

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Gail Perlick

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Gail Perlick conducted by Frances Connell on September 9th, 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: Gail Perlick

Location: Mequon, WS via SKYPE

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell

Date: September 9th, 2015

00:00:01 Q: This is an interview taking place with Gail Perlick at her home in—outside of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. We are doing this via Skype. The interviewer is Frances Connell. Today is September 9, 2015. And this is for the Barnard College Voices class of 1971 Oral History Project.

All right, so Gail. I'm looking at you as a [senior] at Barnard College back in 1971 in our Mortarboard graduation picture. But I'd like you to go back and to start telling me a bit about your childhood. What you remember as significant in your growing up years. Your family, your relationship with them, those kind of good personal details.

[INTERRUPTION]

00:00:57 Q: So we lost a little bit of the interview there. So let me just rehash what you were telling me before good old Skype cut us off. So you said that you were born in April 1949, and that you're the youngest of your sisters and that you were born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At that time you said that your parents lived in a small flat on North 57th Street, and you grew up in a very close family with a large extended family all there in the Wisconsin area. You did the usual things, of going to school, but something that was very big in your home was that you had this

summer cottage on the nearby inland lake called Nagawicka Lake. You explained there were many names here, there rather, that have Indian or Native American backgrounds. And that Nagawicka Lake is one of them.

You had a family compound there and that was—which your grandfather had bought. And it was a truck farm. And then you were about to explain that a truck farm was a place where they raised vegetables. So let's pick up again from there.

[INTERRUPTION]

00:02:27 Perlick: —if you know what that is. This is a space where they would raise vegetables and then sell them in the city, Milwaukee. In those days there were no highways going out to this area, it would take you all day to get out there. So my grandfather kind of created this family compound, and we had a cottage. It was a former chicken coop that was turned into a cottage. No heat. Didn't need heat [laughs]. And it was very basic, but we spent summers out there. And I became a very good sailor. I raced in what were called cub boats, X boats at that time. I was very close with my family growing up.

And an important thing that influenced my life growing up—

[INTERRUPTION]

00:03:32 Perlick: An important thing and something that I think always made me different growing up, or at least I felt so—and this was true in the 1950s and 1960s—at the age of twelve I was five feet ten inches tall. At twelve my sister would take me to the state fair and enter me in the contest, you know, where they would guess your age. And we always won the biggest kewpie doll because they thought I was twenty-one when I was twelve. And so this had a very—I mean, you know, my family doesn't necessarily agree with me on this, but from my standpoint this had a very big effect on me. I was always very serious. And I was always a very good student. And here I am, I'm twelve years old, and people think I'm twenty-one. And so there is this—this what some—I forget, psychologists have a word for this, an age/size problem where you are mistaken for being much older than you are.

So at the age of twelve I was already taking care of my mom. She was my “little mom.” She was five foot three, and I was five feet ten. And that influenced my growing up, because I was very serious and a very good student, and I continued to be very serious and a very good student all the way through high school. And I was one of those kind of kids I had to run everything. You know? Be on the student council and be an officer. And run everything.

And so when it was time—and you guess—I'm guessing you want me to tell—tell how I wound up at Barnard, right Frances? Okay.

Q: [So talk a little about friendships prior to college, who you spent time with?]

00:05:36 Perlick: Oh yes I had many good friends. Yes. Well, you know, I finally did go to prom. I mean I joke about—well, when I was in sixth grade there were only two guys taller than me. Two students taller than me, two boys. And both of these boys had flunked several times, so they were older [laughs]. And I still remember their names but I won't record it for you. But it was very difficult to be so tall so young. I was always mistaken for being older.

[INTERRUPTION]

00:06:14 Perlick: I was—you wanted to hear again about the birth order situation and also about the cottage, and so I'll give you that again.

I was one of two daughters and I was the second daughter. I was very close to my family, my mom and my dad and my sister. My grandfather on my dad's side had purchased this piece of land on Nagawicka Lake in Wisconsin. And this is about—well now there's a super highway that goes out there, but when I was growing up it would take you about an hour to get there because there were only two-lane roads. And we would go move out there for the summer. And so I would be surrounded by my aunt and uncle and cousin and my sister and my mom and dad and my grandma and grandpa.

We lived in a cottage there that my grandpa had converted from a chicken coop into a cottage. Now needless to say there—it had no heat in it. Yes it had running water but it was pretty basic. But being on Nagawicka Lake, I was able to be involved in sailing. And I sailed a cub boat. That's a class X 16 foot boat that children race on the inland lakes in Wisconsin. And these

inland lake in Wisconsin—now here comes—this is a fable, were created by Paul Bunyon and Babe the blue ox walking north to Minnesota. And then, you know, Babe made all these imprints in the ground. And then the rain rained and it stayed in there, and that’s how these inland lakes were created. Well, that’s the myth. The real truth is they were created by the glacier, which was receding. And so they are fresh water lakes and there are quite a few of them in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

So I was on one of these inland lakes growing up and I sailed these cub boats. In time I was the instructor for the cub boat school growing up. And I worked in a restaurant nearby as a bus girl. My dad was a good German, and he believed that it was important to work. And I learned how to work. I had a job from the age of fourteen and I had to have special papers to have a job at age fourteen, until I just recently retired fifty-one years later. And I recently asked my dad, who’s now in heaven, he just passed away about eleven months ago, “Daddy, did I work long enough now?” And he said, “Yes.”

Q: [Was your mother also German in origin?]

00:09:10 Perlick: Yes, both of them were completely German. Her family was actually immigrants. One of her siblings was born in Germany. But her mother and father came from Germany. My dad’s family came from Germany also, but they had been in the United States another generation or so. But we had the German work ethic, oh yes, in spades. And I was very square growing up. Very square. Very serious. And a lot of the seriousness came from being five feet ten inches tall at the age of twelve. And now I was not as heavy as I am now—and I’m not

that heavy, but I have had three sons and worked all the way through in my life, so I'm not the same weight that I was at age twelve, but people used to call me bean pole at that time. It was not cool to be very serious and twelve years old and five feet ten inches tall [laughs]. And so that was something that I dealt with growing up.

I looked older than my older sister. I looked older than everybody my age [laughs]. And it was challenging because in the 1950s and 1960s that was not cool. You know, as a girl you were supposed to be pink and petite and giggle and all of that. And I really didn't do any of that [laughs]. I was very serious. And so I was a very good student. I gave the graduation address at my high school graduation and was involved in—oh gosh I had to run everything and had to get all A's. You know how that is Frances, I'm sure you were the same way. And was overly busy and overly committed all the way through high school. But I was very lucky to have a wonderful mother and father who loved me, and we were very close.

Q: [What were some other activities and classes which you remember?]

00:11:46 Perlick: Okay, you mean when I—after I want to college Frances?

Q: [Prior to college.]

00:11:49 Perlick: Oh, oh. Oh goodness. Well I ran the prom. I was the vice president of the student council. And you know it's such a long time ago now, I can't remember, but I was constantly running something and over committed. I went to school from, you know, seven

fifteen in the morning, I didn't get back until five o'clock most nights. And then I did my homework [laughs]. So lots of activities, extracurriculars I would call them.

Q: [Do you remember dating in high school?]

00:12:25 Perlick: Oh heavens no because I was too tall and too old looking. But I did go to the prom. And I went to the prom with one of these kids from sixth grade, who had flunked several times, [laughs] because he was tall enough. Oh yes. And then I went to another one of the dances at school with another basketball player because he was tall enough. But I wasn't really that interested in—I wasn't interested in the social [life] particularly. I was very focused on getting my good grades and doing all of the things that I was involved in, in school. So I played the piano, and I sang in the choir, both the choir at school and at church, and I was very busy in my church. And so the importance of men—nah, I didn't care that much about them. I mean yes, I would have liked to have had more dates, so to speak, but I was too busy really. And I was also too tall [laughs].

Q: [What kind of church were you raised in?]

00:13:54 Perlick: We belonged to a—what is now—at the time it was called Evangelical and Reformed. The Germans called it Evangelisch. And it, in time, joined the UCC, the United Church of Christ. But that was the church that I grew up in and my husband and I were married at, yes. Calvary Memorial United Church of Christ. We then—we've been very active in our church which is actually a congregational church which is the same tradition, yeah.

Q: [Involvement in one's church for a young person was pretty common in that part of the country.]

00:14:34 Perlick: Oh very definitely more so than in the East. Yes, yes. I was very square when I came to Barnard [laughs]. Still am pretty square.

Q: [So, who was the most influential person in your life, prior to coming to college?]

00:14:55 Perlick: Most influential in my life prior to coming to Barnard would have been my mother and father, yes. And my father, who I'm very much like—and he just went to heaven, as I've said, eleven months ago. That's where I got the height from, he was about six feet one—and he would say to me "Sweetie, do not worry, one day your height and the fact that you're a smart girl will be very attractive to a lot of men." And that was true [laughs]. But not in high school.

Q: [What kind of work did your father do?]

00:15:48 Perlick: We have a business here in Wisconsin, and that's what brought me back. We manufacture beverage dispensing equipment and commercial refrigeration equipment. We bend metal. We are the kind of businesses that are dying because they're all moving overseas. But we are still in business, and have been since 1917.

Q: [And you mother? Can you tell me a story about her that shows what she was like?]

00:16:18 Perlick: Yes, this is on my father's side, yes. My mother was the most loving and fabulous woman in the world. She did nothing but help other people, something that was very—and she had jobs too throughout. She was a travel agent and she took care of one of our buildings. Oh, she had her license as a boilerman [laughs], I think. But she had—when she was in her young thirties, she was diagnosed with breast cancer and they took—and she had two little girls at the time. And they told my father that she would be dead in three months.

She died forty-two years later, not of breast cancer. And as a result of this she was the most positive human being in the world. One day in high school—and I told this story at her funeral. Yes, she died forty-two years later. Yes she died of cancer, but it was not breast cancer. She thought it was either a miracle or a misdiagnosis. And it had recurred on the other side, so I think it was probably a miracle.

But one day when I was in high school still living at home, and this is way before cell phones and computers and all this stuff that keeps track of all of our schedules in life. I used to have a big paper calendar that I had on the wall of my bedroom and I would write down all of my commitments. And I was always over-committed [laughs] on all these many days of all these things that I had to do. And then at the end of the day I would cross it off. And one day she saw me doing that and she looked at me and she got very upset and she said, “Never, ever cross off the days of your life.” And I never did again. I never did again.

She is the kind of woman—every time some woman was diagnosed with breast cancer she was there to give them comfort. And she would joke and say—she'd make deals with God, “Oh, if I can just live long enough to see my girls graduate from high school. Oh, can I just live long enough to see them get married? Oh, can I just live long enough to maybe see some grandchildren?” And she did. I mean she still died relatively young. She looked like she was fifty. She was small. But she looked like me. She had dark hair like me. She was like a mini version of me. When she died she looked like she was in her fifties, but she was only seventy-four. But she was a fabulous, fabulous woman. She had a huge influence on all of her grandchildren. She had five of them. Three of them were mine. And a huge influence on everyone that she met because of her incredibly, sunshiny, upbeat, positive disposition. So she was also—I adored her. I still think of her every day and she's been dead for nineteen years. So I was a very lucky girl.

When my dad was dying, I was with him right to the end. And I kept thanking him for being born to—he and my mom. And you know, we don't get to choose who we're born to, we just are lucky if we have two people like them. So she was a wonderful person, wonderful, yeah. I try to be like her as much as I can be. And he was—oh my father was an unbelievable man. When you worked for us at our business, you were part of our family. Everybody got a turkey at Christmas. And if you were in trouble, you'd go see him. He was known for bailing people out. Always did it. Never told anybody. It was always secret. But he was a servant leader. If there were more men like him in this world the world would be a much better place, a much better place. And I miss him every day. I'm the executor of his estate. So even though I've retired recently I have not

been retired [laughs], because we have a business. And it's—I'm in charge of all the details of his estate still.

So that's kind of—that would sum up my growing up years in Milwaukee. Yes, I was born in Milwaukee but then we moved to a close in suburb. And here comes another Indian name, Wauwatosa. And then when I was about in sixth grade we moved to a community called Elm Grove. It was just a little bit farther out. And that was tough because I was in sixth grade. And I was the new kid, and then here I am five feet ten inches tall. And then there were kids calling me pill boxes, and I was way too tall and too mature and all that stuff. But you know, it all was character building [laughs]. And that's where one of the guys that I went to prom with, that's when I met him. His first name was Scott but I will not give his last name because I don't want him to hear—because he was one of the people that was held back several times, and that's why he was taller than me [laughs], but anyway.

Q: [What do you remember of current events when you were growing up? Assassinations, wars, civil rights?]

00:22:18 Perlick: Oh yes, I was—I tried to be pretty aware. Now as I've said, I was square. My family was square. We knew how to work and be very reliable individuals. But I do remember when the man was walking on the moon. I do remember that. We watched that together. And I was aware of the political environment, yes, growing up and what was going on in it. And yes, I was actually—that was in college, I was a member of Young Republicans for a little while, not

long, in college at the beginning of college. But that would probably sum up my political awareness. [Laughs] I was pretty busy so I didn't have a lot of time to spend a lot of time on it.

But I did read the newspaper and grew up to be a journalist as we haven't talked about yet. But anyway it started young and I thought that was very good to be able to be able to be paid to educate yourself and help bring information to the world in an unbiased way, help them feel like they were there to know what was happening. So I was interested in that early on, yes.

Q: [Okay. How about the process of deciding to go to Barnard, and arriving there for the first time?]

00:24:12 Perlick: Okay, now you need to know that I transferred into Barnard. And when I was growing up, as I told you, my father was a very traditional German. And he felt that he paid taxes to the State of Wisconsin and so his daughter should go to the University of Wisconsin, my older sister went there. And then because I graduated way up high in the top of my class I also qualified for a small honors scholarship to go to the University of Wisconsin. And I kind of wanted to see what the rest of the world was like, a little bit. But my father was very determined and I did have this partial scholarship. So I went to the University of Wisconsin for the first two years.

I went there and I was happy there, but it was very much—oh, it's very, very big. Classes were very large. And there was a lot of drinking and fooling around that went on. And I participated a little bit in that, but I wasn't terribly interested in that. And I was still, you know, very tall and

very serious. And I was doing very well at the University of Wisconsin, academically, and I was in something called the Mortar Board. They came around and tapped you in your dormitory for being a student leader. I was involved in student government. I ran into the woman who was the secretary of the UW student government. She was older. At that time she was, I think she was an RA in the dorm that I lived in. And she latched onto me and got me involved in being her assistant at UW student government. So I got to know many of the leaders on campus who are friends of mine still [laughs]. I was active in student government there and that's how I got tapped for mortar board. I was a good student. But there was a lot of drinking and goofing around going on there, and I wasn't really into that.

Q: [What else do you remember of that experience?]

00:26:06 Perlick: It was kind of interesting, because at the beginning—and this is the late '60s. And you were in college at this time so you know, Frances, what was going on. At the beginning of my time there, there would be panty raids, believe this or not. Boys would come to the dormitory and scream, “We want silk! We want silk!” And then girls would send their underwear down floating out into the air. Well as you know, by the time I left UW Madison, and UW Madison was quite a liberal place, there were no more panty raids. After the second year of my being there, ooh, the dorms were being tear gassed because we had Vietnam demonstrations going on. And so there was a big change in the environment just during the time that I was there. And that was interesting as I watched that.

But I was still yearning. I thought I would like to see what some of the rest of the world might be like, to go to school in a place that wasn't just a couple of hours from home, that would be different. And so as a sophomore, I thought, Well, I think I would like to make a change here. And so I applied to—and I knew about the Seven Sisters schools. And I applied to a bunch of them. And I thought, I would be interested to see if this is where all the really smart girls are, I want to see how smart they are [laughs].

So I got into Smith and Wellesley, and Barnard to transfer. And at Barnard—my mom and I went to visit. I took my little mom with me and we went to visit. She looked at everything there and said, “Honey, you're not going to fit in here.” And she was right. Now—but I chose Barnard because I went to Wellesley and Smith and looked at them, and these were these pretty schools out in the middle of nowhere. And that's not what I thought was me. And so I thought I would like to go to New York and see what this was about. And then I was attracted by the fact—I was an economics major. They told me that I could take classes in the graduate economics department at Columbia, and at the business school at Columbia as a Barnard undergraduate. And that appealed to me because I already had in my head what I was going to do was get an economics degree, and then I was going to go to graduate school and become a financial journalist, because at that time there were not many women that were doing that. And I thought, This is going to be a spot for me [laughs].

So I was attracted by the intellectual environment at Barnard and the chance to take all those classes at Columbia, which I did do once I got there. But it is true that I did not fit in at Barnard in 1969. I arrived, and I lived at Plimpton when it was almost brand new. I had suitemates who,

you know, their boyfriends were all over the place. You know? They were with us all the time. And some of them had been involved in a lot of the anti-war demonstrations. And some of them were taking drugs. And that was not anything that you did as a very square girl from the Midwest [laughs].

But I brought who I was, and tried to stay who I was there. That was difficult to begin with. But what I did enjoy about Barnard was I was able to take these classes, and I enjoyed them very much. And the economics department was small and we had seminars with Raymond J. Saulnier, who was the head of the department at that time. He had been the chairman of the Board of Economic Advisors for Dwight Eisenhower during his presidency. And here we were, five girls that got to have, you know, these classes with him. And you know, truly what he mostly talked about was “Well, when I was the Chairman of the Board, you know,” and then he’d tell us all about his experience. And he didn’t really teach us as much about economics as I wanted to learn. I think he just recently passed away a couple of years ago. But that was very fun. And I loved being able to take the classes at Columbia.

One of my roommates at Plimpton—you know, there were five roommates. Did you live at Plimpton, Frances?

Q: [Yes, one semester.]

00:31:05 Perlick: Okay, you know exactly what it is. We had a kitchen and a common area and then the bedrooms. One of my roommates that first semester, who I loved dearly—and I think

she died young, but what a wonderful girl from New Jersey. And you know, she and I would talk about things. She was Jewish and I of course am Christian, and we would talk about all the traditions in the—and I’ve forgotten some of the traditions—but all the traditions that both of us grew up with. But I remember her dad coming in and asking me, he said, “Well, how do you like going to a girls’ school?” And I said to him, “You know, I hadn’t noticed.” I was taking a lot of classes at Columbia right from the start.

But some of the classes—in addition to the economic classes, I loved particularly these classes that I took on the intellectual history of the United States with Dr. [Robert A.] McCaughey, who I think is still teaching. He was fabulous. And then I took some classes at Columbia, the intellectual history of Europe. And we were assigned to read—I still remember—like fourteen books in one semester! And I read them all [laughs]. And it was very challenging to stay up with this. It was a class of, like, ten people that you could really get into these wonderful conversations with the professor, and he was a full professor. So I really enjoyed the academic part of Barnard.

And the other thing that I really appreciated about Barnard, at that time, was it was okay to be a smart girl. And I had accepted by then—I remember when I was at the University of Wisconsin, one day I looked in the mirror in my room in the dorm. I looked at myself—and this was, oh, my second year I think—and I said to myself, “Gail, you are big. You are tall. You look older. And you can’t wear pink. And you’re not sweet and petite. And just accept it. Be who you are.” And by then I had accepted it. And so I was happy to be in an environment where it was okay to be smart and encouraged. Yes, I didn’t really fit in with a lot of the very left wing anti war stuff

going on. I listened to it all. I talked to people about it. I even had one roommate once whose boyfriend was dropping off tablets in my mail box, and she was capping mescaline. And I was so stupid, I was so square, I didn't know that that's what she was doing with it. So all of that didn't really fit with me at all.

Q: [Oh, no!]

00:34:17 Perlick: But I did find some friends that were more like me. And enjoyed that. I mean Michelle Patrick will tell you that I founded something called the Barnard Dating Service. I thought these girls needed to have more fun. And it was written up, I think, in *Mademoiselle* magazine, I think. And Michelle will always tell you, "Yeah," she says, "Gail, what I remember about you is you always said 'These Barnard girls need to know how to have more fun, to be happy.'"

One of my roommates my second year, as a senior, she was very—well, I lived in an apartment for a while and then I moved back to Plimpton, long story about why. But my roommate was very involved with a boyfriend and it just wasn't working out well. But I came back to Plimpton, and I had a roommate that semester who said to me—and she was dealing with various questions about drugs and trying to find herself—but she said to me, "Gail, there's one thing that really drives me nuts about you. You know what it is?" And I said, "No, what is it?" "Because I didn't want to make anybody mad at me. "You're too happy." And so I was a girl from the Midwest, and my mother trained me to rejoice in life and be happy. And that was not necessarily—everybody was filled with a lot of angst at that time. Not now anymore. You know?

I remember after I graduated from Barnard and I came back to some reunions, because I worked in New York City for a long time, and then I would see people that I knew and they'd say, "Oh Gail." And I'd look at them and I didn't recognize them because they had—well, they had changed. You know? When we were in school it was important, don't comb your hair too often and, you know, wear sloppy clothes and all that sort of stuff. But they looked much more like me. Now, you know, they would have said at the time that they'd sold out to, you know, a more traditional lifestyle. But they recognized me because I was really the same. I didn't change. And I'm still pretty square. That came from my background. I've never been in a huge amount of trouble in my life. And I think that probably a lot of that is related to the fact that I was very square. I didn't experiment with things. I never, never took any drugs. I think I was high on marijuana once because my roommates smoked so much of it. It was in the air and it didn't feel right. But I was square.

And then so, you know, now I love all the Barnard graduates because they are more like me. And many of them have gone on to do wonderful things. And the encouragement that girls got at Barnard I think was very, very important at that time. And because of this, you know, being very tall and looking older and being very serious, that was all okay at Barnard—even though I was square. Now, you know, that wasn't so good, but my roommates dealt with me. I was square. And they had various, you know, names that they called me as a result of it, but it's okay.

But now I like to gather with Barnard graduates because they—so many serious women. At the University of Wisconsin, yes, there were a lot of girls—and, yes, I knew some of them—they got

married after their sophomore year. They didn't have any hopes and dreams for themselves. And I had hopes and dreams for myself. And I was happy to be around—even though yes it was a very tumultuous environment at Columbia at that time, in 1969 when I came. But I liked being around people that liked to read books and were interested in all those kinds of things.

And when I was at Barnard [laughs] I was involved in yearbook. And one year, I was the business manager of the yearbook, and it was the first year that the Barnard—what did we call it? The Mortarboard, I think. Wasn't that the name of our yearbook? Yes. It was the first year that it had been run in the black, in other words, made money. Because I went out personally and I sold ads at all the stores along Broadway to appear in that yearbook so that we were not in the red. And for that they gave me the Barnard bear pin award [laughs] when I graduated. But anyway, and so we had an office, you know, in Mackintosh Hall.

And so that part of Barnard I enjoyed, and that's only gotten better as the years have gone on, you know, because so many of the Barnard women they were like me then. But many of them were more interested in "the revolution," you know, that was supposedly coming at that time. But I really enjoy getting together with them now and staying in touch because—and that's something that I think Barnard is still good at, encouraging women to dream dreams and become what they want to be. And there wasn't—in the time when I was growing up in Wisconsin, there wasn't that for girls. No. And so that was important to me. So that's how I came to Barnard [laughs].

Q: [So were there specific times when you thought, “This is wrong. I shouldn’t be here.” And how did you deal with it?]

00:41:06 Perlick: Oh very definitely, yes, yes. Oh well, I was a—well I think I had the benefit of coming from a very strong family who supported me. And I remember telling Martha [E.] Peterson once—who was the president of Barnard at that time, and had a connection to Wisconsin, had been out here, I think, at Beloit College¹. I’d have to look that up. But she had a connection to Wisconsin—and I remember telling her once, “You know Ms. Peterson, there isn’t really a place for a girl like me at Barnard.” I did feel alone. My one Jewish roommate encouraged me a lot and we would—I would talk about, oh, various traditions and she taught me about the Chanukah fairy because—well we shared some connections there.

But I felt very alone. And how did I deal with that? Well, I just did what I always did. Be a good student and try and make a positive difference in the world. I mean I did enjoy when I went into that yearbook thing. And “Oh, well, we’ve never made any money, this has always been a money losing effort.” And I thought, No, no, no, this doesn’t have to be a money losing effort. We can do this. And so those kinds of things. And I did run into various girls in student government that I felt I had things in common with. But it was a tough time to be a very square girl from the Midwest at Barnard. I think that it’s easier now to be a pretty square girl from the Midwest at Barnard than it was in 1969. But you know, that does build character too. And you learn about

¹ Martha E. Peterson came from being Dean of Women at University of Wisconsin in 1967 to accept the presidency at Barnard; and she returned to Wisconsin in 1975 to be president of Beloit College.

the world. And I learned that the world outside of Wisconsin, and my very close knit family, was very, very different. And it was good for me to learn how to function in that environment.

But I remember feeling lonely, yes, I do remember that. I walked over to Riverside Church on occasion to go to church there. And there weren't any other girls that went to church [laughs]. So I was always the only younger person there. But I just carried on. And oh, I had a lot of dates, oh my goodness. My dad was right about that because I was taking classes at the business school. And in the economics department. I met a lot of guys from Columbia who I went out [with] all the time. And that was nice. But I really enjoyed the academic life there and the encouragement that it was okay to be a serious student and a woman. And that was important at that time. Yeah. I think you get more of that now in other environments, but at that time it wasn't that common.

Q: [What can you tell me about how you have seen your role as a woman change, since Barnard?]

00:44:41 Perlick: My role as a woman? Well, I've always believed that it is important to do positive things in the world. Now that doesn't have anything to do with being a woman particularly. But because the world can be a sad and dark place and part of the message of Christianity, Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. You don't put a light under a table, you put it on a table so that the light can shine. Bring light to the world." I believe that's very important. Now you can do that if you're a man or a woman, but I always felt that in—

With regard to being a woman. Yes, I did this idea of undergraduate economics and then I did a graduate degree in journalism. And then I worked at *The Wall Street Journal* and from there I went to *Time* magazine and then after about ten years in New York I moved back to Wisconsin. And then here in Wisconsin I worked at the local newspaper, *The Milwaukee Journal*. I was a college professor for thirty-two years at Marquette University teaching journalism and then later economics [laughs]. And then I have three sons, and a husband that I have been married to for forty-three years. And believe me, he was not a man that was—I raised my sons—I had said to them, “Now if you think you are going to find girls who will work all day for money, and then all night too, you won’t find them in your generation.” And I knew that was true because I’d been a college professor for thirty-two years. And I realize now looking back on it I was a role model for many, many young women. And they would come and talk to me hours, for hours at a time. And I always spent too much time with my students but I loved them. And I was writing, you know, on the side.

Oh well, anyway, it’s a long story, but getting back to your question. So I felt that it was the good thing to be in financial journalism as a woman at that time, because there weren’t many women in financial journalism at that time. I remember when I was at *Time* magazine, even though I was a young woman, when the budget documents would come in—you know, the federal budget documents. They’re all on-line now, but when I was there in the 1970s they would be a stack of documents, books, maybe a foot tall. And frequently they would wind up on my desk because I was the only one there with an actual economics degree. And you know, they thought I understood all that. I didn’t understand all of that. I was a young woman, but did have the economics degree. And we had a Board of Economists at that time. And I got to interview,

and knew personally people like Alan Greenspan. You know, he went on to be the Fed. Chair [Chair of the Federal Reserve]. And when I was out here teaching at Marquette in economics, many of the people that were in the textbooks that I'm teaching from out here are people that I interviewed when I was a young woman. And that was very challenging as a young woman. And very fun.

I found that I was able to, yes, as I grew older, be a role model for other young women that I was teaching and mentoring, so to speak. And also had an influence on the way my sons look at women. And you know, when you were a sixteen-years old in my family, you would be sent to the grocery store, which was called Pick And Save out here. And it's a big store where you have to go—it's like a warehouse kind of place. You go and get all your groceries and then you pack them all up. And I would send them with an enormous list. Now if you can consider that I had four men living in the house, plus me—and you have to understand, yes, I'm five ten but my husband is six five, and an ex-professional athlete, and all the boys eventually got bigger than me. We ate an enormous amount of food [laughs]! And so if I sent you to the grocery store to buy all this food, and bring it back—and I did this with my sons. I would give them the big list and then before the days cell phones I would show them a—here is the layout of the grocery store, where you will find all of these many things. And then go and buy it all and bring it all home, and I'll see you in two hours. And they did it. We had lessons in toilet cleaning, and how to cook, and all of that. Two of them are married and I think they have a great respect for the intelligence of their wives as a result. And I think that's a good thing. And they do a lot of the shared work together.

Q: [How else have you yourself been a role model, or lived how you think a woman should?]

00:49:58 Perlick: I'm hoping I'm answering the question there Frances. So serving as a role model to young women who are my students, trying to—well way back before I was the college professor when I was just interviewing all these people, trying to—I was very friendly with Alan Greenspan and Walter Heller and all of these people. And Walter [W.] Heller used to love to talk to me because he was from Wisconsin. You probably don't remember who he was, but he had advised JFK [John F. Kennedy], on economics. And he used to like to talk to me because I was from Wisconsin. And when I interviewed these people, they respected me as an intelligent person. And these guys were very, very smart. It was challenging to get it all straight and then write it all down, and explain this to someone who doesn't understand it. So the combination of being an economics person, and then in journalism, and then a college professor gave me many—and having three sons and a husband—gave me many opportunities to try and be a woman that is not silly, a woman that is taken seriously and respected so that other women will be taken seriously and be respected.

Nobody ever patted me on the head and said, "Nice little girl." No one ever did that. And that was—you know, even though my sons don't believe this, I told them, "Guys, you have to understand, being five feet ten made a big difference for me in my life in terms of being taken seriously." I remember, still, an example at *Time* magazine, another one of my colleagues—who had the same position that I did, we were both reporters, and she was very smart—and we were at a dinner one evening to honor Alan Greenspan, because he was just building his career at that time. I still remember the waiter went around the table and asked everybody what they wanted to

drink, you know, white wine or whatever you were ordering. And when he got to her—and she was only about oh, five six maybe if she was lucky. Maybe five four. Very smart girl but didn't have the size thing. Do you know what the waiter said to her? Now these are the days when this went on. "And what would you like, little girl?" True story.

Q: [Oh, no!]

00:52:34 Perlick: I had many things said to me also. But you could not pat me on head and call me little girl, because I was bigger than most of the men. So there was an advantage there. But the disadvantage was that I wasn't like other girls. I couldn't wear pink and—my mother who was this sweet short little lady, we'd go shopping and she would want me to buy all these, what I call, girly girl outfits. And I never wanted to buy any of them. And I would say to her, "Mom, I'm too big. I look like a clown in that." She didn't think so, but I did. But there were, then, a growing—later in life, tremendous advantages.

Another anecdotal story. I remember a colleague of mine down at Marquette, a youngish woman who was much shorter than me. And she was young and just trying to figure out how to get college students to respect her. You know, she was making some mistakes. One of them was she was wearing blue jeans; she looks like the college kids. I didn't say to her, "Just dress like an authority figure and that will help you a lot." But that would have helped her a lot. But in answer to her question, did I have trouble getting young people to take me seriously? The answer was never. Never. And there again I think it was the Barnard advantage, maybe, some, but also the size advantage because you had to take me seriously [laughs].

And now looking at it, I see that it was a huge advantage. I did not think it was an advantage when I was growing up, but I see that it is a big advantage. So I hope that I've been able to be a good role model for other young women, and teach all the men that I live with—one of my best jokes when I was teaching was—I didn't say this the first day in class, but I would say within the first couple of weeks, "I live with three boys and a husband, that's why I look the way I do." It always got a laugh, [laughs] because if you do that—do you have kids Frances? Yeah. How many?

Q: [Three sons.]

00:54:47 Perlick: You know in spades. Oh, we have a lot in common. We will have to get together at the next reunion and chat. You know—

Q: [Yeah, but I'm short. I'm five foot four and a half.]

Perlick: But you're five four and a half? [Laughs] But you know in spades what that is like. Everybody—and young men, they know it all at a certain age. And I don't know if your husband was better at it than mine, but my husband was not particularly good at cooking or remembering what I call the "details of life." I won't go into some funny stories, but he pulled quite a number of boners over the years with regard—

Q: [Please share one, to give a sense of your husband, the contrast.]

00:55:46 Perlick: You want a funny story? [Laughs] All right. Here we are—now since I now know you have three sons, this is a story of one of our very last son, whose name is Robert. We had all gone to school and gone to work that morning. I don't know if I was at the newspaper at that time or if I was at the university, but Robert got sick at school. He was six years old at the time. And now he is the third of three sons, so he's been battered around and, you know, he's a tough little guy and he can take care of himself. But he's six.

Well, the school calls me or tries to get me, and this is, again, the days before cell phones were so ubiquitous. Try to get me, and I was in class or I was—I don't remember if I was at the newspaper or at the university that day, but I was at work and they could not reach me. So they called my husband at work. And when I came home from work that day—and we lived in a very close by suburb called White Fish Bay, where the garage was separate from the house, but the lot was very small. So I parked my car in the garage and I'm walking in toward our family room—which was very close to the garage on the back of the house. It was a little addition we had put on—and here I see the television is on. And here I see that Robert is in the house. And I walked in the door and, yes, he had—at least the door was locked. But I said to him, “Robert, how did you get here?” And he said, “Oh, dad brought me. And it was great mom, we went to McDonald's for lunch and he brought me home.” And I said, “And where is dad?” “Oh, he went back to work, Mom.” Robert was six at the time.

And you know, I said to him later, “That was illegal. Do you know that was illegal?” “Oh, he was fine sweetie.” He was six! And yes we had close neighbors, but truly would he have been smart enough to know to call one of them if something happened? No. And yes he was the third of three boys and he had been thrown around a lot as a little guy, but still at the age of six. True story. He went back to work.

I told the school what happened; they were horrified. I said, “The next time when you can not find me, please hold Robert at school until you can reach me.” Now you know in today’s world that would never happen because everybody has cell phones, but that was a true story. Those were typical kinds of things. He’s a wonderful man but just not tuned into those kinds of things. Did your husband ever leave a six-year old home alone in your house?

Q: [No, he was usually gone, working, during their waking hours!]

00:58:51 Perlick: He wasn’t better? Oh.

Q: [Okay. So how did you two meet?]

00:58:55 Perlick: How did we meet, my husband and I? Well now Frances, this is probably way more than you want to hear about all of this stuff.

Q: [No, no. It’s an important part.]

00:59:02 Perlick: You're okay? Because you're going to edit this all, aren't you? Well, it is all about—it is once again all about height. Can you believe this? Oh Gail, this is crazy. All right, we met—where did we meet? My roommate at the time, when I was living in an apartment building as a senior, she was a friend of mine from the University of Wisconsin. She was actually a couple of years older than me and she was working at Columbia P & S [Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons] in the lab. And she was a pretty blonde girl, originally from the East coast. We decided we were going to live together in this apartment and the—it was—now it's all gentrified but it was a rough neighborhood on the edges of Columbia. But she was working at P & S, Columbia Physicians and Surgeons. And my husband, who's from Pittsburgh, had just moved to New York. He had a job lined up, because he had just finished his M.B.A. and he was done playing professional football in the CFL [Canadian Football League] in Canada—

Q: [So he had been a professional football player in Canada?]

01:00:11 Perlick: Oh yes, yes, he did that. Anyway, so he's going to come to New York. He's got a job lined up in an M.B.A. program. And he had some friends that offered a room in their apartment, which was up in Washington Heights. So he arrived from Pittsburgh and one of his buddies who was also from Pittsburgh—but he didn't know him at that time, but he was a friend of one of the other roommates. There were like four guys living there—was a student at P & S, a medical student.

And so there was going to be a party at a medical student's apartment, his friend whose name was Art said, "Hey, you know, why don't you come to this party. I think this very cute blonde girl who works in the lab is going to be there." And so he tells the story that he said, "Sure, yeah, yeah, I'm new in town. You know some girls. Sure. I'm going to go." So they go to this party. And back in those days, most medical students were boys, not girls. So they go to this party and they see the blonde girl, but she is across the room and surrounded by a bunch of guys. He said to himself, "Oh my gosh, there's no way I'm going to meet this girl. Come on Art, get me over there." But you know, there was no way because she was surrounded by all these guys.

So then the end of the evening had come around and the host comes to him and says, "Hey, we got a couple of girls here that need a ride back to Columbia. And I know you've got a car, will you take them?" And it was late at night and in those days it wasn't terribly safe to travel from P & S on the subway down to Columbia at like midnight, you know, two girls. As he tells the story he said, "No, no, we're not going there. But we're going there. There's some girls that want to go there, we'll take them, no problem."

So the girls walk out, and who walks out but the blonde girl that he was trying to meet all night—her name was Ginny—and Ginny's roommate. And so because Art—and he had another girlfriend at the time, but it's a funny story because he broke up with that girl. But because Art was shorter than my husband Larry, when we walked out of the party Art walked out with Ginny and Larry walked out with the tall girl, who was me [laughs], Ginny's roommate. Art and Ginny got married six months later and they got very, very intense, very fast. And I wasn't in such a rush. I thought, if I don't get away from this guy, my husband [to be], I'm going to wind up

marrying this guy because he is five years old than me and he was calling me every single day and I needed to get away. And so I moved back to the dorms [laughs]. I went back to Plimpton and my roommate got another roommate to share this apartment.

But anyway, that is how we met. It was once again all about height. I joke about this. We were both—you know, when you're growing up in grade school—when we were growing up anyway. And I'm sure this is true for you too—and I still remember this. I always stood in the back row because I was so tall. Well, so one back row girl married a back row boy. And we matched [laughs]

Q: [So it was a good match.]

01:04:00 Perlick: Yes, well—and at that time we even kind of looked like each other. At that time he had dark hair too. And he's Italian. I did not change my name, you can wonder. You were Gail Perlick? Yes. That was part of what I did as a journalist. I couldn't change my name. I couldn't disappear. I had to be Gail Perlick. And so I didn't change my name. Back in those days nobody did that. I investigated with a friend of mine, who was a Harvard law grad, who was a friend of mine from UW Madison—he was the student body president when I was involved with the student government. And I'm still in touch with him. He's still a friend of mine. And he researched it for me and he said, “Gail, you don't have to change your name when you get married. It is just long time custom. But there's no law that says you have to do that.” So I didn't. And at the time my German dad was rather embarrassed by that. But in time he actually was proud, because there were no boys in my family, and so the name would have died.

But anyway, so that was the story of how Larry and I met. It was all about height. He walked out with the tall girl [laughs] and his roommate walked out with the shorter one. Isn't that silly?

Q: [How was the courtship?]

01:05:12 Perlick: Well, he was five years older, as I've said. He was all done with his schooling, and he was ready to meet a girl, as he said. He liked tall girls, and he liked smart girls. And so he just called me every day, for two and a half years. I tried to get away from him. And you know, at the time he did have an M.B.A., and he was in an M.B.A. training program. Some of my friends at Plimpton would want to know—because he would show up to see me. Now you can remember, Frances, what it was like at that time, 1970? He'd come after work in a coat and tie, you know, in a suit. And my roommates would look at him and say, "Who's that pig you're going out with?" True story. But you know, he survived it. It was good for him to see other things in life too. But anyway, and I was—let's me see. I was a senior at that time at Barnard, yeah. [Laughs] So that's how I met him.

Q: [Sorry about that intolerance! After Barnard, you went straight to the Columbia U. School of Journalism?]

01:06:40 Perlick: At Columbia, I went to Columbia Journalism School, yes.

Q: [Tell me about that experience.]

01:06:54 Perlick: Wonderful. I loved it. I loved it. It was wonderful. I had great opportunities to go uncover things and do internships in places. I remember still I was able to do an internship at NBC. Got to meet John Chancellor and Barbara Walters and, you know, that whole crew. At that time it was very tough to get a journalism job. When I got out of Columbia, you know, it was not easy. I just went around offering myself up on a silver platter to everybody, the same old Midwestern yourah, hurrah. “Would you like to have a smart girl with an economics degree? Really hard worker. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.” And most of the time I got, “Oh, no thanks, we don’t need you. Goodbye.”

But one day I went to *The Wall Street Journal* and the man there, he said, “Well, you have an interesting approach. Come on down.” Well, what I got was a copy editing function. I didn’t need a masters degree to do what I did. I basically copy edited one fifth of *The Wall Street Journal* every day. It was called the monitored desk. But it was *The Wall Street Journal* and in my free time I offered to do some reporting and they let me do that. I mean my hours were horrible. Because it was a copy editing function, I worked the day before the paper came out, so I was there on Christmas Day. You know? But it was *The Wall Street Journal*.

And when I went to *Time* magazine, they were more interested in the fact that it was *The Wall Street Journal*. They didn’t care that I was copy editing. They were interested in that background. They needed someone in the business, an economics section. And I had that background. And then the other thing—I mean life is funny like this. When I went in to interview with the lady for that job, I walked in and here on the wall is a huge framed map of the

State of Wisconsin. And I learned—because I know you have to ask questions. And you’re asking questions with me Frances. I don’t usually talk about myself this much, but I know this is the purpose of this—I asked of course about her connection to the State of Wisconsin. And it turned out that her father had written the fight song Wisconsin, [Singing] “On Wisconsin, on Wisconsin,” that one. And there was a line a mile long for this job in the business and economics department, but once I learned that and then I talked to her about Wisconsin, and then I had *The Wall Street Journal* background, and the economics degree, I remember riding home on the bus that day and thinking, Oh my goodness, I think I’m going to get this job. And I did. And you know, it was just funny. There was more coincidences that were funny about that. But, funny coincidence. And life is like that.

And yes, I actually in my lifetime wanted to be the editor of *The Wall Street Journal*. That’s what I wanted to do. Now obviously I didn’t wind up doing that. And it’s because I went back to Wisconsin. And I came back because of my family here [laughs]. And we have a business here. And it’s a long story about how it happened. But my husband began working for it from afar. My father wouldn’t have me, Frances, because I was a girl. And he regretted that later too. But he thought he wouldn’t have any grandchildren then. Well, it didn’t matter. I had all these boys and I still worked all the way through, didn’t matter. And he realized that later. But anyway, my husband was representing us in the New York area. Our New York rep had died. And it was a way for my father to get us interested.

I knew once we started that, that if we stuck with that it would bring us back to Wisconsin. And it was—I gave up a lot. I had what I thought was a very promising journalism career. And I

continued it here. I still represented this area for *Money* magazine and *Life* magazine and there are stories about how that all happened, and I worked at the local newspaper, and wrote for other national and local publications. And college professor for thirty-two years. So I've been very, very busy. But it wasn't what I planned to do.

Now looking back on it I think I had a big influence on quite a lot of my college students, and I'm still in touch with quite a number of them. And truly if I had not given up what was a budding career in New York, at the time that I did, I would never have been a college teacher. And I would have missed that opportunity to have an influence. When my own kids were sick of me, I had everybody else's kids at a very formative age in their life. And it was frightening how much credence they gave to what I said. You know? More so than sometimes what their parents would say. "But my professor, Mrs. P says such and such." And it was frightening really how much influence I had. So I always tried to advise all these kids the way I thought their parents would want me to be advising them. And I had all kinds of things like two kids who are pregnant with each other. The class is only eighteen kids, and they're pregnant with each other and no one knows except me. And how to deal with these kinds of things. Oh, I have lots and lots of student stories.

So when I look back on it, yes, I would have liked to have been able to continue doing journalism in New York. And the guy that took my job at *Time* magazine when I left, he went on to become the Managing Editor. And he's written books and done all kinds of things. And I left. And the truth is that there are certainly industries that are, even in the electronic age, there are certain industries that are in certain cities. And in the case of New York, media and finance, that

is New York. And if you're not there, it's pretty hard to really have big time opportunities if you're not there. And I wasn't there. But it gave me other things in life. And my children benefited enormously from being around my family here. But, I would have liked to have been able to pursue what I had started.

But then, you know, truthfully—and this might be true of you too in some ways—I don't think I would have had my third son. You know? Of course he was supposed to be a girl, but I don't think I would have taken enough time to have three children. And that's quite a few children. [Laughs] you know? And I truly can not name any friends of mine here who worked all the way through with three children. Can't name anyone.

Q: [How did you balance being a professional, in really two domains, and a mother?]

01:15:09 Perlick: Oh, my dear. With not much sleep. Wou know? Well what is my signature gift to any young woman who gets married, who is also working and I know she's going to work and maybe try and have babies too? A slow cooker. Do you have one Frances? I bet you do. [Laughs] In fact this morning because I knew we were going to do this and I wasn't sure how long it was going to go on for, and I have a couple other things I have to do today, there is something cooking in the slow cooker.

What was happening to me on 9/11? That's also my dad's birthday, but 9/11 when New York was attacked, and two of my kids were living in New York at that time. I was making something in the slow cooker before I went off to the university—I taught at Marquette University here in

Milwaukee—to teach. So that’s one way you do it, because—you know yourself Frances, you have three sons—when you get home from work and they’re all there and they’re going to eat the counter if there’s not something healthy there. And if you have thought ahead and made it at six A.M. in the morning and then you walk in and it’s all done. And then I would joke about the blue fairy. You know who the blue fairy was. She was here cooking all day. And so therefore there is food ready for all of you so you can go to your evening activities and have healthy food.

My house has been a disaster for years. But I always felt—and I’m sure you can identify with this—if my children were all at school on time, they all had clean clothes to wear, their bed was made in the morning, they had good healthy food, they were in church every Sunday, and I was at work on time prepared and my husband was able to travel as he did—you know, “Oh sweetie, I got to go for three days, see you.” You know, who was always picking up all the slack? Me. I figured that I was doing well. If I had to live with a lot of killer dust balls, that had to be. And clutter too.

I had a wake up call ten months ago. I had a stroke. And I have made a miraculous recovery, to use the words of the heart doctor. And my body just said, okay Gail, you’ve got to slow down. And my dad was dying at the time. I had just stopped teaching. But I was out of town, visiting friends and family on the East coast. Happened to me in a motel room. And it was from uncontrolled high blood pressure and too much stress.

And so my two older boys actually said to my husband, “Dad, you’ve got to do some of this stuff now. You can not do this. Mom is way over ODed, Dad.” But I’m sure you identify with this,

Frances. Our generation really was the first group that tried to work and have kids too. And before men were more understanding of, you know, “where’s the food?” I remember one night I came home from *The Wall Street Journal*. We were newly married. And I was on one of my late shifts. I’m coming in at like eight o’clock at night. My husband was at home and had been home for some time. I walk in the door and he says to me, “Sweetie, what’s for dinner?” And I said to him, “I don’t know. What is for dinner?” Well, the next time to his credit he tried to cook dinner, and I walked in on a fire that he was having in the broiler. You know all the ovens in New York are all gas. He was having a hamburger grease fire in the broiler. Trying to cook, yes.

But you know, we were the first generation, really. I know this to be true because all of my students over the years, and young women, would talk to me about these things. “How did you do this Mrs. P?” And then I would say to them, “Well, look at me. People who haven’t seen me in thirty years still recognize me because I wear the same clothes, my hair is the same. I haven’t really had any time for myself throughout all of this.” And that’s one thing, the women’s movement did a lot of wonderful things in terms of making opportunities for us. And we were fighting that when we were young.

I still remember one guy, and it would be illegal now, it was a job I’d interviewed for in Baltimore, and I was newly married, as a reporter at a television station there. And the guy calls me up and these were his words—he said this. Now you know, I couldn’t identify him again, but these were his words, I still remember, he said to me on the phone, “Gail, we think you have a lot of balls, but we’re worried about you in the family way.” Yeah. Oh you’d get sued now for a comment like that. But that’s what he said to me on the phone. And the truth is, yes, I had

children but not until like seven or eight years after that. And I worked all the way through anyway! And I mean, you know, no one would ever say something like that now. But we lived at the time—you remember Frances, I'm sure you've got stories like that—where that was the case. There was out and out discrimination. And we had to fight that.

And there's where, you know, the Barnard connection is good because other women—I mean I go to the Barnard activities and the women are wonderful. I love being around them. They're like me, you know, a lot of them. I mean I have a lot of friends now who all they do is talk about their grandkids, that's all. They don't talk about what's going on in the world or books that they might have read or, you know, any intellectual endeavors. Whereas when I go and gather with the Barnard women, we always have—there's never enough time to talk about all the things that there is to talk about, what's happening culturally in the world and just in the world in general. So I think that Barnard is still accomplishing that for young women. And I like to support it. And that's why I said I would participate in this oral history thing, because it's important.

Actually, you know, and what's going on in the world now, and you could say this, the girls do have many opportunities. We haven't yet figured out exactly how to take care of the children. We're working on that still. But there's a certain amount of reverse discrimination going on now, if you are a young man and you are—and you then also happen to be Caucasian, oh yay. And then if you're Catholic or Christian too, that's three strikes against you now in today's world. I've seen that. Because we're bending over backwards, you know, to make sure that we're not discriminating against anyone, so as a result sometimes we're discriminating against boys.

I've had young men tell me now, who are going off to college, "Well don't you know Mrs. P, I'm a rapist. Don't you know that? I'm a rapist. Rapist." Well, because any—do you know that if you think you want to kiss a girl now in college or touch her in any way you have to ask her first. You have to get agreement. Otherwise you can be accused of sexual molestation. How old are your boys Frances? Probably about the same age as my boys. Are they all married and gone?

Q: [They're thirty-five, thirty-two, and twenty-five. The youngest is twenty-five.]

01:23:25 Perlick: Yeah, and so they're in the same age range as my kids. So that young one might feel this a little bit. Does he?

Q: [Yes, I think he does.]

01:23:35 Perlick: And that's kind of a result—so from twenty-three to thirty-four. Yeah, we should spend the weekend—we could share lots of stories. Frances, remind me—and I know you're supposed to be interviewing me. But tell me again, what did you do professionally all of your life?

Q: [College teacher, writing, work with refugee resettlement.]

01:24:28 Perlick: Refuge settlement. Did I get the word right? Yes? Good. Oh my goodness, that would be fun. And where did you do all this?

Q: [The D.C. area. Maryland, Virginia. I got burned out.]

01:24:41 Perlick: I could believe that you get burned out, yes. Refuge—and where are you teaching?

Q: [University of Maryland University College.]

01:24:49 Perlick: Oh, good. Yes, yes, good, good, good. Oh we would have a lot in common. Yes. I didn't know you, Frances, when I was there. But I knew mostly the kids that were involved with the yearbook and the economics girls. And there were only about five or six of us. And then, you know, the people that I lived with at Plimpton. But we'd have a lot in common, yes. I hope we get a chance to spend more time together, yes.

Q: [So what are you most proud of in your life, your career? What accomplishments?}]

01:25:36 Perlick: Oh heavens. Well, it's very hard to answer that question, really. Most proud of professionally or personally?

Q: [Either that you are comfortable speaking about.]

01:25:54 Perlick: Okay. Well, I would say that, personally, I am most proud of the fact that my husband and I have stayed married for forty-three years, and we have three kids that we both adore. And nobody has gone off the deep end yet on anything. I mean, we both, using journalism

terminology, emptied my notebook on my kids. They know everything that I know about life. If they screw up now it's not because I didn't spend enough time with them. All I did, for all their growing up years, was work and take care of them. So I feel very lucky when I go somewhere and—we just had our wedding anniversary—and tell someone we've been married for forty-three years, that's not that common [laughs] in today's world. So personally that's probably—and then the wonderful family life that I was able to have, extended family, because I came back to Wisconsin.

Professionally, well, I didn't get to accomplish what I wanted to. But I think that it was a good thing to be able to be a female financial journalist in the time that I did it, to show other young women that you could do this. And making sense of complex information is not beyond the ability of women. And to, kind of, provide that sort of role model at the time that I was doing that work. And also for my students, because young women are looking for mentors and people that they want to try and understand how you did this. When we were young and working professionally there weren't female mentors, really. One young woman asked me once, "Did you ever—? was there anyone that kind of took you under their arm and mentored you?" And the answer was, No, there wasn't. I would have loved that, but there really wasn't at that time. I think there—hopefully there is now for young women. But there wasn't at that time.

Q: [Yes, so true. Continuing, what do you hope to do in the future? Dreams? Aspirations?]

01:28:34 Perlick: So probably that opportunity, to try and bring some kind of positive spirit and light to the world, personally, with my children, my husband, my students and professionally. If I

have been able to do that, then I feel good. I would have liked to have accomplished more. I have a book that I still want to write, but I haven't had time to do that. And I have a project that I want to do with one of my sons, a creative project, haven't had time to do that. And hopefully I will yet have time to do that in my life, but I don't know. So of the things I have been able to do, that probably would be a good summary.

Q: [What specifically? Time to write?]

01:29:28 Perlick: Oh sure. You want to hear about my book? The book that I don't know if I'm ever going to get to write it, but—

Q: [What about some of the things you've written and published over the years? Are these available? Are there some stories you particularly remember—?]

01:29:48 Perlick: Oh it is, it is. Covering—I mean yes, I had cover stories on the front of the business section of the *Milwaukee Journal*, for example. I have written cover stories for magazines. And I have been a correspondent where I've covered an area for particular magazines. And it's all wonderful. Oh, did you want to know about the book that I would like to do?

Q: [Yes.]

01:30:15 Perlick: Okay. Well this book came out of the teaching, out of the decades of teaching. When you were in my journalism classes, your first assignment—and I would do this as a confidence builder—is I would want you to write a story about yourself, a newsworthy event in your life. And write it in the first person. This is your only chance this semester to write in the first person. And pull out all the stops. If it's funny and hilarious like the day your older brothers almost drowned you trying to teach you how to water ski? Make me laugh. If it is sad, make me cry. Pull out all the stops. Put life onto paper.

And they did. And I collected these stories over the years. And I have a stack of them. Of course this would be—I will have to get in touch with all of these people, all of whom are grown up now. Something I learned from college students, one thing they often told me that frustrated them, because I would ask them, about the generation ahead of them, our generation, “They don't ever take me seriously, Mrs. P. They don't take me seriously.” Well, this book would be a compilation of stories and the title of it would be—let me remember the title that I had picked out. It was either *Tales of a Young Heart* or *Something From the Heartland*. Anyway, it would show people that you need to take young people seriously. They have something to say. And read these stories.

And then what I was going to do is get their agreement to let me use their story in a book, and then write a little bit about each one of them and what they had done professionally in their life. And I've had kids that were in my classes that have gone on to do some marvelous things [laughs]. Marvelous things. So that's a book that I'd like to yet do. I don't know if I'm going to have time to do it [laughs]. I got a little sidetracked when my dad got very sick.

And the other project, did you want to hear of the other project? But you know, don't use this on—I mean because I will explain to you Frances what it is, but I don't want this to go live, necessary, because I don't want someone else to do it before I have a chance to do it.

Q: [Okay. Maybe don't share that one then. What are some of your other plans for the future?]

01:33:04 Perlick: Okay. Professional plans? Or just—

Q: [Again, either is fine.]

01:33:12 Perlick: [Laughs] Well, I'm glad to be alive. I'm trying to dig out from what is the mess that is my house, but I also have my entire dad's estate to deal with, and he had a house and many, many things that I'm still dealing with. Ooh, if I get my time I would still do my book and this other project that I want to do. I will just tell you that it is a musical with one of my sons. My sons are all very musical. The middle one has his own studio in New York. I'm sure you've heard some of his music that he creates for websites and television commercials. And he's very, very talented and he got the German work like a dog ethic in him. He works very, very hard. But we have had a project, a musical that we've wanted to do for years that he would write the music for and I would write the play for, a musical. And I'd like to do that [laughs] if I can still find the time.

And I'm just happy to be alive. I never cross off the days of my life because my mother taught me not to do that. And whatever I can influence yet in a positive way in the world is important to me. I only have one grandchild, but it's a little girl. I complimented my son who had the little girl that he was able to make little girls, whereas his dad could not make little girls. And if I can be a good role model for her I would like to be, to show her that she can be anything in her life that she wants to be. She does not have to be a girly girl. She can be a professional woman. She can be anything. She wants to be a girly girl, then she can do that too. But anything is open to her.

And when I find young people, I love young people because I always want to know what they're doing with their life, and see if I can encourage them in any way. And this is an advantage of being a teacher—but you know this Frances—they're the hope of the world. Tell them that. And we're all counting on you. So it's important that you and I do a good job teaching them English, or whatever it is that we're teaching them, so that they will go and pass it on and be leaders in the world. So whenever I can do that I love to do that even though I don't get them in the class now anymore. I don't miss all the paper grading and preparing lectures, but I do miss the one on one contact that I had with them. But we can still do that in our life.

So I'm grateful to be alive. Most people who have strokes, I have been told, you are either dead, you are paralyzed on one side, or you can never talk again. And I know people that fall into all those categories. I've been told that—I've read this in places, that of the 800,000 people in the United States every year who have a stroke, what percentage do you think make a full recovery?

Q: [Hmm. ten to fifteen percent?]

01:36:47 Perlick: Good guess. See you're an educated woman. Most people guess a higher number than that. But ten percent is the number. And I regard myself to be extremely lucky that I am in that ten percent. Some other parts of my body are falling apart, but I'm grateful to be alive, and I think I still have things that I can do in the world, and hope to be able to have a chance to do them.

I can't understand people who are bored when they're retired, or just bored in general. I'm never bored. There's never enough time in the day for what I want to learn, what I want to do. And I think Barnard played a role in that. The encouragement to be curious—I mean journalism plays a role in that too. Another thing that journalism does for you, in spades, is you always look at something in a certain way, you know. But I would teach my students, yes, we all look at something in a certain way, but when you're interviewing someone you need to ask enough questions to try and understand how they look at it. Now you don't have to agree, but you need to understand how they look at it. And that opens up a lot of worlds for you and you find out that though the way you look at something is a good way to look at it, there's also these other ways to look at something, which is equally good. And you don't know that if you never ask people questions.

So, you know, the opportunity to interview people was wonderful in life. I got to interview all kinds of wonderful people and get to know them in a way that other people would not get to know them. I mean Sam [Samuel C.] Johnson I interviewed once. Do you know who he is? He was the head of Johnson Wax, you know, that's a Wisconsin company. I did a profile of him for

the *Milwaukee Journal* out here. And he wouldn't sit for interviews because the newspaper people had too often crucified him, basically. And I was very lucky to get this interview with him and it was wonderful. I had a marvelous time with him. He was a wonderful man. Very family oriented and family business. He's gone now, but S. C. Johnson—you know, the Raid and Pledge and all of those things, is a family business out here in Wisconsin. So I got to interview people that I would have never—knowing Walter Heller as a friend or Alan Greenspan, you don't have those opportunities. And interviewing heads of corporations. I've had people scream at me when I've interviewed them. And I could tell you stories about how that happened. But you know, you still got to finish the interview. Even if they've lost it and you think they're going to have a heart attack, you have to finish the interview and you have to find a way—I'm thinking of one man who did that, screamed at me because I—

Q: [Can you describe one such interview experience?]

01:40:10 Perlick: Oh sure, I was writing a cover piece for the *Milwaukee Journal* for the Sunday journal and it was a late assignment. You know, those were due in advance and I had only a couple of days to put this together. And so I did what I commonly would do after the fact, I interviewed some of the competitors of this man's business. And this man—he was having a kind of a hard time at his business. And he heard about it, that I had talked to some competitors. Now normally I would talk to them after, but I didn't have time. So I had to talk to the competitors beforehand. And he heard about it and I came into his office and he unleashed his anger at me. How could I do that, and yadda, yadda, yadda, yadda. And he got red in the face and I just let him go on and scream at me for, oh, probably fifteen or twenty minutes. But I still had

to do the story. And believe it or not I got the man calmed down. I explained to him why I had interviewed competitors. To get the other side, to get balance, I always do this, I had to do it in advance this time because I was on a very short deadline. But the man calmed down and he gave me one of my best quotes that I used in the story, and then because the copy editor was inexperienced, and he copy edited it out because I was using it as the kicker, and so he cut from the bottom. And on a feature story you don't cut from the bottom. But he didn't know. But anyway, this man who screamed at me gave me this marvelous quote. "The truth is that no one really understands what it is to rub together two nickels and make a dime." And it's true. It's true. And I got him to calm down and I had a fabulous interview with him.

So you just don't get those kinds of opportunities, those challenges. Things don't always go right for you, that's—it's good that things don't always go right for you. It brings challenges to your life and you grow as a person. Yeah, I learned a lot from having a stroke. I got to cool it a little bit [laughs], and learned how to say no. Yeah, when I was younger I was not good at that. I would be teaching at the university, and writing for all these various publications. And you know, someone would come along with the next project. Oh, and then I'd do that. I can't do that anymore. In fact I—one cover story that I wrote for a publication out here, and it was a cover story of Donna Shalala. Do you know who she is? Yeah? She loved it actually. I had a great time with her. But the people that wanted me to do that, I said to them, "I can't do it." Oh but they wanted me to do it. Then I said, "You can't afford me." And then the next question was, "How much do you want?" Well I did it. And it was a great experience. And she loved that cover story. She used it—she was at that time the chancellor of UW Madison. She went on and she was in Clinton's cabinet and—where is she now? I think she's in Miami now. Isn't she in Miami? I

think. We could look it up. But anyway, at the time she was the head of the University of Wisconsin here in Wisconsin. And I had some great anecdotal stories about her, which were really fun that I had in that story.

So—I forgot. That was in answer to a question. Oh, what else do I think I still want to do? Well, if I have good enough health there are lots of things that I want to do. I do not have a desire to go away to a sandy island and retire. No. No. I read two newspapers every day still. And I’m in touch with lots of former students, and in touch with the rest of the world, and still very heavily involved with my dad’s estate because this is a relatively new thing, and in touch with my children. But there just isn’t enough time in the day to—I realize that I will not be the editor of *The Wall Street Journal*. I know that’s not going to happen. I am too old. And I’m not going to be the editor of *Time* magazine anymore either. But the guy who took my job did become [laughs] the editor in time.

But anyway—so I’m just grateful to be alive and to—I’m a lucky girl. I have enough to eat. I’m married to the same man. He goes around. He’s very handsome. He gets picked up all the time. Six five, yeah. Some people think he looks like Bill Clinton. I said, “Listen, you go ahead, have a good time.” But he’s a wonderful role model for our sons and a good man. Yes he’s not terribly capable when it comes to the details of life, as I call it, but a good man. And I’ve got good kids. And I’ve been lucky.

Q: [What would you like to share about your sons?]

01:45:50 Perlick: One son is here in Milwaukee and married. He's the one with the little baby girl. And he was a lawyer, criminal defense attorney and did very well, was in the top forty in the State of Wisconsin. And about a year ago decided that he wanted to work for the family business. So he's trying that right now. He's here. Then there's the middle one who has his studio in New York, the one that I'm going to write the musical with. And he's in Brooklyn where all the young kids live now. Do you know they all live in Brooklyn? Do your kids live in Brooklyn?

Q: [One does. Our middle son.]

01:46:24 Perlick: [Laughs] Okay. And the third one, Robert, is also in Brooklyn, also doing music-related stuff. So I have two out there. So I get out there. Yeah. And the one married with the child is here. The second one is married. His wife works with him. The third one is single like your last little guy. And so I'm in touch with them. But you know, we know, we're good mothers-in-law. When they get married you have to let them go. And I try to do that. I never show up at the one who's here. The only way—I never show up and expect them to feed me. Never. I arrive with dinner and presents every time. It's the blue fairy [laughs].

They know me at Buca's, if you know what that is. It's a take out Italian restaurant [laughs].

Q: [So how has journalism changed since you were a student?]

01:47:40 Perlick: Oh my goodness, it's completely different in one generation. When I would tell my students that I used to write my stories on a Royal manual typewriter, not even an electric typewriter, they were stunned. And this has happened in one generation. Now everything is digital, everything is digital. And people would say to me, journalism is dying. It's not dying. It's just going on a screen. But journalists are asked to do much more. You know, when I was involved there was a deadline, yes, but there wasn't the constant need to update stories digitally, because they're all on-line now. So it is twenty-four/seven. And there are fewer publications yes, absolutely. The big joke in journalism is when the last baby boomer, us, dies, that's the day the last printed newspaper will come off the press. I don't think that it's that, that bad, but we both know that people don't read anymore. They read it all on the screen.

Now that's fine, but are you reading things that are well researched and well reported where there are authoritative sources? Or are you just reading something on the screen that is written by a—that is a blog? So it is the gospel according to that person. Do you believe that all? And the young people now, they need work in critical thinking. They just, so many of them, “Well, didn't you see it? It's on the internet, Mom.” Yes, but how do we know that that's true? We don't necessarily know that that's true.

I mean, I remember my grandfather years ago when I was a little girl, and I would ask him, “Grandpa, how do you know something?” And then he would pull out the newspaper and he'd show me, “Well, see, it's in the newspaper.” And then his granddaughter grew up to be one of those people that's writing that stuff that's in the newspaper and you see that it is—you have to work very hard to get it straight. You've got to talk to a lot of people and get both sides of the

story to try and put on paper, or on a screen as it is now, what is actually happening in a situation. And because everything is digital it's put much more pressure on journalists. There are fewer jobs. It's not going away, but there's far too much credence placed upon anything you read on the internet. And I'm sure you'd agree with that. Yeah.

And so much of is—it is just, especially the blogging. It's the gospel according to the writer. It lacks authority, as I would tell my students, you know, when they would write down something with no attribution. "Where did you get that from? Where did you get that statistic from? Who said that? What authority said that?" So much of what you read on the internet there's none of that. And the kids believe it all [laughs], which is not good. So I think that that's been a big change, the digitization—that's not a word—digitalizing of journalism. But still we need journalism. Broadcast journalism, so much of it is half entertainment. You know? And we want to be outrageous, either on the right or on the left, we've got to be outrageous. Just give me the facts and cut the—I don't want all of your attitude too. So I prefer the printed word still, because I can pick and choose what I'm going to read and I can see if this is authoritative or not. But I know that I'm in the minority there [laughs]. We're moving pretty quickly toward an all digital world.

The kids, it's stunning how they don't read, they don't know what's going on in the world. It is just stunning. I don't know how we can change that. I don't know. But that's the big change in journalism, the move to everything digital. Everything [laughs]. And it was in one generation. One generation. It happened in our time. By the time I was done, yes, I pushed the send button

on the computer, and the articles in the newspaper were set electronically. You know, I mean that all happened in our time. It's been very fast, and hard to adjust to in some ways.

I don't want to see all the newspapers of the world die. But it's a tough go. It is a tough go. We've still got pretty good readership here in Milwaukee, the two newspapers combined. It's now the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. I worked at the *Milwaukee Journal* when I worked at the newspaper here. And it was the afternoon daily, well, there aren't any afternoon dailies left. And it was the big afternoon daily. So it combined with the smaller morning paper, and now it's a morning paper. And we have still pretty good penetration with the *Journal Sentinel*. But it's always stunning to me how many people—and some people even our age—who don't read the newspaper anymore. And don't know what's going on, are not well educated in many, many fields. And it's frightening really.

Well, I try to get people to read and think, and critically think. When young people seem to have all the answers about something, to probe them and find out why they think the way they do, and where did they get that from, and make them try and think. So there's plenty for all of us to do yet, still [laughs].

Q: [Is there any part of your life we haven't covered, and which you wish to share?]

01:54:18 Perlick: Oh, no I think, in the long time that we've had a chance to chat, I think I've described pretty well who I am and what I've done in my life and why I did what I did. And there's nothing—I don't have—I mean yes I wanted to be the editor of *The Wall Street Journal*

or *Time* magazine and that did not happen. But then I wouldn't have been a college professor, and that brought—I mean I once had one young man, ooh, he told me later that he was suicidal. I was in terms of with him when he's thinking about what he's going to do, and we stopped it. But he told me later—because I once made some comment to him that, well, you know, I didn't really accomplish in my life what I wanted to do—and he said, “No, Mrs. P, you did a more important thing with your life. It was more important that you went and were a college professor for a long time because of the influence that you could have with young people.” And so I didn't accomplish what I thought I wanted to, but I did some things I didn't expect to do that turned out to be good things that helped me grow as a person. I'm also a very long time Sunday school teacher. I didn't mention that to you, but that probably wouldn't be surprising. And just the—being able to influence the future.

So there aren't things that I'm kicking around in the house thinking, Gee, I wish I'd spent more time with my kids. No. I spent every bit of time I had. Yes, my house is a mess, but that's not important. People are far more important. And doing important—not important, but good things in the world. Changing the world one person at a time to make—I mean you can't change everyone. My father once gave me very good advice, and he said, “Sweetie, just remember, you can not change the whole world.” And then I added to that, well, you know, one person can not change the whole world. I'd learned that you change the world one person at a time, one student at a time, one friend at a time, one person at a time. And if you can do that, and I would encourage my students to do that too, then when you're old if you've done that then there will be a whole bunch of people that you could stand together in a large group and say, “Yes, these people, I made a difference for these people.” And that's important.

You have to be a person that wants to get outside of yourself. That is where—well that's all over the Bible of course. But James [M.] Barrie, you remember him, Peter Pan, he—and I have this in the bathroom that I usually use, it's a little plaque and it says, "He who brings sunshine to the life of others can not keep it from himself." And that's all over the Bible, too, that you get the most out of life if you give in life, if you make effort in life. That is where the biggest rewards come. So I've been very, very busy over all these many years, but it's been a good busy. I have to slow down a little bit now because I want to live. I want to be healthy for a while yet [laughs].

But I think that there isn't really anything that I'm hiding, you know, something that I haven't told you that I think you should know about. No. Or a deep dark secret, or a deep dark desire that I feel somehow I've not been able to reach. I haven't been able to reach the things I wanted to reach because I haven't had the time and I got side tracked. But it isn't that what I got side tracked with wasn't also good. I don't think I would have had three children, for example, if I could have pursued what I thought I was going to pursue. And so I don't think there is anything else, Frances. I think we've gotten—

I mean I actually—this was an interview of me, I know. But I'd like to have the chance to ask you a lot of those questions. And I'm sure you're having a wonderful time doing this with our classmates and getting to know them, so many of them that maybe you didn't know before. So I hope this has been helpful.

What are we doing with this? Remind me what we're doing.

Q: [The audios, videos and transcripts of the interviews will be put into the Barnard College Archives, a special collection of Class of '71 oral histories. Maybe a film will be made for the two sixteen Renunion, and maybe at some point a documentary can be financed in time for the fiftieth anniversary of the '67 Strike. Etc.]

01:59:57 Perlick: Yes, yes, yes, that would be good. That would be good. Well, if I were able to help with them I'd love to, in terms from the writing standpoint. The video standpoint I wouldn't be very helpful with, but the writing standpoint. Yes, and I guess I knew that. And yes, we are kind of an interesting—our age. I worked on a cover story at *Time* magazine on demography and it ran in Europe but not in the United States, because what happened that week was Ford pardoned Nixon and we had to throw it out and do a different cover story. But anyway the people that I was interviewing about that would often talk about, they talked about “the baby boom generation,” our generation. We have a pig in the python. You know? We've moved through the whole thing, we're creating trouble now with Social Security because there are so many of us retired, and we're going to have an explosion of Alzheimer's disease in, you know, another ten years or so, yes. And all of this is happening because there are so many of us moving through life at the same time. And that of course was the explanation for why we had the big upheaval of the '60s and '70s that we had, the pig in the python. And we continue to be that.

Now there was a reason that I brought that up. Remind me Frances, what was I talking about just before that?

Q: [What our oral histories may reflect.]

02:01:26 Perlick: Our generation, oh yes. And so there are a lot of people that are interested in this baby boomer generation because so many things changed during our time when I look back on it. Now things are always still changing, even now, but there was a lot that changed when we were young. And it was a rocky slope. I found it difficult. I was just this little square girl from the Midwest who was friendly and happy and this was something that was—you know, I had to make various adjustments and learn to look at life differently in some ways. So big changes in our time, yes, definitely.

So it's been fun and I hope to see you, Frances, at the next reunion. Are you going to be there? The one coming up?

Q: [Yes, for sure. I live in NYC now.]

02:02:25 Perlick: Good, good. Well, I am hoping to be there too, but it happens to be the same weekend as my husband's because he's five years older than me. We're on this five year thing, you know, we are forty-five. His is going to be fifty. And he was the Treasurer of his class at the University of Virginia down there. Now talk about difference in world, when he went to the University of Virginia, it was all boys and they wore coat and tie, twenty-four/seven [laughs]. They were Virginia gentlemen and that's gone.

Q: [Oh, yes.]

02:03:11 Perlick: All right, it was very fun. I'm glad we got it to work as well as we did. And I will look forward to seeing you, Frances. And thank you for all the work you're doing on this project to get in touch with all of our classmates. I will love to hear them. And so we will be able to go to this, and listen to some of what our classmates said?

Q: [Yes, the audios and transcripts of the interviews are digitized in the Barnard College Archives and can be accessed from anywhere.]

02:03:36 Perlick: Excellent. And thank you so much for your diligence in getting in touch with everybody and listening. You're a good interviewer. You could have been a journalist [laughs].

Q: [Thanks to you. That's actually another story!]

02:03:50 Perlick: [Laughs] All right, take care and I hope to see you in June. Okay, bye, bye.

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