

Jane English Interview

Allison Standish

Oral History Transcription

Women's History

Due: April 10, 2014

Allison: Hi my name is Allison Standish. Today I am interviewing Jane English for the Women of the White Mountains project. Today is Saturday March 29, 2014, 2:02pm on Saturday.

Allison: Where were you born?

Jane: I was born in Boston, MA and at the time my parents had lived out in Topsfield, MA. It was a small farming town and was far from suburbia. It was about 30 miles north of Boston.

Allison: When were you born?

Jane: April 11, 1942

Allison: So, those were some earlier times, how was life growing up in the Boston area?

Jane: Well, you know it was normal 1940s, the war years, when I was really young and then the dull boring 1950's, the Eisenhower years when everyone had a mother and father and two children. The father commuted to work and so forth and so on. It was pretty normal, except that I grew up in a really old house built in 1765 a big chimney centered Colonial which had six fireplaces.

Allison: Wow that is a lot of fireplaces!

Jane: That was pretty neat. One of the fireplaces was 7 feet wide and 4 feet tall and 5 feet deep or maybe 5 feet tall and 4 feet deep. But it was the old kitchen fireplace back in the days before iron stoves.

Allison: What was your birth name? I just wanted to get your full name make sure I have everything.

Jane: My full name is Jane Butterfield English. Butterfield was my mother's mothers' maiden name. So it was a family name.

Allison: So I know we talked about you having a brother but do you have any other siblings beside your brother or is just you two?

Jane: Nope! My brother is two years older than me and he did his master's degree at Plymouth.

Allison: Wow! What did he get his master's degree in?

Jane: Education

Allison: Um, did he put that degree to work after he got it

Jane: Oh yeah! He was a junior high school teacher. He taught first in Massachusetts but then he was in Campton, NH just north of where you are and he also taught at Cardigan Mountain School and in Concord and then spent twenty or maybe more years teaching in Bartlett, NH.

Allison: What was life growing up for you as a young child into your teenage years and above?

Jane: I was at public school through the 8th grade. And then my mother realized that I was not being challenged academically so I was a day student at a private school for my freshman year and then I did three years as a boarding school at Northfield, it is now Northfield Mt. Hermon. But it was a girls' school then and my brother Ben went to Mt. Hermon, the boy's school.

Allison: So, what was it like just going to boarding school for girls?

Jane: Oh I loved it! It was great. And I also went to a women's college, Mount Holyoke College.

Allison: Oh I have heard of Mount Holyoke.

Jane: Yeah in fact I am actually going to my 50th reunion in May. Isn't that cool?

Allison: Wow that is neat! That is really exciting actually.

Jane: I still think that there is a place for women's education especially. I went into science, I did physics. I do not think I would have had gone nearly as far if I had not had the grounding that I had in the women's college. I was in graduate school and I was the only woman in any of my classes and research groups, so that was not really easy.

Allison: Yeah, I would say!

Jane: People would come into a room and one of our laboratories and look at me and literally this happened, they would look around and say oh none of the physicists are here. They would assume I was a girlfriend or a secretary. In fact, I had people take a pile of handwritten stuff and flop it on my desk and say type this for me please. I do not type.

Allison: Did you have any hobbies growing up?

Jane: Oh yeah! I was really into stamp collecting. My grandmother's sister did a lot of that and then my mother encourage my brother and I me to belong to a stamp collection club. I had a butterfly collection. I liked making my own bows and arrows out in the woods. I did a lot of archery and I had a real bow too. I liked carving things. So I was outdoors a lot.

Allison: Yeah it seems as though you were outdoors a lot, living in the area you did.

Jane: Well my mother grew up on a farm in Portsmouth, NH not in the city but it was on a salt water creek near Portsmouth

Allison: Did you visit their a lot when you were growing up?

Jane: No because she moved away from there when she was thirteen I think. But we went to the mountains a lot because my parents met each other in Jackson, NH and that is where I grew up. They were skiing in the 1930s and my mother was with a bunch of her friends and my dad was with a bunch of his friends. He worked at General Electric in Lynn, MA and there was a farmhouse in Jackson near what is Black Mountain now near that ski area, it's called Moody's. This bunch of girls and bunch of guys got together and I think four marriages came out of it. Then they skied together a lot and had rented a house in Bristol and used that a lot in the middle 1930s.

Allison: Did you have a best friend growing up?

Jane: Yeah I did. Her name was Judy. She had grown up on a farm, her mother very much so grew up on a farm, her dad was from Vermont. Judy and I ran in the woods, we spent a lot of time together. She also had four aged sheep which I helped her a lot with like showing sheep at the Topsfield Fair. It is one of the old county fairs, it is still going. So, Judy and I a lot of time out in the woods as much as we could. Her birthday was a week after mine so we always had a birthday party on Saturday between our birthdays. It was almost always an outdoor picnic even in April.

Allison: Do you still keep in touch with her?

Jane: Off and on. She raises those mini horses, the little bitty horses. I visited her once when there were little foals. She said pick this up. It was like holding a small dog, I said I am holding a small horse? I have not stayed all that close with her after she got married and moved away and I was living on the west coast, we kind of went separate directions.

Allison: When did you live on the west coast?

Jane: Oh well let's see. Well I did graduate school in Wisconsin and then I spent a few years in California and then five or six years in Colorado. Then I went back to California. I moved here to Vermont 2002. I was probably twenty-five years in California. I was in various places, the Bay area and then up around Mt. Shasta which is a big mountain. I have made my living as photographer. I met a meteorology graduate student when I was in graduate school and he got me going, working in the darkroom. So, I have done nature photography since about 1965 and I have illustrated books and living at the base of Mt. Chasten which is one of the big 14,000 ft. cascade volcanoes living there fifteen years I did books based on that mountain. So mountains have always had a big place in my life.

Allison: It seems that way. It must have been nice living out in the sunny weather of California.

Jane: Well you know, a funny thing when I came to Vermont people had heard that I had moved and I had California plates on my car, they said oh what do you think of our winters in Vermont and I said well, I came with a car with four wheel drive and instead I added snow tires. There was always a point in winter when we had at least four feet of snow on the ground. So, people think of California as it is all palm trees and beaches, but it is not.

Allison: Yeah I have been to California, Anaheim area.

Jane: Yeah northern California very different

Allison: What kind of music did you listen growing up?

Jane: Well let's see, the very beginning you are going to laugh. My mother had an old record player, the kind that you crank and these old 78 rpm records so we listened to some of them. It was kind of fun. I remember I was always scared I was going to break the record when I put the needle down on it. Then my brother in the fifties got into rock and roll and we had those 45 rpm records with the big hole in the middle and so I kind of got into that with Chubby Checker, Elvis and all of that kind of stuff. My dad got into classical music. He bought a record player that is when the 33 rpm vinyl records came out. He also bought which was a new thing, a FM radio before that there was just AM radio. You could get nice classical music on that. Then, when I was at Northfield I did not listen to too much. There was a lot of singing in the choir kind of stuff there. But then when I was in graduate school it was in the late 1960s, I really went for the Beatles, The Doors, Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, all of that kind of stuff. So that is the kind of music that I listened to.

Allison: So growing up, were academics really important to you and to your family?

Jane: Yeah they were. As I said, my mother realized when the mother of one of my classmates complained about how much homework her daughter was bringing home, my mother said what homework because I was doing it all in school. I would just get it done. She realized I just was not getting challenged that is why I went to a private school. My grandfather the one who did the photographs that are in the Our Mountain trips books, he was a professor at MIT. He was the first one in his family to go to college because one of his teachers in Portsmouth, NH told him he was college material and suggested he look into colleges and MIT is where he ended up. My mother went to college and my dad I think was the first in his family to go to college too, so it was important, academics were.

Allison: So you went to college after your private school years, what did you major in as an undergraduate student?

Jane: I majored in physics.

Allison: Did you really like physics?

Jane: I did because I liked the experimental part of it. Actually my freshman year, in the dorm I was in the room next door was a graduate student, there was not many graduate students at Mount Holyoke but she was the lab instructor for physics and she noticed that I did really well in the labs so she asked me if I wanted to come in on Saturday mornings and do the labs and then I would teach the class with her during the week. We would do two labs on Saturday and the next two weeks she would teach one lab and I would teach the other lab so they divided the class in half so that labs were smaller. Then sophomore year, I did the same stuff only that time I was paid for it. Junior year and senior year I was a lab assistant in the sophomore physics lab. So I really liked physics and playing with things. I remember the laboratory we did working with spectrums, those colors were so intense and so pure, it was really neat.

Allison: Were you apart of any college organizations or groups?

Jane: Yeah I was. There was a good outing club at Mt. Holyoke. We would go hiking and skiing, all that kind of stuff. Also there was ski team but it was not the high powered stuff like some of the Northern New England colleges have but we did go race and have various places and I also played field hockey, lacrosse, canoeing, archery and again I sang some in the choir.

Allison: Did you play any of those sports growing up or did you just start when you got to college?

Jane: No, I played field hockey when I was in 8th grade and in fact Topsfield High School was small enough that as an 8th grader I was on the varsity field hockey team and they did not know what quite to do with me when it came time to give out letters so all the high school kids got six inch T's and I got a four inch T because I was a junior high kid. The skiing and hiking had been something my parents had been doing with us all along, also the archery. The canoeing I kind of got from Girl Scout camp.

Allison: Oh so you were a girl scout growing up too?

Jane: Oh yeah absolutely!

Allison: Did you loving being part of girl scouts growing up?

Jane: I loved the outdoor part of it but I did not have much interest in the sewing and cooking at all and all that kind of stuff. *Goes to get Girl Scout sash off wall to show me.*

Allison: Wow you have a lot of badges! That is impressive.

Jane: I liked it was a lot of fun

Allison: So, after college you said you went to graduate school, did you go to grad school right away or did you wait a little bit?

Jane: Yeah I went directly the fall of the year that I graduated. I was four and half years getting a PhD and then I was six months as post-doctoral research and then I bailed out.

Allison: Wow that is a lot of schooling though

Jane: Yeah it is! And I have never had a regular job. So, I have just been self-employed. The photography got in graduate school has served me well. It was not the formal stuff I did in grad school it was the other stuff

Allison: What made you decide to go the more self-employed route rather than getting a regular job with your degrees that you earned?

Jane: Well college jobs looked kind of boring when I was working as a research associate after I got my PhD I realized I was offered a job at Rutgers but I decided not to take it. I figured I could make my living as a photographer. It just seemed really dull and boring and confining, being stuck in the laboratories all day. I did not want to live like that.

Allison: So, it kind of brought you back to the photography growing up in nature, kind of thing I would assume.

Jane: Yeah that is why I stayed with it and I lived in some communal houses and a whole bunch of stuff.

Allison: Are you married?

Jane: Not now, I was married for four years to a Chinese man who was twenty-three years older than me. He is the one I did the *Tao Te Ching* book. That book sold well over a million copies and it is in about eight different languages. I do a calendar every year based on that with Chow Fu Chinese calligraphy right on my black and white photographs kind of like Chinese landscape paintings

Allison: That is pretty cool!

Jane: Yeah so it is neat. There are times when I am out in the woods with my camera or out in nature with my camera and I say I am out at work, Wow!

Allison: Did you have any children during that marriage?

Jane: No I did not. The children that I connected with in my life are my brother's children, the one's I am an aunt too and it seemed like when I was living in California especially these young girls. There was one seven year old girl who on her own initiative drew up a piece of paper that was an adoption certificate, adopting me as her aunt.

Allison: So umm, you do mostly photography now

Jane: Yeah there is a phase in there about fifteen years ago where I did a lot of hot air balloon stuff, I am a hot air balloon pilot.

Allison: Wow!

Jane: That is a pretty amazing way to look at the earth

Allison: I would imagine, when did you get your license to pilot?

Jane: 1997. Then I sold my balloon when I moved to Vermont in 2002. There are too many trees here. I have nothing but admiration for the pilots who fly in the Northeast cause it is really hard to find a place to land.

Allison: Yeah I would assume, would be doing a lot of crashing into trees up this way.

Allison: Are your hobbies still the same as when you were growing up or have they changed since then?

Jane: Well, I volunteer here at a children's outdoor education place called Earth Walk Vermont. And so, I get to do carving, I get to build camp fires, we sing songs, a lot of the stuff I really like doing when I was a kid I get to do there with these kids of all ages.

Allison: Ok so we are now going to switch over to the White Mountain's questions

Jane: Yeah

Allison: Do you remember your first trip the White Mountains?

Jane: Uhh, I do not know my exact first one but the picture that I sent you this morning is of me standing on Fire Screw Mountain looking at Cardigan Mountain and there is another picture my mother, my brother and me and I was about five at that time. I think they took me the mountains before that but we did not climb anything. I remember my mother saying when we were walking a trail to this waterfall. She would say you tripped over every root, I thought she's never going to become a hiker. Well, she was wrong. So, I think I was taken to the White Mountains as early as I can remember.

Allison: Is that one of your earliest memories of the White Mountains that trip?

Jane: I think so, yeah. I think it is. We stayed at Cardigan Lodge, the AMC lodge. Yeah we stayed there. We also camped at various state parks during my dad's two week vacation every summer. We camped at Moose Brook State Park up near Gorham.

Allison: What drew you to the White Mountains growing up?

Jane: My mother, my mother. What drew me to the mountains, my grandparents because my grandfather grew up in Portsmouth, my grandmother grew up in Dunstable, Massachusetts which is just south of Nashua, NH. There is a story we tell in the introduction to the first volume of Our Mountain trips, my grandmother from the farm she lived on a hill they could see Mount Monadnock and so my grandparents went in 1899 in a horse and buggy. That was their honeymoon trip was to drive out to Mount Monadnock and climb up Mount Monadnock.

Allison: Wow!

Jane: So it runs in the family, I do not think I had any other choice. You know my brother lives in Jackson now, so I spend a lot of time there.

Allison: I know that your mother grew up in Portsmouth, but how did your family end up in the White Mountains, through your grandparents?

Jane: Yeah through my grandparents and then because my grandparents took my mother to the White Mountains, if you look at that book you will see that, when they lived in Portsmouth and then later on Waltham, MA, every summer they took mountain trips. They took one when my mother was only two years old. She did not hike or anything then but it was just genetic almost. You know it really just runs in the family to go to the White Mountains. My grandfather was an AMC member over a hundred years ago and he was on the trails committee and that one of the stories is in the second volume of Our Mountain trips, it is pretty much a trip he and one of the other AMC people took to inspect the trail where they work and the shelter building that the trail crew had done that summer

Allison: Wow!

Jane: My brother Ben was on the trail crew in the 1950s and he has stayed connected. Do you know that book, I think it is called *Mountain Voices*?

Allison: I think, I heard of it.

Jane: My brother is one of the people profiled in that book.

Allison: Wow! That's pretty cool

Jane: It tells some of the history, you might want to look at that because he talks some about the history of our family in relation to the White Mountains.

Allison: Wow!

Jane: So that would be worth looking at.

Allison: So, is it just your mothers' parents that grew up in the White Mountains or did your fathers' parents grow up there as well?

Jane: My fathers' parents, my fathers' father died when he was five so he does not even remember him, and then his mother died in 1950 so she was just an old lady, she lived with us some after my fathers' sister had died the year I was born. So, she was not an outdoors lady. She was from Brooklyn, NY and New Haven, CT. But my father went to the University of Maine and did a lot of canoeing. That is where the canoeing comes from because he was in Maine a lot in summers when he was growing up so that was his connection to the North Country.

Allison: And then he met your mother on their trip to the White Mountains

Jane: Yeah in Jackson, yeah

Allison: Are you more of a hiker, climber person or do you kind of like to do both along with the photography?

Jane: I am not a climber, not a technical climber. I like to hike or as my grandparents called it, they called it tramping. In those books the word hiking does not appear at all, it was called tramping back then. Isn't that interesting?

Allison: That is very interesting

Jane: I think the name changed during the Depression when there was a lot of unemployed people, homeless people that were called tramps so the word tramping got a bad condemnation and it became hiking.

Allison: Wow! That is really interesting.

Jane: So, I have always been interested in nature and I went to some Audubon camps when I was young. As I have said I have been skiing and I am looking at the question you wrote here, how

has my life and work connect you to the mountains? It is through my photography and the books that I have done both my own books and working on my grandfather's books.

Allison: So, are you an avid skier?

Jane: Yeah, I do not ski so much anymore but I have been very much a skier. I did ski patrol while I was in college. There was a little mountain, Mount Tom down in Massachusetts and I was on the ski patrol there and when I lived in Mt. Stansted for fifteen years, I skied a lot and when I lived in Colorado for about five years before I went to California I skied a lot also. I mean my mother's diary, I think in February of 1945 there is an entry that says tried to take the children skiing. We were two and three. She said I tried, that is the important word that I think I probably just fell over and cried or something.

Allison: So, what is your favorite section or area in the mountains region?

Jane: Well you know I thought a lot about that and I think because of doing the mountain trips books, I have really gotten to know the Albany Interval where the Kancamagus Highway goes through because there is a lot of history in there and looking at, Ben and myself have wandered around in there so trying to find some of the places my grandparents talked about and following the old logging railroad. Um, I like all of it, I like the above tree line parts. I do amateur radio so I show up at some of the foot and bike races up Mt. Washington and sit there and do sort of safety communications with, you know they have about every half a mile they have someone with a radio and I am one of them sometimes. It is just neat to sit above tree line for a whole day.

Allison: Yeah I would assume that would be really nice. Just the view and the atmosphere.

Jane: Yeah just sitting above tree line just reminds me of being out on the tundra of Greenland.

Allison: Wow! Did you do a lot of traveling out of country?

Jane: Um, I think I started that in about the 1970s, so I was about in my thirties. I been traveled in Europe quite a lot and recently some of the people I know from Greenland live in Germany and I have visited them there several times, been to Mexico just once, you know little trips to Canada. I took the train across Canada one December that was really neat. I took the train all the way across. Um, so I have traveled around the U.S. and some in Europe.

Allison: What are some good things about the White Mountains? And maybe something you do not like about the White Mountains?

Jane: I do not like black flies. I like that there are trails in a lot of places that is definitely neat. It is nice there are national forests that got preserved because you know my grandparents were there before there were any national forests and they have stories about the logging camps that were there, pretty amazing stuff and I think the accessibility is also something I do not like because very often there is too many people. So you see when I go visit my brother from where I live here north of Montpelier, I go across route two then down 302 or I go all the way across two to Gorham so I go past a lot of trail heads and just the number of cars that are parked there in the summer is absolutely ridiculous.

Allison: Wow

Jane: Yeah so, Yeah I like, there is not much that I do not like about the White Mountains

Allison: Do you know what Title IX is and if so, what did you think about it when it first passed?

Jane: Yeah I do know about it. Could you remind me what year it passed?

Allison: I believe it was 1970s

Jane: Yeah see at that point I had already finished graduate school and was out on my own so it did not affect me while I was a student. I remember at Mount Holyoke when I tore up my knee, I did not get much support, it was like you know here are some crutches. Now, there would have been much more attention and the ski team we did not have very good practices, we just sort of did what we did. So, I think it would have been a real plus to have Title IX in place and yeah I always thought it was great. I had always thought it was ridiculous that there was the amount of inequality in the sports world.

Allison: Because it did not really affect you in school, it probably really did not have a direct or indirect affect, but did it have an indirect or direct affect with the White Mountains?

Jane: Yes, it made me envious of the younger women who got to work in the huts. When I was young I had a friend who is a year older than me and she was hut crew but the only place that women were allowed to be hut crew was Pinkham. So she worked at Pinkham and so I would definitely applied to be hut crew if it had been allowed, but it was not. There was just no space for women in any of that.

Allison: Yeah so that Title IX definitely helped for a lot of people after.

Jane: Yeah, and you know Ben my brother still stays connected with the trail crew. He goes into the woods where the trail crew is and brings a watermelon or something for them to chop up with a machete. But they come and visit him at his place and the trail crew always has a big New Year's Eve party and then on New Year's Day all these hung over trail crew people come to my brother's house and my sister-in-law has this big pot of chili or soup or something and they sit by the fire, go play outside and half of them our women. I have been there when some of those folks visit and it is really neat that these young women get to be trail crew which was not available for me.

Allison: So, do you work specifically for the White Mountains or just more of your self-employment?

Jane: I have never worked for anybody after I got done at graduate school being a teacher's assistant or research assistant. I have never been an employee. Some of my income comes out of the White Mountains and because of the interest in the White Mountains through the books because people buy the books and pictures that I take and write.

Allison: Do you think that people accept your work as an equal for the White Mountains as being a woman?

Jane: Oh yeah! Ben and I are very much equals. He and I do PowerPoint shows about the books. We have done them at different historical societies in various towns and areas in New Hampshire. So we are always pretty much equal.

Allison: So do you feel you do the same amount of work as your male colleagues that they do?

Jane: That is not a relevant question, really, because what I do is so unique. I photograph nature and I make books and I make calendars.

Allison: So it is your own little thing

Jane: It is my own business. I am not an employee nor do I have employees.

Allison: My last question would be, have you changed about how you feel about the White Mountains over time and if you could kind of explain that?

Jane: Um, when I first went west and I saw the big mountains in Colorado and then the Sierra Nevada and I have also seen the Alps, they are so big and impressive but there is just something about the White Mountains that I still like. They are my native Mountains. It is what I think of, when I think of mountains. With all of the stuff I have done in other places and in like Mt. Shasta because I had radio skills I worked with a big search and rescue crew running the radios, I was not out crashing through the bushes or anything but I was running the radios and got a lot of interesting experiences that way. But, yeah I like the White Mountains even though they are smaller than a lot of the other mountains that I have lived in or visited.

Allison: So I want to thank you for your time and I really appreciate you giving up your time during the day to answer these questions

Jane: And I appreciate that too. I am glad there is folks like you that are doing what you are doing. Oh one thing that I did not mention is that I worked at, I did kind of work when I was in college I was a counselor at some summer camps, one near Squam Lake and one a little further south near Andover, NH. I was a trip leader. We took kids on hiking trips in the mountains and day trips and sometimes we stayed in the huts and so I spent some time there. So you know the AMC Mountain Leadership training program, my brother was a participant in the very first one in 1960 and I was a participant in the second one in 1961 so that is just a little piece of my history to the White Mountains was leading campers.

Allison: Wow! You have done a lot it seems with the White Mountains and it has helped you.

Jane: Yeah I have and it is very much multi-generational thing. You three generations, my grandmother, my mother, myself and my brother. Neither of his kids have really gotten into it but that is just how it is. They grew up with the view out their living room window was Mt. Washington so they just take it for granted I think.

Allison: I think a lot of kids take it for granted these days and do not take the time to appreciate the nature and everything else around them

Jane: Well that is why I am working with kids now as a volunteer, just getting people out there