BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Bettina Berch

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Bettina Berch conducted by Frances Garrett Connell on April 23, 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: Bettina Berch Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell Date: April 23, 2015

00:00:05 Q: This is an interview taking place with Bettina Berch at her apartment in New York City on April 23, 2015. The interviewer is Frances Connell. So, as we said we are going to start sort of with your childhood. Anything particular that you would like to tell me about memories you have as a child and the circumstances of your family as you were growing up. You might start with where you were born.

Berch: I was born and raised in Washington, D.C. and probably that's enough for purposes of this interview.

00:00:52 Q: Were you parents particularly influential? In your early years, things you remember about them.

Berch: Well, I grew up in a nuclear family, so my parents were the adults I knew best. They were very influential.

00:01:06 Q: And was there a particular mentor at that time, as you were growing up?

Berch: A mentor?

00:01:13 Q: A mentor that you might have had in school?

Berch: I suppose I had many mentors. I was very into school.

00:01:19 Q: Do you want to talk a little about the school experience?

Berch: My school experiences? I went to Washington D.C. public schools, because my mother taught in the D.C. public schools. And she was my teacher in eighth grade, which is a little unusual. And after I graduated from junior high school, there [were] changes in the D.C. schools, which eliminated tracking in schools, so my parents felt that I should get an education in Maryland. They paid tuition and I went to a Maryland public school. But they weren't really into paying tuition too much, so they basically said, "Hey, you can either go to high school or you can go to college. Which would you prefer?" I didn't know, so they said, "Go to college." So actually, I didn't graduate from high school. I applied to colleges and was accepted by Barnard [College], Goucher [College], and so at the end of 11th grade, I went to college.

00:02:54 Q: So, were there social issues you were involved with prior to going to college?

Berch: Yeah.

00:02:58 Q: Such as—

Berch: Well, I went from a—I can show you graphically—This was my junior high class picture. You can find me. I am one of the few white people. There I am. That was my class, and that was my life.

00:03:29 Q: What junior high school was this?

Berch: This was Paul Junior High in Washington, D.C. And I went from there to pretty much an all-white school, in the Maryland suburbs. Very good academically, but socially, I had no means of connecting with this place. My parents didn't really see that that was going to be such a problem. So they were not really going to do anything about that. So, that was difficult. I mean I understood a lot about race before I arrived at the very white high school that I went to.

00:04:16 Q: I actually raised my kids up in Silver Spring so I am familiar with the various areas there.

00:04:23 Berch: If you grow up in Washington, you get used to politics. My mother, being a history teacher, had started a program in the D.C. schools that would bring D.C. students to go to things on the [Capitol] Hill. To go to Congress, to go to the Supreme Court. And for most of us, we had never been in those kind of places. I mean, if I went to Congress, I went to my father's state's representative. My father had come from Washington State. Otherwise, you couldn't get a pass to go in the gallery from Washington, D.C., if you lived in Washington, D.C., because you

didn't have a Representative who gave you the little pass so you could in the gallery and watch. So, you know, it was more than that, but that was symbolic. On the other hand, if you live in Washington, you grow up in Washington, you get used to demonstrations and rallies and things going on, on a regular basis, and you go to some.

00:05:47 Q: You show you were in a primarily Black middle school. Were you in one for elementary school as well?

Berch: Yeah.

00:05:51 Q: What was your take on the Civil Rights movement at that time, the whole Civil Rights issues? Were your contemporaries talking about it? Were you aware of their parents' anger? Things going on.

Berch: Our family, as well as many others in the neighborhood, were part of a group called Neighbors, Inc, which has a long history, that people write about today. It was a very strong organization of Black-White unity that was residentially-based, [in] our neighborhood, but which looked toward being a force for positive change. So, I was brought up with a lot of awareness.

00:06:45 Q: So being in the capital, say, at the time of the assassination of [John F.] Kennedy, the Cuban Missile Crisis, things like that, do you have specific memories?

Berch: Well, you know, we did the old duck and cover. We had a fall-out shelter in the basement of the school, and my father, at one point built a fall-out shelter in the woodshed of our house. It wasn't funny, but in retrospect, it wasn't going to do the job. But, yeah, you grow up in Washington, you get used to a certain amount of the national panic.

00:07:38 Q: Well put. So socially, when you moved to the suburbs, were there special friends—

Berch: We didn't move—

Q: I'm sorry, when you transferred schools—

Berch: —I just went to a school where I had to be driven to where the school bus would pick up —And there weren't many people that I could relate to, but one of my friends, her ambition was to go to Barnard. So, I didn't know anything about places, but she wanted to go to Barnard, so I thought, okay, I'll apply to go to Barnard. But I was a year ahead of her, because I was not graduating. She actually came to Barnard a year later.

Barnard, to its credit, was one of the few schools that was willing to entertain an application for somebody who wasn't going to graduate high school. Other schools said things to me that were very mysterious, like “if we accept you now, we are denying someone whose last chance it is to go to Radcliffe [College].”

00:08:46 Q: Sounds exactly how the Radcliffe rejections would have sounded.

Berch: It was a face-to-face discussion, and that comment kind of floored me. I had not really thought of myself as denying a place to somebody. I was just applying. [Laughs] Yeah, there it went.

So I went to Barnard. I went to look at Goucher [College], and Goucher was just very horsey. And my brother took me to go and visit there, and when they told us that I was free to bring my horse because they had stables, you know, available to students, I looked at my brother, my brother looked at me. We didn't want to even come near a horse. We were very urban people. So Barnard was sort of, okay let's go to Barnard.

00:09:48 Q: At this point were you marching against Vietnam? Things like that, in the high school?

Berch: No, high school was different. You know, the drama teacher at the school was my homeroom teacher, and he was very cool and very into avant garde drama and things like that. So that was what I was probably mostly into. Whatever was going on there, that's probably what I was doing.

00:10:27 Q: Here we make a great leap, into philosophy. Would you say you were the same person who walked through the gates of Barnard as a freshman, and what changed you?

You were seventeen? Were you seventeen?

00:10:44 Berch: Yeah, seventeen? 1967? Yeah. No, of course you're not the same person. I'm not the same person today that I was yesterday. You know, I can't walk in the same river twice, and all of that. Nothing stays the same. Especially when you walk into college as a fresh-person, or freshman, you don't even remember what you were like, much less—

00:11:13 Q: Well, maybe we could say it this way. Is there something that sort of defines you as a person which was nurtured by Barnard, or that you remember how you were at Barnard that has stayed pretty standard in your personality or your—

Berch: Well—

00:11:30 Q: She's giving me that look.

Berch: I'm giving you that look, because you obviously have missed some chapters of my life, not your fault since you don't know me. But, after I did my years as a student at Barnard, I did my graduate work, and then I came back to Barnard to teach. So I taught at Barnard until I sued Barnard for sex discrimination, and then left teaching for a good twenty years. So Barnard, you know, gave with one hand and took with the other, in terms of my life. So I have—on balance—I think Barnard took more from me than Barnard gave. And also, if I look around Barnard these

days, and I see what goes on, I'm not really very—I know that the Barnard that exists today is nowhere near what Barnard was when we went there.

00:12:40 Q: How so? I mean, you've been on all sides.

Berch: For one, your odds of being taught by an adjunct at Barnard are high.

00:12:49 Q: I didn't realize that.

Berch: They just had a piece in the [*Columbia Daily*] *Spectator* about—over 65% of the courses in the Psych[ology] Department are taught by adjuncts. And that's the most popular of the science departments. Why 65%? That's like where I teach now, at BMCC [Borough of Manhattan Community College]. You're paying "Ivy money" for people who are putting together life on an adjunct basis. You know, so that is definitely not the same. The other is that Barnard's leadership has gotten to be very—you know—a corporately interesting thing. It's not Martha Peterson. And by that I don't mean that she was so wonderful, but she definitely understood that she was a college president, and a college president was not someone who was grooming themselves to be on TV next week, or—you know. It wasn't an occupation for a flashy person. It was an occupation for someone who was seriously interested in the education of undergraduates. And relating to them. So I didn't let my daughter apply to Barnard.

00:14:30 Q: Was this during the time you were teaching—no, the twenty year hiatus.

Berch: No, my daughter's twenty-three. It was five years ago or so when she was applying to colleges, and we talked a lot about places. And you know I would not have wanted her—I mean even if she were interested in Barnard, I wouldn't have wanted her to go there. Because I just think there are a lot of things they promise but don't deliver with anymore. So it is too bad.

00:15:05 Q: I am actually appalled. I can't believe the adjunct situation. I really had no idea. Yeah.

Berch: And what else are they planning? They're talking about getting rid of the library, and they say, we can put—we can have like a virtual library. Well, what is a virtual library in an undergraduate, teaching institution? The whole idea of open stacks was essential to my years at Barnard. I would roam around the open stacks. I would have a number in mind of the book I was looking for, and then I would look at everything that was on one side or the other of it. And I would find new ideas, new authors, new stuff. You can't do that with—order these books from off-site, or you know—and the other thing is that they have wonderfully talented librarians. Well, you know, that was an important relationship. And so what are you going to have when you don't have a library anymore? Well, they're not going to hire those people. They're just going to gradually shift them around until they're not there anymore. So, those are important parts of the kind of flavor of an undergraduate institution. And they're not going to be there.

00:16:41 Q: Going back though, at the time when you were a young student entering the school, you left high school early, how satisfied were you with your undergraduate education then?

Berch: I was so satisfied I wanted to come back and teach there.

00:16:56 Q: And what made it satisfying to you? At that point.

Berch: Marian Gillim, who taught Statistics, and you know, awarded me some prizes in statistics, which— she not only arranged, but she brought me to the event, and had her bourbon and branch water, which I'll never forget. She was like some Kentucky legend. They were all these wonderful people who were very devoted to, you know, their teaching. And it was very, very good. So I thought that was a perfect place for me to teach. People were into teaching, and education and teaching and students, and the life of the mind, so—

00:18:22 Q: Did you know you wanted to do Economics from the beginning? Or did it take you a while to—?

Berch: No, I was, I didn't really care what I took too much. Initially it was my father who said, "If you're not so picky, why don't you try Economics instead. It's going to be a big field." And I liked Economics, I liked English, but I had this sneaking suspicion that if I started being an English major, that I would stop liking just reading, cause it would be work, then. So maybe I

would just leave that as something I enjoyed, and not try to make it my career. But I loved Remington Patterson teaching—you know—Shakespeare. He was just, you know, so inspiring.

00:19:08 Q: He was really that archetypal caring—

Berch: And very gentle. It was just a perfect match.

00:19:26 Q: So while you were there, you were one of the youngest students, how did you relate socially to the revolutions going on? Experimentation with drugs, sex?

Berch: Yeah. All those things.

00:19:40 Q: And being younger, did that impact—

Berch: No, who really asked each other, oh, are you 17? Or are you 18? You didn't have to show your age to get some drugs.

00:19:55 Q: And was it something you did regularly, or just—

Berch: Yeah, took a lot of drugs.

00:20:05 Q: And where were you living? Were you in the dorms?

Berch: Yeah, I had a single in Hewitt [Hall] my Freshman year. And then after that went over to Plimpton [Hall]. And was in that first cohort that was trying to civilize the rules about Plimpton.

00:20:28 Q: Any significant friends from that period, who affected your life, or nurtured your development, or our career plans, or—

00:20:37 Berch: No, I have some friends that I am still in touch with. They weren't necessarily Barnard students, but they were from that period.

00:20:48 Q: And during the summers. What did you do during the summers?

Berch: I worked as a librarian for a couple summers in the place where my father worked, which was a research lab. So I was a research librarian. It was nothing too interesting. In the summer of one of those years, I went to Turkey, cause I had an internship with AIESEC [International Association of Students in Economic and Commercial Sciences], which is an exchange organization of students who are in economics and business. A-I-E-S-E-C. So I was there, I was in Istanbul for the summer, which was good. It was the first time I left home, you know, left the country.

00:21:52 Q: What about any particular romances— romances!—an old-fashioned word— excuse me. Relationships.

Berch: Yeah. Major ones.

00:22:02 Q: And—

Berch: Well, they lasted until they didn't last. [Laughs]

00:22:12 Q: No, I ask that, because I met a guy my Freshman year and ended up marrying him, and so my life was "doomed" for ever. [Laughs] Why? What was wrong with me? But, anyway that's not my interview.

Berch: Ha. Well, I had one that started in my freshman year and he broke it up— I think just before— I think he was a year ahead of me. He broke it up just before he graduated. Because I wasn't really the sort of— he had tried bringing me home once and I really wasn't appropriate. And he was going to be a more straight-laced person when he graduated, so he found himself someone more appropriate to his station. Sound like *Downtown Abbey*, but it wasn't. Yeah, I had different flings of different lengths, and somebody I met near the end of—must have been my Senior year then—we carried that on for a little graduate school time, but—you know.

00:23:23 Q: So, what— I know this is somewhat general, but—as I recall, you were very much a leader in several things [that were] going on during our tenure at Barnard. You were involved in

a number of things. So, I suppose we could jump to involvement with the Strike and your involvement and role in that. When did you first find out about it?

Berch: Well, I'm not sure when I first found out about it, but whatever. I remember—there must have been a point when we were still having classes going on at Barnard, because I do remember the deal that Catherine [R.] Stimpson put out to us in her class. I was taking “Rebels, Writers and Revolutionaries.”

00:24:33 Q: Perfect.

Berch: And she said in the beginning of the class, “Anybody who gets arrested gets an automatic 'A' in my class.” So, I do remember coming back to see her, just before the end of the spring term, and saying, “Well, I got arrested so—you owe me.” [Laughs] But, yeah so I pulled out some stuff for you, because I knew you were coming—some of my old artifacts. But Stimpson had put out a questionnaire. Now, let's see. [Looks at her papers]

I put out this questionnaire, now that I look at it, because it says, “I am a student at Barnard College doing this research for one of my seminars. I would like to find out about the image that most people have in their mind of the nature of the rebel.” You know there were various questions. “Could you name one rebel that comes to mind?” And of course what is really fascinating here is that they're all, the language was all male, “Does he come from a low, middle

or upper income bracket? Is he from an urban or rural—" Blah, blah, blah. So this rebel was very much in our mind as a guy.

00:26:11 Q: And who would you have chosen? Do you remember?

Berch: Oh, in the class, I wrote papers on people like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and some other people. Pretty interesting.

So, when it started, I thought it was the right thing to do. I knew what the demands were, and I—you know—went over to Fayerweather [Hall] and kind of started going there more often, and then ended up I was there more than I wasn't.

00:26:52 Q: What do you remember about what you actually did there? About the group meetings and things like that?

Berch: Well, there were meetings, and they seemed to be interminable. I mean, whenever anybody was meeting it was sort of a participatory democracy of a type I had never experienced before, or realized went on and on and on. There was a wedding, I think, in Fayerweather at one point. That was a social occasion, you could say. But mostly it was a lot of really interesting, cool people around. It was also wonderful to occupy a classroom building. Because it just had all of these wonderful hidden areas and everything. It was very interesting. So, and it was nice to kind of making it into a place to live.

00:27:51 Q: I'm sorry, to what?

Berch: To make it into a place to live.

Q: Right.

Berch: Retro-fitting it for human needs. When you wanted to go out, you went out. It wasn't like you were nailed to some locked doors, where outside, you know, there was—not like sit-down strikes of the 1930's in Detroit, where outside there's all these police and you're inside and you know, this tension of the two. That only happened at the end. But in the middle times, it was sort of interesting. You could go and meet with people who were in different buildings and find out what they were doing there. You'd go home for a while, you'd come back.

00:28:47 Q: Did you have anything to do with Hamilton [Hall]. The occupation. Were you aware of people there? I know there was a real cleavage, Major.

Berch: This was a photo taken in front of Hamilton. And this was Hamilton [first photo shows a group of all-white males arguing, one appearing to speak into microphone; the second shows a man and two female students on the balcony at Hamilton].

00:29:09 Q: Who took these pictures?

Berch: A friend of mine, Stephen Farber. You know the thing about Hamilton and the Black students was that they had no time at all for white people. And sometimes I think about it, think about, well, what was worse, being called a "honkie,"or being called "a chick"?

Q: Good point.

Berch: In retrospect, I didn't mind being called a chick as much as I minded being called a honkie. And I found that most of the Black students that I knew at Barnard or Columbia or any of the ones involved with Hamilton Hall, were doing an incredible amount of posturing, and they seemed to be making up for a whole lot of personal alienation that was much more their own problem. There they were at an elite institution that was building a gymnasium in a Harlem park for the university's use, and you know, they just had no way of getting a better attitude toward where they were, other than just being very hostile. So, you can only—how do you react to the hostility? You walk away from it. Because anything else you do is going to be shoved in your face. So, that was that.

00:31:08 Q: Do you remember students from other universities being involved in the Strike? Or was it primarily Columbia-Barnard people?

Berch: No, for me, it was just Columbia-Barnard people, although I knew things were going on at other schools. We all did.

00:31:22 Q: So what about the other years? No, before you answer that, tell me, explain a little bit about the arrest and where you were, where you ended up and how the process worked for you.

Berch: We were in Fayerweather, so when—we knew when they were coming to arrest people, so if you wanted to you could have not been there. But we were taken out of the building and then we were put on the police buses, and on the bus, the policeman introduced himself as our arresting officer and had us put his name on our forms. And then we went, of course, to the Tombs, where we were put in our cell and our little stuff was taken from us—I still have my little envelope with—because they took, as they said—pills [shows envelope], well I had birth control pills. So they had to put that in their property envelope. And then we were represented by Barnard's lawyers at the arraignment—Butler, Jablow & Geller— and then we had a date for a trial.

And our trial was just wonderful. Because we were there and the policeman is reading his notes, how he arrested us, and we go like this [motion of nudging] to the Lawyer's Guild lawyer, and we do this [covering side of mouth], tell our attorney basically that what he said is a lie. He never arrested us in the building, he was just the policeman on the bus, and so the Lawyer's Guild lawyer asks the court if he could see the notes that the policeman was reading from, and there was a little back and forth about it—no, no, no, yes, yes, yes— and then the court asked to see the notebook and the notebook was blank. And we were therefore released. So I mean, talk

about a technicality, but on the other hand, it being what a lot of people were facing, you know, some expenses associated with what they were going to do about sentencing, and everything.

And Barnard's lawyer wrote us a letter saying they were only going to represent us for so long, and then we had to come up with some money if we wanted them to keep representing us.

00:34:54 Q: Now how do you happen to have saved all this? I'm really intrigued.

Berch: It's part of my life.

00:35:04 Q: So you're an archivist—

Berch: To some degree. So this is them [the lawyers] telling us that they're going to—you know—they represented us "in and on April 30th" and then what we were charged with, and then what—and then, "We were present at suggestion of Barnard College, in order to place ourselves at the disposal of all Barnard students who desired legal counsel at their arraignment, but who quite naturally had not been able to obtain such counsel prior to that time." So, you know "Please decide what you are doing and get back to us," and then the Lawyer's Guild had a little different approach.

00:35:53 Q: So there were two sets, there were Barnard's lawyers, and then there were the Lawyers' Guild.

Berch: Yeah, Barnard's lawyers stepped in for Barnard students at the arraignment, and then after that you could either—I don't know if anyone actually retained them as their attorneys after that because the Lawyers' Guild and the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], they were much more appropriate, you would say. They specified in their letter to us, you know, what kind of approach they were taking to this, as a political trial, not as a—trespassing trial.

00:36:39 Q: Criminal trespassing.

Berch: So that was obviously more wonderful. One of the things, I think one of the things that a lot of people will miss when they're talking about this time. [Looking through pictures in her folder.] This is a photograph of "the Pad." You remember "the Pad?" [Holds up photo] The Pad was a place on Amsterdam at 116th St. and this was like the wall when you walked up the steps.

Q: I was never there actually—

Berch: And it was in black light, so that it could be really cool when you turned off the light and put on a black light. It was very much the sort of drug and hippie subculture that was, that I enjoyed at that time.

00:37:45 Q: So did you arrive in buttoned-down blouses, and then move into more flowery clothes, sandals, what—I don't mean here, in general during that freshman year of college.

Berch: Freshman year. I didn't have many clothes of any kind. You know. I didn't come from a family where clothes, you know, were something people spent money on. My parents were paying for my tuition. It was a good chunk of money. That's what they spent money on. They didn't spend money on clothes. So whatever I wore, I wore. But I did do drugs a lot. It didn't matter what you wore. Sort of like LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide] was an equal opportunity good drug.

00:38:31 Q: Now, so you feel that impacted anything in those particular years.

Berch: Yeah. It was a big deal to me.

Q: I mean, do you have memories of the experiences you had under LSD.

Berch: Yeah. A very good drug.

00:38:46 Q: And you always had good trips?

Berch: Yeah. It was always a little different, but yeah.

00:38:55 Q: And where would you get your drugs from?

Berch: There was always somebody who knew somebody who had some, and then there was always the “so this is a really good batch,” or “this is some Sunshine,” or—you know—they had names, just like drugs always have. And so somebody was always having some. If you used mescaline, LSD, those kinds of drugs, you knew who you were getting them from. And there were different people, from what everyone else was doing.

00:39:39 Q: So back to the politics of it all. What other—so that spring-summer the assassination of [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] and then of [John F.] Kennedy, Eugene McCarthy running for President and then Chicago. There were a lot of things going on beyond Columbia. What are your memories of that, or—

Berch: Well, you know, my brother was in Chicago. He was in law school at the time and they were doing defense of the people arrested at the—

Q: Convention.

Berch: Convention. And I had a really good friend—the guy who took these pictures—he wasn't a draft dodger—he had served already—but still he was more or less living in Canada, in Montreal. So, you know, through my friends, I knew about what was going on elsewhere. And it seemed like, I don't know—a time of great change. And it was good to be part of it.

00:40:58 Q: So, you sort of hinted at it when you were talking about the way the African-American, Black kids in Hamilton responded to everyone else. Did you feel that kind of racial tension within the institution continued through the four years, or was it just sort of an anomaly during the Strike?

Berch: I don't know officially how many Black students there ever really were in those four years at Barnard.

Barnard has a way of making statistics that don't correspond to the reality that you saw on the ground. And that was true when I was teaching, too. I mean Barnard was always saying it had so many percentage of minority students, and then they would break it down, but I hardly ever had very many Black students in any of my classes. The ones that I had, you know, they were memorable. And I don't think there were that many Black students at Barnard in this period. When I lived off campus—that would be my junior year—one of my roommates was a Black woman who was a Barnard student in our year. And she was just full of attitude.

00:42:25 Q: Attitude's the word. I remember that.

Berch: Umm. Yeah, she got her—she's the one who went from the Talbot's outfits and such to the Afro, and you know, I don't know how, except that the rent was really good, how she managed to put it together in her head that she was living with all these "honkies" by choice, you know. She just tried to deal with it her way, I guess.

But, you know, I really had no time for a lot of that attitude, because I had grown up with Black people and I had good Black friends who had no connection to Barnard or Columbia—so I wasn't really sure why there had to be all that attitude, and I didn't have the understanding I have at this point in life, which is they were in a very difficult cognitive dissonance kind of thing, where they were on one hand very opposed to where they were, and on the other hand, they chose to be there. So I understand in retrospect more about their bind, but it wasn't anything at the time I felt coming anywhere near.

00:44:06 Q: Yeah. I remember the BOSS—Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters, a couple of meetings people would drift in and out, but I do not remember what was being asked for. And then there was a floor in Hewitt, I remember a lot of the Blacks students moved there—I don't remember the specifics now.

Berch: Well, there—that would have been— I wouldn't have known about it. I was probably—

Q: —In Plimpton.

Berch: In Plimpton? That was my sophomore year in Plimpton. You know there was also the Experimental College, and that was, you know, an important development out of the—you know-the riots.

00:44:53 Q: Now, were you part of that at all?

Berch: I was in a way. Because Hester Eisenstein was part of it, of organizing it, and later, actually—it's hard to sort out exactly—I liked the whole thing of having classes on the lawn and the sort of—I wasn't going to live at the Paris Hotel—and be part of the whole living thing, but afterward when I came back to teach at Barnard, some of those connections were still important for me.

So Serge Gavronsky, who had been part of a lot of the spirit of that, he became one of my close—he became one of my colleagues whom I was close with who was not in the Econ[nomics] Department. And, actually, I think when I was at Barnard, he had started Thursday Noons, which were—Remember Thursday Noons, which were in the College Parlor? So I teamed up with him as a student to put together the programs. And so what was in it for me was that I met all of Serge's like hipster friends, and some of whom were living, actually at the Paris Hotel at the time. Leo Skir was one, and some of his others, when he was, he put together this program as a way of giving a little stipend to some of his more artistic friends, who didn't have any way to get any. So, it worked for him and it worked for his friends. And then, I got to meet all these people, so I liked it.

00:46:57 Q: Where is Serge anyway? Is he still with us?

Berch: Yeah. He retired and you can see him sometimes walking on the street—I see him every so often. Sometimes it will happen like every month I'll see him, and then our ways will split. He tends to do something up at Barnard still. Or at Columbia, because he lives, I think, in the eighties and he walks up there. And he's still a good soul.

And he always felt really bad; when I had my grievance at Barnard, he was on the faculty committee that was hearing the grievance. And he never felt that Barnard treated me right, and yet he was on this—he was part of the Barnard Committee, so. I think for a long time he must have felt like I was had very much of a grievance against him, when actually I thought that the whole place was so hypocritical that I couldn't bear anybody personal animus. It was the institution that was much more in charge than any of these poor faculty puppets who were sitting on this—

00:48:47 Q: So what about some of your—well clearly you were a very independent, spunky woman from the beginning, but the seminal feminist movement, or your sense of what others were doing, and over the years, how that impacted your life.

Berch: A sense of what others were doing. I'm no sure what you're asking. I mean, when I came to Barnard, I started teaching Women's Studies at Barnard.

00:49:13 Q: You were teaching Women's Studies, so you've done the whole spectrum.

Berch: And economics. I started a course called, “Women in the Economy.”

00:49:21 Q: Excellent.

Berch: Yeah, you would think it would be excellent. And I published a textbook on the subject, which was the only textbook there was at the time. That's why I felt I was really getting screwed when they wouldn't let me stand for tenure in the Economics Department.

Q: What year was this? This was in the 80's—

Berch:—And they put up for tenure André Burgstaller, who is the most plodding guy— He's still doing nothing till today. And I had published and I had great student reviews and they didn't want to come anywhere near putting me up for tenure. And of course, they hadn't put Sylvia Hewlitt up for tenure. Or they put her up for tenure and then didn't give it to her. And Cynthia Lloyd, and—they had a whole problem with women, and there I was working on sex discrimination, so you know, the ironies abounded. But, yeah, I taught Women' Studies also, I taught the foundations course, Feminist Texts.

00:50:47 Q: Catherine [Kate] Stimpson. The voice continues right there.

Berch: Well, Kate Stimpson, she remained a friend. In a later book she did a blurb on the cover for me. So it's not like I socialized with her. She went on to do other things, but— I did, I ran a

Scholar and the Feminist Conference for Barnard on Women and Technology. It was really a breakthrough kind of conference. It was when the Scholar and the Feminist was really doing original things, rather than just looking backwards all the time. We were looking forward. We had a really wonderful conference. I did a lot for Barnard. And most of it counted against me, because I identified myself with things which Barnard was not ready to embrace, one of them was feminism.

00:51:52 Q: A women' college not embracing feminism.

Berch: There were a lot of things. When I first came to Barnard, I had a visit in my office from Mirra Komarovsky. You know Mirra was like one of "the greats" that Barnard had on is faculty back in the day. And she said to me, she said, "It's nice to have you here on the faculty. I want to make sure you understand, however, that people with names like mine and background like yours—you know, you don't really get tenure here." And what she was saying to me was that there was anti-Jewish discrimination at Barnard, and she had dealt with a lot of discrimination over the course of her younger years, and didn't want me—she wanted to make sure I had some tough skin, because I would need it.

So, there were so many things that I didn't realize when I was a student. It was all kind of hidden behind the "Oh, which course are you going to take?" and, you know, "How's this course. And how's that course?" "Do you have enough for your major and what are you doing your Senior

Thesis on?" And, you know, you just sort of made your assumptions about what the institution was doing. And the institution maybe was a little more progressive then.

00:53:45 Q: So when you finally graduated from Barnard, you did take the four years, right? What did you anticipate was going to happen to you next? And what did happen, academically, professionally?

Berch: Well, I had already arranged to go to graduate school.

00:54:03 Q: And did you go to Columbia?

Berch: No, I went to the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Q: That was a big change.

Berch: Think of Madison as New York in the Midwest. And in some ways, well it was really different. I lived on a farm—just outside of Madison.

00:54:20 Q: Oh, you did?

Berch: For part of it. When I first came I lived right on State Street, downtown—'cause that way I could walk to class and—yeah, they offered me a graduate fellowship so it was all paid for. Throughout my doctorate I never paid Wisconsin.

00:54:51 Q: And what did you do your doctorate on?

Berch: Industrialization and Working Women in the 19th Century, Britain, France and the United States. It was a comparative study.

00:55:04 Q: And this became a book?

Berch: Well, that was an issue that came up in my first year of teaching. I was offered a contract for publishing it. And Annette Baxter, you know, she was the history department's chair at the time, and it was a publishing concern that she was sort of their editor in chief.

Q: Of the publishing house?

Berch: Yeah, well. I have the papers for that. It was like Garland Publishing; they specialized in doing doctoral dissertations and reprints of historical works. Things like that. And I looked at the contract and said to Annette, "I can't sign this contract, because you're not paying anything." And she said, But you need this for tenure; you need to have publications." And I said, "But this dissertation is really good. It could be a book, a real book." And so, she said, "Well, it's up to

you." We stayed really good friends. I gave one of the eulogies at her funeral, because she was just such a brilliant, wonderful force. And she was always so desperately concerned that after she left, if she weren't in the history department it would go so far right wing, it wasn't funny. And that's what happened. Because, you know, she was the one who was keeping it feminist.

Q: She was a pioneer, more than that.

00:57:01 Q: So you've already hinted how your adult life was different, after you left Barnard than you had anticipated when you entered Barnard, in terms of your adult life, because of the tenure situation, etc. Were there other areas—clearly you are a scholar, so this was a key to your life—in which— were there other areas where you thought things would be different, that were shockingly—I'm sorry. Were you, were there other areas that you were hoping, having gone through Barnard for four years, graduated, gone on to graduate school, would sort of just fit in place, that were radically different in terms of your life, and that you care to share?

Berch: I'm not sure what you have in mind.

00:57:54 Q: I think you've put so much emphasis or reiterated so fully the situation of going back and teaching at Barnard, and what happened those years. So I am wondering if there were other areas of your life, other than your professional one, where—marriage or not marriage, relationships, or maybe just things—

Berch: Well everyone has their relationships. I don't think it had much to do with Barnard. I mean, Barnard was my education and my employer, but wasn't my whole world.

00:58:40 Q: Okay. Fair enough. If you could go back to that first day at Barnard, that first week at Barnard—I think I know the answer to this because you told me about your daughter— what advice would you give to a young Bettina about how to get through all of this?

Berch: It's probably the same thing I told my daughter anyway, and the students I have now, which is, whatever school you're at, you know, take advantage of your professor's office hours and go in and find out what they're about. I mean some of them you may discover are really cool people outside the classroom, and you never suspected that. And other ones you'll find a lot of common ground with, but those are relationships that you'll remember afterwards and will be important in many ways to you. Umm, I mean, I bribed my daughter to do that, when she went to school. I said, you know, "Tell me you went to some of your professors' office hours. Just tell me you went, and I'll send you a check."

I mean it's partly that I'm an economist and I believe you should put your money where your mouth is. But, you know, it made a difference. She didn't say, "Oh, send me a check," she said, "Oh, I went and visited my history professor during office hours, and you know, I really want to take more courses from him because he's really interesting," and so. And I know that, I know enough about academic institutions, that you can lose your life in these little organizations they

have, that are meaningless, or you can take advantage of the wonders of the smart people on the faculty, and go see them.

01:00:53 Q: I even thought that way about Martha [E.] Peterson. I found this note in my stuff. It was dated, May 6th. This would have been 1971 because I was graduating. She wrote: "Dear Bettina. I've just finished signing your diploma. You will be pleased to know it is ready. What you don't know is how much I have enjoyed personally having you at Barnard. You add liveliness, zest and good sense to almost all undertakings. You may find more stimulating and happier homes than Barnard, in the future, but never one that cherishes your special qualities more."

Q: That's fantastic.

Berch: And that's from a person whose office I sat—I sat in her office when we did the Linda LeClair, you know, the Plimpton—we gotta liberate Plimpton and we sat in, in her office, and that's how she knew me.

Q: And respected you.

Berch: She didn't send everyone in our class a note. But she sent me a note because she knew me, and she knew me because I had been sitting in her office.

Q: And having a conversation, a dialogue.

01:02:17 Berch: Yes. That whole business with Plimpton. I don't know if you followed it very much.

Q: I think I have selective discordant memories of it. I was actually in Plimpton, but not until the second semester—.

Berch: We had a “sleep-in.”

Q: Tell me more about that. I don't—

Berch: And, we had media coverage.

Q: Well, I knew about Linda LeClair, but I didn't know what followed from that.

Berch: Yeah, well, let me show you. [Brings over folder of papers and begins to sort through them and show interviewer.] ‘Cause this actually got me into more trouble than a lot of other things. That was the leaflet, actually. Everything was by "Ad-Hoc Committee".

Q: So she got expelled. Linda LeClair got expelled for “cohabiting.”

Berch: Yeah, because she broke the rules. [Laughing]

Q: Okay. That's impressive. Now did you write this?

Berch: Here we are. This is "Barnard Dorms are Not a Home. Sleep-ins Ruled Out by College." That was the *Daily News. T*he *Daily News!* So there I am sitting on my bed in Plimpton, unaware of—.

Q: This is you.

Berch: Yes. Unaware that, how's that going to look? There I am sitting on my bed. I mean, my parents were very upset.

Q: [Reading] Oh, I remember Elizabeth Meyers.

Berch: And of course there was no other furniture. I mean I gave the guest the chair. So I sat on the bed. But it makes it look like I just got out of bed.

Q: Yes.

Berch: —"fresh from sex" kind of thing.

Q: So this was what date?

Berch: So that was the *Daily News*, October 26, 1968.

Q: 1968.

Berch: So that was, you know, that fall. That was when, Plimpton opened that Fall. And it seemed so perfectly natural to us, oh, to have a sleep-in. That's how we'll—we'll sign people in and they won't sign out. And then what will they do?

Q: Was it co-ed?

Berch: Well that was the point. The guys were supposed to sign out, but instead they signed in but they weren't going to sign out. It seemed, you know, like the perfectly normal thing to do. Have a sleep-in. After the Spring of '68, that kind of thinking was pretty normal. That's why. Significant.

01:05:36 Q: So, what finally came of that? We had twenty-four-hour parietals. So it worked.

Berch: Yeah, we worked it out. They wanted a little less of this kind of publicity. They didn't want Barnard to be in the *Daily New*s, not at all. And the other thing is that Barnard and Columbia controlled the *New York Times* coverage of things to a great extent.

Q: You mean during the Strike?

Berch: Historically, but especially the Strike and what was going on. But the *Daily News* was not an area where Barnard either had any connections and didn't want that name Barnard in that newspaper one bit, because it never was a good thing. So we made an arrangement. And that made the first year of Plimpton more interesting. We had pretty good, interesting years at Barnard, I think.

01:06:46 Q: What about the other shut-downs? Seventy again, wasn't it? Sixty-nine, seventy? I thought we lost a couple of semesters. Not our senior year, but mostly I think it was anti-War strikes. Weren't there other times when there were strikes? Nothing as large as '68, of course.

Berch: Hmm. I think the next time I was arrested was when I was already teaching.

01:07:19 Q: What were you arrested for? Teaching.

Berch: Well that was the South African Embassy, apartheid and the Sharpville Massacre. That was when I was teaching and, you know, you could if you went to the South African consulate and you demonstrated, then you indicated if you were willing to be arrested. If you were arrested, you went through the process.

Q: Were you arrested multiple times?

Berch: No, that was the only other time?

Q: And how did you, was that an issue in terms of having a record established for you then?

Berch: Well, my mother always went on about it. Because if you grew up in Washington, you get— my mother would say, “You'll never get a security clearance." But those charges were also dismissed. The judge actually made some nice comments about how it was our right to speak. No, it wasn't a foregone conclusion, but I never ended up with problems.

Q: Clean slate.

Berch: Well, at one time I did get my FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] record, because I was working on—.

Q: And what did they have on you?

Berch: I was working on a book, a biography of Elizabeth Hawes, who had a huge FBI file, and when I was learning how to apply for it, I figured, “well, as long as I'm applying for hers, I can see what they have on me, too.” So with mine, there were just some deleted, a page or two of deleted names, people I had known personally, whatever. Nothing compared to hers. I was

curious and you could do that. Now I think there is so much more fear about even asking for things. They really made it their kind of country.

01:10:08 Q: Right. Okay. Again, this is one of those superlative kind of questions. Which I personally find difficult to answer, much less ask. But still, what was the most memorable day of your career, of your community involvement, something that really was sort of an apex, in your years of teaching, working, being a community advocate, activist?

Berch: I don't know. You mean that day I got the Nobel Prize [laughs]? It seems to be asking for something like that, which I don't have.

01:10:58 Q: What do you consider your greatest accomplishment so far? What are you most proud of?

Berch: Oh. Probably my delightful daughter.

01:11:12 Q: I'm assuming. Did she grow up here?

Berch: Yeah. She grew up a lot here. Before school age she and I were more in Belize.

Q: Oh, you were in Belize, too? What were you doing in Belize?

Berch: Living there a lot.

Q: This was before teaching at—?

Berch: No, this was after teaching.

Q: The hiatus, I keep forgetting.

Berch: And I was working on different books. So, I was what they call now "an independent scholar." But raising her. We came back here to live full time when she was school age, because they have very rudimentary schools in Belize. And I raised her myself, with the help of friends [laughs]. I've been a single parent all my life, so.

Q: And does she have anything to do with her dad, do you?

Berch: Well, at this point he's dead, but even when he was alive, he didn't acknowledge her. I did go to court in Belize to have the Court acknowledge her. That was a kind of Pyrrhic victory. But it meant a lot to me at the time. In retrospect, it was a waste of my time and money.

Q: It's a British system, right?

Berch: Magistrates and there's somebody who's taking down your whole testimony, but he—probably not that way in the year 2015, but at the time, and I had to swear on a Bible when I

gave my testimony. And then the other side's attorney came to me and said, "But you're Jewish, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." [Laughing] That was already as if to say, "Yeah, put your hand on that Bible, but it's not really right" kind of thing. So—It was not a nice thing. But I think raising her has been one of my great accomplishments.

Q: Where is she now?

Berch: She's in her first year of law school, in Philadelphia.

Q: Fantastic, fantastic. University of Pennsylvania?

Berch: Yeah. It's a very, very good match for her. She's very congenial; she's having the time of her life. So.

Q: Not too many people say that about law school.

Berch: They don't. That's why at the beginning I was worried. Cause, you know, she was having such a good time. And I realized that they're actually just very nice people. And they, you know, they ply them with a lot of food. And drink. And it makes for "happy-happy." And they are all nice people. I go and visit and they are all kind of nice. There's— nobody's sharpening their tools. They're all pleasant.

01:14:57 Q. I have to laugh, because my ex went to University of Pennsylvania Law School, and he was part of the "Irish Mafia." They went [in seating] by order [of names], Connell, Casey, and I forgot the other guy's name. They sat in the back and—were rebellious. But that was 48 years ago! So I think the timbre would have changed.

01:15:16 Berch: Well. They still have a lot of affinity groups; there's the Black Students, and the Latino, which includes my daughter, there are all kinds of different little groups and they seem to, a lot of them, put on really good food. And that's what they do. And they recruit more of their own group to come.

Q: To become part of it.

Berch: Yeah. It works. It works. I'd be happy.

01:15:50 Q: Some rather generalist questions here. Let me see if I can skip some. or— "Did the Woman's Movement ever intersect with your life?" Come on, I think we've answered that. Do you want to talk a little more about some of the books you've written and their subjects, because I don't know all the names you mentioned.

Berch: All right. Let's see. Hold on. [Gets up and retrieves several books, then hands them to Connell.] This is the textbook when I was teaching. This one was later. So that was the first book when I was teaching, because we didn't have one. I invented this course on Women and the

Economy, but we didn't have a textbook, so for the first year or so I taught without a textbook, just a lot of readings. Then gradually, I developed a textbook based on how I structured the course. And used it while I was teaching there. [Book is: *The Endless Day: The Political Economy of Women and Work*]. You know, after some years, there were more courses on women and the economy, so that got to be more of a field, you know, but for a while, there weren't any. So the ironies.

Q: A big leap from Betty Friedan.

Berch: Well, everybody's got their place. So this is *Radical by Design, which* I wrote after leaving Barnard. It was based on—hmm—again, when I was teaching, some of the historical research that I was doing was on women in WWII [World War II] in the factories. Elizabeth Hawes had written a book on the subject, which was really kind of wonderful. And so I was aware of her. And as I did more work on her, I realized that she was also, in addition to working for the auto workers during the War, she was also a fashion designer. And then these two parts of the life got to be really exciting, and interesting, and then the fact that she had this FBI file. But, the FBI had confused her with another woman who was named Elizabeth Hawes, who was also a very, very radical person. She was with this Tennessee Highlander [Folk] School, the other Elizabeth Hawes. So, actually, I did get in contact eventually with the other Elizabeth Hawes. This, in fact, may be coming back for me, this book. There's a guy who's working on a mini-series.

Q: Fantastic, I had no idea.

Berch: Yes, she's wonderful. Then after that, I did this other book. You may have seen this iconic photograph? The photographer is Frances Benjamin Johnson, and she had never had a biography. So I did this biography of her, very long and wonderful life, that went through many, many phases. She has really a remarkable career, from celebrity photos to a whole series on educational institutions. The Hampton Album. And then a phase that was into landscape architecture, and finally, historic preservation in the South. So she's really a remarkable figure and—.

Q: She had an exhibit at the MET [Metropolitan Museum of Art]?

Berch: No, not really.

Q: They had a few samples?

Berch: The Hampton Album was showcased by MOMA [Museum of Modern Art]. Their photography department felt as if they had discovered her. And this album. They do have a beautiful copy of it. And they kind of consider her one of theirs, although all of her work is in the Library of Congress. That's where she went to a great deal of trouble to deposit all of her papers and her photographs, which made this book possible, because I could not have afforded to pay for these photographs otherwise. And there's no point having a book about a photographer when

you can't put the photographs in. And some of these photographs— you know there are a million more that are wonderful—[points] some like that which I found just marvelous.

And then this last one was a biography of Anzia Yezierska, that I did, who was a writer. Again, a fascinating character, who lived in this neighborhood and was the lover of John Dewey for a while, and had been with Barnes in Philadelphia, when the Barnes Collection was getting started, and yet she was this great short story writer, and everyone assumed that her short stories were actually her own life. And so it became a project to write her biography because her life was not anything like the characters in her stories. They were different. She wrote *The Bread Givers*, which a lot of Freshman English classes read, because it's about the immigrant experience in America.

Q: I will definitely look that up.

Berch: So, it you would like a copy, I am happy to give you a copy.

Q: Sure

01:23:00 Q: All right. Again. I feel you answered many of these. How about, how your feelings as a woman have changed over the years? This is your subject. How about spirituality and religion. I know you were born Jewish, or raised Jewish. Has this impacted your life in any way?

Berch: [Shouts] Things going on with the Jews! [Laughs]

Q: I mean more in a spiritual realm.

Berch: Oh, I'm a materialist. Not in the Madonna sense of material girl. More in the sense—back in the day we would say, “Marxist materialists as opposed to these spiritual s who believed in—.

Q: The dichotomy.

Berch: That particular meaning of materialist.

Q; Thank you for clarifying that. I should have realized I was dealing with an economist here.

Berch: I don't really think Barnard has any— Barnard's unease with religion has always been an annoying thing. I mean they never could deal with, like, Jewish holidays, and they get themselves all up in a twist about Kosher food or not. They have just never been able to acknowledge, they were always careful that no one assumed they were a “Jewish” school. And their fear of that has created these calendars that used to be awful when you're teaching, and they'd have classes on Yom Kippur, and most students would draw the line there and say, “I really should be doing religion today. Not school.” And Barnard would just say, ”Well make

whatever accommodation you need to." And it was always so frustrating, I mean, why didn't they just look at the facts? They have a lot of Jewish students.

Q: They've always had a lot of Jewish students. Our classmates were very largely Jewish.

Berch: But they never acknowledged that. Barnard was very afraid to be tagged as a Jewish school in New York City. So that's kind of annoying, but other than that.

01:25:56 Q: Did you raise your daughter attending Hebrew school and things like that?

Berch: Yeah. She knows who she is. Part of proper raising of kids is that they know who they are.

01:26:14 Q: So this is real personal. What prompted your decision to have a child?

Berch: I was living a lot in Belize and all around me I saw people who were doing the crappiest job in the world of raising children. I mean, they'd think nothing. They'd take a baby bottle and they'd throw the Fanta in there. And they'd pop it in their kid's mouth. Or you'd go into a drugstore, even today in Belize, and on the shelf, right near the cash register, you buy "Gripe Water." Gripe water is what you give the baby when it's having lots of "agita." And it's just like alcohol. And, yeah, it puts them to sleep. And they beat their children terribly. If they do bad things, you know, they really, you know, don't spare the rod there. So all around me I was seeing

these people doing such a crappy job of raising kids, and I think the worst part of it is still there today, which is , you know, sizteen-year-old girls are having babies. All over. It doesn't even bear remark.

And so I said, actually, people are doing such a lousy job. I could do a better job than this. And, you know, if I had been living in New York, in New York you look around and everybody, in order to do a quality job, they've got to have a lot of money, and means. They have to be able to go to the best schools and they have to be able to do this and that. So, everything. A lot of the pressure was off me because I was already too old. When I had my daughter, I was forty-two. For a first baby, forty-two is like over the hill. So, you know, no one else around me was the same age. Everybody having their first baby down there at the playground, they're all these young things. But I didn't have to do any of the things they were doing because I was so much older than they were, anyway. So I was out of my cohort, age cohort, and with Belize, I was just out of the culture, but I wasn't going to do what they were doing anyway. No Gripe Water, no beating the kid. I breastfed, I was perfectly happy doing all these things.

So, okay, I was a scarlet woman, because I had this child by one of their men who was married and had family and lived the equivalent of a block or two away from me, in an island where everybody knew everyone's business anyway. So, apart from the "scarlet letter," which I effectively wore the whole time and still do to this day, you know, it seemed like, why not? Suddenly. And I didn't have to be married to do it, so that was even better. I have married a couple of times, but—.

Q: Oh, you have?

Berch: Yeah, not because I wanted to, it was never to "marry." It was always because there was a need. The first time he needed a green card. And then the second time I married him again because I needed his health insurance.

Q: Very practical.

Berch: Well, I really think people find marriage a bad idea. [Aside by Q]. There is the marriage penalty from the IRS. It also puts a strain on a relationship. I really liked the guy I married. I was very involved with him. The thought that they weren't going to let him in the country the next time was enough to make me say, "We could marry and then go and do the green card thing." But it ruined the relationship. No, I thought we were all on the same page with this. It turns out he was really into being married, because it gave him security. And his parents were holocaust survivors. And he had grown up in a displaced person's camp. And for him, you know, this was like security. Being married, and living in America and not Vienna, it was all really wonderful. And he settled down to being the old man that he really wanted to be.
It drove me crazy. Yeah, it ended a good relationship.

01:32:06 Q: Okay, so what do you look forward to happening in the future?

Berch: Is this when we say “world peace?”

01:32:18 Q: In your personal life.

Berch: In my personal life?

01:32:26 Q: Actually, you didn't get a chance to talk about your current teaching.

Berch: I teach at BMCC, very much the sort of school I should have gone to after Barnard screwed me. I should have just gone there directly. Do not pass “Go” just go. But I didn't know anything about community colleges; when I went to school they called them junior colleges then. The feeling was that they were not real places to go to school. And I discovered a fantastic world there. I have some of the most infuriating and some of the most rewarding students, but it's always interesting. I have a room full of students from everywhere in the world. Some “plain American” is really an anomaly. The first day I usually have them do a little paper, you know, “Tell me something about yourself that's interesting, so I can attach your name to your face.” And this one woman, she wrote, “I'm a Caucasian.” [Laughs] I thought, “That's kind of cute. Why do you think that is such a phenomenal difference that you have?” [Laughs] You know I have grandmothers, I have people from all—I didn't know people left Albania and came to community college in New York, but I have Albanians, I have Mongolians, Nepalese, I have everywhere in the world in this one room, and you know, it's very rewarding because sometimes I make a difference in their lives.

None of them walk in like Barnard students do, pretending they know everything. That's the thing that gets you at Barnard, where even your favorite students, they feel they have to walk in and sort of (mimics voice) “Oh, yeah, I know about that.” So if you know about everything, what are you going to learn here? So they have all their flaws and their problems, my students now, but at least they don't walk in knowing everything. They walk in with a problem of not knowing enough. So my value-added is good there. As long as I can teach there, I'll teach there.

01:35:19 Q: So you teach economics—

Berch: Yes, I teach economics, but I teach a “writing Intensive Economics,” which is a program every student has to take one writing course in order to graduate. So I teach writing at the same time I teach economics, which is a back door way of doing what I wanted to do, which is teach writing. These days, even in the community college, you can't teach something you don't have the paperwork in. You know, if I wanted to teach writing, I'd have to go and get a degree in English or something.

Q: Credentialization.

Berch: Yeah, but it's okay. You know, I’m an adjunct, so that puts me in the front lines of—you know— the biggest change in higher education today, and their struggles to change the system is interesting.

01:36:28 Q: So have you been politically active. Are there outlets for that?

Berch; I'm a union member, which is different. I was never a union member when I taught at Barnard. The only Barnard union there is is the staff workers', but the teachers don't have a union. So it's kind of fun to have a union and a contract, with rights. That's nice.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to share?

Berch: No, you did a fine job.

01:37:10 Q: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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