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Interviews of the Margaret MacVicar Memorial AMITA Oral History Project

Margaret Mace Kingman – Class of 1937

(interviewed by Anuja H. Patel)

August 24, 1992

INTERVIEWEE: Margaret Mace Kingman

INTERVIEWER: Anuja H. Patel

Richmond, MA

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AP: My name is Anuja Patel. I'm here with Margaret Mace Kingman at the Peirson Place. It's Monday, August 24, 1992 and we're in Richmond, MA. Ms. Kingman, can you describe your childhood?

MMK: My childhood was right here on the property because I was born in the same room, in the same bed that was my mother was born in, in the same room my grandfather was born in. The property had been in the hands of my family since the land was bought from the Indians in 1761. There's more information in the brochure that I will give you.

My favorite person was my grandfather, who showed me everything and carried me around. I wrote a story about my grandfather to a writing group I belong to and I had them all crying at the end. I told them about how he took me out of my crib at night and carried me across the road to where the whippoorwill was. I had never even seen a whippoorwill.

AP: What is a whippoorwill?

MMK: It's a bird whose song sounds like a willow and he whips the last part of the whip. It's a night bird, so you don't see it in the daytime. So my grandfather carried me in his arms and I slept all the way over. When he got under the limb of the tree, which the

whippoorwill was on, he woke me up. And I saw the whippoorwill. It had to be a moonlit night and I wrote that up and they all said, "That's the most wonderful love story you've ever written."

AP: Did you spend a lot of time with your grandfather?

MMK: Yes. While he was alive, I was essentially the only child because my brother was born twelve years later and never knew my grandfather. When I was young, my grandfather had retired and therefore he had lots of time for me. People ask how I happened to get into geology and that was because of my grandfather. He taught me when I was quite small to recognize mica and quartz and the obvious things in natural science. He had gone to, what was then called Mass Agi, Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst. He did a great deal with both nut and fruit trees and berry bushes, grafting them and starting new strains and that sort of thing. Sometimes I take students up around on the trails; we have quite a number of trails because we have, along with the property I gave to my son, more than 400 acres here. And you can see the trees still, some of the crab apple trees to which he had grafted other types of apples. They're still growing although everything's grown up now into forest. It used to be much more open than it is today. Also, there are a number of geologists who came here. The first topographic sheet done of the area had already been mapped out by my grandfather by just taking a surveyor around because he could tell exactly where things were and the topographer would fill in the contour lines properly. The other reason geologists came here was because of the Richmond Boulder Train, an easily identified trail of rocks to

their source. Dr. Lyell had been in Switzerland. He came over to map the Train, which is a very easy one to follow because it begins in New York State. My property is the New York State line. It starts at a ridge where it looks as if a giant hand had just taken all these blocks out and then you can follow them to the valley and up over the ridge and down across the property. It was such an obvious trail that it was written up early in the geologic history of this area.

AP: Were your parents here also?

MMK: Oh, yes. My father was in the army during World War I. There were dozens of cousins. As a child, it was just my grandfather, my mother, and myself because he was overseas all the time during the war.

AP: You were three years old when the war began?

MMK: Yes.

AP: Do you remember anything from it?

MMK: From the war? I remember that when he got to Paris, he sent me a pink dress and a pink hat with a blue ribbon on it. I was the envy of everybody because I had that Paris gown. I think I have a picture of me about so high in this fancy dress. I was also a bit jealous because he also sent a picture of himself with a German girl on his lap. And he

said she made him think of me, this little girl. I didn't like the picture at all. We got to know each other better later on.

AP: When did he return?

MMK: When he came back, I was 19 or 20.

AP: Do you have siblings?

MMK: I did have a brother. He died about six years ago. And I have a half-sister who is a little over half my age. And that's it. But I have lots of cousins. We have a family association here because this was always the gathering point for all of my grandmother's family primarily. My grandmother came from Mason, Ohio and the Peirson line. I am descended from the oldest daughter by the first wife. Katherine Peirson, whose portrait was in the room where we were, was the youngest by the second wife. It turned out that my grandmother and her great aunt and her aunt were the same age. Katherine Peirson never married and so she just brought in the whole family. Summers here were just a large group of cousins, second cousins, sort of a gathering of the clan. Some of them would come from Ohio on motorcycle. When I was growing up, I was always looking for the boys that would come from the east on their motorcycles.

AP: Did you get along with your siblings?

MMK: I was jealous of my brother. I'm a jealous person, anyway; I think you could see that. I was quite jealous of my brother because they made a great deal of him as he was the only boy. My father was the youngest of twelve and my brother was the only one carrying the family name. And it seemed to me that he was always getting things that I would have liked to have had, and more attention. It wasn't until I was grown that my Uncle Wilbur, who was always bringing things for his nephew...Uncle Wilbur had no children and I didn't know he cared about me at all until in Washington. My uncle became the president of the Metropolitan Club, which is a men's club in Washington and I was in the cloakroom when I heard him talking to some men. Then he disappeared, and one of the men said, "He's a fine person, but I wish he'd stop boasting about his niece all the time." That was when I was at the White House. That's the first time I realized he really was interested in what I was doing. I wasn't too happy about his boasting about it, but at least he was paying attention to me.

And I had lots of uncle and aunts and cousins that were fun. Now their descendants are all together. I'm now sort of the matriarch of the group. Many of them are getting to know each other for the first time with our family association. So we're setting this up as a trust. I'll be leaving it to a trust and part of what we'll be doing is environmental science. I had a group of blind here when I was teaching at the State University of New York doing a study on nonvisual perception of the environment. I teamed my sighted students with the nonsighted and we mapped the area and did all kinds of different things together. We learned from each other a great deal about how you can get along without sight. That was a lot of fun because for them...I remember

Bruce saying, "Why bother to tell us the kind of trees that are growing here? A tree is a tree and when you've hit it, you know you've hit a tree."

AP: Who said this?

MMK: One of the blind students. You know you're getting a different viewpoint on the environment entirely. We had a smell and tell trail. Part of this trail, which starts right here, was part of the smell and tell. And the pond, of course, is part of it. Learning to find your position by sound, by clapping your hand...I was with one of the blind students up on the trail and he said, "What building is that?" I said, "There is no building there." He replied, "Yes, there is a building there. And he said about how many feet away it was. I said, "But there isn't any building." I said, "Let's walk down." We walked down. True enough, my neighbors had built a new garage and, of course, he could get the echo. And from the echo, it was just a couple of times, he could tell me how big it was and how far away it was.

We have a large number of bats. You notice I have a bat house up here and another one here. We got to know the bats very well because they were so interested and it's true. One time I had the Richmond Boy Scouts and teamed them off with the blind scouts from The Perkins School in Watertown. I had been taught, my grandfather had taught me that the bats, what they're doing when they come near you is measuring you so they won't hit you. They do your height and they go around and get your volume and then they're happy. They know not to hit you. When the blind scouts were here, I happened to realize that one of them was behind me and he wasn't touching me at all, but

I suddenly realized that was exactly what he was doing. My head, he'd started up there. I realized he was doing it when he got to my shoulders and then he said, "You're so much shorter than I'd thought you'd be." Then we got into a discussion of where your voice is when you're talking with somebody. Whether it's higher or lower, the differences in sound. So, part of this trust will be on environmental science and some of my blind former students, one of whom looks as if he's going to become a judge (he's a lawyer, went through law school). I had him at the age of fifteen and at sixteen he was a runner up for the Junior Chess Championship for the state of Massachusetts. This group was very bright. They were the ones who had been premature babies, who had gotten too much oxygen in their early years, at birth actually. The lowest IQ was 135. And they've all done very well.

AP: And this was at New Paltz?

MMK: No, I had two of them from the public school. This is the blind group that I'm talking about. The others were at the Perkins School. And then I had one local one who actually had some sight vision. He could recognize light, so he would know where a window was or something different enough so he could see. He could see well enough to ride a bicycle alone the white line on the road. Of course, he had to stay on the white line. That used to scare me because sometimes cars go very close to the white line. He managed.

AP: What made you want to do this?

MMK: There was a study when they redid the Boston Commons. It was a study that was done at the Graphic Center at Harvard. I forget now who was in charge of it, but they redid the planning and the benches where people sat. I had read about it in the literature that this was going on. They had taken sighted students and blindfolded them to go and sit on these benches or near to a bush, or what have you, get their feelings and reactions. They also wanted to find out why there was one bench in particular where they had noticed, from people's reactions, the people would sit for maybe as long as ten minutes, usually about five, and then they'd get up and move. I thought it was so ridiculous. Why not, instead of blindfolding sighted people, use blind people, who use this every single day. So that's how I happened to get involved in it. It was curious because they only sat on that bench for five minutes and they knew exactly why everybody got up. It was, most people wouldn't consciously notice it, the subway that was in back of them and when the train went through, it made sort of a sucking sound. You know how children hate the sound of a flushing toilet. It's something pulling you down and this was pulling air or pushing air in such a way that it bothered people and so every time a subway train was going by and made this sound, people got up and moved away from it. It was that simple. And so if I ever see anybody blindfolding sighted people to get ideas and thoughts about one's environment, I get in touch with them and get some of the bright ones. Although today, it's difficult to find a nonsighted that is as intelligent as this group was.

AP: Why do you suppose they were so intelligent?

MMK: There was nothing wrong with them. They were normal except that they could not see. The ones now, as a result of drugs or multiple things, are not as bright. These were all physically perfect, although I did have one that had been lamed, as well. That was a problem; she didn't stay very long, but diabetes often takes sight away after they're somewhat grown. With the Goodwill Industry in Pittsfield, I had one for a while; he was twelve before he realized that he was going to be blind. And he just fought against it and fought against it. Just couldn't reach him. See, these have been born with it from the beginning and it was all they had. He could remember seeing and that messed him up. Of course, measles takes away sight, too, or it did, but in general, it's things that have crippled them in other ways as well as blindness.

AP: You went to school in Richmond before you came to Radcliffe. What was that like?

MMK: We just had a session because we had eight regional schools and the little house up on Route 295 was the center school. And so I just walked to school very central. Oh, it was wonderful; we had a wonderful teacher. The town was larger then. The mine kill was still active and so was Richmond Furnace, the iron furnace, so we had a number in the school who didn't speak English too well so that we would learn different words and so forth. There were eight grades of us so that we went from five essentially to twelve. I remember at one time this one boy, all the children were laughing about it. Since I wasn't there at noon, the others brought their lunch and ate at the school and for water

they would come down here because this is all spring water and carry it back up. What happened was, this one boy, he was new and he would fall asleep after lunch and then I discovered he was bringing wine to drink. When the teacher found out, she explained to us that Italians were always drinking wine with their lunch and it was a part of...because the boy had said his parents had given him this and none of us would believe him we weren't given wine. But she did a beautiful job of getting us to recognize that there were other people in the world who did things differently than what we did. That helped me in geography and getting interested in the whole field of why people are different in different countries and so forth.

We only had one black boy that we weren't very nice to. I think he was a model. We had a number of artists and sculptors who lived here in Richmond. One of them did the fountain that is in front of the Library of Congress on Washington; it's Neptune. He had a number of...he was a friend of Madame Alda who was an opera singer. I think she was the mother of Alan Alda; I'm not too sure. She was a great, tremendous woman. Often she came up she had some black people with her and I know that Perry also did some statues of blacks so we got to know them also. But then I was brought up...my mother was brought up by a family who was half black, half Indian. They had brought me up until I was eight. She was here. never realized that she was black. In her last years, they discovered she had TB and took her away and I was quite upset because she was the oldest of the house and I was the youngest. Her lap was always available, you know that kind of thing. And then at the nursing home, mother finally took me over to see her and there she was. I hadn't realized that she was black until I saw her in that

white bed with the white sheets. All of a sudden, I realized she was black. Of course, this was much younger than the story I was getting into in school.

One of the things I'm trying to do right now is to track the black population that was in Richmond at one time. That's quite a long story. One of the Peirson's before the American Revolution had hired a ship out of Boston to take hogs to the Caribbean and he was wrecked off Savannah, Georgia. By the time he rescued enough to pay off the crew, he was finally able to make it to shore. Of course, he lost all the goods he was planning to sell. By that time the fighting and the battles were all between Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, and New Hampshire, from where he came. So it was some time before he was able to go north. Before he got home, he had married a French woman. She had assumed after seven years that he was dead. So she had remarried. So he turned around and went back again and he apparently, whether he married this other black or not, I don't know, but in Savannah somewhere, his two white sons went down and put a gravestone up to him and apparently shared in the inheritance.

In the meantime, I had called someone I found in the telephone directory who spells the name as we do with the ei spelling, which is a Scottish spelling of Pearson and pronounced Pi-ear-son. I asked him about his family and he said, yes, his family wanted to be sure that the spelling was always that. We talked for a bit and I asked him about his genealogy. He said, "From your speech, may I assume that you are white?" And I said, "From your question, do I assume that you are black?" And he was. He was head of political science at Howard University in Washington. His family had come from Savannah, Georgia. He said, yes, they always had plenty of money. He said his sons were all at Stanford, good colleges, well educated. I have people who have invited me to

stay in Savannah and to come down and to hunt and find out what went on, whether they were married, which I assume had been done when he found out his wife had remarried. It would make an interesting story, anyway. That's what I want to go on to sometime. One reason that I'm going to Hanover is that I'm too busy here, as you're noticing. I have to hide in order to get away from the telephone and from the things that go on.

AP: What were your interests in high school?

MMK: In high school, I thought I was going to be a great writer. I was the class poet. Actually, I went to a...the students here and my mother went to high school in Pittsfield and to do so, you had to take Summit Road over here to the railroad track. On the timetable, there used to be three stations in Richmond. There was only one that had a station house and it was just a crossing of the railroad. So for two weeks, I went to Pittsfield High School but in order to board the train, you had to go across the railroad track to get on the boarding side going north to Pittsfield. The mentor was a senior who was supposed to watch out for all of us. This one day, she herself was late and she tried to get across just as the train started up and the cowcatcher on the front of the train just picked her right up. When my family heard about that, that was the end. So I went for two years to a school. There were two of us who got scholarships to go to a school, Ms. Mill's School in Pittsfield. Then the last two years I had a scholarship to Northfield Mount Herman, which is in Northfield. It was there, I think...they asked me to give a talk at what is now the Women's Club, which was then Ms. Mill's School. They wanted me to give a talk about the students that had been there and something about the

background of the schools and so forth. The ones that I had kept in contact with all remember the English teacher who did scenes from Shakespeare. Even in the summertime, when we were all on our own, we did scenes in the upper barn there. We used those sliding doors as the screen. The audience had to sit outside, but we had the balcony. We did Romeo and Juliet. We did these in the summer when we weren't in school at all, following what she had done and we all wrote poetry. In my mother's diary, I found a poem written by one of my classmates. We've been friends ever since. Actually, we met in kindergarten somewhere before that. We got to know each other there, There was a poem that she wrote about trees that apparently she had given my mother. My mother had kept it in her diary and I sent it to Liz, who has since published, I don't know how many times, in the forties anyway, forty or fifty books. She was so touched by this and she said, "You wrote the class poem." That was when we were studying Beowulf and I had my whole class jumping into the yeasty waves Beowulf had done. She seemed to think it was fairly good even so. That was very strong on English. When I got to Northfield, that's when I got into chemistry and mathematics. I had a wonderful math teacher. She was fantastic and an excellent Latin teacher. They stand out in my mind, in my memory.

AP: And then you went to college.

MMK: And then I went to Radcliffe. My mother had gone to Wheaton, but my aunt had gone to Radcliffe and she thought I was more Radcliffe. It was funny because my cousin and my mother would go to Wheaton early on. Aunt Olda and I would go to Radcliffe.

So that's how I got in and there, almost immediately, I got into geology. I chose the major, I guess, at the end of my first year. That's when I ran into those two professors who wouldn't teach me and that's how I ended up at MIT to take these courses.

AP: Now, was there ever any doubt about you going to college?

MMK: No. My grandmother had gone to college, my mother, my aunt. One of my aunts is a doctor. No, there was no doubt. My grandmother marched with Susan B. Anthony, who lived just up the way here. No, there was no...you were just expected to go.

AP: You went to college during the Depression. Did that affect you any?

MMK: Well, I had a scholarship for one year. I lost it my sophomore year. I didn't do too well; it was awful. I stayed with the Fullers. In fact, Mrs. Fuller, you may have heard of Buckminster Fuller. He was sort of a guru during the sixties here. I looked after their two children. I was, well, there is a term for it. I lived with them and, as a result, I had my room and board. And then with a group, I guess there were four of us, we started a catering service because the faculty were the ones that had the money in those days and so we started with the faculty and then we set up cocktail parties and so forth. We couldn't serve the liquor but we did all the little canapés and stuff and served. It was very good. We also got some interesting things to eat ourselves. We met a lot of interesting people, also. That's how I got through.

Then I had help for my masters and I was teaching at Smith. I also got married.

AP: How did you meet Lucius Kingman?

MMK: I've been married twice. The first one was a student at Tufts Medical and his mother had been my mother's roommate at Wheaton. I feel I was sort of pushed into this whole thing. So that didn't last very long. Just about when we were breaking up, that's when the government...see, there were only two things that you were told that you really had to do and that was either teach in a women's college or get a job with the government. So everybody automatically wrote to all the women's colleges and made out our first applications forms to the government. So, in 1941, when we were breaking up, I got this notice that they would please like me to go to Washington and so that was a complete turnover and I ended up in Washington.

AP: Did you have any children with your first husband?

MMK: No. I had been told that...he wanted to be a pediatrician; that was his aim and I was told I couldn't have a child. Of course, later on I did, but the only reason was that my uterus was tipped in the wrong direction and so I had an operation and that's how I happened to have one son. I have a foster son, that's all.

AP: What sort of activities did you do in college? Did you have time for a social life?

MMK: Not too much, as I can remember. Reminds me of...I have teenagers who work at the inn and Sean just finished his freshman year in high school and they're studying the sixties. So one of his questions was, "What was the procedure for dating in the sixties?" I said, "Sean, I was a mother, practically a grandmother by that time." And it shook me, too, that he would think I would be dating in the sixties. Then another thing was curious because he said, "How did you dress in the sixties?" And I said, "Oh!" I'd just been going through my wardrobe on order to get ready to retire and get some things out. There were two dresses that I wore when I was at the White House that I liked and I thought I'd just keep two of them. I said, "I have two upstairs. You want to see them?" We looked at them. He said, "That's what they're wearing today!" it's true. So then I got back into the dresses.

We had a lot of music and if you helped usher at Symphony Hall we could go in, but we were way up high. I remember one opera. One Loengrin, when he comes in in the swan boat and everyone ohs and ahs and of course we couldn't see him because you're at the wrong angle for seeing anything in the back of the stage. So, that was dumb. We didn't like to go to most of the operas because you couldn't see all the action.

The boys had their own frats. We went to frat dances and sometimes we would, on weekends, visit other people's homes or they would have parties but very little one-on-one dating. Even here we didn't have one-on-one dating because it was always a big group and you didn't go off on your own with somebody. Sean couldn't understand that. I suppose it's quite different today.

AP: So you were a spunky teenager or pretty mild mannered?

MMK: Yes, I was pretty spunky. I guess spunky is...also, I was the only girl. I had so many boy cousins, I was thinking about that the other day because there would usually be five or six of them and just me. So we did all the same things together. I remember being so relieved when...the family up on the hill had a girl my age but she had epilepsy and could never do the same things that I did because they, in fact, didn't let her out of their sight pretty much. She was supposed to be a playmate of mine but we never really did. I guess we played with dolls and things but we never...but then neighbors moved in. In fact, they bought the house that's right in the corner across the way and there was a daughter my age and then in the summers...he was a grandson of Horace Mann, the educator. His name was Horace Mann. He's the only descendant, actually, the only male descendant. Essentially, he tutored us in many ways and one year they had a summer place in Southwest Harbor, Maine, and I'd go up in the fall, usually in September. I also made some money tutoring children in math around here in the summertime. We did a lot of sailing along the coast. Most of the things I did were outdoor things, but I didn't like competitive sports. When I first glanced at the New Paltz over here at the State University of New York, the president called me and said he's putting me on the athletic board. And I said, "Well, you have chosen the wrong person. I hate competitive sports." Then he said, "We have all kinds, you know." So I told my students and asked them, "What should I do?" They said, "Oh, we'll do it for you." And they did. They wanted more bicycle routes. They wanted better access to the swangum for rock climbing and they handed me this beautiful sheet and all I had to do was put it together. And I got congratulations for the noncompetitiveness. So I owe a lot to my students.

Another thing I owe to them is giving up smoking. When I discovered that they were betting, when I was trying to give up smoking and I was giving a course on air pollution, you know, the Greenhouse Effect and all that kind of stuff. And here I was smoking. I didn't realize it, but blocks of chalk are the same size as a package of cigarettes and I would be there holding this in one hand and then I would be playing with it. I didn't realize I was playing with this until sometimes there would be a sigh all over the class and then I discovered they were betting on how long it would take before I took that chalk out and put it in my mouth. And I didn't want to be ridiculous in front of the class. Therefore, I congratulate my students on getting me away from smoking because I did that real early. On the field trip from the Richmond School when we went up on to the top of Greylock, somebody sneaked away. It was a group with other schools so we sneaked away and had tiny little cigarettes about this long. That's when I started smoking.

AP: Was it common for women to be smoking at that time?

MMK: Yes. Aunt Georgia was the first. No, Aunt Vanessa, I guess, was the first one I saw smoking and I thought anything that Aunt Georgia did was wonderful so I copied her. My mother thought it was dreadful. I was more obedient to Aunt Georgia than I was to my mother.

AP: What was your MIT experience like?

MMK: That was nice. At Radcliffe, there were more women in the classes, of course, but usually not more than two, three, or four. I was the only woman in the classes that I took but at Harvard they were always so polite and saw that you had everything in front of you, the other students. At MIT, they didn't pay any attention to you. You were just another woman. So what. You were essentially an equal; that's what I was sort of used to with my cousins because I was kept with them. We just assumed. And I guess I took it for granted that I was supposed to sit in the back of the classes that I audited. I guess they just assumed I was somebody's secretary doing something because I took notes and sat in the back.

AP: Did you make good friends there?

MMK: At MIT? The only one I started to make friends with was the instructor and it turned out he was dating one of my classmates. So I sneaked out in the back once. There was one, I still have some letters from him. I still don't understand what the letters were about. He certainly didn't see me as I see me.

AP: Was he in love with you?

MMK: I guess so. It's funny. Again, his mother had been friends with my mother and they had lived here in Richmond before she was married. Allen was very bright. He made good grades and he had a wonderful job during the war. He was early into his ----- (inaudible). A cousin of his, now his brother appeared in Washington. In the government

experience, often you never see the employees that are going to be assigned to you. All of a sudden, you look up and when you've said you need this or you need that and one appears but you've never interviewed them or anything. And Allen's brother turned up to be one of my cartographers and we kind of started -----(inaudible). His brother is married to Kingman, visited us out in McLean and he died recently and he had a beautiful, quite an art collection. Clark University and Williams College he left some things to. Also, he left one to his cousin, Henry Williamson, who is in charge of the Norman Rockwell trustees and so forth. Henry called me because he came across some pictures and my mother is in some of the pictures. I made out to talking about Allen and his brother and he thought, as far as he knew, Allen just disappeared and nobody knew where he was, whether he was alive or dead. And he didn't even know that he had been out at Stanford. He was on the West Coast and involved with lots of interesting things. And then after that, I had correspondence with him.

All you have to do to reach eighty years, I have and start trying to decide what to throw and what to keep and sure enough, there were Allen's letters. I was going to give one to Henry and ask him to please analyze it for me. Apparently he'd thought he'd hurt me in some way. I have no idea. That was my major MIT experience.

AP: Did your parents have any objections to you going to MIT? The fact that it was mostly male?

MMK: No.

AP: They were pretty free with you?

MMK: Yes. And my donor, I don't think it's there any longer but, my donor, Stanley, had given the library, her name is Runkel. It was the Runkel library. It has been incorporated into the library now but for a long time, the Runkel name was there over the library entrance back in the thirties. That was a long time ago. It's even earlier than the sixties. I went back to a reunion at one time and it was another...they had me assigned to the class of 1937, I assume. When you get old enough and you wonder what you're going to do with this world's goods, school is what you go back to always. They make it obvious that they're in need. So I went back, that must have been in the fifties, and made a lot of friends at that one. That was fun. I enjoyed it but many of them are at some distance away, California.

AP: And they came out for the reunion?

MMK: Yes. They stayed here afterward. Nathaniel stayed with me for a while after. That's nice. So my connections with MIT are very tenuous, as you can see. I don't remember that I ever...oh, because there were so many schools in that area that most the Harvard Business School and there was a lot going on.

AP: Did you meet a lot of students from other colleges around there?

MMK: Yes, mostly from...I had classmates that went to Boston University. In fact, I was offered a job at BU; and at Simmons and, of course, at the Business School. I didn't see much of Wellesley or I don't remember what other college but there were lots of things going on in the Law School. My roommate, the one year that I was in the dorm and not earning my own, was a law student. We had law students that looked like weak students, too, used to shoot around the window with a BB gun. I did attend the MIT Club in Washington and there were some special things there. I think the first of the things that you could do with a laser, you know, real early. They come out with some nice exhibits and things at club meetings and that was fun.

AP: You said you were in a dorm at one point.

MMK: I was in a Radcliffe dorm. That was after I lost my scholarship my sophomore year. Thought I'd do better if I were in a dorm.

AP: Did you do better?

MMK: Yes, I did.

AP: Then you went to Smith College to teach. Was that your first job after college?

MMK: My first job was coincidental with another job that I got. My first paying job was photographing and doing what is called today an environmental impact statement, the

location of building the carbon reservoir and I got paid for that. At the same time, I took pictures of Smith College. I had some film left so I took some nice pictures of Smith College. I got a bit mixed up on my directions and I said it was on a hill. And the first time we circled was the North Hampton Mental Hospital and I didn't get pictures of it because I thought it very funny, laughed and laughed away the chance. And then the second one was the Veteran's Hospital. I got pictures of that and gave them to them and of course I gave them to Smith. And I think somebody said, "Well, that's why you got the job, you gave them the nice aerial view." You see, I was married then and I would commute down to Cambridge to work on my doctorate and then back and forth but I never finished my doctorate. That was why they sent me...it was a complicated situation.

The American Geographical Society was given up after World War I. They were the ones who had decided with Bowman at the head of the boundaries of the new countries of Europe. There was some misunderstanding or something going on about...it was just really politics. Anyway, Mrs. Widener, who gave Widener Library to Harvard, essentially bought up for her husband, Hamilton Rice, the area right next to Harvard on Trinity Avenue for the Institute of Geographical Exploration. So, almost immediately, when it was completed, I was in on that and it was Byrd's first visit to the South Pole and we all worked together, took time on the radio to keep contact with Byrd. The Harvard Mountaineering Club also had its headquarters there so that you met a number of the explorers, not just one. Some of the new radio things that were being done but those were the things that...the Board of Overseers at Harvard felt that this was just a playboy's paradise over there at the institute. So even though they've got kids from Harvard, most geographers, as you know, there were no buildings. I don't know what

houses they had, but the Institute is gone. But that's where I got into photogrammetry and aerosurveying and because of my two professors, although Draper at MIT gave me a good recommendation, too. Colonel Bagley was the first to use aerial photography during World War I on the Scott Cashiered for it. You don't take them before the masts. He was court marshaled. A friend of his was in the small air wing that they had during World War I. He got in the plane and Colonel Bagley took pictures and sent them forward to show that you could save a lot of time and know where the Germans were just by looking at the air photos. He was court marshaled for doing this because he wasn't supposed to have done it out of the hierarchy that the military had. He was well known in Washington. So that was an open sesame for me to put all the services together. The other one held the stratosphere record for many years and he finally became a general. He was one of my supporters, too. I had open doors.

AP: Then, afterwards, you went to work for the government during World War II.

MMK: Yes, I did. Just before World War II, I was called down and asked in March of 1941 to bring my dossier up to date and if I had further knowledge of urban geography to please expand, which I did. Then they called and they said they wanted me to report and I said, "Well, I still have the rest of the semester at Smith and really couldn't leave until June." But pretty soon they said you jolly well better get down here. All kinds of things...the things that surprised me, I had been made a fellow of the AAAS. I was elected fellow to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. There was a meeting, part of which was closed and that was when they actually told us that the atom

had been split. I had secret clearance so that they allowed me in and then when I came out and looked at the exhibit, they had the Boston Camera there, which we had been told was super secret. That's why we had to develop the U2, which came under and we could only get 100 miles in, as far as the USSR was concerned and needed something more to know what was going on. General Thistle okayed the U2 and the new cameras but anybody could have...I've often wondered about that. Who else beside myself and a certain group of people that I knew recognized the Boston Camera at that exhibit that was open to the public? Lots of strange things happen with the government.

AP: What was the U2?

MMK: The U2 was the plane that was, one of them was shot down over Russia and gave away the fact that we were flying over the whole area. See, originally we could only get in 100 so Thistle approved structuring a plane so that we could fly over the whole area and Powers got himself shot down somehow. But we got a lot of information before he was shot down.

AP: Were you on this mission?

MMK: No. I received the materials and my group put them together and analyzed, measured, all that kind of stuff.

AP: Were you considered an expert cartographer because the government went to you?

MMK: I was the only one of that class except for Greg Warson who went any further with it. I think the men all got seasick. I mean they were sick. Sometimes the plane smelled as though everybody had...I was the only one. I was the only one who came up with basically what they needed.

AP: So you were a woman heading a group of men. Were there any problems?

MMK: I only had one problem and that was after the war was over. We were getting ready...I guess we were still the OSS, weren't we? Yes, it was toward the end of the war. I had the rank of major in the air force. It's what you call not a real one. There was another major, I guess he was a major in the air force, too. Anyway, he didn't see a woman running this thing at all, that he knew more about printing and publishing than I did. I had asked for and I had received my own printing press. My own printing group couldn't do it at the government printing office because it wasn't secure enough, so I had my own group from the government printing office and they set it up in one of the former navy buildings. It was set up just as the printing for the Institute had been done. This major, of course if you read the books, it looks as though the best maps were engravings. So he took a map that the cartographic group had finished working on and he took it to a company in Baltimore and ran a copy to show that it was better than the one I did, but I hadn't run mine yet. The one he ran, of course, was cheaper or something or the other

and I remember I went to my group and I told them what had happened to my printing press. They ran one off and I said, "How will I handle this?" They said, "Just slip it onto your representative on the staff office." So when they were meeting the next time, there was a representative from the army, the navy, the air force, and the OSS State Department. They each had their representatives in this organization and so I put it on my OSS man's desk, my copy. Everybody said, "Oh, my! That's excellent. Where did it come from?" He was fired. He was dropped.

AP: The other major.

MMK: The other major was dropped. Never saw him again. I made it clear to the New Paltz. They called me in and I said, "Well, I don't know. I never gave him the materials to do that." So anxiously what I had done...oh, the other thing was that he company that he had sent it to was one that I did have a contact with and they had wondered about it and then when I saw it, we quickly ran that thing off that mike. The men were up until two o'clock in the morning getting it out. A run on this one we had to take in the next morning and get it there before the garod.

Oh, then I had one, really, in my whole experience, what 26 years, that one and I was assigned a Sergeant Genust. I'll never forget him. He had the biggest feet you ever saw. He was a draftsman. He had been on with Marrels Marodus in the South Pacific and was being sort of on home leave from Walter Reed Hospital. We had to get a special...everything was big about him, he was a tremendous man. And as I say, he had these big shoes and I also had a wave lieutenant who the admiral was always calling her

in to do something or other and she was always taking off her shoes when she was working and so this one time somebody exchanged the shoes and the admiral called for the wave and the wave puts her feet down and here they are picking up these great big fudhoppers. He had a sense of humor but what he used to do, e smoked a cigar and I was a smoker in those days and I had an ashtray on my desk and he would deliberately put that smoking cigar which smelt so awful and then he would kindly laugh. I suppose he thought he was just teasing me, but I was certainly annoyed with him. But that was more teasing than it was anything else, but the other man really wanted my job. He just couldn't understand why anybody had allowed me to get the position I had.

AP: Now, what were these missions you did with Germany and Russia?

MMK: They accused me of...

AP: This is Joseph McCarthy.

MMK: There are so many things and it's only recently that I've been able to unscramble a lot of it. I remember that they asked me if I knew anybody on Mount Desert Island that they could get in touch with. And I said, "Oh, yes, let's see. Horace Mann had a place out on Mount Desert." And they said, "Well, would you write?" I wish I remembered what they told me to write. Anyway, I sent it out to Mrs. Horace Mann, Southwest Harbor, Maine.

Then somebody, a stranger, appeared at the office and said they wanted to speak to me and they had my letter that had not been mailed and said, "Do you know this woman? Mrs. Horace Mann. Is there such a person?" And I said, "Well, yes," so forth and so on. Then I never thought any more about it. Later on, we were working a twelve-hour day and so we were in the former Navy Medical Building where there were fruit flies on two floors. There were monkeys on one of the floors that they were researching. Often at night, we would get hungry and down below, you had to go down a slope, which had bushes and flowers and things to the White Castle where you could get hamburgers and coffee and so forth to keep yourself going. What we did was to pull straws to see whose turn it was to go down. I had a young man who was Amish, I guess. He never had any buttons and he was almost lost in Washington. He drew the other straw and instead of going down the main walk which wound down the hill in that direction, I used to go straight down to the White Castle through the bushes. Well, this night we both stepped in and I fell headlong and the moment I started to fall, lights went on, sirens went off, and a voice said, "Who goes?" And dogs barked and I realized it was barbed wire that I had gotten and they said, "What are you doing? Who are you?" I gave my name and he was speechless. I had to give his name, too. Then they said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm looking for the list." He said, "What list?" I was gathering myself together. I said, "I don't remember how many coffees straight, how many with cream, how many with just sugar, how many with just cream." Whereupon, they began to laugh. And they said, "Why didn't you go around the other way?" And I said, "Because it's shorter this way." Why go the long way when you can go the short way? Anyway, we got ourselves together and we walked down the right way.

What I had not known was that they had picked up the German off the submarine at Northeast Harbor, the Mann's lived at Southwest Harbor. It's a harbor just across the way, at Amagansett on Long Island, where I had been many times and where the Peirsons originally came from and where I was known, on Staten island, where my father had invested in the real estate and where we had stayed a couple of winters. I didn't know about the Miami one at the time. But here were these three instances plus the fact that I had rented the house with the red roof over here to a couple who owned a brewery in Bavaria and that's where the money came from and so he was keeping track of everything that was going on because it was his business. The money was coming over here that he was living on over here and he had a very fancy, soft, short wave radio. They put all these things together and had me in touch with the Germans.

Then I had gone with Margaret Sanger into the USSR and of course there were all those who disapproved highly of Margaret Sanger in the first place and the contacts that we had made over there. Even H.G. Wells was not that well approved of. Actually, the woman that he was over there to meet was the mistress of Gorky and I met her but I was so naïve, I didn't know what was going on to my knowledge. So I had all these contacts and they accused me of getting my orders in the USSR and then into Germany. Then you see, I'd also taken the Smith girls on bicycle trips through Germany. Somebody really tortured me somewhat but then I was also responsible for setting up youth hostel centers in Virginia and we had brought over the founder of the Youth Hostel Movement, Eleanor Roosevelt gave us that letter to give to Hitler but we never got to Hitler. We got to Hiss. Alger Hiss, who spoke clear English and they allowed him to come over here to speak

but he spoke only German and I was thinking that he bought his wife and children over, sort of a lost exercise.

AP: He spoke perfect English but he only spoke German?

MMK: No, Alger Hiss was excellent, but the founder of the Youth Hostel, whose name at this moment escapes me, I always want to call him Haushofer but Haushofer was actually the geographer for Hitler, the one who did all the cartography, making it look as though Scandinavia was a great big serpent circling Germany and so they had to, you know that type of thing. He was very good at propaganda. There was quite a bit, under the Freedom of Information Act, I got about 140 pages of stuff. There were also about ten pages of stuff that they could not release to me. One of them, I happened to have and that was the second interview that I had. They call up, the title was U.S. Civil Service. I'm now part of history it seems to me. I actually have some of them.

AP: Your mother introduced you to Margaret Sanger. Why?

MMK: I was born as an eleven-pound breach delivery in the house I showed you before. Margaret Usher was the nurse for the family up here, up the hill, the Runkel, who gave the Runkel Library at Harvard. The doctor, of course, he didn't have all the apparatus for delivering me and he had to wait until Dr. Colt came down by train and came over and got me out. They thought I was dead but I wasn't. Anyway, Dr. Colt said that she sucked all the stuff out of my mouth and handed me to Dr. Colt, who grabbed me by the

legs and walloped me and he said, "You came right out with a bang!" Anyway, it wrecked my mother. She was told she should not ever have any more children.

In those days, birth control, this is 1912, was cocoa. They were excellent. They were cocoa. I thought they were candies. They came in a little pink box, cocoa thing. It was like a cone and, of course, the condom. It was that because one time mother gave a party. They ran out of balloons and I said, "Oh, I know! Daddy's got some balloons!" And I brought down my daddy's balloons, which practically wrecked the party.

But, at any rate, my Aunt Georgia, who lived in New York City...they couldn't go through the mail, you see. Contraceptives in those days were not allowed, could not be mailed. So Aunt Georgia would bring them up when she came up on weekends and she usually came up at least once a month. That was when Margaret Sanger had...Noah Sleet, her husband, was sort of in charge of production of these and was doing very well and then, I think almost simultaneously, three other companies copied what he was doing and selling them for less. Then there was a lot of dirty work at the crossroads, so that there were no more. In fact, the business was essentially dead at that point and Aunt Georgia had no access to these other places. That's when my mother became pregnant with my brother and she was insensible, actually, for almost two months. They never expected her to live at all. She was in bed, not knowing what was going on or anything. It was a very difficult time and then my brother arrived in only about an hour after all this.

But the time I was introduced was after...it was after the time my mother had gotten in contact with Margaret Sanger for more of the birth control that she'd had. Then, of course, she heard there was no more; they were working on it. Noah didn't go

across with us. We went over on the Aquitania and there was an international geographical congress at the same time so I was to be with Margaret and then go to the Congress, which was held in Warsaw, Poland. Now that I think of it, how did it happen that I met her? Well, mother was there when she boarded. That was the first time I met her, when we boarded the ship and her husband joined us in England coming back. So I got to know him, too.

AP: Was Margaret Sanger a role model for you?

MMK: She was. She knew what she wanted to do and she did it!

AP: Did you visit the birth control centers in Russia?

MMK: I went to one and I didn't go to the abortion clinic. She said they were awful. She was a bit of an idealist, too. If you had planned parenthood, you wouldn't have to have abortions. She told me that it was just like a dentist chair and the women were just waiting in line. Hardly any care taken of them afterwards, they were out within the hour. She found that very disagreeable. My, we went a long ways to see it. The doors were closed and locked and we found somebody to unlock the place for us and here were all these men still painting the place. We never found out what happened to that clinic. Mrs. Hepburn joined us, that's Katherine Hepburn's mother, and he two of them went around to the birth control place. I once would have. But she introduced me to H.G. Wells and I had a nice hour with him, almost an hour, in between acts of Russian Theater. I hope I

kept some letters from that time. Now I'm realizing it's a good idea to keep certain letters when you're trying to compose your life again and figure out why you did this and why you did that.

AP: Then you went to hear lectures in Warsaw.

MMK: No, I had a map. I did the first map and I don't have it anymore. It was the very first map centered on the seismograph station at Harvard. So that you could get the distance away, working with the two other seismograph stations, you could locate the center of the quake. It had never been done before and I was a student representative to Warsaw and my map is on display there. Wish I had it, but I don't. I don't even remember the name of the projection that I used except that the distances from the center were correct.

AP: That's when you first encountered Nazism?

MMK: Yes. It's true.

AP: How did that make you feel?

MMK: I thought I was dreaming. I couldn't imagine that it was really happening. I met this Jewish girl who invited me to go to the ghetto and see where the nightlife was. It was the first time I ever drank mead, fermented honey. So we came out of the ghetto and

it was late and we had only gone a few steps before the police came up and asked her for her Star of David and he asked her where it was. She had to translate. I don't speak Polish. She said it was in her purse, I her handbag. He said, "Take it out. Put it on." I could tell from his voice that he wasn't happy with her. So she took it out and put it out on her arm and she explained that I was American and she was taking me back to the students' dorm where I was staying. He walked alongside us the whole way. He had a horse, got down from the horse, and he was walking, and he followed us, right along with us, still talking and making things up. Then apparently he had her tell me that she's going to be perfectly all right, that he's just going to take her back to the ghetto, to her family in the ghetto, but I never saw her again. Then when Dr. Roamer...I thought I might stay and study with Dr. Roamer at the University and he said, "No, things are not going well." When we went back into the lecture room, there were yellow benches for the Jews. They all had to sit in the two back rows. The others had chairs. There's nothing left of the ghetto. We had experiences in Germany on our last years on our bicycle tours. It wasn't nice.

Washington wasn't nice to the blacks, either. We had Lori Hensen, a black girl who wrote beautiful poetry and we had to change where we met every week to some different place because she was followed by men. She couldn't get out of a trolley; she couldn't get into a taxicab. They were after her all the time. A friend of mine, her husband worked with me and she liked the showing on the Grand March and she came and did, I guess it was sewing, something artistic anyway, but she did crowing. She didn't appear one day. Corinne got upset because she'd always been very prompt. So she called the police; gave the information to the police and then heard nothing. No sign

to go on. Finally she called the police again and they said, “Oh! No, that was just another nigger down the river.” She had been raped and thrown into the river.

We had what we called Neighbors for a Better Community. It was not my idea, it was the sister of Allen Dulles who’d been near us. We paired off one black and one white woman together and one black man and one white to go around to the houses and explain that they could send their children, their first-graders, instead of going to Monasis, thirty miles away, on a bus they could go across the street to the school across the street. That they didn’t have to pay a poll tax anymore in order to vote.

AP: They didn’t know this?

MMK: They had heard it but they didn’t believe it. They didn’t believe it and anyone who did it was...and we also in that neighborhood, believe it or not, had Rockwell, who is head of the Nazi party and he turned out to the school children as they walked to school, the churchgoers when they went to church. No, Washington wasn’t a nice place. And there were houses that I didn’t know existed right in my own neighborhood and there was one that looked like, from the outside, just like crates put together to make a house and you go inside and it was absolutely beautiful. The windows were full of flowering plants that were growing and the most beautiful antique furniture you’ve ever seen. And you know my mouth dropped open. This came from my great-great-great grandmother. Whenever a plantation house decided it needed new furniture, they just gave the old to the help and they had kept it and kept it polished and it was gorgeous. And then I got into the house of a Fendeguards who worked for us in Boston who was a

direct descendant of Lord Fearfox and a slave. And his house was a large house. He built it himself. It was quite large. We walked in. There was practically no furniture and I said, "Where is the furniture?" He said, "Mrs. Kingman, when you have five children in college you do not have antique furniture." That's right.

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