

# Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project

Smith College Archives  
Northampton, MA

*Francie Garber Pepper, Class of 1962*

Interviewed by  
Kayla Ginsburg, Class of 2013

May 24, 2012

## **Abstract**

In this oral history, Francie Pepper describes shattering her high school teacher's expectations by not only going to Smith but succeeding as well. She discusses coming from a long line of strong women, participating in sports while at Smith, studying abroad in Madrid, going to secretarial school and using her Spanish to get top jobs, raising money for the YWCA, and working on social issues like birth control, domestic violence, and trafficking.

## **Restrictions**

None.

## **Format**

Interview recorded on miniDV tapes using a Panasonic DVX-100A camera. One 60-minute tape.

## **Transcript**

Transcribed by Janet Harris with Harris Reporting. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Kayla Ginsburg.

## **Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms**

### *Video Recording*

**Bibliography:** Pepper, Francie Garber. Interview by Kayla Ginsburg. Video recording, May 24, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Francie Garber Pepper, interview by Kayla Ginsburg, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, tape 1.

### *Transcript*

**Bibliography:** Pepper, Francie Garber. Interview by Kayla Ginsburg. Transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012. Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives. **Footnote:** Francie Garber Pepper, interview by Kayla Ginsburg, transcript of video recording, May 24, 2012, Smith College Alumnae Oral History Project, Smith College Archives, p. 3.

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Transcript of interview conducted May 24, 2012, with:

FRANCIE GARBER PEPPER

by: KAYLA GINSBURG  
filmed by: KATE GEISS

GINSBURG: So my name is Kayla Ginsburg. I'm sitting here with Francie Pepper for the Alumnae Oral History Project on May 24, 2012, and thank you so much for agreeing to be part of this project. Can you hear? Is this okay? Okay, awesome. So I want to start by asking you about how you chose to go to Smith?

PEPPER: Well, that's a funny story actually. No, I loved Smith. I went around at all the – you know, Wellesley and all the other colleges in the area and other places, and this was the one I wanted to go to.

GINSBURG: Could you only choose between the Seven Sisters, or did you have other options?

PEPPER: Well, back in my day it was either -- that was your choice. You didn't -- it was either the Seven Sisters or -- you know, that was sort of tradition. And I was told I couldn't come to Smith. I would not get in. And so I made my first choice something else, and then I got in and the head of the school went around the class. There were only 12 in this particular section and she went all the way around and she got to me and everybody said where they were going to go, because we got our acceptances all on the same day. It wasn't like it is today, and she said -- she went all the way around she said -- oh that's great, that's good, that's good and she got to me and it seemed like 15 minutes or more and she said, "You'll flunk out." And I said, "Oh, no, I won't."

GINSBURG: This is your high school professor?

PEPPER: Mm-hmm. I said no, I won't, and guess what? I didn't. (laughter) And I've been a good Smithie ever since.

GINSBURG: So what house -- you lived in Scales House?

PEPPER: I lived in Laura Scales, and I didn't -- I chose not to take French because I had so much French in high school and I was scared of taking the French that had the English reading. It was French but it was -- you read in

French but you did your exams in English and I said no, no, no, I can't do that. That's not right. So I started Spanish and that's been -- that's been my whole life. That change in my direction -- well, at one point I thought I would major in zoology, and then I decided to go to junior year in Spain, so I went to junior here in Spain and the rest is history. It's been great fun.

GINSBURG: So you majored in Spanish?

PEPPER: I majored in Spanish and I was just in Madrid in January, visiting with my friends from 52 years ago.

GINSBURG: Smith friends? Or -- oh no, Madrid -- Spanish friends?

PEPPER: Spanish friends, yeah.

GINSBURG: That's awesome. So what were the house communities like back then?

PEPPER: Well, we all lived in separate houses. We ate in our houses. Laura Scales was a pretty big house, so we had quite a number of people and we had -- we were called the elegant -- we had -- what did they call it? Gracious Living because we had tablecloths and the house mother was very particular about how we -- how we did that. We were very proper and people laughed at us, but we liked it, and then there was coffee in the dining room -- in the living room afterwards and demitasse, and that's where I learned to drink coffee and there was always a table of bridge in the corner and I had learned how to play bridge a little bit. So one time I got three people to play with me and when I had got to the table they had gotten a fourth, so I never played bridge again in my life. I never did because that -- but I did learn -- that's where I drank coffee. They said if you had -- it was a little demitasse, and they said if you drink the -- you know, a couple of those without anything, you will be a coffee drinker. I am a major coffee drinker today.

But that's where it started and then we always went in the living room after dinner, but dinner was Gracious Living. In those days you had to wear, you know, put a skirt on for dinner, but during the day I wore a gym uniform. I played basketball every day I think, and I played field hockey, so I was always in the gym uniform -- which was an old -- I don't know if they have them today, but it was in English hockey tunic and ours was red because our class is red, and I did play basketball every day so I ran around in that.

Other than that it was jeans. My closet was pretty empty. I was appalled at the number -- amount of clothes that some people had. I had two skirts and I had two dresses and I had two gym uniforms and I had I think two pairs of jeans, and that was it. And a few blouses to go with a skirt. But other people came in and they laughed at my closet because my closet was, you know, what the closets look like. They are not too big, but mine was mostly empty, and we didn't have telephones. We didn't have CD

players or even record players. I had -- and I was thinking about it today. We had -- I had a little white radio, like that, but I never used it. It was just about that big and you just -- that was that. Nobody had anything more than that. We didn't have -- we didn't have anything to cook with. There was a little place in the kitchen where you could do that, but I never did that.

GINSBURG: So you are from Cincinnati, right?

PEPPER: Mm-hmm.

GINSBURG: Do you remember -- did that affect kind of -- because most people were from the East Coast, did that affect how you related to people being from a different part of the country?

PEPPER: No, I never -- actually, I was very comfortable when I got here and it was very strange because I was just as new as everybody else, but I found people asking me questions and just for -- to be very funny about it, many, many, many, many years later my cousin who lived here in Northampton at one point who is a genealogist, we had a family reunion in the clubhouse down at the field -- the Fieldhouse, and that's where I found out that all of what is today the Smith College campus was my first relative coming across the ocean, his farm. The whole thing. And I now know why I was so comfortable when I came in, because my relatives were looking over me, and we went on that trip -- we went -- my brother came. I mean we were all -- there were a lot of us here, my family, I mean from all over the country and we made a big parade and went to the cemetery and went to the oldest part of the Northampton cemetery to visit the relatives.

And yet, I knew something was up way back when I was a freshman during the reunion, and this little lady came up to me and she was about as wide as she was tall and she said to me, "I am your grandmother's only female cousin," and I had never heard of her and my grandmother was Alzheimered, and I don't know how this woman knew anything, and she wanted to take me to the cemetery to visit the relatives. And of course during reunion I was working when she was free and I was free when she was doing, you know, stuff for the reunion, so I never got to go until -- but that gave me a little hint about something funny about it, but I didn't know what it was until many, many, many, many years later.

But I kept up with that relative for years until -- I don't know when she died. She was single and she lived in a fourth floor walk-up in New Jersey somewhere, and I don't know -- I never got any history from her, but -- so I never knew the rest of the story, but that's why I was comfortable. I was always comfortable here.

GINSBURG: So can you tell me a little bit about what the typical Smithie was like when you went here?

PEPPER: I don't know. I don't know what's typical. We were everything.

GINSBURG: Mm-hmm. Yep.

PEPPER: We were everything. I mean we came from all over. We came from all over the country really and even -- I mean we had pretty many foreign students too. Not like today. My husband came up to talk one time, and he was blown away by the international students here. I mean we just had -- but in my day there were -- you know, there were a few. I mean not that many, but some. We were everything really.

GINSBURG: And did you ever feel that because of differences between people that there was any sort of divisiveness or --

PEPPER: I never felt it. I know other people felt it, something. But I was never really aware of it because I've just always been comfortable with people, so I never -- I never had that -- I never thought about it. The one thing I guess I never thought about at the time too, and I have a very unusual history of women and strong women, which I really wasn't completely aware of either, but when I was here I thought that everybody came from people who went to college, from women who went to college, 'cause all of my -- you know, my mother, my grandmother -- you know, on both sides, that kind of -- they all went to college and I just thought that was normal.

And I thought it was normal, for instance my mother -- well, she was raised by women in New York City when she went into high school, actually, and when she graduated from college in Boston they -- the aunt, who was the first woman appointed Commissioner in New York City in charge of the prisons before women could vote, gave my mother a Model A Ford, and my mother in 1930 drove a Model A Ford from New York to California.

So I thought women could do whatever they wanted. I didn't realize that women were having -- and at Smith, of course, we were getting that women can do anything they want. And of course, when you got out of Smith in 1962, you couldn't. And that was a comeuppance, and -- and -- but it didn't affect me either really, because I had -- I know for other women it did, because they -- they didn't -- I don't know they -- a lot of people didn't want to do what the -- you could be a nurse, a teacher or a secretary, and I had done the financial office in my high school and did all of the bookkeeping for the school shop, you know, where you pencils and paper and stuff, and so I liked that. So I went right from Smith to secretarial school in Chicago and learned to type and learned shorthand and I got a really good job afterwards, by mistake, that was also by mistake.

But before that I actually submitted my 4OB. Do you have for 4OB anymore?

GINSBURG: (Shakes head negatively.)

PEPPER: Okay, 4OB paper was the -- they didn't let us in Spanish, they didn't let us honor. They didn't let us honor, and I don't know if that is the same terminology today.

GINSBURG: It is.

PEPPER: If you honored, then you could -- you wrote a thesis and you spent -- you took fewer courses and then you wrote your thesis. You did your research and thesis over two years. We couldn't do that and so we had a 4OB, which was the last semester and it was kind of a tie up of your -- of your major, okay?

And I submitted my 4OB paper to the Spanish Embassy in Washington for a -- for a -- it was on Lope DeVega, and it was his anniversary of his birth or something and I submitted it and I won. There were three prizes. One for a professor, one for a graduate student and one for an undergrad, and I won, and I won a round-trip ticket back to Madrid and with all expenses paid and spending money for a month, which I did.

And then my father called me when I was over there, I had been there about six weeks, I guess, I didn't have much more money because I only got a month and I had worked, so I had a little bit more but not much and I really was running thin. But he called and he had been to a lunch in Cincinnati and heard that someone needed a secretary who spoke Spanish, and I came home and I got the job. And again not knowing about women in the '60s, I didn't know women didn't travel in their jobs. So in 1966 I went back to Madrid again with a company as an interpreter for contract negotiations. I didn't know women didn't do that.

So -- but I only found -- you know, these things just came up when I bought my first car for instance. My dad cosigned. Well, that made sense to me at the time. Nobody told me that women couldn't get loans themselves. But my dad cosigned because I didn't have any money, so he did cosign for me, but I thought that was normal procedure. He didn't dare tell me that he had to do that or I couldn't have gotten the car. You know, a little tiny Volkswagen bug. So you know, those were differences and only -- only I didn't realize that a lot of people here were -- I guess what happened to me was being told I wouldn't get in, being told some other things that they didn't think I could do made me say, okay, I can do whatever I want and after I did a few times, I realized yeah, I can do this.

So I had that behind me. I've always you know -- have done things that people say oh, you know, how can you do that? Well, I got mad. I just wish a lot of people would not take no for an answer and just get mad and do it, but they don't, so that's where I -- where I think I got some of it.

GINSBURG: So were you part of any clubs or organizations or activism going on campus at the time?

PEPPER: Hmm, that's a funny one. Well, basketball. I mean I was captain of the hockey team, the hockey team for the class. The third hockey team, not the top one. That's because I chose to play a position that I had not played before, because I just assumed that the other woman who had my position was going to be better and she probably was, and I picked another position which I didn't know as well so -- but I was on that hockey team, and I did all the sports for the house. We had intramural -- we weren't allowed to go against other -- we didn't go against other colleges back then.

GINSBURG: Right.

PEPPER: We played inter-house. So I did everything, the swimming, basketball, whatever it was, I did. And then there was Gold Key. Do they have that still?

GINSBURG: Yeah, they still have that.

PEPPER: Well, I always did Gold Key during the vacations because I didn't go home, so I just stayed. Like Thanksgiving they'd put us in a different house. We would have to move out of where we would live, and they'd have a house for people who didn't go home, and I didn't go home. And I always did Gold Key, but then when I applied for it, I didn't get it. But it's kind of a joke because the woman who was -- who was in charge of it lived in my house and I frightened her because I turned a horseshoe crab loose in the bathroom. And she didn't like that. (laughter)

GINSBURG: Why?

PEPPER: She was afraid of it.

GINSBURG: But why did you do that? Why did you --

PEPPER: Because it was just Spring. So you know -- but I didn't care. I mean I got to do it anyway, you know, during vacations. It didn't matter, so.

GINSBURG: So what were your -- did you have any favorite Smith traditions while you were here that you --

PEPPER: Oh, yeah. The same things you all have now I think. We had Rally Day and we had Mountain Day and we had all those same -- I think those traditions just keep going.

GINSBURG: Except for the hoop rolling. Did you do the hoop rolling?

PEPPER: No. I didn't but maybe some people did. I don't remember.

GINSBURG: Yeah. Now do you remember that Martin Luther King Junior spoke here at Smith in 1961? Do you remember that?



- PEPPER: Uh-uh (negative).
- GINSBURG: Okay, I was wondering if it was a big thing on campus.
- PEPPER: I don't know why -- no. If he spoke here in 1961, it's surprising. No, I didn't know that. That's weird that I don't know that.
- GINSBURG: And you were around for all of the Newton Arvin controversy, right?
- PEPPER: Oh, you know why I don't know that in 1961, that's when I was in Europe.
- GINSBURG: Oh, you went abroad?
- PEPPER: In Spain. I was in Spain in 1960-'61. That's why -- yeah.
- GINSBURG: Okay. That's why.
- PEPPER: That was -- I was there when JFK was elected.
- GINSBURG: Mm-hmm. So then you also weren't around for the whole Newton Arvin -
- PEPPER: For what?
- GINSBURG: For the -- do you remember Professor Newton Arvin?
- PEPPER: Oh, yeah, no. I was -- I was here -- I wasn't here when it all happened, no. But I do know that I was signed up for -- what class was it? It was -- what do they call it? General Lit. And I did go to his class -- I was put in his section, and I -- I was -- I almost fell asleep and I thought I can't -- so I switched to English Lit which I didn't sleep through. It was very exciting, but I knew I couldn't be in his class because of the -- he just talked like this, (talks in a monotone) and I just wasn't going to make it. But as far as whatever -- what happened to him, I have no -- I didn't know about it until later. We didn't talk about it, we didn't know.
- GINSBURG: You didn't talk about it.
- PEPPER: I mean it didn't happen when I was here I don't think.
- GINSBURG: Right. Right. When you came back there wasn't any conversation about it?
- PEPPER: No. No.
- GINSBURG: Interesting. So were there any specific professors or mentors that really inspired you, or that you connected to?

PEPPER: Yeah. Yeah. Erna Burndt was a Spanish professor. I think she passed away a number of years ago. And then Mrs. Whitmore was in Spanish and then Mr. Vallarte. Señor Vallarte and I don't know if he is still alive or not, but the last time I -- it was 25 years ago actually that I was in touch with him for a little bit, but -- getting ready for 25th reunion, but yeah, I mean they were terrific teachers. But Erna was a particularly good friend. She was young and she was fun. We had a good time. And our Spanish group was very small, and so -- I mean -- I think -- I think they are -- are there -- five of us here for reunion and there were only 18 of us in Madrid that year and half of them were not from Smith, they were -- they just came in for the Smith program. And now Smith is mixed up with a bunch of other colleges and they go to a small town, which I think is too bad because Madrid is really a -- the center of everything and they go to a small town.

I've always been sorry that they -- they pulled out after -- we were there during the Franco era, and I don't think Smith closed down even during that -- they may have closed down a little bit during the Spanish Civil War. But I was sad because when Franco was gone, Smith pulled out of Spain and moved to Peru because they thought Spain was too dangerous, and of course Peru was a lot more dangerous, I think, if you are talking about student safety. And now they are in Córdoba or someplace. I mean you can walk around Córdoba in just about a day. There is not all that much -- I mean there is some interesting -- oh, there is interesting stuff, no kidding, but it is not like Madrid where around every corner there is something exciting.

GINSBURG: I think there is two Smith Spanish -- Spain programs right now actually --

PEPPER: Oh, I don't know.

GINSBURG: -- because I have a friend in Madrid.

PEPPER: I don't know. You know, what happens is that you're out of touch. You read the quarterly. I was class president, and at the time you -- you know, I got to come back or one of my other co-officers would come back, and we would write our newsletter to our class based on our own experience with our own point of view. And today the college puts that letter out, so we hear what the college wants us to hear. We don't hear necessarily what we see from our perspective. So --

GINSBURG: You were class president your senior year?

PEPPER: No, no class president after the 25th reunion.

GINSBURG: Oh, okay.

PEPPER: And then I was secretary of the class for 10 years after that. So 15 years all in all I was, you know, on the class -- that's because I came home from Europe at that point and hadn't gotten into anything yet.

GINSBURG: Right. Right.

PEPPER: Because we lived in Europe a long time.

GINSBURG: Okay.

PEPPER: I took -- my daughter was born in Brussels and I took -- I moved to Italy in 1974 with three babies under the age of four, and then was pregnant and moved to Belgium, and the baby was born two weeks after we moved into our house and a week later they said we were moving back to Cincinnati. It was kind of crazy life. And then three years later we moved back to Belgium again for another three years.

GINSBURG: Wow. So you travelled a lot.

PEPPER: And then we moved back again.

GINSBURG: Yeah. Yeah. So can you tell me a little bit about -- well, I guess we'll first talk about the rest of Smith and then transition into, you know, what you did after Smith. Can you tell me a little bit about your experiences dating while at Smith?

PEPPER: At what?

GINSBURG: Dating. While at Smith?

PEPPER: Oh. It was not fun. (laughter) I had -- I didn't date much in high school and then I came to Smith and I went -- we had mixers, I don't -- do you -- mixers?

GINSBURG: Not anymore.

PEPPER: And I think I went to -- I -- well, let's go back. I mean I spent my summers in Canada with some really fun people and had a great time. I was really studied at home. I mean that's what I really devoted my time to was studying, but at -- in Cincinnati, but when I went to Canada in the summertime I just had -- I had a wonderful time with friends who are still -- I mean -- I've known them since I was, you know, young -- and -- really young. And they are still my best friends and we see each other every summer now, and our children our friends and our grandchildren are friends, and those are the people that kept me going.

So I went to a couple of mixers and I can remember, you know, I don't smoke -- never smoked -- but I would have to have a cigarette to keep some jerks hands away, you know? No -- I -- no. So I think I went

to two mixers and I said forget that. I don't need that anymore. I've got these friends, and I got a letter from Canada almost every day from somebody, and phone call every week from somebody. I mean they -- so I didn't need to go looking for boys, and they were, too. And my Canadian friends were, you know, we did -- we could do boats, and we could do sailing and we did all the really, you know, interesting sports and these guys just wanted to drink. That was stupid in my opinion. I mean I don't drink either -- I drink wine but I don't drink anything else, and that was just stupid. No, I didn't get into that.

I had a couple of dates. I had one guy -- there was one guy who -- who called and asked for a date. You may laugh at this. I laugh at it now. It's funny. And he -- and I said, absolutely not, I won't go out with you. And he said why not? And I said -- because I know that you are going down the list alphabetically in the freshman book, and I'm not about to be one of the number. And he said -- he was really upset. His idea was that he was going to run for president of the United States and if he dated everybody at Smith, they would remember him when he ran for president.

Oh, he was so upset that I wouldn't do it. So he said, well, can I come over and meet you? And I said okay, I'll go for that. So he came over and on Friday nights -- I don't know if you remember this, but Friday night you could -- you had to be back in the house by 12, and at five minutes to 12 they bumped the lights, you know, so you could -- had to be -- you know, that was to warn the people in the driveway. And Saturday night you -- they -- you could have a guest in the house until 12, and then you had to go out in the driveway. So he came over on a Saturday night and then I sent him out and he was in the driveway, and another time he came over and we did go somewhere, and then I shook his hand at the door, and I went up to my room at 12 because I wasn't going to stay out in the -- shaking hands 'til one, you know from 12 to 1.

So I went up and I remember some friends coming up to the door, "Are you the one who shook hands?" I said yep. Because -- but anyway he was bound to be president of the United States and that -- and I wasn't going to be one of the ones, you know, so we never really had a date. We just -- but he was so upset that I wouldn't even count as going out with him. It was funny. I remember that. I've forgotten all about that until just now. Yeah. I don't know what happened to him.

GINSBURG: He didn't become president?

PEPPER: I have no -- no, he didn't run for president, no. No. And now I've got a politician for a son, so go figure, right?

GINSBURG: So, when you graduated, what were the expectations for women, but Smith graduates in general?

PEPPER: Well, I was really -- I guess it really bothered me -- and I remember this specifically, it really bothered me that so many women were running

around with -- they all -- they had rings, and they were running around the bathroom looking at colors of towels, and I couldn't understand why they cared about towels. It was the farthest thing from my mind. I -- you know, I had a mother who drove to California for a job, and she drove across the country eleven times before she -- you know, her life was over. And she worked for years out there and then she worked for -- in Cincinnati after she married my dad, who was doing his -- his internship and residency, and then he went back to Boston to do some more special training, and she worked all that time. She worked for 10 years, and then after that she did all kinds of, you know, community things.

So I -- and she was raised by women who worked, women who never married, who -- who were self-supporting, and I just never could understand getting married right out of college and -- and you know-- and in fact I got married -- I guess five years -- five and half years later, and I actually cried at my wedding, everybody thinks I'm crying 'cause I'm happy, and I'm crying because I don't know what I'm doing. Am I giving up my freedom? Yes. Some of it. But not all of it. Because I was independent, but I worried maybe because I thought no -- because marriage in those days was washing somebody else's dirty socks and that was not what I had in my mind. I had a job plan and it started with going to secretarial school and I figured with a Smith College education and the secretarial skills I could work for the top people, and I've always worked for the top people. I never --

GINSBURG: So --

PEPPER: I've always worked for the top people, because I was on that trajectory. I knew that. I wasn't going to, you know, I knew I could -- but I was the girl behind the scenes because that's -- that was the role, but I in fact had a -- you know, had a lot of responsibility, so --

GINSBURG: So, you've done a lot since getting married. I know you've had four kids, but you've also been involved in a lot of philanthropical work, and can you tell me a few highlights of what you have done since leaving Smith?

PEPPER: Well, I've done a lot. You're right. But I did -- in fact it's funny, my daughter is a -- my daughter graduated from Yale and her major was comparative literature in French, Italian and English, and what she really is is a folk singer of the mountain tradition from North Carolina. And she went off to teach in Paris for a year and then she came back to Cincinnati, and she joined a choir and she went down -- one day she just said, mom -- and she moved back in with us because she -- the drug dealers moved in across the street from where she was living and that scared her so, my boys said, what do you mean she's moving home? You told us we couldn't come home? But she -- we let her come home for a little bit. And then one day she said I'm leaving, and she went down to North Carolina. And she ended up going to Appalachian State University and getting her

master's degree in Appalachian studies, and she teaches mountain music and she ran a program down there.

So that just -- but all that time that she did that, she did not know that I was the business manager of the first Appalachian Festival outside of Appalachia in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1971 way before she was thought of, because she was born in 1977. And so that's one of the things I did.

I did a lot of different things, but mostly what I am the most in tune with is very important to you young women today. It's called birth control. I was on the Foundation Board for Planned Parenthood, but not in a significant way. But what I have done is work with the YWCA for the last 17 years I guess. I raised a lot -- 7 and a half million dollars for a new battered women's shelter and -- and the downtown headquarters, and I -- I have done speeches around about domestic violence, violence against women. I was just in Washington last week for the national YWCA conference and the vice president came and talked about the Violence Against Women Act, and I was on a conference call today while at the airport while I waited for a friend to come in on what's happening in Washington. I am very much involved with all of that whole -- that whole thing. And I've been involved with -- I was board chair of the YWCA in Cincinnati. I've done a lot. And then -- that's -- that to me is the most important thing. I -- as I said before, I grew up with strong women in the family, and I didn't know about women who had trouble. I accept that. I grew up in a very -- I don't know if you've ever been to the Tenement Museum in New York? Have you?

GINSBURG: I haven't, but I know, of it.

PEPPER: Okay, well -- the house -- I grew up in a private home, but we were surrounded by tenement buildings, just like the ones in the tenement building in New York, and I knew children were beaten by -- you know, their mothers were -- and then I was -- I came home from Smith and I went -- was tutoring. A Smith friend asked -- who worked for the welfare department. She was a couple years ahead of me and she was from Cincinnati, she was a couple years ahead of me in high school too, and she asked me to -- if could tutor this little girl in Spanish, and I said yes.

So I went, you know, several afternoons a week and she was a total mess when I started with her, and she developed into just a lovely young woman. But one afternoon a gang of boys came over and it was a home for pre-delinquent girls, before the foster care system, and a gang of boys came in and beat up a little girl right there. And I was tiny -- not like I am now, and I didn't -- we didn't have cell phones. We didn't have -- housemother? Where was the housemother? I mean where was the person in charge? I have no idea. I never saw her. Not over five years I never saw her.

And -- but what really got to me was the little girl said, don't worry about it. That's her boyfriend. He owns her. And that just set off bells and whistles in my head. You know, I was 22 years old thinking -- and I

remember sitting there and saying someday I'm going to grow up and do something about it and I think I have. And I'm happy with that.

That was a real -- and now I know more stories about domestic violence than you'd ever want to hear. It just seems like people tell them to me all the time, the stories. I could write a book about the stories I've heard, but it's such an important issue and to have our -- the Violence Against Women Act which has been passed with bipartisan support since 1994 become an issue in this administration is ridiculous. It's very, very upsetting to me, and that's what we spent most of the conference on in Washington.

GINSBURG: That's great.

PEPPER: So -- but that's -- that's -- it's not a very pleasant thing to talk about, but --

GINSBURG: But it's so important.

PEPPER: But I have enough name recognition in Cincinnati and beyond to be able to discuss it and have people pay attention, so -- I feel good about that.

GINSBURG: That's great.

PEPPER: Work is not over. There is a lot more to do. We are working on trafficking now. I'm missing a big meeting tomorrow of people that I kind of got together, because there were all these different people working on trafficking and it's a huge, huge problem right now. I mean it's always been a problem, but people are beginning to recognize it and I'm missing the meeting. And I kind of got everybody to talk to each other, because I knew this group was doing it and that group was doing it and the other group was doing it, but I hope they -- I hope they figure out -- but I don't want to get -- I mean I am involved with what I need to do and I don't want to start doing something again new, but I put them all together so that -- I find myself being a facilitator because of connections, so --

GINSBURG: So we are nearing the end of the interview, unfortunately. We have a couple more minutes, but last question. Do you have any advice for current and future Smithies?

PEPPER: Don't be afraid when you have your -- the options are there. You know, you are going to come to crossroads and you have to choose, but don't be afraid to choose what you really want to do because you are afraid of the -- what might or might not happen. It's something that I always -- it's part of what I always told all the children in their college look -- process. It -- do absolute -- go for it. Go for whatever you want, because you can live with the what -- if you don't get it, you can live with that. What you can't live with is the what if? What if I had done that? Who would I have been if I had taken that chance? If I had just done it -- you can live with -- you

can live with the failure better than you can live with the what if. And that's what I told all the kids -- not my kids, all the kids, all the kids, so --

GINSBURG: So do you have any last kind of Smith's stories that you definitely want on the record?

PEPPER: Uh oh. I just knew it was a lot of hard work. And it was kind of scary when I came in because of what I had been told, but then I found out I was okay.

GINSBURG: And was that your family or your high school teachers that were telling you that you --

PEPPER: It was the high school teachers, but my family was quiet. They were quiet when I got accepted to Spain and I didn't know why, so I didn't even tell them. And then I told them and they were really happy, but they were afraid that I might not get it, so they didn't ask or show any enthusiasm. And they would tell you that that wasn't true now, I suspect, if they were alive. But yeah. But people kept -- nobody really encouraged me, you know to -- I know they wanted me to go to Smith, but they also accepted that teachers thought that I wouldn't get in. So -- but I proved that wrong too. I was -- but you have to do that. I mean I -- yeah, I mean if I had said oh, I'm going to flunk and hadn't come -- and honestly when we had our exit interview, so to speak, with the Dean, I asked, you know, I told her that -- what had happened and I asked well, what exactly was it that put me over the top to be accepted, and strangely enough it was my French which went on to be -- you know, I speak French, Italian, Spanish. I even spoke some Chinese the other day to a woman on the phone. I only know a few words but enough to recognize their accent, so I just used my few words.

So you know I just -- you know just go for it. Go for whatever you think needs -- and go for what you -- if you see something that needs to be done in the world, go for it. And bring as many other people along with you as you possibly can, you know, be persuasive. Don't stand back.

GINSBURG: That's great. Well, thank you so much. This was at great -- great interview.

GEISS: That was wonderful. I do have one question --

GINSBURG: Go ahead.

GEISS: Can you -- do you have a sense of where your conviction comes from? Is it just something that is just in you, or do you feel like there was influence in your life or -- and you can answer Kayla.

GINSBURG: Yeah, you can look at me.



PEPPER: No, not really. It's just all the things that I saw. All the things that I saw as I was growing up, living next -- surrounded by tenement buildings. I can remember a young man, very, very nice young man and we played basketball with a crowd from the neighborhood in the afternoons, and you know some of them were in and out of reform school and they were not going to be amounting to, you know, much. One of them ended up in this prison, I know, but this one young man was just really, really nice and I -- you know, I was 14 I guess or something, 15. And then he came one day and he said, "My birthday is tomorrow I'll be 16. I'm dropping out of school to support my family."

And I thought oh, you know, that's -- and that was something that I was unaware of because everybody I knew went to school and college. And then just in the neighborhood with, you know how poor people were. One of my best friend in the neighborhood's father was the janitor in the tenement building, and they lived -- it was like a -- I don't know, like a mole hole and they lived underneath the building, and there were no lights -- no windows to the outside. I never got past the hallway but it was just a narrow hallway, all dark, no lights. You know, I don't know, and there were seven kids in the family. And I just knew people lived differently than I did and I got that. I didn't expect that Smith women did, but maybe they did too, and I just didn't think of it that.

But all of those things and then in the shelter -- or in the home for pre-delinquent girls, they were there because their family situation was so bad that they would become delinquent, not because they had been delinquent. And that was -- all those things just added up and added up and then what my mother did with the YWCA and all the things that she did. I didn't expect to be with the YWCA. She was and her aunt who raised her in New York City, not the commissioner, that's the sister of the YWCA, but the other one was the YWCA, and they were all, you know, self-supporting women. I just didn't think -- and they were all helping people. I mean all of them, the commissioner was -- but I didn't know about that part of it. I knew my mother used to go to birthday parties in prison, but I didn't understand why, you know, she -- she would tell us the stories and we thought it was funny, but we didn't know why.

But my mother was always, you know, busy with good works after she stopped working. She stopped working when I was born and she was older when she had me. And my three siblings who are younger, she had two after she was 40. So I didn't have -- I had that -- I don't know, I just watched all that and it all just sort of added up, and then we moved a lot and you know I helped women -- I mean I had the languages and we were there with a company in Europe, and I -- women would come in back when and they -- they couldn't speak the languages and they had children and they were afraid to drive and -- so I was always helping other people do, you know, learn to do stuff, you know.

GINSBURG: That's great.

PEPPER: So that's -- I don't know, I just -- and now I worry about women who aren't getting help with domestic violence. It just all sort of -- it's all about women -- that's what I do. That's where I kind of ended up. I did schools for 25 years, all kinds of things in schools, and then I said okay when my last child graduated from high school I'm going to go -- back to where I started with the domestic violence and the women.

GINSBURG: Well, thank you so much. This is great. Much appreciated.

END OF INTERVIEW

*Transcribed by Janet Harris, June 2012.*