

PEMBROKE CENTER

Associates Newsletter

Brown Alumnae in Documentary Film



PHOTO CREDIT: HANK RANDALL

Panelists watch a short clip from *Single Asian Female*, a film by Debbie Lum '91.

Documentaries were thought to be worthy and noble, and sometimes dull," said Betsy West '73, P'17, Fred W. Friendly Professor of Professional Practice in Media and Society, Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. "But that is no longer the perception or the reality. It is a very exciting time to be a documentary filmmaker."

A filmmaker herself, West moderated a panel with four alumnae who have directed and produced provocative and prize-winning documentary films. The conversation was part of the Pembroke Center Associates commencement

forum, "Getting Reel: Brown Women in Documentary Film," cosponsored by the Women's Leadership Council.

Each filmmaker's work, whether documenting a moment in history or an issue vexing contemporary society, explores issues of difference such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class that are central to the Pembroke Center's research mission.

Rory Kennedy '91 directed and produced *Last Days in Vietnam* for the PBS series *American Experience* and is cofounder of Moxie Firecracker Films. She explained that she got her start in

filmmaking from an idea that emerged while writing her Women's Studies thesis about the difficulties that women addicts were having in getting treatment.

"This was a time when there were a lot of stories in the press about 'crack moms' having 'crack babies,'" remembered Kennedy. Yet the research she did for her thesis showed that these women were very different from how they were portrayed in the media.

"They cared so much about their children, and they would do anything to get care but were unable to get it," said Kennedy. The barriers to care coincided with a devastating increase in incarceration of pregnant women who were also addicted.

"I thought, 'I can't bring all these women to Capitol Hill, but I can bring a camera into their living room.'" This work to help them tell their stories became her first documentary film, *Women of Substance*. Kennedy also made a ten-minute advocacy version of the film that she showed on Capitol Hill in an effort to improve public policy and legislation.

Debbie Lum '91 sought to make documentaries counter to the mainstream. "I always wanted to make films that expressed stories from underrepresented communities, such as the Asian American community, which all of my films have been about," explained Lum. Most recently she produced, wrote, and filmed *Seeking Asian Female*, shown on PBS *Independent Lens*.

Continued on page 3

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From the Director

The Pembroke Center, like all other units at Brown this spring semester, has been actively thinking about and planning the Center's future strategies for creating more diversity and a climate of greater inclusion in its programming, staffing, and curriculum. After President Paxson shared the University's *Pathways to Diversity and Inclusion: An Action Plan for Brown University* on February 1, 2016, Pembroke and all other academic units were asked by the Dean of the Faculty to develop and submit a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). The Pembroke Center submitted its DIAP this May as part of its new strategic plan for future years. I would like to share here some of the Center's past achievements and planned improvements in this important matter.

First, Pembroke brings to Brown three postdoctoral fellows each year as a part of its Pembroke Seminar program. Over the past six years, one third of these fellows have come from historically underrepresented groups. We are proud of these numbers, but would like to strengthen our commitments in this regard. I am happy to announce that for the next two years we will host one of the Presidential Diversity Postdoctoral Fellows. We hope that such a fellowship can be regularized at the Pembroke Center for the future.

Second, working with the office of Liza Cariaga-Lo, Vice-President for Academic Development, Diversity, and Inclusion, next year the Pembroke Center will host a speaker series of four to five distinguished scholars who work in Postcolonial Feminism/Race and Gender.

Third, as we move forward in collecting the papers of important feminist theorists for the Feminist Theory Archive, we realize that our list of paper donors could and should be more diverse. The broader inclusion of feminist theorists from historically underrepresented groups is a major goal for the coming years. Likewise, we will continue to diversify the collections in the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive, which focuses on Brown/Pembroke and Rhode Island women.

Fourth, while our student body and course offerings in Gender and Sexuality Studies are already quite diverse – if for no other reason that we rely for our course offerings on a broad range of courses from across the University – we nevertheless feel that regular climate surveys and input from our student body will be helpful in order to stay on top of student needs.

Thank you for helping us to build an even more diverse and inclusive Pembroke Center.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg P'19
Director

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Brown Alumnae in Documentary Film Continued from page 1



(L-R): Debbie Lum '91, Rory Kennedy '91, Betsy West '76, Alison Klayman '06, Marcela Gaviria '91

West asked her to talk about making a film about a very serious subject while taking a humorous approach. "I don't think I could make a film that wasn't funny," said Lum.

Lum also uses humor to reach audiences who might not otherwise be interested in the subjects of her films. She thinks about each story in terms of whom it might reach and also asks herself, "How am I going to make a message that I want to be true and authentic to my community to actually speak to a universal audience?"

Marcela Gaviria '91 wrote, produced, and directed *Chasing Heroin*, which has recently aired on PBS *FRONTLINE*. Although she considers herself to be a journalist, she said she could not make documentaries without also being a storyteller.

"So much of the way that I find a story or figure out the storytelling is to find the narrative arc. I try to do that through looking at every subject and coming up with an original new way of dissecting it," said Gaviria.

"I use the techniques that a fiction writer would. 'What would be the best opening scene?' 'Where is my climax?' 'What is the character conflict and tension?'"

asked Gaviria. "I use all of those techniques and hope it shows in a not so dull documentary."

Alison Klayman '06, who directed, produced, and was cinematographer for the independent film *Ai Wei Wei: Never Sorry*, discussed the challenges posed by the business side of documentary film. She was responsible for the film's financing while also doing most of the filming and production.

While shooting her film, Klayman was living modestly in Beijing on her savings and working as an accredited journalist.

"Any money that I could raise while shooting it was to pay anyone who I needed and for travel because Ai Wei Wei travelled a lot."

As the film gained momentum, more funders, including foundations, signed on because "everybody likes to back a winner," recalled Klayman. "People are really excited to help you once you have a lot of it shot and once it is already in a polished enough form that they can see what it is."

West asked the panel if they had advice for students thinking about a career in documentary film. Marcela Gaviria said to make certain it is what you

want to do. Alison Klayman concurred and suggested that it is important to have a plan about how to make a living because there is no clear career track for independent filmmakers. Debbie Lum urged parents to take their children seriously if they are interested in a non-traditional career like documentary film and noted that the children should take themselves seriously and follow their passions.

"There was a bit of a backlash about these kids who were Women's Studies majors and what they would possibly do in the world with a Women's Studies degree," remembers Rory Kennedy. "I feel like I really used my Women's Studies degree and it actually gave me a lot of tools that I still apply and use and fall back on today. I feel really lucky to have had that experience at Brown and am very grateful for that."

To view the video of the program, please visit: brown.edu/research/Pembroke-center/videos.

Introducing Pembroke Center Archivist Mary Murphy



Mary Murphy joins the Pembroke Center on August 1, 2016.

The Pembroke Center is excited to announce the appointment of Mary Murphy as the first full-time Pembroke Center Archivist. In this role, Murphy will oversee the Feminist Theory Archive and the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive, including the Center's Brown Women Speak oral history project. To call attention to the importance of these collections, Murphy also will plan exhibits and events related to them.

"I was drawn to many aspects of the position but especially to the curatorial and collection services functions of the role and the opportunity to work directly with archival collections," said Murphy. "I'm interested in the history of the Pembroke Center being grounded in women's education as well as it being the home of the Gender and Sexuality Studies concentration at Brown. I am really looking forward to working within a community of students and scholars dedicated to the study of women, gender, and difference."

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Before coming to the Pembroke Center, Murphy served as Administrative Librarian at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, which is part of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. In that position, Murphy oversaw project management and strategic planning efforts. She was responsible for special projects, including grant writing for the digitization of women's history collections; the Radcliffe Workshop on Technology and Archival Processing; strengthening minority representation within Schlesinger manuscripts collections; and planning for the new Curator for Race and Ethnicity. Murphy also worked with the library's longtime Oral History Coordinator to assess the state of oral history projects produced by the Schlesinger Library since the 1970s and to create a roadmap for completion.

Murphy joined the Schlesinger Library in 2008 as a manuscripts archivist processing special collections, including the papers of Shere Hite, feminist theorist and author of the *Hite Report on Female Sexuality*; Nan Robertson, *New York Times* journalist; the Records of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective; the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians; and the Cambodian-American Women's Oral History Collection. Murphy also chaired the exhibit committee for "Inside/Out: The Geography of Gendered Space" and served as communications liaison between the Schlesinger Library and the Radcliffe Institute for all of the library's exhibits produced in 2015–2016.

Prior to joining the Schlesinger Library, Murphy served as Archivist for the Boston Redevelopment Authority; she began her career as a library and archives reference assistant at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah. Murphy holds a Master of Library and Information Science degree from Simmons College and a Master of Fine Art degree in Historic Preservation from

the Savannah College of Art & Design, where her thesis, "South of Stonewall: Preserving Lavender Landmarks in Charleston, SC," focused on documenting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) historic sites. Murphy recently recorded a podcast with the National Parks Service about those historic sites, which may be accessed online here: ncptt.nps.gov/blog/lavender-landmarks-of-charleston-south-carolina-podcast-episode-55. Murphy also co-authored the *American Archivist* article, "Failure Is an Option: The Experimental Archives Project Puts Archival Innovation to the Test" (fall/winter 2015).

BUILDING THE PEMBROKE CENTER'S UNIQUE ARCHIVES

Murphy's broad experience has given her keen insight into the Pembroke Center's two archives. For both the Feminist Theory Archive and Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive, Murphy sees particular strength in their focus and the clear story that each tells. "The size and scope of these archives communicate a message of thoughtful curation. These archives are not trying to be everything to everyone or to capture all of women's history, but rather they provide a focused history of feminist theory in the academy and an engaging history of women at Brown University and in Rhode Island. It is with this well-defined scope that the Pembroke Center leads."

Murphy believes the history that is captured in the Naomi Schor and Anne Fausto-Sterling collections from the Feminist Theory Archive and the digitized *Pembroke Record* from the Farnham Archive can serve as guides for future collecting. Among the challenges to be tackled are identifying and filling gaps in both archives, but Murphy feels that opportunities abound to do so at the local, national, and international levels.

"I am particularly interested in the idea of cluster collecting around a subject like intersectional feminist theory or feminist theory of illicit economies," said Murphy.

“Here, the Pembroke Center could target nationally recognized theorists of a particular subject while also collecting from local scholars of the same subject and regional women’s organizations that may practice that feminist theory in their work.”

Another way that Murphy hopes to connect with those who might donate materials is through Brown alumnae/i and student engagement. “I believe that events like the Pembroke Center’s *Out of the Archive* lecture series featuring those who have committed their papers to the Pembroke Center Archives are especially important,” said Murphy. “These events give voice to the archival record and turn up the volume on important history contained within each collection.”

Murphy would like to see the Pembroke Center consider doing other events to engage Brown’s students and alumnae/i,

such as inviting them to read passages from the Farnham Archive and from their own archival collections. “Through these programs, the Pembroke Center might remind alumnae/i and especially current students and emerging scholars that they are our record creators and that we value their unique history,” she added.

In thinking about challenges that lie ahead, Murphy said, “I want to make sure that people know that digital records are as welcome in the Pembroke Center Archives as physical materials. It is important for people to know that although the field of digital preservation, description, and access is still emerging, I will be working with colleagues at the Pembroke Center, the John Hay Library, and Brown University to set policy, create procedural roadmaps, and move forward to capture and provide access to digital record collections.”

THANK YOU

The Pembroke Center is deeply grateful to the many alumnae/i, parents, faculty, staff, and friends who have contributed to the Pembroke Center Archives Endowment. Their generosity has made it possible not only for the Pembroke Center to hire a full-time archivist but also to expand collections and programming for both archives. If you would like to help the Pembroke Center further expand its collections and the programming associated with them, we invite you to make a gift to the Pembroke Center Archives Endowment. Please turn to page 8 to learn more.

Pembroke Center Student Prizes



PHOTO CREDIT: HANK RANDALL

The Pembroke Center awards prizes each year for exceptional undergraduate and graduate student research. We are pleased to announce our 2016 recipients.

Melanie Abeygunawardana '16, a concentrator in English and Literary Arts, is the recipient of the Ruth Simmons Prize in Gender in Gender and Women’s Studies. Her thesis, titled “The Persistent Dialogue: Butch-Femme Erotics as Queer Reading,” theorizes that the lesbian butch-femme dyad

emerges from a process of queer reading, persisting as a relation across time, text, and space. Reading queer theory and literary theory alongside memoir and film, Abeygunawardana charts how butch-femme becomes legible to itself at the moment of erotic encounter, as well as how it becomes a form irreducible to bodies themselves.

After Brown, Abeygunawardana plans to pursue her Ph.D. in English. She has been accepted into the University of Pennsylvania’s graduate program and starts in the fall.

The Marie J. Langlois Dissertation Prize honors an outstanding dissertation in areas related to gender studies or feminist analysis. The Pembroke Center awarded the prize to **Natalie Adler '16**, a graduate student in Comparative Literature, for her dissertation, “Beyond the Poetic Principle: Psychoanalysis and the Lyric.”

Adler reads lyric poetry alongside feminist psychoanalysis to refocus critical attention on their mutual



PHOTO CREDIT: HANK RANDALL

interest in the line between listening and interpreting. Her dissertation thereby provides a model for how a psychoanalytic attention to form can open new avenues in our understanding of lyric poetry as a particular economy of pleasure, tension, and suspense.

Adler will remain at Brown next year as Visiting Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature. She also will teach a course for the Pembroke Center’s Gender and Sexuality Studies concentration.

Combating Discrimination in the Foreign Service and the Church: The Life of Alison Palmer '53

Alison Palmer '53 has broken down barriers women face in every position she has held, leading an extraordinary life of achievement and service.

Much of her life story can be discovered in the Alison Palmer Collection in the Pembroke Center's Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive housed in the Brown University Library. Since 1982, the Pembroke Center has been building this important archive of materials related to women at Brown and in Rhode Island. The Alison Palmer Collection contains both her papers and an oral history that recounts her pathbreaking career in the Foreign Service in Africa and Vietnam, and also her ordination as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

Palmer chose to attend Pembroke College in Brown University in part because her mother Lois Patten Palmer '27 was an alumna. She recalls receiving "an absolutely superb liberal education." After college she worked briefly in the research department of the *Christian Science Monitor* and as a receptionist and typist in the women's section of the *New York Times*. Palmer noted that there were women journalists at the *Times*, but that they were confined to the women's section of the paper.

THE FOREIGN SERVICE

A life-defining moment occurred when Palmer learned that the Foreign Service was recruiting for its staff corps (secretarial positions) and applied. She also took the Foreign Service officer exam and passed the written exam in June of 1955 but failed to pass the oral exam. She later came to believe that this failure was due to sexual discrimination.

She entered the Foreign Service as a secretary, not as an officer as she had hoped. Her first assignment was to the Gold Coast of West Africa, an area colonized by Great Britain. She served there as the colony declared independence and became the nation of Ghana.

Palmer returned to the US and took the Foreign Service officer exam again. She passed both the written and oral exams. She was assigned as a personnel officer to help prepare other women for overseas assignments, but had difficulties accessing the training necessary to advance her career.

The Belgian Congo was her next assignment. She arrived just as the Congolese Army rebelled against Belgian rule. She met and assisted Ralph Bunche, who was a diplomat for the United Nations and later won a Nobel Peace Prize. The political situation became so dangerous that the US Ambassador ordered wives and children of embassy employees – and all women employees – to evacuate. Palmer refused and stayed to help Americans who encountered difficulties amid the political upheaval.

At the conclusion of this assignment, Palmer applied for training to gain specialized skills and knowledge about Africa. Her application was denied. "The training officer, who was a woman Foreign Service officer, said that there was 'no point in training women officers because they're always leaving to get married,'" recalled Palmer.

She was eventually assigned as a consular officer in British Guyana. In addition to her regular duties there, Palmer also did some political reporting. While there, communists bombed the US Consulate, but Palmer had left the building ten minutes earlier and was not harmed.

After applying again for African training, Palmer was accepted and received a promotion. She was told she would be assigned to be a political officer in Tanzania, which Palmer felt was "a very good post." The ambassador there objected, so she was reassigned to Uganda. Palmer reluctantly accepted, but then that ambassador canceled the position. She was reassigned again, this time as a political officer in Ethiopia.

When the ambassador to Ethiopia objected to her placement there, Palmer fought back and eventually

the assignment went through. When she arrived, however, her role was limited to assisting the ambassador's wife – not work suitable for a Foreign Service officer. Palmer started an internal grievance procedure through the Equal Employment Office charging sex discrimination. Only after the ambassador left Ethiopia was she able to fulfill her role as a political officer.

SERVING IN VIETNAM

When she learned that her position in Ethiopia was going to be eliminated, Palmer requested assignment as a political officer in Saigon, but in 1968 was sent to the Military Advisory Group in the Classification Program in Nha Trang. She became Chief of the Reports Branch for the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support in the II Corps Tactical Zone.

Palmer's job was to analyze reports from American advisors at the district and province levels and to make her own observations on reconnaissance missions. She then wrote monthly reports for the Pentagon that summarized all military and civilian activities. Sometimes the reports she received from the district and province levels tried to put a good face on things, but overall, Palmer understood that the war was not going well and was forthright in her own reports.

She also became increasingly troubled by the use of airstrikes because she felt they were indiscriminate and killed many civilians. Palmer's work, which included reporting civilian casualties caused by the airstrikes, was not well received. Military officers refuted her accounts and offered alternate scenarios blaming the Viet Cong for the civilian casualties that Palmer reported.

At this time, Palmer learned that the Equal Employment Office had found in her favor on the sex discrimination charge she had filed while in Ethiopia. The office refused to enter the report in her personnel file.

Palmer returned to the US in 1970. She reported her concerns about the conduct of the war to the Judge Advocate General of the US Army. When she did not receive a response, she took her concerns to the press. Despite her reports which were unpopular with the military, she was recommended for a Superior Honor Award: the State Department's second highest honor.

A CALLING TO THE PRIESTHOOD

While still in Vietnam, Palmer spent more and more time reading the Bible to help ease her fear for her safety and her growing ethical misgivings about the war. It was during this period that she first felt a call to the priesthood.

When Palmer returned to Washington, she started attending her local Episcopal Church and religious retreats and decided she wanted to become an Episcopal priest. While still working for the State Department, she wrote to the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D.C. and asked for an interview. They met, and he said that in the past he had rejected women because he felt that there was no possibility of them being ordained, but now he felt that there was a possibility.

Palmer was interviewed extensively and underwent psychiatric and physical exams. She took night courses at the Virginia Theological Seminary to prepare. "I took the exams after two years of part-time study and got the highest grading in the Diocese of Washington, which means if nothing else, I'm a good student," recalled Palmer. "Then I was ordained as a deacon in June of 1974, the first woman deacon in the Diocese." There are three positions in the Episcopal Church: deacons, priests, and bishops.

Palmer wanted to become a priest, but according to the rules of the Episcopal Church then in force, neither she nor any of the other women deacons across the country could be ordained as priests. The Episcopal Church's General Convention, the decision-making body that met once every three years, had not approved the ordination of women as priests. Therefore, her bishop would not ordain her.

Palmer decided to join with two other local women, and a fourth from Alaska, to seek ordination anyway. They decided to pursue an "irregular" ordination. The sought and found a bishop who was willing to ordain them, despite the lack of approval from the General Convention and the bishop of the Diocese of Washington, D.C.

Reverend George Barrett, former Bishop of Rochester, conducted the ordination of Palmer and Eleanor Lee McGee, Betty Rosenberg, and Diane Tickell, in Washington D.C. on September 7, 1975. More than 1,000 people were present for the "irregular" ordination. Palmer was the thirteenth woman to be ordained in the United States as an Episcopal priest. It was not until 1977 that the Episcopal Church recognized Palmer's ordination.

LEGAL BATTLES CONTINUE

While pursuing her calling to the priesthood, Palmer continued to work at the State Department and fight discrimination there. In 1971, Palmer filed a sex discrimination lawsuit against the State Department. Her 1974 victory resulted in the prohibition of sex discrimination in assignments.

In 1976, Palmer joined with other women colleagues to file a class action lawsuit against the State Department for discrimination in violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The suit alleged that the State Department discriminated against women by hiring more men and giving men better career assignments and more career-advancing performance ratings and honor awards.

After several years of litigation, a 1989 court order found that the State Department had discriminated against women in the written portion of the Foreign Service officer test. It was thereafter restricted from administering written exams that had adverse impacts on women. In 1990, the State Department agreed to settle the suit by giving some Foreign Service officers priority in obtaining prestigious assignments or honors they had been denied because they were women.

The court monitored the agreement for several years. In 2010, the lawsuit was dismissed, as all parties agreed that the State Department had demonstrated compliance of the court orders by making reparations to women who were affected and by modifying hiring systems.

PHOTO CREDIT: ALISON PALMER PAPERS, MS.90.6, CHRISTINE DUNLAP FARNHAM ARCHIVE, BROWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



Alison Palmer '53 on a reconnaissance mission in Vietnam, 1968-1970. The Alison Palmer Papers collection includes the fatigues shown in this photograph.

TO LEARN MORE

Palmer retired from the State Department in 1981, and although she ministered to individuals who sought her out, she never had an interest in being responsible for a parish. Palmer published her autobiography, *Diplomat and Priest: One Woman's Challenge to State and Church*, in 2015.

To listen to Alison Palmer's oral history or read the transcript, please visit Brown Women Speak at: brown.edu/initiatives/women-speak. If you would like to see other materials in the Allison Palmer '53 collection, please contact the Pembroke Center Archives at pembroke_archives@brown.edu or (401) 863-6268.



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The Pembroke Center is expanding its two important archives, the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archive, which focuses on the history of women at Brown and in Rhode Island, and the Feminist Theory Archive, which houses the papers of major feminist scholars. To support these archives, including funding the full-time archivist position soon to be held by Mary Murphy (whose profile appears on p. 4), the Center has been pursuing a \$3,500,000 endowment to provide permanent funding for of both archives. To help reach the Center's participation goals and finish this campaign, please donate as generously as you can.

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