BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Shelley Korshak

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Shelley Korshak conducted by Frances Connell on September 2, 2015. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project
Interviewee: Shelley Korshak — Location: Skype, Chicago/New York
Interviewer: Frances Connell — Date: September 2, 2015

00:00:01 Q: [This is an interview taking place via Skype with Shelley Korshak on September 2, 2015] for the Barnard College Voices Class of 1971 Oral History Project. The interviewer is Frances Connell and Shelley [Korshak] is in Chicago, and we will go from there.

So Shelley, we usually start by asking you to think a little about your early childhood, your family, particular influences from those early days. So feel free to begin wherever you want to. Thank you.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

00:00:32 Korshak: Well, give me guidance because I could make this a long story. I was born 1949, so I'm sixty-five years old. I was born in Chicago. I was the third of three children from two marriages. I don't know how complex you want me to get about my family's story.

Q: [Say as much as you like.]

00:01:09 Korshak: Can you say something about the mission of the project so I can focus?

Q: [(Explains) So what are some memories, people that influenced you?]

00:01:54 Korshak: Ah—And you would say both positive and negative I think. There's a way in which many of us from the Class of 71 had horror stories. [It was suggested in Newsweek magazine that because the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, baby boomers were all impacted by the anxiety of our mothers fearing for the end of the world.] Being a psychotherapist, I've spent a lot of time putting together the influences on my life in order to be able to evolve out of dysfunction of my family and into the life I have today, which is a life I love. So I guess my story is one of transformation. Maybe that's a way I can think about this particular interview—that I would tell the story of my transformation including where the times impacted me, and how Barnard influenced me.

Q: [Please describe it.]

00:02:53 Korshak: My parents were very influenced by the ‘50s. We had a large house, you know, the beautiful house in the suburbs with the metaphorical white picket fence. Suburban life north of Chicago. We moved to the suburbs when I was two.

00:03:12 Korshak: Stop me anytime if you have questions or to steer me a different way. I grew up with the picture of a perfect family, and a great education. I actually hid out in school, because at home there was arguing conflict and also lots that wasn’t being talked about. I don’t know how graphic you want me to be. I assume this will be edited before we go public, right?

Q: [(Explains)]

00:03:56 Korshak: I’m not concerned about me, I’m concerned about how Barnard might not want this in their archive. My father was a gambler and a womanizer, and my mom was very much in denial and very repressed. Those things weren’t being talked about at all in that era. I would stay up, when my dad wasn’t coming home because he was out all night supposedly playing cards with the boys. I would stay up reading. I loved to read. I would stay up all night sometimes and go to school on no sleep. Reading felt safe. And, of course, I didn’t want to have the nightmares that were a part of growing up when there are lies and secrets going on.

00:05:10 Korshak: So I’m curious about other interviewees and what they are telling, but this is what I’m telling a story about a family that looked good on the outside. But on the inside there were major problems, so severe that my mom was hospitalized for psychotic depression when I was in high school. My mother went to her deathbed never grappling with how her husband had

been unfaithful, and so his infidelity remained a secret until long after his death. But I started to piece together the story, and I started to understand why—and I'm trying to think about my grade school and high school now—I had always felt that there was something off. I got good grades and I loved school, but there was something off. I had boyfriends and friends, but there was always something wrong.

00:06:07 Korshak: I wanted to go to Barnard. I didn't get in when I applied as a freshman, but I got in as a sophomore as a transfer student. I wanted to get a great education and I wanted to live in New York. I had heard great things about New York and it was exciting to me to be there. I wanted everything in the world. I was very ambitious and seeking the stars. I think it was a way to medicate my pain.

00:06:51 Korshak: When I went to Barnard, I wasn't thinking about it so much being a women's school, I was thinking about it as being in New York. Then I'd be in a class with all women, and a question was asked, and I looked around for a guy to answer, and no guy would be there. And I realized, Oh my god, I could answer these questions.

I started to realize, really for the first time in my life, that there was such a thing as sexism going on. I didn't call it sexism at the time. But that's what had been going on, living in the suburbs in the '50s. It had been going on in my family and also outside my family, also in school. It was very clear that my father was the dominant force in my family. Sexism was alive and well there. He was dominant; that was the unspoken rule. He got his way, whatever he wanted. In my school, the guys could answer the questions, the guys got to play all the sports, the guys got the

opportunities to excel academically. So when I went to Barnard I looked back and started to understand that I'd been influenced by this thing in America: sexism.

Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and others were just becoming popular. I felt fortunate that Barnard was all women. I'm still grateful for that. You know, I have tears in my eyes thinking about it. It gave me a sense of empowerment that I'd never had, ever, anywhere. As much as I had liked school, it wasn't the same as when the classes were all women. Somehow there was an equality now with men that I'd never experienced. I didn't have to fight my way to get what I wanted. I could just emerge in a kind of effortless way, and I loved that.

So I loved that it was all women, and I also loved that it was a time when the women's movement was encouraging me to play full out wherever I wanted to play bigger. So Barnard being all women was a very good influence on me and it was a surprise to me how much that mattered.

What have I left out of my pre-Barnard influences? Would you like more detail in any area? I can say a little more about role models—something you mentioned. Should I go there?

Q: [Share ore about your family origins. Role models. Your other one way or the other?]

00:09:36 Korshak: One of the things that was wonderful is that—distressed as my family was—we had a large extended family that was truly wonderful, on my mother's side. She had an older sister who was generous and giving and warm and intelligent. She was also married to a man

who was intelligent and wise. He was United States ambassador to foreign countries, and he would have dinner parties in his home. And so I was exposed to a way of being with people, where people could discuss political events, and grapple with important social issues like poverty and segregation. This was a very very good influence for me. It gave me values, a direction, and a vision for where I wanted to go with my life, where I might go with my life.

So my goal in that era was to become—who was that woman in Europe—Gertrude Stein—who had people to her home and who would entertain people. A salon, yes! That was my vision of what I wanted to be, which was a wonderful vision. It became my north star, and it's still my north star, to have some of those qualities. To be open and discussing, to be democratic, to care about social issues. All of that was at the influence of my aunt and uncle, and the other aunts and uncles in the larger family. One of the tragedies of my life is that when this couple died, the extended family sort of fell apart. But the larger family made a huge impression on me. That was lifesaving, I think. Yes. Yes, it was a wonderful escape from the conflict and chaos, or maybe a way to transcend the conflict and chaos.

Q: [And some particulars of your early schooling? High school?]

00:12:03 Korshak: I did well. I've always been an overachiever. I don't know—I mean I'm intelligent enough, but getting good grades didn't come easy to me. But what happened was that I loved learning. My parents didn't live the values that they taught me, but they taught me [laughs] the values of a good work ethic and they taught me the importance of education. In fact, my father—he was very dominant and he loved to lecture. He would read to us from the

encyclopedia after dinner the nights that he was home, five or so nights a week. He didn't come home two nights a week. But when he was home he would read to us from the encyclopedia after dinner. My sister would sleep—my older sister who actually barely finished high school—would sleep, but I was all ears. Now, he carried it very far, as he even graded us for our participation. My sister, when she would pay attention, would always get higher grades than I because she was able to follow the material. I was five and six and seven years old, and the material was often above my head [laughs].

Nonetheless, I'd hang in there and my strong suit was persistence. So long after my sister left home, to get married, to get pregnant early and marry early, and to be using drugs and alcohol, I was the good girl staying home. We switched from the encyclopedia to Mark Twain and *Moby Dick*, and other the great literature, so I had that influence from home. I also loved to stay up late at night, talking with my father—well, listening to him lecture actually—whether it was about Einstein or about economics, or whatever it was that he felt like talking about.

Q: [And what kind of family did your parents come from?]

00:14:39 Korshak: Well, my parents were both poor growing up. It was the Depression. My dad was born in 1906. His grandfather came from Russia—a town outside Kiev, who came to America in the 1880s. My father worked his way up, from an early age, to get an academic background, because that was a value in his family. He got a scholarship to Northwestern University to go to law school, and became a lawyer. During the Depression in the '30s, he and his father had a position with the government to hear cases where people had their property

confiscated. Then my father bought land. He scraped together and bought land because he wanted to never be poor again. His buying land supported our family. Then when he died, he was able to leave me enough money for my education, not only at Barnard, but then to professional school. I went to medical school to become a psychiatrist.

So I am grateful that he did that, because I don't know that I would have been able to scrape together scholarship money for becoming a professional. I had this gift, from my father's really working hard to become financially solid—it was more out of fear than out of love. It was part of his gambling and part of his materialism. But nonetheless I benefited.

My mom—should I switch to my mom? She also grew up poor. She grew up even more poor because her parents had six kids. Her parents had come to America from a small town in what was Czechoslovakia. Her parents had six children, actually seven and one died. Her father worked three jobs at a time. There are many romantic stories about how capable he was, how hard working he was. Then he died of pneumonia at the age of something like thirty, leaving his wife with six kids at the time. The children were farmed out to other homes whenever the mother would go into the psychiatric hospital because she was so upset—whether she was depressed, or whether it was schizophrenia, or whether it was manic depressive illness, we don't know.

These kids were really, really abandoned and because of that, but they held together as a family and hung together, developing a deep family loyalty. They produced this wonderful aunt that I was telling you about, who was the oldest of the six kids, who always took care of the others and who was always wonderful, especially when the mother wasn't around. They didn't have money,

but they had these wonderful values, better values than my father had. My father cared about education, but that was as far as it went. These people knew was it was to love each other, and to care about each other. And so I got those values from my mother, which I am really grateful for.

But, she never found her voice. She was always crowded out. I think she had probably been traumatized, maybe sexually abused, that she learned how to not see things, to be so scared, to be a little mouse. That was her story. She never ever got out of that prison of codependency—taking care of everybody else, never thinking about herself, lots of guilt—when she was really a wonderful person. It was my father who was doing shenanigans, but she never saw that. She only saw that he was wonderful, and why couldn't she be as good as he was. She never got her freedom.

By the way, there's a book written coincidentally by four Barnard women, *A Woman's Way of Knowing.* That book really explains my own development and the development of so many women in my family, on both sides—women who didn't know who they were for a long time, and then they find out who they are but can't speak up, and then they—[laughs] this is my version of the book—and then finally they are able to speak up and have voice. Those are stages of many women's development. My mother never was able to see what was going on around her and within her. So that's my mother's story.

Q: _____[??]

00:20:15 Korshak: [This applies to] a lot of people in America today, and all over the world.

Q: [Were you close to any family members, specifically a sibling?]

00:20:28 Korshak: I was the youngest of three girls. We were like planets in outer space that rarely came into each other's orbits. We were so isolated. If you can't say, "Where was dad last night?" because mom might burst out crying, then what can you say other than "Please pass the spaghetti sauce," or "ketchup," or "more salt and pepper, please!" You really can't talk about anything meaningful, and if you can't talk about the things that are basic, you can't be close. So I focused on school. I did have friends, but again, I always thought there was something wrong that was within me, and I didn't know what it was.

Looking back, there was a lot of abuse. My father would abuse my sister. My sister would abuse me. That was overtly. Of course, he was covertly abusing my mom. I have another story about my father. I may have said that I thought my mother was probably abused when she went to other families [as a child.] My aunt remembered being approached sexually by the tailor when she was four years old. The family also spoke about another man—an older man who would come visit my mother on Sundays and take her for ice cream. It would make sense that he was sexually abusing her, although she never talked about it. And I may have been sexually abused.

Q: [Can you explain?]

00:22:11 Korshak: Well, I don't have memories of being sexually abused, but I have over a hundred clues that suggest I was. Odd things, like my fear of locker rooms, or my refusing to

wear undershirts as a child and my preference for baggy clothes. It doesn't matter to me whether I was sexually abused or not, but exploring the hypothesis has allowed me to explain the shame that I'd been carrying my whole life. That feeling of something being very wrong. The feeling has now vanished. It is as if there was always a puzzle and a piece missing, but now I feel all the pieces of my story and my family's story are known, and there is no more mystery.

There's one wonderful story that my paternal grandparents were extraordinarily socially concerned. They brought over two families during the Nazi era from Germany, and saved their lives, and set them up to be able to live and live well. Their descendants live in South Bend, Indiana.

There's another even funnier story when my grandfather was a judge—was he a judge? Or a lawyer? There was a man who was imprisoned for murdering his wife, and my grandfather took it on to say, "Judge, let this man free. He didn't kill his wife. Let him come home with me—" maybe he did kill his wife and now he was reformed—"let him come home with me. It's Christmas." So he took this man, the "axe murderer," we later called him. My father was six or seven years old. The family took this man home as a houseguest under my grandfather's supervision. This man disappeared after three weeks. My own thought is that he may have sexually abused my father. My father would have secrets his whole life, and that he would think it was okay to act out sexually. It may not be true, but it's a story that gives coherence to my understanding of my father. It's sort of a funny story too, and it says a lot about the naivety of my grandfather, who was a lovely jolly man with his heart in the right place, but he not very realistic.

My father was more a hard-as-nails reality guy. He would do what he wanted to do, rather than to have any kind of more noble expectations of himself. He principled in some ways, but not when it came to the domain of family. He had good values intellectually, and he would teach good values to me in his lectures, but he didn't live them himself. So that's a story that might say something about some of the people in my family.

You were asking about my family. There's some data—I'm just repeating—there's some data that my sister was sexually abused as well as physically abused. I watched the physical abuse. There's some data that I was sexually abused, as I said before, and I was physically abused by my sister regularly. She would beat me up when my father wasn't home, and tried to kill me at least one time.

Q: [Explain what you remember.]

00:25:54 Korshak: I remember she had a pillow over my head and I couldn't breathe—[laughs] I don't know if should go in the Archives or not—I still remember it. I was six. I remember thinking, if I struggled she would keep trying to smother me, but if I played dead, that would give the best chances for her to be curious and lift up the pillow. And that's what she did, so I lived. I also remember making the decision while I was under the pillow not breathing that if I lived would do whatever anybody asked of me for the rest of my life. I would do whatever she asked of me always. The beginning of my codependency [laughs].

That's how I was. So, it's not a surprise that even though I was with the group of girls that I wanted to be in, in grade school, there as always a sense of, Oh, I really don't fit in, there's something wrong, I'm really a bad person. I was always just catering to them, unable to take a stand for who I was or what I wanted. I felt I was always marginalized in the group, but I at least made it in the group. Sort of like I was in my family. I made it in the family, but I felt marginalized, beat up, not privy to the secrets.

Then one day, I remember talking to one of the girls, one of the women—she later became a therapist and is a therapist to this day. I remember talking to this one woman, Patty, and telling her some of what was going on at home. That was a wonderful thing for me—I think, fifth grade—to be able to tell someone something of my story. I always felt close to this woman. I felt that this woman was my friend. Even though she had lots of other friends who she preferred over me, nonetheless, I always felt there was a bond and that she cared about me also. That was a wonderful thing.

Q: _____[??]

00:28:26 Korshak: I think she just was and is a lovely human being. A lovely, caring human being. And she thought she had dysfunction in her family, alsoso she shared some of her stories—so she was also looking for someone to talk to. A few of us talked about the dysfunction that was going on in our homes.

Q: [Mute was the word on private life, in those days.]

00:29:08 Korshak: Yes, well the norm was to not talk about negative things, I think, but there were some little side conversations in some sub-groups that were developing. When I had a boyfriend, I could tell more to my boyfriend, and he could tell me more about the difficulties in his family. In that era, everybody was trying to look good, because it was a suburban high school. But I think everybody, when you would talk to them for very long, most people would start to talk about dysfunction and family secrets.

We also some quasi-delinquent things here and there. It wasn't anything huge or serious until later decades, when some people actually got into some real trouble. But most of us got through doing just quasi little rebellious things.

I think a lot of us where lost during college. Most of us in our twenties and thirties and forties found our way back to normal society—and I never really strayed all that much. But I felt lost. I would flirt with drugs, like LSD and mescaline. I loved mescaline. I would flirt with doing things that were—we called them "risqué." Like necking in the back row of the movie theater, that weren't supposed to do. Then later it became, actually, having sex when we shouldn't have been having sex. Birth control was very new. We were the cohort where birth control started to be available. Everybody was confused about sex and there was no guidance. I'm not sure how much to say, but our college years were more wild than in other eras, or maybe than what a parent would hope.

Q: [Yes. We were all confused, without guidance.]

00:32:02 Korshak: Yes. I, personally, was so wound up in surviving that I was not directly involved with social justice the way some people were. I was passionate about my education. I was passionate about learning one-to-one from people. I dated as many guys as I could, not because I wanted to build a secure relationship, or that I liked anyone deeply—I would pull them in and then hold them at bay—but I loved hearing stories and I loved hearing about other people's interests and activities.

One of the guys that I was seeing was very passionate about politics and social justice. So because of him I was at the '68 Democratic Convention in Chicago when Yippies [Youth International Party] kind of took over and there was violence between the Yippies and the police —or maybe it was the hippies—what is his name? Abby Hoffman, the Chicago Seven, all that was going on. I got involved with it through this boyfriend.

Q: [Were you at the '68 Convention?]

00:33:33 Korshak: I was in Chicago during the '68 convention, and I had all these opportunities because I knew people who were doing exciting things. So this guy, Denny Lawton took me to Grant Park, and so I was there, and I was a part of it, when the police were clubbing down the protestors, and it was exciting and important. I started to realize—somebody else took me to a Bob Dylan concert who was signing about "The Times They are A' Changing"—and I started to realize later than some people—maybe my senior year in high school—I started to realize, "Oh, the world <u>is</u> changing."

I didn't go to Barnard [the first year]; I went to University of Illinois, and it was a very conservative place. We had ten o'clock curfew as girls—so we had to be back in our dorm at ten o'clock. But the seeds of change were there. And I knew something about what was going on at Barnard, and that Columbia closed down for a few days that year because of the students taking over various buildings. It was fascinating to me. I didn't want to be in the middle of it, but I was fascinated, and I was always in conversations about these things.

Another thing was—so drugs. Someone gave me—my boyfriend at the time—gave me mescaline. Meanwhile my father died during my sophomore year. During my freshman year he was diagnosed with lung cancer. He had smoked heavily in his twenties and thirties. My father was the center of my world, so his being ill was just unbelievable to me. I started to use mescaline, and I loved mescaline. To this day, I'm not sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing, to take mescaline. It gave me an experience of what it could be to be fully alive, but it was a cheating way to get there. It made the rest of life seem very depressing compared to what it was like to be on mescaline. So I stopped using it because I knew that if life was not going to seem look good compared to the experience of taking drugs, there was a problem. I thought it was important that ordinary life should feel good. And ordinary life <u>does</u> feel wonderful to me today.

Q: [So how did it feel? Being on mescaline?]

00:36:51 Korshak: Oh, it was a wonderful feeling. It's more than euphoria. Remember I said that in my family, everyone was in outer space, passing each other from different orbits. Mescaline

gave me a sense of connection with others that I had never, ever experienced. In the moment, I'm thinking, yes, I'm glad I took it. I remember one time feeling euphoric and loving and seeing a duck, and falling in love with the duck, and then realizing "oh my god, I ate duck for dinner last night," and I started to sob. How could I have done that, this duck is so beautiful? Everything looked so beautiful, and I was so connected to everything and everyone. I loved it. I really loved it. I took it probably twenty times.

Q: _Amazing[??]

00:37:46 Korshak: Yes, well, that was what was great. When I was with my boyfriend or with someone I trusted—that was great. What was the topic? I'm losing the topic here. [Laughs] Not a surprise.

Oh, you were asking about social justice! And I was answering about mescaline. That's who I was. I was not clear about what my path should be. I was confused. I went through coursework at University of Illinois, I went through coursework at Barnard, and I graduated from Barnard. I was still very isolated, just like I had been in my family. I knew how to have a grammar school relationship. I knew how to have a high school relationship. I did not know how—somehow it's more serious in college. Somehow I was not able in college to create friendships. I had a couple of people I knew and I might go over to their dorm room and talk, but only for a few months. And also with guys, I couldn't stay with a guy—I would like the guy, or the guy would like me, I couldn't have both.

So my childhood dysfunction really slammed me in college. Some of that was because I was a workaholic with studying, so I would do all-nighters on a regular basis. Very insane. I would take five and six courses at a time—some at Barnard, some at Columbia—and I would just load myself up because I wanted to take every single course I could. So that was part of the problem; I was a workaholic. Another problem was my sexuality. When I was sexual, the sexuality would undercut developing any of the building blocks that a relationship needs. My promiscuity, my lack of guidance around sexual values, was another significant barrier to forming the intimacy that I said I wanted. Intimacy would've been pretty scary for me in that era.

That's really part of why I stopped using drugs. I was never close to anyone at Barnard/Columbia —and using drugs alone wasn't fun the way it was when I was with my boyfriend who had been at the University of Illinois. And that was fine. That was good. Because by then I knew that drugs really wasn't an answer for how to live my life.

I said to myself that, Okay I'm pretty screwed up, it's going to take a long time to figure out how to be happy. I had bumped into the counseling office trying to sign up for a particular class, and it was like, Oh, there's such a thing as counseling. [Laughs] I had been naïve about it. So I had a counselor at Barnard who I saw for six or eight months. She would ask me things like, "What are you going to do after you graduate?" And remember, my father had died when I was a sophomore and so it was like, I don't know. I have no idea. My mother was too much of a mouse to ever ask those questions. The counselor asked if I wanted my mother to come to my graduation, and I didn't have any idea. The counselor asked me those questions and I would have a headache every time I would go see her. But I would keep going to see her. She said,

"Whatever you do, wherever you go, pick out a therapist and make sure you stay with a therapist for a long time." That sounded like a good idea.

I went to Chicago after my graduation, which is where most of my family was. My therapist there said, if you could do anything you wanted to do, what would you do. I said, "Anything?" [Laughs] Really?" No one had ever asked me that question. I answered that if I could do anything I wanted to do, I'd be a therapist, because I knew that I liked listening to people's stories. I liked people, and I loved people, as long as you kept them far enough away, I guess [laughs]. The need to keep people at a distance wasn't conscious. But I liked people, and I wanted more from people. So I decided to see if I could become a therapist.

I made a decision that if it was going to take a long time to learn to be happy, maybe ten years, I might as well go to medical school, where at the end of the ten years, I would have something that would have meaning to me. That turned out to be a good decision, one of the good decisions of my life, to go to medical school. In that era, it was hard to get into medical school. Everybody was applying and it was hard to get in. Coming form Barnard gave me a boost that I might not have had otherwise. I got in! [Laughs] And I was grateful.

Q: [Talk about some experiences you had, arriving at Barnard. Dorm life?]

00:44:18 Korshak: Sure.

Q: [Where did you live those years?]

00:44:37 Korshak: Yes, so. Again, my own personal experience was not necessary universal, because I came as a transfer student in my sophomore year. New York was big and exciting. I was in the dorm on 125th Street in a tiny room that looked out the window on a brick building about two feet away. This was very much non-glamorous.

Q: [Was this in Plimpton?]

00:45:29 Korshak: No, no, Plimpton was a five star hotel compared to this. This was—I don't even know if they still use this building. It was an old, dilapidated building on 125th street between Broadway and Amsterdam. As a transfer student, I couldn't be in Plimpton because all those rooms were taken. I was placed in this building that they had, at least for a while, with other Barnard students—I think there were five of us. Four of us were isolates; one of us was a social person. So, it was possible to be a social person. I remember I thought about trying out for cheerleading to become involved in something. Instead I stayed back in my room and painted my room psychedelic colors rather than going out to try out for cheerleading. Looking back, I can see there was a schism between the suburban '50s white picket fence, clean living—which cheerleading would have symbolized—versus the psychedelic world, which I identified with without even being conscious that that was my identification.

Should I stay in my room, or should I go out? I chose the route of isolating. I studied and I lived in this crazy room that had crazy gold paint on one wall and red paint on the other walls and some kind of poster from the Metropolitan Museum of Art from a painting by Ashille Gorky. I

loved music, and I was very upset when Jimi Hendrix died and Janis Joplin died. I really was part of the psychedelic community, even though I wasn't using drugs very often anymore. If I had a friend from high school come visit me for a weekend we might use drugs. Or if I visited my boyfriend back in Champagne, Illinois, I might use drugs with him. But he was seeing other people, so I was in a lot of pain in that relationship.

It was a very painful, painful four years, and the pain continued throughout my twenties. I lived in an apartment on 82nd Street for my senior year, and my sister lived on 79th Street, but she—well, her husband tried to kill himself that year, and he did kill himself a year later.

Q: [How sad. What precipitated that?]

00:48:24 Korshak: Yes, I know. He was unhappy and my sister was a cruel woman. She was married six times that we know of. Yes, but I wanted to live near her because she was family. And so I lived at 82nd and Amsterdam, and there were guys using heroin sitting on my front stairs. I would set a trap for the rats at night. But I went to school, I loved my studies, I participated in all the discussions, I wrote all the papers, I got two majors, not just one major—I got a major in history and a major in English literature—because I wanted it all [laughs].

I wasn't even taking [pre-med classes]. I had no sense of what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. I wanted to learn. I took courses in anthropology, and English literature and poetry and I loved it all. I loved everything about Barnard, and I loved everything about Columbia, and I

loved everything about the academic part, but the social part—I was fringe to the social events. I was part of it, in that I was one of the women—looking back—who was emerging, finding my way. But I was still so lost, that I couldn't really be effective in any of the social movements, or even the extra-curricular activities. I would only read the flyers for different events and occasionally go to a Communist movie—I had a Communist boyfriend for a while. But I was not involved in any kind of organized or productive way. I was in too much pain to be able to join anything. Yes, and I'm sad when I think back.

I needed mentors and I didn't have enough mentoring. One of my mentors was the guy who was the head of the History department at Barnard, or the guy who was teaching at Columbia. George Stade. He was gorgeous and tall and slender and he would teach Faulkner and American literature. Those were my heroes, but I never got close to these people. They thought I was special, they thought I was wonderful because I was enthusiastic. The history guy let me do my dissertation research reading French newspaper articles in the original French. I did not know enough French—recently I reread that dissertation and I think it was crap. But I had some good ideas, some great ideas, and I did get a couple of A's or A minuses. But I was passionate about it all, because I couldn't really express anything from my heart or sustain competence in any way that had meaning to me.

Q: [What was the Senior Paper on?]

00:51:29 Korshak: I think two—I want to say there were three things, in answer to your question. The first answer is, I took up: Why was France against entering the war of World War II in the

beginning of 1939—in fact in the beginning of October—? and why at the end of October did they say they would enter World War II? I am a pacifist, so how a nation would go to war was important to me. So thanks for asking. So I wanted to do this paper, but I was so passionate about the topic I could never succeed in researching and writing the paper; doing the paper in French was a way to have a little distance to my topic.

When my dad died, I wrote a poem in French about how he had died and how I felt, because I wanted to write something, and I could only write it in French. I couldn't write it in English. Too close to the emotions, too close to the reality. So that's my answer about some of my academic work, how my insanity—my intense and disorganized emotionality—impacted my academic work.

History was my original major. I added on English literature because I was so passionate about what I was reading. I had done the course work, but to get a major at Barnard I had to write a thesis paper. I don't think I spent more than two weeks on that paper. One week I did not sleep from Monday morning until Friday at noon, when I turned it in, in order to write that paper. I wrote it on the family—I didn't realize that until now. That's why I love these interviews, I realize more while I'm talking—I wrote it on that English family, the *Forsythe Saga*, which had three novels. I thought I could think of something intelligent to say, and that I was very interested in understanding that family. That was my English literature contribution.

There were some brilliant ideas. It was my forte to listen to my mother and integrate it with my father was saying—that turns out to be a strength, even today. I just published a book where I

took from multiple sources and co-wrote it with two other people. I think it's a nice contribution to the field even though it's easier to write a book than to sell a book. It's still a nice contribution, even though we haven't sold very many copies. What I was able to do was take ideas from this professor or that professor, and then apply it to whatever I was writing about. So there would be sparks of excellent work. I don't know if I got an A minus or a B plus, but it wasn't trash, even though it also wasn't stellar. It was enough that I could graduate and get the double major—which has given me nothing. Nobody has ever, ever, ever cared [laughs] that I did all that work, because nobody cares about it. But I'm glad, because it made me a better person, doing all that. That was my strength, to get a lot out of my education.

Q: [What about your greatest accomplishment?]

00:55:39 Korshak: Oh, that I still have a strength to take a lot of information from different sources. I could talk about the book now for a moment? It's a book about process addictions, which is a new field. The American Psychiatric Association doesn't even use the word 'addiction' in the DSM [The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders]. The media is so far ahead of the medical field. It's just amazing that they won't use the word addiction. They even give an explanation, "We don't use the word addiction because of how controversial it is and also because of the stigma attached." They'll use the word schizophrenia because that's usually not rich people, but they won't use the word addiction. They call it "substance use disorder," rather than addiction.

I've become very interested in addiction because I believe my father was addicted to both gambling and sex and work and cigarettes earlier on. I believe that both parents were workaholics. I believe I have been, and continue to be, a workaholic [laughs] and that I also am capable of going to other addictions like sexual addiction, and codependency. With two other colleagues, the three of us wrote a book where we borrow from what is in the literature—and there is a lot in the literature. There's not as much as I think there will be, but there is enough in the literature to have written this book with scientific backing. We also borrow from what we know clinically from working with our patients and we borrow from the twelve-step community. I became part of the Twelve-Step community at age forty-three.

Q: [Can you explain further?]

00:57:52 Korshak: Process addiction. It's a behavioral addiction. So here's the idea—like gambling. Gambling is a process addiction. In other words, you know you can have an addiction to alcohol. It become the "go-to" when you are happy; it's your go-to when you are sad. It's what you do every day; it becomes the most important relationship in your life. More important than people. Cigarettes are your friend if you are addicted and you care about your cigarettes before you care about your family. It's a choice—and maybe not, maybe I'm exaggerating—but the problem is the preference of engaging with addictive substances or processes over engaging with people. Instead of going to people when you are upset to get comforted, you go to your cigarettes, or whatever is your drug of choice.

A lot of people—most people in the AMA believe that it has to be a substance, a neurologically-altering, biologically-altering substance to create an addiction. But when scientists started to look at the MRIs of the people who are using some processes—like the people who are gambling—they found, "Oh my god, the MRI lights up with gambling just as if you gave them a hit of cocaine."

00:59:49 Korshak: So the AMA now has allowed, in the new DSM-V, which is the handbook of psychiatric disorders—they've put gambling in as a potential disorder. With that, they have opened a section for process addictions—or behavioral addictions. I use them synonymously—they've opened the way for other addictions to be listed.

So my team, all of us have been in the Twelve-Step community, as well as doing therapy professionally for our patients. We got together and we decided that we would take what we've learned in the Twelve-Step community about many addictions, and publish a book about it. And that's what we've done. Because we believe that it's not just gambling, but it's also work addiction, and sex, it's also technology like smart phones, computers, the internet and online and offline video games, and so on. We even discuss religious addiction. We think that the Jim Jones thing—where 960 people went to an island and they all took Kool-Aid that was laced with cyanide—we think of that as religious addiction, when religion undermines rather than enhances the well-being of the believers, sabotages rather than enhances their relationships, and erodes rather than fosters their humanity. We think that's dangerous. And so that's in our book.

Anyhow, the reason why I brought this up is my forte is to borrow from multiple venues and put them together in a way where we have a cogent story about what's going on. I believe that what we came up with is extremely meaningful, whether the world thinks so or not [laughs]. We've sold a couple hundred copies. We don't have a good marketing department, but anyway. I love doing that work and I'm continuing to do that work, and I do think that that's one of my strengths. I don't know how important it is to the archive.

But I did the English thing, and then I did the History thing, and then I was lost. But I moved to Chicago and got a therapist and decided to go to medical school. And gradually I put together my story, and found ways to move forward professionally, and finally socially. Anything else?

Q: [What were your expectations for Barnard?]

01:03:02 Korshak: I didn't know what to expect. I think I expected excellent academics, and I got that. University of Illinois was also academically excellent, but the Barnard academics were much more cozy. Instead of thirty to three hundred people in a class, it was twelve people to thirty people. And so we had discussions rather than lectures. I loved both because the lectures were so fabulous and fascinating to me, opening up worlds. Like, how did Hitler get away with what he was doing? All kinds of wonderful questions. The Barnard education was less about facts and more about discussion, and more thinking, and more about interpersonal relating, which was challenging for me but fascinating. I think my intellect was better than my ability to engage and participate. I did engage and participate, but I think I could've done better.

I wrote a letter to Barnard some years later that thanked Barnard. They used it as a donation letter. I was thanking Barnard for having given me such a splendid education. I said in the letter that my only regret was that I didn't fully take advantage of the opportunity to develop deep and solid relationships. That's really true. It was all there, being offered, and I could only eat what I could eat. I could only do what was in the classroom, I couldn't take in anything socially outside of the classroom. I studied alone. I made, as I said, a few friends, but—

I thought I would enjoy New York, which I did. I would walk to the Met [Metropolitan Museum], even on those cold Sunday afternoons. I would walk across Central Park from my apartment. I was right across the park from it—and I would see this modern art that I absolutely loved, all these paintings, [Jackson] Pollock, [Claude] Monet, [Édouard] Manet, [Vincent] Van Gogh, [Georges] Seurat, and Ashille Gorky. I loved New York, and I loved the academics, and I did not know what to expect. I think I expected I would do better socially, because I had been better socially. I was surprised, and kind of concerned, that I wasn't doing well socially. I didn't really know what that was about at the time.

Q: [You had some distractions]_[??]

01:06:37 Korhsak: Yes, yes. My family was an influence. I remember the day before my first final exam in the spring of my freshman year, my sister called. My dad was still alive, but he was ill. And my sister said she was delivering a baby that was going to be put up for adoption, and she wasn't telling our parents, and she wasn't telling anybody but me. So there I am, the night before exam week, my first exams, scheduled for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I

think that I blew my English exam in part because of this. I mean, I blew it, meaning I got a B plus instead of an A. I wrote it in pencil, which was an act of defiance, because we were supposed to write it in pen. That kind of thing was the kind of thing that I would do to express my anger somewhere. I was just loaded up with stress and confusion. That kind of thing would happen, just at a time when I needed to focus on my studies—So it gave me the idea—I'll distance myself from family, I'll distance myself from people, I'll study harder. That was how I coped.

So those crises, yes, impacted me. My mother was hospitalized for being psychotic, and got ECT [Electroconvulsive Therapy] treatments in my senior year of high school. These things did shape me, did impact me. I'm sad about it, and I'm really grateful that I've been able to get out of it and build a wonderful life for myself.

Q: [And the strikes, marches, protests? Were you ever involved? What did you think?]

01:09:07 Korshak: I thought it was fascinating, and I didn't really know how to get involved, or if I wanted to get involved. I didn't really know. And again, my entrée was always a particular person who was involved. I dated a Communist, who thought everything in America was terrible, and the world was going to hell. I don't know that those conversations helped me become more involved in any kind of useful way. It just meant that I saw some movies, like the violent Goddard movies, that I might not have otherwise seen. I really didn't know how to understand any of it. It scared me. It really scared me. But it also intrigued me, and resonated with something inside.

And when Kent State happened—and I'm going to name one other act of insanity: I went back to University of Illinois for a semester. That Kent State incident happened that semester, when the National Guard shot at the students on the mall, and four people were killed. That horrific incident mirrored the upheaval of my own crisscrossing between the University of Illinois and Barnard. You said I was three years at Barnard; it was really two years at Barnard because I went to Barnard for spring and fall—spring of sophomore year and fall of junior year and then for my senior year. The in the spring of my junior year I went back to University of Illinois to live with this man who I was in love with.

Q: [This was your original boyfriend?]

01:10:32 Korshak: Yes, an original boyfriend who I was madly in love with. I went back and lived with him for a semester, but it was only a semester, and then he had had enough. So I went back to Barnard for my Senior year, but not before—oh my God, this is so insane. While I was on mescaline and watching the movie Woodstock, I made the decision to go to South America for the summer with a backpack to travel with a girlfriend, who was really one of my closest friends, and we picked up a dozen Peace Corps workers and we went through South America looking for a little town on the Amazon—a little dangerous. I wrote Barnard saying I wasn't coming back in the fall because I was doing this thing.

The people in these little communities were welcoming to us, letting us sleep in their homes and eat with their families wherever we went. At some point I realized that I wanted to be able to get some sort of career, so that went I went to communities like this I would be able to give back.

It was a wonderful thing for me to get to verify the value system of my mother's family, to realize these people have no money, many families sleep on a dirt floor all in one room—that's how they live—and they are happier than anybody I had ever known, maybe because they are poor. I saw that they valued humor and love and they valued each other. That was a lesson to me about material things, that it's not material wealth that is necessary for happiness.

But I wanted to give back to these people who had taken me in to their homes—you know, poor people in Peru and Bolivia would open their homes to us in ways middle class and upper class people wouldn't. So when I was out of money and sitting at the side of the road—because I wouldn't sleep with the truck driver who came onto me—the only person who ever gave me any difficulty while I was hitchhiking. When I declined his request for him to take me back to his home he pulled over to the side of the road and said, "Get out." I got out and I was crying because I didn't have any money and how was I ever going to earn enough money to get back to the United States, and I was going to be in Bolivia the rest of my life. The little children came around and they asked me what was wrong. We communicated with gestures and facial expressions because I didn't know their language—it wasn't even Spanish, it was an Indian language—but they took me to their home and they fed me and they sent me on my way the next day. And people kept doing that, people kept being generous and wonderful. And I got home

[laughs]. I got to Manaus, Brazil, where my mother was able to send me a check to get me to fly to Miami and then to Chicago to come home.

I wrote Barnard that I was coming back, and I went back for my senior year. That year I had an apartment on 82nd Street between Columbus and Amsterdam and my older sister lived at 79th.

Q: [How did you happen to choose to go to South America?]

01:14:04 Korshak: My girlfriend wrote me a letter. I was watching Woodstock with my boyfriend. We were tripping. And my girlfriend had written me a letter inviting me to join her where she was, where she had taken a car—she was a girlfriend I had traveled with on camping trips in the United States. My parents had put me on an eight-week camping trip around the United States when I was sixteen. They were well intended, and they wanted me to get a broad education, so I got this great thing of going around the United States on this camping trip with twenty kids and six staff. We climbed Mt. Rainier and we ran rivers in Utah and we learned to scuba dive. I was a privileged kid, and it opened up my world that there can be more in life than what I knew in suburbia. I loved camping. I loved roughing it. I think being abused in the house —again, abused, whether it was physical, emotional or sexual—getting away from that was a wonderful thing.

My girlfriend, who I had met on this camping trip, wrote me that she had taken a car and she was on her way to India via South America, because India was where she could learn about Hindu teachings like her grandmother had taught her. Her father had been an alcoholic; she was looking

for a spiritual way of life. She wrote me from Chile, inviting me to join her. saying she was in Santiago, Chile and did I want to join her. While I was watching the movie Woodstock, I realized I would say "yes," and suddenly, I was going to South America. I called my one uncle, the diplomat, and asked should I do this or not, and he said, "Of course you should do this; this is a wonderful opportunity." He underestimated the potential danger, as I was only nineteen years old.

I took off with my backpack and I flew to Quito, Ecuador. I took buses and trains and I hitchhiked south to Lima, Peru and I ended up in Santiago, Chile. I meet up with my girlfriend and twelve people she had met, mostly Peace Corps workers, and we all went searching for a small town on the Amazon River in Bolivia. Some officers sent our passports to La Paz, thinking we might be Communist guerillas. We were a three days donkey-ride from La Paz in a little village, and I stayed there two of three weeks with the others, waiting for our passports to be returned. This was an absolutely wonderful experience because we got to know the village people. They fed us and gave us shelter and we returned their generosity putting on a talent show with our singing, guitar playing, dancing and acrobatics. It was all very wonderful experience. I realized I want to go back to school to become educated and develop a way to give back to these people, so I went to La Paz and got my passport from a government agency to go back to Barnard for the fall. I headed north to Miami, and at one point I ran into one of the families who had seen me in the talent show; they offered me a ride to the border of Brazil on their houseboat.

Q: _[How amazing!]

01:17:20 Korshak: Yes, it was just one experience after another, and I brought my insanity with me. While there were some wonderful experiences with the children taking me in, there were also some not so pretty experiences of falling in love with this one guy in Santiago. This is for the archives and I want to be honest. There was wonderful expansion of what could happen in the world, and there was a dark side of how problems, interpersonal problems, could take me off course into emotional turmoil and pain. Barnard was a relatively safe place, so I went back to do my one major, and then I added another major and graduated.

Q: [What did you do right after Barnard?]

01:18:13 Korshak: After graduation I moved back to Chicago to get myself a therapist and to be where I had some family. My father had died, but my mother lived another fifteen years. It was really lovely to be able to support her in her last years. That was a wonderful thing. In later years, now that I'm happy, I really cherish who my mother was and how I would love to have her back.

I went to medical school. As we used to say, I loved "crashing through double doors to save lives." It was a perfect activity for me because I already knew how to stay up all night and focus intently on work.

Q: [Were you at University of Chicago?]

01:19:13 Korshak: No, I was at University of Illinois, Chicago campus.

Q: [You went directly to medical school?]

01:19:25 Korshak: Well, oh, there was three years in between graduating from Barnard in 1971 and going to medical school in 1975.

I was seeing a therapist. I studied architecture, because I knew I needed more solid structure in my life, and I loved architecture. But it wasn't a good field for me because you really have to be good, and I wasn't that good. But it kept me safe for eighteen months until I realized I wanted to be a therapist and go to medical school. I took some undergraduate premed courses, doing all the premed requirements in two years, and I took an advanced chemistry course piggybacking on the introductory course—I worked really hard because I wanted to get admitted.

I took my MCATs. I studied for my MCATs every day for six months, but then I woke up with a horrific cold—a cold to beat all colds—and went in and took the test anyway, and totally aced it—achieving the ninety-seven percentile, ninety-five percentile, and ninety-three percentile in general information, English and mathematics. In science I scored only in the fifty-five percentile. I had just done the science courses in lightning speed to skim the surface. When I opened that envelope and saw my scores I thought, "Oh my God, I'm going to medical school." So then I went to medical school. And of course I ended up really loving it. As an intern I gave up my vacation to do the cardiology rotation. I didn't want to miss anything.

Q: _____[??]

01:22:14 Korshak: I'm really happy to say that then, at age forty-three, when I was in love with a guy—can I go to this next phase and talk about my life since age forty-three?

What happened was—it was really wonderful. I realized I needed to develop my capacity for having relationships. I fell for this guy who lived and lives across the street, and I fell hard. He also was a sex addict, who had multiple partners. My patients were going to Twelve-step meetings. I had been formally psychoanalyzed twice, once by the head of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis, and the question was, should I go into a third analysis because of my pain, or why don't I go to a Twelve-step meeting? Some of my patients were going to twelve step meetings. It would only cost a dollar.

I went to my first twelve-step meeting and people were talking openly about their pain. They were talking with the kind of honesty that I had never experienced with anyone. When I talked with my therapists or girlfriends, I would be reporting events and behaviors. But in the Twelve-step meeting, people were talking about themselves and their experiences—things I never said to any therapist, because I might upset the therapist, as if I was still worried about upsetting my mother at the dinner table. My therapy had been an intellectual exercise. Seven years of psychoanalysis in my twenties, and seven more years of analysis in my thirties. I wonder, how much did I get for that half million dollars and all that time? So now I don't practice that way with my patients today. I used to practice that way—listening, listening—I don't do that anymore. I interact. I've become a talker, as you can tell [laughs]. It's important that I have found my voice, and I have found out who I am.

I would go to these meetings, and I would hear things that were true for me, things I hadn't realized. I would hear my story in the stories others told. I began to understand what had happened in my family. I could understand my father and my mother and my sister and myself and my older half-sister, who had lived in New York, which is why I haven't talked about her much. She would only be with us for her week-long vacation from school in the spring. So I began to understand, and I began to understand that some of my choices had been problematic. My focusing on work was omitting this other piece about being able to build meaningful relationships with people, and being able to relate to myself and my own feelings, and to know my own reactions to things—that task became a priority for the next several years.

I still worked, but I cut back a little on my work. I told myself I was putting myself back in nursery school and growing up all over again, but this time, with the kind of wisdom and loving support from the twelve step community that I had always needed but never had. This community became family for me, and I was able to do the kind of healing, growth and change that I'd never done, even as a patient in my professional psychotherapy. It was truly wonderful.

I went to AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings, even though that's not a primary thing for me—alcohol, I really don't like the taste—I went to AA meetings because AA was the most rigorous program with the clearest wisdom. I went every day. Some people do a ninety and ninety, going every day for ninety days. I went every day for three years. And the wisdom in that fellowship allowed me to address what had been wrong in my thinking and what had been wrong in my behavior in my relationships. I'd learned how I'd been judgmental and intellectual and a critical

of others, and how that's not good for bonding [laughs]. I could diagnose anybody, but that wouldn't build a relationship.

I learned that what I was doing with my anger was repressing it, disavowing it and projecting it onto others, and then shaming them for what a perceived as their meanness. I would say: "You're angry," when really I was angry. That was a kind of trick that people do when they grow up in dysfunctional families. The AA community knows about those tricks, and people talk in meetings about those tricks. I learned to spot them and correct them.

And then I met the man who is my husband today. My marriage continues to be stable and supportive and in some ways wonderful. Not that we don't have challenges [laughs], but I married the right guy—a guy who's good for me and a guy who balances me. My career has absolutely taken off because I have his support, and, also, in learning my own story, I have become able to teach others how I learned and what I've learned. I go to conferences for therapists, and I teach therapists different therapeutic techniques that have helped me to become who I am today.

Since being in twelve step meetings, therapy has helped. Twelve-step recovery has been necessary, but there are a few therapy modalities that have also been critical to my growth and development. Group psychotherapy has been critical. To be able to actually be with people and look at what I'm doing that's problematic and make different choices. I co-wrote an article published last year comparing twelve step recovery and group psychotherapy, discussing the

strengths of each, and suggesting that the therapist who is familiar with both modalities can better understand the healing process, and offer their patients a greater array of tools.

Another kind of therapy that's been critical is psychodrama, because using psychodrama techniques I have been able to create a scene from age four and talk with my father about his misjudgments, and also really scream at him. And talk to the four-year-old little girl inside myself. Even though my father has been dead for four decades, being able to scream at someone role-playing my father has been liberating for me. It's allowed me to be significantly stronger in who I am as I live my daily life and as I navigate my relationships. I don't have to be intimidated by people. It's really been wonderful for me, this journey, where I continue to learn and grow.

Q: [Are there regrets in your life?]

01:29:06 Korshak: Yes The one missing—which doesn't bother me today—but the one missing has been fulfilling a dream of having children. I was that era where we thought we had forever to have babies. When birth control methods first came out, we thought, "Oh, now we don't have to have babies in our twenties, we can wait till we're mature." That was the one thing I always wanted, was to have children. I used to fantasize about having twelve children. I love to cook, and I pictured large tables and serving a large family from big bowls of food. I even thought about having two sets of children—one dozen that I could have to love, and the set that I could experiment with to learn how to be a good parent [laughs]. I really had lots of hopes about having children.

But we thought we had forever, and when I was thirty years old, I realized I might not ever have a good relationship and I might never have children. I knew that it would take more than ten years to be ready for a good relationship. I sort of knew. And, indeed, it took to age fifty, and by then it was too late to have children.

I want to record that in the archive, that in our era, my cohort, many of us missed the boat when it came to children and families. That was something, which should be, I think, the most important experience a person can have. I love my life, and I don't dwell on this issue, I don't think about it often, but it's important. Most of my friends—their children are grown now. But it is missing for me, and I want that in the archive. My values, wonderful as they are today, there's still a missing because I lacked the skills for creating meaningful relationship in my life in my twenties and thirties. I was incompetent in the domain of being able to have relationships, have children and build a family. So I name that.

Q: [What can you share about your experience with class, race and/or gender?]

01:31:41 Korshak: Class, race and gender? May I? [Laughs] Oh yes? I know that I'm white and upper middle class, and I consider myself very fortunate. I had wanted to be a male in grade school and high school, because men had advantages that women didn't have. But when I was in college I could be attend a class at Columbia and get a lot out of the class because of my passion, even though I was a woman. Especially after having been over at Barnard, and I begin to know that I should be treated as equal, so I had the extra oomph [laughs] to be able to participate very

fully. Being a woman might have gotten me into medical school, too, so it worked in my advantage.

That was the era, of course, where we had discrimination in reverse—society wanted to and still wants to make room for women. People started to think, "let's bend over backwards to make sure minorities are given extra advantages."

I can see that racial injustice is a tremendous problem, but I'm not experiencing it directly myself. I'm experiencing actually benefits from the way in which we have a stratified. After all, I have financial security. I have the benefits of being upper class, I have the liberal values of caring about minorities—I can be sad from afar. I remember in '67 when the riots broke out in Detroit and I think Newark, I was traveling through Russia at the time, and I read about the riots in the newspaper and thought, this must be communist propaganda, and an exaggeration. Then I came home to realize it was really true, the rioting was really happening in our country. But I've been mostly peripheral to these struggles, not central to them. I care about it. I care about it a lot. But I have the view that the forces of history are so overwhelming that I don't know what to do about these problems, I guess. On the other hand, I am confident that as a civilization we will develop ideas that will create a progression of the democracy that we know and more equitable economics so that more people can be fed and have medical care and have opportunities that I have had which were necessary to self-actualize.

Of course, whenever anyone is discriminated against, whether politically, economically or emotionally, everyone is impacted. Abuse and neglect of human beings is pervasive in our

society, and my own thinking was distorted for too many years by my not knowing how to welcome people into my life. Tao and Buddhist philosophies have helped me let go of intellectual constructs that justify my isolation, and have taught me how to shift from my head to my heart in how I live my life, and how to center myself in love to the best of my ability, while taking good care of myself.

Q: [Good!]

01:34:18 Korshak: Yes. There is one piece that I want to name in particular. I've been involved in group relations work—yes, this is a good story. I walked into a group relations conference in Washington, D.C. ten or fifteen minutes late, as a white Jewish psychiatrist. The way the room was set up that people were sitting in concentric circles, and the only seat that was open was a chair in the inner circle in the middle of the room. So as I wind my way toward the seat in the center of the room, this one vacant seat, I heard this one black woman say, "I wish all the white people would just leave right now." That statement blew away major suburban constructs not only about race—but also prohibitions about what can and cannot be said out loud.

This is good medicine for me, to be in a forum where you are supported for saying whatever you think and whatever you feel. Because the director of this conference was black, a black woman felt empowered to be able to make this outrageous statement of how she felt, even though it was hostile to the white women in the room. My reaction was, "Oh my god, this is wonderful." Here was a place where people weren't concerned about being polite, like in the suburbs of Chicago where I grew up. People are saying how they really felt, , and they are playing full out. There

were many forums that helped me get to the experience of wholeness and belonging that I have today: twelve-step recovery, psychodrama, group psychotherapy—and this group relations work has also contributed significantly in my being able to grapple with other people who are being honest, grapple with the challenge of my being able to transcend the restrictions that social politeness expected of me, to be able to tell the truth, to be able to know who I am, and to authorize myself to become all of who I can be. So I still participate in a group relations conference or two every year in order to make sure that I'm keeping my honesty level in high gear. I have a dream of directing a conference one day, to offer others the experience of expansion that has been so important for me.

So you asked about race. That was clearly a conference where my eyes were opened. I came to understand how I listened preferentially to white people over black people, straight people over homosexuals, and men over women. I went to the conference for developing my own empowerment and honesty, but the conference work taught me about my own prejudicial constructs. I could see how the girl who I had thought was somebody to be dismissed was showing up saying creative, intelligent things. It was as if I had glasses on that were distorting what was going on. As Alcoholics Anonymous wisdom teaches, "I had my glasses on backwards." The idea is that if I see something wrong with someone else, I need to look at myself. This conference work has given me some awareness and clarity and a different way of relating to people than I would otherwise could have had.

Q: [What about religion and spirituality?]

01:38:01 Korshak: Right, yes, yes. So, the same guy that brought me to the Grant Park, in the '68 Democratic Convention, also was dabbling in Zen Buddhism. I had grown up Jewish, which had very little meaning for me at the time. I really never learned how to work with any Jewish concepts in my daily life. I went to Sunday School and got confirmed, but I didn't know how to apply the teachings or see their relevance. Then, this guy introduced me to Zen Buddhism, which I really liked but didn't follow up with it at the time.

Then when I was forty-three years old I was in pain over a relationship with the guy who lived and lives across the street, and I became part of the Twelve Step community. Step two of the twelve steps suggests we "Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." For me was it meant if I'm in my own world, I might think I'm in charge of things, and that's ludicrous. I'm not in charge of so many things that are going on in my life. Remember, I didn't get to twelve step recovery with problems from alcohol, so I wasn't at rock bottom. I was sort of at a good place, living my life well, but it made sense to me to recognize that I couldn't control everything that I thought I could control. Whoever God was, it wasn't me. I saw that it was a problem thinking that I was the most important entity in my universe and that could control more than I could control, without consideration of other forces, and powers greater than myself. After all, this guy had triggered enormous pain for me. I couldn't control him and I couldn't control my attachment to him and I couldn't control our relationship.

I also understood that people who believe in God are happier than those who don't. I was brought up to <u>not</u> believe in God. My father taught that religions bring war. I understood that religion could be the opiate of the masses, as Marx had taught. I recognized that when parents

fall short in their ability to parent, defining a higher power can be psychologically beneficial, and necessary for ethical guidance if not also for emotional comfort. I have also learned in recent years that human beings are social animals, needing to be attached outside of ourselves. I actually had made the man across the street my higher power; I needed a higher power other than him! [Laughs]

Twelve Step programs encourage members to define for themselves something they can trust, something they can turn to in difficult times, something to replace their addictions. It was hard for me to develop a sense of higher power. At first—I don't know if you want all this detail—at first I used the notions of wisdom and love, including the wisdom I was getting in the Twelve-step programs, that was my higher power. Christian Scientists talk about synonyms for God: love, truth, life—so for awhile it was truth, and love, and life. Later my higher power became goodness. My notion of a higher power became whatever goodness was in the world that was largely outside my control.

It's really hard to pray to goodness, but I learned to meditate about a year and a half after I started being in twelve-step recovery. I realized that I'm passionate about many things, and if I'm passionate about poison, I would do better to think twice before being involved with it. I had better slow down, I better stop, I better learn to meditate to see what's really true. If I'm going 180 miles an hour in the wrong direction, I'm going to be 180 miles in the wrong direction! [Laughs] So I better make my choices wisely. I learned to meditate, and I went back to Zen Buddhism to learn to meditate.

As Buddhism teaches, we wear dark glasses. Coming from a dysfunctional family, we see things a lot more negatively. The world is a much better place than I ever knew, and it keeps getting better all the time. The more I can stay with my spiritual practice and mediating the better off I am. [I don't meditate a lot anymore. I meditate when I need to. I meditate a few times a month, or when I'm upset. More if I'm upset.]

But I continue to practice what I call a spiritual way of living my life, practicing spiritual principles with integrity with values, a lifelong endeavor. So I wouldn't drink alcohol or do any drugs. Maybe someday I'll have wine or something, but not right now. Right now I'm still learning and growing. And I don't want anything to interfere with this path that I'm on, because I love the path that I'm on. My life is—the phrase is, "beyond my wildest dreams." Just today, I got a proposal accepted at a professional conference. Someone called and said, "We accepted your proposal, why didn't you answer our email?" I'm not a good emailer, so I didn't realize my proposal was accepted. And I never thought this proposal would be accepted, because I'm taking psychodrama, which I learned in one conference, in one organization, and I'm bringing it to an organization that really doesn't like psychodrama. But they are letting me do a ninety minute workshop. So I'm thrilled. It really makes me happy. So even today, my life is becoming bigger today than it was yesterday.

You asked me about religion. So I think intellectually I see myself as a Buddhist. I don't practice rigorously, but my spirituality is a big part of my every day. I teach it to my patients too, if they are willing. It's especially useful for people who are depressed or anxious. Because while I'm not a theologian, I believe that we're all psychologically healthier if we can have humility and

recognize that there is goodness all around us. One can hypothesize that it's our task to be able to connect with the goodness in the world, whether it's in people or in nature, or art, wherever it is.

Q: [What about travel, special places, happy days?]

01:44:26 Korshak: Oh, well there are many. There are many. I love—even before I was in recovery—going down to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and camping by the Havasu falls, my favorite place, with my Cornish hens and my camp stove. I had two friends with me.

In January, I'm going with my husband on a National Geographic tour around-the-world. We are going to see the Taj Mahal in India, the Dali Lama's palace in Tibet, and see elephants in the Serengetti Plains in Tanzania, and Machu Picchu in Peru. I'm very psyched about that trip.

But if you ask about a peak moment, there's another way to talk about it. I remember when—I was two years into recovery. I'm playing the piano in an amateur talent show, I'm playing Chopin—and I'm not a good piano player—but I'm playing Chopin and—I don't know if you saw the movie "Shine." Remember I'm an overachiever, so I worked, and worked, and worked, and worked. I don't know how musical it was—but if you saw the movie Shine where the guy is the pianist?

He plays the piano and the next scene is he's in the psych hospital. My experience was similar to his. I'm playing Chopin and suddenly I am so inspired, and I am playing musically in a way I never did before or since. And then panic came up. My theory is that it's when we are feeling

really good old, unresolved feelings emerge because they can, because we are strong enough to hold them. That's why sometimes we run away from feeling good, because we don't want the experience of these repressed feelings coming up, such as the panic. Anyway, that's theory. But what happened was, the panic emerged and I froze mid-performance. And then I think, "All these people here love me. They're not my enemies. They're with me." And so I realize, Oh, okay, I can play. Now, I didn't go back to playing the way I had been playing, but I played some notes [laughs], any notes, until I found the notes on the page so I could play those notes, and I finished and nobody died. It was ok for the worst to happen. But having felt that panic and neutralized it with a sense of support from my audience, I felt a new strength within me. I was stronger for having had that experience of really—we could say touching God, or touching the core of musical genius. So that's was a peak experience. It's not a Kodak moment at Christmastime, but it is a moment that I treasure.

And there are other moments like that, where I have been able to access the best of me and be connected to either a composer or art or other people or to myself.

I don't know if you want to hear another one. I was in my work and I was very disrupted last spring, emotionally, where I had more emotion available to me because of something going on in my personal life. So I was emotional, and because I was emotional, I was saying things in my groups—I have five therapy groups in my office—and I was saying things in my groups like, "This is what you <u>have</u> to do." [Laughs] I was a quiet mouse when I started as a therapist—I'm not a mouse anymore, and I was saying these very controlling things. This is not the most effective way to create change in people. So the patients were getting disrupted, which I'm

ashamed to say. This is what happens. They started fighting with me, and fighting with each other, because they were getting stirred up. So I'm like, "Oh my God, this is horrific."

In one particular group that I want to talk about—I'll make up some names. I'll say Diane and Jennifer, which are made up names. So Diane is angry at Jennifer because Jennifer is a new member and Diane knows I care deeply about Jennifer and she is afraid that she is no longer going to be the hot shit in the group. She's really angry, and she's mean and she's hostile. I'm thinking, "Oh my God, I'm abusing Jennifer to put her in the group." But I borrowed some psychodrama techniques, one particular session, and I said, "Okay I want each of you to think about who in your psychological world could protect you and help you feel safe." And Jennifer named me, that I could help her. And I said, "Well I have a different role here, so ask Angela—another pseudonym for one of the other patients—ask Angela to sit in this chair next to you and hold your hand and protect you, so that you don't have to feel afraid." And she did that and Angela was sitting next to her. And Diane chose Linda to sit next to her. So they each had somebody to hold their hand.

So Diane said something Jennifer experienced as attacking, and Jennifer said, "I don't know how to respond," so she talked with Angela and they decided together how she should respond, and she responded, "what you said reminds me of what my brother used to say to me, and it triggers me." Diane started to attack back, only this time I was a little quicker, and I came around and doubled, speaking as Diane to Jennifer, and said, "Jennifer, when I was six years old, my mother went away. I was left with my father at the kitchen table telling me how suicidal he was and how unhappy he was, and he filled me all up with all of that. And who is going to take care of me?"

I doubled the first part—she accepted it, said it, started to cry, she cried for five or ten minutes, remembering the pain of her mother being occupied elsewhere, and then she said, "Jennifer, I realize, it's not just you, it's anyone Dr. K would have added to this group. It's not you, it's anybody who would be added to this group, I would feel threatened with the responsibility to take care of them, and I would be hostile towards them, and I would be afraid of the the painful feelings from my mother being away, and no one taking care of me, because there was no one to take care of me when my mother went away. I never got enough from my mother, and then I had to take care of my father. So if anybody new comes in, I'm going to feel like I have to take care of them. It isn't you, it's what my family set me up with."

It was a wow. Each person was in touch with the meaning of their triggers, and they were able to transcend their transferences from the past, and appreciate the opportunity they were for each other, the opportunity to access previously buried feelings and integrate them with new understandings. So that was a high for me. It was even more elegant than the way I'm describing it. It was really beautiful and it was important work. Again, now they are best buddies and getting along just fine and that whole group is just singing. That's something I love. I don't know if it was a peak moment exactly, but it was a moment I'll certainly always look back on and say, This was a great experience. I was powerless as a child but today I can effect change.

I have other experiences like that. I gave a two day conference attended by forty-two people, and we made $4,700 for the organization, which was a record. It was a two-day workshop in which I was introducing therapists to psychodrama and it was—for two days, it was like a symphony

from start to finish. The participants were engaged in the work and getting realizations, and the realizations cascaded throughout the group, because everybody—it's not just one person who gets it, the people who witness the action also get realizations about their own path and their own childhoods. That was a really great experience, too.

Q: [That had to be richly satisfying. Are there other instances--?]

Korshak: Oh, I have one more! I have one more. My wedding. I was fifty-three when I got married for the first time. I call it a cascade of miracles and surprises. It was going to be a small wedding at the courthouse on a Friday morning, on Valentine's day, because that happened to fit into my work schedule between professional conferences. People who heard about it kept giving me support that I'd never experienced. And I learned, that's how people are supposed to be when you get married, or when anything good happens in your life. People are supposed to call to say, "congratulations, this is wonderful!" [Laughs] And I didn't know that because I'd never had that experience before.

More and more people were coming so we went down to the synagogue and got married by the rabbi, and by the time it happened there were one hundred people. Everybody left work, everybody came and showed up. That was a wonderful experience, and the wedding day was wonderful from beginning to end. I forgot my makeup at home, and it didn't matter. I used my bathroom curtains as a shawl because they were beautiful lace, and I couldn't find anything to buy that pretty. They were upside down and inside out, and it didn't matter, [laughs] because the

people were there and the community showed up and it was so loving. I had to mention that one too. Thank you for listening to it and allowing it.

Q: [What do you look forward to happening in the future?]

01:54:56 Korshak: Right now, it's hard to see past the trip. That's really big. I never left work for more than a week, or maybe two. I'm used to taking one, and I'm taking almost four weeks off work for this trip. I started talking to my patients this week, telling people, and people are pretty supportive, saying, "Yes, take care of your self." I really am there for my patients. I used to have rigid boundaries, but I really love my work and they know it, and so I'm not against giving, and I text with my patients now if they initiate it, even outside the sessions themselves. So far they're like, "Yes, take care of yourself, we're glad you're taking care of yourself, we'll figure it out."

So, I'm looking forward to this trip. And I'm look forward to a series of trips, because it is something my husband and I do well. I anticipate that we'll do an adventurous trip every two or three years somewhere, which might look like Paris or it might look like something more exotic. I'm always for the exotic, and he's always for the Ritz Carlton. So we have to come up with compromises. I have learned to like the Ritz! [Laughs]

01:56:41 Korshak: So there are trips, but I also was just thinking of making a bucket list. I really, really, really want to do more writing. I contributed one article that I think is a real contribution, that somebody may discover in twenty or fifty years. This paper is my heart, even though it's only ten pages, or so. The psychodynamic effect is the principle that dictates that the rich get

richer, because they have more and more resources, and the poor get poorer. This paper introduces a psychodrama technique to reverse that effect. I never liked psychodrama because people can get marginalized. So I was co-facilitating a workshop, and one point I told my partner that I wasn't willing to use the classical format that tends to marginalize people. I just am not willing to have that in my workshop. So she went back to this scholar and talked to him and we all talked, and we looked in the old writings of the father of psychodrama, Jacob Moreno, and we realized we could take one of his techniques, and reverse it, and that solved the problem about marginalizing people, and then we wrote a paper about it. I use it in all my workshops, and it's a very powerful technique.

In the paper, we argue for the integration of previously marginalized people. We notice that the people who are the ones who would get marginalized tend to be the members of the group who are closest to "God," like the shamans in some societies. If you can reintegrate those people back into your community, you now have a community that is ethical if not spiritual. We make the point that chaos theory teaches that it's at the edge of order where the emergence of new possibilities exist and where creativity is maximal. We also make the point of how Taoism teaches that within yin there is always a seed of yang and visa versa, so that within each of us there are the seeds of each other; therefore, in accepting the people we might otherwise exclude we may be accepting parts of ourselves.

I would like to see this technique practiced in nursery schools and kindergartens as well as in other groups. Not only do the children not get marginalized, but the community is richer for being able to tap into the resources of the people on the margins.

Q: [Can you explain more about this article, and the people to whom you refer?]

02:01:14 Korshak: Well, it's three of us, we all contributed. So it was Ed Schreiber, who is a Moreno scholar, and Marianne Shapiro, my co-facilitator who is a psychodramatist who practices in Seattle.

Jacob Moreno is the father of psychodrama and sociometry. He developed techniques to help us access and make manifest our deepest truths, such as the rage I spoke about earlier that I expressed towards my father by going back to a scene when I was four years old. He developed role play and role reversal, techniques used by Fritz Perls, the father of Gestalt psychotherapy, and Virginia Satir, the founder of family therapy and play therapy. Moreno made psychotherapy not just an intellectual exercise but a relational experience.

So it's in my heart is to write, and to leave a legacy of whatever is going to be helpful to society, to community, and to the field of psychotherapy. Moreno starts his book, *Who Shall Survive* saying: any truly therapeutic technique needs to bring healing to the whole world. He cared about the whole world, and I do too. But in my writing I want to be deliberate, and to give some thought to what would be useful to write about. I also want to collaborate with colleagues, because I'm a believer that if I collaborate, the work will likely be more useful than what I can create on my own. I'm trying to contact some of the leaders in the field of process addiction, so we can collaborate.

But you are asking me what's in my future. I want to continue to build on my group work in my office, because I think that's the most powerful way I can help people. I want to train other therapists. I'm continuing to give workshops in both group psychotherapy and also psychodrama. I'm doing as much as I can, but I've come to understand that more doesn't mean better. I need to pay attention to going slowly enough so that the quality of what I do is as good as it can be, so I can make meaningful contributions.

Q: [So if you could go back in time and whisper into the ear of a young Shelley some advice, what would it be?]

02:05:23 Korshak: Oh that's brilliant, that's great. Well, I want to do three, I can't do one. You know me.

Q: [That's fine.]

02:05:40 [Laughs] Thank you. I would go back to me in grade school—I don't know what age—and whisper, "Get a therapist." That would've been wonderful. I might go back to age twenty and say, "Go to twelve-step meetings," because they offered the wisdom and support I needed for my own growth and development. But, maybe then I wouldn't have gone to medical school, so I'm not sure [laughs] if it would've been in my best interest. I'm saying this as a fantasy,

I can say—I'd like to deviate for a minute, and say the best decision I ever made in my life was to go to medical school, number one. Number two, to go to twelve-step meetings, and number

three, to marry my husband. So those are the three best decisions I've made. I think I also would go back multiple times and say, "Cherish this person." I would've said, "Speak your truth about how you feel about them, not in a blaming way but in a sincere way, to share with them the impact they have on you. Tell your father that you love him. Don't be shy. Even if he's all embarrassed when you say that, let that reaction wash off." Of everything, that's what I would say. I would say, at multiple ages, "Don't be stopped by the other person playing small. Say whatever is in your heart that's true. Go ahead and say it. If you are saying something loving, you can say it again and again and as loud as you like, or as soft as you like. Go for it." That's what I would say because I think I learned to be quiet as a child, and as you can tell by our conversation now [laughs], I have learned to talk. I just really love what happens, from using words in a way that's loving and wise.

Q: [Well, we'll end there. Thanks so much for your time and insights.]

02:08:25 Korshak: Yes, this interview has been a real pleasure for me [laughs]. I'm embarrassed about some of it, but I'm grateful to you. Some of what's happened in this interview is I've put things together a little differently. I've discovered two or three things that I'll play with more. My life has more meaning, my history has more meaning, because of this conversation. So I'm grateful to you, for your help with this.

Q: [Thank you for your rich reflections.]

02:09:08 Korshak: Yes, I'm a big believer in conversation. That's the point of our talking, is that that we can bounce off each other and identify and differentiate our choices and our paths. Good.

Thank you. If you get any thoughts from this, please do call, or not, it would be your choice. But I really thank you for the meaningful conversation today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]