

Transcript – Rita Ann Chao, class of 1969

Narrator: Rita Ann Chao  
Interviewer: Mary Murphy  
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Mary Murphy: Okay, so Good morning. Good morning to our listeners of our newest Pembroke Center Oral History Project alumnae interview. I'm here this morning with a Brown University graduate who will introduce herself in just a moment. I will set the scene by saying it is July 23, 2019. And this interview is being recorded via FaceTime. So location is dependent. I'm in Providence. Okay, good morning, Rita. Could I please have you introduce yourself?

Rita Chao: Good morning, Mary. I'm delighted to have this interview with you. My name is Rita Chao Hadden. I attended Brown from 1965 to 1969. [1:00] I was an applied mathematics major with a minor in studio art. And my years at Brown were wonderful. Difficult, but wonderful. Difficult, because applied mathematics at that time was a fairly challenging major with very few women in it. And not that much help outside of classes. But wonderful, because after graduation, that degree in applied math helped open many doors for me, including getting my first job. At that time, there was still a lingering [2:00] remnant of the fact that careers open to women were fairly limited. It was just the beginning of things opening up. I had married another Brown graduate who was one year ahead of me, Bill Hadden, in fact, on the day before graduation at Brown –

MM: So, Rita, I'm going to stop you and just ask that you back up a little bit so that our listeners can have a little more context as you begin your story.

RC: Okay.

MM: So I think that's helpful to just go back a little bit. So if you –

RC: Okay.

MM: If you could, please tell us a bit about your childhood, where you were born, [3:00] and raised, and for your purposes, when you came to the States, a little bit about your parents, if you might share about that first.

RC: Okay. So I was born of Chinese parents in Hanoi, North Vietnam, during the war with the French. In fact, 40 days after I was born, the war had become so intense that my mother had to evacuate Hanoi with my twin sister and me. We were around three pounds each. And it was a very difficult time for my mother because she knew nothing about children. Well, I can tell you more about that later. [4:00] But my father couldn't go with her to South Vietnam, Saigon, because of his job with the Bank of China.

At that time, this was before the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), so it was not the PRC's Bank of China. It was the Taiwan Bank of China. My father had to remain in Hanoi to close up the bank. So here's my mother with these two tiny twin daughters. She had to evacuate from Hanoi to Saigon. She knew almost no one in Saigon. She did not speak Vietnamese because she's from Hong Kong. My parents met in Calcutta, India. It's a very complex love story. If you want more details let me know.

MM: Yeah.

RC: In any case, [5:00] so I said –

MM: Can I pause?

RC: I'm sorry?

MM: Is your mother Chinese or is she...?

RC: My mother is ethnically Chinese, so is my father.

MM: Okay.

RC: They met in Calcutta during World War II, because he was posted to Calcutta by the Bank of China.

MM: Oh, okay.

RC: And my mother was there, because during World War II, Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese army for four years. And it was not safe for her to remain there, since the first year after the Japan Army took over Hong Kong, over 20,000 women were raped.

MM: Yes.

RC: And every night there would be Japanese soldiers who were intoxicated who came to my mother's home, and wanted to go from room to room searching [6:00] for young women. So eventually, her grandfather said she had to leave. So my mother found a way to go to mainland China. We lived in the southern part of mainland China. And he taught English there –

MM: Okay.

RC: – for only two semesters before the Japanese army invaded Guilin.

MM: Yeah.

RC: And so my mother had to run again. And her escape was a very dramatic story. But eventually she ended up in Kunming in the western part of China. And she tried to find a job teaching there, but could not find one, nor could she find tutoring work. Eventually, because it was war time, and there was rationing, she was living with some Hong Kong [7:00] cousins in Kunming. And her cousin was the liaison between the British and Americans during the war. So her cousin told my mother that the British Consulate in Kunming was giving exams and that she should go and sit for the exams, to see if she could get a job. Well, to make a story short, she did

better than anybody else at the exams that day. And she was given a job with the British intelligence as a translator –

MM: Fabulous!

RC: A translator from English to Chinese, Chinese to English. She, eventually got transferred to Calcutta.

MM: Got it.

RC: She was along the River Kwai, at one point –

MM: Wow.

RC: –And then got transferred to Calcutta.

MM: Oh, wow.

RC: And [8:00] Calcutta was where my mother met my father, who was posted by the Bank of China there. After they married (they married after the war ended) he took her back to Hanoi. He returned to the bank in Hanoi, and that's where we were born.

MM: So you and your sister were your parents' first children?

RC: First children.

MM: Okay, first children.

RC: First children. And so we lived in Saigon for 12 years, interrupted by four years in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

MM: Okay.

RC: Saigon did not have a higher education system for those who studied French (I went to a French school, from kindergarten to the equivalent of high school level). And the reason I went to French school, instead of Chinese school, was because my parents started me in Chinese school, but one year after I started, the government of Vietnam passed laws forbidding the teaching of Chinese in Chinese schools (except as a foreign language). The Vietnamese resented the Chinese.

MM: Right

RC: The Chinese in Vietnam were the [10:00] traders, the business people. They were good at conducting commerce and so there was a lot of resentment. And many laws were passed that forbade Chinese people, for example, to do business in Vietnam or to own property, unless they have Vietnamese nationality. Now, my family did not have to have Vietnamese nationality because my father was with the Bank of China, and the bank in those days worked like the State Department, you can keep your own nationality, you were there to represent the bank. And you were posted for a number of years and then you might get posted somewhere else.

But anyway, I ended up spending 12 years in Vietnam [11:00] in Saigon and, and four years in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. When I was 16, and reached a point in French education, where I really could only go for one or two more years and then that was the end, because there was no French university in Saigon. So if I want to go to the university, I would have to attend the Vietnamese University, but since I am not a Vietnamese speaker, I could not attend a Vietnamese school. And so my parents wanted to send me to either England, America, or France. We had family in all three of those countries, which meant that my parents could send us to one of those [12:00] families. Now, the family that wanted us the most was one of my father's brothers, who was a medical doctor in Maine, the state of Maine.

MM: Okay.

RC: He was an Ophthalmologist and was enthusiastic about taking both twins to complete their high school education in Maine.

MM: How did you feel about leaving home?

RC: Well, it took us two years to get a visa because the Vietnamese government would not give us an exit visa.

MM: Wow.

RC: The government said that because we were born in Vietnam, that automatically made us Vietnamese citizens, even though we held Taiwan passports.

MM: Yeah. [13:00]

RC: They would not give us an exit visa. My father was a man of integrity, he did not pay bribes.

MM: Okay.

RC: And without bribes we were getting nowhere for close to two years.

MM: Wow.

RC: And finally, my father had to go to a Catholic bishop to ask for help, because that Bishop happens to be the brother of President Diem.

MM: Okay. Oh, yes. Mm hmm.

RC: So we got our exit visa within a week. And so for our family, it was like a release.

MM: Yes. Okay.

RC: it was a release. So we left –

MM: So you were about 16?

RC: We left in ten days.

MM: Oh, wow. Okay.

RC: We left within ten days because we were [14:00] afraid something else would happen and we wouldn't be able to leave again.

MM: Wow.

RC: So we came to Maine.

MM: Do you remember – can I stop because I think this is very important for others students and people who go through the transition, emigrating. Do you remember what the trip itself was like? The day you left your parents?

RC: The trip itself was sadly uneventful because we left with my mother and stopped in Hong Kong first, because that's her hometown. We didn't have any winter clothes in Vietnam, because it was so hot. Maine, we knew, was going to be very cold. So we stopped in Hong Kong to buy just a couple pieces of winter [15:00] clothing.

MM: What time of year was it? Do you remember?

RC: Yes, we left for America, I believe, it must have been the end of July.

MM: Okay.

RC: Around the end of July, we spent some time in Hong Kong. So we arrived in America probably in August sometime.

MM: Okay.

RC: And I remember that the first six months I was in Maine, I came down with pneumonia.

MM: Of course. Yeah. I could see that.

RC: Because the difference in temperature was pretty dramatic. And it was a struggle the first six months because we were fluent French speakers. We only spoke English hesitantly, although we had studied English as a foreign language.

MM: Yep.

RC: So we knew English vocabulary and the grammar, but we did not have [16:00] a chance to practice the conversation. So it took us about six months, if not more, to come up to speed in terms of speaking English. And so I remember the first three months we went to a public high school in Maine...

MM: Where in Maine? do you remember it?

RC: Yes, it was in Auburn, Maine.

MM: Auburn.

RC: Which was the twin city of Lewiston where Bates College is.

MM: Oh, wow. Okay.

RC: Right. So Auburn is a very small town.



MM: Yes.

RC: And so the first three months we were at the public high school, it was called Edward Little High School, the first three months, I failed just about every spelling test that was given. And that was a wakeup call for us. Because my sister and I [17:00] had always been at the top of our classes in the French school. We were always number one and number two. And so to go from that to flunking spelling tests was a wakeup call. So we spent a lot of time studying the two years that we were in high school in Maine. We joined the high school as juniors.

MM: Okay.

RC: In the junior year, we applied to college.

MM: Oh, yeah.

RC: And I applied to Brown, for early decision.

MM: Can I just stop you for a minute? And so how old were you when you arrived in the United States?

RC: 16.

MM: You were 16? Okay. So do you remember some of those conversations you had with your sister as you were getting these test scores that weren't good, and kind of maybe panicking a little bit about how you were going to get this pulled together? Do you remember any of those conversations with her? [18:00]

RC: Well, ironically, because we knew ourselves to be good students we did not panic. We knew it was a matter of time before we were going to adapt to the language, adopt the language and, and adapt to the circumstances because it was not only a different language, it was a different

education system. The French do not educate the way the Americans educate. The French school that we attended was taught by French professors. And it was using the French education system at that time, which was in the 1960s, depended on memorization. [19:00]

MM: Okay.

RC: In French high school, you do not study just four or five subjects. You study all the subjects every year. So not only geography, and biology, and chemistry, and languages, and writing etc, you study everything all at once. And in order to do well on the exams, you have to start studying for an exam, more than a month in advance.

MM: Okay.

RC: You have to use your memorization skills to remember all the dates in history. When did that happen? Who was in power, etc. We studied French history, not World History. It was a different education system. So to [20:00], to adapt to the American education system and the new language, we knew it would take time before we were going to get there. And so we ended up doing well in that American high school. It was not a small high school. Our graduating class was between four to five hundred kids, so it was not a tiny high school. And I graduated second of my class.

MM: Oh, my god! Nice job!

RC: It was a matter of time. But it was difficult. It was difficult because we had to come up to speed because we knew nothing about American history, there were many things that we knew nothing about. We knew nothing about American culture, [21:00] Everything.

MM: So this is 1964. Right?

RC: Yes.

MM: Okay.

RC: we attended high school starting in September 1963.

MM: Okay.

RC: To May 1965.

MM: So while you're here in the States, trying to study and pull your grades in line to attend American University, the United States is entering the Vietnam conflict or is already involved, involved in some ways in the Vietnam conflict.

RC: Definitely. In fact, I left Saigon when the monks started immolating themselves.

MM: Yeah.

RC: And I did not actually see the immolation act until I got here –

MM: On television? [22:00]

RC: Because there was no TV there (in VN).

MM: Yes.

RC: And the streets were all blocked, near the event, so that very few people could see. I didn't see it until I got here. But Americans had already started sending advisors for quite a long time. And it was beginning to build up in those years.

And so one of the things I wanted to share this interview is my journey with the backdrop of what was happening in Vietnam, and in China since I was born in Vietnam, but ethnically Chinese. Because I believe that that really has made a dramatic impact on my life in America. [23:00] Because I've now lived in America for 50, more than 55 years, and I would say from 1963 to 1995 I had to be extremely cautious about mentioning the word Vietnam, because of the

Vietnam War, and its aftermath. There were many people in this country who were very angry about the war, who had suffered because maybe someone dear to them had died. Or maybe they themselves got injured. And so it was – we had to be very careful not to mention the Vietnam War. And only to answer questions if asked. Then, from I would say about [24:00] 1995 until 2012, we had a breather, because at that time the Vietnam War was beginning to fade a little bit, and China was opening up, and it was rising. It hadn't become a threat to the US yet. So that was a bit of a breather.

I remember in the beginning of 2000 was the first time that I actually dared wear a Chinese gown in public because politically, I didn't want to call attention to myself. But of course, since 2012, when Xi Jinping took over, things had become more and more tense with America, up to present day. Conceivably, it could last another hundred years this hostile coexistence with America, if China is now a strategic competitor –

MM: Absolutely, it is.

RC: And, it's very conceivable that things will only be alleviated slightly, but not enough for it to ever become a true partnership again. In fact, it's highly doubtful that it will ever become a real partnership again. So that means then, that people like me, once again, have to be extremely careful. I don't want to tell people I'm Chinese because it's getting to a point now where it doesn't matter whether you're an American citizen or [26:00] not. It doesn't matter that you have contributed to American Society for 55 years because you are suspect just because ethnically, you are Chinese.

MM: Can I ask you a question about –

RC: Hang on Mary, because I noticed my husband has just boiled water and the hot water bottle is making a loud noise.

MM: Okay, I'll wait. [brief pause] Okay. I wanted to ask you a question.

RC: I'm sorry, Mary. Can you repeat?

MM: Yes. I wanted to ask you a question on that same topic, about the fact that your parents were still in Vietnam, as the conflict with the United States, in [27:00] 1963 '64. And about this very topic. So you felt like you had to be silent or hide in many ways. But while you're also, I would assume deeply concerned about the safety of your parents?

RC: Very concerned because my father, representing the Taiwan Bank of China, was receiving death threats on a weekly basis from the Vietcong who viewed him as a capitalist, etc. And so I was very concerned about my parents' safety, because although we lived in a fairly safe area of Saigon, in many ways, it was also very dangerous, because we lived around the corner from the American Embassy.

MM: Yes.

RC: And not far from the Presidential Palace. [28:00]

MM: Yeah.

RC: So there were a number of times when there were coup d'états, and a number of bombing of the Presidential Palace, bombing of the American Embassy, where we would get some of the grenades, you know, that were being thrown around. And we were lucky that none of my family ever got injured by this. But we certainly could have been, we could have been. So I was concerned about my parents. I really could not go back. And they couldn't come because my father was still working. And so I did not see them for seven years.

MM: Oh, my God.

RC: Yeah. Seven years. And so then finally they came in 1969 for my wedding. The wedding the day before my graduation.

MM: Oh my gosh. Well, [29:00] let's talk a little bit about your time at Brown. I think that's a good segue. As I, as I watched my time here a little bit. So you begin to look at colleges, and

your sisters' doing the same thing. I think there's probably, I'm listening to this. And I'm thinking "thank God, you had your sister with you." So you're both looking at colleges. And so why Brown? Can you tell us a little bit about that and your first experiences on campus.

RC: We were both looking at smaller schools. We did not want schools that had 40,000 people. And so we were looking at small schools. And we were hoping to stay on the East Coast, because that's the area we had some familiarity with. And so we were looking at all the schools. She applied to a number of schools, I applied to a number of schools. [30:00] Well, actually, I applied to early decision at Brown, because I had come down for an interview. I had good vibes about the school. It had the Pembroke component, but it also had the Brown. So I liked that. I didn't want to go to an all-women's college. I wanted to study applied mathematics, and Brown had a strong Applied Math Department. And Providence was a small city, I was not looking for rural area. So I wanted either a bigger city or small city, I did not want a school that would be like Smith, for example. By the way, my sister ended up at Mount Holyoke.

MM: Oh, okay.

RC: Yeah. [31:00] She ended up at Mount Holyoke. She was unhappy there for the first couple of years, because of the fact that it was not cosmopolitan.

MM: Very rural

RC: It was very rural. But she ended up graduating from there. She's very happy. She's got great friends. And so everything worked out for her.

Then I came to Brown, I applied early decision and was accepted. And so I even got a scholarship. I got a tuition scholarship, not room and board, so I had to work every summer. And during the school year, to make sure that I was able to attend Brown, My father was helping me, but the exchange rate between the Vietnamese money and the US dollar was just so horrendous.

MM: Yes.

RC: That he, [32:00] my father could not help me as much as I needed help. And so I worked every summer, and during the school year. My time at Brown basically consisted of studying, keeping my average, so I wouldn't lose my scholarship, and working on campus. I worked at various places, at the library, I tutored French in Providence, I worked for a Professor at one point doing earthquake-wave analysis.

MM: Wow!

RC: I can't remember everything. But anyway, I did not have a lot of time for socializing. I did not spend a lot of time socializing because I had to focus on my studies. [33:00] And finishing.

MM: Can I ask you a question? So you're facing a double whammy, right? You were a person new to the United States. And then you come into Brown, and you're focusing from what I can gather in a discipline, that's almost entirely men, right?

RC: Yes.

MM: Okay. So –

RC: At that time there was no open curriculum. And so my curriculum was heavily in the sciences, I had to take many other engineering courses to get a degree in applied mathematics. I had to take all kinds of physics and dynamics and, you know, all those courses, and they were not easy. And as I said, we didn't get much help outside of classes. And so it was challenging. But once again, I knew that if I focused and work hard, that somehow [34:00] it was going to be okay. And I was very happy on my graduation day.

MM: Oh, I'm sure. So –

RC: Very happy on my graduation day. But what I didn't realize after I graduated, and married Bill Hadden, was how hard it was going to be after graduation, because I was facing severe obstacles that I hadn't faced up to that point, which was gender discrimination in the workforce.

MM: Tell me about that.

RC: The first two years were the worst because my husband was a graduate student at Cornell. I had decided I did not want to work for Cornell University, because they had an abundance, an overabundance of [35:00] graduate student wives that were overqualified, and underpaid. They were treated badly, and I didn't want to be one of them. So I decided I will try for jobs in Ithaca. Well, I applied to 12 banks, thinking, surely, they would want someone like me. They all wrote back and said, "We can't even give you an interview because you're overqualified. You're not going to stay with us." So then I said, "Okay, let me see what else there is in Ithaca." If I don't want to work for Cornell, there wasn't much.

MM: No.

RC: So I found three manufacturing companies. And I applied and I wanted to work in their information processing department, and they all [36:00] made me job offers.

MM: Okay, wow.

RC: Yeah. Because you see, in those days women got paid a lot less than men.

MM: Oh, so. Yeah.

RC: So I was the only woman in that department. All my colleagues were male, my boss was very much a chauvinist. He reminded me weekly that the role of a woman is in the home. I said, "Jack, I am the breadwinner. My husband is in graduate school." And he would still say the role of the woman is in the home. And he would do everything in his power to get me to not stay. So

—

MM: Did he hire you? Was that —

RC: He did hire me, but he didn't make things easy for me.



MM: And then he tried to drag you out.

RC: And the other thing he said to me, the first thing he said to me was “Rita, I want you to make coffee for the whole department every day. [37:00] I said, “Jack, I don’t drink coffee so I don’t know how to make it.” He said, “You will have to learn.” So the two years I was there I made coffee every day. That’s fine. So then come performance evaluation time, he would say, “Rita you did a great job, but I’m not giving you a raise, because you are transient. As soon as your husband gets his degree, you’re going to leave me.” So I said, “Well, what can I say?” I would tell him, “Jack, I’m allergic to smoke” because at that time, many of my colleagues were chain smokers.

MM: Yes.

RC: So what did he do? Put me in a room with three chain smokers. Okay. Anyway, so at the end of two years, I decided enough was enough, because it isn’t going to get any better. So at that time, my parents had been posted in London, outside of London. [38:00] And so they invited me to come to England, all expenses paid for two weeks. And I said, “I’m not going to give that up,” So I went in to see Jack and I said, “Jack, I’m giving my two weeks’ notice.” And he said, “Are you crazy?” “I’m not keeping this job for you.” I said, “Well, I don’t expect you to.” He said, “Do you have another job?” I said, “No.” He says, “Well, you’re just crazy to leave a job.” Okay. I said, “Well, I didn’t think you would give me two weeks to go to England. So he said, “You bet I’m not going to do that.” so I said, “Well, then I have to give you my resignation.” So that was the end of the conversation. And so within one day the word that I was leaving this office, [39:00] got out to everyone that I had worked with. I was receiving phone calls at home from male colleagues who had gone to work somewhere else. And now were the boss somewhere else. They wanted me to come and work for them!

MM: Good for you.

RC: Okay, from that day on, I never had to apply for a job because they came to me, because people recognize a hard worker and someone who could produce, someone who could deliver,

they recognize that. So I did not have to apply for jobs again, until seven years later, when I came to Washington, because my husband got a job in Washington. I didn't know anyone in DC and so I had to apply for jobs here. I scheduled interviews for one week, where I would have an interview in the morning, one in the afternoon, six days [40:00] straight. I got 11 job offers on the spot.

MM: Oh my gosh!

RC: Do you know why?

MM: Not bad!

RC: Because I was underpaid. I was underpaid not only as a woman, but because I had worked in Upper New York State.

MM: Yep. Yeah.

RC: Okay.

MM: Yeah.

RC: And so the job I really wanted was the twelfth one that did not make me an offer right away. So I decided that I would wait to hear from them. Because that place really stood head and shoulders over the others. So I waited and waited and waited. And meanwhile, the other ones who had made me a job offer said, "Well, are you going to take the job offer or not?" and I would say, "Well, I haven't heard from everyone yet. I need to wait for everyone." And they would call me every day, "Are you going to take it?" [41:00] Honestly, I had to say, "Well, if I have to give you an answer right away, it will be no because I haven't heard from everyone yet." So three weeks after the interview, I heard back from the chairman of the company called American Management Systems, AMS. He called me at my work. I was with Corning Glass at the time in upper New York state. He called me and he made me a job offer that I could not refuse because he did not base my salary on what I was making plus 10%. He offered me a salary

that was above and beyond that because he said, “I’m not paying you based on what you’re making now. I’m [42:00] paying you based on what you’re worth in the Washington DC metropolitan area.”

MM: Wow, he, that was so ahead of his time.

RC: They approach recruiting in a very different way. That’s what had attracted me about them because they treated women well in this company.

MM: Wow.

RC: Unlike all the other companies.

MM: So what year was this, Rita?

RC: 1976.

MM: Okay.

RC: 1976. So I came to Washington, worked for American Management System for 20 years, because they were a consulting firm so every project was different. You know, it was a different industry. It was a different application. It was a different platform, technical platform. And so it was like constantly learning new things. So I spent almost 20 years with American Management System, but [43:00] over the 20 years, it had gone from about 200 people to 10,000.

MM: Oh, yeah.

RC: So it had become a totally different place and I didn’t want to be there anymore.

MM: So in those 20 years, that's right in the middle of the Women's Movement. Then you're coming up into the 80s, which were actually really progressive. But in terms of being yeah, for you –

RC: For me it was moving forward all the time. Especially when I was able to negotiate with my, the company because I had started having children, finally, 10 years after I got married. I couldn't have children before because my husband was in graduate school. And then when we moved to Washington, we bought a house [44:00] that was a fixer upper, which meant that, you know, I really couldn't have children until after my husband had established himself in a career. And we had enough income to not have to worry,

MM: Where did your husband end up working in Washington, if you don't mind?

RC: He ended up working with what was to become the Center for Disease Control.

MM: Okay.

RC: The CDC. And, you know, he was a sociologist from Brown, got a degree from Cornell, but did not finish his doctorate at Cornell, for complicated reasons.

MM: Okay.

RC: But anyway, he ended up working for the CDC for close to 30 years.

MM: Oh, wow.

RC: Yeah. So he also had a very long term career.

MM: Yeah.

RC: So after 10 years, we expected [45:00] our first child, and then we had another child 3 years later who went to Brown.

MM: You, I'm sorry, you're just to clarify both of your children attended Brown?

RC: No, just the second one.

MM: Second child. Okay.

RC: Second one. So anyway, when I was able to negotiate with this company that, in return for them giving me local projects, minimizing the travel, I would take less salary increase and less promotion. I made this conscious deal with them.

MM: Yeah.

RC: That was going to be the tradeoff. And so for 17 years they honored my minimum travel requests.

MM: Okay.

RC: Now, it didn't mean I didn't have to travel, but they minimized the travel [46:00]. Consulting companies are notorious for sending you far away for long periods of time. And many of my colleagues were leaving home at 5am on Monday and not getting back until midnight on Friday.

MM: No! Oh, that's terrible!

RC: And so, that was a big deal for me to be able to do minimum travel. Yes, I had to pay for it. There is always a price, but I was willing to pay the price so that I wouldn't have that kind of life. And at the end of 17 years, I no longer had the reason that my kids were young. I needed to be home. So they put me on full time travel, the same company put me on full time travel. So it

has become grueling, leaving home 5am on Monday, returning after midnight on Friday, and I just decided I don't want to live that way.

MM: No.

RC: I left [47:00] this company that I had loved, two months before my 20th anniversary.

MM: Okay.

RC: And all the people said, "You should never have left. You should have stayed for your 20th anniversary," because for your 20th anniversary date they give you a travel ticket to any place in the world you want to go to.

MM: They should shine after sending you around everywhere. Yeah.

RC: Yeah, so it was a great gift, but I wasn't willing to do that because -

MM: Yeah.

RC: And by the way, when I left American Management Systems, that was the first and only time in my whole life, that I had anything to do with another Brown graduate.

MM: Okay.

RC: Because I ended up, I applied to a number of jobs, but I ended up taking a position with a tiny [48:00] consulting firm and the President at that time was a Brown graduate.

MM: Oh, neat!

RC: Yes. It's the only time I've ever had anything to do, work-wise, with a Brown graduate. And so it was great. I was there, I was at that company for something like 4 years.

MM: And can you - and can you tell us just a little bit about what your, your roles, what you did in the workplace at a consulting firm, just so people understand a little bit more about that. And then after you explain that, we're running up on time a little bit. So I want to make sure no matter what subject it's on, if you want to switch, switch subjects, I want you to have time to share anything that you really want to get on the record here. So just those two things, you can explain a little bit about what your career, what types of things you were doing during your career, [49:00] and then open whatever you want to tell me.

RC: Well, the very first job in upper New York state that I had was as a software engineering trainee. At that time, the word "software engineering" didn't exist, so it was a software development trainee. And that was a great entry into that field, because my degree was applied math, it was not in computer science. Brown didn't have a computer science degree at that time. So I was trained by this company to develop software. They also trained me to design systems. So I became more of a business analyst and systems analyst system designer, [50:00] after perhaps, I would say, two to three years of doing software development. I learned a lot of different software development languages in the process. And there was a time when I was not only designing but also developing. So, that basically was my work. So I had a lot of interface with the clients, you know, the customers so to speak, in these companies to make sure I could meet their business needs using technology.

MM: Okay.

RC: So then, after that, when I came to American Management Systems, they were a management consulting firm, but they also used technology to solve business problems. That's why they were interested in me because I had already had some experience in that. Now, at American Management System, [51:00] I did not do development, software development. I started out by helping them, helping their clients meet the client's needs, by using packages, software packages, they had already developed, you know, customizing it to the customer's needs. I did that for a few years. And then I moved, I immediately moved into project management. Actually, even from day one of that company, AMS. I did project management for

a number of years. And then I got more and more responsibility. And I was managing multiple projects, managing multiple teams. And then I moved into a field in my [52:00] last maybe two or three years there that involved helping clients change their corporate culture, and adopting best practice, industry best practices in their companies. And after I left AMS, I spent another many years of doing that. So I spent the last 22 years of my career in what's called organization transformation, but always helping businesses that look great on the outside, but were somewhat broken on the inside, because they were using obsolete practices, adopt industry best practices, and changing that culture, doing things differently. Instead of shooting from the hip, you would actually plan [53:00] ahead.

MM: And, I'm sorry.

RC: Sorry?

MM: I'm sorry. I don't want to, I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt you, I wanted to know if you are still working or if you are now retired?

RC: Okay, so no, I stopped working in that field in, let's see - in 19, well, that's not true. It was 2000 and, let's see, yes, 2008 was when I stopped working in that field because I had an opportunity to go to China to teach there.

MM: Oh, wow. Okay.

RC: So I spent a year teaching in China.

MM: Wow.

RC: Yeah. I taught at University of Nanjing [54:00] for one year. I taught project management in Nanjing University. So when I came back, I was still doing some consulting. I'd been doing consulting and I only stopped consulting in I would say, I think my last consulting - well, I could consider I'm still doing consulting now, although now, I do it, as a volunteer.



MM: Got it.

RC: But I did consulting for, for many years in technology and management practices and whatnot. So -

MM: Okay.

RC: We were saying?

MM: Okay, so that, so thank you. So I think that kind of explains [55:00] I, sometimes, our listeners need a little help understanding what people do in the day to day of their work. But now, as we run up on the 11 o'clock hour, I want you to have some time to, to get on the record, whatever you want to have on the record that I haven't already asked you. So make sure that you have this time now for however much time you need to share what you want to share here, that you want to make sure that people 100 years from now can know about your experience,

RC: I want to say that I have loved my career. For someone who entered the workforce at an age when there was still a lot of discrimination against women, I have loved my career that I started in 1969. '69. I have [56:00] loved every day of my career, I have had multiple experiences. And it's been something that has helped me grow professionally. And I've just loved every day of it. Even at the height of discrimination against women, I've been very fortunate to find work in places that have valued me, as an individual.

MM: Rita, can I ask you a question? Did you participate in women's rights activism at all? Did you ever protest with women?

RC: Well, I did it to a certain degree. In other words, I was a member of NOW, National Organization of Women. But I also have worked within the system to improve it. So when I joined [57:00] American Management Systems, which was a consulting firm in Washington, DC, and where I stayed for many years, it was a good platform because they, they had very little sexual bias. And so yeah, I was able to blossom as a professional with American Management

Systems. And grateful for what they taught me. And because I had encountered plenty of sexual bias in my earlier work, when I was working in Ithaca, New York. And when I was working [58:00] in my early work, it was a lot of sexual discrimination, you know, bias, gender bias. But starting with American Management Systems, it was a tremendous growth period for me. And I ended up staying with them for 20 years. So it was a great career.

MM: Okay. Well, so if you have again, if you have any other last thoughts that you'd like to share, for the record, now is the time.

RC: Well, the last thought that I had to share, I mean, I don't think there's ever a last thought to share, but I'm very grateful to Brown for having equipped me with the kind of credentials that would give me a chance during the height of the [59:00] gender wars, to have, to be taken seriously. Because someone who did not have a degree in applied mathematics probably would have suffered more than I did, in terms of discrimination. So I feel very fortunate to have been well equipped by Brown, you know, to have, to have been able to face this world and be, I believe, very successful in a career that has spanned so many years. I have worked for a long, long time, and, and I'm able to contribute, to give back now. I'm very grateful for that.

MM: Well, thank you. Thank you so much, Rita, for taking the time to speak with me today. I will probably have a couple of questions and follow up just to add to the biographical note that will accompany your interview. But we can do that by email. So I'm going to turn, I'm going to say thank you so much for helping today and for adding your interview to our corpus, to our collection. And I'm going to stop the recording now. So thank you.

RC: Thank you.

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