Transcript of Audio File:

Thelma Ehrlich Anderson

21 September 2007
Interviewers: Naomi McCormack and Peter Simonson

Transcription's Text: UNCORRECTED FOR SPELLING

Thank you for working with Accentance for your transcription needs. The text below represents a professional transcriptionist's understanding of the words spoken. No guarantee of complete accuracy is expressed or implied, particularly regarding spellings of names and other unfamiliar or hard-to-hear words and phrases. "(ph)" or "(sp?)" indicate phonetics or best guesses. To verify important quotes, we recommend listening to the corresponding audio. Timestamps throughout the transcript facilitate locating the desired quote, using software such as Windows Media or QuickTime players.

INTERVIEWER: And when were you born?

THELMA ANDERSON: I was born in 1921 in Lower Manhattan; I think it was the St. Mark's (sp?) Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible at 0:00:23.1)?

THELMA ANDERSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what did your parents do?

THELMA ANDERSON: My father was a pharmacist and my mother was a housewife.

INTERVIEWER: And where do your parents come from?

THELMA ANDERSON: Dad came here from Poland when he was 8 years old, the oldest of I think six children, with his mother and his father. And I'm ashamed, I'm uncertain about whether it was my father's father or my mother's father that had been a cashier in a mine in Poland. I think it was my mother's father. [0:01:05.6]

At any rate, he came as a child of 8 and was obviously bright, because he went onto the Townsend Harris High School, which was part of City College and was an academically select school and one had to qualify for it academically.

And mother came here in her late teens. Her mother had died when she was 8 and her father and elder siblings came here, but she was shipped off to Leipzig to live with a cousin so that she really grew up in Germany. [0:01:53.2]

And then in her late teens there was a thing about she had a boyfriend who was a student, which meant that he went about in a uniform and had very special status. And she realized nothing permanent was going to come of that for her, so she packed herself up and came here to the family. And I might add that she found it sort of shocking to be on the lower east side, walking along the street one day, and having a corset sail out of the window and land on her head, which was a striking story for me.

In any case, they met because each of them had -- a sister of each of them, two sisters, worked together and they arranged this meeting. So mother and dad married, and I guess they went on living on the lower east side for a spell and -- I've lost track. And I was born -- dad was a pharmacist by then. Did I say so? I think he'd meant to be a doctor, a good Jewish tradition, but his father died and it was clear he had to speed up his career, so he went to -- got a degree at Columbia School of Pharmacy. [0:03:22.3]

And they packed themselves up at some point and came to Brooklyn, I was still quite young, and my father bought a drugstore at the end of Brooklyn near Queens. The store was down in the commercial area and they bought a house up on a hill in a pleasant residential neighborhood. And that was where I grew up and went to the public school and then went to the girls' high school, which at that time, like boys' high school, those were both academically special schools. And went to girls' high school, and then went to Brooklyn College. [0:04:19.5]

Last night I remembered I had been offered a scholarship at Long Island University, but I thought, well, it was not really academically select, not at that time; it didn't have a great reputation. And I thought, well, what happens if I don't make it, I don't qualify after the second year, in any case, after the first year. In any case, I went to Brooklyn College and that was the first year that Brooklyn College was on its new campus; it had formerly been in, I think, office buildings, downtown Brooklyn. And there we were in Flatbush I guess on a pretty campus, new buildings, mud all around because the landscaping wasn't done, and labs that were not fully equipped, but I went to Brooklyn College. [0:05:20.9]

And I became interested in psychology, sort of minored in that, and my friends were also in that field, and it was a very lively department. I've been trying to remember names. One that I think was Helen Block, who was rather -- she was successful, she was interesting. And Abe Maslow is the name that persisted, I think. [0:06:02.7]

So I did that and I also studies economics, and that was partly family pressure; these were depression years still and what was a woman going to do to support herself? Well, she would be a teacher. So I studied economics and took education courses, which did not excite me. But there too, there was -- I can't remember her name -- a professor in the economics department who was an admirable, serious, interesting figure. Well, now where am I? Brooklyn College?

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, I just want to backtrack a little bit --

THELMA ANDERSON: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: -- and ask you when you were going to the girls' high school, what were your early goals and aspirations?

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh God.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any back then, or was it just to go to university or…

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, it was assumed that I would go to university or college is how we thought of it in those years. Oh, I think I dreamed about perhaps being a journalist or a lawyer, and I'll be damned if I know why I chose those, but that was the kind of thing I was interested in. [0:07:23.9]

And I cannot remember much about my studies there. I had a spell of acting. I have a dim memory of playing Abraham Lincoln in something. And I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

THELMA ANDERSON: I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: But that's interesting that your early aspirations were in journalism and law and then you went on to do media research.

THELMA ANDERSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. You mentioned that because you were growing up during the depression there was some pressure on you to I guess study very practical things.

THELMA ANDERSON: Right. [0:07:59.3]

INTERVIEWER: Can you discuss that a little bit more? How you feel when you look back on it now; how you felt growing up during the depression affected your career prospects or what you were interested in or…

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, we weren't hardest hit. My father did have the drugstore, we did own our house, but money was very scarce and we had to be very, very careful about it. It might amuse you to -- if one walked along the street and found a penny on the sidewalk, would you believe it, one picked it up. And one of my great memories was finding a $20 bill on the sidewalk; how about that?

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

THELMA ANDERSON: Hmm?

INTERVIEWER: What year was that, if you remember?

THELMA ANDERSON: I was under 12. I don't know, I was in grammar school and grade school. What can I tell you about it? I delivered prescriptions sometimes for my father. And sometimes the tip was 3 cents and sometimes it was 5 cents, that was a lot, so we had to be very, very careful about money. And when I was in high school I took -- I had to travel; it was not a neighborhood high school. I took a train, it was an elevated, and then walked, I don't know, ten blocks or something like that, because one wouldn't dream of spending an extra nickel on another fare if one could walk it. [0:09:47.1]

And I'm reminded now that I would go marketing with my mother once a week to Brownsville, which was quite a distance from home, where she could buy kosher things and where she could buy good fruits and vegetables inexpensively. And the end of our trek up and down the street, looking at carts and stopping in shops, we'd have our sacks of food. Then mother would give us an option: We could either spend a nickel on the bus to take us closer to home, or buy a frankfurter and walk home. I don't know if that gives you a sense of what the financial world was then. [0:10:36.1]

INTERVIEWER: And what was your usual choice?

THELMA ANDERSON: I suspect it was the frankfurter. I think it must have been a Nathan's frankfurter; they were very good even then.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so that was great. Can you just give us a lead-in to what you just said by -- it's like growing up in the depression; you know, "I remember, you know, delivering prescriptions" or something like that. [0:11:02.5]

THELMA ANDERSON: If I could do what, dear?

INTERVIEWER: I like what you said, but we don't have a lead-in about actually what you're talking about, growing up in the depression. So can you just give us a sentence like "Growing up in the depression I remember delivering prescriptions"?

THELMA ANDERSON: Okay, okay.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

THELMA ANDERSON: Growing up in the depression I remember we had to be very, very careful about money; every penny counted. And it also made a change in the way we lived. My father no longer had a clerk, and that meant that he worked from 9:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night; I think seven days a week. And I think it would be on Sundays that my brother and I, when we were I suppose high school age, we would clerk in the drugstore; you know, hold the fort while dad was allowed to go home and have a

home-cooked meal, instead of having what mother would carry down to him at the drugstore. [0:12:14.6]

And it also meant that we no longer -- I think we no longer had any kind of domestic help, you know, a cleaner or a laundress or anything like that; we learned to do it all ourselves.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

THELMA ANDERSON: And learned things, in fact, that surprised me. I know have -- a bonded girl comes by a couple of days a week because my eyes are very bad and she deals with my e-mail and so on. There was an occasion recently when I said, "Could you please sew this button," and she said, "Well, I never have." And we marched in back and I said, "Well, here's the button, here's the thread. See if you can find a thimble." And she looked up and said, "What's a thimble," which I found quite wonderful because it was taken for granted when I was a child, when we were in grade school, the girls learned how to sew, and indeed we made our graduation dresses, and there was real sexism going on. The boys went to shop and the girls went to cooking classes and it was all quite separate: This is for girls and this is for boys. But I now realize we learned things that none of you today know how to do. [0:13:36.2]

INTERVIEWER: Like sewing a button?

THELMA ANDERSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

THELMA ANDERSON: Or use a thimble.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you, okay. So let's go to your undergraduate education. So you talked a little bit about studying psychology and economics. When did you start to get involved in social research and communication? Was that after graduating or when did that interest you? [0:13:58.6]

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, when I graduated in June of 1941 the financial world was not great. And one could get a job at Macy's as a sales girl, which was a -- I think they earned as much as $5 a week was my memory, but you had to have a Master's degree so I couldn't qualify for that.

What did I do? I went to a -- they called it a business school, it was a secretarial school, and learned shorthand and typing. And I have a feeling I'm off the track here, but shall I just go on?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

THELMA ANDERSON: And then I don't know how I ended up with a job as a secretary at the National Defense Research Committee, and that was my first real job as secretary to a man named Edwin, I think, Colpitts, who had come from Bell Labs. [0:15:22.8]

And this was a government organization that was sponsoring research on secret things like sonar and radar. And I had nothing to do with, you know, the technical, with the professional aspect of it, I was secretary, but I learned a lot of orderly things which have stood me in good stead over the years. And I met lively people, scientists who were coming in from Caltech and various other places, and people who were working here at Columbia. [0:16:00.5]

At some point I must have obviously retained friendship with some of the people I've gone to college with, and at one point I was urged to take a crack at Columbia to work with Paul Lazarsfeld, whom they -- I guess they were fairly recent graduates themselves, you know, PhDs themselves, and they were interested in Paul's work. And my memory is that they had urged me to go and see what it was like. So I think what I did was to start out with evening classes at Columbia.

And I don't remember the transition or exactly when it was or why or how I left the National Defense Research Committee. It may have been that moving into student-hood at Columbia and being offered coding work at the bureau, that was going to be enough to provide me with ordinary living expenses, because I was still living at home in Brooklyn.

So I don't really remember how that transition went. But in any case I then was working at the bureau as a coder, learned how to code. [0:17:27.0]

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us what a coder does?

THELMA ANDERSON: I shall indeed. Somebody designed a piece of paper with --

INTERVIEWER: Actually, can you just start out saying "This is what I did" or "This is what a coder did"?

THELMA ANDERSON: Okay. What a coder did was go through the written questionnaire and assign a code for the answers to each question. Let's say the first four columns -- let me back up. This was all designed for a Hollerith card, which was shaped like a business envelope and had 80 columns in it. We would assign a code to -- well, first of all, columns would be the identification number of the respondent, let's say. And then it would be -- we'd enter a 1 for male and a 2 for female and a 3 for no answer; that would be in the next column. [0:18:34.3]

And so we would classify each questionnaire. We would classify the background information of age, which we did, as I recall, in categories, not the straight digit; age, sex, socioeconomic level, which there's an amusing story about that. I don't remember when it was originated, but it had to have been around then. And we classified people as follows: Assigned A to those who were the top of the heap, wealthy and so on; B were

people who were successful professionals and successful businessmen and lived very well; they were classified as C if they were ordinary, middle class; D if they were poor. And what keeps running through my head is E was people who live like animals, and I think that was just something we invented for our own amusement. I don't think we classified people that way. [0:19:50.2]

In any case, we would assign codes to this code sheet which would then be transferred to a card that could be sorted and counted on a Hollerith machine, but I'll get to that in a minute.

Some codes were for yes/no answers to questions and some codes were for open-ended answers so that we'd have to classify what the person was saying to explain a yes or no vote, and classify all of this on a sheet. [0:20:29.5]

It then got punched onto the Hollerith card, which they all got stacked up and dropped into this machine which was -- oh, it was about the size of a piano keyboard, I guess, and it had dividers. And you'd put it in and you'd say, "Well, I'm going to take a look at -- first I'm going to take a look at men versus women," so you would sort the cards by the sex code and you'd have a pile of the men and a pile of the women. And then I want to see how they differ on whatever it is, how they voted, how much education they had or whatever. And we would put them back in the machine and set it to read -- we could either sort or simply read the responses to a specific column, which is to say to a specific question. [0:21:24.1]

And about all of that, if I may digress, there was a wonderful moment years later when Mel Goldberg, who had gone on to be, I think, director of social research at ABC, he used to spend a lot of time doing the sorting and the counting, because we would set up tables that we wanted filled in. We wanted a tabulation of men versus women, how they differed on answers to something, or by education, whatever. We would set up these requests for cross-tabulations and Mel would stand there, running the cards through the machines and filling in the responses.

Well, the cards got a lot of use and it was a rule that if any of them got worn out he would go and find the code sheets from which the cards had been punched and re-punch the card. He said occasionally when he was tired he would simply snatch another card out of the deck, put it in upside down, duplicate it, and put it in with the rest of the cards. But by and large, we really were very, very careful to be accurate about what we were doing. [0:22:55.5]

There was also something called -- I can't remember the name of it -- it was designed for classifying qualitative material, and that was a card that was about 5 by 8 in size, it had holes all around the rims, and categories were assigned to each set of holes somehow or another. And as he went through and looked through the responses to a particular question, you would choose the category, you would choose the code, and then you would punch out an opening. So that then if you wanted to sort cards, you wanted to count responses or count or get cross-tabulations of responses to a particular question by

different groups, you used a knitting needle, pushed it through, lifted it up, and the cards that, you know, didn't have -- that did have the hole punch dropped and then you could count them.

Or, as I recall, we would also write things at the center of these cards, quotes or, you know, verbatims, so that if we were looking through the material and wanted to know exactly what that person meant, there it would be on the card. Is that…

INTERVIEWER: That's a pretty thorough description. [0:24:29.9]

THELMA ANDERSON: I bored you.

INTERVIEWER: You have a good memory.

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, we spent time with it, and those cards were fun. There was an occasion when I guess the machine was being replaced by another, and my memory is that in the process of moving, one of them got dropped out of the window, and there were pieces all over Amsterdam Avenue and 59th Street, so it was fun there, too.

INTERVIEWER: So what kind of research were you doing there? What kind of projects came in?

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, there were all kinds of projects that we worked on there. I remember there was an episode when there were studies being done, The True Story; they provided bread and butter, but it was a way of studying media behavior. I remember…

INTERVIEWER: Excuse me. True Story (inaudible at 0:25:35.2)?

THELMA ANDERSON: True Story magazine.

INTERVIEWER: And so what were you doing when you were there?

THELMA ANDERSON: I'd be damned if I know, who they were or what they liked or whatever it was we could inform True Story about their readers, or perhaps even about their non-readers and why not. [0:25:54.8]

I do remember working on a Superman study, and all I can remember about that is that Bob Merten (sp?), who had an office at the bureau, an upstairs dusty office -- I think it was Hazel Goeday (sp?) was there and a number of the graduate students. And we all sat around brainstorming what it was we could study about what Superman was meaning; it was new, you see, at the time; what it meant to the children who were reading it -- I presume they were mostly children -- and how to research it. But that was -- I suspect that that had to have been the qualitative research project, not a big quantitative thing. [0:26:55.1]

I can't really remember -- I did code for various studies along with other graduate students, but then I was sent to Decatur, Illinois and was out of the office for a long time. That is to say we did several waves of interviewing there and I don't remember exactly what part of the year we started, but it had to have been -- no, I can't remember. It must have been through the spring and then there was a break in the summer. How did I get into this? [0:27:38.4]

INTERVIEWER: Just by I was asking you about projects you did (inaudible at 0:27:41.0) yes.

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, on the Elmira -- no, the Decat --

INTERVIEWER: Okay, yes. Can you tell us what the Decatur study was about?

THELMA ANDERSON: The Decatur study was about personal influence. That is to say we -- gosh, I should have looked at the book. We were studying how people formed opinion in several areas: In politics; as regards entertainment, I think movies; and I don't remember what the other two were. [0:28:21.0]

But what we did was we assembled a crew of interviewers whom we trained and gave them a very careful sample, it was very meticulous, about going to every nth household and getting every nth responded and going back as often as you had to in order to get that responding; interviewed them about who they were and so on and how they formed opinions and whom they talked to, let's say, about politics, and then went to interview those people whom they designated as people they discussed politics were.
So that we were looking for how opinions were formed and what the personal influence line was. What else shall I tell you? [0:29:18.7]

INTERVIEWER: And who were the people who worked on it? Was that mostly the people like yourself? Was it graduate students? Were they mostly women or men or…

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, this was a project which was assigned to C. Wright Mills, who had I suppose come to Columbia rather recently. And I suspect that Helen Dinerman had been involved -- Helen Schneider who became Helen Dinerman -- had been involved in the design of the study. I think Barney (sp?) Berelson must have designed the study, because I think my memory is that that was one of his great qualifications. [0:30:10.5]

And so Wright and Jeanette Greene (sp?), who was at the bureau a fieldwork specialist, the three of us packed up and took the train separately and settled down in Decatur. And in addition to training the interviewers and checking their work every day and going over every single questionnaire we also interviewed local people. I remember interviewing a local priest and the mayor, but I don't remember what; anyhow, probably to find out about the political structure in Decatur.

And in between, we must have packed up and gone home and got the data coded. I think I must have worked pretty much on that, not only in the field but also when we got back home. What else should I tell you? [0:31:15.9]

INTERVIEWER: And, well, how do you remember that project? Did you enjoy working on it? Was it fun? Was it difficult? I mean what were the challenges?

THELMA ANDERSON: It was great fun working on that project. You know, we were away from the nest, we were on our own in Decatur, Illinois, which was pretty far from New York, and it was fun, it was exciting. You know, we would -- I think we all felt we were being innovative in social research and it was very exciting to try things out to see how they worked. And personally, I think we all liked one another. [0:32:00.8]

INTERVIEWER: And what was the reception there? How did the people respond to you in Decatur?

THELMA ANDERSON: In Decatur? The Decatur -- I think, by and large, we were very well received. At that time it was perfectly possible to do personal interviews at home, and by and large, people were very receptive. There was one incident; I don't remember whether it was in Elmira. It must have been in Elmira, New York in the voting study. I remember young Roger Baldwin going out to interview and kept going back to the same house to get the same respondent, who was a panel study, and nobody would answer the door. [0:32:55.1]

And he finally succeeded by yelling out, "I see you. You're wearing blue fuzzy slippers and I see them under the door." And he got his interview with the person he meant to be, to interview. So we really were very meticulous about what we were doing, and on the whole, I think rather excited because everybody was thinking and accepting or rejecting ideas.

INTERVIEWER: So did you feel that you were sort of on the cutting edge of some new wave of social research or what did you feel about how…

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, I think on the whole we all felt that in one way or another we were on the cutting edge of social research. We were designing new methods and producing results that were of some interest, so it was rather exciting for us; I think for all of us, in fact.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. And what was the Elmira study about? [0:33:57.4]

THELMA ANDERSON: It had to have been -- when was it? The Elmira study, I don't remember whether it started at the end of '47 or in '48. That was a voting study in which we, again, had a very carefully selected sample and interviewed people, the same people; I don't remember whether it was three or four times. And it was primarily concerned with their political views, how they were going to vote and how their attitudes changed and what kind of influences were exerted on them. We were interested in politics. I may be

wrong, I think we threw in a segment on -- I may be wrong -- about movie going; I'm not sure. [0:35:12.8]

In any case, we did the field work and brought it home and went through that ritual of coding responses and tabulating them and setting up requests, or doing it ourselves, for cross-tabulations which would enable us to write a chapter or a report or whatever describing what was going on, okay?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Well, did you have the same kind of feeling that the whole thing was fun when you went to Elmira? Did you go, again, take the train out to this town and spend a week there or it was sort of a group effort or…

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, Elmira was fun too; it was different. I think -- my memory is the two of us were supervising the fieldwork, myself and Harris Huey (sp?), both of whom -- we had both shifted from whatever we'd been doing before; I'd been at the bureau and I don't know what Harris had done. [0:36:18.5]

We shifted to IPOR, International Public Opinion Research, which was one of the sponsors of this study, and I think it was just Harris and I that went to Elmira, New York. And I think I stayed in the Mark Twain Hotel and he stayed in a little play cottage out in the garden, and that was fun too. My husband came along in the summertime and he was studying for his PhD and I remember he was studying his Latin that he was never very good at. And Harris and I did that same routine of choosing interviewers and training them and assigning work to them and checking over the work they brought back. And I don't remember now what I had to do with any of the analysis of the data. [0:37:39.1]

I do remember one great thing, and I hope I'm accurate. The last of the panel study interviews that we did was just before the election and this was '48. And so of course, we secretly that evening at home tabbed through everything to see was it true that Dewey was going to be elected, which everybody assumed was so. Not so in our sample. And so we said, "All right, we're not in the business of predicting who's going to win, we're just doing the study of how people decide what to do." And I think we kept our mouths shut, because our sample was voting for Truman. And as you may all know, perhaps not, it was Truman that was elected and the newspapers, that had been printed with the Dewey headline had to be trashed, so that was sort of fun. [0:38:38.8]

INTERVIEWER: Wow, we're getting an advanced look at the --

THELMA ANDERSON: What, dear?

INTERVIEWER: An advanced look into the election results.

THELMA ANDERSON: Really, right.

INTERVIEWER: So is that what IPOR was mainly doing?

THELMA ANDERSON: No. International Public -- IPOR; that stands for International Public Opinion Research. And IPOR was founded I believe by Elmo Wilson, whom we called Bug, and Elmo Roper, who was by then of course a well-known public opinion research person. And IPOR was formed to do research abroad, internationally that is to say, much of it for the government, doing public opinion studies in Europe and in South America and I don't remember what else. [0:39:31.6]

But in any case, what we did was design studies -- well, they were contracted for -- we designed them, had the fieldwork done, by and large, by local -- you know, by whoever it was in Germany or France or England and so on. And as I recall, they would send the data back to us and we did the analysis, wrote the reports, and submitted them to whoever the client was. [0:40:10.6]

They weren't all of that sort. I think I did a study about teachers' attitudes here in New York and that probably was for the Board of Education; I don't remember what it was for. So there would be studies, oh, for private or organizational clients. And as I say initially, at least, there were these very large-scale international studies done for the government for which we had to have clearance, you know, security clearance. And what can I tell you? [0:40:53.8]

INTERVIEWER: Okay, no, that's good. Let's take like a two-minute break here. You can get a drink of water of you'd like.

THELMA ANDERSON: …or a really successful journalist and I think I was differential and sort of submissive. So I think I didn't have -- I don't mean I was a wimp, but I think I didn't have quite the toughness that your mother had, you know? I thought of her as being more determined. And I suppose also I was kind of confused about what could I do. I was spending an awful lot of time in the subway, I mean going to high school and then going to college, in order to get to college, which was 20 minutes away from me in Brooklyn. Hmm?

MALE SPEAKER: By car.

THELMA ANDERSON: By car. I had to take a subway into Manhattan and then another one to the other part of Brooklyn. And then coming up to Columbia from Brooklyn was a hassle too, so I spent a lot of time in the subway. And I suppose I didn't have a great deal of self-confidence, and let's face it, I probably wasn't all that bright.

MALE SPEAKER: Hmm, I disagree with you, but we experienced the same duality to this status. Mother -- well, I discovered in recent years that she doesn't have a very high regard for herself, and it's confusing because I never -- I remember when I first heard about assertiveness classes…

INTERVIEWER: All right, so let's -- are we ready?

MALE SPEAKER: Yes, that's fine.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Let's talk about the culture at the bureau then in terms of personalities that were there and any kind of gender differences and who got to do what kind of work or, yes. Can you sort of discuss that? [0:43:05.5]

THELMA ANDERSON: I'll try.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

THELMA ANDERSON: Okay. I think we all felt that the bureau was great fun. I mean people were very serious about their work and no doubt anxious about their careers and so on. But there was a -- my memory is that there was a great spirit of camaraderie there. And it may have been partly because the bureau itself was located on 59th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, way down from Columbia. It had originally been the Columbia University Medical School, and in fact there was a moment when we were having a meeting in Bob Merten's (sp?) office about Superman which I think I spoke about, and the whole concept of Superman, you see, was new.

And so we were speculating and thinking and talking, and suddenly the back wall of Bob's office, which was a dusty attic in that building opened, and in walked a man, a guard, carrying a lantern, it was Demosthenes, and that was when I learned that that was the top of the old amphitheater for the medical school. So it was that kind of adventurous experience that we had there. [0:44:58.1]

I think it was special in a way, not only because it was not geographically next to Columbia or part of Columbia, but also it was wartime, and I think in part that may have accounted for why there were as many women there as there were, although there were men too. Among the students there were -- I blanked out on names. Do you want me to do that?

INTERVIEWER: No, that's okay.

THELMA ANDERSON: Is that okay?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. [0:45:39.1]

THELMA ANDERSON: We were very respectful of the staff, which we, meaning the graduate students, were certainly respectful of the staff, which included Paul -- Paul Lazarsfeld --and Bob Merten (sp?) and -- I've lost it. But those were the men. But Herda (sp?) made her appearances and was certainly respected. I think Helen Dinerman, who at that time was Helen Schneider, was Paul Lazarsfeld's assistant, teaching assistant, and so there was serious crossover. [0:46:35.8]

As for men versus women I don't -- I think we women certainly felt we weren't being held down by the men and that there were opportunities ahead for us, that we could

succeed in whatever we wanted to. It was great fun. I think there was a certain amount of sexual play and there had to have been affairs of various sorts, but it was quite discreet. [0:47:10.3]

And I think we felt good, we females felt good about what we were doing, and it was fun, in large part because we respected, you know, the Merten (sp?) and Lazarsfeld minds and we were being adventurous professionally. What else shall I tell you?

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that you got the same opportunities as any male graduate students and your peers? Do you feel they were taken as seriously?

THELMA ANDERSON: I think they were prepared -- well, how shall I start? I think as regards male versus female students I think -- I'm about to sneeze -- I think the opportunity was there for women to succeed. Certainly, for example, Pat Kendall (sp?) made a good professional career and Marjorie Fisk (sp?) was highly respected, so the opportunity was there. It was a question of whether one could meet it and that's where I feel, for whatever reason, I didn't really succeed. [0:48:36.7]

INTERVIEWER: Well, let's talk about that. Why did you feel that you didn't really succeed?

THELMA ANDERSON: Well, you know, I've never been psychoanalyzed so I can't talk about it intelligibly, or intelligently.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that it was part of the culture of the bureau, or was that part of your own sort of personal situation when you got married? [0:49:02.0]

THELMA ANDERSON: I think it was personal, you know. I don't think -- well, to some extent I suppose the men held the reins there. Women were succeeding at the bureau and in sociology and sociological research, but in a way it may have been perhaps because it was part, in some ways, of the Columbia culture where there weren't very many women who were professionally recognized at Columbia, unlike what was true at Brooklyn College where there were highly respected women on staff but not so far as I know at Columbia. [0:49:57.9]

For example, in the English department, which I was rather familiar with because my husband taught there, I think there was only one woman on the staff and that was in the graduate school; that was Susan Knobby (sp?).

MALE SPEAKER: No, Marjorie Nicholson (sp?).

THELMA ANDERSON: There was another woman who was very important in the English department named Marjorie Nicholson (sp?), but she was the tyrant who ran the office. She was an administrative person; I don’t think she taught.

MALE SPEAKER: She was a distinguished scholar.

THELMA ANDERSON: She was?

MALE SPEAKER: Yes.

THELMA ANDERSON: Of what?

MALE SPEAKER: You know, I don't…

THELMA ANDERSON: You want to bet?

MALE SPEAKER: She's of the sublime and various other subjects.

INTERVIEWER: Of the sublime, did you say?

MALE SPEAKER: Yes, in literature, yes.

THELMA ANDERSON: I'm thinking of someone else. I'm thinking of someone named Adele (sp?).

MALE SPEAKER: I don't know.

THELMA ANDERSON: I think so. I don't know about Marjorie Nicholson (sp?); scratch that. [0:51:02.2]

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, let's go back to the idea of success. What constitutes in your mind -- what would have been being a success in those days for you?

THELMA ANDERSON: I suppose my notion of real success at that time, since I was engaged in the research field, would have been someone who was competent to really direct research projects and, you know, serious ones, and I did direct a good many but they were not major projects. And success I suppose might also have been in the academic world, but I simply wasn't -- I wasn't up to that. I wasn't training myself for it. But it may have been partly because it was wartime that the world was more open to women, but I don't think so. [0:52:13.5]

At the bureau I think there was more room for some women; certainly Hazel Goeday (sp?) and Missy Hodor (sp?) and so on, partly because of the European tradition which they brought with them. And as far as I can remember, Marjorie Fisk (sp?) was the only woman who had achieved a kind of real success, although Helen Schneider did, Helen Dinerman did; certainly she did, too. But I was not really at that level somehow.

INTERVIEWER: But you did go on to, certainly, work in very important studies like the Elmira study.

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh yes, oh yes, yes.

INTERVIEWER: But in terms of projects that you yourself directed and designed you --

THELMA ANDERSON: I don't think so. I don't think so. I don't remember any such. [0:53:14.3]

INTERVIEWER: Can you describe some of the projects that you did design and direct?

THELMA ANDERSON: Not at the bureau, really.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, what about other ones? Well, what about the children's media study that you mentioned?

THELMA ANDERSON: Right. I think -- I'm trying to remember where I worked and what I did. I should tell you there was a break in my career, so to speak, or career as they say, because when my first child was born I left work and stayed home and I was mommy for several years. I did continue to do analysis, write reports on an outside basis for IPOR, but I wasn't really working full time. [0:54:20.5]

And then there was a break -- oh I can't remember what the sequence was; I meant to look it up. I was about to take time off really from everything and just stay home and read books when I got a call to work at City College on a project called college discovery program, which was -- it preceded the open enrollment in the city universities. And the college development program, that involved high school graduates who were selected by high school advisors as potentially good students who had not qualified in the traditional scholastic way. And they were put into I think there were two newly formed colleges at the time, one in Brooklyn and one in the Bronx. Ultimately there was one in each borough and each -- the youngsters went to these schools and they had special coaching. And it was our job to track their success and also to design tests that would predict success of a different order from the conventional academic things. [0:55:56.0]

Well, there I was, in an atmosphere with faculty members and with graduate students in the psychology department up at City College and I had a feeling the students were looking at me, "Who the hell is she?" And it was as if I had been sent in as a kind of cleaning woman, because I didn't have the PhD which would have established me as an authority with them, so that was a rather strange experience. [0:56:32.3]

Anyhow, I did that for a spell. And then I guess I left because Quentin was invited to England -- no. That first trip was to France, and so we packed up and went for an academic year in France. And then when I came back…

MALE SPEAKER: I think this was the England trip. I think this would have been later.

THELMA ANDERSON: I don't remember which. It doesn't matter, does it? I worked at J. Walter Thompson; I don't even remember how I got that job.

MALE SPEAKER: Was it through Reno (sp?)?

THELMA ANDERSON: No. I met her there. I mean she hired me. But I worked at J. Walter Thompson for some years. I've got it all muddled; I'm not doing this well. And… [0:57:25.4]

INTERVIEWER: No, you're doing fine. What kind of projects did you do at J. Walter Thompson?

THELMA ANDERSON: There I was doing -- we were doing qualitative -- I was qualitative research, which was sort of new to me. And what we did were a lot of focus groups. Unlike what happens today, focus groups were not then treated as, you know, the summary of what the world thinks, but they were designed to give the creative people at the advertising agency a sense of how their potential targets thought about the product or the service which they were offering, just to give them a feeling for how the consumer mind worked. [0:58:19.4]

And then we went on to do quantified studies of some sort on the given subject. But my main role was to conduct, as I say, these focus group sessions, three or four or whatever it was for a topic, and write reports and talk about it to the creative people, and that in a way was sort of fun. I remember spending a lot of time doing research for the Singer Sewing Machine Company about how women felt about sewing and how they felt about the equipment. [0:59:02.9]

And I remember we did a big study for Pepsi International in which we designed the interviews that were conducted in various countries and the material sent back to us for our analysis. And I remember on the Pepsi study we had three target groups: Teenagers and young adults and mothers. And it was amusing to me that Reena (sp?) chose the appropriate person to analyze the teenage data and the appropriate person to do the young adult data and me to do the mothers, because I guess I was still being very much of a mother.

INTERVIEWER: So let's talk about that. How do you feel that, you know, getting married and having a family -- how did that impact or intersect with your career when you look back on it? [1:00:05.7]

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh dear. Well, I guess that was it.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you said you took a break in your career when you were being a full-time mom for a few years.

THELMA ANDERSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was that kind of standard, what women did? Could you have actually returned to work, or how was it looked upon?

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh dear.

MALE SPEAKER: Naomi, I wonder, excuse me for interrupting.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MALE SPEAKER: But she hasn't had any lunch.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MALE SPEAKER: I was wondering if you could stay and visit would you like a piece of chicken? Would that be good?

THELMA ANDERSON: No, I'm fine, darling.

MALE SPEAKER: Sorry.

INTERVIEWER: We're going to finish up in about ten minutes.

MALE SPEAKER: I thought she was running down a little bit.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, yes.

THELMA ANDERSON: No. You're a sweetie, darling. [1:00:49.1]

How I felt about being a mom and how that impacted my career… Well, we had choices, those of us who went in for having families. And some of us -- some managed it by staying home for a brief period and then going back full time professionally. I did not, partly because we couldn't really have afforded proper, you know, nurse baby care, and it didn't seem right to us for me to do that. And partly also because we were living in the Columbia neighborhood and it meant that if I was -- if I did work on a project, just an isolated project, Quentin could pitch in for baby care, you know, between classes and so on. [1:02:07.7]

Others did the -- as I said, others had their children, spent a limited amount of time at home, and then went back to full-time career, which is what Helen Dinerman did. And I don't know -- perhaps that didn't appeal to us partly because although Quentin, who loved me, was proud of my working and was proud that I was earning more money than he was, but as I said before, he didn't really respect sociology as a discipline, nor did he really feel that, quite rightly, that I was making any great contribution to the mind, to the world of the mind. I don't know. It's too late for me to go into analysis, isn't it? I don't know how to answer your question. [1:03:14.3]

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, let's just wrap up. That was an interesting observation, but let's just wrap up with a couple of questions about how you feel when you look back on

your career now. What do you think were your greatest accomplishments or what projects did you enjoy working on the most? What were some of your biggest challenges when you look back on it all?

THELMA ANDERSON: I enjoyed working on a lot of my projects. At the bureau, working on those two big public opinion surveys, the panel studies, I enjoyed those, because we were really involved in how people were thinking and why and all of that. [1:04:07.0]

I don't know about J. Walter Thompson, whether I… Well, what the hell. I enjoyed working on -- I enjoyed doing all those little itsy bits and pieces. I think it was when I got to the newspaper advertising bureau that I really felt at home, and partly it was because when I started there it was with the launching of what was called the newspaper readership project. And one of the things that pleased me was that one of the studies I did for that had to do with children's media habits, which it was the first study of children's media habits and it was extensive and it was interesting. [1:05:20.2]

There were other projects there that I enjoyed and was proud of. Oh, one of the things I did at the bureau, I became somehow responsible for something called the newspaper in education. I don't know if schools and newspapers do that these days, but at that time newspapers would provide copies of newspapers to the local schools and would also provide a certain amount of assistance in engaging the teachers to have the children engaged in learning to use newspapers, and I became responsible somehow for the whole national project, and I rather liked that very much. I mean at that time we believed that newspapers were important. And it had an educational role that I was rather -- I think I was rather pleased with that and really proud of that. [1:06:29.8]

And it was fun in a way; I did a certain amount of travel to various parts of the country to see how the program was working and what wasn't working and what needed correction and what kinds of suggestions could be made. [1:06:44.8]

I also got involved in -- the bureau formulated something called the new technology department and I was shifted to that and worked with Charles Kinsolving, who was the director. And I may be confusing some lines there, but cable had just appeared in the world and it pleased me that we were attempting to figure out a way for newspapers to survive the competition that cable was offering. [1:07:27.8]

And one of the things I rather loved was computers had just appeared in the wor -- you know, in offices and we all were learning how to use it. And I remember at one point someone had said to newspaper ad salesmen that they had to learn to use computers in order to prepare presentations for their clients; you know, the two or six martini lunches when they would speak to the local whoever and try to talk them into the advantages of advertising in newspapers. And I think it was Charlie Kinsolving, I'm not sure, who said, "Well, now, look at Thelma Anderson. If a woman of that age could use a computer, so can you," so that pleased me. What else do I know? [1:08:30.7]

INTERVIEWER: You know, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but that reminds me of somewhat old story that you mentioned about Paul Lazarsfeld going into put a --

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh right, right, right. There was also certainly at the bureau a real hierarchy and Paul Lazarsfeld was certainly at the top of the heap. And one of the -- sort of general memory that I have of the bureau is Paul rushing about, pigeon-toed, dashing about to do this or to do that. [1:09:09.8]

There was an occasion when he was holding a meeting in his office and received a phone call. And so he rushed out, and roundabout this dusty bureau, seen opening doors, and finally opened one door and said, "Oh, this is good. I can take the call here; there's nobody here." There were just two graduate students in there. One of them was Joan Doris (sp?) who became Joan Goldhammer, and I don't remember who the other one was. So there was a sense, to be sure, that graduate students were sometimes invisible. And there were other episodes of that sort, I suppose, but it was the kind of thing that we could just laugh at and laugh at Paul for. What else? [1:10:06.3]

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, that's good for me.

THELMA ANDERSON: Is it?

INTERVIEWER: Unless you have anything else you'd like to add, you know.

THELMA ANDERSON: There was something else I thought of that might be relevant and I can't remember it. Do you remember anything, Pete...
MALE SPEAKER: The only other question I was going to ask is why you left the bureau to go to IPOR.

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh. Well, the transition from the bureau to IPOR, it wasn't really a matter of leaving the bureau. I think it was really a matter of getting a real job, because you know, the bureau was really sort of a training scene and it was part time. And the way the transition happened was that Helen left the bureau and had gone to -- it may all have happened at the same time and it had to do I think with the Elmira voting study; that IPOR was just formed, and that Helen shifted to IPOR.

I think it had to do with, as I say, the voting study. And so I would have worked on Elmira via the bureau too, but I don't know; I wasn't privy to it, nor do I remember the details. In any case, Helen had gone to IPOR and then I went, and I think it was a matter of it's a real job and it was doing the same kind of work; it was the same job. I mean the bureau was involved in the study as well. Does that make sense? [1:11:55.7]

MALE SPEAKER: And one more. And maybe look over it, Naomi, just for continuity. As I look back, there were a lot of women who worked at Lazarsfeld's bureaus throughout the years. Why do you think Lazarsfeld hired so many women? [1:12:13.7]

THELMA ANDERSON: One might think about why did Lazarsfeld hire so many women and that's an interesting question. I suppose in part it may have been because they were smart and he knew it and needed them. Gosh. I myself have never been analyzed; I don't know if he ever was. I don't know that it was a woman thing. It may have been -- in the bureau days it may have been partly because more women were available than men during the war. I don't know. I don't know why he hired… I don't know. He was certainly right to respect them. I mean the women whom he hired were good. [1:13:33.4]

MALE SPEAKER: Do you think it was an economic thing as well? Could he pay the women less than he paid the men?

THELMA ANDERSON: No, no, because the women -- I think because the women -- it wouldn't have been an economic thing of paying women less than men, because the women whom he hired were very, very good. Those women who succeeded were very, very good. I don't know, I don't know. It may also partly have been partly perhaps that it was wartime, and perhaps there would have been other men, more men available, who are qualified. I don't think so. I think the whole world of sociology, you know, social research of this sort, was quite new and maybe women -- maybe, in fact, women were better qualified for this kind of endeavor than men would have been. [1:14:54.7]

But I think really the reason there was so many women in his professional career was that they were available and they were educated, they were skilled, and I don't think you can make a sexist story out of it. Not I think that he -- interesting to think about whether Paul could have worked for a woman, and that would be hard to imagine. I don't know. But I was so much younger, you see, and I was working for them, so I don't know how it would have worked the other way around. [1:15:51.0]

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well --

THELMA ANDERSON: Does that make sense?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Thank you so much, Thelma. You were a trooper here. I didn't expect us to go on for, you know, so long.

THELMA ANDERSON: You just got me started. What time are you coming back tomorrow?

(Chuckling)

INTERVIEWER: Actually we are going to take a break. And thank you very much for making the chicken. I think we'll all share some with you, if that's all right. But then I want to shoot a little bit of footage of you, looking at photographs.

THELMA ANDERSON: Oh, anything you'd like, sure.

INTERVIEWER: Okay?

THELMA ANDERSON: You see how submissive I am.

INTERVIEWER: You're very cooperative. [1:16:21.3]