Interviewer: I'm doing an interview with Emily Ladner of Class of 1937. We're interested in what it was like for women at Rice at the time where you are here. Um, just sorta get things rolling. Do you remember a favorite spot that you had on campus?

Emily Ladner: Oh, I just always loved the Sallyport.

Interviewer: Mm hmm.

Emily Ladner: And when you looked through the Sallyport, then there was no buildings across. You looked to the back of the campus, which was wild and it was very nice, and the sun set back there.

Interviewer: All right. What did you think when you first came here? Do you remember your first impressions of Rice?

Emily Ladner: Uh, no, because I was born in Houston. Uh, I always knew I would go to Rice, and, uh, I had been – they, they used to have every other year an engineering show, and I was brought to the engineering shows before I knew what college was I guess. And later, I, I took part in the engineering shows. They, uh, the chemists used to have the alchemist den, and it'd always just been three guys that did it. Well, the year we did it, I, I was a witch, and we did all of these tricks that, uh, you can pour something out and it bursts into flames, or you'd wash your hands in flame, and –

Interviewer: That's an –

Emily Ladner: – a lot of fun.

Interviewer: – exciting thing. Well, did you feel strange being one of the only women in your field?

Emily Ladner: No. Uh, there were actually seven of us in, uh, that, uh, uh, started honors, for honors in chemistry, and four of us finished it, uh, graduated, uh. And then I went on, uh, for a master's degree, but, uh, there was, uh, another woman who was two years ahead of me going for her Ph.D., so there were two of us ****. It was, it was not so lonely. And then all the, the guys were all very friendly and nice. One or two were not, but mostly they were very accepting.

Interviewer: You found you got the respect you deserved?

Emily Ladner: Yes. Uh, the, uh, the professors – I, I was just realizing this yesterday, uh, thinking about the subject of how I was treated as a girl here at Rice at that time. For one thing,
the, the original professors were still here in the early ’30s, and they were a very select group, and they, a number of them had daughters just my age who were in Rice, and I think that had a lot to do with the way they treated the girls in their classes. There was Dr. Wiess' daughter, Dorothy, and Dr. Chandler's daughter, Dorothy, and Mr. Watkins' two girls and Dr. Sanloff's two girls. We were all, uh, the, the same age and all in Rice at that time, and I'm sure that that had a lot to do with the way we were treated. Uh, the one thing that has always, uh, irritated me to say the least was that the year I got my master's degree in chemistry, uh, my faculty supervisor, it just didn't occur to him that I would want to be nominated for Sigma Xi, the scientific, uh. He was real-, really surprised and taken aback when I said, "Why wasn't I voted into Sigma Xi?"

And he said, "It didn't occur to me you would want to be." Here I was, going to be a professional chemist, and, you know, not having the professional organization. It just hadn't occurred to him. Uh, that's really, uh, my, uh, only serious complaint I think about it. I had complaints about the way **** Dean was treated. Uh, she was an excellent mathematics teacher. She was allowed to teach only the freshman girls, Math 100, and, uh, she was the first librarian. She set up the library, put it on the, uh, Library of Congress system. She was never given the full title of librarian. She was always listed as acting librarian.

Interviewer: Wow. Hard to believe. So, let's see. Where did you live while you were, you were here at Rice.

Emily Ladner: Well, I lived at home. Uh, we were, we were depression kids. If Rice hadn't been here and been essentially free, and if we could not have lived at home, many of us would not have been able to go to college at all. Rice was, uh, we knew we had to be in the top 10 percent of our high school class because we had to come to Rice.

Interviewer: Exactly. How do you think, um, the depression affected, um, just the attitude here at Rice? Did you sense it much? Was it, or once you were in the hedges, were you inside of –

Emily Ladner: There was a difference, certainly, between, um, the students who came from well-to-do families and the ones of us who were from very poor families. They, they dressed better. Uh, they were the ones who made the beauty section in the **** and went to all the dances and everything. Uh, but, and they were the ones who were in the literary societies. It was mainly the, uh, the girls from, uh, the more society families, the ones that were better off, that belonged to the, the four, uh, literary societies. Uh, the rest of us, uh, did not, were not asked to join. It was like, like sororities.

Interviewer: Mm hmm.

Emily Ladner: Um, it never, never bothered me. Uh, my parents had both been, uh, against fraternities and sororities when they were in college, and so it, uh, that was in the tradition that, uh, I didn't belong to any exclusive society.

Interviewer: It's sort of amazing to me to hear about things like the beauty section of the ****.

Emily Ladner: Mm hmm.
Interviewer: Things that just wouldn't happen today.

Emily Ladner: Mm hmm.

Interviewer: Uh, how did that make a person feel about the importance of appearance? I mean, was that a very important thing?

Emily Ladner: Oh, it was to some, I'm sure, very important. Uh, uh, it wasn't to me. Uh, in those days, I didn't have much sense of style or anything. I was very young for my years, and, uh, had been a Girl Scout up through the, until I finished high school, had been on the swimming team and everything like that in high school, and, and as I say, I was very young for my years. I was more interested in making the grade out here. Uh, you know that, in those years, girls were not supposed to be on the campus after 5:00 in the afternoon. There were no living accommodations for girls on the campus then. No eating accommodations, uh, for anyone that was not, uh, living in the dorms, and the dorms were all male at that time. Uh, Autry House had a little cafeteria that we, or we could walk to the drugstore. Uh, needless to say, we didn't observe that 5:00 limit. I was frequently still working in the chemistry lab after 5:00, and if there was any question, we could always go out a window. Uh, girls were not allowed to wear trousers on campus, but when I was in chemical engineering classes and had to clamber around on the heat exchangers and such, well I wore pants, and no one ever criticized it.

Interviewer: Did you, how often, or how much a week would you say you studied? Like, what percentage of your time was spent in studies?

Emily Ladner: Oh dear. I don't know. Um, my brother and I spent a good many hours at the dining room table. Uh, we were active in other things too, though. Uh, I was in the choral club. That was the only musical thing on campus, was a volunteer organization that had a faculty sponsor. And I was briefly in the dramatic club. But, uh, and, uh, I sang in, in church choirs that were not my church because in the depression you had this exchange of services, so there was a system where no one had any money. Uh, uh, my brother and I sang in the choir and the organist played, uh, accompaniments for our singing teacher. He gave us our singing lessons for free. That sort of thing was very common.

Interviewer: What did you, um, do for social life? Was there much of that going on? I know with you living at home, it probably was a different situation.

Emily Ladner: Well, we, surely we had friends, uh, some connected with Rice and some old friends from previous days. Uh, I was not one that went to the Saturday night dances, but we had parties certainly. Uh, well, we belonged to a very active, uh, young people's group at First Methodist Church at that time, and that had, uh, various activities. Uh –

Interviewer: Do you think a lot of people were involved with church groups, religious groups, then?

Emily Ladner: Yes. Uh, there were, uh, church groups on, on campus. Uh, the, uh, Baptist organization and there were, uh – I don't, I don't know that the Methodist had a, a group on
campus. Uh, I know the, uh, Baptist Students Union, BSU, they were active on campus and there were various church groups, but I don't believe there was a Methodist one. Uh, I, uh, was always sorry that Dr. Axson died when I was a sophomore, so I didn't get to take his famous Shakespeare course. Dr. Axson was, uh, was a very highly educated Princeton man. He was President Wilson's brother-in-law. Yeah, Edie Ellis, uh, no, not Edie Ellis. Uh, Ellen Axson Wilson was, uh, the President's wife. And, uh, Dr. Axson was, was very highly regarded as a Shakespeare scholar, and I was looking forward to his course, and he died two years too soon. You weren't allowed to take it until your senior year.

Interviewer: Were you, um, still capable, even with your chemistry honors program, to take a lot of humanities classes and things like that?

Emily Ladner: I took History 100 because, uh, Mr. McCann, the registrar, who was the admissions, uh, committee – if you made a good impression on Mr. McCann, you got in – uh, said that, uh, everyone should have a course in history, and so I took Dr. Lear's History 100. Made the worst grades I ever made in it. And I took an English course every year. You were required to take two, freshman English and the sophomore survey course, and after that, I took, uh, George Williams's Creative Writing and his, uh, Modern English and American Poetry. And I did take the Shakespeare course, but Carol Camden taught it when I took it. It was, it always complicated the exam schedule to have someone going cross-culture that way.

Interviewer: I imagine.

Emily Ladner: Um, but when we were out here, of course there were many fewer buildings than there are now, uh, but where the hedges are, uh, in the quadrangle, uh, those used to be, uh, cape jessamine hedges. Uh, do you know cape jessamines? They're, they're a gardenia grandiflora. They're about this big around, and they used to grow in this area all the time. The, a white fly invasion came in and killed 'em out, but they have very sweet gardenia perfume, and, uh, the hedges would just be blooming solid, and the, at final exam time, there was no air conditioning, and the mocking birds would be singing outside and the breeze would be wafting this, uh, gardenia scent in through the windows, and you were supposed to stay awake and alert for a three-hour final exam.

Interviewer: Have you stayed in Houston, and if so, have you been able to see the changes that the Rice campus has gone through?

Emily Ladner: Oh, well, yes. Uh, we've, we were, uh, out of Houston, uh, for 17 years, but Houston was always home base. We were down in Kingsville and, and at Dickinson. Uh, so we were in and out. We were strongly opposed to building the Fondren Library where they built it because in the, the original plans, it, nothing was to go across the big sweep of the – it was to be a quadrangle going all the way to the back, and the library was supposed to be off, oh I think about where, maybe where the biology building is now, in that area. Uh, but, oh, we used to come to a great books group on the campus, and I belong to the SOUW now and, and I've seen the campus through the years and approve of some of the buildings and not of others. I don't like this one at all. Those three buildings, the biology, geology and whatever the other one is, I think
those are handsome, modern buildings that fit in with the spirit of the campus. But, uh, there are others I don't care for.

Interviewer: I understand completely. So how about romance at Rice? Was that ever an issue?

Emily Ladner: Uh, romance. There were, there were very few marriages, practically no married students. Uh, there was a big controversy one year because the girl who was elected May Queen was married, and, and whether she was going to be permitted to be May Queen because she was married. And I knew one couple that got married and had a baby, and the girl dropped out of school, and he had to work after school. But, uh, so romance was, uh, and this was before the days of the pill, so romance was strictly above the waist. Uh, I was not, uh, as I say, I was young for my years. I did have a steady boyfriend for a couple of years. I, there, there was really nothing to it except he liked me enough to ask me out with him, and it was nice to have someone to go to the movies with and go to the basketball games with. We broke up amicably. Uh, there were, of course, some very, uh, intense romances. You couldn't have young people on a campus like this. But, uh, it was entirely a different character.

Interviewer: I guess so. Let's see. What do you remember, um, uh, being proud of at Rice? What accomplishment or something –

Emily Ladner: Uh, proud of something I did?

Interviewer: Yes. Or something Rice did. Just something that makes you proud to have been here.

Emily Ladner: Oh, I was just always proud of Rice's standing as, as really a, a fine school. We knew it was a fine school, and, and the, uh, the professors were such high caliber. Uh, Dr. Lovett had hand-selected them from all over the world, and, uh, brought Dr. Wilson from Scotland, and Dr. Freund from Germany, uh, Dr. Moraud from France, uh, and of course, Dr. Sanloff, Dr. Wiess. They were all, uh, top-notch people in their fields, and it was a privilege to, uh, to go to Rice. And is there something I did that I was proud of at Rice? I guess just, just getting through and getting my degrees. Uh, I can't, can't think of any one particular exploit.

Interviewer: Do you remember, um, your freshman year, just what changes or what struggles it meant to you?

Emily Ladner: I had always made 90s on my test papers, and that first, uh, until Christmas of that first year, I was just in despair to come up with 65s and 75s, and when I was studying harder than I ever had and not doing well. It was just a, a whole culture shock there, and I suppose students still encounter that.

Interviewer: I think that's a permanent fixture of Rice life.

Emily Ladner: Oh, they, uh, have you ever heard of the Rice Nightmare or the Rice Dream?

Interviewer: No, uh huh.
Emily Ladner: This is something that will pursue you for 30 or 40 years anyhow. It's the dream that you haven't been going to class. You don't even know where that class was, and exams are coming up and you haven't studied, you haven't been going to class, and here, you don't even know where the exam is going to be at. And it's, practically every Rice graduate has some form of that dream.

Interviewer: That's unbelievable.

Emily Ladner: That, uh, that you just haven't been studying and it, and it's final exam time. There, of course, there are variations on it, but, uh, so you're, you're marked for life once you've gone to Rice. Even your dreams.

Interviewer: How do you think your life would have been different had you been able to go to a different school? I know you said you came to Rice because of the cost issue, but –

Emily Ladner: Well, uh, I, it never occurred to me to want to go to any other school. Rice had been built up to me by my mother all my life, and, uh, my father died, uh, quite young. I was only 3 when he died, but they were living in Houston when Rice was being built, and they were so enthusiastic about the school, and, uh, it, it was just always an ideal to come to Rice. I had no, no desire to go anywhere else.

Interviewer: Was it everything you thought it'd be?

Emily Ladner: Pardon?

Interviewer: Was it everything you thought it would be? Hoped it would be?


Interviewer: Was there ever a time when you thought about throwing it in and going home? I can't do this.

Emily Ladner: No, uh, you know, we never dropped courses. Uh, when, if you signed up for a course, you didn't decide later that you weren't interested and drop it. You drudged your way through it no matter what. Uh, I, I was just astounded in later years to hear about Rice students dropping courses, dropping them before they would have the grade on their, uh, on their record. I can think of at least one that I would have been happy to drop.

Interviewer: I, I think students nowadays almost expect to get a good grade from a class, you know.

Emily Ladner: Uh huh.

Interviewer: If you don't get a good grade, then you might as well drop it.
Emily Ladner: Uh huh.

Interviewer: But that wasn't the attitude back then?

Emily Ladner: Uh, no. No. Uh, it, uh, I suppose there were people who dropped courses, but, uh, I can't, I don't, I don't know of any. We took it for granted that if you signed up for a class, you stuck it out.

Interviewer: Would you say there was a lot of intellectual discussion that went on?

Emily Ladner: No, I don't think so. We weren't very intellectual outside of class. I think we talked about just the ordinary things, what, what was the popular song of the day or what movie we wanted to see that Saturday night.

Interviewer: Things don't change. Well, I guess to wrap up, um, what would you say is the most important thing you learned at Rice?

Emily Ladner: Mm. That you don't have to know it all; you just have to know where to find it.

Interviewer: ****. Thank you very much.