BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Constance Brown

2015

PREFACE

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

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

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project

Interviewee: Constance Brown | Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell | Date: May 2, 2015

00:00:00 Q: This is an interview taking place for Barnard College Voices Oral History Collection on May 2nd, 2015. I'm interviewing Professor [Constance] Connie Brown from the Class of '71. The interviewer is Frances Connell. Okay. So, if we could start by asking you to say a little about your, uh, your beginnings—your earliest years and what you remember.

00:00:30 Brown: Uh—I was born and grew up in Brookline, Massachusetts, which is a suburb of Boston. My father taught at the business school at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. My mother had been a high school English teacher, but in those days you stopped working when you got married. My parents were much older—they were both forty-five when I was born. I have a—had a sister ten years older than I who died eight years ago of lung cancer. So I grew up in a very educated household. Lots of books, lots of interest in education. Um, had a—pretty much uneventful childhood, and growing up, uh—the most—I don't know what to say—in some ways, the most daring thing I did—from my parents' point of view—was come to Barnard [College]. From my mother's point of view. My father wanted me to go away from home. My sister went to Wellesley [College]—he didn't approve of that. He wouldn't let her call home. She had to write letters. She had to pretend that she was away at college.

So at least I went farther away, and my father—being in the academic world himself—thought that I should choose my own college. My mother wanted me to go to Wellesley, which is where she had gone, and she did not like New York, and she did not like the fact that I would be in a world that was not just Harvard [University] Protestants, which makes my mother sound more bigoted than she was. She wasn't, but that was what she wanted for me. And that was one reason I came to Barnard. I went to an all-girls high school, which was a wonderful educational experience. I learned a huge amount. I got a wonderful education. I made excellent friends. Um —I was perfectly happy going to a women's college having been to a girls' high school, but I wanted a much bigger world. I wanted to meet the kind of people I had not met. I wanted to be in a city. I wanted to be in a very different place. Um, and—nobody stood in my way. My mother didn't want me to come, but she wasn't going to stop me from coming. So, that's—

00:03:02 Q: All right—so going back just a little further than that, um, do you have any particular memories of the street where you grew up, and your elementary school, and then high school?

00:03:11 Brown: Well, I lived in the same house. It was a wonderful place to live. Brookline is a suburb of Boston, but it's so close to Boston, public transportation is right there. Um, so I didn't need to be driven places. I could walk places; I could take public transportation to places. I lived in a single family house across from the park, so it was the perfect place to grow up. Really, it was a wonderful place. School was great. I was a nerd. I loved reading. I did well in all my

classes. My teachers liked me. I had good experiences, aside from not being, like—you know—being a teenager girl can be difficult, and not being one of the field hockey-playing popular crowd, I was relegated to the smart side of the room. But, yeah—that was okay.

00:04:20 Q: Were there specific activities that you were involved in, that you remember as being really supportive of you?

00:04:27 Brown: I took six years of ballet—

00:04:30 Q: Oh! I'm sure that comes in handy for a professor. [Both laugh]

00:03:34 Brown: Actually, this evening I'm going to a dance performance organized by Barnard. I've kept my interest in ballet. Um—I, but—I read a lot, and I was a very overweight child, and my pediatrician said to my mother, "You've got to get her out, and running around and joining activities." But I really—and I did do ballet—but I was overweight when I was doing ballet. So, I didn't have groups—

00:05:10 Q: Okay, like clubs or particular things—?

00:05:12 Brown: In high school I did—I was on the yearbook. I was in the drama club—I did lighting for plays, for the drama club. So I did do that.

00:05:23 Q: Okay. Were there any special friends that you remember, that you've kept up with?

00:05:27 Brown: Not that I've kept up with. I had very close friends—wonderful friends. Um—

00:05:36 Q: Did most of them go on to colleges such as Barnard or—?

00:05:37 Brown: Yes, my closest friends went to Bryn Mawr [College], Sarah Lawrence [College], uh—and what's now Colby-Sawyer College in New Hampshire—it was then Colby Junior College. Um—and we—I hesitate to generalize because I'm sure this isn't true for everybody who graduated from high school in 1967, but I think it's partly, graduating in 1967, we weren't—my sister graduated from the same school ten years earlier, and she was friends with those people until the end of her life. Some of her best friends were people she'd gone to high school with. We scattered; we went apart. I think it was part of being in all of the upheaval and all of the—we don't want to be in this community anymore. We want to be different.

00:06:41 Q: Yeah, I think that's an excellent point. Yeah. Uh, is there a particular story that you'd like to share about either your mother or your father that kind of illustrates what they were, and who they were, or what they cared about?

00:06:52 Brown: Exhales. A particular story—Um.

00:07:05 Q: Or maybe just, you know, how they did their work—

00:07:09 Brown: Well, my—my mother was a very warm and poised—both warm and poised—person. Um, they both smoked. [Laughs]. I'm visualizing them, and I'm visualizing them both holding cigarettes, which is why that just came out, and my sister died of lung cancer. We think it was second-hand smoke. But, uh—my parents both died of lung disease, too. So I can see my mother looking very elegant with a cigarette in her hand, and she—she was very much present. My father not only was a professor at MIT, but he also did arbitration. He was a professor of labor relations, and he did some arbitration, and they would occupy him, and he would literally be in the house, but metaphorically not be in the house because he would be so involved in the arbitration. And he was also much more taciturn than my mother, so I didn't—I talked much more with my mother than I did with my father. Um—but I don't know that there's any anecdote that sums either of them up.

00:08:35 Q: So who do you think was probably the most influential person in your life prior to college? Or most influential persons? [Laughs]

00:08:42 Brown: Well, I think, I guess my parents. Among other things—aside from the fact that they had a house full of books and their expectation was that I would be a good student and that I would like to be a good student—there was no flicker of a suggestion that as girls, my sister and I would do less than we would have done if we were boys. Um—we didn't have a brother. I don't know what it would have been like if we'd had a brother. There were just the two of us. But, the expectation was that we would excel, and that we would go to college.

My sister graduated from college in 1961, and that was a different, a different world. The expectation for her was that she would work for a while, and get married and have children. Which is exactly what she did. Although she—after her children were in high school, she went back and got a business degree and went back to work. Um, by the time everything happened that happened to us in the 60s and 70s, I was on track to have a career, but both of my parents just assumed that I could do anything anybody could do. And I'm sure that—then going to a girl's school, so that all though I am in fact a shy person, I never had any doubt about my capacity to do well and to achieve.

I guess—my sister—My father was an economist, my mother was in English, my sister was an economist, I was in English, so there was a certain sense that I was chasing my sister in the area of math, but I was pretty good at math. [Laughs] And maybe I was good partly because I was chasing my sister, but I was good at math. Um, and um—I had very close friends. I don't know about influences, but we all fell in love with the Beatles at the same time, so we spent a lot of time very much engaged in that aspect of being a teenager in the 60s. Um, and one of my friends read *The Fountainhead* and liked it, and I read it and hated it, so that was an interesting conversation.

00:11:20 Q: Surely. So was there any time growing up in Brookline, in your neighborhood, when you felt that your family was different than others, or that you were different from others around you?

00:11:31 Brown: What was different was how old my parents were. I have a lot of friends who didn't have children until they were thirty-nine or forty, but my parents having a child at forty-five was extraordinary in those days. My best friend in high school, her mother was young enough to be my mother's daughter. There was this missing—missing generation. It was as if I was the child of my grandparents, and there were times when that made no difference whatsoever, and there were times, when you know, when other fathers were out playing ball games with the kids, and mine was not. Or, other parents were—other parents were much more

willing to chauffeur their daughters around to various places; my parents didn't really want to do that.

00:12:26 Q: Right. But you had Boston transportation—

00:12:28 Brown: But I had Boston transportation, so that was fine.

00:12:31 Q: Yeah. Good. Okay. So your teens were not your favorite times, although you were a very good student. Yeah, I mean junior high is what I hated. [Laughs] Um, okay. Was there any sense that you wanted to rebel against your parents by participating in the rites of the 60s—drugs, sex, just—yeah?

00:12:57 Brown: Yeah, well—yes. Um. One was going to Barnard. As I said, my mother thought that was just a ghastly idea. Um, I also did—when I was still in high school—I did things like—go to the airport to see the Rolling Stones get off an airplane.

00:13:19 Q: Oh, my. [Laughs]

00:13:20 Brown: And my parents didn't know that I was doing this. Go to a hotel to see the Beatles exit the hotel. And my parents—my parents never knew that I had done either of those things. In the grand scale of rebellion, they're tiny, but it was—and my sister never would have done anything like that. Then, when I got to college—yes, um—I smoked marijuana, but mostly because people smoked marijuana. It wasn't something I was, um, deeply engaged in, but I can remember my mother tried very hard. My mother asked me—I think I was a junior or senior at Barnard—my mother said to me, "Have you ever smoked any of that stuff?" [Laughs] Or some question to that effect, and I said, "Yes," I had, and she said, "What does it taste like?" [Laughs]

00:14:25 Q: As a smoker, huh? A connoisseur?

00:14:26 Brown: [Laughs] I guess! Um, so she was—at that point, she was not trying to be judgmental or disciplinary. She was trying to find out. Sex was a different thing. She—I came home—Christmas Vacation of my junior year, I came back to New York early, and I actually stayed with friends who lived in John Jay [Hall], because the Columbia dorms were open all Christmas vacation—Barnard dorms were closed. Um, and I wasn't actually sexually involved with anybody at that point, but my mother thought that I was, and she said to me, "But you're our treasure." Which sort of took me aback. It was such a nineteenth century thing to say. [Laughs] And then, when it came to April 1968 and everything that happened then, um—my mother was—she said, "College is supposed to be an ivory tower. You're not supposed to be involved in any of this. This is not what you go to college for." That was, of course, not what I

thought. My father, since he was himself an academic, was much more open. He was also—he was opposed to the [Vietnam] War. He was sympathetic with some of the aims of what was happening in 1968, but he also had a better understanding that college can in fact be a time when you're not in an ivory tower.

00:16:11 Q: Which brings us to our next question—what, uh, I mean, the tumultuous events that were going on when we were growing up, from the assassination of [John F.] Kennedy on—do you remember experiencing them and particular thoughts about them at the time or afterwards? The Civil Rights Movement, I mean all those things, as you know. And then the Vietnam War, of course.

00:16:25 Brown: Yeah. Um—I'm sure for all of us, it's one of those clichés. You know where you were when you heard a particular piece of news. I know where I was when I heard that Kennedy had been killed. I was on public transportation coming home from school, um, and I came home and came in the front door and said to my mother, "The President's been shot." And, it's not that I didn't find it shocking. I was old enough to find it shocking, but the look on her face told me more about how important it was than I had actually realized, and they—my parents were having a dinner party that night, and they debated whether to cancel it or not. They finally did not cancel it, but everyone just sat in front of the television all night long, and people brought the food into the living room and sat in front of the television. So, I remember that very vividly. And I remember, although I went to—I went to an all-girls school, it was a private school, all

those hockey-playing girls, it was—But the administration of the school brought in—I can remember assemblies when Freedom Fighters, or what's the term?

00:17:50 Q: Marchers.

00:17:51 Brown: Freedom Marchers came and talked about their experience down South. At one of our commencements, the speaker was William Sloane Coffin [Jr.], so the school tried to inculcate—if that's the right word—tried to make us aware of what was going on in the larger world, and I had a teacher in high school who had us write an editorial. Things one doesn't ever think about ever—I wrote an editorial about the sheriff who used fire hoses on demonstrators—

00:18:28 Q: Oh—that's pretty sophisticated!

00:18:29 Brown: —down South. So, there were no people of color in my high school, so when I came to Barnard that was the first time that I had ever been in school with people of color. Um—there had been token Catholics and Jews in my high school, but when I came to Barnard, there were lots and lots of Catholics and Jews—and Asians. I'd never—I don't think I'd ever seen an Asian before. But, I did have—my parents had me read the newspaper. So, I did have a sense of events, and I was very—Oh, the other thing that I was—I almost no sense of feminism when I entered Barnard. That was not an issue that I had ever thought much about, but gay rights was.

That wasn't the term then, but I was beginning to be aware of discrimination against homosexuals, and what that was like, and those issues.

00:19:34 Q: Um, because of people you knew, or just it was something being discussed in Boston?

00:19:35 Brown: Books.

00:19:39 Q: Oh, in books. It was something you read. Yeah, interesting. Okay, okay. Can you sort of pinpoint a moment or day that really changed your life? [Laughs]

00:19:48 Brown: Woah.

00:19:50 Q: I always laugh when I ask this question. "Check off!"

00:19:57 Brown: [Laughs] Changed my life—um—I guess—being at Barnard changed my life. I don't know that it's a day, or—so I guess the decision to come to Barnard. I applied Early Decision; it was the only place I'd wanted to come, um, not knowing—[Laughs] Little did I

know when I applied to Barnard everything that was going to happen in my first year and subsequent years. That was not what I signed on for, but in fact—you asked—I'm not sure how much awareness I had of the Vietnam War when I entered Barnard. Lots of thinking about Civil Rights. Not so much about the war. But, obviously, in our first year here, we learned a lot. Or, there was a lot available to learn if we chose to. But, no, there's no moment that changed my life. It was a series of related experiences.

00:21:14 Q: How would you—as a person—do you think that the young woman who entered Barnard is still kind of at your core, or were there major changes in how you think of yourself and how you relate to the world? I mean, you said you were shy and reticent—and bookish? [Laughs]

00:21:33 Brown: Well, I'm still shy and bookish. [Laughs] I, uh, I think I'm still the same person, just on a very simplistic level, I chose Barnard partly because I thought I wanted to major in English, and I did major in English, and I went on to get a PhD in English and teach English, so there was nothing revolutionary about that path, and no real change there. What's different about me, or how my experiences changed me, is feminism, and all of the awareness of that.

00:22:33 Q: When do you think you became aware—particularly of feminism? When did it become sort of a personal issue as opposed to an academic something out there?

00:22:44 Brown: Yeah, it was an academic issue first, um. I had—someone who's still one of my best friends—someone whom I met during orientation during Barnard—I came in having discovered gay rights, and she came in having discovered feminism, so we sort of shared those interests with each other, and she made me aware of that. But even in the Spring of '68 when I was participating on the margins, I look back now and I think, "It was all men." You know, I can remember being in an elevator in Carman Hall—not Carman, in Ferris Booth Hall; Ferris Booth was an entire building in 1968—with Mark Rudd and his girlfriend, and that was how I thought of them—Mark Rudd and his girlfriend. This appendage who belonged to this extremely exciting person, and that was—I'm not sure when—I'm really not sure, I can't pinpoint a year when it dawned on me when I saw there were women involved here, too, and women who had things to contribute. At some point, that did dawn on me.

00:24:09 Q: Right. I mean, there were women involved—all of them say they didn't get a chance to really speak.

00:24:13 Brown: Right, no, there were women involved. And I know there were women in our class who arrested, and jailed, and they were very much—they were vocal and they were intense, but they were not considered to be the leaders or to be worthy, if that's the word I want. That's the wrong word—there was no expectation that women would be the leaders.

00:24:40 Q: Yeah, yeah. No, that happened for a while, I think. [Laughs] How about any obstacles, obstacles, that you felt may have been placed in your path, and how you dealt with it, or them?

00:24:56 Brown: I've been lucky. The obstacles have been pretty small. Um, in retrospect and in comparison to other people, very small. I had economic security, I had education, um, I had family, I had friends. I lucked into—or I was able to get a series of jobs that led one to another. I have never in my life applied for a job that I got. All of the jobs have come my way, one way or another, and that's extraordinary. So—

00:25:51 Q: Is that from a network of friends, or I mean how—is this—I'm just curious how this worked. Do you want to elucidate a little more?

00:25:57 Brown: Well, I think it's—and it's not that—I have applied for things that I haven't gotten. [Laughs] I have applied for jobs that I haven't gotten, I have applied for schools that I haven't gotten into, but the jobs that I ended up getting—So I started teaching at Barnard when I was in graduate school, and I was hired to teach First-Year English at Barnard because the Barnard faculty knew me. Um, I was eventually, after I got my doctorate, I continued to teach and—I applied for teaching jobs at other schools and didn't get them—but Barnard allowed me

to continue part-time, and I worked part-time for many years—I worked part-time as a legal secretary, so I was teaching part-time and would do that work part-time. And then, an administrative job opened at Barnard, and people knew me through a series of circumstances and asked me if I was interested, and then—I'm now the Registrar, and where we are now is the Registrar's Office—the previous registrar was over seventy [years old], and they were encouraging her to leave, and they asked me if I wanted the job, so it's—I have not had obstacles, professionally, at all. And personally, sure, I've had obstacles, but nothing that's worth —I mean, I've had setbacks, but nothing that's worth bringing up.

00:27:36 Q: To what extent do you think, growing up in an academic family, and you alluded to your family having dinner parties I assume, as a professor, your father hosted departmental things—so did you know from an early age that you wanted to be a professor?

00:27:54 Brown: No. I did not. I thought—I knew I was going to major in English—but I thought I'd go into publishing or something like that. I applied to graduate school mostly because I couldn't think of anything else to do, and got into Columbia [University] and went, which I don't recommend. When I talk to students, I say, "Never go straight from college to graduate school. It's not a good idea. Really, you need time doing something else before you commit yourself to graduate school." Um, but again, once I started teaching, once was given the opportunity to teach, I realized I really enjoyed this—this is something I could do, I really liked this. Um, so, but applying to graduate school was not something I had always dreamed of, no.

00:28:53 Q: Okay. Good. How about—I'm looking at the picture over there of someone's wedding—what was the most joyous day of your life? [Laughs]

00:29:01 Brown: Oh, that's one of my nieces' weddings. The most joyous day of my life?

00:29:07 Q: I know these superlatives are nasty. [Laughs]

00:29:15 Brown: I don't think I—I don't think I can answer that one.

00:29:16 Q: Okay, that's fine. Is there anything else that defines you as a person? [Laughs] That describes you during your years at Barnard that you'd like to share? Maybe something you did that was quite memorable to you, or maybe made an impression on you, or the way you conducted yourself as a student? [Laughs]

00:29:43 Brown: Hmm—Well, I probably—I could have—I coasted a bit. I could have worked harder. And I have slight regrets about that. Uh—but, no I can't, I can't come up with an answer to that.

00:30:12 Q: So, were you commuting, or you were living in—?

00:30:14 Brown: No, no, I lived in Hewitt for two years and Brooks [Hall] for two years.

00:30:18 Q: Right, because you're from Boston—Right. I mean like, not commuting from Brooklyn, but if you lived off campus.

00:30:24 Brown: No. No, I didn't even leave what's now called The Quad. [Laughs]

00:30:29 Q: Anything you've done, or not done in your life, that you would change? That's kind of back-on-back-on the same question—a ballet dancer? [Laughs] A musician? A band-follower?

00:30:42 Brown: Oh, no. No. I have no capacity to be a musician. And I never would have danced professionally. No, I think—what I would differently would be to take time off between college and graduate school. Um, but, I think, in the end, being in academia is—was right. And it turns out that being in administration is right, although that was not something I ever thought that I would do. Um, no. There are lots of moments that I would like to take back, but in terms of the trajectory, I wouldn't change anything in the trajectory.

00:31:38 Q: Okay. So when you were a student, what did you most want out of life, and how and when might that have changed?

00:31:46 Brown: What did I most want out of life? Well, the—to answer that a different way, the times when I was happiest were the times when I was with friends, talking about books or talking about opera—I go to a lot of theater and opera—um, and sharing that knowledge and those interests. I'm sorry, what was the question? [Laughs]

00:32:31 Q: What you had most wanted out of life as a student, and maybe how that's changed, not changed—?

00:32:37 Brown: Well, I, I assume, it's hard to remember back—somethings, it's hard to remember back—I assume that I intended to have a husband and children, and I have never had a husband or children, but that's not a regret. Um, I like my life the way it is. So, at some point, and I certainly had relationships that ended in pain—but, everybody does—um, yeah, it's hard—it's hard to remember. Some things are very vivid, but some of those aspirations, I'm not sure that they're vivid now.

00:33:34 Q: Yeah. We were so young. [Laughs] We were. All right, let's go back and see if you can remember when you first arrived at Barnard. You know, fresh from Brookline, Massachusetts, I'm assuming. You didn't go to Europe before?

00:33:48 Brown: No.

00:33:49 Q: You came straight down, okay. And how did you arrive? Did you parents bring you?

00:33:51 Brown: Yes.

00:33:52 Q: And then, what do you remember experiencing the first couple days or weeks?

00:33:59 Brown: My parents brought me. Um, we—at orientation I met lots of interesting people, two of whom are still my friends. One whom I really, really liked was a commuter and we just had a very difficult time connecting once orientation was over and she wasn't living in the dorms anymore, and that friendship sort of went by the wayside, and that's too bad. And I do remember that. I remember her bringing her high school yearbook in, and we went over it together. And I remember some of orientation—not a whole lot—but I remember some of

orientation. I remember going to a mixer. Actually, that was—I had been to dances in high school that were just awful, just horrible.

00:35:00 Q: Were you matched up with a boy's school, I assume?

00:35:03 Brown: Yes, we were matched up with a boy's school, and I was among the shortest, so I was always matched up with the shortest boys. [Laughs]

00:35:11 Q: [Laughs] Trauma.

00:35:13 Brown: And they weren't interested in me, and I wasn't interested in them. Um, but at this mixer, I actually met someone—nothing ever came of it—but I met a boy whom I liked, and who liked me, who was fairly short, but he wasn't as short as some of the ones I'd been matched with in high school. So that was kind of a nice way to open one's year in college. Um, and there were—from the beginning, I had good friends and good people to spend time with, and activities that I shared with people. I did—and this is a very common experience for Barnard students—I had been at the top of my class in my high school, and everybody at Barnard had been at the top of her class at high school, and I discovered that I wasn't in the top of my class in every way here, and that took a little getting used to, but I got used to it. And I realized that, in some areas, I was just going to have to work harder. I can remember faculty, from Remington Patterson in the

English Department. I took a class with him in my first year, and I think I took a class with him every year, so that bond, that continuing connection to a particular faculty member was very important.

00:36:36 Q: Was he here when you started teaching?

00:36:37 Brown: Yes. He's the one who hired me to teach First-Year English.

00:36:45. Q: Yeah, he was amazing. I do remember him well.

00:36:49 Brown: He was a lovely, lovely man. And he was very supportive of me.

00:36:52 Q: Well, you were probably one of his better students—that helped. [Laughs]

00:36:54 Brown: Yes, yes. And, years later—he died about three years ago—and in the last ten years of his life, each of us was reading one [Anthony] Trollope novel a year, and we discovered this, so every time we would see each other, we would say, "And which Trollope novel did you read?" So, that continued. Um, so what I remember about orientation was meeting friends. And

what I remember about the beginning of college was meeting faculty. I also started—in my first year—I started tutoring for what was called the Harlem Education Project, and I did that—I tutored, in fact, the same girl for all four years at Barnard—and that was wonderful, to have that continuity also. But, the first two years, they lived—I don't remember exactly where—but they lived in a run-down tenement in a very dangerous neighborhood, and they had—I don't know—not a Pitbull, they didn't have Pitbulls in those days, but they had some very aggressive dog that they kept locked up at all times, but the dog was to protect the apartment and to protect the people in the apartment. Um, and then they moved to a housing project, the Polo Grounds housing project, which was much better, but those were—I had never been in places like that, and uh—I wasn't nervous.

00:38:42 Q: Were you able to walk there, or did you take the bus or something? Because I remember we were very limited to sort of a square. You couldn't go out any further than Morningside Park, and 125th was the limit, and—.

00:39:00 Brown: You didn't go east. And— you certainly didn't go east. And north and south were dicey, depending on where you went. I took the subway—I took the subway to both places they lived. Although, in my first or second year, I would travel to Harlem with two other Barnard-Columbia students, and we would often walk. It was 140-something, so it wasn't that far a walk, but we wouldn't walk alone; the three of us would walk together. And, when I left,

alone—the girl I tutored was named Dianne—Dianne's older brother was deputed to walk me to the subway.

00:39:53 Q: That's amazing, for four years, to keep up with someone.

00:39:56 Brown: Yeah, it was.

00:40:00 Q: Okay, did you ever question why you were at Barnard? [Laughs]

00:40:04 Brown: Nope.

00:40:06 Q: It was a good fit from the beginning?

00:40:07 Brown: It was a good fit from the beginning.

00:40:11 Q: Good. So nothing ever really let you down? Other than the—you mentioned the strikes wasn't really what you planned—

00:40:20 Brown: Oh, but that didn't really let me down. Unlike my mother, I don't believe that college is an ivory tower. It was all to the good, I thought. No, I don't think anything ever let me down, no.

00:40:35 Q: How about mentors? You mentioned Professor Patterson. Were there others?

00:40:43 Brown: Um, well he was the—because he not only taught me, but he also hired me—Joann Morse, also. She was my English major advisor and she was, um, someone whom I felt quite close to also. Uh, nobody in the administration—and David Robertson, also, in the English Department.

00:41:11 Q: And what did you end up doing your graduate work in? What area of English?

00:41:14 Brown: Um, going back in time for a moment—in high school, I had a history teacher, wonderful history teacher. In our senior year, she did a segment on the First World War, and she had us read two poems—one that was very idealistic about the war and one that was very bitter. And that was it. I was hooked for life. So, I have been working around the—British literature of the First World War ever since. My dissertation was on a group of writers after the First World

War and the impact that the war had on them, and that's continued to be my primary scholarly interest.

00:42:02 Q: So, you've taught some classes on that here?

00:42:04 Brown: I've never been able to teach just on the First World War, but I have taught—for several years, I taught a course on the literature of wars, so I did Troy, World War I, and Vietnam. Um, which I think have a lot of commonalities and the literature about them has a lot of commonalities.

00:42:25 Q: That's fascinating. And then, so I guess to become an administrator at this point, as well as having been a professor, um, what was that transition like for you—to be out of the classroom, and to be, you know, a manager? And a lot of responsibility—.

00:42:40 Brown: Well, yes. Um, I didn't actually leave the classroom until a year and a half ago.

00:42:45 Q: Oh, okay.

00:42:48 Brown: I continued to teach. When I was hired—first I was part-time administration, part-time faculty, then I was full-time administration. But I continued to teach voluntarily. I wasn't paid to teach—I'm paid to be an administrator. I taught one course every semester until fall 2013. So, um, so I kept that up. Um, and, again, you know, in some ways I've had the best of all possible worlds. It turns out that—well, it turns out that I'm a good administrator. It turns out that, although my father and my sister were the math people, I'm really good with the computer. That was a skill that I didn't know I had.

00:43:38 Q: It was dormant all these years, huh? [Laughs]

00:43:39 Brown: Right. [Laughs] And becoming registrar made me realize it's not just my father and my sister who can do these things. I can do it, too. So, that's been very gratifying. And I very much like the balance of being an administrator and a teacher, but I find being a manager very difficult. I've never had any training in how to be a manager except observing other people. I find it—I find it the most difficult of being an administrator. I have a staff of six, and they've all been here a very long time—not all of them, but many of them have been here a very long time, which is great, but the balance of praise and criticism and how—I have to evaluate my staff every year, and naturally—that's not a surprising fact—but I expressed to the head of HR [human resources] once that I found this very difficult, and she said, "But you're a teacher. You give grades all the time." Which I thought was an interesting analogy, but I find it much easier to grade students than to evaluate staff—not sure why. Um, but I do enjoy doing both.

00:45:07 Q: Um, okay. We're going to do one other question kind of in that realm. What do you most admire, what influences you the most now?

00:45:20 Brown: Can you narrow that down?

00:45:21 Q: I don't know how to—I've got to put my glasses on to read the question. [Laughs]

00:45:25 Brown: Personally? Professionally? Politically? [Laughs]

00:45:26 Q: No, I think the question is for what inspires you, or what influences you most now. It can be politically, musically, or individually? I mean—politically, culturally?

00:45:37 Brown: What inspires me—ehh. Um, I, I have some wonderful colleagues, including my own staff, and working with them can be extremely rewarding—is often extremely rewarding. Um, inspiring—well, yeah, that's an interesting question. There isn't much in the world that's very inspiring. I don't know—it's different. I mean, I love wonderful performances of plays, wonderful performances of operas—they're very valuable, but they're not—I mean, I don't know if that's what your question is getting at—

00:46:49 Q: That's good enough, I think. Uh, I think your statement about, "There's not much in the world that's inspiring right now" is kind of—kind of sums a lot up, so, we don't need to prod. All right, let's look right now at the period of '67 to '72, and the political and racial tension and turmoil. Specifically, when did you first hear about the strike, and do you want to talk a little bit about your involvement, or lack of involvement—support, lack of support, what have you?

00:47:16 Brown: Um, I—I remember, obviously, the assassination of Martin Luther King [Jr.], and I went to—there was a service in St. Paul's Chapel, at which Mark Rudd got up to speak, and the administration cut the microphone so that he couldn't be heard, and he and a number of black students walked out of St. Paul's, including a friend of mine. I was with—I will say Ardyth because I will be talking about Ardyth in the future, also Ardyth was one of my good friends, and we were with our friend, Adele, who was black, and Adele got up and walked out. And Ardyth and I were, "What's happening? What do we do? What does this mean? Should we be going with Adele? Should we be not going with Adele? Why—what's going on?!" And that was the first, I guess, that was my moment of—maybe I knew things, but that was what I remember most about the fact that something was happening at Columbia, and that it was having an impact on people who mattered to me. It was just not something that I was reading about in the *New York Times*, it was local as well as global. Uh, and that would have been March? February? I don't know when King was assassinated.

00:49:06 Q: I thought it was March.

00:49:07 Brown: March? So, it was a very short—actually it was a very short time between that and the strike, because the strike was April. Um, and so I began reading *Spectator*, which in those days was a very good newspaper, at least in my memory, it was a very good newspaper, and it had a lot of coverage of what was going on at Columbia, and why it was going on at Columbia, and Dow Chemical and the Vietnam War and the gym in Morningside Park and all of the issues that were central to what happened in 1968, and I was very—I became very, um, sympathetic—agreed with what people were saying—agreed with the protests, agreed with demonstrations and anger and all of that. Not to the extent—I think I was still shy and resistant, I think I still am, not to the extent that I participated in occupying any of the buildings, but, um, I did—I did want to show my support.

Um, and Ardyth and I went over—during the occupation of the buildings, we would spend evenings on the Columbia campus, or we would spend evenings near the buildings, and Barnard had a curfew. Couldn't be out after 10 p.m. during the week, or after midnight on weekends without special permission, signing in and signing out. So the—one evening Ardyth and I came back before 10, and the next evening, we didn't. We were still there after 10, so we realized we had to be out all night. We had no choice; we couldn't come back to the dorm. And that was the night of the bust. So we were there when the police came. And we sat—we joined people sitting on the steps of Fayerweather [Hall] forming a barricade against the police, not that anyone

thought it would be a very effective barricade, and it wasn't. The police had no problem pushing people off the steps, throwing people around. Um, but I—so I was on campus that night. We were on campus that night. And we—they—we were forced to leave campus, but we were allowed to come back in through another gate. It was really not a very well-organized evening on the part of the administration. Um, so I saw, from a distance, I saw some of the police violence. There was an iconic poster of a boy with blood streaming down his face, and I had seen him—before he became a poster boy. I had seen him, um, and I had been—I mean for years afterwards, I couldn't be in a crowd at night because it was just terrifying—

00:52:44 Q: You're the second person who's said that that I've interviewed in the last two days. It was—very traumatic.

00:52:48 Brown: Ahh. In fact, I went down to, um, Costa-Gavras' movie *Z*, which was very—which has a demonstration or a crowd scene in it, and it was all I could do to stay in the theatre, to watch it—nothing happened to me, um, or to Ardyth, but I saw, I saw things that were appalling. Um, and then I became—after, there were lots of groups that grew up. One was called Step-Sitters and Sympathizers, that was the group that I was a part of, Step-Sitters and Sympathizers, led by a young man, of course, at Columbia. It folded at the end of the semester, it folded after that, nothing happened after that, but we would meet periodically and talk about—and the men would talk about what we would do, and how we would support the people who had been arrested.

00:53:52 Q: Do you remember some of the actual dialog and conversation from that time that you might have had with friends or—?

00:52:58 Brown: Um, actual dialog bits. I remember Peter Juviler, who was a professor of political science here, and he was very supportive, but he was also anxious about his students, and by his students, I mean the university, not just necessarily Barnard. He would come out in the evenings and meet with students, and say, "Tell me—why are you doing this? What is it that's upsetting you so much?" and just try to listen and absorb and learn and give support, but I don't remember specific conversations, and I remember, I had—I knew someone who was on the other side, someone who was very much opposed to what was going on, and I can remember debating with him, but I don't remember the actual words that we used. Um, yeah, uh, and I think that—I don't remember any specific dialog, and I think all I could do is—you know, I've read so much—I read so much at the time about it, I read so much now about it—it would just be parroting what I have read—

00:55:29 Q: It was a long time ago. Okay. I had a question—I lost it. Oh, yeah, of course. So, having been on the other side, as a teacher and—how do you think your view of that has changed? If there were to be a strike, or there had been a strike, maybe three years ago, and your class had to stop?

00:55:59 Brown: Um—I have a couple of answers to that question. One is indirect, which is that the Barnard administration handled 1968 quite well, just from the beginning. Columbia administration was—just could not have been stupider in a lot of what they did. But Columbia learned from that experience, so I think that nothing quite like this could happen again at Barnard or Columbia because the administrations are much savvier, which is not to say that there have not been issues. There have been issues around divestment, issues more recently around sexual assault, there have certainly issues that students have become very agitated about. Several years ago—now this is embarrassing—several years ago Barnard students occupied the office of our chief financial officer, and now I don't remember why, which is terrible.

00:57:10 Q: Rising tuition or something?

00:57:11 Brown: No, it wasn't a Barnard issue, it was a more national—It may have been divestment, I'm not sure. And, I have, yeah—so, in retrospect—In retrospect, as a faculty member and as an administrator, I am quite amazed that Barnard canceled final exams. That strikes me as such an extraordinary thing to do, and they did it again in 1970. And that just—I can't imagine that happening. I'm not opposed to it, it's just—astonishing. Um, but, and, but—I'm not sure what the connective is here. I hope that I would be supportive if my students felt strongly—and of course if I agreed with what they felt—if they felt so strongly about an issue that disruption was the only way. As I said, I think the administration is now savvier, and that

there are options other than that kind of disruption, but if they felt that disruption was the only way to do it, I hope that I would be supportive.

00:58:44 Q: So, how was your education affected by this early termination of classes in ’68 and also ’70? Um, you already said your mother said, “This was supposed to be an ivory tower—you’re supposed to be studying!”

00:58:58 Brown: Right. [Laughs] Um, yeah, I don’t know that it had much impact on me. Um, because I continued—through all of this—I continued to be a nerd. I continued to be someone who spent a lot of time on academics. So I did all the reading, even if there wasn’t a final exam.

00:59:18 Q: Right, you learned anyway. [Laughs]

00:59:19 Brown: Well, I probably didn’t learn it as well—.

00:59:23 Q: You had to write papers, too. Those were still due, if I recall.

00:59:27 Brown: Yeah, I don't know—I know exams were canceled, I don't remember. Some of them were turned into take-homes, rather than in-class exams. Um, so I—I'm in a position where, as an administrator—as a faculty member, I could have done what I wanted. But, as an administrator, I am not allowed to participate in demonstrations, or to, um, refuse to come to work in order to honor somebody else's demonstration. As part of the terms of my job, I cannot do that. Um, but, I would hope that I could find other ways in which to be supportive.

01:00:21 Q: Do you remember specific faculty members? You said—as the Barnard administration handled it quite well—I'm just trying to think who, who was responsible for that. Was it Martha Peterson or—?

01:00:38 Brown: Well, yeah. That question, I'm answering not out of memory, but out of things I've learned more recently. I've been going to [Robert A.] Bob McCaughey's sessions on making Barnard history, and he and Rosalind Rosenberg both think that Martha Peterson handled it brilliantly, and so that's now, that's now my view, too, but I don't specifically remember—I mean, I do remember that, um, Barnard was much more flexible than Columbia, and that Barnard was a kind of haven from the violence and disruption at Columbia. But I could not have, at the time, I could not have said, "Oh, let's hear it for Martha Peterson."

01:01:23 Q: Okay, so looking sort of at the larger picture and some of the impetus for those strikes, um, and demonstrations, are there particular events that you, that really impacted you, that you sort of personalized and thought, "Goodness. My whole life has changed"? Um, Kent State, the draft, Vietnam, the assassinations, the rioting in Harlem—was there rioting in Boston, too?

01:01:53 Brown: Um, if there was I didn't know about it. No, I don't think there was. Boston had, um—Boston's big thing was school desegregation, school busing. That was violent and long-lasting. Uh, well also, I went to two of the marches on Washington. To one of them, I went wearing a skirt. I was wearing a skirt during the bust. Life was very different then. [Laughs]

01:02:29 Q: I remember it being so cold when I went to the March on Washington because I was wearing a skirt. Glad to hear it wasn't just me!

01:02:33 Brown: Oh, good! [Laughs] I mean, it wasn't that everybody was wearing skirts. There were people wearing pants, but I was still wearing skirts. Anyway, no, I—.certainly, all of the things that you mentioned were very much part of my consciousness, part of my thinking every day, um—colored—I was going to say colored my political views, which is true, although, um, my father was a very liberal Democrat, so I wasn't rebelling against my father, and my mother was—my parents were [Adlai] Stevenson Democrats, both of them. Um, so I grew up in that

atmosphere. I can remember being—I don't know—eighth grade, ninth grade. There was a straw poll for president and I and one other person were the only girls in the class who voted for whoever—[John F.] Kennedy?—whoever the Democrat was who was. Everybody else voted Republican. Who are these people? [Laughs] Anyway, so I came from that background, although I was more intensely concerned about some of these issues than my parents were. Well, the issues were new, too. They didn't exist when Stevenson was running for President. Vietnam was going on, but we didn't know about. Uh, but again, I don't have any specific events or experiences.

01:04:19 Q: And how did you spend your summers? Do you remember?

01:04:22 Brown: Uh, summer after my first year, the summer after my sophomore year, I was a research assistant to people in the Economics Department at Harvard.

01:04:35 Q: Oh, so you stayed here?

01:04:36 Brown: No, at Harvard. Got the job through my father. Um—

01:04:38 Q: Good connection. [Laughs]

01:04:39 Brown: Well, got the—got the first job through my father, although—it was a graduate student. He was looking for a research assistant, and he came and interviewed me, and my father said to me, "You know, I'm sure he's interviewing several other people, and he might not take you." That was my father's way of saying, "I got you the interview. I can't get you the job." Um, but I got the job, so I did okay. So, I spent two years doing research. It was actually very interesting. It was into employment and training programs in the Boston area, well wider Boston area, um, General Dynamics, um, and we were looking at—it was just by chance that this was the work that I was in, but I learned a lot about—a lot. I don't remember it now. I learned a lot about labor issues, and I learned a lot about employing the disadvantaged and how hard it is for the disadvantaged to be successful once they are employed because they have so many obstacles coming into those positions so that they don't—they don't stay in the job very long, even if they're qualified, because of all the background issues that are holding them back. Um, anyway, so I spent two years doing that. And then the summer after my junior year, I went to a program at Oxford for the summer.

01:06:11 Q: All right. Um, so we go post-1971—graduation. I mean, is there anything else you'd like to say about your undergraduate years in particular? We can come back again. Um, how would you say your adult life has been different from what you anticipated? I think I already asked that—

01:06:34 Brown: Well, the—you asked that, and I answered it in a way. No husband, no children.

01:06:41 Q: Yeah, you did say that. Okay. Yeah, because you were expecting more of a traditional formula—

01:06:51 Brown: Right.

01:06:51 Q: How about if you could go back to the first day? Uh, when you entered Barnard, what kind of words would you whisper to yourself, or tell that girl, to get more out of college?

01:07:04 Brown: Oh, to get more out of college— Huh.

01:07:13 Q: Or maybe just, get more out of life.

01:07:16 Brown: Well, I would tell her to take more risks, but I haven't—the adult, the older me—haven't taken a lot of risks, either, so that's a kind of odd recommendation. I guess that's, that's—if I have a regret, I'm sure we all have regrets.

01:07:36 Q: Of course. [Laughs]

01:07:39 Brown: Have I had exactly the life I should have had? No. Um, and I think that in one way, a lack of risk-taking is, is a regret.

01:07:52 Q: Okay. How about—maybe the most memorable day of your life? Not of your life—excuse me—but of your career?

01:08:09 Brown: I don't think that—I know that you didn't write the questions, but the questions keep asking me for this one moment, and I just—it's more of a continuum, but I'm sure people say "the happiest day of my life was when I got married" or something like that, is that true?

01:08:28 Q: Well, we had one who went to meet [Barack H.] Obama not too long ago after finishing her career, so that was a cool one

01:08:35 Brown: That's very exciting. Um—

01:08:38 Q: Every once and a while something interesting comes up. Yeah, I think again it's a continuum, so perhaps maybe some of the most satisfying experiences you've had over the course of your career.

01:08:50 Brown: Well, the—probably— There are the "ah ha" moments. Teaching someone and seeing the light go on, or teaching a class and seeing the light go on, or throwing out a question to a class, and getting an answer I never expected that made a light go on for me. Um, that's the reward of teaching just in general—is the shared learning and the illumination that comes from it. But I have those "ah ha" moments as registrar, too, when "What's wrong? Why isn't this report working? It worked last week?" And three people get together, and they analyze it and "Ah! That's it! That's what's wrong. That's how we fix it." Um, it's those, just those lightbulbs.

01:09:51 Q: It's solving problems like that.

01:09:52 Brown: It's solving problems, yeah. Um, and illumination again. Illumination in the sense of knowledge, understanding, but in a very momentary "ah ha" kind of way.

01:10:11 Q: What would you say would have been the biggest changes in your years, in your career at Barnard?

01:10:16 Brown: Yeah, people ask me that all the time, and it's very difficult to answer because I've been here so long. I started teaching in 1974, and—yeah, I had just passed my orals—and I've just been here so long that it kind of blends together. Um, you know, students change, yes/no, teaching changes, yes. Teaching is much more, or the classroom is, much more interactive I think than it was—well, much more, more interactive. Lecture classes have discussion sections attached to them. Even lecture, even lecturers try to get students to talk during the class. Instead of assigning, you know, four papers over the course of the semester, we assign students to post electronic comments every week, and read one another's electronic comments, so that the teaching and learning is much more—I said interactive and ongoing. And I think this is all to the good. Um—and Barnard students are smart. We were smart; they were less smart in the 80s after Columbia College went co-ed, but now they're smarter again. Yeah, they were fine, but the quality of the student of the '80s was not what it was before and after.

01:12:12 Q: So, enrollments and applications are high, and you could take your choice. Good. I always wonder, though, in terms of the size of the English Department, I know I'd heard actually some complaints about the number of—I guess this was a *Columbia Daily Spectator* article actually—the number of adjuncts in psychology, for example. That's not true in other departments, or has that also been a change?

01:12:41 Brown: Ah, no, I don't think so. Yes, I don't know why *Spectator* chose to do an article on the Psych[ology] Department. I do not think that the *Spectator* of the last twenty years is on par with the *Spectator* of our youth by any means. The English department has a number of adjuncts, but for a perfectly good reason. They are creative writers, they are published writers who come in and teach writing classes—poetry, playwriting. Um, and First-Year English is also taught, to an extent, by adjuncts, but I think that was probably true—well, I don't know if that was true when we were here. Um—

01:13:19 Q: Who was your freshman English teacher?

01:13:20 Brown: I was exempt on the basis of the AP [Advanced Placement].

01:13:22 Q: Oh, of course. I remember.

01:13:25 Brown: Who was yours?

01:13:26 Q: I had Anne Prescott.

01:13:26 Brown: Oh, you did? She's still teaching.

01:13:29 Q: She's lovely. I should go visit her. Anyway—

01:13:33 Brown: She's a wonderful woman. I never took a class with her, but—

01:13:25 Q: Yeah, I remember being mortified that I hadn't placed out, so my revenge was I sat there, never talking the entire semester, but I did okay. She was very kind.

01:13:45 Brown: Well, now nobody can place out. For the last twenty years or so, nobody's been able to place out. Everybody has to take First-Year English.

01:13:52 Q: I see. That's probably a good idea.

01:13:54 Brown: Yes, that's an excellent idea.

01:13:55 Q: And you would know. [Laughs] Interesting. Okay. And back to the questions then. What would you say was the most—how did they phrase it—I guess the question is—again, it's

one of those superlatives—What do you rate sort of as some of your greatest achievements and greatest accomplishments? Something that really makes you proud. You already said, you know being able to master the complexity of being a registrar, as well.

01:14:27 Brown: Well, being able to master the computer. Um, my predecessor as registrar was devoted to Barnard, but she was a negative, crotchety, past-her-prime person, whose tendency was to say no to everything, and I knew when I was hired for this position, that one of my—one of the expectations was that I would change the whole tenor of the office to a place that is helpful and available and—we have to say no. No, you can't extend the deadline. A deadline is a deadline. But there are ways to say no, and there are ways to be informative and helpful, and I feel that I have done that. Well, I feel—I've been registrar since 1992. I did that in the first few years, but I have maintained that. I really feel that I, that I made this office, um—and it wasn't—her staff were okay, she set a bad tone, it's not that the people on her staff were negative and unpleasant, she just set a bad tone—

01:15:56 Q: It's hard, though, to replace that culture. To reverse it—a lot of work.

01:16:01 Brown: Yes, yes it is. And it was—she said no to faculty too not to, so it's not just how we treat students, it's how we interact with faculty, and I feel very, very proud of the way I think this office is now viewed by the faculty. Um, and I think those are real achievements. And I also,

just in terms of my teaching, I'm just pleased that I was able to do it, and that I feel that I taught. That I got through to students. That I succeeded not with all of them, but with a lot of them.

01:16:45 Q: Yeah. Okay. And again, this question may not be pertinent to you because you've been in an academic setting, and a multitude of people coming and going all the time, but the question is—did you ever have a friend who was of a different race or class, and can you talk about the person? You talked about being with Adele, and her walking out, so that might lead to something more. And what has been your experience since leaving Barnard? But, you haven't left Barnard—[Laughs] So, what has been your experience as an adult post-Barnard? With class and with race.

01:17:18 Brown: Um, well, Ardyth, whom I keep talking about. Ardyth came to Barnard from Boise, Idaho. She was an illegitimate child, working class, no money. In retrospect, I think back and realize how little money she had. She had like three dresses that she wore all year. She just had nothing. Um, and we're still friends. She has now moved into the professional class. She is a lawyer. She is married to a doctor. Although she never finished Barnard. Her mother got, had breast cancer and Ardyth dropped out of Barnard and never finished, but went on to be successful anyway. I was friends with Adele, who was black, but not as close as with Ardyth. I don't—I have not had close friends of other races, although I've had friends of other races, and I have colleagues, some quite close, but as you say, I haven't left the academic world.

It's still—in my own staff, I have two African Americans, who came originally from the Dominican Republic, but they're support staff, they're not professional staff. The professional staff is white, and that's common at the college, that the support staff are people of color. I mean, there are professional staff who are people of color, but there's—that's a divide that we still haven't bridged, and I know that that's a concern among students, that students feel that if you're Asian or Latino or if you're African American, people look and you and say, "Oh, she is whatever." But if you come from a family with no money, and you can't afford books and you can't afford to go to—all those restaurants on Broadway, they weren't there when we were students. We ate in the dorm. There are all these restaurants, and they're filled with students day after day, and I think, "Where is this money coming from?"

01:19:53 Q: Yeah, I wonder, too.

01:19:54 Brown: But, I know that students are conscious of that. That people—. "Let's go to Starbucks and get coffee." Well, Starbucks coffee is really expensive. There are people who cannot afford that. But it is a hidden—class is a much more hidden issue than race, and it's an ongoing issue, and Barnard is trying—like, all colleges like Barnard— we're trying to recruit more students from the working classes, but it's hard. I mean, which isn't to say we couldn't make better efforts, but that's—. When I was at Barnard, race was a big deal. Um, and I had—Ardyth was a good friend of mine. But some of these other issues weren't as obvious.

01:20:51 Q: Do you remember the year that most of the black students—students who were dormies—moved into one hall? I don't know, they were part of the BOSS, Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters. That was separate. But, I do remember that. I think it was—what's the hall between Reid [Hall] and Hewitt [Hall]?

01:21:14 Brown: Brooks [Hall].

01:21:15 Q: Brooks, yeah. I think it was Brooks. Anyway, I'm just—. I remember that being very shocking since I knew some of them, and I was like, "What's going on?" Kind of like Adele walking out—

01:21:24 Brown: Yes, yes, yes, yes. I don't remember that. I guess Adele wasn't one of them. Um, but, right, and that's—I know now, as a professional educator, I know that that's partly a developmental process. People in their teens—in their late teens—tend to attach to their own community, and therefore it's not—it's developmentally normal for all the Black students to want to be together. I understand that. It's still upsetting.

01:22:06 Q: Right. I think it's part of that whole Black identity, which had not happened before.

01:22:12 Brown: No, right, right.

01:22:13 Q: Okay. How about as a woman? Do you ever feel that you personally have been discriminated against because you were a woman?

01:22:26 Brown: Probably not. Um—not sure. I—not in any obvious way. Let me put it like that.

01:22:47 Q: Can you tell me a time when you became involved in a cause or a cause that you have been involved with now? Again, that's one of those words. If it were an English essay—I'll try to review these and think these through.

01:23:01 Brown: Right. Well, and I think circling back, the War. Um, and as I said, March on Washington, and um—protests at Columbia. And then—this is not part of joining a cause—but the fact that I've taught the literature of three wars and I see them as so similar, those three wars, which is academically very interesting.

01:23:50 Q: Would you like to say a little bit more about that? About the similarities?

01:23:56 Brown: Well, Troy and the First World War and Vietnam. In all cases it was, it was—and this is reductive—but we're going off to save the world, we're full of idealism, we're doing what is fully absolutely right, and we get there and we discover that it is a quagmire, a mess, an unending disaster, um, in which the people in the trenches—literally, in the First World War—are having an experience that the commanding officers don't understand. That's in the *Iliad* also. That's certainly true in Vietnam. And in each case, the war was planned based on the previous war, and turned out to be a very different kind of war, and the literature is just shot through with these horrible disillusionments. I mean, World War II is different in some ways. Certainly, I haven't taught Afghanistan or Iraq, but certainly those fit into the paradigm, which is what is so, if I have a cause, if I have a cause, my cause is: Stop wars like that. But, the more I learn, the more I read, I realize that that's not possible. That they are part of human nature in some way, that we are always, always going to go on doing this. So, it's not—I'm not saying that it's not worth protesting or objecting or voting against going into Iraq—but I don't have much hope about improvement.

01:26:16 Q: Going back to Homer. I mean, that's a long history of mankind. We never learned, have we?

01:26:17 Brown: No.

01:26:24 Q: It's fascinating, though. I'd like to look at your booklist sometime. Your reading list. Okay, so let's see. Jumping away from the profound—[Laughs] How do you perceive yourself as a woman, and how has it changed over time? Your sense of yourself as a woman.

01:26:49 Brown: Hmm—I feel the opposite of what I just said—I feel fortunate to live in the time that I live in because it has been pretty easy for me to be a single woman. It would not have been easy if I were fifteen years older, it would have been harder for me to do that. And being in New York helps, too. I don't know how easy it would be to be a woman in, I don't know, Brattleboro, Vermont, or Kansas City, or something. Um—you know, I can do what I want to do, and be what I want to be, and there isn't anybody saying, "You ought to marry, you ought to have children, you ought to dress differently, you ought to have a different kind of career, you ought to behave differently." I haven't had to deal with that as I would have in previous times. But my—again, this is something I can't pinpoint—my sense of myself as a woman is something over a long continuum. It's hard to say, you know, this year I felt this, and ten years later, I felt something different.

01:28:27 Q: Maybe the question is, when did you feel comfortable—you said entering college, you thought, "Oh, maybe I'll marry and have children"—when did you reach a point when you were just comfortable with who you were and the choices you had made?

02:28:40 Brown: I don't know. It happened. It—well, I guess a more specific answer would be in my thirties as I think back. That, that was when I realized—realized that this was my life, and thought, "Oh, that's fine."

01:29:15 Q: Have you always stayed in New York?

01:29:16 Brown: I have. I came to Barnard partly because I wanted to be in New York, and that turned out to be right.

01:29:22 Q: Yes, that's very hard to beat. But it's a unique culture, cultures.

01:29:28 Brown: It is. You either really like it, or you really don't like it.

01:29:33 Q: Intimate relationships? Any romantic relationships or relationships that changed the trajectory of your life that you remember or want to share?

01:29:44 Brown: Huh—hmm, well I certainly had my share of romantic relationships. One when I was in college, and early graduate school. I had a boyfriend who—I found this very annoying—

I had to break up with him. He wouldn't have the courage to break up with me, and I found this extremely annoying. I don't know if that's a feminist or a non-feminist thing to say. But, anyway, I did break up with him. And subsequently it turned out that he was gay, which explained a lot. [Laughs] And he's now one of my closest friends. So, that—he didn't know he was gay. I mean, that's a whole other issue in terms of the times that we've lived through, um, you know and—men coming out as gay—or women for that matter—was, I don't know if I— "Are you sitting down? Can you take this?" So anyway, that's a nice story. [Laughs]

01:31:14 Q: No, no definitely. Good. Okay, so let's see—you clearly made choices around career versus family. And again, this kind of goes back to the same thing, I asked you when you felt comfortable with those decisions. I guess, yeah, I guess you've probably answered that. Is there anything else you want to add? How about, in such a desolate age that we've had since we've entered college—nothing ever quite works out politically or socially that we would want, ideally—what's kind of maintained you? Has there been any spirituality or any religious faith, or anything you want to share in that area?

01:31:55 Brown: Um, I'm an atheist. I think I've probably been an atheist for most of my life, although I didn't always know that I was. My father, my father was, but not militantly, he just, he didn't believe in anything—I don't believe in anything. I'm not militant about it, I just don't believe in anything. So I don't have any kind of, um, and I wouldn't call myself spiritual in any

way, either. I think what keeps me going is friendship and family—human connections. I have two nieces whom I am very fond of.

01:32:34 Q: Did either of them go to Barnard?

01:32:34 Brown: No. They don't like the city. One of them went to Harvard [University], and one went to Middlebury [College], which was perfect for her.

01:32:44 Q: Oh, yeah, those are very different, very different environments. So there was no brainwashing as a child? You weren't exposed to particular traditions or—?

01:32:59 Brown: No, my mother—my parents were both raised as sort of middle-of-the-road Protestants, and my mother took me to Sunday School, and had me baptized, but she didn't force it on me, it was just, "This is there if you want it. If you don't want it, that's okay."

01:33:32 Q: I guess we can move to kind of some of the final questions. So what do you look forward to happening in the future? Maybe post-employment here, post—?

01:33:46 Brown: Yeah, um—I am thinking of retiring, although I'm not doing it in the immediate future, and looking forward to—this is a very time-consuming job—

01:34:08 Q: Yes, you're still working here on a Saturday!

01:34:09 Brown: Well, I don't work most Saturdays, but I do work a lot of—I work a lot of time, a lot of hours, and I'm looking forward to working fewer hours and maybe doing some more traveling and going to more museums and hanging out with friends more. Although I would also like to, um, I don't want to do nothing. I would like to do some kind of volunteer work or something. You know, I feel—I've been in non-profit work my whole career, I've been in academia, and that's valuable. Um—but I don't know. I think I'd like to do something more directly helping people in need. I have not defined the people or the need or indeed the nature of the work, but I think I would like to do that—many fewer hours a week than I do this job.

01:35:08 Q: Um, okay. In terms of, like, feminism, has that impacted any of your academic research or teaching or involvement at Barnard, having such feminist presence, or as part of your colleagues?

01:35:26 Brown: Well, part of—

01:35:30 Q: I meant to ask that earlier. It's not really a closing question—

01:35:35 Brown: I think it informs all my teaching, and I was—I don't know whether to be pleased or not. A few years ago, a student wrote on one of my teaching evaluations that she appreciated the quietly feminist approach I brought to every text. I didn't know whether I like the word "quietly" or not. But I do bring a feminist approach to every text, even though I don't put it in the forefront necessarily, and I was pleased that somebody was acknowledging that, that she picked up on it, and it's, um—you know, it's odd that my academic interest is war, which is not a particularly feminist area of inquiry, but I'm very, very interested in the impact that war has on women, and how they deal with it—in scholarly terms, in their writing—but also in their lives. So, I think it informs that as well, and, you know, I work at a women's college where we try to model for women and be available to women all day long.

01:37:08 Q: You're pretty much living that life. [Laughs]

01:37:09 Brown: I am. [Laughs]

01:37:12 Q: Okay, and is there anything else that you feel should be included in this interview that you haven't mentioned or I haven't prod enough through?

01:37:22 Brown: I don't think so.

01:37:24 Q: I don't think so. Well thank you. Thank you very much.

01:37:26 Brown: Thank you.

01:37:38 Q: We'll, uh—we'll see where we go from here. Hopefully, we'll—

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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