

**University of Illinois Student Life, 1928 – 38:  
Oral History Project  
Portia Allyn Smith – 1934 - 1937  
Urbana, Illinois  
April 18, 2001**

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

**Ellen Swain:** This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain. The narrator is Portia Allyn Smith, who attended the University of Illinois from fall 1934 through 1937. We are at Mrs. Smith's home in Urbana, Illinois, and the date is April 18th, 2001.

**Could you state your full name and birth date?**

Portia Smith: My maiden name is Portia Moffet Allyn, A-L-L-Y-N. I married George Edward Smith [class of 1937]. My birth date is December 26, 1916. I was born in Urbana.

**ES: Tell me about growing up? What did your parents do? Where did you live?**

PS: I was born in Urbana and my dad was on the University Agricultural Faculty as a, well, I don't know what you would call him. He was an assistant, he wasn't a professor, but he had a teaching job, teaching and research I guess, on the campus. But in 1916, he and his father decided that they had to raise wheat for the country, for the war effort. So they went to Montana and bought some land in Montana. My dad wanted to become a farm advisor. In those days, to be a farm advisor in Illinois you had to have five years of practical farming experience. So that's the way that he got his experience, he went to Montana and farmed with his dad in the dry land farming area of eastern Montana.

He came back to Illinois in 1920, maybe. About five years. Somewhere around 1920 or 21 and settled in Dekalb, Illinois, where he got the job as assistant farm advisor in Dekalb. That was a big enough county to have a full time advisor and an assistant. He became an assistant and after several years in Dekalb County he became farm advisor full time in Dewitt County, which is where I went to grade school and partly high school, in Clinton, Illinois.

My dad died in 1931 in the fall of pneumonia. So my mother moved the family, we had four children but my younger brother had died of pneumonia that same spring. She moved us back to Urbana, which was her old home. I went into Urbana High School in the middle of my junior year. Of course my life was ruined, you know. *[Laughter.]* It was hard to fit into a high school group that was already set anyway. But I managed to get through and I graduated in '33. I belonged to the band, played the clarinet.

**ES: How did your mom get along in the early 30's during the Depression?**

PS: Her father had left her some money, so she had a little money. And she had a little insurance, but most of that went to something else. She was not good with money. *[Laughter.]* I don't know what us kids did. My sister is two years younger than I am. I had a brother who was about two years older. He was already at the University when my dad died. He had come over from Clinton to Urbana and had finished I think a year and a half when dad died. He did

not finish because he couldn't scrape up the money. When the banks closed in 1933, Roosevelt closed the banks, all the money he had was tied up in the bank. It was not much, but \$100 in those days was some money. He didn't have any money, and mom didn't have any money to do anything with, so she said, "Well, we still have our ranch in Montana, I'll send you out there and you can be a farmer." [*Laughter*]. Well, he went out there, she got some things together, and he tied it all in, whatever he had, got a truck, and in the end he traded all his possessions for an old airplane because he was crazy about flying. He had lessons earlier for flying before my dad died. Bought this airplane and was a smart-alecky kid and was flying around in this little town where they had the ranch. In the meantime he had married the school teacher too. But on the first wedding anniversary, crashed that plane, killed himself, and that was the end of that brother. So, two brothers are gone [Younger brother died in April '31 of pneumonia].

Then my sister, let's see, she had gone with my dad to Montana. My dad died in Montana. He had gone out there from Clinton, Illinois, he wanted to trade in his dry farm area of grazing land up in the mountains. He was looking around and, anyway, he contracted pneumonia, if you contract it. Anyway he got pneumonia and really died of it right there in Montana. There wasn't penicillin or anything in those days. He didn't make it. My sister, the only one, had gone with him to Montana and I was boarded out with a family friend in Clinton and was going to high school. My sister didn't get to move back to Urbana at that time. An aunt of ours in Texas offered to take the sister for several years, so she lived with her in Wichita Falls, Texas. But she did come back to Urbana and live with Mother and me in the late 30s, '34 or '35 or somewhere in there. She graduated from Urbana High School in '36. So she did get here. She went on to college at Illinois in music for two years, played the cello. I don't remember if she had a scholarship, I don't know about that, but she did get to go for two years.

I was in school at the same time and I was working for the National Youth Administration. Do you remember hearing about that? It was the government program to help college students through school. I had a clerk's job, we called it secretarial, but it was plain old clerk, in the geology department. I got that as a freshmen and had that same job for three years all the time I was in school.

**ES: How many hours a week did you spend at work?**

PS: I think only 20, I believe, I'm not sure. But that brought in \$35 a month through that program and that was a big help, I must say. It paid all the tuition. Tuition in those days was \$35 a semester.

**ES: And then you lived at home to save money?**

PS: Lived at home so I didn't really have a whole lot of extra expense. Books certainly weren't as expensive as they are today. We tried to get second-hand ones when we could. We lived in Urbana, almost downtown Urbana, on Green Street. I walked back and fourth to the campus. I'd come home for lunch, back to the campus. Twice a day I made that trek, it was a mile each way, so I was a pretty good walker. If I hadn't been, I sure would have learned in a hurry. I could've taken the little street car, but it would cost more time than there was to spend taking the street car. They didn't have any bus service in those days. We did have a car for a while, but my mother had to dispose of that because she couldn't afford to keep it.

That was one year. The second year [1935-1936] we moved from Green Street to south Lincoln Avenue. My sister wanted to be in a better location she said [*laughter*]. So my mother found an apartment that she liked and we moved into it [summer of '35].

**ES: Was it important to your mother that you go to college?**

PS: That was determined before we were born [*laughter*]. Her father [my grandfather] was a graduate of the class of 1877. And she had two sisters and a brother and they all graduated from Illinois. My mother got her bachelor's degree in 1903 and got a master's degree in 1904. After 1904 she taught school in different places. She finally ended up teaching at the Colonel Wolfe School in Champaign. She taught there for many years until she was married in 1912.

We moved to this apartment on south Lincoln, because my sister said it would "up" her social status, but that wasn't the real reason. She liked it better and it was closer to her friends. She must have been a freshmen or maybe still in high school. We were there until the summer of '36. My mother and my sister decided that they had to go to Chicago to live because my sister wanted a better cello teacher. She was pretty good with the cello, but she didn't think the teachers here were good enough for her [*laughter*]. So, they went up to Chicago. They managed to go up there and live in a tiny little apartment. We had some relatives in Chicago and Chicago in those days wasn't too hard.

That left me without a place to live so my mother put the apartment up for rent furnished. She knew that Maria Leonard, who was Dean of Women at that time, wanted an apartment. So Mom got in touch with her and Maria Leonard rented our apartment furnished for the next year. But there was the condition that she had to find me a place to live. She got me into the Beta house, which was a co-op house on campus. I don't know whether you've had anybody tell you about those or not. There was, I was going to say four, but there may have been more than four on the campus.

The girls did all the work and paid all the bills. They had a house mother and lived together as a family would, except it was a bunch of girls. I got into the Beta house which was on south Lincoln, I think there is a parking lot there now. Right south of that block of buildings at Nevada and Lincoln. It was between that building and the hospital, that's where the Beta house was. That was the year of '36 and '37. That was a good year because I learned a lot. There was 22 girls and a house mother. I really got a good short course in life almost. Most of the girls were farm girls. That was one of the purposes of the co-op houses, some place for the farm girls to live. There were some city girls, but nearly all were farm girls.

My roommate became one of my very best friends. I had two roommates. One of them died right after she got out of college. I really don't remember of what. But this one roommate that I thought so much of just died a few years ago of emphysema really, but she didn't smoke. She had some kind of lung congestion that just did her in. Anyway, she was from Genoa, Illinois. She married a boy in agriculture that I introduced her to [*laughter*]. During this year in the Beta house I met my husband at some Agricultural Club function that I was invited to by another boy. I met George at that function. I guess that was a good thing.

**ES: You mentioned you went to business school before you went to U of I. How did that come about?**

PS: Yes. Well, Mom thought I could get a job if I had business training. It did help. I went to Illinois Commercial College, which was probably the best commercial college in Illinois at that time.

**ES: Where was that located?**

PS: Right on the campus. It was private, but it was right on Wright Street in what was called Illini Hall. I don't know what they call it now. The building to the south of Hanley's, well, Hanley's isn't even there any more.

**ES: I know what you're talking about.**

PS: It was south of the corner of Wright and John. Illinois Commercial College rented the building and it was quite a school.

**ES: So you were there for a year?**

PS: I was there for nine months, not quite nine months. I took everything except machine work. They were just beginning to teach machines, meaning, what do we call those things. They were sort of calculators, but I think they called them "comtometers." Great big things [laughter], but I did not take that course. They were used mainly for bookkeeping, and I was not interested in bookkeeping. I was interested in short hand and typing. I got pretty good in short hand and competent at least in typing. I suppose that helped because that was what I stressed when I applied for jobs. It didn't hurt, I know.

**ES: Then you entered the U of I in '34?**

PS: In the fall of '34.

**ES: What was your major?**

PS: Well, the first semester I thought I was going to be a P.E. teacher and get into P.E. But that idea soon left me and I decided that I was too much interested in other things. I finally majored in geology, I set that as my major. I don't even think we had to set a major in those days until our junior year. But I took courses in geology and tried to chose things that would lead in that direction. One course that I had my freshman year, which was not open for freshmen, [laughter] but I got in, was a geology field trip during Easter vacation. It was a whole course in field geology. They had their big trip over Easter vacation under Dr. Wanless [Harold Rollin Wanless], who has been dead for years. We went to different areas, different geological areas around the Midwest. One was the sand dunes of Indiana on the south coast of Lake Michigan. One was the driftless area in Wisconsin, around Baraboo. The Illinois River area around LaSalle-Peru. Several other areas, I don't even remember them all. At that time I was interested mainly in sand dunes. So my term paper for that course was on sand dunes. I think I got a B in that course. There were three girls and about ten boys in that course.

**ES: Were there many women in Geology?**

PS: Very, very few. [*Laughter.*] I don't remember, but there was one other girl and she was also from Urbana [in freshman Geology].

**ES: Did a lot of students in your high school class go to the U of I?**

PS: Not a lot, but many. Our class probably had 150 or so, somewhere in there. Out of that 150, well, I don't know. I should know that, but I don't know how many went to the U of I. At least a third of them probably started anyway. Several of the girls, most of the girls probably did odd jobs. I don't know what girls did in those days because I was not in a crowd that did things very much. I was kind of a loner, still am [*laughter*]. It was a good year.

**ES: Why did you go to the U of I? Why did you chose that school?**

PS: Family tradition! We had to! We had to.

**ES: Your mother wanted you to go.**

PS: And I lived in town, I couldn't afford to go anywhere else. It would have been nice to go to a big girls school I think, like Smith or Radcliffe, or one of those eastern colleges, but I wasn't in that class.

**ES: When you went to school, did you have career goals in mind? Did you want to be a geologist?**

PS: For a while, I was definitely set on being a petroleum geologist. It didn't work out. I don't believe there was a woman petroleum geologist in the whole country at that time. But, it didn't pan out that way. I could have been in a office, that's for sure, done business and technical work for a petroleum company. In the meantime, I had met George [*laughter*].

**ES: Did you have any favorite professors that you remember?**

PS: Dr. Quirke, the one that I worked for all of those three years. Dr. Terrence T. Quirke who was a professor of geology but his main field was, I think, petrography. He taught Geology 101 so all the freshmen had to have him. In those days you had a professor, you didn't get a teaching assistant. He died very young, 55 or so, of a heart attack. It was after I was out and we weren't even in town at the time. That was a shame.

**ES: Did you know the faculty well? Did the student and faculty socialize outside of class?**

PS: I'm sure that there was much more interaction. Especially in departments. First, there was Dr. Wanless who would always have a group of his students, at the end of the semester or the end of the year, he would always have a big gala for his students. In between you could easily talk to them. Any of them were open to talking at any time. Much more so than today, I'm sure. I don't think students felt constricted to talk with them. I didn't have much reason to, I didn't have any problems. I am sure they did.

**ES: They had office hours?**

PS: They had office hours and any time you were even passing in the hall you would stop and talk with them.

**ES: What were the classes like? How many students were in a class?**

PS: Usually, 30 I think, 30 or less. The big lecture courses, or course, had 100 or so. Just as today, they combine several small classes for a lecture. I suppose they still do that today. I don't know whether they do or not [*laughter*]. You'd have a lecturer for some classes, but not so much in geology because there weren't many students in geology. It was a big college. I remember a botany course I took under Dr. Hottes, he was the lecturer, about once or twice a week, in the big auditorium in the Natural History Building. He lectured to students from many sections. And who did the laboratory work? I really don't remember. We had small classes for that. In other classes, I'm sure they had combined lectures for the main professor. We did have contact with the main professors. I think that was true in every college, every branch at the University.

**ES: Did you feel like you got a good education?**

PS: Yes, I know I did. But then being in geology may have helped too. If I had been in some other school, maybe I wouldn't have thought it was great, but I know I took an extra course for credit [elective], one that you want to take. I don't even know if students are even allowed to do that today. I took a course in vegetables [*laughter*], I was sort of interested in that too. It was just learning about vegetables and tasting them. Gosh, I can't even remember the name of the course. Mostly farm kids were in that. It was under the College of Agriculture. The teacher, the professor I should say, was dead set against girls. I was the one girl in a class of 13 all together, with 12 boys. I know that I did better than most of the boys in the class. I knew more to begin with [*laughter*] and I liked the subject and I wanted it to mean something. But this professor would not give me an A in that course; some of those boys got an A and I didn't. I'm sure that went on all through the University in different amounts, but maybe more so in agriculture than others. I didn't notice that in geology at all, even though there were only a few girls.

**ES: Do you think that might have been common?**

PS: I think it was. And girls didn't complain. They wouldn't have been listened to had they complained.

**ES: Did they complain to each other?**

PS: There wasn't any other girl to complain to [in my case].

**ES: Your other friends did they feel that way in their department?**

PS: I don't know if there were any in the same situation. Most of them were in music or education or something that there wasn't any reason to have any bias. I think that must have just been that one professor in this one case. I just never have understood why that professor had to be so ornery [*laughter*]. For instance, one day we were supposed to identify and taste some different root vegetables. So here on the table, this was in the little old building called the Horticulture Building. I think it's still there, it will be gone before long, it'll be torn down. It's a little stucco building. The professor had all these vegetables lined up—beets and carrots and various root vegetables. In that bunch was a horseradish root.

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PS: One of the boys in the class thought he'd be smart and took a piece of horseradish root and peeled it and handed it to me and said, "here, taste this." I said, "what is it?" And he said, "just taste it." I did. You know, it looks just like a parsnip. I thought it might be kind of good, I don't know whether I'd ever had a raw parsnip before, maybe I had. And oh boy! That bite was just like eating fire. Those boys just killed themselves laughing. I was the goat of course. There again, that was partly the teacher, he was in on that. This was a pure case of, well, I suppose today you'd call it discrimination. The girls wouldn't have stood for it today. Even though there would have only been one in a class, she still wouldn't have stood for it. They probably haven't had such a class for years anyway, it was too interesting.

**ES: But you got that feeling from the other boys in class?**

PS: Oh sure, sure, they all snickered. I had kind of a feeling that something was going on. I don't think I had ever seen a horseradish root before, I don't think I had ever had. Even though I was sort of a country gal, I had never lived on a farm. We did not fix our own horseradish then. My grandparents did, but I was never around when they did it. Anyway, it was quite an experience. That one fellow, if he's still alive, he's probably still laughing [*laughter*].

**ES: You said that you got an NYA job in the geology department. How did you get that?**

PS: I believe you had to apply for the job and then were interviewed by, I think, the department, because these jobs were offered in every college. At freshman level they started. I think that happened. I'm not sure, but I didn't have a bit of trouble. I'm sure there weren't too many students who had a business education before going to college. Anyway, I got the job right away. I think the college picked me to work for Dr. Quirke, but I'm not sure. I worked for him all those three years doing, mainly typing, transcribing his notes, his handwriting was atrocious but I managed to read it. I'm not sure how that came about but I ended up in geology, which was a benefit for me.

**ES: How did you get registered with the National Youth Administration? Did you have to apply?**

PS: I think you did that, I'm not sure if you did that when you registered at matriculation or whether it came up later. I'm not sure about that. I know you had to get your name on the list

that you wanted student help. I don't believe that there is a program like that today, is there? Maybe these, what do you call them, Pell scholarships.

**ES: Right work study and—**

PS: I don't really know. This program, I don't know how long it really lasted even. It was really equivalent to WPA for students.

**ES: Did a lot of students have outside jobs?**

PS: Most everybody who came from the country anyway. I didn't come from the country, but many students had to have extra help or they couldn't have gone to college at all.

**ES: What kinds of things did they do? What kinds of jobs did people have?**

PS: Well, same sort of thing that they do today I guess. Some of them helping in labs, washing bottles. Some of them, well, I don't really know what a lot of them did. Mine was, I suppose, clerical and secretarial work. I don't even know how many would do that today. I don't even know what's offered today. Also, people would do other kinds of work, just plain physical labor. My mother was registered for wanting someone to fire the furnace. We had an old coal furnace and she had to do everything. She got tired of doing it and said, "I'm going to get a student if I can to help with this furnace." In those days you stoked your coal and you cleaned your ashes and you did all of that kind of stuff. She did manage to get a student who'd come from southern Illinois. She gave him a room for stoking the furnace at our house. Sometimes for meals, if he was around when we were eating, he'd get a meal, but he had a room at our house.

**ES: So the University had a list of people who needed students?**

PS: They had a list of people who wanted help and they had a list of people who wanted jobs. I suppose they put them together somewhere.

**ES: Was that through the Dean of Women?**

PS: I'm not sure, maybe the Dean of Men. I really don't know. I don't think there was a set administration for it, or maybe there was. Most of the kids I knew in high school did not have to work. At least, I don't think they did. Those who went on to school. A lot of them were professors' children. See, being in Urbana, you may have an advantage because so many of the students had parents on the faculty. In fact, I had another student friend, one of my friends from Urbana who's mother was also a widow, she did the same sort of thing, got into the NYA program. I don't remember what she did.

**ES: Could you talk a little bit more about Maria Leonard? What was your impression of her? How students on campus viewed her.**

PS: I think many of the students snickered behind her back. There was no reason to. She was certainly a good upstanding woman. She had the reputation for being very strict and carrying out



the rules to the letter. I don't know anyone who ever got into trouble and had to be remanded to the Dean. I do remember her giving a speech, it might have been at Woman's Convocation at the beginning of the year. Her big point was that girls shouldn't wear red dresses because it inflamed the boys [*laughter*]. She didn't say those words, "Dress modestly, mustn't do anything to entice feelings from the other sex," I don't know. I think they dwelt on such a thing in those days. I never thought anything about it.

**ES: Did she address the women every year at the beginning of the school year?**

PS: I think she probably did. I think that's what she did at this Women's Convocation, I think it was called and I think it was at the beginning of the year. I should have kept notes on all these things.

**ES: What kind of rules were there?**

PS: Town girls, I don't know if they had any set rules, I think that was pretty much up to the parents. When I lived at the Beta house, the rules were that you have to be in the house at 10:30 on the week nights and I believe 11:30 or 12 on Friday and Saturday. They were very strict about that, at least our house mother was, she was very strict.

**ES: What was the penalty?**

PS: I don't know.

**ES: You didn't do it!**

PS: A reprimand. I didn't do it. My roommate, once stayed out a little late and we sneaked her in the back door. I'm sure she didn't do it on purpose. Sometimes it would be unavoidable because students did not have cars, as a rule. We didn't have buses then either, I believe. She was late getting in and we had a back door and some of the girls would use the back door. We would have a code with our roommate to let us in. I didn't do that, but I supposed if I needed to I would have. But, a penalty, I don't know. Maybe remanded, or reprimanded, to the Dean. But, nobody wanted to. I never heard of anybody who got into trouble.

**ES: Were you aware that there were different rules for women versus men?**

PS: Oh yes. I don't know whether men had sort of a curfew or not, I'm not sure about that. The women did. That was the out-of-towners. At home, I think that was up to the parents. But if a student were on the campus too late, I don't know what would have happened. If he lived in town, probably no consequences. I don't know. I wasn't in a bunch that that happened to.

**ES: Did you feel that morality was regulated pretty strictly? You talked about Maria Leonard and the red dress.**

PS: Oh, that was her speech. I think she was trying to keep everything under control. No, I don't remember feeling that way because society had not progressed, or deteriorated however

you look at it, to the point where that was one of the big points. Sexual mores were not usually talked of freely. Well, that wouldn't really be sexual mores, but dating habits maybe. I didn't really date much. For one thing, I was busy. For another, I didn't really care. The girls who were from out-of-town and lived on campus probably had a lot more connection with it. Especially sororities, I have a feeling that they were very strict, and probably fraternities at that time, although I don't know. I had dates with fraternity boys now and then, and I don't remember anything special about it.

**ES: How did you look at figures of authority? Did you feel in awe of them or were you critical?**

PS: Not terribly critical. I don't think we expressed our views very much, especially towards older faculty, or as you say, figures of authority.

**ES: Did you know who Fred Turner was?**

PS: Oh yes. He was Dean of Men at that time. But he didn't have much influence over girls even though when he talked I supposed he included women as well as men. But, I don't recall his making any pointed remarks at women. Maria did, of course, because that was her job.

**ES: Was religion important to students on campus?**

PS: Some. Much more sometimes I think than today, but I don't know much about that either. It was important to me because I always went to my church which was a Universalist Church in Urbana. I got up and went on Sundays and had several friends. Most of my friends went to church somewhere. Other times, if we were in a bind for studying, we didn't. There were lots of students that were, I guess, just lackadaisical, no great commitment to religious thought. It depended more on your home upbringing, I think, than other things. Unless you belonged to a church, if that group went to church, you went with them.

**ES: Your church was a community based church though, not campus?**

PS: No, it was for the time. Because we lived in town and we always went to that church and I had friends of all ages in the Universalist church. It was just a block from our house, in fact, when we lived on Green Street.

**ES: Were you aware of who the President of the University was? Did you have any kind of contact, while you were a student, of him?**

PS: Yes, but contact, I think not. You would see him. I think that was when Willard was President at that time. At least, when I was a freshman, the President lived in a house on the corner of Green and Wright street. A great big white house. It's long gone. We were conscious that he was there. Most people had great respect for him and liked him. I don't recall ever hearing anything adverse about Willard. Some of the other Presidents were a bit different, but I think everybody liked Willard. Students, maybe some of them never saw him unless they went to some meeting where he was speaking. I think he was always at Convocation. I don't even

know if they have Convocation any more. Too many students, you see, this was in the days when there were maybe 7,000 students, maybe fewer.

**ES: So did the President have a big impact on the student's daily lives?**

PS: I doubt it. At least the lower undergraduates. The reason I know more about it is because from home my mother would stress the fact that we were home, we were part of the University. We were expected to be upright, moral citizens. We were not just coming over for the good times like many of the out-of-towners did supposedly.

**ES: Talk about that. About the town students versus the students that came from out of town. Was there a division there?**

PS: I don't think there was a real division. No because most of the girls I knew were from out of town except for the few that went on from high school that I remembered. There was the program for students who did not belong to sororities or fraternities. I forget what we called that. The girls were divided into groups, independents they were called. I got into a group. Gosh I have forgotten what the group was called, I think it was Loki – L-O-K-I. I don't believe that there was another town girl in that. It was supposed to counteract, not counteract, it was supposed to balance the effect of the Greek sorority against non-sorority girls. They had their organization and belonged to it and we had independent functions. But, it was still organized. I don't think that happens today.

**ES: Were the town girls not as active in extra-curricular groups?**

PS: It depended on the girl—what the girl wanted to do and what she was doing. I don't remember any town girls that were really outstanding in anything. I can't think of any right now. But I may not have had as much contact with campus life as they did, either; I wasn't there all the time. I didn't go to a campus church group. I don't know. One girl, I do remember, out of town, in physical education, was Jane Fauntz who was a diver, a wonderful diver. She was at the top in everything aquatic. And of course, I was in swimming and I was a pretty good swimmer. I followed her. Not only was she good, but a beautiful woman. I enjoyed things that she did and went to. The swimming club was the, gosh, what were they called, the Turtles? No.

**ES: Terrapin?**

PS: Terrapin Club.

**ES: You were involved in that?**

PS: No, I wasn't. I didn't have time, for one thing, and I wasn't quite that good. I don't think I was. A lot of it was the sorority girls too. Sometimes I had the feeling that sorority girls got first pick on everything, but that may have been just my feeling. I didn't have money to belong to a sorority and I don't think that my mother would have let me join a sorority; she didn't think it was a good idea.

**ES: Why was that?**

PS: Too cliquey I think. Didn't have any money, anyway. My brother didn't belong to a fraternity when he was here before he died. She didn't belong to a sorority and I think there were sororities when she was in college. There were other clubs; she belonged to literary clubs and that sort of thing.

**ES: How did the Greek students and the Independent students get along? Did they intermingle socially?**

PS: Not too much really. I think it was probably easier for female than for male students, but I'm not sure about that. In class, if you had a friend that belonged to a Greek organization, you were still friends. There was a big difference in the social life.

**ES: Did it give you more social prestige to belong to a sorority?**

PS: Well, I'm sure they thought it did. I probably thought it did at that time. But as you get away from it, it didn't make a bit of difference, you did what you could. If you didn't have too much time, you couldn't do everything anyway. I knew both sorority girls and independents. In fact, my roommate at the Beta house was a sorority girl. She wasn't active in the sorority here because she had gone to some other college first and joined a sorority, and she didn't get active in the sorority when she came to Illinois.

**ES: How did the Beta house differ from a sorority? You didn't have to pledge.**

PS: We did the work. We did our own cooking, cleaning, everything. The housemother kept things going and made out a schedule. She made out schedules for the girls, when they'd cook, what days, when to do cleaning, and so on. The girls planned the menus, did all the work, did all the dishes, cleaned the house, did everything that had to be done.

**ES: Did you get free board that way?**

PS: No, the room and board was \$35 a month. Just what I made from the NYA. It was fortunate. I never had a cent to spend extra, never. I did some extra typing once and a while and got a dollar to two. If you got a dollar in those days, you were wealthy *[laughter]*.

**ES: Did your house have activities that you did together, or was it more just working?**

PS: Yes, we had, as an independent group, we had to do what ever they required and perform. We had to prepare this song for the Songfest that went on every spring. Part of that May Day Fest that started years ago. Although it wasn't as elaborate as it was in the early 1900s. We did that. I'm not sure what else we did. I do remember the song, we did do that. Whatever the rules that the independent bunch required.

**ES: You talked about swimming. Were you in other organizations?**

PS: The freshman honorary society, what's the name of it?

**ES: Alpha Lambda Delta?**

PS: Yes, that's it, Alpha Lambda Delta. I was in that, but they didn't do anything but maybe twice a year. They got together and had a tea or something, nothing really big. At induction time was the main festivity when they took in new members. I belonged to that and what else? I don't know. I was so busy with many things, with my own life and with working. When I worked, most of the time I didn't have any other time. I walked back and forth from home all the time. I didn't really have time to do a whole lot else. One time I was invited to a sorority rush dinner and I went because I wanted to. Nothing ever came of it. They didn't ask me to join and I probably wouldn't have anyway because it wasn't a sorority that I would have wanted. It was a big bunch of girls. And as I said, I didn't have any money. No money and my mother didn't approve of such things and there were many more girls than were not sorority girls.

**ES: When you did have some time and a little money, what did you do? What did you do for fun?**

PS: Fun, let me see, what's fun [*laughter*]? More than anything was connected with the church. The young peoples' group at the Universalist Church had a meeting every Sunday evening. We had conventions or meetings at different churches around the state maybe two or three different times a year. You'd meet new people and renew acquaintances with ones you had met before. Let's see fun, what did we do? You'd have a date and go out with boys if you got a date. Dates weren't much, you'd have a Coca-Cola, a five cent Coca-Cola. That was about the extent of your entertainment with no money and very little time. Dancing if you could get to a dance that was great. I did get to quite a few dances, but most of them were student hops which were no charge. Of course the big Proms I did go to. We had Robeson's Roof in town that many students went to in the summer and in the spring. They opened up when the weather got warm and had a live band.

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

PS: You did ask what I would do for a good time. If I ever got a few cents together to save, I would go out for a meal because my mother was not a great cook. I had a friend in town that was a little older and was a librarian at the Urbana Library. We went to church together. When we would get as much as 35 cents, we would go out to Oldham's Drug Store in Urbana. They served a T-bone steak dinner for 35 cents with a vegetable, a salad, a drink, and dessert. 35 cents! That was a big pleasure. I can remember those days—Good.

**ES: But you didn't do that very often?**

PS: No. It was hard to get 35 cents together. After school and after I was married and had one child and we came back to Urbana for a while and were living here. The matinees at the Urbana Princess Theater were 10 cents. So I did go to quite a few matinees, but that was in the 40s, later.

**ES: Did you go to sporting events? Was that important?**

PS: Very seldom. They still charged, and that was not my big thing in those days, sports. The cost wasn't outrageous, but just having a cost connected with it was prohibitive for many people.

**ES: Did students talk about the Depression and what they were going through financially to each other?**

PS: I don't think they realized it. I know I didn't. Maybe my case was unique because my father was dead, we didn't have a set income. My mother, as I said, she had some money from her father that she used. I don't really know where she got all her money, but we didn't have very much. I don't know that we talked about the Depression at all. I don't know if anybody did. The bank closing was the main thing back in '33. I don't know when, let's see, those banks were closed for at least two months, but I don't know if my brother ever got that money back from the bank or not. I don't remember what happened. I certainly didn't have any connection with it. Maybe my mother did, I don't know. She must have had a bank account. The kids from out of town, the farm kids, I don't know if they knew anything about it. Well, my husband talked about it. But that was years later when corn was 10 cents a bushel and they burned corn for heating fuel in their house, just like some farmers are doing today, have done this winter [2000].

**ES: Where was he from?**

PS: He was from Tolono, Illinois, right there in Champaign County.

**ES: Say how did you meet him?**

PS: I was invited to a picnic by some Erg boy who was in some club. I don't even remember what club it was. The picnic was in. . . Crystal Lake Park maybe, somewhere right around town. George was at this picnic. I just met him and we clicked. I came home with him in fact.

**ES: Then you were married?**

PS: We were married right after he graduated in '37. That's the main reason, he had promised his mother that he wouldn't get married while he was in school, and we didn't. We were married that summer and I just never came back and finished my senior year because he had a job right away.

**ES: You moved out of town?**

PS: He had a job with Funk Brother's Seed Company in Bloomington, Illinois. He was in plant breeding. We moved to Bloomington. In the winter of '38 we moved to Iowa, we had one child then who was a baby. We went to Iowa to live because George was assigned northern Iowa to sell seed corn in the winter when they weren't very busy in their corn breeding plots. We went out there. While he was there he got sick, thought it was the flu, couldn't get over it. He was in Des Moines and went to the General Clinic at the hospital in Des Moines and they finally

decided that he had tuberculosis, which was certainly a shock. So we came back to Illinois. We told his father, his mother had died before that. His dad said, "Well, you just stay here for a while and rest." We did, but George didn't get any better. His doctor was Dr. Cole from the TB sanatorium here in Champaign County, right out of Urbana. He finally said, "you really have to come into the sanatorium to recuperate and get well even though you don't have an open infection," which very few people had in those days. It was an inflammation between the two cavity linings between the peritoneal lining and the lining of the lungs. There is a place where the two linings meet. In between fluid water gathered, but there was no open infection. Anyway, he said, "you need to be in a sanatorium." So he went into the sanatorium. We were living in Bloomington then. I said, "well, he'll have to do it. I'll get a job. We'll work it out." And we did. I got a job back here in Urbana in the State Geological Survey. Just a good job for me, right at the time I needed it. George went into the sanatorium. Within a year and two weeks, he was out. Released, not cured, as not able to go to work full time. He stayed at home, but the doctor said, "you can go to work part-time selling seed corn for your dad." His dad was in the seed business, so he did that. In three years he was released by the doctor to full time work and he got a job with a seed company in St. Louis and then we moved there. That worked out fine. From that time on, it was all up. There were a few months when things were tough going though.

**ES: Can I ask you a couple more question about the U of I? One thing I'm interested in is whether you remember black students on campus? If so, were you aware of any kind of discrimination, or how they were they treated differently?**

PS: I probably wasn't aware. I didn't know any. I'm sure there were very few. They probably lived in the north end of Champaign with some black family. I do not remember a black person in any class that I was in. I don't remember seeing any on the campus. There were foreign students, yes. I especially remember a Filipino boy who went to our church even. But blacks, no. There weren't very many. And discrimination? Probably not as much as there is today. If there had been, I don't recall because I had no contact with any. We did have a colored woman who did housework for us at one time when, just after my husband got out of the sanatorium when I was still working full-time. I had her to come in and do some housework. She was an older woman. I don't know anything about her family. I'm sure she didn't have any college boys.

**ES: What about Jewish students?**

PS: Lots of them. Lots and lots. There was a joke, well, it was said in jest, but a lot of truth. You couldn't get down the Broadwalk without being elbowed off by a line of Jewish people, Jewish students. They were pushy, supposedly. I didn't know any. I don't think I felt that. But then, how many did I know?

**ES: But that was a feeling among students?**

PS: I think it was. I would have to say that it was just my feeling, but I think a lot of students felt that way. Sororities I don't think had Jewish girls, unless it was a Jewish sorority. I don't think Jewish girls belonged. Now I think there is a colored sorority, or there was at some time. I

don't think there was at that time. I'm sure there wasn't. I really don't know. I'm not very good to ask about that. Living in town, I didn't have the campus contacts. There was more of a feeling towards quantities of Jewish students than anything. They just sort of descended from Chicago onto Urbana. Just quantities of them. Especially a few years later, during World War II. I don't suppose any more Jewish boys got out of, or were exempt from the draft than the gentile boys.

**ES: Were there, I don't know if you know this either but, Catholic-Protestant divisions on campus?**

PS: I don't think so. I must have been sheltered or I was never aware of such things. I knew that there were Catholic people and I knew some, but I don't recall any great division. I can't even recall if I had any Catholic friends even. Farm people. . .the girls at the Beta house that year were mostly farm girls and not Catholic because there weren't too many...well, I don't know, there are Catholic farmers, but they didn't happen to be at the Beta house. I just don't know. Maybe I was even more sheltered than I think. There was more Jewish/gentile clash than there was Catholic/Protestant, I'm pretty sure.

**ES: How aware were students of national events going on? Did you keep in touch with what was going on in the government and with the economy?**

PS: I don't know whether we ever talked about such things. Gosh. We must have been aware of it, we read the papers. But did it sink in? I kind of doubt it. What was going on then? No, well, World War II was a little bit later.

**ES: Presidential elections?**

PS: Roosevelt's fourth term, or second and third terms even. I think that was more after I got out and after I was married. 30s? I'm trying to think what did go on. There seemed to be a clash in Champaign-Urbana over mayors, which there has been forever. I think at that time there was too whenever that election was, in '32 maybe. I remember something about that. My mother would mention these things every once and a while. What else nationally? What was going on. Let's see, Hitler invaded Poland in '39 wasn't it, '38 or '39. I was off the campus then, but by that time I became much more aware of what was going on in the world.

**ES: Do you remember student peace protests, or any kind of radicals, hippies?**

PS: I don't remember any protest of any kind. Maybe it's because I wasn't in such things. I don't think there were any. I do remember that there were no cars on campus and no smoking on campus. There was no smoking on any corner. Any corner around campus that you would stand on or along a sidewalk, cigarette butts were everywhere. But not on the campus. You could not smoke on the campus. You never saw anybody smoking on the campus, but there were butts everywhere outside. I remember that was a big thing. I would count the cigarette butts walking from my house on Green Street right to the Natural History Building about 10 or 12 blocks. I'd count the cigarette butts in that distance when I had time. I just couldn't believe it. Just couldn't believe it. In the hundreds, at least a hundred.



**ES: Was smoking popular?**

PS: Oh yeah. Not so much girls, I don't know of any girl that smoked. But I'm sure some did. If they weren't allowed to, they sneaked it. Boys, lots of boys smoked. I know my husband smoked at that time. But not on the campus.

**ES: Do you remember the policemen that patrolled? Pete Adams?**

PS: Pete Adams? No, I don't remember him. But there was a policeman, a campus policeman, that did patrolling on foot. I was thinking his name was Clark, maybe later. I remember him and I remember that you'd see him now and then. But I don't ever remember crossing paths with him at any time, I never did, and I don't know anybody that did. I don't remember what kind of ruckuses they had. I will say that the fellows were just as ornery then as they are today. This campus date rape was going on then, I'm sure because it almost happened to me.

**ES: Is that right?**

PS: Oh yeah, people just wouldn't believe it. I never said anything about it ever, but I almost got raped in my own front room. When we lived here. I'll never will forget that, it was a horrible experience. Thank God I'm strong, and it didn't occur. But it's just amazing to think that in my own living room with my mother asleep in the room next door. I had to fight this guy off and I just...people just don't believe it. But it happened. And I'm sure it happens more today than it did then. Maybe, I don't know. Girls know how to take care of themselves pretty well, physically, at least some of them can. And they're not afraid to talk about it, which is good.

**ES: Do you think that was a problem then?**

PS: Sure it was. Why would it happen to me and nobody else? I never heard anybody talk about it--never. They wouldn't have reported it to Maria Leonard under any circumstances [laughter]. It's hard to believe. It must have happened a lot. Just like today except even more so maybe because girls didn't talk about it. Girls didn't even tell their best friend, I certainly didn't tell my girl friends about it.

**ES: Did you go through commencement?**

PS: Only with my children. And my husband too. I didn't finish the fourth year. I went to commencement for a lot of other people and even before. My mother used to bring us over from Clinton, Illinois for her alumni reunions. They had them at commencement time then [University functions]. We'd see this whole business stretching out over the years.

**ES: What were the names of the five generations of your relatives?**

PS: My grandfather, my mother's father, graduated in the class of 1877 in agriculture. Whether they even had colleges, I guess they did. His four children—

**ES: What was his name?**

PS: His name was Hiram Gilkerson. And there is a little square block of cement for the class memorial, somewhere on the campus. It used to be between Altgeld Hall and the Union Building, but there is a bunch of trees there now. I don't know whether it's been moved or not, I haven't looked lately. But that was a very simple class memorial there. Then my mother was the class of 1903, master's 1904, married Orr Milton Allyn, A-L-L-Y-N, in the class of 1912. My dad had to help his family a lot. He finally got through.

**ES: And what was your mom's name?**

PS: Frances Gilkerson. She was the one who graduated in 1903. She had a sister, older, who graduated in 1903, no 1902, and Mom was in 1903. A brother, Thomas John Gilkerson in 1905. A sister Eunice Gilkerson in 1907. They lived in Urbana, too, at that time. They had moved to Urbana and all these kids went to school here. They lived right on California Street, where a Chemistry building is now.

**ES: And you have a granddaughter—**

PS: Then I have my son, George Edward Smith, Junior, graduated in 1960. And my daughter, Amelia Smith Baker Felty, not Baker. She's divorced from Baker. She graduated in 1971. She has a daughter who graduated in horticulture. Her name is Helen Zivar Baker, graduated in 1996 in horticulture. And she has two children, so maybe we'll have six generations, but probably not in my lifetime.

**ES: Well, that's neat. Thank you. Do you have anything else to say?**

PS: No, those are the things that I remember. I'll take a stab at this Chief business. I don't know if it's a good idea or not. I understand the controversy but, I think it's a lot of absolute foolishness to fuss about such a thing. Of course athletics has come to mean much more than it should in every college in the country. They're subordinating curriculum and the real purpose of education to athletics. Of course that's been going on for years and years but it's concentrating and it's been getting worse since the 60s, this concentration of money, time, everything concentrated on athletics. Then this Chief thing comes along, I can't see any point for except it seems to be a political thing that some people make a big point of. Why? There is no good reason for it. No matter what the Indians or the white people did two- or three- hundred years ago. Is that any reason to carry this thing on and go on and on today about it? It's just as silly as this descendants of slaves insisting that the government pay reparations for their ancestors' being slaves. It equates to the same thing – absolute foolishness – in my estimation. We can't go ahead and do these things. We're not going to go backwards just because several people want to change the relationships between Native Americans and the white people or the white people that took over the country. It doesn't say that it's right, or anything else. There's no sense in it. You can't go backwards and it can't be undone. The Chief has always been a good symbol so why not keep him? I think almost all the older alumni would agree with that. But I don't know. I'll be waiting to see what this new Chancellor does.

**ES: In the 30s, how was the Chief seen?**

PS: I don't even remember him. We didn't even have one, did we?

**ES: Mid-twenties he started.**

PS: It wasn't much of a thing. The only thing that I really remembered, because I didn't attend games like a lot of the students did. The only thing that I remember really is that the masthead on the Campus Scout column in the *Daily Illini* was a caricature of the Chief. That's all I remember. Certainly nobody ever protested that. We sang the songs, we talked about it. I don't know that we even connected it with the Boy Scouts. We just never worried about it. In fact, I suppose it was just because every college had a mascot. Why didn't we just have an ear of corn jumping around? It would have been more. . .I don't know. [*Laughter.*]

**ES: Thank you.**

PS: You're most welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW