

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Ruth Louie

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Ruth Louie conducted by Frances Garrett Connell in 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: Ruth Louie

Location: Baltimore, MD

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell

Date: April 14, 2015

00:00:00 Q: Okay, this is an interview taking place with Ruth Louie, at her office, The Baltimore Community Lending, in Baltimore, MD. And the interviewer is Frances Connell and today is April 14, 2015. All right, we will begin. We had a very interesting beginning, which we will note later, but we're now starting. The first question is just if we could ask you to tell a little bit about where you were born and about your early life.

Louie: Oh, okay. I was born in Greene County, Alabama, which is *really* Southern and rural part of Alabama, but raised in Tuscaloosa. And so, I had a pretty different background from the background of many of the women at Barnard [College] when I got there, which is a little interesting.

00:01:01 Q: Can you share a little bit, because—

Louie: Growing up there, this is the south during the—pre and during the Civil Rights Era, which meant that I had both the experience in the south of Jim Crow laws and all of that when I was a small child, segregated schools. In fact until my senior year in high school the schools were—no it was the eleventh grade, the schools were segregated. They were still, a black school system

and a white school system, same superintendent, different schools, et cetera. So that's how I grew up in that situation, I mean I do recall days when I saw—would go downtown to the Kress Store (a local five and dime type store) and there were separate bathrooms marked, White and Colored; they were still there, as were the water fountains, and a lot of people don't really understand, or at least I know Millennials don't understand that time in our history, but I do.

And I also grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. where you could actually go to the church on a weeknight to a rally and folks like King would be there, and speak, and it was a rallying point, and I remember wanting very much to be a part of that. And I remember my dad taking us to some of those rallies, and my aunt taking us to some of those rallies, but not really allowing us to participate in marches or anything like that because they were afraid for our safety, so we couldn't do that kind of thing.

But that was my experience in elementary, you know the pre-elementary school, kindergarten, high school experience, and then in the eleventh grade you know the Movement was beginning to take effect and actually show some results, and therefore schools were beginning to desegregate. I was not in one of the schools that was desegregated; the white high school across town was. Therefore, some of my friends from school were sent to help integrate the white school, because they were on that side of town. I mean they were put in a different situation. They were moved into the white school population. So, anyway—

00:03:45 Q: And your parents, can you share a little bit about them?

Louie: My parents were a laborer and a housekeeper, that was what she did, although Mom actually stayed home with us while we were small, and then as we started to grow up—there were six of us by the way—she would take on jobs here and there. And you know that was my experience. Well, I thought it was a good life, we made the best of what we had. There were eight of us in the household; we shared dinners; we shared as kids all the sibling craziness, and we had lots of kids to play with because we played with each other, because we were all like little stair steps, and also that both parents were there. Now, that's not to say my parents didn't have their problems, they did, but—and our family had problems, but it was a time when we had a huge support network, which—

00:04:54 Q: Which was when my next question.

Louie: Yes, my dad's family, my mother's family, you know my grandmother—my dad mom and dad had died many years before because they were much older, and he was their youngest son. So they had died earlier when I was very young, so I didn't really get to know them, but my grandparents on my mother's side, I did, and her sisters and brothers. My dad's sister (Aunt Lydia) and his brothers were part of my family support system too. And that was the experience. My family, both families were from, as I said Greene and Pickens County, which are very rural counties in Alabama. Many of the black farmers were sharecroppers as were my relatives. I spent summers as a child there because I was the only one who was interested in going and spending time with my cousins and those families.

00:05:44 Q: And how far was it from Tuscaloosa to where you—

Louie: To Eutaw or Union it's about twenty-five miles, so it's not that far. You know and my folks would drive me down, and drop me off, and I'd spend a week or two hanging out with my cousins in "the country" as we say, and then on the farm, and you know we'd hang out and do things like that. And I would have a great time doing it, and come back and go to school when it would be close to time to get ready for school. I also spent time with my grandmother (mom's side) in the summer months for short visits for several years before she and grandpa moved to Tuscaloosa.

And that was it, I mean high school was different, it was a—I thought a very good high school, I excelled in it, in that school, and had a lot of friends, you know not just from the perspective of academics but also from taking, you know, the social part as well as taking on leadership roles with a class and things like that, that were encouraged, and the teachers in the school were *really* an extra support system for me.

When I was in the eighth grade, my mother contracted tuberculosis, and she had to spend two years in a hospital, because in Alabama at that time that's what they did, they put you into what they called a sanitarium with other tuberculosis patients, and then all we could do was see her on the weekends. So it was just my dad taking care of all six of us. And you know sometimes in stressed families you got that one child that becomes the kind of responsible one. I believe I was

that one, [laughs] and you know second in line, but still. That was a difficult time, but you know it didn't deter me from doing what I think I needed to do, as a student and all of that at home helping out. And that was always a good ethic in the house that you were going to school every day, you were going to take care of everything else, you were to make sure you did what you needed to do because education was supported.

00:08:22 Q: Okay. So did you feel—you know clearly racially there were such major divides and such insane injustice, were you—I actually spent the first eight years of my life in Houston, Texas, so I do remember the segregated, and just—I wrote a poem which was published a few years about that. I still could wake up in the morning and remember that.

Louie: Right, yes, I could still see the signs, and I still remember that Kress store and the counter at the local Woolworth and the Ben Franklin store. I still remember the Bus Boycott, I still remember walking to town and not being allowed to take the bus because of what was going on with that, and because my parents felt that it was unsafe. I remember the voting rights campaign. I also remember when my mom first got her voter's card, yes, registered to vote, I remember that. And I was real happy for her, it was like a real big, big accomplishment, and then she and dad allowed me to help out when students came to town who were doing some of the voter registration and stuff to help out, because I could type, [laughs] and you know fill out the cards.

00:09:49 Q: So you were right there in that.

Louie: Yes.

Q: Yes, in the middle of it all, yes, amazing. Were you close to your siblings? Were they also interested in some of the same things you were, or were you a little bit different?

Louie: I think I was different, [laughs] I think I was very different, in fact from them, my brothers and sisters. They've all taken different paths from mine. I was more—I think I was more willing to go out and do things and become a part of activities that were outside the home. My older sister was more of a social type, and she was very smart in her class too. She participated in sports events, like you know “Homecoming Queen,” that kind of thing, and she was majorette in the high school band, when you know here I am the student, you know—

Q: A serious student.

Louie: —the really serious student who wanted to do other things, but some of the things even early on resonated with me, and I wanted to make sure that I explored those things. I remember an argument my dad and I had one time about one of the civil rights events—it was a boycott of the schools because unfairness to the cafeteria workers, and he refused to allow me to go to school because of the boycott that day. I was really upset because I had an exam that day. But he was supporting the movement and the workers and keeping children at home, and I understood that too.

00:11:20 Q: Really?

Louie: Yes, yes, so that was—

00:11:23 Q: Again out of—to protect you.

Louie: Yes, it was just to protect me. I knew that but at that time I just couldn't really understand—I was like, “Yes, but it's something we ought to do,” you know, but I wanted to go take my exam.

00:11:37 Q: So were there—you mentioned a little bit about some social activities too, the things you got involved with that you—

Louie: Yes, you know I belonged to some clubs, some of the social clubs that the girls do; oh, Lord, what was the pink and green one called? The pink and green one, it's like a precursor to one of the sororities, but I've never been a sorority girl by the way. And I'll think of the name of it, later. You know at this age in my life some of that escapes me. So I did those types of things, and I did a lot of church activities, and you know they have lots of clubs and things in the southern church. I was, and you can tell I was different because I did not join the same church that my family was with [laughs].

00:12:29 Q: Oh, really? You joined your own, oh, wow! What was the difference?

Louie: And when I joined that one—Baptist verses Presbyterian, you know Cumberland Presbyterian, which is not—it's a different denomination from regular Presbyterian. So I found that one, I liked the people, I liked the service, and I asked [my parents] if I could join there and they allowed me to do that. So it was kind of interesting. [I walked to a different church around the corner from home. I helped the church catalog books for the library, served as an usher and sang in the choir].

00:12:54 Q: That's fascinating, that's really fascinating. So this—I mean what would you say was your core community then, of support, during the pre-Barnard years?

Louie: Pre-Barnard years? It was probably between my mom and my instructors at school who kind of nurtured me, and kind of helped me along the way to do things, and to get involved in things, and my grandmother and my aunt, [laughs] who were my—my aunt on my dad's side, my grandmother on my mother's side. And my *aunt*, my dad's baby sister and only sister, was a staunch Civil Rights activist, I mean she was the kind who went to jail, you know, and she was an influence too, I'm sure of that. But in terms of the core group—and then of course I had a group of friends from school, you know a couple of really good friends.

00:14:02 Q: So could you say one person who was the most influential, versus a wonderful core?

Louie: You know it's a wonderful core, but I think there was one instructor in the eleventh grade who encouraged me to write an article for the local newspaper. Mr. Davis was quite an influence. And so was—but you know it's like there were several of them that really helped me out, and then I also had a math instructor in high school, Mrs. Hall who mentored me not just, on the math side, but because she thought I was good at it although I didn't think I was, [laughs] but she nurtured me in other ways, she got me involved in some social things like the Delta's, in Tuscaloosa, at Stillman [College]. Their group was doing some social things for young women, and she made sure that I was a part of that. She, supported me in some of my hobbies; I used to sew a lot when I was in school, I made everything I wore just about and did that for other people too, because I was good at it. So, yes, Mr. Davis and Mrs. Hall from high school were very great mentors for me.

00:15:44 Q: Well, growing up in the segregated South itself, how did you—and this is a huge question, but I mean did you have any actual interaction with non-blacks, and if so was it ever positive or was it always negative?

Louie: I had—you know there was very little, it was a really segregated—our social worlds were very, very different. My mom worked for white families. My dad, you know, worked for a white company, but they didn't really have any interaction, they were separated [from the white world]—and I didn't either. And I wasn't part of the kids who got integrated into the white high school, so I didn't know those kids or get to know any of them either before I left for college. So it was—yes, it was a segregated South. Negative? I had a couple of negative experiences; they were

just not to the degree that maybe some other people may have experienced, you know being called the “N” word or something like that was something that was done frequently, and you know it was like a routine thing or something.

00:17:08 Q: Did you ever feel in physical danger?

Louie: No, I did not. You know I think my dad and mom and my aunt tried to really protect us as best they could from that. So, no, I never really did. I knew that what we were doing with the voting rights work, and that was the only mixed situation I was in because there were young white people as well as black who were running those voting rights campaigns.

00:17:45 Q: Right, from the north. [Laughs]

Louie: From the north, right, and they were living in our homes, in fact, not our house, we didn't have the room, but some of the other families we knew were, you know, putting them up as they came through, and making sure that they had food and lodging.

00:18:06 Q: Right, yes, and in terms of like your physical surroundings in those years, I mean we have these stereotypes of you know “the wrong side of the railroad track,” and—

Louie: Well, I lived on the West Side of town, if that's what you mean.

00:18:21 Q: Which was a “good” place? Quote unquote good, yes?

Louie: It was—it was—well, there were—you know in every community whether it is a white one or a black one there's some—some class striation, and what you want to call it there, and so that was there. I didn't live in the middle class section of Tuscaloosa at all; we didn't. Ours was a family of eight with two parents—a laborer and a housekeeper and so we were not there, but we had a decent place to live, you know, and it accommodated all of us. My dad and mom were always trying to do betterment things, and I appreciated that. But given his economic situation and hers, that really was very difficult sometimes, and very challenging. But you know we ate. We had clothing, and we had what we needed for the most part.

00:19:31 Q: Now did you have a best friend?

Louie: That was Dorothy, yes, I did. Up until the—I guess the ninth or tenth grade, Ninth grade. I got recruited, well as a result of one of those national tests. We were National Merit Finalists, There was a group of Quakers, I believe that was looking for Southern children to come and live with a white family, right in the north, and they were recruiting them, and they took people who ‘smart’ students, and there were at least three of us, Dorothy and I were two of them, and John Spencer was the other on. Jon and I were in that test finalist group, and they tried to recruit us to go and live with white families. And of course we were interviewed, et cetera, and my mother really was not for it. She was very reluctant. I was like, [laughs], you know interested, and she was like, “Why would I do that?”

Q: My child!

Louie: But Dorothy, I mean you know some saw it as an opportunity, Dorothy's family saw it as an opportunity, so Dorothy did go. And we were not connected for many, many years after that, and lo and behold when I lived in Chicago I saw this name, Dorothy Foster, at one of the communications companies, and I was working at this bank and I was like, "Oh, my God, that name sounds so familiar. Let me find out if this is the same Dorothy Foster," because I had asked about her over the years, you know, how is she doing and that kind of thing. Sure enough it was. By the way the other guy, John Spencer, who is a distant cousin went as well. So it was a very interesting. Dorothy and I kept in touch periodically any years after that.

00:21:36 Q: Did you ever talk about that period? Had she changed because she—I mean did she feel it was positive there?

Louie: Well, you know, I've never really got that, she—from—you know that it was—you know she benefited from it in education, but I also benefited from the education that I got, so you know it was like we were in parallel worlds almost. You know, she went to good schools, , she was raised by that family and was successful in her career, so I didn't see—in terms of what happened as an end result for the two of us, there wasn't a lot of difference there.

00:22:15 Q: That's interesting. Now, let's just go back to school a second, did you feel your schools were adequately equipped? You said the teachers, particularly in the upper grades were very nurturing.

Louie: Yes, they were.

00:22:28 Q: So did you feel you had what you needed, or—clearly you learned a lot.

Louie: Yes, I think we did. It was—it was probably one great example of the “separate but equal” concept in terms of the schools. This was when I went there the school had been—this high school had been built a few years before, and it was almost, almost but not quite equal to the high school on the West Side. It really was; they [the white high school] almost had the same architecture and layout, they had a few more facilities than we did, and it was bigger, but it was the same architects, the same—so we had the auditoriums and gyms, and all of those facilities that we needed to be able get—educated I guess you could say. And still we had our social groups and all that kind of stuff. So it was just fine.

00:23:43 Q: So you said that you thought your parents were very encouraging of education, that that was the way to go. Do you think that they pushed you in any direction that you might not have gone yourself? Do you feel like they were sort of telling you how to do things—

Louie: No.

Q: —or were you always independent?

Louie: Oh, no. Absolutely not.

00:24:01 Q: Well you chose your own church, so—

Louie: I chose my own church, you know, I also chose some other things I wanted to do. I agreed with my mom about the not leaving Tuscaloosa, and just continuing my education there. No, they were not—my mother completed high school, but my dad never did, so they really didn't quite know, and really probably didn't expect me to go as far as I did. But they were encouraging just the same, except that my father—this is a good story, a quick story for you.

00:24:43 Q: That's okay. Take as long as you need.

Louie: My dad—I almost didn't get to Barnard because of my dad. He was the one that turned at that point, and he wasn't going to sign the permissions to allow me to go, you know. And I *really* couldn't understand that, because he felt, “Well you know you're going so—that far away, you don't know anybody, this is a different experience.” And I'm saying, “Yes, but it's a great opportunity, don't forget I won, I have this scholarship to go, and this is the school I want to go to. And I guess I could go to one of these Alabama schools, or to Howard University or something, but that's—I think this would be very different, and I can learn something here.” And

I'd already done a recruitment thing the year before with Barnard, and I was like, "I think I like this," you know, "This would be a good experience for me." And he finally relented, but I almost didn't make it, he was like, "I shouldn't be signing this."

00:26:04 Q: Yes, it's interesting. What was the process of you applying to Barnard and deciding to go there?

Louie: One of my sister's friends from high school actually went there. Eddie Mary Daniel. I forget her name now; she changed her name to an African name. I still have it in my contacts, I think. But she went to Barnard, and was part of the recruitment team, and she contacted me, and actually she contacted a couple of her teachers as well about women that they thought would be good candidates for Barnard, and I was—we had a little social event in one of my instructor's houses, house, and it worked out. And that was how I was recruited.

00:27:06 Q: That's great. And then you got a scholarship as well?

Louie: Yes, I sure did. And I will always appreciate that.

00:27:14 Q: Yes, I had one as well.

Louie: Yes, it was a generous one. It made a lot of difference to me and to my parents, and that was one of the things I talked to my dad about it, “These other school they're nice, but this one is going—I think going to support me while I'm there,” and so I thought that was good.

00:27:47 Q: Okay. You sort of answered this, and we're going to go over it several times, but do you want to share a little more about some of the memorable world events that you remember growing up. I mean you already talked about that. And then we can go right into—well we'll start here; we're about to get into the actual Barnard years.

Louie: You know, growing up, I think the big event was—

00:28:11 Q: Civil rights?

Louie: The Civil Rights Movement. I mean, I was a child of that era, and locally I considered myself a part of that, you know, what I did and the types of things that I did, and I thought it was a very volatile time. I also—you know the University of Alabama's main campus is there as well, and that is the door that George Wallace stood in.

00:28:39 Q: I mean you were—pew—smack down in the middle of it all.

Louie: So we were right there, watching the TV as it happened. We were sad about it and thought it was so unfair but proud of those black students. My older sister in fact went to the University

of Alabama a few years later. She got married in her junior year and didn't finish there, and she moved to Florida, with her husband, but she went there. And so I recall very, very vividly that day, and realizing how—how bad the situation really was, that you know people were not—that white people were really not interested in allowing black people to receive the same education, or have access to it. Very disappointing and kind of discouraging, but you know, at least there was a movement to adjust, and make sure that that didn't continue to happen, so those were volatile times. I do remember on television seeing stories about some of the things that were happening in the South, you know burnings and you know buses being stopped. I remember the Selma March, and how much I thought that that would have been a great—you know interesting experience, but I knew how my parents were, and I didn't even ask, [laughs] you know. And they would have been very, very concerned about my safety, and I knew it, so—

00:30:26 Q: With good reason.

Louie: Yes, with very good reason. But I, you know, kind of absorbed all I could about it and what was going on.

00:30:34 Q: Yes, I can see, your eyes are bright. How did people feel about [John F.] Kennedy?

Louie: Kennedy, the assassination I do remember that day in high school. You know everybody remembers that important day; everybody remembers that. I remember walking home from school, and how sad I was about his death. I remember that well and how sad all of us were

about it, and about watching hours and hours of television, about what was going on, Oswald's capture and the whole events associated with that assassination. It's just ridiculous.

00:31:19 Q: Yes, that's for sure. Okay, it's a little bit random, did you date in high school at all?

Louie: I dated a couple of guys in high school, one guy in particular, Lorenzo.

00:31:34 Q: [Laughs] Her eyes brighten again. [Laughs]

Louie: Yes, so you know I dated him through high school and for part of my college years, a couple of those years. He was ahead of me a couple of years, and went to Tuskegee [University].

00:31:50 Q: Okay, good. Okay, onto the serious passionate things, [laughter] what would you say would be a day or a moment that just really changed your life?

Louie: Oh, my gosh. That really changed it? You meant throughout my life, or—

00:32:16 Q: Just any personal event. I'm not giving you too much help.

Louie: No, you're not giving me much help. I mean personal events, I can't—I really can't see what. I've been through a lot of different changes and things over my lifetime. I mean I have had you know situations where I felt at risk, you know, but I don't know if that changed me as the

person that I probably was when I was in high school, and I've continued to be. So it's like “life-changing?” Let me think.

00:32:57 Q: Well, let me phrase it a different way because I think this is going to come up as we move into some other issues, so don't wrestle with it too long. But do you think you're the same person who walked through the gates of Barnard that first time, in terms of sort of your core values and your ambitions for life?

Louie: Absolutely not.

00:33:19 Q: Okay, and then what—maybe—I would ask then what changed?

Louie: Okay, I'll tell you a few things that changed. One, I came there with this idea in my head that I was going to be a doctor.

00:33:33 Q: A doctor? Okay.

Louie: And I realized after my first year I needed to rethink that, you know is this really who I want to be or what I want to do? And I struggled for the first two years I was at Barnard with that, you know with the courses, with the math. I told you I didn't think I was as good as Mrs. Hall thought I was with the math, you know—because I didn't like it that much, I just did it, you

know. And, but it turns out the math worked in my favor over the years, look at where I am. I work with money and numbers all the time. So it's kind of interesting about that.

00:34:27 Q: She was right; you're good.

Louie: Yes. And then—so that was my kind of struggle, you know, and I had to—I really had to work hard that first two years at Barnard to find myself, or my niche in terms of—

00:34:40 Q: Those were hard years too.

Louie: So there was a struggle there, , and I had issues with making it, and then I met all these women—I think I had some intimidation going on with that, that all of these very, very smart women, and I was totally unaccustomed to that—

00:35:05 Q: You were used to being the smart one.

Louie: I was used to being the smart one, and—thank you, that was exactly right, and then I realized there are all these other smart women here, and you know and in the world, and I'm—you know, and I'm among them, and I think there was an intimidation factor there. But somehow I figured out, “You know what, you really are kind of smart, aren't you? So, why don't you use that and figure out what you're going to do here, and kind of make a way for yourself to figure

out what you're going to do?" And that's how I ended up with the Biology and Geography, which led me to—and Urban Geography especially, which led me to Planning School, which led me to taking some finance courses, which led me to the quantitative analysis and that stuff, and graduate school, and to where I am, but then in the middle I began to understand community. and I think of the planning as what gave me my kind of grounding in community development, so this you know—Barnard was a part of that change factor.

00:36:25 Q: Were there particular obstacles—go ahead, I didn't mean to cut you off. Do you want to say more about that?

Louie: No, I'll stop there, it might come out again.

00:36:33 Q: Okay. Were there any obstacles then when you arrived at Barnard and during those years in particular?

Louie: Well, obstacle one, I had never been out of the State of Alabama, number one. My mother had allowed me to go to Birmingham to an interview all by myself once, on a bus, to Birmingham, because there was a [white] recruiter there for another school. I can't even remember who it was, and I was responsible for getting myself there, so my mom put me on the Greyhound bus to Birmingham. The interview was not very far from there, I found my way there and got back. so I had never been out of the State of Alabama, ever. So it was quite an experience, and my aunt in Chicago took me under her wing and got me prepared for school. She brought me

on the train to Chicago, and she helped me get my clothing and all that kind of stuff, and everything, assembled. She put me on a train to New York. [Laughs] So—

00:37:53 Q: It was at the Century Limited, I think that's it, or something like that.

Louie: Yes, or something like that, yes, so I took a train to New York, ended up in n Grand Central Station without a clue, and a trunk, and I found my way to Barnard. [Laughs] So you know I had challenges.

Q: Pretty daring.

Louie: It was, so you know, she said, “Well this is what you do; now follow my instructions,” and I did, and I got there, and Barnard took me under its wing at that point, you know, and it was a very good place to be for someone who'd never been there before. So the city itself was very intimidating. *Very, very*—so was the subway, extremely intimidating, but you know sometimes you just always make a way. And I guess I'm one of those people. [Laughs] Made friends, you know, and then there were other African American women who I met when I got there; I knew that there would be some, and of course my sister's girlfriend was already there ahead of me, and she helped me to get oriented and find my way, to things, you know. Barnard is pretty small; it's kind of difficult not to get into, the scene and get to know people and everything.

00:39:30 Q: Can you remember the day you actually arrived, and what you saw?

Louie: Oh, absolutely.

00:39:33 Q: And share a little bit because it's always interesting how we kind of start. I mean we've already got you in Grand Central having come across country on the train.

Louie: Right, from Chicago no less, which was not Alabama. But anyway I had to take the train up to Chicago, stay a few weeks, and then go. The first day, I remember I actually had to get the trunk in a taxi to get to Barnard, and I came up to the door where we checked into our rooms and things like that, and I had already communicated with my roommate, Aimee, and so we had one of those shared rooms where like the two of us in a room, and then we had—we had a middle room, and then the other room—they were all adjoining the three rooms, we had a middle room.

00:40:32 Q: Oh, like a suite.

Louie: It was a suite.

00:40:36 Q: Was that in Hewitt [Hall]—there was Hewitt [Hall], Reid [Hall], and there was—

Louie: Hewitt, Reid, and Brooks.

00:40:41 Q: Brooks [Hall], yes, so it must have been one of those.

Louie: I think it was Brooks. And we—so we studied in the middle room. That was pretty interesting. And I had never had white roommates, and here I am coming from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and you know not really knowing sort of how to deal with that part, it was interesting. Aimee was Chinese, Aimee Tsao, do you remember her? She was into ballet, and I think she may

00:41:17 Q: Aimee Tsao? Was she sort of tall, a really tall woman?

Louie: Tall, thin, she was into ballet. And Aimee really was really striving for the ballet experience, that was her real passion, I think.

00:41:36 Q: Did she say after freshmen year—or—?

Louie: I don't think she stayed because I really lost touch with her. After our freshman year I lost—totally lost touch with Aimee. But we had met by communicating back and forth by letter before we arrived at Barnard.

00:41:53 Q: So not just white but a Chinese white. [Laughs]

Louie: Right. But guess what my last name is, L-O-U-I-E.

Q: Yes, yes.

Louie: And that really is a Chinese name.

Q: Yes, interesting.

Louie: She was amazed—

00:42:03 Q: She never figured out how that happened.

Louie: And I was like, “Did they match me up because of that, or what?” [Laughs] You know, and I really didn't figure it out until I got invited to the Dragon Society meeting. So you see where I'm going with that, yes, and I just wrote them a nice little note, “I don't think so.” [Laughs]

00:42:28 Q: Don't remember anything like this is my heritage.

Louie: I don't have any Chinese heritage. And you know, with a little polite note, “Thank you, but no.” And, so it was an interesting first day, getting to know my roommates, and I just—I totally lost touch with them, after the freshman year, you kind of go, and I moved to Plimpton Hall the next year with another group of ladies, so that was, you know after freshman year I

wasn't really on the main campus, I was on the hill in Plimpton Hall, where I was for the rest of my time.

00:43:10 Q: And you stayed there all three years.

Louie: Yes.

00:43:14 Q: I think I was there a semester.

Louie: In fact I stayed—the summer of the year I graduated I stayed in Plimpton as well, because I had a job and I needed a place to stay, you know. That worked out really good that summer. [correction: I went to grad school at VPI after that summer]. So it was a good time.

00:43:40 Q: So in terms of how you were thinking when you're arriving, you know you're ready to live in a really—

Louie: I just thought I had a lot to learn, a lot, a lot to learn. This was going to be so different from anything I had ever experienced before. And I think there was a lot of cultural overload, there was a lot of, you know, overload on “How do I do this,” and I mentioned to you that I'm meeting all these very, very—and then when I started going to classes, it was a different setting, I just hadn't really been prepared for it, but it worked out in the end. I figured out my way around it, and through it, and here I am. So it worked out. And I'm about challenges though, I'm going to

tell you, I'm all about *a lot* of challenges. I wanted to explore the city a lot. I wanted to figure out what that was all about. And I had a social group of kids that included guys, and you know the Barnard women, guys from Columbia [University], and we were kind of a social unit that hung out together and taught each other things, because most of us were not from New York, and needed to figure out our way around, we needed to figure what was there outside the campus as opposed—you know as well as what was it about on the campus. It was a very interesting first semester, first few days, and months just getting accustomed to that big City.

00:45:31 Q: Did you ever think, “Oh, my, what am I doing here? I just can't handle this?”

Louie: You know I felt pretty overwhelmed sometimes, I really, really did feel *very, very* overwhelmed. I also felt you know with my upbringing and our economic situation, “Oh, how am I going to do this, I don't have a lot of the things that other women have,” you know, “I have the basics covered and that's about it. I don't have money, [laughs] you know to spend or to splurge on things for myself,” and it really was a challenge that first year with that. You know here I am a scholarship student, Barnard did not want us to work or do any little part-time jobs or anything like that, so my mother and father—dad would send me a little bit here and there so I'd have a little spending money, but otherwise I didn't have anything, so I stuck to the campus. I couldn't participate in a lot of the things that the other students did. I had met a couple of people, I mean an interesting experience, I'll tell you what that was. There was one guy who was an African American guy from Columbia, and he had a little circle of friends, and he and I and some others became really good friends. And he was from a very upper middle class black family,

doctors, and he actually treated some of us to a trip to D.C. for Howard [University's] Homecoming, which I thought was a great experience, but I really—other than making the gown that I wore—

Q: Oh, you made it, yes.

Louie: —and you know and going, I mean I felt sometimes rather inadequate because I was there with them, and I wasn't—I mean I wasn't in the same class if you want to put it that way, and but you know I enjoyed the experience and very much appreciated my first plane ride, and that whole experience with them. He [Roy was his name] left the next year and went to another school, but you know just the thing, you know it was nice, but it just made me very much aware of those differences, my upbringing versus the upbringing of a lot of students, the other African American students who were there.

00:48:23 Q: So you thought that most of the other African American students came from more middle class—upper middle class families?

Louie: They did.

00:48:27 Q: They did, okay.

Louie: There was only—

I was not good friends with Patricia Williams, I knew her, talked with her a few times. She was a friend of my Alabama friend (Eddie Mary Daniel) and lived in the same dorm.

Louie: Yes, right.

00:48:38 Q: I remember I had her [trunk still]. And I know her father was a doctor in St. Louis, because I was from St. Louis.

Louie: Well, Eddie Daniels—

Q: Oh, Eddie Daniels.

Louie: Eddie was, and I were kind of you know similar backgrounds. She was a year ahead. And, but in my class, I don't recall anyone other than me who was really not part of a basic black middle class family—I mean from middle class or what we call upper middle class family, I don't remember that at all.

00:49:20 Q: Did you know Joan Bennett?

Louie: I know, Joan, yes.

00:49:23 Q: You know Joan, still, yes we kept up over the years, she was an amazing lady, but very self-appreciate-depreciating, it's hard to pull her out.

Louie: Yes, it is, it's real—you know, and I tried a few times, you know, but I liked Joan, I really liked Joan. And anyway, where did I see her? Oh, I saw her at one of the Women of Color—a couple of those events. I didn't go—I haven't been in a few years, but I did go to our—was that our fortieth reunion or whatever?

00:50:03 Q: Yes, I think I went to that one too.

Louie: Yes, and stayed in a dorm? Oh, my gosh. [Laughs]

00:50:07 Q: I remember how loud and noisy the city was. Were you involved at all with BOSS [Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters]?

Louie: I actually was.

00:50:14 Q: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Louie: I think it's an interesting group; you know, it still sort of exists a little bit.

00:50:20 Q: Oh, does it?

Louie: Yes, and it was like—it had a resurgence around 2000-2001, something like that. I just in fact dropped from the BOSS Yahoo groups because somebody had hacked it, a couple of months ago. But you know emails still come out from some of them, and it was really busy and active there for a while—

00:50:49 Q: Yes, huge, everyone knew about it.

Louie: Everyone knew about it.

00:50:54 Q: Some real leadership there.

Louie: What was the name of the other one? The other group? The other student group, oh, Lord, I'll think of the name of it.

00:51:06 Q: It's okay. It will come to you.

Louie: I know it will. It was mostly the Columbia guys, and some of the women, it was an activist group, and I'll talk to you about that, because—

00:51:20 Q: Yes, we'll get into the Strike and all that in a minute. In fact that's the next question.

Louie: But BOSS was, I mean, I thought it was a great way for us to interact with each other and have a kind of support system, and to talk about issues, I thought that was a great idea. So, I'm trying to think, did that start in my freshman year or did that start after, I think it started after.

00:51:51 Q: Sophomore, maybe.

Louie: Yes, yes.

Q: Because was it the sophomore year that a number of women had their own floor, took over part of Hewitt, so you had a little bit space.

Louie: But I wasn't on that floor. Yes, but it was pretty amazing [Laughs]

00:52:04 Q: Yes, well, no, but you still had [a group]. Yes, I mean, it's pretty amazing.

So did you have any mentors at Barnard? Were there any professors or counselors, or anyone that you felt you could go to or who sort of inspired you? I mean that's two different questions.

Louie: No, not until my senior year did I really think I had one. I had an advisor, but—

00:52:31 Q: My professor was Christine Royer who sort of had everybody, [Laughs]

Louie: You know, Lemoyne Calendar was really good as well.

00:52:43 Q: Who was that?

Louie: Calendar, she was very good, and I think a mentor to many of us. And I had one of my professors, but that was related to my—they called it Environmental Conservation—

00:53:00 Q: That was the major?

Louie: Yes, but it was really Biology and Urban Geography kind of mixed up there together, so they called it Environmental Conservation.

00:53:11 Q: Oh, okay, sure, I can see that.

Louie: And I think there were two of us who graduated, with that degree in '71, which is good.

00:53:16 Q: And who was running that program, was it a specific professor?

Louie: Oh, gosh.

00:53:19 Q: Sure

Louie: I'm not sure who it was. I will have to look at my yearbook, which I have still, you know, and then I can tell you. But in terms of mentors, yes—

00:53:37 Q: So did you feel that Barnard as an institution—I mean did they—were they at all receptive to maybe the special needs of young African American women at that time?

Louie: Well, you know, “The needs of young African American women,” one of the things I think that Barnard did, which you know at first I was like, “Why do we need this?” And then I realized, there were a couple of courses that they offered us.

00:54:07 Q: A couple of courses? Oh.

Louie: Yes, a couple sessions on reading, and a couple of you know other things that I think were for I think those of us coming from the south had—

00:54:22 Q: Oh, so more like a remedial, helping—extra tutorial—oh, so you felt that—

Louie: It wasn't tutoring, it was a speed—one was a speed-reading course, maybe they thought that we—you know—

00:54:35 Q: Oh, I would have been insulted.

Louie: And you know, and at first I was, but then I realized, “Hmm, this isn't bad; I like this.”

But, I was already an avid reader, but they didn't know that. And so this was just a way for me to read more. So in the end I said, “You know what, you make out of things what you can,” and I said, “Umm, okay, I can be insulted by this, but, I'm fine, I will in fact just do it.” I think they put me in a class or two that was like a sort of precursor to some other classes in my freshman—first semester, and I was like, “Okay, this is fine,” you know, “I'm already struggling here, because this is different for me, this is a different environment totally. I got this—”

00:55:41 Q: Yes, I'm thinking more in terms of yes, the social adjustments. I mean academically —I'm sure—

Louie: Yes, academically, it was a major challenge for the first year or two, but I overcame all that, because just it was kind of like I consider that water under the bridge. I had to figure out how to—you know I had to figure it out, and make sure that you know—

00:56:02 Q: And you're a problem solver. [Laughs]

Louie: Yes.

00:56:04 Q: Or you wouldn't be here.

Louie: Right. The—let's see—

00:56:13 Q: And I know we had to read that, we had to read the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* before we arrived, that was like, for me that was an eye-opener. [Laughs] But it's a different——

Louie: Yes. I had a different course on that then, and I didn't have to read that, although I read it, [laughs] you know, I mean I had to read——

00:56:27 Q: You probably could have delivered the lecture notes. [Laughs]

Louie: The—it was, you know, it was kind of interesting. You know some of the things that they kind of put us through, but then at the same time they added in some other social skills training that—some of which I had, and some of which I didn't, you know, and so that was very useful.

00:57:00 Q: You're not talking about, the teas are you?

Louie: Oh, my God, yes. And I was like, “What? Am I okay?” Yes, so I've never done this, I mean, I was like, “Okay, well I'm open to figuring this out, so here we go.”

00:57:15 Q: Amazing, it's—[Laughs]

Louie: Yes, and I love tea now.

00:57:22 Q: Yes, I did learn that, at Barnard, to drink tea.

Louie: And I appreciated it, yes.

00:57:29 Q: So let's turn now to the Strike, and 1967-1971. Can you share with me the moment you first learned about the '68 strike, and what you thought, and then kind of go from there?

Louie: It was probably from BOSS meetings, and some of the other meetings that the Columbia African American students would have. We would talk about issues, and what was going on with the park, with the Morningside Park, and how it was already a separator, and that this [Columbia building a gym on and in the Park] was going to become an even further separation with the way it was going to be built and all of that. And I'll just let you know that senior paper was actually on that issue, it was on Morningside Park. And you know that whole issue of that park, and its history, and you know—because I was in Environmental Conservation, the geography of it and all of that had a lot to do with it. But I may have dropped a few comments about that the Strike in my paper. [Laughs] and that I saw it as an invasion into the park, that it just didn't make sense, and then for it to have that kind of connotation for the West Harlem community on the other side, with the separate entrance and then you're building this monument to Columbia partially on a public park.

00:59:07 Q: To racism, [laughs] to say the least.

Louie: Yes. And so that was—you know that—it really disturbed me. And—we operated as a group, , discussing things, and we were all very, very concerned. Here we are you know a group of African American students at this big college and university and this is what's going on, and it's not fair, you know. It's just not the way things should be, and so—I attended a lot of those meetings and activities associated with the issues. And I was very interested in supporting, making sure that either this plan was changed and there was more engagement of that community in the planning, or that gym needed to be stopped.

01:00:13 Q: So were you part of the group that occupied Hamilton Hall or—?

Louie: Hamilton Hall.

01:00:15 Q: So you were actually there—

Louie: Yes, I was there, the whole time.

01:00:18 Q: What do you remember about that, just more discussions or—?

Louie: No, I—

01:00:24 Q: Because there was a real—I mean at one point that group broke away from the other people, because you had different issues, you had totally different issues.

Louie: Even that too, yes, we had *very* different issues.

01:00:29 Q: Mark Rudd was not a spokesman for you guys.

Louie: No, he was not. And frankly that had to go. And you know I was all in favor of that; that group had to go, and we really felt that—I don't know, I mean it made us a little more vulnerable to violence we think as well, because of that—It was the platform of that group that would really suppress ours, which was the real issue here. And these were activists who were actually—I'm trying to be nice, I'm going to stop being nice—

01:01:20 Q: Don't be nice, be blunt.

Louie: And yes they were nasty, yes, they were absolutely nasty. It was intolerable. And add to that you know the difference in issues and something had to change. And our group leaders, and we all agreed that we had to get them out of there. “Go find your own building,” [laughs] you know, because this one, we're going to stretch out.

01:01:53 Q: And we're going to be very clear what our objectives are.

Louie: Right, and we were.

01:01:57 Q: Yes, yes. Now when people were arrested were you treated—how were you treated by the—“New York's Finest” [laughs]?

Louie: “New York's Finest,” very, you know, they handled us very carefully, I think. And I think that our group was great because we had decided long before they even got there how we would act. We had learned quite a bit from, you know, the non-violent movement, and how to act and comport yourself in a situation like that, and we had gotten—even been talked to about it, you know frequently that this—we are not going to have our heads beat of any of that kind of stuff, we were going to do this with as much dignity as possible, and we did, we pulled it off, we got it done. Police was very nice, so—I mean they weren't nice, they were doing their job at that point, you know they had to get us out of the building, so—peacefully—

01:03:02 Q: Now, have you kept up with any of those people that you were involved with then?

Louie: Very, very few. I have encountered a number of the people over the years, but they were in the early years after, and then as I was starting my career I was in New York, or D.C., you know the New York/D.C. area, and most didn't work in those two areas when that happened. But I haven't really, you know. I saw a—I've seen in the class reunions very few of the people that I was with there, you know, when we were in Hamilton and arrested.

01:03:52 Q: And were there any repercussions for you personally?

Louie: No. Barnard actually took very good care of that. They sent an attorney. We were out of there the next morning.

01:04:05 Q: Yes, yes, there was a little bit of in loco parentis still [laughs]

Louie: Yes, they took, you know—

01:04:12 Q: For once it was good, right?

Louie: My mother said, “I saw your picture. And I understand you are now a jail bird.”

[Laughs] And I was like, “Girl, please,” to my mom.

01:04:22 Q: Wait, so did your parents—they knew about it right away?

Louie: Yes.

01:04:25 Q: And what was their reaction then?

Louie: She was upset—

01:04:27 Q: Your mom was upset, okay.

Louie: Yes, but she understood, you know, she fully understood, which I was like, “Mom, you know, thanks.” So, yes. You know—I don't know if dad did, I never really ever talked to him about that.

01:04:47 Q: “I told you, you go there, girl, it’s going to be a problem.”

Louie: Yes, no, but you know, and I told her, , what the school had done to make sure that we were—that they got us out of there, and that there were no repercussions. I mean I still had to take exams, and do all of that kind of stuff. I mean it ended on a good note for me, so—

01:05:14 Q: And then we had a few other demonstrations.

Louie: Yes.

01:05:16 Q: As the years went on.

Louie: Yes, as the years went on there were. The next year there were some. I participated in supporting the groups and stuff but that was it. I wasn't going to occupy another building, or anything like that.

Q: Enough.

Louie: Yes, it was very tiring, you know, the living conditions were not ideal. I got to say though that that community really, really, really supported us the whole time, I mean they made sure we had meals—

01:05:46 Q: The community, right, outside, yes.

Louie: Yes, yes, it was an amazing support system that they created for us.

01:05:56 Q: Yes, pretty amazing, absolutely. What about the other revolutions? Were you experimenting at all sexually, drugs, anything like that?

Louie: No, I mean sexually yes, I mean you know it was that time.

01:06:11 Q: It was that time, of course.

Louie: And so you know between the boyfriends and stuff there were situations. I think that some of the guys really took advantage of that, and that was not good, but you know you learn. Here I am nice and green from Alabama, and you know not knowing a whole lot or anything like that, but you know what I learned so much from my roommates—

Q: Laughs

Louie: —while I was there. I learned quite a bit from them. You know it was like, I got in it—I actually got up and said this at one of the Women of Color dinners, well no at our—oh, it may have been our reunion in '71 a few years ago, yes, it was our reunion, where I actually got up and said, “I grew up here, at Barnard.” I learned a lot you know about the world, and about you know how to get along, get on in society, I learned you know because it was the sexual revolution I learned more and more about relationships, and of course we all experimented with sex and that kind of thing, and I learned about birth control, all kinds of things like that from my friends, from my roommates, systems, thank you Margaret Sanger Research Bureau. [Laughs] You know things like that that some of us had to learn. But you know I never got in any trouble or anything like that, so that was good.

01:07:58 Q: By the grace of God.

Louie: Yes, that's right, I thank the powers that be for—you know for taking care of me during that time. But you know what that meant to me, was that I needed to learn these things, I needed—you know that I was being—you know that I was going to go on and do some other things, apparently, you know this wasn't going to be a life—this was not going to be a—this would be a life-changing part of my life, yes, it would help direct me into where I was going to go, and also prepared me for you know the next stages I think, and kind of nurtured my independent spirit, and that has turned in to be quite a life.

01:08:48 Q: Yes, I think so. Just going back to that period again, do you remember your reaction to like the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and—

Louie: Yes, I was—I was devastated about that as was so many—

01:09:03 Q: I mean you actually heard him speak and—

Louie: Oh, yes, I'd go down there and see him in person—

01:09:06 Q: And you were there in the middle of all of this—

Louie: Yes, and his wife was—she was actually an opera singer, you know, a soprano. And you know I'd seen Coretta Scott King perform, you know at concerts, right in the local church and things like that. And so, yes, I was pretty devastated by that. I didn't participate in any of the riots or anything, I really didn't think that any of that was going to get me anywhere, or—

01:09:37 Q: You mean the burning buildings and—

Louie: Burning buildings or anything in New York, you know, when that was going on. You know I said, "I'm staying my butt right here on this campus and mourn this loss," and that was—right, that moment that was really all I could do.

01:09:56 Q: Were you at all—what was happening back in Alabama? What were you hearing from your parents?

Louie: Back in Alabama—?

01:10:03 Q: You know like an immediate reaction, obviously it was tremendous grief but—

Louie: Yes, it was tremendous grief, you know and—I think people were just, “Okay, well what now?” You know whether this, too, but you know in the South we were used to lynchings, you know, people getting killed, or you know house burnings, burning crosses, things like that, and you kind of develop a skin, a tough skin you know, or resistance—

Q: To survive?

Louie: —something, but this was too much. This was *absolutely* you know gone too far. And I think that's why a lot of people reacted the way they did because it was just a step too far.

Anyway I just—

01:10:53 Q: Yes, no, it's—absolutely.

Louie: Yes, at that time I mean we all mourned, I mean we you know gathered, and you know, and everybody just sort of supported each other during that time because that was really all we could do.

01:11:15 Q: Were you—about as high a priority as was with the whole peace movement, the anti-war movement with Vietnam? Is that something that was not as immediate to you—?

Louie: No, it was discussed a lot and a lot of us talked about it in the context of people, guys that we knew, who were being sent to Vietnam, and the African American men were *really* being sent to Vietnam.

Q: Absolutely.

Louie: And many of them were being killed. As a part of that one of my dear high school classmates was sent to Vietnam, and he died there, a couple of them in fact. But, you know, I was not an activist in that sense, of you know picketing against the war, or anything, I just wasn't—

01:12:20 Q: You had a pretty full agenda. [Laughs]

Louie: I had a really full agenda at that point, and I wanted to make sure that I did the best I could at Barnard during that time, so I was quite a bit more focused in my last two years there, really focused on making sure that I did what I needed to do, because I did want to graduate, I

did want to do something else. And so you know this is not just about getting through, you know, this was about, “Oh, this is a path to, you know, to the other side.” So I used my time there.

01:13:02 Q: Okay, [moving along then] forget Barnard for a bit, we're going to move to the rest of your life, which is a significant amount of our years. I don't know if you can answer it or not, how has your adult life been different from the life you anticipated, right, how has your adult life been the life you anticipated in terms of once you left Barnard, from the day you left Barnard? So you graduated, you got your diploma, did you head right off to graduate school, or what did you—you said you worked, actually.

Louie: I sure did.

01:13:30 Q: Oh, you did, okay.

Louie: But I worked at the same time. I want you to know that not only did I—you know after the first year I did take a part-time job, you know I took odd part-time jobs, because I wanted to be able to do some support for myself. There was an organization at Columbia, it was a not-for-profit organization that was working out of the—what's the Continuing Education School at Columbia?

01:14:05 Q: Yes, The School of General Education, General Studies, yes.

Louie: General Studies. And I got a job there, a part-time job there, and so I worked with them during that time, and I was still you know doing school and stuff. So I worked for them one summer after I graduated, and you know between that and graduate school, and I had a decision to make whether or not I was going to actually do the graduate school, or, not. I'd gotten a Ford Fellowship to Virginia Tech, and, unbeknown to me I'd also been accepted at Rutgers.

01:14:55 Q: Okay. How could that be unbeknown to you. It's complicated, anyway.

Louie: It's complicated. My dad, during my college, and mom divorced during my college years. And they moved to Detroit first; he took a job at Chrysler. And they moved. And that was not her thing. And they separated and then divorced during my time at Barnard. So—

01:15:31 Q: Well you had a lot of drama.

Louie: I had a lot of drama, let me tell you with that. And so you know I didn't know because my dad—I used the Detroit address for everything—and my dad had gone into some kind of personal tailspin, and he was not sending me things or anything. I had not only been accepted, but I'd also received a scholarship there that was going to pay for everything, and, I'm like, 'Oh, my God.' So I took the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, V.P.I Ford Fellowship, and it turns out that was not—

01:16:19 Q: And where did you end going then?

Louie: V.P.I.

01:16:20 Q: Oh, V.P.I., I'm sorry.

Louie: Yes, that was it, but it turned out that V.P.I. had done something I thought was a travesty for the students, the African American students. What they had done was taken the Ford Fellowship money and tried to spread it between students.

Q: Oh no!

Louie: —yes, they did. So when we got there we thought we had a fellowship that was going to pay for all of our classes and our housing, you know have enough money for that, we found out when we got there that they had spread it—stretched these fellowships—into like you know a third more students, and that cut everybody's fellowship back, and I was like, “How can they do that?” And, I mean, “I don't have any choices here right now. I've just finished college, and there's nobody supporting me. I have no job.” And my roommate, and I were at our wits end, you know, “Oh, my God, we have to work now just to go to this school to pay part of our tuition, get our books, and stuff.” It was amazing what happened to us. Several students actually left before classes started. My best friend and I, who by the way lives right here in Baltimore, and I stayed. And she got a job. I got a job as a waitress and rode my bike to this restaurant, you know, a few miles down the road, back and forth every day, and to school and whatever.

And I made it through the first half of the year but then my dad finally sent me the Rutgers papers. And I said, “Oh, my gosh.”

And I got a call from a friend of mine, a guy I had dated in college, and he said, “You know what?”—and he lived in New Jersey, he had moved to New Jersey. He said, “You know, I was at Rutgers the other day, and—.” This is how it was—He said, “I was at Rutgers the other day, and I saw your name on a mailbox.”

I said, “Excuse me? What the heck are you talking about?”

He said, “I saw your name on a mailbox. And it had mail in it. So I thought you were there.”

And I said, “No, I am sitting here in Blacksburg, Virginia, hating it—” coming from New York and going to Blacksburg, Virginia, quite a change, okay? Although I was from the South, I said, “Oh, it'll probably be okay,” you know, it was not okay. I mean it was smaller than Tuscaloosa, Alabama, oh, my gosh it was tiny, then, cause it's much bigger now.

So, I called my dad and I said, “Dad, did you get anything for—”

“Oh, yes, I got some papers here.”

I said, “Would you please send me those papers?”

And what I did while I was waiting for him was I called the school, and they said, “Yes, we have been looking for you.”

“What?” I said, “You got to be kidding me.”

Now this was almost at the end of the semester. So I asked, “Look, can you—can we fix this?”

And they said, “Yes, you know you have a scholarship waiting for you. You know you have however missed a part of this course—.”

You know they had semesters, V.P.I. had, what's the thing, the trimester, so there was a difference, disconnect there, so I had to figure that out with them, and they you know agreed that I would just—you know, “If you can take this course and this course, we'll be fine,” you know, and so they did.

01:20:19 Q: At least you're back on track.

Louie: Yes, so then we'll be back on track for next semester. And I did that. And you know, and I said, “Can I just start,” and I resigned from V.P.I., three days later. And I was on a plane to New York.

01:20:38 Q: Well your friend did you an amazing service.

Louie: Yes, yes, he did.

01:20:42 Q: And who knows when your dad would have looked at—

Louie: Then I had met a woman at Barnard who was staying in Plimpton Hall that summer, Nadine, and Nadine was going to Columbia's Planning School. And by the way it was V.P.I.'s Planning School and Rutgers' Planning School, and I really wanted to go to Rutgers, but thought I hadn't gotten in, I hadn't heard anything, you know and they used that Detroit address. So anyway it was a very interesting experience.

01:21:17 Q: And you liked it then. And then once you're at Rutgers—?

Louie: And I went to Rutgers, and I stayed—I had met Nadine, Nadine and her roommate in New York, her roommate had fortunately gotten a fellowship to go to Ghana for two years, so that left Nadine without a roommate, and it worked out. So here I am commuting back and forth every day to Rutgers, from New York. Going down to Port Authority, getting on the bus.

01:21:46 Q: That's better than biking through Blacksburg.

Louie: Getting on the bus, taking the shuttle bus, you know, out to the Livingston Campus to the Planning School. But, yes. And I was able to get a job as well through my roommate, she introduced me to some other people, and I got a job, you know that actually supported me, so I can pay my rent. And because that first—you know that first semester I really—I stayed in the dorm, you know, in a room with two other women, [laughs] we shared—you know it was a kind of dorm where you had a sort of central bedrooms, you know three people, and then central showers, and they had a break room in the middle where you had a locked cabinet for your food, and you can cook and things like that, so it was—ooh, I got all like this—anyway, it wasn't Barnard, it wasn't you know living in an apartment or anything like that. So I went to graduate school at Rutgers.

01:22:49 Q: Amazing, wow.

Louie: Yes, in City and Regional Planning.

01:22:54 Q: Fantastic, and that's led to everything else, which we're going to get to now.

What happened after that? So what would you say would be the most memorable day or most memorable experience of your career?

Louie: Memorable experiences in my career.

01:23:13 Q: Or of your whole work history, I mean since you—and then you need to tell me about some of the other things you did.

Louie: Yes, I mean I've done a lot of stuff, yes. I think one of the most memorable ones is the, some of the work I did in Chicago.

01:23:34 Q: Did you work with [Barack H.] Obama?

Louie: No. No. But what I did do in Chicago was I worked for The Urban League. I ran their development corporation.

01:23:48 Q: Oh, really?

Louie: Yes. And you know that was housing. So I did that. And one of the things we developed a knack for was packaging loans for the financial institutions under C.R.A., Community Investment Act. And I got pretty, pretty damn good at it. And that was the way—you know and so that analysis work and all of that, it meant that all of this work I'd done in graduate school and everything, and the job I had as a consultant in D.C., and in New York—

01:24:32 Q: Were those with the government or with N.G.O's?

Louie: No, these were all private firms.

01:24:35 Q: Private firms, okay.

Louie: Yes, all of that stuff began to pay off with that job when I moved to Chicago. So it was kind of like, “Oh, wow, things are sort of coming together and working to my—,” it was a development corporation, a community development corporation. And I was doing Affordable Housing. I was packaging loans for investors who wanted to do multi-family rental properties, you know.

I had also over the years worked for a development company, myself I ran in Baltimore—I ran the Mid-Atlantic office of a development company. And that did come from my government service. My first—let me see—one of my jobs—in the job I got while I was in graduate school, was with a consulting firm, a black-owned consulting firm. They were planning consultants in New York, and that was one of my first jobs. So that one led me to another consulting job in D.C., and then after that—I was acting as a consultant, and did a lot of HUD contracts, and helped a lot of small towns in Florida and North Carolina that had black mayors to apply for and get government grants for infrastructure, you know water facilities, new city hall, police station, that kind of thing. And that was the kind of work I did out of Barnard, and you know with the firm in New York, with the firm in Washington, D.C., and then someone introduced me to Baltimore, and a job in the planning department in Baltimore, which *was* government work. So I liked it, and it was okay. It wasn't—but it presented me with some opportunities to really get to learn more about how municipal government worked, how planning was actually done in a local

government setting, and also introduced me to housing and housing development and how that was done, and the whole building process.

So you know this is a progression here, getting me to where I am now, I think. And these were jobs I liked, and each one led to something else; I worked for the mayor's office, an economic development group for a few years on assignment from the planning department.

And—

01:27:34 Q: And that was in Baltimore?

Louie: Yes, that was in Baltimore, that was the first time I lived in Baltimore, before I took a job with a development company. A friend of mine—in fact she went to Barnard, Marcia Anderson, Marcia Anderson Brown, she was a year behind me, knew that she—had started working for this development company in Boston, “Housing Innovations,” and they did Section 8 housing, and they were developers, and they were looking for someone who really knew Baltimore to run their Baltimore office. And I got the job. I interviewed for it, you know, and the president and I hit it off, and I was able to do housing development here in Baltimore. In fact somebody told me a couple of years ago that they saw my name on a bunch of documents from that *first project I did*, [Laughs]. And she said, “Ruth, I saw your name on these docs, and we've been around a long time, haven't we?” “Yes.” So it was interesting, really really interesting stuff. So, yes, there were a lot of jobs that led me to where I am, you know, that one went into my trying consulting on my

own for a while, but that didn't work, and then I started working for the Center for Community Change in Washington, D.C.

01:29:12 Q: Ah, yes, yes.

Louie: I don't know if you're familiar with the center at all?

01:29:15 Q: I—yes, yes.

Louie: But we had a real estate develop—you know a consulting group that really worked with CDC's, in helping them to get their projects off the ground, and my development background was kind of what they needed to get some of their projects off the ground. [Laughs] I worked with a group in Las Vegas, you know that wanted to take one of the old black hotels—because you know in Las Vegas it was segregated for a long time too—and turn it into senior housing. I worked with a group in St. Louis, “I Loved Irma Lawrence,” in St. Louis, Missouri, that did housing development.

01:30:18 Q: Where was that, I'm just curious? Where in St. Louis, because that's—

Louie: North Side Preservation.

01:30:21 Q: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Louie: Yes, and you know a few others in Florida.

01:30:27 Q: You've been all over, my goodness, you're a national expert.

Louie: Yes, so, I worked with a lot of groups under community development corporations on their development projects. It's been an interesting life to say the least.

01:30:43 Q: And you've done a lot of good, too.

Louie: Yes, and so that's been my focus. And I met my ex-husband while I was working for the Center.

01:31:01 Q: Center for Social Change.

Louie: And that was when I moved to Chicago.

01:31:05 Q: I see, okay.

Louie: Yes, when I met Arthur, we married, and I moved to Chicago. Unfortunately the relationship didn't last as long as I stayed in Chicago. I was in Chicago for more than ten years.

[Laughs] Yes, about ten years I was there, and I, you know, ran the development corporation, and *then* met—and if you'd want to talk about like pivotal times—

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

Louie: I met John Yedinak, who was the president of the bank I worked for in Chicago. It was out in the suburbs. It was a small bank that he had acquired. He was looking for someone to help him on the community development in the CRA[Community Reinvestment Act] side. We met at a Federal Home Loan Bank seminar. I had been asked if I wanted to do this—you know I'd found a mentor who happened to work for the Federal Home Loan Bank. He invited me to a few events while I was running the development corporation, and I met Yedinak there.

And you know he calls up one day, “Hi, you remember me? We met at such and such, and I wanted to know if you are interested in coming to the bank to work for us?”

I said, “Doing what? I don't know anything about banking.”

He said, “Yes, but you do know development, and you know community development. And I talked to Chuck about you, so let's meet and talk.”

And I went to the bank, and that's how I got into banking and started doing that for several years, and then went to a bank in Atlanta, thinking that the South was probably where I was going to

end up anyway. You know, in my career—from the South, Alabama, and exchanging some and maybe Georgia would be a good place, and Atlanta you hear a lot about—a great city.

I don't know about that. It was—it was a nice enough city, but it wasn't New York, it wasn't Washington, it wasn't Baltimore. It certainly wasn't Chicago. And I think I'd gotten used to that, you know, all those years, and the work I was doing, I had to create the wheel there because that bank was a Canadian bank, and had acquired this small Internet bank, and there was a lot of development work associated with that, and meanwhile I didn't like Atlanta—living in Atlanta. And the commute back and forth to Alabama to see my mom was a little challenging. It's a four-hour drive each way. And you know when you are going due west into the sun, as you were driving over, and then coming back if you came in the morning you're facing the sun, it was very challenging. And living there [Atlanta] for an African American professional woman was not the greatest place to be to meet guys, and to get engaged in the community because there is a kind of societal class thing going on in Atlanta that's different. It takes years to kind of break through for them to get comfortable enough. Although, I think I did mention, I did my job well, [though] that wasn't where I wanted to be. And I had to make a decision, go back to Chicago or go back to Baltimore or go back to D.C., and Baltimore won. But I think, you know backing up a bit, the job with John—

01:34:54 Q: So that was like fifteen years ago that you came back to Baltimore then?

Louie: Yes, yes, you know fifteen years. But I think the job with John really kind of rounded out. It really rounded me out in terms of what I'm doing now. It gave me a chance to do development, to finance development, and do it and learn more and more of the ins and outs of how banking works. and so when I came back here I was a liaison; I didn't come to this job when I came back. I actually came to the mayor's office here, to O'Malley's office.

Q: O'Malley?

Louie: Yes. As a liaison with the financial institutions, from the C.R.A's perspective.

01:35:49 Q: Oh, my. And this was something he was very supportive of, wasn't it?

Louie: Yes, he was, and wanted to have that as a component, and I think was the right thing to do. And you know it led me to this organization, because I became a—at the time this organization required some help and was kind of quasi-public; it was not a separate not-for-profit entity as it is now, or CDFI [Community Development Financial Institution]. It was tied at the hip to the city, meaning you know the Commissioner of Housing had to be the chair, the City Treasurer had to be the treasurer, a deputy from the Housing Department had to be on the board. It kind of dictated who the board was, there was this like super-body that was appointed by the mayor, and it was different. But I was a mayor's—

Q: Liaison.

Louie: —liaison, and made a board member. And I—you know—it was an interesting place to be, they—one of the first things I worked with them on was—because I now knew banking and CDFI's and a bunch of other things, and one of the first things I worked on with this organization was their certification as a CDFI. They did have an issue; you cannot be controlled by a government entity. That was—I said, “Okay, if you let me know—”

[Interruption]

01:37:45 Q: So you were talking about how you—when you came you changed, things began to change.

Louie: Yes, when I got on the board it was about helping them—well not, you know as a board member and the mayor's liaison and kind of assigned to this organization, you know, as a board member, I worked with them on the issue because I knew what the issue was immediately, if you look at the bylaws you got a problem, [laughs] you know. And so you got to fix that.

01:38:16 Q: Yes, the certification, yes. The accreditation.

Louie: Yes, in order to be certified as a community development financial institution. So, and we got that done, and while I was on the mayor's staff. Then I went over to the Housing Department, you know, the commissioner asked if I would come over to the Housing Department to be a—

you know, to be one of the Assistant Commissioners, and dealt with a lot of community development, block grants and Section 108, finance, that type of stuff over there.

But that was short-lived because this job came open. And unfortunately the prior president lost the job, you know was—he left, I'll put it that way, and they needed to find someone, and I was on the board at the time, and not knowing *all* the details of what was going on with that, I was asked if I wanted [laughing] the job. And I said, “No, you probably need to be looking around.” “Well, why don't you just put your hat—your name in the hat here,, we kind of think you know you might be a great candidate for this, so put your—” And it took me a while to think about that because I was[n't] involved in intimate details of the organization, right, I really was, in terms of who they were and what they did, and how they did it, and then created one of the programs that they ran, you know while I was over on the mayor's staff, and said, “This is the place to put it, and okay, and this is how you do it,” you know that kind of thing. So, yes, anyway, I got the job.

[Laughs]

01:40:13 Q: And you kept it for a while, and you made a lot of changes here.

Louie: It will be eleven years in August that I came here. I came here in August of 2004. Which is a nice long time.

01:40:25 Q: It's a long time.

Louie: Yes, to run an organization, I really didn't—I think I mentioned it to you earlier. I really didn't expect to be here this long. You know, because I hadn't had a job for more than six years, because I guess I was doing my progression in my career, you know. But I've enjoyed it, it has really had its challenges, the organization's been through a lot—a lot. You know the economic downturn helped—it really, really hurt us. And it hurt us in that the level of lending that we were doing prior to that, and our asset size got literally almost cut in half because of some bond debt that that accelerated on us. And one of my biggest challenges since I've been here, other than totally restructuring the organization so that it can run again the first two years, getting that done, and then all of a sudden the economic downturn hit. And I'm going to tell you, we had a twenty-five-million dollar bond that prohibited us—not only did it prohibit us from borrowing money it also accelerated when the liquidity provider pulled out, and, [liquidity provider said:] “I'm sorry, it's not about you, or anything that you have done, but we're just—anything we don't have to renew we're not. Go find yourself another liquidity provider,” and they put—and this big bank put this note in a “fax,” didn't call me, didn't call Sean [our CFO], they just put in a fax, “Oh, by the way, you know your bond letter is not up for renewal; we're not going to do it, we'll send you a letter.” [Laughs] Okay! So it meant that as a team we had to pull ourselves together and figure out how we're going to take this loan that was a thirty-year—with a thirty-year term, you know nice payments, and pay it off in five.

We paid it off in three and a half, but it took a lot out of us as an organization, because it meant that it limited—we had to take all of our assets and put those into paying down the debt, at a time when our services and the types of loans we do were *really, really* needed, and they were just

unavailable in the marketplace. Banks pulled out of doing that kind of lending, the regulators weren't letting them do it anyway. And so here we are, you know, that lender of last resort, and we are struggling too because we have to pay off twenty-three-plus-million of that bond debt in a short period of time. So it limited our lending to a trickle. That was one of the worse times I've been through in my career, I believe. And it was a *very difficult* time; you're running an organization, you cut half your staff because you know first you cut out that that isn't profitable, you know that's not paying for itself and is not—is a little too labor intensive for you, so that's a service we don't provide anymore. We will never take on a single-family acquisition; we have done in the financing again; that's just not our niche. We had too much competition. And we kept, you know, the commercial lending side to do the small amounts that we could eek out each of those three years. And we came out of it with a pristine balance sheet, beautiful but very little capitol left. But fortunately I had put together a plan. You know, we decided that it was time—you know, we should do a capitalization plan long before we finished, so that we got us out there again talking to everybody about what was going on, and what our plan was so that we could actually be in a position, and once we finished paying off the debt to immediately approach some of those same people, and it worked.

Q: And it worked, yes.

Louie: And it worked. And the dragon was paid off—was that last payment on the bond debt. And you know I was so happy to push that button that day, you can't imagine. [Laughs]. Okay, that's over.

01:45:27 Q: That's fantastic. That's fantastic.

Louie: I can—you know we can rock no roll on raising capital, we had a three-year plan to raise some capital that would supplement what we had, and it worked.

01:45:45 Q: Amazing, that's a real success story. This is kind of peripheral, but during the course of your career have you ever felt discriminated against because you were a woman? That made it harder—?

Louie: Yes. It makes it harder. It just does.

01:45:56 Q: Yes?

Louie: It makes it harder, I'm sorry but it does. It just makes it so much harder. And I can tell you this, being an African American woman, as a president of an organization is an even greater challenge sometimes.

01:46:14 Q: Tripled, yes.

Louie: I think I get quite a bit of respect here, you know in Baltimore, and for my background, experience and all of that. But the organization, you know, sometimes you look around and

nobody—I mean, white women run some of the CDFI's that are now in town, but you know a lot of white men run them too, and I'm a black woman [laughs] so there are a couple of them around the country, a few, and then sometimes I think locally we get marginalized, you know, “Well, you know, they're just that small organization over there.” But we do some of the hardest work in town, I mean, some of the *hardest* work in town. We're doing the things that everybody else—everybody else is doing the bigger, attractive projects that get all the press, and we're here doing the—you know the loans that nobody else will do, that the banks won't do, and we're addressing the needs in communities—this is a city of row houses. And many of those row houses are rented. And then some of them are you know renovated for sale, but a lot of them are rented and if we can weed out the 'chaff' we call them, those folks who are just looking to come in and buy up some cheap property, and slap something in it, you know, when we screen those out, we're not going to do those. We do the ones that make sense in a neighborhood to re-stabilize the neighborhood, and those are the loans that aren't getting made to developers whether they're black or white. I mean those loans aren't—you know that construction loan is not being made, they're coming out of their pocket to do it, and then they bundle them and they refinance them out to the bank. And we become that place, and then some of the community facilities you know they're not being done. Somebody has to step in and take that risk, and that's what we do here.

01:48:59 Q: We have a lot of housing to deal with in this state, in Baltimore, yes—

Louie: You know we got so much to do and nowhere near enough capital to do it, and that's been my biggest challenge is that there's just simply not enough money. And I mean we're—you know

some say we're a quiet company, "You're too quiet," you know, that kind of stuff, but you know we have finite amounts of money here. And so we can advertise, but I don't want to overdo either, you know, but I do want to get the money out and I want to get the money in the right place as well so that it's going to make a difference. We recently did a study on like a time—you know a period, 2000 to 2012, in terms of what the change had been in the neighborhoods, from the investment that we made in property, you know, just track that property from—you know each of those properties from the period 2000 to 2012, that I just looked at the final copy of that the other day so I'm going to make some good use of that, and put a bit of it, the preliminary stuff in our annual report, because this was our twenty-fifth year.

01:50:18 Q: Oh, my goodness.

Louie: Yes, the organization's been around for twenty-five years, so it's been through a lot of changes since then, most of them since I got here. [Laughs]

01:50:26 Q: I think so. You always were the revolutionary in a much needed place. Oh, goodness. Okay, let's just kind of talk a little bit about gender relations, and any other significant relationships in your life?

Louie: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

01:50:41 Q: That you want to share? [Laughs]

Louie: Well, you know I was married once.

01:50:49 Q: Yes, this was in Chicago.

Louie: And divorced, and in Chicago. And you know that didn't last very long. You know there were some mismatch things. I think, you know, I didn't make the greatest choice, sometimes I think we go through phases in our lives where we feel we've got to have this relationship, or you know maybe, "My biologic clock is ticking" or something, and sure enough I didn't make the best choice. I've had relationship issues over the years.

01:51:19 Q: Haven't we all?

Louie: You know, we all do. But it was a learning experience too, just like some of the other stuff I've done. I—for now, I mean I've had a couple of really good relationships in my life, and a couple of really negative relationships. Right now I'm in probably the best one I've ever had. I found a guy who is really more of a partner than anyone else.

01:51:53 Q: A partner, yes.

Louie: Yes, you know, and we do things together. And he has a *love* for one of my passions, and that is travel.

01:52:04 Q: Okay!

Louie: Yes, and he's the kind of guy I can you know say, "Well, I really want to go to South Africa, and you know do a trip there," and he's, "Oh, really, when are we going?" You know, and we did it. And you know other things that we do. He, unfortunately—not unfortunately, fortunately, I should say, I really think that's a fortunate, lives in North Carolina. I live in Baltimore. He spends a lot of time here. I go down there whenever I can. It works for the two of us; it really works well. And now you know we kind of think of the house in North Carolina as almost a vacation house. And I wish I just had more time to really spend there because I like it down there. It's not a big city though, you know, Wilmington, North Carolina is a college town, a beach town, you know a semi-beach town. It's got its own waterfront, a lovely historic town. And so I like it down there and love it here in Baltimore.

01:53:24 Q: It's very attractive, yes.

Louie: Yes.

01:53:28 Q: Wow, well that's good. How about religion? Has religion been much of—traditions, a religion or spirituality, been very big in your life?

Louie: Well, I think spirituality has been. I—you know my early years, and you know, of course, there was a Baptist church, and then I chose my own church with that Cumberland Presbyterian Church, in Tuscaloosa. But for many, many years church and I were not partners, but I always believed you know in a higher power and that there was guidance that you could obtain from God, and so you know those beliefs have stayed with me a long, long time. I did not start going to church again until I moved back to Baltimore, after many, many years. I was introduced to Unity, and really liked it. And I still go to [Unity churches]—I don't—the congregation here I had some issues with, I wasn't getting out of that what I needed, and the congregation and the whole political craziness was—was interfering with my ability to really get what I needed out of the community. So I go to the one in D.C. when I can, and whenever I'm in North Carolina there's one I like there, and I go every time I'm down there. And I love their teachings, and their approach, which is that actually God is in you, and who you are and what you do is a reflection of that, and you just—you know it's not that God is going to just instantly do for you what you need. You have that power, and that is with you. And you have to use that power and discover what it is, and you know you're not going to be helped unless you try. So, anyway, that's just—

01:55:55 Q: I think that's kind of just all your life, though, I mean you really—you've done that in so many ways.

Louie: And I also think why it really resonates with me to be a part of Unity, and to go to their services is what it's about. And there's a higher power—

Q: Right.

Louie: Yes, but that power is really in you.

01:56:15 Q: Okay, well we'll close by kind of asking you what your plans are for the future, but I think that could be a huge question, because you're still in the middle of it all. At least some of us would say, "Oh, well, we're going to retire in five years, and—"

Louie: Well, no I'm not, I'm going to retire sooner than that. And the reason for that is I have another passion. And I've touched on it briefly when I talked about Lee and travel. I have had a passion for travel for, oh God, years. I have been [sighs]—Africa is my—is my love, in terms of destinations and places to go and explore, and it has been—I have been on—I've been in East Africa, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, and Botswana, and Tanzania; I have been in Morocco, in Egypt, and West Africa, Senegal and Ghana, and South Africa. I told you about that trip. I organized that trip to South Africa, with a group, and I took my group to South Africa. And I want to be able to travel more, to do some of those places I haven't done, to go back to some of the places I have. And five years ago, well actually more than ten years ago I started learning the travel business as well.

01:58:01 Q: Oh, okay, [Laughs] Multi-tasking!

Louie: Yes, I've been multi-tasking for years, I mean I have always done multi-tasks, okay. I think that Barnard had something to do with that. I don't know.

01:58:13 Q: We were expected to, maybe.

Louie: Yes, maybe we were. Yes, so I—

01:58:17 Q: And then just being women, period.

Louie: Yes, we do. I started with an agency, you know, just as an independent contractor, and occasionally booking for people, and in 2010 I actually did a business plan for a travel business—you know, created the LLC, and all of that. And then back in 2012, you know, I really was doing too much.

There was too much going on with the bond debt and all of that, and I just wasn't putting the time in, so the agency owner and I, in terms of my independent contract was—well she was like, “Well, you know you're not really doing much.”

And I said, “I don't have time, but I want to stay in this business, and I plan to do that.”

She said, “Yes, but I got some requirements and stuff.”

And I said, “I know that.”

So what I did was I simply in 2012 activated my own business, and put the money in that it needed to keep it going until I could get to the point that I could expand it into a real business, and I'm ready to do that.

01:59:35 Q: Exciting! A whole other career!

Louie: A whole other career, yes, but doing something that—something that I have a real love and passion for. So I continue to, in the evenings and early mornings, I you know book other people's travel, but not a whole lot because I don't—you know I run this organization, and when I walk in this door, this is it, and until I walk back out this door I'm committed to it. But I am going to leave this year, probably toward the end of this year, and just not renew my contract. And I am going to—and so that I can really transition into doing that, spending more daytime hours doing it, instead of my evenings, and literally I don't get a lot of sleep, and the only time I rest is when I'm traveling.

02:00:38 Q: So in terms of your model for your agency you'll get to do a lot of the traveling, will you lead tours, or you'll—I mean I know you do—

Louie: I'll will lead some.

02:00:45 Q: You'll lead some, so you'll get to continue—

Louie: Right, yes, I'll get to continue to lead foreign groups.

02:00:50 Q: And you'll be based in Baltimore?

Louie: And I'll be right here, but you know what, the beauty of the travel business is you can do it anywhere, as long as you're connected you can do it anywhere. And I would go down to North Carolina, and everything, all my tours are right there in my iPad, and my phone. And you know I get a phone call, “Oh, great, okay, yes, we can do that.” Right now I'm just servicing people that I already know or had a relationship with, or people that are referred to me by people that I've already helped before. I got some great stories about some of the trips I've planned for people that I could tell, yes, [laughs] so, yes, but you know I'm using them too.

02:01:38 Q: Wow, so the whole continent of Africa is your little bailiwick.

Louie: This is my thing. That's what I want, you know. I want to be able to do more. I mean there's some places I will not send people, but you know, and as the political situation in some places goes I can't. You know like I wouldn't send anybody to Kenya right now. But what can I say, I mean, it recovered the last time it had issues and it will probably recover again.

02:02:12 Q: Yes, because for the time maybe, you know, so—

Louie: And that's my transition job, you know, I'll be doing that. You know I'm ready.

02:02:25 Q: Now do you have any fears for the future?

Louie: Oh, fears are just, you know one of my usual stuff, you know, whatever doesn't work out, and you know I don't get to deal as much as that as I wanted to, you know I always—you know, I've worked with my financial planner to make sure that you know if I step out there I'm ready, you know and I put all that in place. But you know I just worry about things like, you know, okay, am I stepping off a cliff here? [Laughs] Not that I haven't stepped off a few cliffs before, but this one feels different. And I think it feels different partly because of the eleven years, going on eleven years I've worked here. You know it has been a great experience, and it has funded my ability to invest in my little business, and to do a lot of the travel I've done, although the travel probably spans you know the last thirty years because I started that long before I got to Baltimore.

Anyway, I'm going to go with it; that's my plan. And it always takes a plan, and you know plans change, people change, conditions change. I think my mom's death last year—

Q: Oh, you lost your mom, yes.

Louie: —was probably one of those things that made me think more about it, and how I really need to decide more, what's this next phase going to be? I had already started the planning and everything, but that just—that kind of opens your eyes to well what's next. And then I went—

02:04:35 Q: We aren't going to live forever is what we realize, right?

Louie: Right, it's not forever; it's really not forever. And I thought about the things that she did to help me, and my brother. We were the two who sort of took the responsibility, and took it and made sure that everything was done for her in her last two years, but she thought about all this when she was my age, my current age, she did. And she put some things in place that literally when—you know, we knew that it wasn't going to be very long we started looking at this, and I'm saying, “My gosh, she has put together a road map,” you know, and all those things were in place, and all we had to do was carry them out, you know, and you know we had to supplement it because you know that was twenty years earlier, and so you know their economics then were very different from now, so you know, but that was okay, she at least thought about it, and put—you know her plan was this lockbox that she had kept, and she put you know those papers in there, and they were kind of disorganized in all of her last years, you know she had dementia—you know it—really she didn't take good care of a lot of things, but they were all there if you just went through it and reorganized it. And that helped me out a lot. But anyway, it just made me think about, you know, okay, yes, I think it kind of put the—you know—the thought in my head, yes, it's time to make that transition cause there's some things you want to do, and you need to be about those too. And I have given a lot of me, here, over the last years, and you know put out a

lot of energy, and you know expended, and killed a few brain cells, [laughs] you know, trying to make sure that this organization at least was successful.

02:06:57 Q: Congratulations, you've done it. Let's just end with one question, and that is if you were to go back to the girl who entered Barnard in 1967? Yes? And whisper in her ear something about how she should live her life, what would it be?

Louie: Oh, it would certainly be, “Don't be afraid to take a risk here and there,” really, that's what it would be.

02:07:25 Q: Great.

Louie: Don't—you know think about it, but don't be afraid to take the risk, and once you've weighed it out, and you'll find a way.

02:07:37 Q: I love it. Anything that I didn't cover that you feel is a reflection of your life—

Louie: Oh, wow—!

02:07:44 Q: —your Barnard years or anything that you want to add?

Louie: No, you know what? It's funny that I never really had a vision of myself being a housewife or any of that stuff. I've never really had that vision, you know? And it's been an interesting life, as you know, a single, independent woman. You know we have a lot of challenges.

02:08:09 Q: A single independent woman from Tuscaloo—

Louie: From Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

02:08:16 Q: Tuscaloosa, Alabama, I couldn't get all those syllables out.

Louie: Yes, yes, right, a lot of people struggle with that.

02:08:23 Q: And you've come a long way.

Louie: Yes, so it's been an interesting life, I'm really proud of it, and—I think I've—

02:08:28 Q: As you should be. [Laughs]

Louie: Yes, I am, and I'm—you know, people tell me that I don't toot my horn enough, and that kind of stuff. I'm like, “It's not about that really. This is what I wanted to do, this is what I do, this is me.”

02:08:46 Q: Yes. Yes. That's great. Wow, well thank you, this is amazing.

Louie: You're welcome.

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