

TRANSCRIPT (uncorrected)

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Kim Tuckett: This is Kim Tuckett and I'm interviewing Jan Solomon, Rice Class of '74. All right, so just to get your memory started about Rice and everything like that, can you remember a favorite spot that you had on campus? All right, so, let's see, just to get your memory started about Rice and everything like that, um, can you remember a favorite spot that you had on campus?

Jan Solomon: Well, yeah, I can. I used to hang out at the tennis courts –

Kim Tuckett: Really?

Jan Solomon: – and the gym and I was always a real athlete in growing up and in high school I was on the tennis team and everything, so I spent a lot of time over by the gymnasium playing volleyball and playing tennis and, um, watching the tennis players. I had a real interest in watching tennis, so that was kinda my hangout.

Kim Tuckett: Did you play any sports?

Jan Solomon: I played on the Rice team –

Kim Tuckett: Mm hmm.

Jan Solomon: – on the collegiate team. We were in a separate league, we were not in the Southwest Conference, and I don't really remember what conference we were in. We played different schools, and one year I played No. 1, I think it was when I was probably a senior 'cause we had the older players that were there, so I played on the Rice team and, um, we had powder puff football, and I played anything that were sports at Rice, I played softball and stuff like that.

Kim Tuckett: Was that real common? Did most people, was it a very sports-oriented social life you think?

Jan Solomon: Um, no, not really. You know, it was, people were pretty focused on their school work and everything so there weren't a lot of people doing sports, not that much in, in the women. I think more so for the men, definitely.

Kim Tuckett: Did you have a lot of interaction with men?

Jan Solomon: Um, yeah, as a matter of fact I did. As a matter of fact, well, this is, now I'm gonna go into a different kind of a story, but, um, when I was graduating from high school I had a boyfriend and I was from East, East Texas, not far from her, Longview, Texas, and, uh, and I really did not wanna leave, and I wanted to stay, you know, in that area and have my boyfriend

and all that, and, I mean, even though I did well in school, I didn't really have my sights on being, you know, a chemist or a scientist or a mathematician or anything like that. I think the culture was so strong where I was from, it was more, you know, my goals in life were to get married and have kids, you know, and be like my mother, and so, um, but my sister'd gone to Rice and she was really smart, and, um, my parents were not wealthy and they told me, well, wherever I got a scholarship, you know, that was where I was gonna hafta go to school. So, um, I ended up coming to Rice and really not wanting to at all, not wanting to leave home first of all because I'd been very sheltered, and then second of all, not, uh, going to a difficult school because I, academics was not my thing, I was a sports person, but it was free education and my parents, who neither one graduated from college, wanted all their kids, all four of us to go to college. So I ended up at Rice and, now what was your question that made me think of that, what did you –

Kim Tuckett: Boys, I asked about –

Jan Solomon: – oh, about boys. So, you know, it was kind of like I wanted to be with the boys when I was in high school and it was sort of a natural for me, you know, to have boyfriends when I was here, and I think that was all the sports-related thing too, that I was, sports was always dominated by men, so when I got here, you know, I kinda gravitated more toward the men rather than toward the academics, the women or the males that were in academics. So I ended up, um, I had a boy, I had several boyfriends but the one that I married was a tennis player for Rice and he was an All-American tennis player and, and, uh, what a great life I ended up having out of all that, but, um, men have always been very important in my life and, uh, and at Rice as well.

Kim Tuckett: Did you find it difficult living at a women's college? But you lived at Jones at the time, right?

Jan Solomon: Uh huh, Jones and, uh, that was only, that was the only thing that was available. I mean, when we were here, we could only, it wasn't co-ed, so there, it was, wasn't like an option, you didn't even, it wasn't in your mind to even think that that would be where you could live at a men's college or anything.

Kim Tuckett: Are you surprised at how that works now?

Jan Solomon: No, I'm not surprised. As a matter of fact, I don't know if you were in on that earlier discuss, you were at the table when I said that that my sister actually lived at Hanson with her boyfriend for two years before it went co-ed, and maybe that was kinda the beginning of it going co-ed, that, you know, women were spending a lot of time in the men's dorms and men were spending time in the women's dorms, but it was, that was more difficult to get by with 'cause you had to sign them in and out and all that, but no, I'm not surprised, you know, I think it's part of the way the culture's moving. Men and women starting to relate on all different levels and not have that scary sexual thing going on of, oh, my God, what's gonna happen if they're together.

Kim Tuckett: So you said that your goals were somewhat limited when you came here?

Jan Solomon: Oh, definitely.

Kim Tuckett: How did they change? What, what changed?

Jan Solomon: Well, you know, the truth is, I'm not really sure what happened, but, um, just by me coming here and getting away from my family and my environment, which was Southern Baptist, first of all, and a real strong family tie of real strong discipline and, you know, I would just say I was so limited in my own thinking and of who I was or who I could be. I mean, my idols were, you know, Barbie and \*\*\*\*\*, um, anyway, I would just say that, you know, just coming here, first of all to a big city, that was quite a shock first of all, and then to start to be exposed to people, and I would just say Rice students were, um, very dif, they were very different from the environment not which I grew up in as far as just being more free spirited, more free thinkers, and so just getting into that environment all of a sudden, you know, I started to have different idols and different, you know, maybe who I would want to be like or who I could be myself, and whereas, you know, before it was pretty much, well, I wanted to, to be an actress, probably just because I'd seen something on TV. You know, that was kinda my sole, uh, access to the world, living where I lived, and, um, so I, and then, when I left Rice with this sort of new opening that maybe I could be, um, anything, I think that would probably, that'd be the way to say it. There were no limitations on me at that time, although I think I still had in the background that I should get married and have kids, you know, that's such a strong cultural, um, training that I had, but, but then I said, well, you know, what do I really wanna be and, and, um, and then at that time my husband, he wasn't my husband yet, but he said to me, look, I'm traveling all over the world playing in tennis tournaments. Why don't you come go with me, and who could resist that? I mean, I had not even been on an airplane before, if you can imagine, this was in 1974. So we started traveling around the world and I started to see the world in kind, and then having the background of a Rice education or an education that was more open thinking, more global thinking, more international thinking. My whole focus became on the world, and I, I really would say became a world citizen, a global citizen, and I saw a lot of poverty and I saw a lot of, um, degradation of human beings and I completely committed my life to having that, that me when I left the world, that it would be a better place for all of humanity. So I think it was really a combination of things. I think it first of all, coming here gave me, opened my eyes so that I could see the world, and then that I had the opportunity to really to see it and it was a combination \*\*\*\*\*, and then I started working what I'm gonna call in a transformational process for personal and social transformation, and I'd taken so many courses, I can't even name them all in the last 20 years, of, uh, what it takes to transform one's own beliefs, transform one's own cultural background, transform and have it be then be shared with the world, so would've never dreamed that I would live the life that I life now, and, oh, it just moves me to think about, you know, where I came from and what's possible for everyone, you know, that it would happen to me. I don't know why that's, I, you know, I have such a great life, and I really want to make, you know, a difference in the world, and then, now all of a sudden, in 1991, I've always loved to sing. This is a whole, you know, another thing, and I always sang in church, obviously, a good Southern Baptist would do that, but, um, I never had any formal training, and I had the opportunity to sing in Carnegie Hall and with the chorus and then again, um, I was at, invited to sing in an opera in 1991, and ever since then, I have completely fallen in love with opera and classical music and, uh, it's kinda like, like I have a whole other life, and now I can't imagine

what will happen in another ten years. You know, if things have opened up for me, you know, like that, what will, you know, what will be my career when I'm 50 and 60 and 70. I'm so excited to be alive, you know.

Kim Tuckett: That's wonderful. What d'ya think your life would've been different had you gone to another university maybe? One without quite as much free thinking?

Jan Solomon: Well, well, I think, you know, I wanted to go to Kilgore Junior College which, you know, it was a big thing to be a Rangerette, you know, that was like the big thing and, um, I think, we talked about this a little bit. Uh, I don't know if it was at lunch today, but sometimes we can, about there is such a strong culture in Texas that is very limiting, and I see it when I come back. I wouldn't say in Houston, necessarily, but in other pockets of Texas, and it's very, um, bigoted and racist and, uh, separating and divisive and, you know, and I love Texas. I mean, this is where I was born, but, um, I would say that that is, um, if I had gone to a school like that, that I would probably have, you know, the truth is, I would probably be happy 'cause I think I'm basically a very happy person, but I would never have had the opportunities that I've had to open up my thinking, and I think I would be, wherever I would be, I would be doing good work, I think, but if I went to Kilgore Junior College or maybe if I'd gone to University of Texas where I really wanted to go, I would've probably seen the world, uh, differently too. I mean, just to be in a university atmosphere and, but I do think there's something very special about Rice and the opportunity that I was afforded by being here and the professors were just so incredible. You know, Dr. Cuthbertson, he's in political science. Now, even though I think at the time I didn't understand very much of what he was saying, he, he seems like ahead of his time, that now, you know, when I look back on what I studied and learned, somehow it seeped in and it, you know, became a part of the way I viewed the world, and can understand the world. I think I have a real, um, tolerance and a patience with the world for where we are now, and that makes it easier for me to work in the world, rather than resisting and hating the way it is in the world. I'm not saying sometimes I don't feel that way, but I think much more I understand that the world is in process and that we are, that we create myths and we create the values that we have in the world to be able to cope, you know, with the way the world is, but to always know that we're the ones creating them, the myths and the values, so if you're creating them, then you obviously can change them.

Kim Tuckett: So would you say that academics took a backseat to your, just personal and social sort of growth that you did?

Jan Solomon: Definitely, definitely. You know, I would say to tell ya the truth, as far as knowledge is concerned, I can't recall learning, I don't know what you would call that, uh, learning knowledge. I, I really don't think that's the, the main thing I got when I was here. It was something way more inside, there was, there was some kind of learning going on for me that was, had more depth to it and, you know, look, I went to school, a lot of my friends were chemists and, you know, people like that who had a lot of lot of knowledge and they got that here too but I was, I think I got what I came here to get, to tell ya the truth, and I was a very social animal and definitely soc, being social here was important to me, and I did that. I mean, I actually think if you wanna do that at Rice, you'll find a way to do it and back then, you know,

you really had to either make that happen or, or really seek it out because there wasn't a lot of, you know, social activity going on.

Kim Tuckett: What was the social life like and how did you make the most of it?

Jan Solomon: Well, let's see. I'm tryin' to remember how we, you know, I would, mostly the men were having parties, and you either had to know a, a guy that was part of the party and, you know, get yourself invited or just crash it, which was kinda of, at that time, you know, it kind, it did say a little bit something about, and you had to be careful about that, but, you know, I was wanting to have fun and I hung out, out a lot with football players and, and then with my husband when he was here. He only stayed two years at Rice and, uh, so, you know, I just kinda had a little meter for fun, you know, and I was looking for fun, and I, you know, I tried out for cheerleader. I was never a cheerleader in high school or anything but it seemed like, you know, that crowd was having a little bit more fun, and then with sports, you would be around the fun, some of the fun things that were happening, and you would also hear about, if you hung out at the gym, you would know where the parties were and all that, and I would think my academics suffered a little bit because of that, but I definitely think it was well worth what I got out of being here for four years.

Kim Tuckett: I heard some people saying earlier that they felt sort of a negative attitude towards cheerleaders or athletes on campus. Did you ever feel that?

Jan Solomon: Uh, you know what, I didn't. I didn't feel that myself. I would say in general, I, I didn't feel it personally, but I would say in general that the, that the cheerleaders were thought of as bimbos, you know, and, uh, I don't know, you know, it was like, we were probably more laughed at than anything, but for some reason that didn't bother me. Uh, I was pretty confident about who I was and, and but I would say for the, for the jocks, I mean, I don't know if that's what everybody calls them now but, you know, for the football players and other athletes, they took a lot of shit, I'm telling you. You know, even though there were some very smart guys in there, um, as a group, they were pretty much thought of as really stupid and, um, and I would hafta say at that time I would be, I would guess that Rice had a policy of letting athletes in, lower SAT scores. I think the standards were lowered for athletes at that time, so there probably were some, I would say, were stupid but, you know, that really, um, were not, you know, really high intelligence and, but they all got the, the label as dumb jocks or whatever.

Kim Tuckett: I'd say the '70s were a pretty political time. Did you sense much of that or was it as apathetic then as it is now at Rice?

Jan Solomon: That's funny to hear you say that. Um, it's interesting because the year before I came, I was kind of like post-hippie, and the hippie era was really, um, the one that was not apathetic, that were really, people were just saying something, the students, and, you know, and like at Kent State, they were actually killed for that stand, the stance that they took, and the year before I came, there was a, um, they took over a building here or something, I don't really know. I was trying to find out from somebody historically what happened, but there was a protest on campus and I think it was a building takeover or something by some of the students but, um, my sister was older and she was more, um, involved in some of that, but I, I think, I came in sort of

on the coattails and was a little bit of, uh, wanting to be a hippie but, you know, I was more like a hippie-wannabe, but dressing that way, but for me and other people on campus, I don't think, you know, Vietnam was either just over, I can't remember, what are the dates of Vietnam, I'm tryin' to remember.

Kim Tuckett: It's '68 to '72.

Jan Solomon: '70, '72?

Kim Tuckett: Something like that.

Jan Solomon: So it was just right after, uh, Vietnam and, you know, that was definitely a discussion and, you know, people were so happy they didn't get drafted. You know, you would talk about things like that and Lyndon Johnson, of course, he was from Texas so there were certain things, but there wasn't really what I would call stand-taking regarding politics and, you know, there was, I remember a lot of activity of this, um, I know there was a black group, I'm tryin' to remember what it was called, S, what was, do you know there's a, if they're still an organization on campus for blacks?

Kim Tuckett: Um, there's a black student union.

Jan Solomon: It was, black student union, that's what it was, it was just getting formed. So there were things kind of bubbling up at that time and, but I wouldn't say as a whole that people were real active politically, but you really couldn't, you couldn't get away from it, even on the Rice campus. It, it had infiltrated into conversation and \*\*\*\*.

Kim Tuckett: Did you feel that, that the campus was a very sort of closed community? Did you do anything like outside beyond the hedges? Was that a big push at the time or?

Jan Solomon: Well, not really, you know, until I was a senior and moved off campus when I was a senior and until that time, you know, pretty much we stayed on campus. I think there was a Jack-in-the-Box in the village, and I can remember my husband and I, after we'd study, you know, half the night, we would head for Jack-in-the-Box to get a taco or something, but that was about as far as you would go. You know, the village, you would, and that you could almost consider Rice at that time. It was kind of like just an extension, but, you know, we really didn't go, get off campus very much, and it was a false sense of security, I would say. My sister had two suite mates who were raped on the campus, um, that was probably in '72 or '73, so, um, you know, we, even though you felt very protected and very safe here, which was really kind of an illusion, um, uh, you know, things did happen, but I think we were sort of lulled by the hedges and, you know, probably weren't as careful as we should've been \*\*\*\*, but, um, I always felt like it was a sanctuary. I even still call it the sanctuary, it's so beautiful here.

Kim Tuckett: You said that, um, you had a boyfriend most of the time? Was, was dating and romance, was that very common was it or?

Jan Solomon: Oh, yeah, definitely. Being, I think I hung out with the girls who did that, you know, who had boyfriends, and then there were a group of women who, you know, that wasn't a thing. You know, they were studying all the time, but there were definitely girls that were dating and, you know, and you would sit in the lobby and talk about, you know, who you were goin' out with and, you know, it was girls talking and having fun and, you know, going out on Friday and Saturday nights and during the week. I'm just tryin' to remember what, if there was anything about that. We seemed like regular, regular the girls.

Kim Tuckett: Yeah.

Jan Solomon: I would say women but I really wouldn't think of us as being women at that time. Or we were more like the girls, fresh, fresh from high school.

Kim Tuckett: Did, was the ratio at the time of men to women, was it lopsided way in favor of men at the time?

Jan Solomon: Yeah, it was.

Kim Tuckett: Did you sense that and what affect did that have on the campus?

Jan Solomon: Well, I would say, um, first of all it just seemed like there were a lot more men around and, you know, and there were more men's colleges. I think it must've been five men's colleges to two women or something, something like that. You would have to check that in the records but, um, you know, in your classroom, way more men in the classroom than women, and, but you know, it really didn't bother me or anything, and I really never felt, you know, that it was a disadvantage. I mean, I kinda like it, you know. There were always plenty of guys for the girls and, you know, we kind've enjoyed all of the, the, uh, attention and so, I never see it as a problem or anything like that, and at that time I wouldn't say I was conscious at all of any kind of feminism or thinking anything about a gender gap or gender problem, that wasn't even in consciousness at that time; for me it wasn't. I'm sure it was boiling up in the country somewhere.

Kim Tuckett: Was there a consciousness of the difference at the time between science and engineering students and humanities students?

Jan Solomon: Then I, there was definitely, that was kind of a joke in particular I think among the, the women in the, in the, in our college. Now see, I'm calling us women. When you talk about being smart, it makes me wanna say women, but, um, because those of us who were in the humanities, we really didn't study that much to tell ya the truth. I mean, when we had to, we did, but the, but the other suite mates and people on our floor who were chemistry or math, you know, it just seemed like they were studying all the time, and they, there was some resentment about that, you know. We would walk through the lobby there, they would be studying on a Friday night or a Saturday night, and, you know, we were all friends. I mean, that was one great thing about Rice. I have, some of my most wonderful friendships I still have, but there was a little bit of resentment and you could always tell, you know, that that was, it was a little bit like we were on a free ride or something, you know, not having to work so hard, and I felt pretty

badly for them, you know, having to study and never really getting to play, although they probably have. You know, I think that now that they, the, the ones I'm thinking of, particularly the women, they probably used their studying, you know, to keep from whatever they thought was out there with men or socially or whatever so.

Kim Tuckett: Yeah.

Jan Solomon: I mean, they had always, I think getting to that point of, you know, wanting to be in that field had been driven from probably avoiding being very social in high school anyway so I'm not, I don't know that that's true but.

Kim Tuckett: Was there anything you wished you could've done here that you weren't able to and you didn't do?

Jan Solomon: Well, I \*\*\*\* have any regrets but I wish that I had taken advantage of the education that Rice would really offer me, but it just wasn't a priority for me at that time in my life, and I told Helena Mickey after she spoke that I'd give anything now to be in Houston and be able to come in and audit her classes or be in women's studies and then particularly music. I would, you know, although that seemed that was, none of that was here when I was here but, um, I think I, that would be my only regret was to not be more of a sponge while I was here and soak, soak up more knowledge, but I think I soaked up more than I, than I think I did.

Kim Tuckett: What're ya most proud of you doing at Rice?

Jan Solomon: Probably graduating, first of all. First graduating, getting in, first of all, where, you know, that was real questionable with, with, although I had good grades, my SATs were not great, but to be accepted, and then to actually done what it took to go through four years of studying and really disciplining myself on my own, because I had never done that my whole life. You know, my family had been so, um, closed and so, um, protective, I would say that, you know, my father did my homework with me the, my whole life. My whole life my mother and my father, particularly my father, sat down and did home work with me. So I think the growth I had as a human being, you know, was probably a great accomplishment, but to've really done what I needed to do to graduate.

Kim Tuckett: You think that was the most challenging thing is learning to, to make it on your own, to be responsible?

Jan Solomon: I think so. Yeah, I think so. When I first came to Rice, I was here two weeks and I called my parents and I told 'em to come and get me, that I was not gonna stay here, and so they did, they came and got me, and they took me home. They didn't withdraw me, you know, they must've called unbeknownst to me and just said, you know, that they knew I needed to, you know, just have that last home visit, you know, and, uh, I was home for a week and then some, something clicked and I said, okay, and I, I'm ready to go back. Now, I went back a lot, you know, weekends, but and actually thought when I went back at that time that I was not gonna stay here, but whatever it was that I needed to get through was, it was that separation, you know, from my parents, the culture, you know, everything, my whole life that I'd known in my whole



life. It's so funny to think of me at that way 'cause I'm so not that way, you know. Thank God for Rice.

Kim Tuckett: I guess, I guess just to wrap up, I guess I want you to tell me the most important thing you think happened to you here.

Jan Solomon: The most important thing that happened to me. Well, I hafta honestly say of meeting my husband and of meeting someone who was brought here not only, you know, for his athletic abilities but he had to make the grades too, and, um, you know, that it was an institution where I could meet someone who was smart and had, you know, qualities 'cause there was quite an interview process. I mean, the interview process that people go through, I mean, if you could actually interview somebody to be married, it's kind of like the Rice interview process. So he had passed that and I, I just think that, you know, that's probably the most important thing, just meeting a wonderful human being and who came here for a lot of the same reasons that I came, you know, to Rice and that we've been married for 17 years.

Kim Tuckett: That's great.

Jan Solomon: Mm hmm.

Kim Tuckett: Thank you very much for your time \*\*\*\*.

Jan Solomon: You're welcome.

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