. [12:00] I was able to take a graduate course while I was an undergraduate in poetry and I remember writing different kinds of poems, narratives, sonnets, and it was a very small class. I think there were only about 14 of us in the class around a long table.

JL: Male and female?

EF: Yes.

JL: And the –

EF: Mostly male though.

JL: Really?

EF: Yes.

JL: And the Shakespeare class in here, was that all women or – ?

EF: Yes, all women.

JL: So, explain to me. Some of the courses you did, if they were straight Pembroke courses, they would be all women?

EF: Yes.

JL: But you could take courses at Brown which would be co-ed?

EF: Certain courses, I think. That course was a graduate course late in the afternoon – it was a four o'clock class.

JL: Did you live at home? [13:00]

EF: Yes.

JL: So you were a City Girl?

EF: And I walked – yes.

JL: So you walked from President Avenue?

EF: Right. (laughter) I think at that time it probably took me less than ten minutes. (laughter)

JL: It doesn't take – I walked here actually. (laughter) It doesn't take long. So did you use West Hall?

EF: No. No, we didn't use West Hall. So that – I wasn't so friendly with those girls that lived in the dorm.

JL: So were the City Girls – did they – were they friendly with each other?

EF: Yes, and some of them had already been friendly previously to even coming to college.

JL: So you met up again with some Hope High girls who had been in your class?

EF: Yes, yes.

JL: So what do you think you missed by not being in the dorm?

EF: Oh, I think I missed a great deal. [14:00] Of course I had lived at junior college, so I had that experience of living away from home, but walking back and forth and using the library for studying really didn't have the same social relationships that you would if you lived in a dorm. I think I lost a great deal by not doing that.

JL: Did you get some of these relationships by being in the dramatic societies?

EF: Yes, yes I did.

JL: So, tell me more about the dynamics of these organizations.

EF: Well I really don't remember so much about the dynamics of interrelationships because while the rehearsals would be going on you would be studying when you weren't on the stage taking part, and so that I would come and go and be very busy and not spend that much time just socializing. [15:00]

JL: And do you remember what plays you were actually in?

EF: Well I really have – I have a scrapbook that I brought with me. (laughter)

JL: Okay, look at that. You were in a lot.

EF: Yes, I were– and also while I was here, I was also in a repertory theater group called the Lippitt Players and they played in Cumberland, and so every week I was in a different play. And I think that was probably in my junior year.

JL: Sounds like a lot of work.

EF: Yes, and there was a lot of memorization involved.

JL: What do you think you got out of coming to Brown – to Pembroke? [16:00]

EF: Well I think I got a great – a great deal. I certainly felt I matured and I became more focused. And I did form some lifelong friendships.

JL: Have you been involved in your class reunions?

EF: No, not really. No.

JL: That's interesting because you're so close.

EF: Yes. I've attended some of them, yes.

JL: What about some of these sort of Ivy Day things, some of these traditional celebrations? Did you take part in those when you were here?

EF: No, I don't think so.

JL: Now you came during the – well, it was the end of the Depression, or middle of the Depression I suppose you started? – [17:00]

EF: Yes.

JL: What was it like going to college in the later '30s?

EF: Well, I think I was very fortunate that the Depression didn't seem to affect me in any way, except that I know that if I was going on to college, it had to be as a day student.

JL: Because it was much less expensive?

EF: Yes. Yes, that was the primary reason.

JL: But your family was not particularly affected by the Depression?

EF: No.

JL: (inaudible)

EF: Which was very fortunate.

JL: What did your father do?

EF: Well my father carried on his father's business of wholesale paper bags and they went around to various stores selling all different kinds of supplies, and he was a salesman for the company. [18:00]

JL: And the junior college you went to, was that a female college?

EF: Yes.

JL: So you had four years – four and a half years – of single-sex education –

EF: Yes. Yes, but when you were at Pembroke you really didn't feel that way because there were so many young boys around actually.

JL: (laughter) So you had classes with them and it – particularly as a day – as a home-based City Girl –

EF: Yes.

JL: – without the dorm experience. You didn't have much of that single-sex –

EF: No.

JL: – experience, did you?

EF: No.

JL: And a high proportion of the girls were City Girls, is that right?

EF: Yes, but in that time we weren't so much aware as you are now of whether you're just girls or just boys. [19:00] Now it's entirely different.

JL: You think it's different? How do you think it's different?

EF: Well, I think that growing up you'd have more friends who are male than when you're just with girls all the time, and that you'd treat males just like you would treat a girlfriend as you're growing up.

JL: Right. And so people in your teenage years went around in groups mostly?

EF: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

JL: Mixed groups.

EF: Yes, I did definitely have a group of certain boys and certain girls who met every Saturday night at different family homes. [20:00]

JL: So you did this at people's homes, you didn't go out somewhere?

EF: No, no. And their families were always home and it was the same group.

JL: And how did – how did you get to know this group of people?

EF: Well I really don't know how it started because it wasn't just if they lived next door to you. It might have been through school. I think it might have been through high school.

JL: And some of them went to Brown or Pembroke and some of them went elsewhere?

EF: No, I think most of them went elsewhere, yes.

JL: Was Brown difficult to get into in those days?

EF: I don't – I don't think so. Not competitive as it is today. (laughter) [21:00] My granddaughter wanted to go to Brown so badly. She did go to Berkeley in – you know, U of California in Berkeley. But she really wanted to go to Brown, and then she's a freshman in medical school and she wanted to go to Brown Medical School. (laughter) But she's at another medical school, at New York Medical College.

JL: I've read that there was a Jewish quota at Lincoln – at Pembroke. Is that still in operation?

EF: I really don't know. I don't know.

JL: I think it was –

EF: I don't really think it is.

JL: It was?

EF: I don't know, but I wouldn't think that they'd have one now.

JL: Not now, but I'm just thinking that in the '30s they might have still had one.

EF: Yes, but I wasn't aware of it.

JL: So they kept very quiet.

EF: If they had one, yes. (laughter)

JL: [22:00] I think it may have applied more to the dorm – to the residential students –

EF: Perhaps.

JL: – than to the day girls. Should we look at your scrapbook and things?

EF: Well, alright. I want you to look at the cover of this because I had red hair.

JL: Was that you?

EF: No. (laughter)

JL: That's a nice picture. So tell me about some of your memories from that.

EF: Well, I remember – well, you know, I was in so many different plays that I really don't remember any one particular play. [23:00] Now this was – are you going to be able to see this? This was when I was at the summer theater at the Lake Shore Players.

JL: And where is the Lake Shore Players?

EF: That was near Lowell.

JL: OK.



EF: And then in the Komians I was in a play called *Sister Beatrice, The night of January 16<sup>th</sup>, Fresh Fields*.

JL: Fresh – who is *Fresh Fields* by?

EF: *Fresh Fields* was Ivor Novello.

JL: Oh, so is that a musical?

EF: [24:00] No, no. I was never in musicals. I have no singing voice whatsoever.

JL: What kind of parts did you play?

EF: Well I usually played ingénues. I played ingénues. But when I was at the Lake Shore Players, I played ingénues also, but when I was in the Lippitt Players, I played all kinds of different character parts. All different ages and all. This is from the intercollegiate poetry reading evening that I told you about at Mount Holyoke.

JL: And that was in 1938, was it?

EF: Yes, 1938. And I was in a freshman play, *The Necklace is Mine*. [25:00] And that I directed. I also directed some plays at the Komians. And also, I was in a program of marionettes.

JL: Where was that held?

EF: That was held on Benefit Street, and I don't know the name of the building, but as you come along Benefit Street from Olney Street, it's the first very large brick building, and I don't know what it's used for now but it used to have all different kinds of programs going on at that –

JL: Is it on the right?

EF: Yes.

JL: I think it's something to do with the cathedral now, isn't it?

EF: Perhaps, yes. So that you can see that I was very involved in dramatics.

JL: [26:00] Right. Can I see?

EF: Yes, certainly.

JL: – ask you about some of this. So at Hope High, you were in plays?

EF: Yes. I was in a play called *Ghost Train*, yes.

JL: The dramatics club of LaSalle Junior College, 1934. *The Ghost Train*. There we are, Hope High School, 1939. But you had left by then?

EF: But I was a student teacher then.

JL: Oh, I see. So you were actually in the play or were you directing it?

EF: I think I helped direct it.

JL: Here we go. And this is LaSalle. [27:00] *So This Be London*. (laughter) Very pretty gown. It's great. "Green stockings was lauded for players, fine vim and spirit." So which one is you in that? That's you, I see. Looking very pretty. So you were very busy, and then you –

EF: But I think the most important years of my life was when I was at Meeting Street School. I was on the program of the children under three and they were all referred by the medical profession. These were handicapped babies, and my field was language development and feeding

problems, and then I taught other professionals there. [28:00] Because we did cross-modality. We trained each other so if someone was watching us through the two-way mirror, they wouldn't know whether we were a physical therapist, or an occupational therapist, or a speech and language therapist. We all did our evaluations in our own field and made programs for others to follow. But I think that was the most rewarding –

JL: And you were there for many years.

EF: Yes.

JL: And in a sense that came out of your experiences at college, didn't it? With –

EF: Yes, it did. It really did, of helping the students improve their speech and their delivery and ability to communicate inter-relationally. [29:00]

JL: I'm just seeing here that you wrote a play as well. *The King's Niece*. And *Henry VIII's Study*. Very busy. Some of these must be at Brown. Lake Shore, Lippitt... Lippitt... Elaine Frank. *Hay Fever*. That's Noël Coward, isn't it?

EF: Yes, yes. [30:00] A lot of history.

JL: Yeah. And here's Hans Bulow's *Last Puppet*, 30 Benefit Street. Here you are. All these things I didn't know. It's amazing. *Pride and Prejudice*. What were you in *Pride and Prejudice*?

EF: I really don't remember. (laughter)

JL: You're one of the Bennett sisters, I think. So what do you think about – well, your conclusions, if you like – about the single-sex – well, the education you got at Pembroke?

EF: Well I think education – you get out of it sometimes what you put into it, and the professors really certainly direct you, but some professors talk with you and some professors just read to

you and some professors really interrelate with you so that, as a whole, I suppose whatever I got out of it was the groundwork that they laid but whatever I took away from it – (laughter) [31:00]

JL: Yeah, and you took away from it this enthusiasm for speech.

EF: Yes, and for learning.

JL: And for learning.

EF: And for learning. I still go to lectures twice a week.

JL: Where do you go?

EF: Well, at Temple Emmanuel, they have a group called the Leisure Club and we have two lectures on Mondays and two lectures on Thursday morning, and we sometimes have Brown professors from different colleges. [32:00] Today, we had a speaker from University of Rhode Island. And it's the way of keeping your mind active and learning more.

JL: So it's a whole lifelong learning thing.

EF: Yes, life is learning from day to day.

JL: Yeah, absolutely. Well this has been – I've learned so much about you. Thank you so much. I didn't know any of this. We nod in the street.

EF: Yes, yes.

JL: This has been very, very interesting. Thank you so much.

EF: You're welcome. Thank you for asking me.

JL: It's a pleasure. Thank you.

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