Karen Smith: Go ahead and introduce yourself.

Jean Cornelius: All right, my name is Jean Cornelius, I, uh, graduated in 1954 with a major in English. Um –

Karen Smith: From Rice?

Jean Cornelius: From Rice, Rice University.

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: Rice Institute then.

Karen Smith: Okay. And I am the interviewer and I am Karen Smith, alumnna of ’96. Um, well, well just start with the first quis, question, just what it was like for women at Rice during the time you were here. What was your favorite spot on campus? If you don’t have one it’s okay.

Jean Cornelius: I don’t think I have thought of a favorite spot on campus. I was, uh, uh, here from 1950 to 1954 and I was, uh, one of very few out of town girls.

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh –

Karen Smith: So where are you from originally then?

Jean Cornelius: Pampa, Texas, in the Panhandle.

Karen Smith: Oh, okay.

Jean Cornelius: My father went to Rice. And, uh, there were girl, girls’ dorms at that time and my freshman year I lived in Bel Air with another freshman girl and we had a carpool with other Rice students to the campus. And coming from the higher altitude to Houston I was really sleepy and I took a lotta naps in the Fondren Library.

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah! We still do that a lot!

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, my sophomore year I lived on the dead end part of Albans Road which –
Karen Smith: That’s right across the street, that’s great.

Jean Cornelius: Which, which one of Larry McMurtry’s book talks about Albans and the dead end part and I just felt it was written for me. But anyway, uh –

Karen Smith: Did you have any classes with him?

Jean Cornelius: No, he was a little bit after me.

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, uh, I lived with three other Rice girls who were I think two valedictorians and a salutatorian and me.

Karen Smith: Wow. That’s stressful.

Jean Cornelius: And we lived with a, um, a widow of a doctor and she lived in the, she owned the duplex and rented out the upstairs and we lived, and it was two bedrooms and girls had the, we girls had the two bedrooms and she slept in the dining room behind a screen.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And cooked breakfast and dinner for us.

Karen Smith: Oh, that’s very nice.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, uh, then my senior year I rented an apartment with another girl who just graduated from Texas Tech which was a sister of a Rice, uh, man and, and uh we lived on the end, on Benz –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And walked to the campus and that was fun.

Karen Smith: That’s convenient.

Jean Cornelius: Only owned an apartment then. But I, but when the put in girls’ dorm I just felt like I’d been born ten years too soon for Rice dorms, the women’s dorms and for –

Karen Smith: When did they –

Jean Cornelius: ’57.

Karen Smith: The year you graduated?

Jean Cornelius: ’54 I graduated.
Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: I think it was, anyway it was later.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: Maybe even later than that, but.

Karen Smith: Do you think you would have preferred life?

Jean Cornelius: Oh yes, I felt, uh, I wouldn’t a Houston girl and –

Karen Smith: You were in a new city.

Jean Cornelius: And I was in a new city, I’d only been to Houston, I’d never been to Houston before I came to Rice.

Karen Smith: Really?

Jean Cornelius: Only knew two people in the whole city. I was farther away from home than my roommate who lived in Covington, Tennessee, and I think I was 630 and she was only 600 miles from home!

Karen Smith: There was jealousy!

Jean Cornelius: They called me a Yankee Texan!

Karen Smith: Oh no!

Jean Cornelius: Because I was from so far north! Um, okay?

Karen Smith: Next? So you spent a lot of time off campus.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah, we had the literary societies then, and, uh, and that was a very important part for me, was the Owls, I was and Owl, and I have many long-time friends from Owls.

Karen Smith: Oh, that’s good.

Jean Cornelius: And, and that was sort of a bonding that, that was good for me.

Karen Smith: Do you have any, this is kind of a random question that I just thought of, did you ever have any problems when you were walking the campus all the time? Did you ever worry about walking the campus at night?
Jean Cornelius: A lot.

Karen Smith: I mean because there’s a lot of security stuff goin’ on right now –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: – on campus and, um, I actually lived, pause, sorry, okay, next question, what brought you to Rice, why did you come? You said your father?

Jean Cornelius: Yes, I was supposed to go, I had chosen, uh, Christian College in Columbia, Missouri which was a senior college for about 300 girls. And, uh, my father said well I’m a Texan and you’re gonna go to school in Texas. And the Korean War was gettin’ started, looked like and I thought well this may be my only chance to go to school with boys and I wanna go to UT! And he said well I just happen to have this application from Rice –

Karen Smith: Oh!

Jean Cornelius: And I said but Rice is a boys’ school. I didn’t even know it was a girls’ school, he hadn’t talked much about it.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, as I said, and then I found out how hard it was and I, and it wasn’t popular to be smart in those days, and women hid their intelligence well.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And, and I’d tell people I was goin’ to Rice and they’d say oh, I didn’t know you were a brain!

Karen Smith: Yeah, we still get that, yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And I’d cry. And, uh, uh, I just hated it that I had to come until I got here.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And got through orientation and, and I loved it after I got here.

Karen Smith: That’s great.

Jean Cornelius: But it was awful, I really thought I was bein’ abandoned.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: Brought down here, my dad brought me down. We got here at 10:00 o’clock and he left at 1:00 o’clock.
Karen Smith: I think that’s the way that they make us do it now. My parents had to leave at 1:00 too.

Jean Cornelius: Oh.

Karen Smith: But what about, I know my mom went to a co, to an all-women’s college –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: – she was in North Carolina and like it wasn’t really an option to go to a coed college. What was that like?

Jean Cornelius: Uh –

Karen Smith: Did a lot of your friends go to –

Jean Cornelius: Oh yes.

Karen Smith: – go to single sex colleges?

Jean Cornelius: I don’t think any of my kids, any of my friend went to, uh, girls’ school.

Karen Smith: Oh really, everybody went to coed colleges?

Jean Cornelius: Oklahoma or SMU, seemed like, from the Panhandle.

Karen Smith: Oh really. Okay, so you were the only one that you knew that came down here?

Jean Cornelius: Yes, there was a, a, a Rice man named Gerald Swath from Amarillo and his girlfriend was my big sister in Owls. I guess that’s how I got in Owls.

Karen Smith: Oh, oh cool.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. Met him at summer school or somethin’.

Karen Smith: That’s neat. Small world is what I was thinking. Um, describe for us your first impression of the school, the first time you saw it, what were your feelings? Well the first time you came down here your dad was driving off?

Jean Cornelius: Yeah. We all, my feeling was that I may not have been accepted!

Karen Smith: You didn’t know?

Jean Cornelius: My, uh, I understood that if I took trigonometry that I would, you know I was accepted to Rice. And, uh, uh, so anyway my brought me and says I think it’s about time to
back to go down to school and so he brought me down and we walked in and Mr. McCann said oh, I sent you a telegram this morning and I never got the telegram.

Karen Smith: So you didn’t know, you were just, I hope I got in!

Jean Cornelius: Or maybe they’d had time to cancel it or somethin’. But I just ended up here,

Karen Smith: That’s so great. What were classes like and professors then?

Jean Cornelius: Oh, um, I don’ wanna say, um, well I transferred in from West Texas State English and history.

Karen Smith: Oh, so you came in here –

Jean Cornelius: After summer school.

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: And so –

Karen Smith: So you had an experience with a public university?

Jean Cornelius: Right. Just a little bit. Mm hmm. And, and then, um, so I took two sophomore courses a government course and an, uh, economics course and, uh, and what I remember when you asked that, the first thing that came to mind was I walked into economics class with my freshman beanie and this guy says, you’re not supposed to be here. And I said oh yes I am, and, and I later married him!

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah! That’s fabulous! Was he a student?

Jean Cornelius: Yes, he was a sophomore and I was, we both took Economics 200 together and my dad wanted me to be –

Karen Smith: Your first class, or one of your first classes at Rice?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: I love hearing stories like that!

Jean Cornelius: And, and my dad wanted me to be an accountant and he majored in accounting and I didn’t like accounting –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: – so it was easier to marry one than be one!
Karen Smith: Yes!

Jean Cornelius: So that’s what I did.

Karen Smith: Satisfy the dad and, that’s so great. That’s really neat. Was it, it’s common, and they still kinda quote statistics about how many Rice graduates marry other. Was that a really big thing?

Jean Cornelius: Uh, yes, I think, or we had a wonderful social life and dance clubs and bridge clubs and everything after graduation and marriage and so our Rice community, we live in Houston was, was our, our social life, and it was wonderful. Uh, I’m, I’m one of the few Rice graduates of my era that’s divorced and, um, and, uh, I should have known, you know from the first comment probably!

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah!

Jean Cornelius: But anyway.

Karen Smith: Satisfied dad for a while, that was good. What was social life like?

Jean Cornelius: Oh, in the –

Karen Smith: Well did y’all start dating like first year and you dated all through or –

Jean Cornelius: No, I uh, I went with, I guess I went with, freshman girls at Rice in those days, the ratio was 4 to 1, it was wonderful –

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah! I like that, 2 to 1 too.

Jean Cornelius: And I didn’t, I could not study as much as my roommate. My freshman roommate studied all the time and I just couldn’t and, uh, uh, well I was so sleepy, I was so sleepy when I got here, and, and every time I had a date with my to-be husband, he would come and, to pick me up and I would asleep and, and my housemother, the freshmen’s mother would come in and say Jean, you have a date, and said no, and then she’d come in say Ross is here, uh he says he has a date. Oh yes! So, so anyway, you know there were lots of signs. My subconscious was –

Karen Smith: Yeah, maybe you should have thought about this more.

Jean Cornelius: But anyway, we had, I don’t think everything happens just right but anyway.

Karen Smith: That’s so cool. Well did y’all do, um, I mean now our system works where the all the colleges have parties every Friday and stuff. Well there’s at least one big college party a
weekend and that’s kind of what we do. We’ve also got other parties going along on campus, you said there were a lotta big dances and shoulder

Jean Cornelius: Oh yes, there was. In fact, uh, one of the things we had was the, the Follies, the Rice Follies.

Karen Smith: What’s that?

Jean Cornelius: It was a, a show that different organizations got together and put on about Christmas or sometime and it was dancin’ and everything so the Owls were putting on an act –

Karen Smith: So it was like a talent show?

Jean Cornelius: We had a dance teacher come in and teach us how to do this.

Karen Smith: Oh wow.

Jean Cornelius: This St. Louis swing and you know and can still sorta remember the dance.

Karen Smith: That’s great.

Jean Cornelius: And, and this, this guy I married asked to be in our show and he was for a little while but he had two left feet so he didn’t stay but –

Karen Smith: He supported from the audience.

Jean Cornelius: Yes, but, uh anyway we, my first or second date with him was to a big dance. He was in a service organization, I’ve forgotten the name of it now. Uh, and they, he, anyway –

Karen Smith: Was it RSVP, was it that back then, Rice Student Volunteer Program?

Jean Cornelius: Uh, no, seems like it had a P, Public Service somethin’. Anyway, and so we went to a cocktail party before the dance and somewhere along the line and this was, this was, I don’t whether to tell this on tape or not, but I had, I had, there was this little saying about Rice guys: We don’t smoke and we don’t chew and we don’t go with the girls who do. Um, let’s see, rudy toot toot, rudy toot toot, we are the boys from the Institute. We don’t smoke and we don’t chew and we don’t go with the girls who do.

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah!

Jean Cornelius: So I had this idea of Rice men of being, because I’d heard that before I got there –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.
Jean Cornelius: As being really Casper Milk Toast sort of, this was my opinion –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: – I guess I thought smoking and drinking was cool, I don’t’ know, but, but anyway –

Karen Smith: When you’re, when you’re in high school, things like that, it’s very rebellious, so –

Jean Cornelius: So anyway I went to this, uh –

Karen Smith: Cocktail party –

Jean Cornelius: Cocktail party with him and I think the dance started at 10:00 and the cocktail party probably at 8:00, and, uh, I didn’t eat any dinner –

Karen Smith: That’s not smart! I’ve done that before!

Jean Cornelius: So anyway I was, I was, I got to the dance at 10:00, danced two dances, we stopped and got me a cup of coffee on the way home. I was so sick I had to go home, and I spilled the coffee on him –

Karen Smith: Hah!

Jean Cornelius: On his car, and he took me on home and I was just mortified, I was just, oh –

Karen Smith: This was your second date?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Gosh!

Jean Cornelius: And I wouldn’t have married him, this was my second date and I was just mortified the next day at the rehearsal which was on Sunday for the Follies. Well I went in and I apologized and I was so sorry, and he said he’d forgive me if I’d go to a movie with him.

Karen Smith: That’s cute.

Jean Cornelius: And so I, we went to the movie and then later he wanted to go steady but I didn’t wanna go steady and, uh, so he started dating someone at Texas and went with her most of our Rice career –

Karen Smith: Really?
Jean Cornelius: And my junior, my junior year I, I went to the Rice, and Owl formal dance –

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: In the spring, I invited a guy who –

Karen Smith: They call it Roundelay now, I don’t know if they did then.

Jean Cornelius: Oh no, this was the, the literary society had its own formal dance. And, so I, I asked, uh, uh, a guy that I knew was a good dancer and we went there, and so when I came in, uh, through the lounge the next day or Monday, uh it was you know well why did you ask him? And I said well I didn’t, if I asked you you’d think I was runnin’ after you.

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah! Go with it!

Jean Cornelius: So he started askin’ me out again after that and then, my junior year, senior year and we got engaged in March and got married in June.

Karen Smith: Wow, that’s really cool. Well did a lotta people go steady, was that a big thing?

Jean Cornelius: Lotta people got married during our four years.

Karen Smith: During? Wow. See now it’s rare that people get married right out.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. It was, it was a time when women and men got married real early, you know 19, 20, 21, 22. It’s think it’s probably the earliest marriages in our, in our culture.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: Was during that time.

Karen Smith: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, like my parents were odd that they didn’t get married until 28.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: And stuff. And now we don’t even think about it ‘til then.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah right. I have a son who’s 33 who’s still you know single.

Karen Smith: Looking, sure, sure. Um, gosh, what was I gonna ask you, what did you after then? Well you got married.
Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Did you just kinda start the whole housewife –

Jean Cornelius: In, uh, September I started teaching school. I, I taught down on the bayou, Rusk Elementary School. I think it was the last year it was open, it was 98 percent, uh, Mexican Americans and uh –

Karen Smith: How as that, coming from Rice?

Jean Cornelius: That was, that year –

Karen Smith: Rice was still all white, right?

Jean Cornelius: Right. Mm hmm. And that year was, um, a real eye-opener from getting out of the, off the Rice campus and seein’ other parts because I didn’t last the whole year teaching, I got sick and volunteered for the Red Cross and drove for a motor, was in the motor corps and went all over like Lions Avenue and pickin’ up people, poor people to take to the hospital so I saw another side of Houston –

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: Than what I’d seen at Rice.

Karen Smith: So you were sheltered when I here?

Jean Cornelius: I was sheltered, yes. Anyway the teaching, um, uh, I wanted to make ‘em all President and I’d, I’d bring ‘em home me –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: It was, I was really dedicated.

Karen Smith: Like I need another child?

Jean Cornelius: And he didn’t even want me talkin’ about me teachin’ school.

Karen Smith: Really?

Jean Cornelius: He didn’t wanna hear about it.

Karen Smith: I guess that was your first clue.

Jean Cornelius: And whenever I, um, after I taught all day I didn’t much wanna talk anymore when I got home. He said I was like a freight train hittin’ a mountain. I was just exhausted. I was real hard for me to control.
Karen Smith: What grade were you teaching?

Jean Cornelius: Third, with 33 students.

Karen Smith: Oh my gosh!

Jean Cornelius: And I, and I was just exhausted and you know I’d fall asleep at 9:00 o’clock every night.

Karen Smith: Well sure, I mean –

Jean Cornelius: And then I ran a fever from Thanksgiving to Christmas and then I stopped teaching at the semester.

Karen Smith: Yeah. So if you, what do you do now?

Jean Cornelius: I’m an attorney.

Karen Smith: Oh! Hello! Wow, did you do that right after or was it after –

Jean Cornelius: No, I, I taught school, I worked at Rice in the alumni placement office –

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: For, after drivin’ for the Red Cross. It got hot and the cars weren’t air conditioned and I got another job.

Karen Smith: I think that’s the best reason!

Jean Cornelius: And then I, then I went back to teaching and I thought I might be pregnant when that year started. I think I started teachin’ in October of that year, and I taught in a regular, uh, I can’t, it starts with an S, an elementary school –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: – it’s over here in Southwest Houston.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, and it was, it was, uh, the same socioeconomic school and it was very much more difficult teaching. Lesson plans that would last a whole week at Rusk I would go through in on day.

Karen Smith: Really?
Jean Cornelius: So I really saw the difference between the, the, the, I had –

Karen Smith: Different socioeconomics –

Jean Cornelius: Out of 33 students I three students on a third grade level, and classes ranged, my children ranged from 8 to 12 and most of them were from public house, Clayton Homes, at that time.

Karen Smith: What did you, what did you think contributed to that more? I mean was it –

Jean Cornelius: Um, the inability to speak English when they started.

Karen Smith: Yeah, I never thought about that. I never thought about that. Did you speak Spanish at all?

Jean Cornelius: No, as a matter of fact they wouldn’t allow us to. And my little kids would get so excited if I’d say Fritos or –

Karen Smith: Taco.

Jean Cornelius: or tacos or I can’ remember when I’d say Frito Lay, they loved for me to speak Spanish.

Karen Smith: That’s gotta be hard. I think they’re, they’re really getting more into the bilingual.

Jean Cornelius: And they would speak Spanish on the playground but they were not supposed to speak it inside the building.

Karen Smith: Oh, that’s harsh.

Jean Cornelius: It was.

Karen Smith: That’s harsh. I know there’re more interesting questions that I’ve got. Um, what, what was the most important thing that happened to you? Maybe your husband was the most important thing that happened to you?

Jean Cornelius: That’s right.

Karen Smith: I’m still waiting for that.

Jean Cornelius: I wanna talk about –

Karen Smith: Yes, please.
Jean Cornelius: — the difference between whatever the, I think Rice was really oppressive to students the freshman and sophomore years.

Karen Smith: As opposed to junior and senior year?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: In what way?

Jean Cornelius: In that, uh, uh, even from orientation we’ve done you a big favor by letting you come to Rice.

Karen Smith: Sure.

Jean Cornelius: And you probably, and I mean I never, I guess I had low self-esteem or somethin’ but I never felt like I belonged and I was gonna be one of those that failed out and I don’t have a lot of foresight as to what’s –

Karen Smith: Was that kind of all-encompassing or was that being a woman or was that from being out of town?

Jean Cornelius: I only can speak for myself.

Karen Smith: Right.

Jean Cornelius: And I know that I was just amazed, my junior year that I could see that I was gonna graduate, the change in respect that the faculty paid the students when you go to be a junior –

Karen Smith: Right.

Jean Cornelius: And it’s almost like all of a sudden you became somebody.

Karen Smith: Right.

Jean Cornelius: And, and I began, and, and just the difference between the end of my sophomore year and beginning of my junior year, now I felt about getting this education and that I was gonna be able to do it.

Karen Smith: I think sometimes that happens as a freshman, because, especially at a research institute, a lot of the professors are thinking about research and so freshmen and sophomores aren’t a lotta help to them.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.
Karen Smith: – in their researches, and so I can see when it was still and institute and based on that, they, **** I don’t wanna make generalizations because obviously I wasn’t there, but –

Jean Cornelius: I think even there was a history written of Rice, maybe in the 1970 –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: – that probably the early ‘50s or the ’50s where the hardest time to be at Rice.

Karen Smith: Really? Because of that kind of –

Jean Cornelius: Because they didn’t have the tuition yet, they, they felt like you know there were, I mean it was like we’re really, we’re really good, doin’ you a big favor and you better appreciate it!

Karen Smith: Big egos!

Jean Cornelius: Yeah.

Karen Smith: What did they, what did they do? I mean was it the way that the professors treated you in class?

Jean Cornelius: I guess it was comments in class and so forth, I don’t know, that’s just –

Karen Smith: Yeah?

Jean Cornelius: – I think they just told us all the time how –

Karen Smith: I have, I have a professor now that’s always like well since this a freshman class, and I’m a senior in this class. I can really see how that would hard and oppressive.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah. I wish I’d four years of ego building instead of two!

Karen Smith: Yeah. Definitely. So did you decide your major early when you came in or did you –

Jean Cornelius: No, I started out majoring in, uh –

Karen Smith: Economics?

Jean Cornelius: There you go and, uh, I was the only girl in the accounting class my sophomore year.

Karen Smith: Hmm.
Jean Cornelius: And I was also good in Math 100 so I was takin’ 200 and I spent eight hours on the first day’s assignment, so I dropped 200 –

Karen Smith: That’s too long!

Jean Cornelius: And, and I just hated accounting and, uh so I, and I was the only girl in the class and I switched to English with all of my friends.

Karen Smith: Okay, and are you glad about that?

Jean Cornelius: Yes. Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Now are you glad about that because of what your learned or because of where you were –

Jean Cornelius: To this day I don’t like to keep books or do accounting, any of that, I mean it was not my, I mean I, I’m sorry you know there wasn’t some sort of aptitude or somethin’ –

Karen Smith: Yeah, I should know! Or didn’t like it.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: So where did this whole lawyer thing come in?

Jean Cornelius: Okay, um, well after, uh, I stopped teaching when I was pregnant and had three children and was a housewife, homemaker for the next ten years, you know for ten years. And when my children were 9, 7 and 4 my husband left me for his secretary.

Karen Smith: That’s not fun.

Jean Cornelius: And so then I, I, I went to a therapist after the divorce and he, uh, suggested I might be a computer programmer and that was the beginning of, this was 1970, or ’67, and, uh, so I had a friend from Rice whose husband, also from Rice, uh, was the manager of a software firm. And he was goin’ back to school and gettin’ some computer training and uh he was some sort of engineer before that. Anyway I called him and said, you know my therapist thinks I could be a computer programmer, what do you know? He said come in and I’ll give you a test. And so I took the test and I scored second highest that he had ever had and he said the highest had been a music major.

Karen Smith: Oh wow.

Jean Cornelius: And so there’s some sort of with the math and programming and music, there’s all this commonality.

Karen Smith: There is there’s a lot of music in math.
Jean Cornelius: And so, um, I, he told me some books to read and I was havin’ a real hard time learnin’ it on my own and I called him back and I said will I see this ad for this night school, and I said what do you think and he said that’s why they have teachers because it’s hard to learn on your own.

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah!

Jean Cornelius: So I went to night school and then offered me a job as a programmer trainee.

Karen Smith: Oh great.

Jean Cornelius: And so I went to work for Computer Usage Corporation in April after my divorce was final in March.

Karen Smith: Oh, wow.

Jean Cornelius: And it was –

Karen Smith: Talk about moving on!

Jean Cornelius: And it was, it was really exciting. I felt like I was in a whole new world and computing in those days, it was, there was a scarcity of people and women were really, I mean I was just amazed at how, uh, uh, nice people were –

Karen Smith: Really?

Jean Cornelius: And for women?

Karen Smith: And there weren’t many women?

Jean Cornelius: And there weren’t, there weren’t –

Karen Smith: So you were like valued.

Jean Cornelius: I was a really valued –

Karen Smith: That’s great.

Jean Cornelius: – computer programmer and then, and then I had my own contract I mean through them I worked for Exxon and then they closed in a recession in 1970 and I got my own contract with Exxon which tripled my hourly income and –

Karen Smith: Yeah, independent contractors do a little better.
Jean Cornelius: And, uh, uh, the guy I worked for must have been the same kinda personality type or somethin’ but when he said somethin’ I know exactly what he meant and he was really impressed with, with –

Karen Smith: That’s nice to work somebody like that.

Jean Cornelius: – my ability to communicate and he was always so appreciative and so amazed at how fast I could do it, and so forth. So anyway I did that, and, and so I had my own contract with Exxon for two years and I didn’t have, I have, I think there was somethin’ about me that, you know this low esteem or somethin’, I had to get another degree or had to do somethin’ to be somebody or somethin’.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And by that time I’d worked with, I felt like I wasn’t out in the world because it was just me and the machine.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And so I decided –

Karen Smith: Not a lotta socializing.

Jean Cornelius: Went back to see the therapist and told him –

Karen Smith: Same one?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: That’s good.

Jean Cornelius: And uh, he suggested law school. I mean I had said one time, you know in the software firm a lotta people were goin; to, to law school at night and I wondered if there was any connection, somethin’ like that. Anyway, it was good that I did that. I think I think one reason I enjoyed law school or wanted to do that was to know what my rights were.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: You know I needed to know what my rights were.

Karen Smith: Well and you also had gone through somethin’ with a, a lawyer.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: You know you’d had to go through a divorce, and that’s always really –
Jean Cornelius: Oh it seemed like law school tied together all of life, everything had to do with the law, it felt to me like you know that this was –

Karen Smith: And you’re learning about it all which is great.

Jean Cornelius: So I was 40 when I started to law school.

Karen Smith: Wow.

Jean Cornelius: And my children were, uh, 10 to 5.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And I had three children and I have three children and, uh, and so that was a great thing to do and, and, when they were school I was in class and doin’ my library work and when they were home they were big enough that I just needed to be there –

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And I could go ahead and do my casework and stuff.

Karen Smith: That’s great, that’s a great ideal age I guess.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. It really did work well. Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: So you went to law school, where did you go?

Jean Cornelius: I went to St. Mary’s in San Antonio.

Karen Smith: I have a friend who’s third year now at St. Mary’s.

Jean Cornelius: I, it was right when there were so many people enrolling, you know applying to law school and I applied Texas and I wanted to leave Houston because my life was full –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: – and I didn’t have room for law school and so I thought I’d take on law school and then see what else I had time for. And, uh –

Karen Smith: And you moved with your kids?

Jean Cornelius: I moved with my kids to San Antonio. I didn’t get into Texas but I got into St. Mary’s and I was the only Rice graduate. I think they had **** that year so they’d take me!
Karen Smith: Hey, you know.

Jean Cornelius: There were 15 girls in law school when I was, I was the first, I mean they were so impressed that they had 15 girls in law school and we, and we ended up bein’, not me but, but havin’ the editor of the Law Review and the president of the study body out of our class of 15.

Karen Smith: That’s wonderful.

Jean Cornelius: And uh –

Karen Smith: And so now you do, are you still –

Jean Cornelius: And so then I moved to Austin, I didn’t stay in San Antonio because, I moved to Austin because of state government. There still weren’t a lotta jobs for women and I went to work and I was, even then sort of the token woman, so it was real hard for me to feel like a lawyer from my upbringing in the ‘50s and –

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And it wasn’t until I was in the Attorney General’s office later that I began to feel like I was a lawyer.

Karen Smith: A part of it? Yeah. Is that what year-old still do now?

Jean Cornelius: No, I’ve been in private practice since ’84 –

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: And then I got, I’m just now gettin’ back into it after a couple of years of just –

Karen Smith: Hangin’ out?

Jean Cornelius: Yeah, reconnecting with friends and children. And I have nine grandchildren and –

Karen Smith: Wow.

Jean Cornelius: And –

Karen Smith: It’s nice to have time to spend with them.

Jean Cornelius: Well they live far away and if I was ever gonna know ‘em I was gonna have to stop and do that.
Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And I spent two weeks with the two families. One has five children and one has four. Uh, three different times during that time or running around but –

Karen Smith: Great.

Jean Cornelius: And I went to Costa Rica and took Spanish.

Karen Smith: Oh, so now you can speak Spanish to the kids! Did that come from that?

Jean Cornelius: I think, I think, I think I always wanted, and I think I had Spanish in the fourth grade and I just feel like –

Karen Smith: It’s really easy to learn another language.

Jean Cornelius: And to communicate in Texas you’re gonna have to learn Spanish.

Karen Smith: When you’re drivin’ by and there’s a billboard in Spanish you’re gonna know now? So you’ve basically stayed in South Texas or –

Jean Cornelius: Central.

Karen Smith: Well south as opposed to where you were?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. Right.

Karen Smith: So do you like the area?

Jean Cornelius: Yes, I wouldn’t want to go back to the Panhandle.

Karen Smith: See I’ve never been to it, I think I’ve been through Amarillo but I don’t really know what –

Jean Cornelius: It’s flat, it’s dry and it’s –

Karen Smith: ****

Jean Cornelius: The wind blows all the time, it really is crazy making I think, the wind blowin’ all the time. But I spent, my mother died and I spent some time up there in ’94 and my, my face just hurt from the dryness.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: I just couldn’t get it.
Karen Smith: That happens to me all the time when I go back to Dallas, it’s different from being in Houston, you just get so used to it.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah.

Karen Smith: Okay, let me see if there’s anything. Um, on my, there’re a couple interesting ones. How would your life have been different if you’d gone to another school such as the University of Texas? How would your life have been different?

Jean Cornelius: I have no idea. My sister went to the University of Texas and, uh she married a guy there and she’s still married.

Karen Smith: So maybe! I don’t think we can make a connection there.

Jean Cornelius: But, but it was, I really think that everything works just fine. It was devastating to me at the time of the divorce but no I, I really feel like I’ve had it all.

Karen Smith: Yeah? Do really characterize your experience here like through your relationship with your husband or former husband? I mean that seemed to be just a big part of –

Jean Cornelius: I don’t know why that’s so much a part of my past, because I didn’t –

Karen Smith: Well it’s, it’s somethin’ that you remember –

Jean Cornelius: It’s almost like –

Karen Smith: – and it’s somethin’ that lasted.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah right.

Karen Smith: It was a thread to connect to.

Jean Cornelius: But I mean I didn’t date him all through school. Uh what, what Rice is also is sorta like a parent. It feels, it’s sorta like, a really important institution in my life and, and my folks were Chrysler dealers and I felt that way about Chrysler Corporation, I mean it’s almost like a parent or somethin’. And I don’t know if everybody does this or this is just part of my own –

Karen Smith: Well I think it’s kind of the idea of an alma mater.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah.

Karen Smith: You’ve got this place that you can go, and this place that you’re really connected to.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.
Karen Smith: And a lotta places like UT for example, probably wouldn’t have provided that kind of –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: – well I don’t know how many there were.

Jean Cornelius: Well of course living in Austin there were lots of rapid Longhorns there.

Karen Smith: Hah hah hah!

Jean Cornelius: They’d come back to be close. I don’t know what I was gonna say, somethin’ about –

Karen Smith: That’s great. I was just gonna say Rice is a small, smaller community so there’s more connection I think between, between the two. Um, what was the most important thing you learned about life here, and what did you not learn that you wish Rice had taught you? Wow, that’s a really heavy question.

Jean Cornelius: Well both, uh, uh, I think they raised us Rice, I mean they educated us at Rice with the idea that if the education a woman they education a family, that they didn’t education an individual.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: I don’t think we were treated as individuals. I don’t think –

Karen Smith: Do you think they tread men differently? Do you think they were treating men like individuals?

Jean Cornelius: I don’t know, I don’t know but I, I think that probably the girls’ school, I think things happen just right, but the girls’ school, if I’d had that first couple of years at the girls’ school and then come to Rice it might have been –

Karen Smith: Okay.

Jean Cornelius: – more –

Karen Smith: Because you would have been a junior and you would have –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. And more ego-building and so forth.

Karen Smith: Yeah.
Jean Cornelius: And, um, and, but, but I love Rice and I came back in 1991 to the publishing school because I began to, there’s a lotta, I’m really not a person that likes a lotta conflict.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And, uh, it just got, it just seemed like the practice of law was just too much.

Karen Smith: All about conflict!

Jean Cornelius: And so I started looking toward maybe you know doing somethin’ in publishing or somethin’. I came back and was a generation and a half older than everybody and, and the timing was bad and I thought I’d better say in law.

Karen Smith: Yeah, yeah.

Jean Cornelius: So I did for another two years and I’m gonna stay in it. And I went to law school because it’s supposed to be a good profession for older people.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm. You can do a lot with it. Um, what was the, what have you been doing since you left Rice? I think we –

Jean Cornelius: Covered that.

Karen Smith: Covered that one.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Is there anything else that you wanna, say, talk about?

Jean Cornelius: I’m very, yeah, I, uh, I’ve, I’ve been, the, the I guess I hadn’t realized the feeling of Rice being sort of like home or a parent or somethin’ until this conversation, but –

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: But I, uh, I enjoy, uh, Dr. Gillis’ letters.

Karen Smith: Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And hearing about what’s goin’ on and visiting the campus and I came to the Women’s Conference in 1963.

Karen Smith: Really? That’s great!

Jean Cornelius: And I don’t think this conference is gonna do what that one did.
Karen Smith: Right. It was a lot more innovative.

Jean Cornelius: It was, it was fantastic. And, and I really think it had a lot to do with changing my life.

Karen Smith: Wow. That’s great.

Jean Cornelius: A whole new outlook and way to look at things and so forth. But –

Karen Smith: And that was kind or, like in the middle of your kids and –

Jean Cornelius: Yeah, my youngest child was 6 months old, they were, uh, it was Margaret Mead, an anthropologist, Bruno Bettelheim, the child psychiatrist.

Karen Smith: Here, Margaret Mead was HERE?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: I didn’t know that!

Jean Cornelius: A couple times, ’63 and ’67. And, uh, Fortune Magazine editor that was a Rice graduate, a woman and Dr. Seinoff’s wife who had been volunteering a lot of years and they talked about how, if women would get paying jobs it would help the economy, about if we didn’t have women doin’ all these volunteer things how the society might suffer.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: Uh, Bettelheim was that it’s not the amount of time you spend with kids, the quality of time, and that maybe if you, you know if you worked and had a shorter time it would be more quality time, you know that’d get so much –

Karen Smith: They were really trying to –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: – bet people to start managing?

Jean Cornelius: And this was, yesterday I realized this was January of ’93, ’63, I didn’t remember when that was.

Karen Smith: Right.

Jean Cornelius: And, um, and, um, let’s see, who was the other one? Oh Margaret Mead I can’t remember, what, how that tied in except that was she was just talking anthropologically.
Karen Smith: She, she’s a very, incredibly, I mean I’m starting to read stuff about her and by her and it’s really great that she was here.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Yeah, that’s probably, I know it’d be really cool of like all, if we heard of these people like we hear of them now.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: That’s really neat.

Jean Cornelius: Well I think we had some wonderful ideas and I think it’s gonna maybe develop.

Karen Smith: Develop, I hope so. Well how do you feel like coming back now and like seeing all, obviously this is a new building, brand new building.

Jean Cornelius: Oh, it’s hard to recognize, because when I was here there was only, well the stadium was new, the first year the field house was open, first year they’d had girls’ PE, and Holly Beth Poindexter was, was 23 and I was 18, she was my teacher and it’s been interesting visiting with her.

Karen Smith: I just ate lunch with her so yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And uh, uh, they had Anderson Hall, the Lovett Building, the Physic Building and the Fondren Library.

Karen Smith: So the, the quad?

Jean Cornelius: And the chem building and that was, that was it.

Karen Smith: Wow.

Jean Cornelius: They built, they built the, oh the atomic thing –

Karen Smith: The nuclear laboratory?

Jean Cornelius: No, it was before that, the, uh, I, I can’t remember now what it’s called, maybe it’ll come to me in a little bit.

Karen Smith: Like I, I feel now that it’s, I mean there’s gonna be three buildings going up and when I come back next year there’s gonna be three new buildings that are foreign to me, you know and I’ve been here for four years and it’s, that’s kind of weird to me.

Jean Cornelius: Yeah, I think Cohen House was here.
Karen Smith: Mm hmm. Yeah.

Jean Cornelius: And the, the President’s home, but none, none of the you know the colleges weren’t, the men’s dorms –

Karen Smith: Baker.

Jean Cornelius: They weren’t colleges yet and, and of course there was no Jones College or any like that.

Karen Smith: Yeah. So that’s so great. So, when you, when you come back do you feel like, do you feel like it’s still home?

Jean Cornelius: Uh –

Karen Smith: Or how do you –

Jean Cornelius: I guess, I guess in ’91 when I came from the, for the publishing school it did not feel like the same place.

Karen Smith: And you were being a student too.

Jean Cornelius: I was being a student and I was over in the –

Karen Smith: Media Center.

Jean Cornelius: – next to the Media Center I guess, anyway the continuing education. And, uh, and the buses across the campus and, and the crime area. I mean it was, and the, and the drug store and the, and the dopies hangin’ out at the drug store over here.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: And all of the homes of the people livin’ behind locked gates and, and so on, I mean it was just really astounding to me, I was just glad I didn’t live in Houston anymore.

Karen Smith: Yeah, at this time. So you live in Aus, Austin now still?

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Yeah, it is, it is different. I think the Rice campus though is, like Houston has grown around our campus.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Which is nice.
Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: But unfortunately it’s not the best area of town, but it’s nice on that side!

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And then with Herman Park and everything.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm.

Jean Cornelius: It was just amazing to me that, that, and the medical center and everything that there would be that, that feeling her of, of, but that was probably one of the low points of crime in Houston was ’91.

Karen Smith: Yeah, and it’s getting a lot better, we’re doing a lot for security.

Jean Cornelius: – and, and um, the bus driver on the campus had just lost somebody in his neighborhood who was on the neighborhood watch, that I mean was shot, so it was very, you know –

Karen Smith: Oooh!

Jean Cornelius: It was, it was happenin’, it even touched us even just bein’ in town for a month, you know? Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: That’s really, that’s really intense. But, I don’t know, I think, I think it’s a neat place and I’m glad I came here.

Jean Cornelius: Yes.

Karen Smith: And I certainly think that, I’m big into destiny and fate, too –

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: You know and I think things happen like they need to happen and they’re gonna happen.

Jean Cornelius: I wish I’d realized that when I was your age but I didn’t realize it until I was about 50 and then I look back and I though agh!

Karen Smith: Well I’m glad that you realized it though.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm. Hmm, everything does seem to happen just right.

Karen Smith: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And if it, if it happens a little weird then there’s probably
Jean Cornelius: A lesson to learn?

Karen Smith: Yeah, exactly.

Jean Cornelius: Mm hmm.

Karen Smith: Exactly. Well that’s great. Is there anything else?

Jean Cornelius: I don’t think so.

Karen Smith: I’m just havin’ so much fun talkin’ to you.