

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Frances Garrett Connell

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Frances Garrett Connell conducted by Katherine Brewster on May 8, 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.

00:00:01 Q: All right, I think we are good to go. Okay, so this is an interview for BC Voices, Inc. —who is the organization that is carrying forward the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project and this is an interview with Frances [Garrett] Connell on May 8th of 2015. And she's one of the alum of the class of 1971 at Barnard [College]. Welcome.

Connell: And yourself?

00:00:36 Q: And I'm—and the interviewer is Katherine [Brewster], another alum of [Barnard]. So welcome.

Connell: Thank you.

00:00:43 Q: Thank you for being willing to do this and to share your story.

Connell: My pleasure.

00:00:48 Q: And I'm going to ask you to do one thing and that is to—just remind yourself to speak up. I know you have a tendency to—to drop your voice, to be—“shy” may not be quite the right word, but—not speak up as much about who you are and what you're doing. So—

00:01:16 Q: I'm going to invite you to really do this, because this is a time for you to really share what it is—that your life was like then and what you have done since then. So thank you. All right, so I'm going to start with just—actually, where would you like to start?

Connell: We can start with my childhood.

00:01:37 Q: Okay, all right, tell me.

Connell: So I was born in Houston, Texas on February 21st, [1949]. I was the seventh of eight children. The kids ranged in age from—there's a space of twenty-one years between my youngest brother, my oldest brother—so my oldest brother was finishing law school at the time; my mother was pregnant with my youngest brother. My father was a clerk for Missouri Pacific Railroad, a job which frustrated him endlessly. He came from a large family, he had grown up—they had been very distinguished in Fort Worth, Texas. He was the—very much the black sheep of the family in that he got married and had a lot of children. The other members of the family were lawyers, doctors, CEOs, what have you. So we never had much to do with that—my father's side of the family.

My mother grew up on a farm in Brenham, Texas—outside Brenham, Texas. She was the oldest of five children. And her specific—so my father, let me just finish with him again—he actually had graduated from college with a major in French. This was in 1917. And had—then gone onto

live your life and propagate it—or speak about it. Left—had a number of problems. But anyway —left. So my mother was—we never quite knew what my mother's education was. She grew up on a farm and she—worked as a nurse—or a nurse—probably a practical nurse at a children's hospital when I was very young and did a lot of other things, which we'll talk about in a bit.

So my childhood was—very interesting. We were in a suburban—in an area with—the park was huge—major sprawling park for Houston—was just a block away. There was a Catholic church at one end of our street. My elementary school was on the other. We could walk everywhere; we could bike everywhere. There were tons of children. It was very typical, '50s childhood, where you always had someone out—sort of not watching you, but knowing where you were, I guess. Also with the older brothers and sisters—

00:04:04 Q: So how many children were on the block, would you say?

Connell: I don't really know.

00:04:09 Q: Ball park?

Connell: Yeah, I don't really know. Probably twenty. But we—you know, there were several. The way the neighborhood was laid out, there were alleys behind us. So you had—you actually had neighbors on either side of you, across the street as well as in the alley behind you. In terms of the kids I hung out with—of course, I was very close to my next-of-age brother—who was

to do. But I do remember a period when I also was very close to one of my neighbors across the alley. I don't remember what the story was with them. But—sitting under this fragrant lemon tree, making doll clothes. So I definitely did some girly things, as well.

00:05:02 Q: So some girly things and a tomboy?

Connell: Oh, totally, yeah.

00:05:06 Q: So is there—do you remember a particular story or image or event that comes to mind from that time?

Connell: There are really so many because I have sort of been writing—and this is—this is probably a caveat I should start with. I have been writing about my childhood, about my family—probably since I was ten years old. And in the process of remembering, as memory does tend to be a little bit elusive, I have processed lots of stories, lots of information. Every once in a while I think that, “Oh, actually, that happened in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, that wasn't my life.” [laughter] But it was the same thing. I remember the gardens, pine trees, the seasonal magnolias—you know, magnolia blossoms, I remember coming down there. I remember doing a lot of tree climbing—

00:05:51 Q: Tree climbing, uh-huh.

was, like, ten and that was another small trauma in our collective lives. But—we would go up every weekend, pretty much. We would go up to—it was about a two-hour drive, hour and a half drive out to this country place. And we'd spend the weekend there, just running around the farm. And the older people—my parents, aunts, uncles, what have you—would talk—my grandparents. And we were just kind of free to do what we wanted and that was really very special. I remember the pack of dogs—they always had wild dogs, not “wild,” not uncivilized, but just many generations of dogs that would sleep underneath the porch. I remember my grandfather who was very insistent that we behave ourselves and that consisted of not slamming the door on the porch. So if we did, he would make us take a fly swatter and stand out there and swat flies for a little while. I remember when lots of relatives would come—aunts and uncles—cousins and all of my siblings, because they sprawled such a generation—it was really two generations, it was very hard to get us all together. So it was a small farm house, so we would all sleep out on the porch on pallets, and I just remember the incredible majesty of the Texas sky above on the countryside and these huge grasshoppers that would sort of serenade us all night[laughs]. Anyways, I think that made—that was a little bit different than just the—all the fun things of being in a late fifties childhood, as well.

When I was nine, my father's job was transferred to Saint Louis, Missouri and he was at that point in his late fifties. So there was no question of him finding employment in Houston. And that was a major trauma because at the same time—at that point, my oldest sister was already married, another sister got married literally the week before we moved and the family was pretty much broken up. We were no longer in the same area. We would go down and visit people in

people that we had known and grown up with. It was particularly hard, I think, on my mother in the first years. She would always talk about “sorry Saint Louis—what are we doing in sorry Saint Louis?” She ended up living there till she died at ninety-four, so I think she adjusted. [laughter]

00:08:28 Q: And what was—so what was the environment like for you at Saint Louis? You were talking about in Texas, you were in the suburbs and there are a whole bunch of kids, so where did you move in Saint Louis?

Connell: So we were also in the suburbs, we were in an area called "University City," which my father—I think had—and my mother, who had a tremendous respect for anything to do with education, had scouted out. And it was not a particularly beautiful house, but it had the two requirements, which they were looking for—which was it had to have a garden because my mother and father both gardened. Large gardens, huge gardens. And it had to—even more important than that, it had to be in a good school system. So this was—I think this was the crème be la crème of school districts; it was just a wonderful place to get an education. So I was there from third grade through high school. The neighborhood itself was very mixed. It was not on the most—it wasn't on the side of University City near Washington University, which were the old Victorian houses and much more the many generations of professionals—near City Hall and the library and all of that. It was sort of on the edge, actually, of a transitional area, which is not a far from Ferguson, Missouri, which we've heard of a lot recently. So it was a bit—yeah. But we also had—it was—again, probably like your childhood, we were very free. You know, you—you went, you came, you did what you wanted to; there were friends mostly through school. I don't



programs run by the county. So we—we had a free summer camp in the summers. I spent a lot of time in the library as I got older, I was a wretched bookworm, drove my father crazy. He would like—“You’re never gonna make anything of yourself, all you’re doing is reading.” It’s like, I read nonstop, whenever I could. But I also was very active. I’d bike; I’d run around with my brother. I became very close to my younger brother. I remember him—I remember doing a lot of things with him, you know, playing softball—helping him with his music. I don’t know—there’s a lot, but we can stop with that, I don’t know.

00:10:59 Q: So what was the age difference between—so there’s a brother before you who was sixteen months older, right?

Connell: Yes.

00:11:04 Q: And the younger brother is how many—

Connell: Six years younger.

00:11:07 Q: Six years younger? Okay, all right. So that—I just wanted to get caught up on the age group there. So tell me more about your interests in kind of the high school part of life and what you remember about your high school experiences with boys, dating, class work, I mean—

Connell: Yeah, well, actually—

00:11:33 Q: Puberty, all of the—

Connell: Yeah. I was—I entered—just going back a few years—because I came from a large family and there was such an emphasis on education and I think, also, on—which didn't do most of my siblings any good and I'll get into that later—we had a lot of tragedy in my family. But I entered school—already reading—so I was, you know, I was sort of—I was the model child of the person who—you know, “Oh, she's so bright.” But the point is I had learned how to read because I was surrounded by people who read and it was like, “I'm gonna read, too.” And I do remember one of my sisters really working with me, and it seems to run in the family. My oldest son was reading at four and a half and I don't remember doing a thing but reading to him, so [laughs] somehow, he figured it out. So anyway, I was very much—

00:12:24 Q: Uh-huh, so you loved to read?

Connell: Yeah, I loved to read, but I also had figured that decoding out and that put me sort of at the top of the class. And that continued. I also had siblings who had charmed the teachers by their brightness—and so, they—that was expected of me, as well, coming along as number seven of this family that had all lived in one place. Anyway, so off to Saint Louis we go and now I'm in the third grade and I was put in a speech class because I had a Southern drawl and that was traumatizing. My mother later told me, “It wasn't that, Frances, it was because you had a little lisp.” I said, “No, no, because I had a Southern drawl.”

Connell: So who knows? And then, of course—

00:13:08 Q: So tell me more about it being traumatizing. What do you remember about the trauma for you?

Connell: Oh, because, you know, here I was coming in from—most of the people in that neighborhood and that school had grown up there, they knew each other and I was coming in. And within three weeks, my—the crème de la crème school district had decided that I needed—speech therapy as well as—you know, be pulled from the classroom. So—I mean, I got over it. I—mostly I remember having to do a scrapbook and cutting out pictures and then having to pronounce them for the speech therapist. And I don't think it lasted that long. There were other traumas that—were a little more instrumental in my life. So anyway, I—the first year I was put in a regular class and then—and I was used to being, you know, the top of the class and I don't remember the kids—being a particularly challenging year. But by fourth grade, I was—like all of us, we were put in the “GT” [Gifted and Talented] section and we were—we were the Sputnik generation; if you could do any math or science, you were being pushed. If you could write, read on a level beyond your age group, then you were encouraged to do so. I don't know if it was used everywhere, but they used the Iowa Test in those days. And of course, we all—you know, everyone in the class starting in fourth grade would take it and we'd be placed—you know, tenth grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade reading—so it was a little bit crazy because clearly, we weren't at that level.

But—so—then when I was in—sixth grade, I was just—I always say sixth grade was kind of the pinnacle of my intellectual development—I had just a fantastic teacher. I was very lucky; I had good teachers—all those years. But he was—he later became the superintendent of this large, very premier school district. But he had us just doing amazing things. And—I really thrived. And then, after sixth grade, I was to enter—continuing on this track system—I was gonna be entering, you know, advanced math and all that kind of stuff—algebra in seventh grade or whatever. But we had had problems in our family and when we went to visit my oldest brother who was practicing law, my mother decided we should just stay in Houston. She'd had enough of the situation with my father. So I started seventh grade in a school—

00:15:32 Q: So hold on just a second, so “enough of the situation,” can you say more about that—the situation with your father?

Connell: Well, okay, I was gonna get into that because it's pretty pivotal in my life, even at sixty-five, I still have my first family to kind of cope with. My father was a very frustrated man and he was able to function in the world. He always held a job, he always supported us as best he could, but he would literally fall apart every weekend. And we would have major domestic quarrels, violence, just—a really, really—a very terrible scene. So I—as a small child, you know, I remember hiding a lot. I would go in the closet, I'd hide under the bed. One of my older sisters would come and say, “It's okay, Frances, this is something Daddy has to go through.” This became—when I didn't have the buffer of the older siblings—and I was in the bedroom right next to my parents once we moved to Saint Louis—University City, you know, I was literally in

know, Sunday morning, we'd all go to church. Monday my father would, you know, go get groceries and sit in his chair and read the news and go off to work Monday. But it was a very weird thing—but also, a very terrifying situation. Meanwhile, my brother that I was closest to began to develop signs of mental illness—

00:16:59 Q: This is the sixth one—

Connell: This was on sixteen months older than me, yeah.

00:16:59 Q: Uh-huh, okay.

Connell: And my—next to the oldest sister was one of two twins—had a lot of trauma in her life and she—I mean, I don't know if this is the time to tell—but anyway, we'll get the traumas out and then we can go back to the happier times. She had—she was just a super linguist, she was at Rice Institute—Rice University—Rice Institute then—and had—won a Fulbright [Scholarship] to go to France to study for a year. There was an issue with her then boyfriend. She ended up eloping, never did do the Fulbright, had a very tumultuous experience when he then was transferred to Bogota [Colombia], South America—developed what we always thought must have been schizophrenia. And really, was never normal again. So here I am, growing up with this family, with a brother who would terrify me because he would—you know, he'd get a butcher knife and chase me around the house sometimes when he had these fits.

Connell: This brother that I absolutely adored—

00:18:12 Q: Well, you adored and he—

Connell: Who was incredibly bright and who also introduced me to—literature, writing, at a very early age and would read his stories to me and was very, very gifted as a writer.

00:18:24 Q: And?

Connell: But was also like my father, had this incredibly irrational streak, so that every once in a while when we were left alone, I can remember having to hide in the bathroom because he would just lose his temper and get the [laughs] butcher knife and start to run through the house.

00:18:37 Q: Chasing you?

Connell: Chasing me. Now—did this happen once? Did this happen weekly? I don't remember, I—you know, you survive by—

00:18:44 Q: Do you remember the earliest? Uh-huh.

Connell: —you survive by muting those loud noises or you would be crazy.

00:18:48 Q: Do you remember the earliest stage it happened, though? About?

Connell: I think—yes, yes—it happened when I was about eleven and he was twelve.

00:18:57 Q: Okay, all right.

Connell: Uh-huh, which is when he started to just really lose it on a more regular basis. But then he did, you know, he continued all through high school, he did a lot of other things. Anyway—

00:19:12 Q: Okay, so you—

Connell: So there was this very difficult situation in my house with a lot of violence. On the other hand, we were being held up as, you know, this—“education is everything, you can do anything you want to do—we come from a very distinguished family.” And there were also a lot of financial issues. My father—for all of his brilliance and his craziness—was not a good financial planner. I remember—piles of bills on the mantle place in the—you know, and then a couple of cars being repossessed. And my mother—my mother, whose way of dealing with—there ended up being three siblings who had severe mental illness. And they all died in their forties. Two were suicides, one we never really quite knew what happened. Probably it was the medication he was on mixed with some other medication and it caused a heart attack. That’s the brother who was closest to me in age. Anyway, so there was a lot of that in the background. And I never really could get away from it. It was just always there. When I went away to college, I’d

who is going to call in the middle of my discussion with my mother to try to keep her feeling that life is good— who’s going to interrupt with some new trauma?” Anyway—

00:20:52 Q: Okay, so hold on—hold on—hold on a second, I just want to make sure— understand—

Connell: Sure, sure, sure.

00:20:58 Q: —that we understand a couple of things. One is that—and this is just a segue back for just a second and there’s a question I have about that.

Connell: Oh, sure, I’m rattling along; I’m sorry.

00:21:05 Q: No, no, you’re not rattling along at all. So the—and it’s okay if you—you don’t have to fold your arms [laughs]. It’s okay. So you say there’s a lot—that the violence—I just wanted to clarify—would your father drink a lot on the weekend and then become violent? Or was it just that he had a temper and it would just erupt?

Connell: No, he didn’t drink.

[Crosstalk]



a tendency for alcoholism. But no, he never drank.

00:21:39 Q: Uh-huh, so it's just—

Connell: I sometimes wish he had, it might have calmed him down. No, he just—incredible vulgar language—shouting, screaming, cursing. My mother's response to that was—you know, to get up her—she was a very small, gentle woman. But boy, she—she'd fight back. You know, and I'd hear things being thrown on the floor. Pots and pans clashing in the kitchen and threats to call the police—which, you know, they were called sometimes.

00:22:14 Q: Uh-huh, okay.

Connell: You know, it's just—I mean, it was mortifying to think that we'd all get up and go into our normal lives and here I was the golden kid in the classroom and never could talk about any of this stuff—of course, right? Which is why I've had to write books about it—to get it out of my system.

00:22:31 Q: Uh-huh, so that's why I wanted to get to that double life that was going on. There was the facade and there was this sense of—we're almost the model family—and then, the other part of it was the experience at home and the trauma.

Connell: Good Southern Gothic—good Southern Gothic material.

00:22:47 Q: Uh-huh, great—great way to describe it, good Southern Gothic, okay[laughs].

Connell: Absolutely, *absolument*, right? Yeah.

00:22:52 Q: Right, okay, okay, all right.

Connell: Yeah, so—anyway—so my mother’s reaction to everything—I mean—so I was talking—financially, there was an issue, as well, and my mother—I can’t remember a time when she didn’t work. I mean, she came from this very—this German/Czech roots that always worked. I remember my grandmother, when we’d go visit her, another tiny little woman, she didn’t sit down to eat with us, she’d be bustling around, making sure everybody had what they wanted. And my mother was a bit like that, too. She—she took in kids, she watched kids for a period.

She—there had been some fire back in Texas that destroyed all of her records, and so, she had to retake high school at some point, which she did—because she wanted to do—and her nursing—I don’t know, all this. I mean, we just never quite knew what her actual education was. I am pretty sure she went to business college and she was somehow able to practice as a nurse or a nurse’s assistant when I was very young. Anyway, she ended up taking care of elderly women, she—elderly people, she worked in a nursing home for a while. For about ten years of her life, she ran a—she got a job as a manager of the cafeteria—not at the middle school I was at, but yeah, the middle school and then the high school and she then worked for something at Washington University, organizing or running the food service for some of the fraternities. And then, she just

and she would say, “Oh, you know, take this little money, Frances, I just—I just cleaned out the refrigerator for, you know, Miss Jones up the street and she just gave me the ten dollars.” And I was like, “Mother?” She could not not work. She also grew fantastic things in her garden and gave everything away.

So anyway—and my mother’s reaction to the mental illness in the family was very much—well, let me just love them enough. You know, I can love this illness out of them, and I’m just there for them and I can just take care of them. I can pray. She was a very spiritual woman in a very traditional Lutheran/Methodist sort of format. So anyway, that’s kind of—that’s that. That was a big thing [laughs] that shaped me a lot.

00:25:21 Q: Right, so when you say that in their forties—and they died in their forties, so just to clarify, when the first sibling that had a mental illness, you were about how old?

Connell: So John—I was eleven, yeah. And actually, it was—

00:25:39 Q: When he—so that was your brother?

Connell: That was my brother.

00:25:43 Q: So your sister you talked about, was later?

time. Because she was sixteen—? Yeah, she's twelve years older than me. So she had this tumultuous marriage, left everything she had prepared for, had two kids in a hurry in Bogota, South America, then her husband ended up leaving her. Very—you know, they were very well—he was working for his father's oil company, they were very well-situated and suddenly, she—she no longer had that, and we don't know what triggered it. She also had hepatitis, which I don't know if the hepatitis triggered it, but she was never the same again. Yeah, so I was—I was about eleven, eleven/twelve when all this was happening and it pretty much pursued me for the rest of my life or I was aware of it until—she died in—she died in '86, and the two brothers died in '96.

00:26:50 Q: That's a short time, in a way; it's a lot of trauma in a short time. Yeah.

Connell: Yeah.

00:26:56 Q: Yeah, right.

Connell: But I think that I—I think I was—I had learned to be very good at focusing—I mean, this is one of the reasons I love to write and to read because you can do them without a lot of input from other people. It was always a good escape. I loved being a good student. This is where I was praised and supported. My parents really—you know, it was kind of imbued—I was imbued with this notion that, okay, “You need to do well,” but there was never any pressure. I don't even know—I don't remember them looking at my report cards. I remember my father, like, “Oh, yeah, fine, A's, B's, whatever.” My father never really—When I finally graduated from

was a bit of a leach. We were all just people—kids that he—we disappointed him and there were many who had reason to disappoint him. My mother just loved everybody. We could have been anything. “Whatever you want to be, just be, it’s fine. You are my children, children of God, you’re great.” Very warm and very—just—an amazing woman, really. I think she was probably quite intelligent, but always had a bit of an inferiority complex about her education with respect to my father and my father’s family.

00:28:15 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, right, right. Uh-huh.

Connell: Yeah, but I—you know, I don’t think I was unhappy; I was just terrified all the time [laughs]. I was just scared. And I grew up very timid and I grew up very unassertive. I grew up incapable of dealing with—still —this is what—killed my marriage—dealing with conflict. You run and you put your head under the covers [laughs]. Yeah.

00:28:43 Q: Okay, so yeah—so a survival behavior, right? You run in conflict and you put your head under your covers and right, uh-huh. Yeah. All right. So we have—

[Crosstalk]

Connell: Okay, let’s go back to the high school then.

00:29:01 Q: Yeah. But I—one quick—I need to cut it off and go to the bathroom.

[Interruption]

00:29:13 Q: So one of the things that got us more into the—trauma was you had mentioned that—  
—forgotten what year it was—you took a trip to—

Connell: Seventh grade—in the seventh grade.

00:29:26 Q: Right—back to Houston and your mother was—wanted to stay.

Connell: Yes. So we moved in with my oldest brother who was—an attorney and began, I think, probably a month of school there. And then, whatever my mother and my father decided, “Okay, back to Saint Louis,” so went back and entered school in the seventh grade. They still had all my placements, so I moved in with—you know, people I had known, and took classes in that fast track. Yeah, meanwhile, there’s the parallel story of trauma, things were getting very, very intense in the family at that point with—with some issues with my siblings. Meanwhile, my—another brother had left home and was living back in Houston with my—the same brother that we had stayed with for a little while during this sort of thwarted move back. So yes, so then school—you know, then I did what you do in school, you work hard, you study—

00:30:36 Q: So now, how many kids were at home now? So you’re—

eighteen—sixteen months older and then my youngest brother and myself, there was no one—

00:30:45 Q: So the three of you?

Connell: There were just three of us.

00:30:47 Q: Just the three of you now? Okay.

Connell: Yeah, yeah. And my father was still in his job, obviously, and my mother was doing a variety of things. But you know, there for us, she did things—she was always there for us. So school was great, I loved it. I was a good athlete. I was a fast runner. I played on the sports teams, I—

00:31:11 Q: What sports team did you play on?

Connell: Well, the only one available, I'm sorry, was field hockey, but I was good at field hockey[laughs].

00:31:17 Q: Field hockey? Good field hockey, okay.

Connell: I was good at field hockey. You know, I did some tennis, but I was never very good at it. Again, there were all these—we didn't have any money, we really didn't have any money, so

fantastic opportunities, partially, because of Washington University and the, you know, free concerts—from the Saint Louis Orchestra, four or five times a year. All kinds of exchanges, where we'd go and watch plays or have people come talk to us. I remember the church that I attended—that we attended and it was a very stable thing in my life. The minister just before we started had been Huston [C.] Smith, who wrote the great treatise—treatise on comparative religions. So there was a sense of liberalness and tolerance. The community—this is very important, I should have mentioned it earlier, was about ninety-five percent Jewish. Good, hard working middle-class Jewish. And they, again, that probably bolstered the high quality of the schools. The other—I worked—I won a prize for—as a feature writing on my newspaper from the “Saint Louis Globe Dispatch” at some point, I think eighth or ninth grade. I remember being summoned to the principal's office thinking, “Oh, my gosh, what have I done wrong?” only to be, you know, complimented for winning this honor for the junior high school.

00:32:52 Q: Say again—the name again.

Connell: Brittany—Brittany Junior High School.

00:32:56 Q: Brittany Junior High School?

Connell: Yeah.

00:32:58 Q: So an award for the article you'd written?



Connell: It was a contest, actually, yeah, yeah.

00:33:02 Q: Contest?

Connell: It was a contest, yeah, run by the *Saint Louis Post Dispatch*. And so, it was nice. But again, you know, it's kind of like, "Oh, yeah, I did it, that's great, let's keep going." [laughs] A funny thing about—[seventh grade] elementary school—of course, that's when the [John F.] Kennedy Assassination was and another one of those really traumatic moments is remembering that since we ran the newspaper, we had to get an editorial out. I remember getting to school really early and sitting on the floor in the girl's bathroom, like, writing frantically, out my heart, as the tears were falling—as all of us did, because we had been absolutely mesmerized that entire weekend watching the events unfold.

But I also remember my journalism teacher, who otherwise, was an incredibly enlightened and supportive woman, bringing in one of her former students as a sort of—to present to us what women could do as they got older. And the woman was—nothing against it—but she was a stewardess for American Airlines. And I remember, like, thinking, "Well, she's got half of it right; she's traveling; that's what I want to do, but I think we, you know, we can do better than that."

00:34:20 Q: So you remember having that thought or that—and what grade was this in high school?

Connell: That would have been ninth grade, I think.

00:34:25 Q: Ninth grade? So early ninth grade and about what age are you at this point?

Connell: Thirteen, fourteen.

00:34:31 Q: Thirteen or fourteen.

Connell: Yeah.

00:34:32 Q: So a definite sense that women could do better than—

Connell: Oh, absolutely, yeah. Yeah. I don't remember ever feeling that they couldn't, actually. I mean, there were very strong women in my family.

But the other element that was a theme from the very beginning—and I have spoken of my father's hell and brimstone and thunder, but he had been—a pacifist in the First World War and my mother had lost her favorite brother, just a really precious person in that family named "Honey," which kind of sums it all up—in the Second World War. So from an early age I was infused with this notion that war is wrong, that peace is what you work for, you do whatever you can to make peace. And again, it was kind of ironic having this father who would lose control, but who was writing letters to the editor well before I was born—had been very involved in

even a twinkle in my parents' eyes and had this whole other life. And my mother—I don't think a day went by that she didn't mourn her brother and just had this sense that—you know, all wars are evil, there's never a just war. So that was very big in my—and that was also a theme that I pursued—that and the notion that you—you really live to help other people, that you need to—no matter how little you have, you give it back. So I was active in starting and being a part of tutoring services and tutoring programs for the inner city from our lovely suburban area. But—I became a member of a group called World Tapes for Education and you would—my mother who—you know, again, I don't know how she did this; we had no money, but she came up with this huge tape recorder for me and all the equipment I needed so that we could record little stories and send them to—we had two different exchanges. One was with a young man in Dusseldorf, Germany; the other was with someone in Adelaide, Australia.

So again, that was another theme, this notion of peace, but also, that we really weren't members just of Saint Louis or the United States; we were world citizens. And you were to nurture that any way you could. And that—I did. I mean, that was very much a theme in my life. In high school, I wasn't the smartest kid and I often wonder if it was because I was going in so many different directions and I just—I did well—I mean, I did really well.

00:37:16 Q: Uh-huh, so tell me again about all the different directions at that point.

Connell: Oh, so the directions at that point—well, I mean, again, I was continuing to write—

Connell: I was writing. I was spending my summers—usually babysitting for my older sisters and their kids, my nieces and nephews, in interesting places that are always near the ocean—Newport, Rhode Island—Woodland Hills, California—San Diego, California—Charleston, South Carolina. Going by train to all of these places because that was one of the perks my father got; he could get passes. So that was—yeah, it started in about eighth grade—no, maybe even earlier and I probably did that most summers. I was—what else did I do? I don't know, I was yearbook, I was—all the things you do in high school, I was—

00:38:14 Q: 'Cause not everybody does all those things.

Connell: Oh, okay.

00:38:16 Q: Just slow down for a second. So you were on the yearbook, how many—

Connell: I did the yearbook the final year.

00:38:22 Q: Final year, so senior—

Connell: And I was the “quip editor,” so I had to come up with little quips for underneath everybody's picture.

you writing for the school newspaper?

Connell: Yeah, I was—I was the feature editor for the school newspaper.

00:38:36 Q: Feature editor for the school newspaper? And that was—so when Kennedy—the Kennedy assassination happened, were you—

Connell: In both middle school and high school, yeah.

00:38:44 Q: Middle school and high school, so you were the feature editor for the—school newspaper? Okay. And—

Connell: I worked at a literary magazine in high school.

00:38:52 Q: There's a literary magazine that you were editor for or what?

Connell: No, I wasn't an editor, I just worked with it, editing, helping people—select what was going to go on—go in it—

00:39:02 Q: Okay, so review of articles and—

Connell: I did a lot of—in two years, I did the Model United Nations.

00:39:10 Q: Model United Nations.

Connell: United Nations—which was done at the high school and then they used the facility at Washington University. I participated in the science fairs.

00:39:17 Q: So you say, “participated,” you—

Connell: I had to do projects for science fairs, yeah.

00:39:23 Q: You did projects for science fairs, okay, and were chosen to participate?

Connell: Yes, yes. And I—one of the—one of the great shames of my life is the project I did in Advanced Biology. Because at that point, I wanted to become a great biologist. And I had the opportunity to go work with a professor at Washington University, who was the co-discoverer of Streptomycin and go to Chile, where they were going to work with E-coli [Escherichia coli]. But again, I—I needed to finance that myself, we had no money, I couldn’t do it, so—but anyway, I did a project—I did a science fair project in high school for Advanced Biology—on the effect of radiating chicken embryos. And I remember again, rather than going to a proper lab and all this, I—we got the fertilized eggs and my mother took them to somewhere at Washington University and there was this big gap in my discussion of the—of whatever you call it, not the equipment, but the process, I suppose. And I ended up having to go to the library and research, like, how it

improvised incubator. But anyway, I learned from it. Yeah, so I—I dated.

00:40:46 Q: What do you remember about—

Connell: I dated. I—mostly remember having to wash my hair and look pretty.

00:40:54 Q: Wash your hair and look pretty, uh-huh.

Connell: Wash my hair and look pretty. It's interesting that the—probably the first—my first boyfriend—looked me up—after forty years, he had become a pediatrician, had practiced in Saint Louis, had married, had five kids; the marriage had broken up and he looked me up in 2010. He—turned out he was a marathon runner, so we got together and went to Paris [France] and ran the Paris Marathon together, which was lovely. Lovely. Unfortunately, the next time I saw him he was—he didn't look quite as attractive. He had been a wrestler. Anyway, great—sweet, lovely, man, but—anyway—and then, I dated—I tended to be this sort of confidant for a lot of my girlfriends' boyfriends and then they would decide that they actually liked me better. So then, they would date me for a while.

Probably the most traumatic thing relating to dating was the—Steve Harris who, bless him, he died of some rare kidney disease ten years ago apparently—invited me to the senior prom. His parents ran the JCCA [Jewish Community Centers Association], the Jewish—Community Center.

And I had—having grown up in this incredibly international—with Washington University and

Jew,” it was like—these are my friends, this is my community, this is where I belong. Well, I went to the prom with him and I got a call the next morning and he said, “My parents don’t want me to ever see you again because you’re not Jewish.” And I remember just—I fasted for, like, ten days. I was just so shocked. This is an identity I had never had to have held against me, never saw it as in the least bit traumatic. There was more about him, but we don’t need to go into that. I also—so I tended to be the confidante of some of the boyfriends of the girls—my good friends—I think my best friend in high school was the professor—was the daughter of a professor at—of Chemistry at Washington University; they lived in this huge four-story house about two blocks from the university and I spent a lot of time with her. She also was the first human being I had ever known who had a skateboard; this was in 1965. And then, her—another friend was the daughter of the—first violinist with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra. So it was very cultured, very educated, these were people we gravitated to—I gravitated to, gravitated to each other. Yeah.

00:43:39 Q: What do you remember about—anything about—race relations at that point and your experience with African-Americans or Asian-Americans or Mexican-Americans? I mean, what—at that point—

Connell: Yeah, I had had—one of my good friends from the beginning of elementary school was Japanese. Another—so that was my introduction, I think, to—the only person I knew. And then, she continued through the same track that I did—up through graduation. A really good friend of mine—another one was Korean, Kathy Ku who is just brilliant and went off to Cornell



again, we lived just sort of on the edge, our house—you know, you could walk up to what was called “Page Avenue,” which was the divider between University City and a number of really pretty lower/middle-class communities that eventually became Ferguson [Missouri] and the Ferguson-like places. So they were already beginning to become—primarily black by the time I was in high school. In high school, myself—we—in the high school, we—I remember as a junior—being seated next to a young African-American woman, her family had just moved, her parents were both professionals, a doctor, and she became a really good friend. And then, I think I was conscious of that.

But race relations went way back in my family. As I said, my father—our consciousness of the civil rights movement went way back. My father had tried to desegregate—running for the school board on a de-segregation policy—among other things, in Houston, Texas. I remember as a young child in Houston, Texas, going to the grocery store and seeing the “white only/colored” bathrooms and drinking fountains and being traumatized, just like—what’s going on here? I remember waking up one morning and seeing—because—and I—no one else in my family remembers, and so, I wonder—did I just make it up? But I remember seeing the—a smoldering cross—someone had burned, with all this stuff strewn around it in our front yard. And I—I am puzzled as to where that image came from. I remember my father had—would ride—take the bus to school—to work from—from where we lived, in downtown, where his office was—when we lived in Saint Louis.

00:46:22 Q: In Saint Louis, okay.

Connell: And I remember he had befriended a young black woman who rode the bus, the same schedule—pretty much, he did—and I remember there was some discussion with neighbors of my father being seen with this black woman.

My mother, again, had grown up in a farm where they had had sharecroppers; her childhood friends had been young black kids. She never ever had any issue with color, as did my father. So I—again, I think I was fortunate in growing up with this notion—not so, my older siblings. They kept their Houston roots, some of them. I mean, I—you know, we were not just white Christian Protestant suburbanites. You know, we were world citizens. We had a sense that we were supposed to be different and we're supposed to be aware of whatever was—and tolerant of everyone. Let's see—there were—more traumatic, I think, was the issue—as I got older in high school—with the Six-day War whatever, in Israel—and suddenly, there was this discussion, which I thought—“But wait, who owns that land? You know, what's going on? Why is there a war there to take more of the land that should have been someone else's?” Way back then. So these things were very, very much—they say Southern families always talk about politics and religion—totally, totally true in my case. Totally true in my case. I mean, I just—you know, we all read and we knew about literature and there was music. And my father would sneak into the car on Sunday afternoons and, you know, listen to the Met [Metropolitan Opera] on the radio. It wasn't my mother's forte, you know, she was more into Christian music or something.

00:48:12 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, right, right, uh-huh. Okay, all right.

civil rights movement. I read about it, I was fascinated about what's going on. I couldn't participate, per se.

00:48:27 Q: And what about any growing awareness of the Vietnam War during that time at all or not? What was—

Connell: Yeah. It was very much a subject every day. My mother was a news junkie. My father was a news—written news—newspaper junkie. *The Saint Louis Post Dispatch*—a good paper and they had pretty good coverage. My first awareness of the Vietnam War was literally—I remember—I was never sick, I—had to stay home one day in the sixth grade, when I had this super, duper teacher who had us do current events every week and run our own TV show, I mean, he was just an amazing individual. We learned math by being given textbooks from aeronautical schools to try to work out things. I mean, it just—I wish I had retained some of that. But—I remember having to do a little quip on current events and I opened [the paper] and there was something about—we were sending technical support to Vietnam. And I remember thinking, “Well, what's going on here?” That's probably my first memory. All through high school, there was a lot of—it was a very liberal school, a lot of discussion about peace and justice. I remember the hootenannies and all the peace songs, the people standing up and saying, “We're doing this because our country's launched itself on a very dangerous route and it's—we're going against our principles.” It was the theme, again, of peace—any war was wrong in my family—except my father screaming at my mother.

Connell: Exactly, except the internal wars, except the—

00:50:03 Q: Right. Right, uh-huh.

Connell: I mean, we laugh now, but anyway. So I think that was something I was always aware of—always aware of—I mean, from a very early age. I think—yeah. Yeah, and—as were my friends in that little—the group that we stuck to.

00:50:19 Q: Uh-huh, the group—right. Okay, so world citizen perspective, right?

Connell: Yeah.

00:50:29 Q: Inclusive, everyone is a part of this world—it wouldn't matter what your religious belief is or what the color of your skin is, and aware of current events and what was going on—so how these were playing out in the world at the time. And then, the trauma that was going on at home and the trauma with some of your older brothers and sisters were now—were now—their mental instability was now coming forth and showing up in their lives. So is that kind of a synopsis of you as you begin the process of applying the college?

Connell: Yeah, very much so. I should say, though—there was something about me from an early age—again, maybe this world citizen part of—I remember when a young Mexican girl,

to become her friend and I got her involved in Blue Birds, they call them, the early Campfire Girls.

00:51:29 Q: Ah, okay, right, uh-huh.

Connell: Yeah, and I remember going to her house and being shocked—there was her mother and her father and three tiny, little toddlers and almost no furniture. We sat on the floor and her mother—so they were very poor. Anyway, I—I don't ever know what happened to her. But there was always this sense that I—and it continued till now—of—somehow of almost being more comfortable with people from other countries than my own—my own contemporaries, and it may be just—again, this sense that we really were world citizens, not just one nation or one city. But yeah, that pretty much sums up what it was, uh-huh.

00:52:10 Q: Okay, so—so—so this other strain, too, of feeling more comfortable often with people that didn't seem to have the same kind of class or economic background that—that—right—that you came from, yeah.

Connell: Yeah, yeah, and I—I chose Barnard because my older sister had—been one of those super duper bright kids who had won this national prize—she could go to any of the Seven Sister schools. She was—she is—she is, she's still alive—sixteen years older than me. So she went to Barnard, she chose Barnard.

Connell: And again—but then, she dropped out the end of her sophomore year and got married. And so, I grew up with this sense—again, disappointment from my father—my mother—eh, she accepted it all—that, you know, how could she have done this? I mean, she had everything in front of her. She had this incredible projectile to—to become a very bright professional woman. And when you talk to my sister, she’s like, “Oh, my God, how could I have done that? I was an idiot.” But at eighty—you know? Yeah, so Barnard was—that’s where I felt I was gonna have to go since I was the golden child and everybody loved me and I did everything right, except my father, who saw me as a leech, who had to be taken to the library and picked up from the library on Saturday mornings ‘cause I hung out there.

00:53:43 Q: So you were a leech because?

Connell: Well, just because he was so frustrated. He didn’t have money; he wasn’t doing what he wanted to, he—his children that he believed in—that he’d invested a lot in, really—I mean, as much as fifties fathers did, and certainly, in terms of doing a job to support us, we were all falling apart around him. And he couldn’t really distinguish me as different from the others, I think.

00:54:07 Q: From the others? Okay.

Connell: Even though I was so different. I was so different, yeah.

onto—to Barnard. Tell me more about his—his ethnic background.

Connell: Oh, so my father was—yeah, yeah, Irish-English.

00:54:28 Q: Irish-English? Okay. All right, do you remember when his family came over?

Connell: Oh, yeah, they were—I could be a Daughter of the American Revolution. We are — they are descended from the mother of—Martha Washington’s mother, the Balls. They—we had one of the arms bearers [to General Washington] in the Revolutionary War, [and] a lot of ministers who came over through Georgia. Yeah, the family goes way back, not as far back as the Brewsters, but pretty far back.

00:54:59 Q: Pretty far back?

Connell: Yeah.

00:55:01 Q: So you remember—so it sounds like he remembers that heritage, that—from what I’ve heard you describing—he remembers that heritage going back to the—going back to before the American—

Connell: To the first President, yeah, yeah.

Connell: Yeah, the Revolutionary War. But he—but again, I said he was the black sheep of the family and that he—he was the politically liberal anarchist, the rest of that family was very conservative Southern Republican—yeah.

00:55:35 Q: Definite potential conflict [laughs].

Connell: Yeah. Yeah.

00:55:40 Q: Great, great. And then, your mom's family—so it was Czech/German—

Connell: Czech and German, uh-huh.

00:55:46 Q: Do you remember when they came over? Do you know? Okay.

Connell: Oh, yes, yeah. My grandmother—well, the other thing about both of them is on my father's side, the—his father and his mother were infants—were two-year-olds at the time of the Civil War. Again, these families—just—they sprawl generations. And were raised by their mothers, because their fathers were killed, so this would have been the great-grandfather.

00:56:13 Q: Okay, great. Great-grandfather, right.



migration of—of—of Germans and Czechs—from Europe. And lived—there was a whole little enclave of German Czechs—outside of Brenham, Texas, so my mother was raised speaking only German until she entered school at six and a half. To her dying day, [she] never could get —“sink” —she would still “say zink.” “Put them dishes in the zink, Frances.” [laughs] But otherwise—and you know, she was a little self-conscious, too, she always thought—I mean, she spoke perfect English, but she thought—yeah. I also remember growing up with German in my ear all the time because when she would make these long-distance calls, they were very loud-speaking people, they’d be screaming into the telephone. “Ja, ja.” [Foreign language not transcribed]

00:57:14 Q: Oh, great [laughs]. Good.

Connell: Yeah, so they came and then the grandmother, who was really the Czech side of the family, the rest of them were mostly German—came—a very interesting story, yes—came and ended up marrying an undertaker in this little village in Texas and the family sprang from there. Again, large families—eight kids there—when there’s—all sides. Sisters—cousins marrying cousins—brothers and sisters from different cousins marrying each other—the way things were done in those days.

00:57:46 Q: Right, right. All right, so I want to just check before we go on, do you want to get up and walk around for a second?

00:57:54 Q: Okay? Okay. All right. So—let’s set the stage, now you’re—you knew you—you applied to Barnard because it was almost expected, it sounds like, right? The older sister had gone and hadn’t—finished, disappointment to your father. So did you apply anywhere—do you remember where else you applied or—

Connell: No, I applied early decision, but I remember doing the research and looking at the other schools. I was very interested in [Mount] Holyoke [College]—excuse me—which was totally the antithesis of Barnard in terms of location—and then, I was a bit insecure, so then I actually looked at, like, Clark College in Massachusetts, too, picking it as a back up. I mean, in those days, you—you certainly didn’t have to apply to seventeen schools. But I ended up applying to Barnard, getting an early decision, being ecstatic—but being very worried because we had no money to pay for it, even though it was only \$2,000 a year in those days.

00:58:53 Q: That was a lot of money in those days, so—yeah.

Connell: But it was, yeah. And when the word finally came, I remember calling my mother, she was home that time—had gotten back from work—during my lunch break, maybe—what, in March or something—when the financial decisions were made. And she said, “Frances, you had a full scholarship.” And it was like, ahhh—I screamed in the hall, just as the principal walked by. And he was, like, much aghast—not knowing the story at all and I said, “I just got” —anyway—yeah. So—yeah.

00:59:25 Q: Fantastic, great, all right. So what did you do the summer in between graduating and Barnard?

Connell: Good question. I had decided I was going to learn Mandarin Chinese, so I—because it was offered at my high school and I ended up getting a grant—it was called [Critical] Defense Language Institute, which was run in various places across the country and there was one at Washington University, which was a good—thirty-five, forty minute walk from my house. But I was put in the dorms, it was total immersion and I did that the entire summer. I had taken beginning Chinese at—they had this thing called Mark Twain Institute, which was supposed to be for “the gifted.” They had summer programs and I had taken a class in creative writing one summer and then I did a class in—following my brother, who had done it before. Then I took Chinese, so I had a little bit of that. I entered the second year Chinese class in high school—my senior year—and then I got this grant to study Chinese during the summer before Barnard. That was an amazing summer. My father almost died in an accident on his way to pick me up one day. But I was away—I didn’t know what was going on with the other siblings.

I really—I was studying Chinese, it was quite an unusual experience; I had studied it on-campus, I had stayed on-campus. I was with mostly older people—not older people, but older students, there weren’t too many who were about to start freshmen year of college. Although, there were a few. I had—I think my first introduction then to sex. Not that I—I mean, I was way—I was such a scaredy cat—oh my gosh, such a scaredy cat. I was convinced I was gonna get pregnant if a man looked at me. In fact, there’s a family story with my younger brother because as he was

weekends, he would come and sleep in the bed next to me. And I was already in high school. I had aced every sex education class, which the school district started—you know, sixth grade, eighth grade, twelfth grade, whatever—but I still thought that, you know, he had to keep his distance because there was a man in my bed. This is, like, a twelve-year-old. I was just—I really was not—my body and my mind were not in sync, clearly. What I knew intellectually did not apply to this—

01:01:50 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, right, in terms of the body, right.

Connell: And I don't know—it was probably somewhat common. But anyway—but I remember my roommate—my roommate and then one other woman who was in the institute, who ended up going – she went to Holyoke—would, like, go off at night and not come back. And I was like, “Whoa,” and—“Oh, I was just—we were sleeping in the park,” but you know, they were probably with their boyfriends, which was fine, but I didn't know anything else about that. So that's what I did. And just before going off to Barnard, I was riding my bike home, and I fell off my bike and I got lacerations all up and down my legs, so I remember sort of limping off to Barnard with these horrible cuts on my legs. When I arrived there, I had never flown in an airplane before, so we flew to—my older sister had a friend who lived in the East Village [New York City]—in the West Village, in Greenwich Village—and she connected me up with her and said, “Well, why don't you go visit Alisa?” So I flew into JFK with just a suitcase—

01:02:59 Q: Were you flying by yourself or with—

Connell: Yes, totally by myself.

01:03:02 Q: By yourself, okay—

Connell: With my *Saturday Evening Post*—no, not Saturday—*Saturday Review*, yes, I was reading my *Saturday Review* and I was also reading my—finishing up the last pages being, you know, the perfect student, always do what you're assigned—of—Malcolm X's autobiography, the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which was—we were supposed to read before we got there, to Barnard. So I landed in JFK and it was too early to check into the dorms, so I had booked a place at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] across from 34th Street then—the old beautiful, elegant 34th Street Station still. I spent the night there and then in the morning, I met this old roommate of my sister, who was just—oh, my gosh—she took me to the opera, we ate at a health food store, things that I had not known about in Saint Louis yet, University City yet. And then, I guess I must have checked into the dorm at least the next day. So I arrived with my little suitcase and my, you know, mostly books and there—mostly Chinese books, because I had had heard that I had to take a language placement. So I had all my notebooks and I'm sitting there, like, cramming in these ideograms, Chinese.

01:04:16 Q: Right, right [laughs].

Connell: Like, “Oh, I've gotta place in third year or fourth year Chinese.” So that was—very much occupied me when I first arrived.

01:04:26 Q: And anything you remember about walking through the gates at first or any other impressions when you first arrived on campus?

Connell: Oh, absolutely, yeah. I mean, it looked just beautiful to me—everything looked beautiful. Everything looked clean. I mean, I had grown up in a house where—we had sonic booms and there were cracks in the wall, you know, bookcases that were sort of lopsided. And my mother was just—she liked being outside, keeping an orderly garden more than making the floors look good. I struggled my whole life with cockroaches in the kitchen—in the bathroom—I mean, just something about the way the house was—it would be fumigated every year and the cockroaches would come back. So the fact that everything was very pristine and new and orderly, I think, impressed me. And I thought, “Oh, this is — this is a new phase of my life,” you know? And I don’t remember if I thought about that consciously, but I remember taking in the impressions. I also—I think I had started wearing long skirts already, long dresses, sort of hippie dresses, but nicely made, nothing sloppy, nothing from secondhand stores at that point. I remember—meeting my roommate, who was completely incompatible with me. She later became an accountant and had to struggle with that—the glass ceiling with that, and that was the last I heard from her. I remember—

01:06:00 Q: Uh-huh, who is that, by the way?

Connell: Barbara Beiler.

Connell: Yeah, she could not have been more different. She would take off her shoes, wrap them up in the original paper, put [them] in a box at the top of the closet every night. She allowed herself three Chuckles, you know, those sugar candy things?

01:06:19 Q: Right. Uh-huh.

Connell: That was her perk [laughs]. Her father, when he came up to visit her after a month of us living together, presented me with a—he was a doctor in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—I mean, they were good people, but just very different. And one of his extra appointment books—so that I could organize my life. I turned it into a journal [laughs]. But yeah, but the first week was just—I loved everything, I couldn't get enough of it. There were cultural programs that were organized, I remember Margaret Meade doing our little birds and bees—I thought it was then—you know, her—her work in—Samoa. I remember—just looking at all the people and thinking, “Oh, my gosh, this is my future now.” I mean, I met some people right off who were extremely—became good friends. I liked the orderliness again of going down and eating in the cafeteria and having options of things to choose from, my mother had been pretty big on meatloaf and baked chicken [laughs]. But I had also—I had been sort of anorexic in high school, starting in middle school, I think, so I didn't take advantage of all the food, whether it was good or bad, I don't even remember. But yeah, that was part of it. And then, I remember cramming like crazy when everybody else was out playing, I thought, of—to do this placement test for Chinese.

Connell: They put me in third year Chinese, mostly with graduate students and a couple of others who, you know, had taken—one of them was—oh, what was her name? Oh, I just had it, I've forgotten, who went on and married quite a distinguished Chinese scholar and I'm not sure what happened to her, but she was—she was brilliant. She had a natural ability in languages. I don't think that I ever did, or I convinced myself I didn't. And yet, when I think about it—here I was, trying to master Mandarin Chinese really having done three years in about a year—one full year this summer. So I started with a bit of a disadvantage. I remember I was put in third year for the reading and the writing and we're doing, you know, Mencius and Confucius and newspapers—which all I did great at. But speaking? They put me back with first year. So I'm in the language lab doing, you know, “Nin hao-ma. Ning qiu-sing?” you know, “How are you?” And I wasn't very diligent about doing that, so I didn't get very good at speaking.

Anyway, I was thrilled. I loved everything about it. I was a little disappointed I hadn't placed out of freshmen English when I heard that people could, but as it turned out, that was probably good that I was introduced to Anne [L.] Prescott and her patrician way of looking at the world.

01:09:20 Q: Uh-huh, tell me more about that, the—how—

Connell: Well, I—you know, I had grown up really not—well, she was just very—a brilliant woman, she was an excellent analyst of materials, she was quite well organized, she spoke with a soft voice and was very pleasant to look at. It was a small class, so we all knew each other. Of



years, 'cause I just didn't talk, I didn't ask questions, I just sat there and—out of my head. Wrote great papers, three times longer than they were supposed to be—always. But I saw her as something that—maybe one day I would like to be a college teacher. So I think that's the first time I thought about that.

01:10:09 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh great. All right, so that's—you're entering into Barnard and some of your first impressions—what—tell me about the spring of that year, tell me about the other years at Barnard, what stands out? What—

Connell: Yeah, okay. So again, I—this sort of—egalitarian and also sense of having to save the world. By the way, my middle son was presented with an official certificate when he was in high school, which said, "Shawn Connell, Most Likely To Try To Save The World." So it runs in the family.

01:10:54 Q: It runs in the family [laughs].

Connell: Anyway, I never got—

01:10:57 Q: So you came by it honestly.

Connell: Came by it honestly. Yeah, I think—I mean, the first semester was difficult socially in that I had no guidance, I knew nothing about birth control, I really had grown up with the boys

and vice versa for that—not that we didn’t make out on dates and stuff like that, but that was as far as it went. I was—so I struggled with that. I also had—

01:11:32 Q: So tell me more about struggling with that in the first—

Connell: I struggled in that—I think I just—I wasn’t comfortable with men, period, ‘cause I figured they really wanted to just get me to bed and I couldn’t do that—what would my mother say, you know? So there was always this kind of—and I remember dating—

01:11:55 Q: So you remember—

Connell: I remember there was a panty raid, I don’t remember when it was—maybe—right after the first semester or something.

01:12:00 Q: Yeah, I think it was, right.

Connell: I was like—I didn’t really think about it—it’s archaic, but somehow, I met a guy through that who was a California surfer and I was just totally infatuated with him, he was like no one I had ever seen in my life before. And I dated him for a while and then he dumped me because he was engaged, he told me, “Oh, by the way, I’m engaged. And my wife—my wife-to-be is coming out here soon,” he was—I think he was a junior. Anyway—and then, the other person I dated was—I worked in Saint Paul’s crypt in the coffee house there on Saturdays and

times, and one time I almost got bedded by him and I was terrified. I think I stopped going there for a while.

[Crosstalk]

01:12:54 Q: So the man from California—okay, so did you feel with that—tell me about that in terms of the sexual piece of that, like, the—what was that for you?

Connell: Oh, so he was very protective of me, probably because he knew this wasn't going to last since he had a fiancée.

01:13:06 Q: Okay, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Connell: But he—you know, we would get pretty hot and frantic but he never—we never had intimacy, we never had sex, real sex. Something I wrote about in my journal, which my husband-to-be read and never ever forgave me for, which also is another theme of my life—but anyway, we won't get there yet [laughs]. So okay—so I am volunteering at—I'm volunteering at one of the tutoring programs, we were working with young kids from Harlem [New York City], I did that for a while, just trying to find my roots like everybody, my people. I was very much in—I loved my—the dorm counselor, not the dorm counselor, the floor advisor—what was she called—the resident advisor?

right.

Connell: She was just fantastic; she later became a psychiatrist, which was perfect. I had—there were older women in my hall and they kind of adopted me. They called me “bean” and to this day, I don’t know why they called me “bean,” maybe because I was so naive and I was always doing fourteen things at once, which—my roommate’s father picked up on. Yeah, I mean, I—you know, I wanted guys to like me and I remember going to a couple mixers and just feeling like a wall flower, you know? Yeah, so there was that. Okay, so we get to the spring—

01:14:36 Q: And leading up to that—I mean, was there anything about—I mean, you’re—were you at all involved in anything like SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]? Were you involved with the paper at that point at Barnard? Okay.

Connell: No, I wasn’t. I am trying to remember—I think—you know, the Chinese was taking a lot of my time.

01:14:53 Q: All right.

Connell: I was struggling and I—I wasn’t getting straight A’s in any sense, and that was very disappointing and I began to question my intellectual abilities, probably as many did. I—yeah, I don’t remember the specifics of that first semester all that well, to tell you the truth, other than the first couple—months or so. I know that by the spring, my oldest brother—my middle brother

was on a date with—we had gone to Staten Island, actually, with the guy who I ended up marrying—Princeton [University]—and getting this call that, you know, they had to just take him away, put him away in the hospital. So that was—it was always in the background, there was always somebody having—falling apart.

01:15:56 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, so that was in the spring, as you remember? That was in the spring?

Connell: Yes, I think that was in the spring, too. But yeah, no, I hadn't—I think politically I was following things, I was hoping somebody would run and end the Vietnam War for—in '68. I was collecting signatures against the war. I later worked on the campaign for Eugene McCarthy—but that was after the strikes. Yeah, I don't remember there's—you know, I went to the tea and cookies and hoarded the cookies. I'd get yogurt and put it on the windowsill—and this is not political action. Yeah, I think I just—getting acclimated to what it all meant to be in college and in a woman's college. Yeah, so then the spring came and I was doing a paper on Randolph [S.] Bourne, I remember I—coming out of—

01:16:50 Q: Randolph?

Connell: Bourne, B-O-U-R-N-E, who was a socialist—very interesting fellow; he was a dwarf, as well, wrote quite prodigiously and had a very dramatic life and died quite early, I think, in his early thirties or something.

01:17:08 Q: 1930s. Uh-huh, uh-huh. Okay.

Connell: 1930s, yeah. Anyway—I don't remember when he died, but he was—he was in his thirties, early thirties when he died. So I was writing a paper for my American History class, I guess, or seminar and—coming out of—Butler Library [Columbia University], with my stack of books and my research papers, so we wrote everything longhand by then, right?

01:17:32 Q: Uh-huh, right, [laughs] right, I remember that.

Connell: And I had been hearing—you know, I hadn't gone to the demonstrations yet, but I had gone to the—a memorial for Martin Luther King [Jr.] and I remember there being some tumultuous behavior and people walking out of there, beginning to think, “Oh, there's something not quite right in this university.” But when I walked out that night from Butler Library, I ran into someone—I saw the commotion going on in Hamilton Hall—not Hamilton, at—Fayerweather [Hall].

01:17:58 Q: Fayerweather?

Connell: Fayerweather, yeah, just—right there on the quad, and I just gravitated there and I thoroughly believe that if I went into that building and occupied it, we were gonna end the Vietnam War, that being my highest priority. It was only later that I really took in the whole meaning of the—what the issues were. To me, this was like—oh, finally, I get to do something

stack of books, put them somewhere and stayed there pretty much. A lot of my friends from high school who were in colleges in New York came down and I'd go back to the dorm and clean up and talk with them and let them stay in my room and I can't imagine what poor Barbara was thinking of all of this.

01:18:47 Q: [Laughs] "What's going on?"

Connell: "Oh, God, not only is she disorganized, she's an anarchist, she's a revolutionary, she's a Communist," I don't think she ever discussed it with me. And in fact, ironically, I remember one particular woman from—who was at Hobart [and William Smith Colleges]—it's a college in upstate New York?

[Crosstalk]

Connell: No, it's in Hobart, what's—

01:19:08 Q: Hobart Williams. Right.

Connell: Hobart Williams, yes. She came down and she had been a bit of a revolutionary in high school, so I wasn't surprised. And she slept with some guy occupying Fayerweather and then she came to me and she said, "What do I do about it?" And I was like, "You're asking me?" [laughs] So I—on one hand, I was there because I thought, "This is an important point, I need to protest

The second I—it was fun—I mean, you were, like, living in a commune, you were sharing daily, hourly experiences with people. The intensity was just—it was exciting, it was really exciting. Even though as a woman—as we all learned, you know, we didn’t—we hadn’t found our voices or we weren’t allowed to have our voices. You know, I was cooking pancakes and stuff I had never done in my life, I’d never cooked [laughs]. There was limited space, I remember, like, bedding down next to strangers on sleeping bags, I don’t—we didn’t have sex or anything, but here I was, you know, some stranger, some wooly-haired guy next to me, we’d talk a little bit and we’d—so it was—it was very radical for me, for most of us, I’m sure.

In the very middle of all this, Jocelyn Linnekin, who had been in my hall in Reid said that—she was—gonna see her old friend from high school—she had gone to school in Newport—Virginia? Anyway, and that he was gonna bring up his roommate, Tom Connell, from Princeton, and I remember her saying, “Ah, he’s not too swift, but he’s a nice guy.” So I crawled out of Fayerweather window, because you were able to get—come and go, I guess. The night before I went home, you know, shampooed my hair, did everything I was supposed to do and we—and I went on a date with this—so my—meeting my husband happened during that strike, as well. I got deathly ill and had horrible diarrhea, because I hadn’t been eating, you know? And here we were, in this nice restaurant in the West Village and—

01:21:21 Q: Wait a minute, so you got deathly ill at the restaurant—

[Crosstalk]



Connell: When I ate fish or something—that I had been starving myself.

01:21:29 Q: Okay.

Connell: So yeah, he—he started really early in my life. I didn't think much about him, except I remember him sending me a note saying, "Oh, this was a very interesting and enjoyable experience, maybe we'll see each other again." Anyway, so then, we get back to the strike and I'm becoming much more enamored of the discussions that are going on, I'm understanding that there are real issues here and that this is not just—this is about race and about class, it's about a long history of military research on-campus, of propagating wars in the name of profit, of—I don't think I was all that concerned about the academic structure and the fact that students didn't have that much of a voice, because there wasn't a real—there was a very insipid, as you remember, student government type of thing that nobody really cared much about, administration didn't even kowtow to—or not kowtow, but even consider important. So that part didn't bother me. I wasn't really objecting to the school or to the—the rigidity of the classes or the lack of the curriculum in certain areas, it was really peace, justice—not even the American Way, the International Way.

01:22:46 Q: The International Way, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Connell: So anyway, I was in Hamilton—I'm sorry, I was in Fayerweather when the bust came.

We had gone through instructions as to how to be passively resistant. I don't remember being

to first a women's prison and then the Tombs. I remember Linda LeClair was in my cell and she led us in song. "I've Looked at Love From Both Sides Now," I mean, we're chanting that and the —

01:23:23 Q: All right, so I just need one thing for a moment—yes, thank you. Now say that again, because your—your voice totally—I know it's not on there. So you're in the Tombs and you remember Linda LeClair leading you in song and what was the name of the song? What were the names of the songs?

Connell: Oh, so it was—yeah, it was Joni Mitchell—Joni Mitchell, "I've Looked at Love From Both Sides Now."

01:23:42 Q: "I've Looked at Love From Both Sides Now," right, okay, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Connell: Yeah. I—yeah, we were crowded, we were detained for a long time—detained for a long time, and then, you know, I don't remember the process of—I believe Barnard labor lawyers, whatever, Barnard had contacted lawyers, we were put out—we were let out, we were given a court date, but the specifics of that, really, it's funny, they elude me. What I do remember is getting home—getting back to the dorm and going to the payphones, which we had in the lobby then and calling my mother; [my mother] said—my mother going, "Frances, there's terrible stuff going on at Columbia, please don't cross the street" [laughs]. And I don't know when I finally told her, "Mom, I—when you called me, I had just gotten out of jail for occupying

family stories. Yeah, and I—and then, of course, things became very difficult.

01:24:49 Q: So for a second, just go through what—when you think about that experience there, is there anything from that that stands out that—shifted or changed for you? Maybe not, but I'm just curious, you know, from that experience, anything that you're aware of or not.

Connell: Yeah, no—no, that's a good question. I—I kind of moved beyond it really quickly, I think. I was proud to be part of it. I think that my grades the end of freshmen year were not as good as they should have been because I should/could—I mean, these are nonsense words—at the time, I was on a scholarship, I needed to retain it. I knew I wasn't supposed to be “goofing off,” quote/unquote, academically, so I—it bothered me in that respect that I had done that, but that was the only thing. I think Barnard took pretty good care of us, as I recall. Charges were dropped later because the arresting officer claimed he didn't recognize us. I think there were some steps in there that I should have known about, but I didn't—I don't even remember why that was, but I remember in the summer—I was here in the summer, going to the court. And of course, Tom, the husband-to-be, came and met me at the court, which was very impressive. He later became a lawyer.

01:26:13 Q: [Laughs] Right.

Connell: So what else do I remember about that? I think—I had a sense that we really were doing something that had never been done before, that we were starting—we were a seed that

sending letters—I mean, we were aware of all of that. I also remember a funny thing—I don't know why I was in Ferris Booth, maybe I had—somebody had me do something to do with clerical, but I answered the phone in the office there in an area that had been taken over for the strike and it was—Mark [W.] Rudd's mother and she was saying, "You gotta find Mark, Mark's dad is—I think he might be having a heart attack." And I had to try to find someone to find Mark Rudd.

And again, it's kind of like—why didn't I follow through on any of these stories? I don't remember what happened or how we ever did that. I really—I don't remember bonding specifically with other people who were part of the strike. In fact, it surprised me who all had been occupying those buildings. And I think part of that is because it was—I'm not sure why that was, actually, I can't say why that was. I certainly continued to work for causes that had to do with peace and justice and racial equality as much as I was able to. I remember being shocked by—when the—many of our black—colleagues moved into a floor of their own, second year, junior—sophomore year and I would walk down through there, because I didn't take the elevator, I'd take the stairs and I was like, "Gosh, I don't think they like me," and that was a shock. On the other hand, one of my best friends in college was Joan Bennett, who wasn't part of that and was up in her little eighth floor room in Hewitt, you know, came from a very—a rural—South Carolina family. Yeah. What else do I remember about that period?

01:28:24 Q: So—so—

invigorating. It was being part of a cause and a community that I think I never—I'm not sure we ever replicated—I was able to replicate again—even though I was on marches on Washington—and when they dedicated the Vietnam's Veterans' Memorial in Washington and I went down—I was taking my kids to the zoo or something and got interviewed for television, I remember trying to articulate how this had kind of come full circle. I later traveled in Vietnam and I remember—just wanting to take people and hug them and say, “Have you forgiven us for what we did? I didn't like the war, I fought against it, I almost got thrown out of school for—anyway, yeah, it was—it was—yeah, it impacted my life.” But I don't remember talking much about it or really sharing with other people about it.

01:29:21 Q: Uh-huh, right. When you look back on it now, what is your reaction to it? What's your response to it when you think about it now—you and the choice you made then?

Connell: Oh, I think it was the right choice. I'm very glad that I was part of—I was part of it. There's a certain sadness, because I—in a sense, we were almost like an anomaly; it was such a short, intense period. And then, everybody became interested in the realities of career and tracking into—be a success. I think they were—I felt a great sense of egalitarianism and just a heightened awareness, articulating things that, you know, we had read about academically, but here, we were in the middle of an actual experience. Yeah, I think it was the right thing. When Kent State [University] came, when—when we had marches, when—I guess our junior year, was it, that the—there was another strike—I was plotting along academically, but I don't—but I wasn't—you know, I was aware of what was going on, but I didn't occupy a building again.

01:30:41 Q: You didn't—

Connell: I didn't—I wouldn't have occupied a building again, I don't think, if it had been similar to the '68 strike. Yeah. I really valued going down to Washington [D.C.] and those marches—working for Eugene [J.] McCarthy. I also remember just the—with great sadness, looking out the window from 7th floor Reid, watching buildings on fire, or the smoke coming out from parts of Harlem, the sirens screaming—and then wondering what was going to happen. I saw the repercussions of that later when I lived in Washington. Yeah. It's a lot of things that weren't ever resolved

01:31:34 Q: Things not resolved, yeah. Yeah. So tell me more about that—things not resolved and what that brings up for you.

Connell: Well, I think I still struggle with it. I think I'm basically as my mother was, you know, an optimistic person. I want to believe in the goodness of other people and the worth of intelligence and making decisions and rational choices. And yet, I—I see that so rarely applied—not that people aren't good or have the potential to be good, but the misuse of positions and intelligence. And yeah, it's—it continues to frustrate me and that's part of why so many areas—education, you know, our wars abroad, our exploitation of other people, our failure to really put inequalities at the core of certain policies—or political action—the other part that is sort of—the hypocrisy of religion, religious groups advocating things like that—“Well, we believe in the sanctity of the child,” you know, until the kid is born and then it's like, “Oh, no, we're not gonna

using of religion, a position to—to abuse logical thought or to be inhumane, to come up with inhumane policies.

01:33:17 Q: Inhumane policies, uh-huh.

Connell: Yeah, I mean, that's—that's all still there.

01:33:26 Q: Okay. All right. So before we go on, I just want to check again, I noticed you were fidgeting a little bit—time to get up and walk around? Time to pee?

Connell: Oh, I'm actually fine. I'll—I'm a fidgeting person, so—

01:33:37 Q: [Laughs] Well, there's just a little bit more fidgeting than there had been before, so I just wanted to check in.

Connell: Yeah, after thinking about it, yeah.

01:33:44 Q: Okay, 'cause we can do that, we can get up and walk around and—

Connell: I appreciate that, actually, yeah. No, I think I'm fine.

know, three years at Barnard, are there any particular experiences that stand out, any stories you could tell about, you know—or not? Maybe—so—one thing that seems to be happening is your—the man who became your husband at some point has—has entered your life?

Connell: Yes, he's entered my life and he really—I'd say, pretty much—well, it's complicated. I don't blame him, he's a great guy, he's a wonderful person, we—I was fortunate to have the years I did with him and to have three amazing sons that he fathered. But on the other hand, he—he's very intelligent, very literary, very—loved culture, travel, all the things that I did, but did not have any—not even an iota of the rebellious flower child, hippie dippy—I mean, I was always—I felt—I had to be different; I was unique, I had to be unique and this was—maybe went back to my father's family and the brains and education is the most important thing. He was always—he always sort of put that down, not that he didn't believe in education, not that he wasn't incredibly well-educated but that—eh, I was very much attracted to him for a lot of reasons. I mean, he was a very gentle person, but I—he had never dated before. He had been the Latin Club President, he had been the nerd, he had been the scientific marvel, he had been told—in his family, this Irish Catholic family in Milton, Massachusetts—on the wrong side of the railroad tracks in the Irish ghetto, near the trolley tracks—that he was, you know, at the age of—maybe fifth grade, sixth grade, that, you know, he was gifted and that wasn't something that his family—they allowed him then a certain amount of space that they didn't allow the other kids. They all worked hard, they all worked outside of the home, starting at an early age.



first had sex that summer—I stayed in the city. I was living in an apartment with some other friends, Jocelyn again. Jocelyn—she introduced me to Tom, she—she introduced me to my first job I had that summer, working for Whitney Publications, across from Saint Patrick’s Cathedral; it was a very romantic summer. Very much. He was working as—for what was called—anyway, he was working for some student moving company at Princeton and would come up and visit me and it was a very romantic summer. I remember that being quite lovely, yeah, and I was madly in love with him, there’s no doubt about it. But anyway, it did affect the next three years of my life, because I would go down to Princeton quite a lot, he didn’t come up as often to New York, for some reason. I loved the option of going to the country getting away from the hustle and bustle of—the fire engines shrieking, the ambulances going up Broadway, and just wandering around this expansive campus with its Gothic cathedral-like buildings and having freedom to go in and out of classrooms at night to study, because everything is always open. Sailing on Lake Carnegie, being sort of—at least, the first year, before they went co-ed, being—you know, unique. I was a woman in this man’s college and he would have to steal food for me from food service and bring it to me on Sunday mornings.

It was a bit of a pampered life, in a sense, but I also was very much in his shadow, from day one, I was in Tom’s shadow, and I don’t know why that was. I think probably, again, I was looking for some sort of security. His family was middle-class, Irish Catholic. They did things like—they would have supper every night after dinner at, like, ten o’clock, and you’d sit and you’d drink tea and you’d talk and you’d eat cheese and crackers and cookies and there was a regularity there, there was a peacefulness, there was a—there was never any sort of pushiness—I mean, I later

everyone. But they were very—I loved this sense that there was no one there who was obviously sick mentally, I loved the fact that they loved—and they embraced Tom, he was just—he was really very much—but they loved all their kids. I loved being able to go to the Cape [Cod] and I loved Boston and, you know, getting—having that option. So I always loved where Tom lived, that always helped, too, in terms of him and our relationship. So yes, that was a big part of it. I didn't—I didn't date anyone else again after that, primarily, because he didn't allow me to. He was—he read my journals for my first year and it was like, “This is the end.” He was like, “You had boyfriends? You slept with somebody?” “Well, not really, you know, he fooled around.” Anyway, it was—again, it's like—I was a smart woman, why did I buy into all that? I suppose it was because I wanted the security, so I'd do anything to—

01:39:32 Q: To have the security, uh-huh.

Connell: To have that security, yeah.

01:39:34 Q: And what seemed like normal. Not having someone stick around, not having that in the background—the trauma and drama, right? Uh-huh.

Connell: Yeah, and he's a very—you know, he was very gentle and compassionate with me, but he definitely—you know, I would see parts of that—what later became—yeah, a very intense, A1 personality, my way or no way—made for a fantastic litigator, but not always for someone who

years.

Anyway, so then I—my classes were fantastic; I took a little of everything, I did archaeology, I did some anthropology, which I loved—I took the regular science classes, I did “rat psych” and then I did—geology, which—I look back at poor Mr.—Professor [John E.] Sanders and think, “How could he come and look at all of us standing in that—sitting in that auditorium and taking notes and identifying rocks with absolutely no concern other than to get the easiest science class behind us?” [laughs] He was a good man, actually. I was—I became involved with creative writing quite early. I went through all of the creative writing classes. Elizabeth Hardwick took a real liking to me, Robert [Traill Spence] Lowell’s wife, and she was very much a mentor for me. But I was such a shy person that I—I couldn’t really—pursue that. Mary [C.] Gordon—of course, we all know Mary Gordon—Mary Gordon and I were, like, the two favorites. She was gonna write the poetry, I was gonna write the short stories. But Mary, again, was a very strong, assertive, directed woman. I was like, “Oh, this is nice; I like to write, maybe I’ll become a famous writer. If I just keep writing in my closet, one day, they’ll come and knock on my door.”

01:41:25 Q: [Laughs] On the door. Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Connell: I mean, I really—I don’t know what I thought, anyway. But I loved doing it and it was fun. I had one run-in with one of the creative writing teachers who—I think she was—I don’t think she lasted long—who looked at something I wrote and said, “This is straight out of James [A.] Joyce’s *The Dubliners*” and I said, “No, it’s not, I didn’t steal anything from James Joyce.”

and I'm, like, stealing from all the world's great writers." What else? I really enjoyed the history classes I took, the seminars; I was introduced to social theories that I had never known about before, taught in a very interesting way.

01:42:07 Q: Do you remember what particular social theories—

Connell: I'm not sure—social theories, I just—readings, yeah, readings. I floundered in philosophy, I did—I could not, for the life of me, get the logic—although, I loved doing it. I—well, social philosophy—I think—you know, socialism, the early developments within the 20th century, labor unions—the struggle with the Communist part and people being stigmatized for their beliefs because they were supporting a different class other than the straight intellectuals—and the wealthy. Yeah, I mean, it was all very gratifying and very much what I wanted to believe in. What other classes did I take? Yeah, I mean, I took all the literature classes, I became an English major. My senior year, I—my junior year, I won a fellowship—which now, everybody does, but to—Oxford [University]—to study the uses of imagery and it was a roving—seminar. So we were at Oxford, we were at London University and then we were at the University of Edinburgh.

01:43:20 Q: And so, you went?

Connell: Yeah, I went, it was all paid for, so I went and that was lovely. I'd spent the whole summer and I went with a good friend, who is a year behind us. And—we—you know,

the end of that, again, I mean, it was—it was like living in a dream because it was just what I wanted to be doing—and yet, I didn't totally fit in. I remember—the first day of our tutorial at Oxford, I had done all the reading, I knew it inside and out, but my tutor called on me to answer a question, I just froze—I was—this mouth is supposed to answer? No, I just sit in the back and write papers [laughs]. And that's not the way you do it in English education, so I also remember that I—

01:44:08 Q: So—so tell me more—so did any of that shift? So—in English education, what I'm hearing you say is that in the tutorial, you're being asked to speak, not just to write, so what—

Connell: Absolutely—it's an engagement, yeah.

01:44:20 Q: Okay, so then what happened during the rest of that experience?

Connell: I remember getting a little bit better at it, being able to answer questions and things like that. I mean, we were doing a lot of Shakespeare, we were doing a lot of contemporary poets—Basel [C.] Bunting, Dylan [M.] Thomas, it was—the uses of imagery, so it was—a lot of reading, a lot of discussion and several papers. It was a wonderful experience. But I do remember at the end of it when my grant ran out, I had to get myself from Edinburgh [Scotland] back to my charter flight in Paris and I had no money, I had no money. Just my ticket. So I—not wanting to bother my poor mother because who knows who she was struggling with that summer and who was falling apart—I mean, I say this flippantly, it—it bothered me a lot, but I—you know, here I

my mother, she didn't deserve all that she had to go through—or my little brother, who we tried to get out of the house at one point, sent him off to college after his junior year. But—I had no money and I wasn't about to ask my mother, but finally, I had to, because I had no money to get down from Oxford back to London and then from London to Paris.

01:45:38 Q: Then to—to Paris, right.

Connell: So I did, and she sent me—I guess she must have sent by FedEx—not FedEx—Western Union or something—thirty five dollars, which was just enough for a bus ticket and for the Hoover Craft, I guess, in those days—it's incredible, but it was enough, but not for me to stay a night in London. So I remember sleeping on the—getting down on this torturously slow bus to London, sleeping on a bench in Saint James Park and then, somehow getting on another bus that got me down to Dover and then going across and then getting — getting to [Paris] London, sleeping in the—in the—

01:46:15 Q: Train station?

Connell: Yeah, in Orly there, yeah, anyway, it was pretty traumatic, but it was sort of—and then, when I got to JFK, being met by Tom and just bursting into tears, “Ah, so”—and he was, you know, he was a very kind person in that way, and going down to Princeton with him—before I went back to see my family. Yeah, so that was—that was interesting. I had forgotten your question, actually.

01:46:41 Q: That's all right [laughs]. It doesn't matter.

Connell: I also worked doing a survey for—doing a survey for CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] at one point before the election in '68. I worked as a social work intern under Mayor Daley—not Mayor Daley—John [V.] Lindsay's City Corp—Urban Corp—and I worked in the South Bronx right after everything had been burned the following year.

01:47:05 Q: And this is while you're—

Connell: This is 1969.

01:47:08 Q: So this is still when you're at Barnard, right. [coughs] Excuse me.

Connell: I'm still at Barnard. I—yeah, no, I went to Europe in 1970, so 1969. I went to Woodstock—which was an interesting experience, I was really out of my element.

01:47:25 Q: Tell me—

Connell: I developed a great toothache, and so, I'm going to the emergency tent where everybody is having bad trips and I'm saying, “No, it's really—I just have a bad tooth, can you give me something to kill the pain?” [Laughs] Yeah, I hitchhiked to Nova Scotia and again, I almost ended my relationship with Tom because he's like, “What are you doing? You're going

these little things that—yeah—I —pointed that I was—in a sense, repressing the sort of freedom and my own choices at a very early age because of that relationship and whatever I needed or thought I needed. But I mean, I got a lot of perks out of it. It wasn't—in any sense, all bad, it was mostly good.

01:48:15 Q: And yet, it sounds—so far, from what you've been describing, it also sounds as if—at least, in these years at Barnard, that you were doing—you were, in a way, exploring—you were doing some really other interesting—like, the hitchhiking to Nova Scotia, the fellowship at Oxford, working on the CBS survey, I mean, some very interesting—Lindsay—you said working with the Lindsay—social services with—for the Lindsay Administration.

Connell: Yeah, no, no, I did—I mean, I feel like I had fantastic opportunities at Barnard and I took advantage of most of them. So anyway, what came from that—I mentioned the fellowship to Oxford because I then had applied to be a Senior Scholar my senior year, I was going to write the Great American Novel, right? But I didn't know—I didn't think of it that way, I just thought, “Oh, gosh, I can take all the classes I want? I don't have to worry about grades? And I can write.” So I didn't—I took—I was a free floating spirit, I wrote a collection of short stories and a novel, which I only—years later, you know, did something with the novel; I don't know what happened to the short stories. But it was an amazing experience. I remember auditing classes on—at Columbia—run by [William Y.] Tyndall, who was the major biographer of James Joyce. I worked specifically—I was supposed to be working with—Elizabeth Hardwick, she was to be my advisor, but then she had a leave of absence, so I worked with Janice [F.] Thaddeus, who was



this is—I think—when I began to—“Oh, you’ve gotta take classes, you gotta pass tests, I’m just doing this thing I love doing.” And probably deferring to the seriousness of being a student.

Yeah. There were things going on. But I loved it, it was—I was fine, I was happy. So yeah, I was—sort of the anti scholar/scholar as a Senior Scholars, so I was really reading and doing what I wanted and—yeah. I do remember struggling with my scholarship aid at that point, they were going to cut it back and I didn’t have any clue why. But I—I guess somehow we came up with the money. It may have been that my father hadn’t filled out the forms properly or something. Somehow I got through that, yeah.

01:50:44 Q: Yeah, so a little bit of uncertainty it sounds like—around that—in your senior year?

Yeah.

Connell: Yeah, I basically earned money during the years at Barnard babysitting—babysitting co-op—babysitting was my salvation for pocket money and things because my parents had no money and—I remember the big boon was that I would always get money for taxis to get back and that was, like, half of what you earned a night sitting in someone’s lovely apartment. And I would take the subway and pocket the—

01:51:12 Q: And pocket, the—right [laughs].

Connell: Anyway. Yeah.

01:51:21 Q: Okay, so picking up—from our break—oh, there was something I was thinking of—and I'm having a wisdom moment. Oh, no, I'm having a wisdom—it seems so important. Oh, yeah, it was something about—so in this time with Tom—your years at Barnard and after this story—and Tom, the sexual—relationship, was there anything about that is important to begin to—or not? But I don't know if there's anything then that was important or not.

Connell: As always, you're incredibly perceptive because I—well, it was something that I recently wrote, I created a character who was very hung up about sexuality. And I—you know, what model of it do I have of myself? [Laughs] So I—again, I—you know, I was the good girl, I came from—my parents were Victoria Protestants, and I had this example of an older sister—who—older sisters who had gotten married very young and had had children right away—one of them was miserable, my oldest sister, the one who left Barnard, and went through—I mean, she went through a whole series of nervous breakdowns, too, but we never thought she was crazy, she functioned. The other sister married someone and sort of became—they're still married after, I don't know, sixty years or something. The third sister who was—had the nervous breakdown or was schizophrenic—in her new life, she went onto have a common law husband and had eight more children, lived in a trailer camp, dire poverty—her children were taken from her eventually because she was unstable. So I mean, I had all these models of failed women in my life who had dared to marry or have relationships like that and it was like, “There is no way. One, I don't ever want to have children, but first of all, I can't get pregnant before I even think about marriage.” I never wanted to get married. And I wish I had been honest with my husband. I never wanted to

was uncomfortable from sex from the very beginning because I felt I was doing something that was not—would have made my mother unhappy.

I also felt—I did not trust birth control and I thought, “Oh, I am going to be another flop in the family, I’m gonna get pregnant.” I was terrified—sorry to bring that up with you, but I was just terrified. And so, I don’t know that I enjoyed it. And even after I was married, I was like, “Oh my gosh, I’m going to get pregnant and I can’t go on with anything.” I mean, eventually, it was fine, but initially, it was like—so I think—I mean, that was—that started in the wrong way when I was whatever, nineteen. And I don’t know that I ever quite sorted it out properly and I don’t know that it was ever that satisfying for Tom because he was a very sensitive man and he could pick up on, you know, “What’s going on here? You’re a very passionate woman, why are we not enjoying each other more?” [laughs] I mean, not that we didn’t, you know, but I think as—yeah, anyway. Yeah.

01:54:43 Q: Okay, all right. So your—what do you remember, if anything, about graduation?

Connell: Yeah, I remember we had black arm bands and peace symbols on our mortarboards. I remember my parents coming up and I had to race down—they came by train, my father had just retired and then started working in real estate, which he enjoyed doing very much. But not—you know, they couldn’t afford a hotel, so I—one of the professors—I forgot whose apartment it was, right at 116th and Claremont [New York City], allowed them to stay there for three nights—I can’t remember who it was, though, right around the corner from Martha [D.] Peterson’s place. I

who our speaker was now. But it was a very energizing, wonderful experience. I only graduated cum laude and I had—you know, thought I probably should have done better. I was—I had applied for all sorts of fellowships and hadn't gotten them. I wanted to go into graduate school in—at Yale and I didn't get in, but neither did Tom, who was summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa from Princeton in English, so I didn't feel quite so bad [laughs]. Anyway, so I—we'll get into that in a second. But I guess my future was a little bit uncertain, because I didn't really know which graduate school I was gonna go to until the middle of that summer, yeah.

01:56:24 Q: So that was—but you had applied, in addition to Yale, you had applied to other graduate schools, and what was the field you were working in?

Connell: Okay, so I was applying in English, but I also had applied to all of these schools in England, because I wanted to get out of the U.S. I couldn't stand to think I was living in this—police state, in a sense, but I think I was maybe also hoping to get a little more distance from my family and their problems, which I really couldn't solve. When I think back about—I mean, it's really pretty remarkable that I did as well academically as I did, because there was always something traumatic coming into my life, always—and I—being a responsible daughter and—but anyway, so that—you know—

01:57:12 Q: So say—say more about that, though, Frances, say—what—

when I—just talking to other people, I didn't even know this, but you know, there was a clear sense of parents often being very aware of how you were doing academically and helping—maybe guiding you or not, not everyone, but most of the people I've spoken with, and having certain expectations for their child and guidance—guidance. Whereas, I think I felt like I was the one who was supposed to be—you know, I was a typical child of a highly dysfunctional family and I was the one who was really supposed to take care of everybody else, and that continued, like, when my mother died, I was the one who had to settle the estate and locate all the lost children of my sister who died in '85. And it just went on and on and on. But—yeah, it's—so anyway, back to your question.

01:58:06 Q: Okay, so what of this sense that there's—that there was always something in the family background that could—that was —that was gonna—"would" is not—and intrude—but that's the word that's coming to me—that could intrude at any moment and—what—and it sounds like, potentially, was there a sense that it could derail you? Tell me more about the sense around that.

Connell: I think it was more of a constant distraction.

01:58:41 Q: Constant distraction, okay.

Connell: And that I did not personally have the right to just be a student, to just excel in what I wanted to, even though I had fantastic opportunities, and I pursued most of them—not all of

couldn't give it my all, because there were other things that involved real human beings, not just books and degrees—that I should be solving and I couldn't. I had no idea how to solve them.

01:59:11 Q: Right. So—and you can give one example with one where—where that happened, where you were going along in school and then one of these—is there one that comes to mind in those years at Barnard?

Connell: I mean, I'm just thinking of going back each summer or during—Christmas vacation and spending, you know, staying up all the nights to do my papers because I'd be spending the days—trying to do something to cheer—to alleviate some of the pressures on my mother. A lot of going back and forth in those days—all through college—to—the—the brother, the second brother—the brother, I'm sorry—I keep saying “the second brother,” but the brother, John, who was the closest in age to me, who was in and out of hospitals. And again, the money was a big issue. I think if my parents had had enough money, they would have had proper treatment for him. But he was in state hospitals, you know? He was in state hospitals.

02:00:08 Q: Uh-huh, right.

Connell: We were—I testified at one point—the divorce for my sister who was schizophrenic, or whatever she had—she lost her first two children by this very wealthy—oil tycoon from Houston, who had forced her to marry him. And my parents—the two little girls came to live with us at some point, my mother, again, thought she could handle everything, but the father

particular set up was not a good place for two little girls. So you know, I was—it was—you know, those things wear on you. You are basically testifying against your own sister, who is no longer your sister because she's turned into this strange, trashy lady. She also had a biting temper that came out then and would humiliate me, like, "Oh, you're a student at Barnard, aren't you proud of yourself?" And it was like, "Doesn't anybody believe in me?" Yeah, I mean, my mother did, but I had friends—and I had—anyway, but—it was a lot of pressure. So again, it was—I would hold back, I think I would hold back in terms of being this super scholar that I—really, I always loved—I still do, I just—I love studying, I love being a student. Yeah, so—that would be an example.

02:01:38 Q: Okay, that's a great one. Yeah, good. All right, so—you were applying to graduate schools at the end of—the end of senior year and—in English, there was no—now what were the other schools? 'Cause there was—there was Yale and the other schools were—

Connell: I think North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

02:02:03 Q: North Carolina, Chapel Hill, okay.

Connell: Yeah, and I think I might have gotten in there, but there was no money or something, I don't remember specifically. Iowa, I got into, but I didn't want to go to Iowa, yeah.

02:02:14 Q: Iowa, uh-huh.

Connell: 'Cause it had the Writer's Center there and again, it would have been a different life. I applied to the University of Victoria and I got a full four-year fellowship to study there, but Tom —there was Tom—Tom ended up getting a job teaching and I ended up going to the University of Virginia—primarily, at the last-minute and then I accepted it because of Elizabeth Hardwick, the great New York critic and Cal—Robert Lowell, their good friend was Peter Taylor. So Peter Taylor was gonna be my advisor and he pulled a few strings in letting them know I was gonna go. So I went down to the University of Virginia for a year. Tom taught up north of Baltimore [Maryland] in a private Catholic school, which became the—anyway, that's neither here nor there. Yeah, so I did—and I just whipped through the Masters program. I remember running—I had to go through boxes and boxes of all the papers I ever saved, probably from elementary school—they had passed from my house to different places and da da da and they ended up in storage after I—we had to empty out this huge, six-bedroom house in suburban Maryland—when I moved up here. And they were in storage. And I thought, "I'm tired of moving these boxes," so I just threw—I don't know, ten, fifteen boxes full of papers away. God forbid I ever become famous 'cause I've lost the archives [laughs].

02:03:44 Q: You've lost the archives, exactly.

Connell: I've given up on that right now—Catherine, so—anyway, but I remember running across one—and again, I was so terrified, I was terrified—I had to support myself typing, of all things, for one of my professors who was writing a book on Robert Lowell and I'm—I'm still a terrible typist, they didn't have word processing then.



02:04:08 Q: Right.

Connell: And I would turn these in and he'd give them back to me 'cause I'd have typos and it was like, "Oh, my gosh," we'd do this over and over again, but I was earning my money. So anyway—but I remember being terrified of—I liked the University of Virginia, it was a very—it was a beautiful place to study. But I didn't have the self-confidence, again, to sort of assert myself in classes. I wrote brilliant papers—or good papers, but I don't remember being a great participant and asking the questions I should have, even then, you know, at twenty-three.

I ran across—so when I'm emptying out all these boxes that I have been hoarding for years, I ran across a paper that I had written on Stephen Crane, something about images—the English—the American poet, Civil War poet, and—I don't think—I got married after I finished the Masters, literally, a few weeks afterwards, because I did the whole thing in less than a year. And I had probably never read the comments from the professor. So I'm reading through his comments which were—he had mailed them to my parents' house and I—I don't remember—but anyway, he said, "Your insights are fantastic, you're very original, da da da da," and then I get down to halfway down the page—"and you write quite well, but I have to say when you don't write well, you sound like a drunken James Joyce or a—Faulkner, under the influence." And I thought, "Wow, that sums it all up right there" [laughs]. This is why I couldn't go on and get a PhD in English, I think—but yeah.

hiking on the Appalachian [Trail]—I mean, in the Shenandoah [National Park]—it’s just—it was very different from being in New York and Princeton. I don’t remember there being major problems with my family this year, I think I focused—and then, I—somehow, I was engaged. I went up to his family for—I think it must have been for Easter, and he announced we were engaged and the next thing I knew we were getting married. And I was like, “Oh, okay, I guess that’s okay,” but I was actually devastated, because I thought, “Oh, my gosh, marriage, I’m gonna be just another person married,” I mean, ugh [laughs].

02:06:31 Q: Okay, so you were actually devastated?

Connell: I was, I wasn’t happy about it. But I wanted to make everybody happy, so okay, fine, I’ll get married. I’ll no longer be “living in sin,” I mean, not that I—I never lived with him before, we just cohabitated when we were together on weekends. But before that all happened, I spent the last three months of my Masters program at the University of Virginia living in Peter Taylor—the American short story/novelist’s house—which had been Faulkner’s house— so again, taking care of their dog while he was on sabbatical in England. All sorts of people floated through— John [L.] Ashbery—

02:07:13 Q: Whom else?

Connell: —Tates, I’m trying to remember who else. You know, I mean, again—in correspondence with the Lowells, with Elizabeth Hardwick—I had—my novel I had written as a

interested in publishing it, but I was like, “Oh, my God, this is my family, I have written about my family,” [MAKES NOISE] so I didn’t—said—“Okay, I’ll wait until I have time to revise it and then I’ll send it back.” Athenian—Athenian was the press, it was a small private company—it was one of the small houses in New York then. So yeah. I got married.

02:07:54 Q: All right, take your hand away—

Connell: So I got married, but I didn’t really know what I was getting into. And I became—we—  
—and we honeymooned—it was a very small wedding, I didn’t want to tell any of my friends.  
So I remember one of Tom’s roommates came down—it was in Houston—or it was in Saint  
Louis, University City, it was at my family’s church, I remember having—because he was  
Catholic, we had to go through counseling with a priest and then also with—I swore that if we  
had children, they would be raised as Catholics—which, you know, God will strike me dead, but  
whatever.

02:08:27 Q: Right.

Connell: They were all baptized as Catholics, though. And then, my very—well, anyway—so  
we were married, very small ceremony, one of his friends came down the day before we were  
getting married—they didn’t know we were getting married. My sane sister came up, his family  
came, our pre-marriage—the night before was, like, a barbecue in my background, it was just a  
very, very small scale. My sister, who’s been married forever, married when she was eighteen—

negligee. Always tried to sort of quaff me in womanly ways, which I rebelled, even now you can see in my —[laughs] but yeah. My [youngest] brother, who had then just gotten his license— was to take us down to the train station, we were gonna come back here and then eventually go overseas for—a trip, which I had to book. But he went to visit his girlfriend, who was not too far from the church, and so, we all have these pictures of us looking at watches, like, “When are they gonna go? When are they gonna go?” We stayed at a hotel in Saint Louis, I don’t even remember anything about it. Saint Louis was still in transition then. It was too far from the train station, so in the morning, we ended up calling my mother to come take us to the train station, this was the honeymoon night, right? We then took a train out to Baltimore, stayed in one of his— someone he taught with at school, in their apartment. It was Hurricane Carla that night, we forgot to close the windows, so we flooded the apartment— we ended up flying to Ireland and then spent— a little bit of time wandering around the continent. But I had been there before, so I think Tom never forgave me because, “Oh, well, when I went with Susanne, I saw this.” I was a free spirit and with him, I was trying to— anyway —

02:10:37 Q: With him, you were trying to?

Connell: And I lost my purse. And I lost my ring the second day, when we landed in— when we were camping in Switzerland and I lost my ring. I went into wash my hands and I took off the wedding ring and it was gone. Omens.

02:10:55 Q: Yes [laughs]. Oh, no, what— what did you say a moment ago about—

Connell: Oh, that he—yeah, that I had traveled in some of these places in the summer of 1970 with a good friend of mine before I went to Oxford—

02:11:09 Q: Right, well, what were you trying to be like with Tom? That's what I wasn't quite—you mumbled.

Connell: Oh, I think again—I was probably—I was feeling I couldn't really share exactly how I felt because he wanted to be in control, it was his way. He wanted to kind of call the shots and he really didn't care what I had done before. I mean, he thought I probably had slept all over Europe, I'm pretty sure he—he never had that discussion with me, but he probably thought I had.

02:11:36 Q: Uh-huh, right, so—

[Crosstalk]

02:11:39 Q: So I'm beginning to sense you couldn't quite be who you really are.

Connell: Yeah—no, I mean, that was a theme, and I—you know, it's like, wake up, Frances. But I didn't. I just kind of persisted. And again, there were lots of good things. Eventually, we had amazing financial security and I think—and then, the kids—so what else could I offer them? To stick with it. So—yeah, so that was that, and we came back and he worked and I, with my Masters and my Barnard education, I worked at Friendly Ice Cream in this tiny little town north

anything. You once asked me if I could help raise money and I realized, eh, I never got over that.

02:12:20 Q: Never got over that [laughs].

Connell: And then, I—we applied to Peace Corps, and this had been one of the conditions of getting married that, you know—will we apply to Peace Corps, maybe? Because I had been wanting since the sixth grade, when I first saw Kennedy—I wanted to go to Peace Corps. So yeah, we got accepted to Peace Corps and after our first year of marriage, we went off to Kabul—to Afghanistan.

02:12:44 Q: So tell me some things that stand out from that—and how many years were you in the Peace Corps?

Connell: Three, three.

02:12:51 Q: Three. And were you in—Afghanistan the whole time, did you—okay.

Connell: We were in Afghanistan, yes, in terms of our work the whole time. We spent—they gave us very generous vacations in those days, so we spent one—between our first and second year, we went to Greece, traveled over land through—Iran and Turkey, which was an amazing experience. We just crossed into Greece and the Cypress War began, the Turk-Cypress War began.

02:13:22 Q: So this was what year?

Connell: 1973—'74. We married in—

02:13:28 Q: Okay, so you were—so backtrack for a second—

[Crosstalk]

Connell: We got married in '72, we went in '73 to Peace Corps, so it would have been the following summer, '74.

02:13:38 Q: So '73 to '76 you were in the Peace Corps? Okay. So now, we're in the summer of '74—

Connell: '74, uh-huh.

02:13:45 Q: And you enter Greece, and it's the—the Cypress War has been declared.

Connell: Yeah, we just crossed the border and they seized all the trains and threw us off and—  
for military purposes. So it was a bit dramatic and we eventually made our way and did  
everything we wanted to in Greece and made our way back.

Connell: Well, when we first arrived, I—we just happened to hear someone speaking English, I remember, she took us home, she had been living there, she was from London and gave us a place to stay that night and kind of negotiated for us to get on a bus the—not the—yes, was it the Thessaloniki, I guess? Yeah. Alexandroupolis [Greece]. Yeah, I'm forgetting.

02:14:29 Q: Yeah, anyway, the northern part of Greece, right? All right.

Connell: Yeah. And that was quite dramatic. You know, watching the—the loads of soldiers going by in the opposite road, going toward Turkey and not knowing what was happening. We also were—up on the—we were up at the Acropolis at the time the—the coup that threw out the military happened, so we're looking down—it's the birth of democracy, right there in front of us. It was a very interesting summer, yeah.

02:14:57 Q: Uh-huh, tell me more, so what was the—about that—and what it was like, when that—after that coup.

Connell: Which coup? Oh, the coup—

02:15:06 Q: You said—you said—that the—



in the streets. I don't remember who it was, but a famous actress was performing at—I guess the Titus Andronicus ancient, ancient theatre, the base of the—Parthenon, on the Acropolis Hill, and I just remember mob scenes of people trying to get tickets to see her because finally, she was no longer a political prisoner and was going to perform. I don't remember much discussion—when we were up in the islands, when we went to a couple of the islands.

02:15:41 Q: Uh-huh, a sense of euphoria in—in Athens and the people you were around, anyway, right?

Connell: There was definitely a sense of euphoria and people who had been retained were now free—yeah, yeah. It was a good feeling. The train—we took the train back across Turkey and it was also an interesting experience, looking out the window and just seeing a very different kind of life. Arriving at the border of Afghanistan and getting back—

02:16:06 Q: So say more about being a different kind of life.

Connell: Oh, just—I mean, it was a very rural area. I thought the train was quite posh, it was the old—it was part of the old Orient Express, I guess, and we just—it was an old fashioned train, but I just remember it was kind of a fun experience, you know, guys with—dressed to the tees bringing us water and pillows. I'm sure it cost nothing because we had no money then. I keep saying that, “We had no money, we had no money,” but—we traveled economically. But yeah, so

exotic as you could get.

02:16:47 Q: Is about as—

Connell: About as exotic as you could get. And yet, there was a commonality there because people considered us—unlike now—“people of the book,” common peoples of the book. We were respected, even though we weren’t Muslims, because we also had the same prophets and Jesus was considered, you know, a great prophet. A lot of respect, a tremendous amount of respect. I taught—we taught at—boys’ and girls’ schools, respectively, in a small village, near the Russian border, were extremely well treated. People who had nothing insisted on providing us lunches and dinners, what have you. Lots of fantastic weddings. And when they were my own students, it made me sad because they were always very young. Trauma when we first arrived, there was a coup, the king was thrown out. Early in July, we had arrived—I think we had been there about ten days at that point. So—different—the cousin of the king, Mohammed Daud [Khan] moved in and—we didn’t really know what our future was gonna be. As it turned out, he kind of ignored us all and had spies everywhere, which I only learned about years later. And eventually, pulled out the volunteers from what were called the provinces, the non-Kabul area.

It became—it was quite instrumental in my life in two ways, I suppose—one was because it was a traditional culture and although I was—we were totally immersed in it and my language skills were as good at Tom’s. I had fewer opportunities to talk because, in one world, as the teacher, I was a bit—as a teacher and as the American, I was kind of a neuter individual, so I would be

you know, they would look over at Tom and—yeah. I was—womanhood was really tested because my students were only interested in how long my hair was, it was very long then, what color clothes I wore to school and what I did in America and why we didn't have babies yet. And these were things that were not high on my consideration. And then, I guess—so one was sort of the deference—I was beginning, again, to be deferring to Tom because—socially, that was somewhat expected of me there.

On the other hand, I was, you know, the third year we were in Kabul, I was the head of the English Department for the Faculty of Engineering, I was in on lots of the decisions, I was—it was a pretty prestigious position. I think that was because I was the only one that had a Masters in English in that particular cycle of Peace Corps. And he was promoted to sort of a volunteer/non-volunteer. He was selected by the Country Director to go around and sort of bring information to all the volunteers who were out in other parts of the country. So again, there was kind of this sense that we both had—we were both much respected for education there, but I also, again, was very much rebellion against him. It was like, “Oh, my gosh, this is an international community, I want to be part of it, oh, this guy is so neat,” and I was very flirtatious, I was—very flirtatious, yeah.

02:20:19 Q: Flirtatious?

Connell: Flirtatious, I met a lot of guys I just adored and I spent time with them—my colleagues at the university and I would have lunch with them and Tom was gone a lot. You know, again, we

hurt and he would storm out and I would cry. Just, you know, unfortunate stuff—yeah, but I guess the third that that was really—I was—the third thing that was important about that is I was doing what I wanted to do, I thought I was helping something in the world, I was being a diplomat for the United States, I was not pushing the American Agenda, per se, I thought, but I was one-on-one, opening up—in the girls school and then later, at the university—particularly in the girls school the first two years in the village, you know, an opportunity for education, which I strongly believed in. And that was very fulfilling. I had some kids who were just brilliant—brilliant and beautiful, just beautiful. And I guess the fourth thing is I ended up using a lot of my field work, my—not my novels, my journals, when I ended up doing my dissertation at Columbia later—on—I did it on that village in Afghanistan and how it had dealt with literacy, what forms of literacy existed. Anthropology and the writer, which—

02:21:46 Q: Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh, right, right.

Connell: 868 pages worth of discussion [laughs]. Two bound volumes. Anyway, so yeah—and then, I've continued—I think I continued for years wanting to—I ended up getting a degree in International Development and Education, my doctorate, and—I always kind of was aware of what was going on in Afghanistan, was just mortified by—a lot of the people I'd worked with escaped and I kept up with them. I eventually worked on a board—I was on a board for about fifteen years for an organization that worked specifically with women's education in Afghanistan. So it's—I mean, it's been—I wrote a book about Afghanistan during those period of years. So it was very—you know, it affected many other things in my life—in subsequent years, yeah.

02:22:38 Q: Uh-huh, it sounds like it was a pretty pivotal experience in many ways.

Connell: Yeah, it was—it was very interesting. Yeah, definitely. And I think, you know, that's one of the things that Tom always thanked me for is that I dragged him to Peace Corps. Nothing—ever he did after that, I think, was quite as satisfying, maybe.

02:22:58 Q: Uh-huh, right.

Connell: Which is not to say that all the Peace Corps people were angels—I mean, weird—we had some weird people [laughs]. They weren't all there to save the world, a lot of 'em were there to just get good pot.

02:23:15 Q: All right, so you end in '76 and you return to the states and—

Connell: Yes, so we came back in '76.

02:23:23 Q: So tell me a little bit more about what—what was that transition like for you?

Connell: It was deadly, it was absolutely awful. Tom had applied to law school. One of the reasons we had stayed a third year was because his—all of his applications got lost, all right, you can imagine the—the mail system between Afghanistan and the United States, so he applied again and his boards were lost and everything—he applied again and got in. In fact, he ended up

had to go down to Kabul, which was twelve hours on this broken down bus in the middle of a snow storm to take it. But anyway, he got in—University of Pennsylvania, and we came back—it was 1976, the bicentennial, we arrived in—they're passing out Tasty Cakes down by the Liberty Bell and it was, like, whoa—and [William J.] Clinton—not Clinton—you know, Carter was running and I worked on his campaign. But the transition was very difficult. We had had a certain—at least, I had had a certain—elevated position in Peace Corps, at the university, a lot of respect, some status, a lot of freedom—within a conservative city. I couldn't find work right away. It was another one of those recessions; nobody really wanted an English teacher. And I was just—again, I think I didn't know the process of how to promote myself, or to put myself in the right places. I ended up substitute teaching, which was deadly. You know, you wake up to 5:00 in the morning to the phone ringing—like, “Can you report to duty?” Or you didn't wake up and that meant you didn't have a job that day.

02:25:11 Q: Right, right.

Connell: I eventually got a job working as, like, an Executive Secretary for an educational research program and I worked for a guy I called Genghis Khan, because he was—he was Pakistani, and he was very—domineering. And again, I was supposed to be using my skills as a typist, which, you know, I typed, I word processed my whole life, but I made mistakes. So that was stressful. I planned—the trips for—anyway, for the team of educators who—again, there was a certain amount of resentment, because it's like, “I should be on that team, why am I doing the planning?” But—I eventually got a job working—teaching at the University of Pennsylvania

coordinator for their writing programs, it was absolutely fascinating—

[Interruption]

Connell: I ended up becoming the—yeah, the coordinator, right underneath the director of the program, it was quite a large, successful program. And I enjoyed that very much because here I was, working with foreign students nonstop and they weren't just young undergraduates, they were mostly graduate students—from all over the world, spent a lot of time socially with them. Tom was in law school and was not to be found. So it worked out.

02:26:32 Q: So it sounds like in that time, like—so I am wondering if—in Kabul, when he was traveling, you had a lot—a certain amount of independence and it sounds like this was a similar—you had a certain amount of—because he was so immersed in school—

Connell: Sure, sure. And hating it, hating it. He always hated the practice of law—it's just, you live with someone for thirty years who hates what he's doing, what does that do to you? And vice versa. He claims I hated a lot of stuff, too, so—we each had our errors. But anyway—so I—yeah, he—so he got a clerkship up here in New York. At that point, I got pregnant. We almost separated after his second year of law school because I was just having too much fun. I was just having too much fun.

02:27:20 Q: So say more about having fun. What—

Connell: I was, you know, I was spending time with other guys, I was going to movies, I was just acting like I wasn't really married. And he thought, "You know, I think maybe we need some space," so he moved out. And then, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I gotta get Tom back," so we went through counseling and I think that's when our—

02:27:43 Q: So say more about that sense, of "Oh, my God, I gotta get Tom back," what—

Connell: Well, again, it's like, how could I—I don't want to be another divorced kid/person in this family, there was that pressure, but I probably had lost my courage, too. And I wasn't involved with anyone specifically that I had any future with. So—I then applied to graduate school, I had applied to graduate school in the meantime. I was getting a full scholarship—again, a full fellowship to the University of Chicago for a fantastic program in—I guess it was called "contemporary thought," or "history of thought" or something. But it was a multi-faceted program, which I loved—just started and it involved creative writing, involved research, involved anthropology, history—everything you can think of, it was just—but I couldn't take it and leave Tom. I just felt I couldn't.

And I often—as I had done with the previous fellowship, it was like, why? But I didn't, I didn't; I got pregnant, we moved to New York. I was the only pregnant woman in all of New York, you know, that, of course—that first year. Again, I had a sense of shame, in a sense, because I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing. I was working. I had commuted, actually, I had started my doctorate. I had been teaching at the University of Pennsylvania, while he was starting the



classes, so I did the classes—

02:29:16 Q: Commuting where? Where was—

Connell: I was commuting from Philadelphia to New York, to take classes at Columbia and some at Teacher's College. Yeah.

02:29:21 Q: Okay, so that's where you— that—

Connell: Yeah, so I did that, and then at the end of that, I was pregnant when I was ready to take my—my comprehensives, and then I ended up writing my dissertation with an infant in hands and got my degree, I think, when he was two soon thereafter, yeah.

02:29:43 Q: And the degree is?

Connell: The degree's in International Educational Development.

02:29:47 Q: International Educational Development, okay.

Connell: Yeah, so. Yeah, so that was—that kind of whipped by, but it had some good and some bad parts to it. Again, I don't—I look back and I can't understand why I thought that by becoming—you know, being married and having a child was somehow—that I had failed. But I

about. But—it was very, very strong. So I immediately started teaching. You know, once—I had a really good friend from Radcliff [College] I had taught with at the University of—at Penn, and she lived in a suburb of Washington—a suburb of Washington where our house was, we did everything together, including—we ended up teaching at the same college, a community college, and we would trade off childcare, she had a little girl about the same age—

02:30:46 Q: So I just wanna make—so you're in Baltimore now?

Connell: Yeah, I'm sorry, so we moved—excuse me, I skipped some stuff—

02:30:53 Q: That's okay, now I just—right.

Connell: So we spent a year in New York, he clerked for this judge; our first child was born in February. We moved in June to Silver Spring, Maryland. I moved to Silver Spring—possibly because I had this friend who helped me find a house and I had been really close to her during the years I was teaching at Penn. She ended up becoming probably one of the best nurturers/supporters/colleagues of my life because she—you know, she graduated in anthropology and from Penn and from Radcliffe, we were on the same wavelength in a lot of ways, a suburban community, and we helped each other. We started a babysitting co-op, she helped me when I was writing my dissertation by watching the child, our little—my son, Brendan; I watched her daughter so that she could teach in the afternoons. And you know, we did that for a while and then she eventually left. Yeah—so.

02:31:51 Q: So—and Tom was working where now? And you're—

Connell: So he took a job in a large firm in Washington.

02:31:56 Q: In Washington, DC?

Connell: I was teaching at a community college, initially, Montgomery College—

02:32:01 Q: And you were teaching what?

Connell: I was teaching English, so English.

02:32:05 Q: Okay, so English?

Connell: Yeah, I wasn't using my degree at all. But I—again, most of—much of my—many of my classes had large groups of foreign students, first-generation, very motivated, very bright, very interesting backgrounds.

02:32:18 Q: Uh-huh, great, okay. So the—so threads, themes, since—you know, since then, the trajectory with Tom, the trajectory of your professional life, your—tell me more about that and all—

with the news—you know, as soon as you have a child, everything changes, right? And you learned it, as well. When I called her up to say, “Brendan, our little boy has been born and da da da,” she said, “Well, aren’t you afraid? You know how boys are in our family?” So again, it was like, “Oh, my gosh, I’ve got to watch this child, I’ve got to guard him, he can’t be mentally ill. I mean, it runs in my family, in my father’s family.” So there was always that fear—there was that fear that I couldn’t really do what I wanted to do because I had to be there for the kids, I had to monitor them.

Not that I was—I was very free spirited. They grew up with tremendous independence. I respected their initiatives, their intuition in so many ways, who was—unlike Tom, who was afraid they were gonna fall out the window or jump in front of a car, I tried to give them quite a bit of independence and I think they thank me for that. But—Tom was the one who was making the money. I was making very little. As a teacher, I—everything was arranged so that I could be with them as much as possible. I did a lot of volunteer work, I volunteered for everything you could imagine—Habitat for Humanity, church programs; I started adult forums on topics like AIDS and homosexuality and—the—the anniversary of the—the 1,000th anniversary of the Russian Orthodox Church and I mean, I just found speakers from all over the metropolitan area. We had the—what’s his name, he was the first astronaut from Sputnik—not Sputnik, from—Cosmonaut, from Russia, he was somehow in the States and I got him to come and talk at this adult forum. I worked—I was part of a group, mostly older retired women, they were like my grandmothers, it was called Seekers of Shalom, and we tried to convert everybody to the peace and justice issue. I started early programs on ecology and ways to—so I used the church, I was allowed to give

that three years.

02:34:53 Q: Mm, what church was this?

Connell: It was a Methodist Church in—Silver Spring, Maryland, which ended up being—like, [Christopher] Van Hollen, who was the representative, has been representative for years in Congress—years for Congress was there. [Michael] Mike [D.] McCurry, who was the Press Secretary for Clinton—he was there. They came a little bit later. Anyway, it was an interesting place. But it was an area where I could—use a lot of my skills without being paid.

02:35:19 Q: Right, uh-huh.

Connell: And as I later—it took me years to realize that one of the reasons was I also—I was accepted and I didn't have to be tested. I didn't like being tested. So I had a couple of full-time jobs—during that period, as well. I worked for Bread for the World, which was an organization that took issues, did—legislative lobbying on behalf of issues of world hunger. I taught a class at a seminary up in Baltimore at one point on issues of world hunger. I did a bunch of consultancies for Peace Corps on adult education, I mean, I was always, you know, doing something, but it was not a direct, career defined trajectory where I had a job and I was moving up some kind of ladder. I—at one point, I was paid to write poems for a magazine that later folded called “The Georgetown Poetry Review,” where he would send me current events—articles on current events and I would write a poem about them and send them back and that was fun. One of my students

Relations] work at one point, so they would send me these informations about what happened with Quality Inn in the various place of the country and I would whip up a little two-paragraph thing about—you know, why they should stay—for their little brochure, I mean, it was nothing very dramatic or great. But it paid extremely well, I remember.

You know, so I did a bunch of things like that—related to writing, relating to—I was very active in the kids—all the children’s PTAs [Parent Teacher Associations], I ran—I did every single newsletter for every school that the kids ever went to, plus Habitat for Humanity, plus this peace and justice program I was in. I was just—I was just—yeah, I was all over the place, yeah, I was all over the place, so—and again, I think there was a resentment growing on Tom’s part, because he was making quite a lot of money, we were living very comfortably, but it was like—why? Why aren’t you also working and making this kind of money? You know, it—and it was evident, because there were years when I clearly was very dissatisfied—I think by the second—I think by the time—I don’t remember being dissatisfied, I just remember being always so busy, like, how could I be dissatisfied? There’s always so much to do. There are always so many things to work on. But I think he remembers me not being happy with it—so I don’t know.

02:37:50 Q: So tell me more about that, him remembering you not being happy.

Connell: Well, Tom eventually left the marriage because he became involved with someone who was all the things I wasn’t, but he always told me she was exactly like me. But—this was twelve, thirteen years ago, so I’ve had enough time to outgrow whatever hurt there was, but there are

professional woman, and yet, I don't know that I had that option, because he didn't believe in paying for childcare. So—the times we had childcare, I just remember—he was—it's good, but I probably wouldn't have been that way. He—you know, we had to have—everything had to be registered legally, so we were paying the money for the woman and taxes were very complicated. And it just—he always made me feel like—and I wasn't making nearly what he was making. I mean, I was probably making about as much as paying for the childcare, I was never paid that well, which is a theme that persists—

02:38:56 Q: All right, just take your hand away for a second.

Connell: Yeah, yeah.

02:39:03 Q: So it sounds like there was—

[Crosstalk]

Connell: Also, he didn't really respect my friends, either. I had a network of other women—very educated, very involved, he didn't respect my church, really. He was like, “Eh, don't tell me you're gonna be one of those, you know, ‘Christians,’” —quote/unquote again. It was like he didn't really know me because I was not a believer; I wasn't—I wasn't at all—someone who was gonna stand up and testify about my faith. It was just—it was a vehicle for—bringing up a lot of things that I knew, for finding a group of common people who supported it, for doing some

lot of support. And he—you know, he didn't really have any friends, I think—I remember being part of a woman's group at one point and he just—again, I thought the marriage was over, he just couldn't tolerate that I was going to these women—"You know, what do you do? Sit around and show your vulvas off?" And it was like, "What are you talking about? We talk about our lives." I was part of a book group, which I loved. But I'd have to—you know, it was very complicated, I'd have to get someone from the co-op to watch the kids, so I could go because these were all over the city. I was a little active with the Barnard Club, went to a few things with that, that was very fun—a lot of fun. English here [laughs]. And that was enjoyable.

But he—you know, he was—he didn't want anything to do with Princeton, he hated everyone he'd known there, he thought—he's changed since then. He didn't really cultivate friends. And yet, he is probably one of the most charming, articulate men you'll ever meet in your life, he is just—you know, you wanna have him at a party because he has so much to say and he is able to blend in and talk to everyone. But not on a day-to-day, personal basis like with his own family. So again, he was absent a lot, so I felt, "Someone's got to be here to raise these kids, so we made this commitment," on the other hand, I'm busy doing these things and nobody's testing and giving me an A or B or C in this, I don't—we don't really need the money, which was a big theme—I thought—"Well, we don't really need the money for me to be making—I don't need to be an executive somewhere, this is fine." But I think that he—in that he sacrificed to stay in a very intense—as—whatever you call it—



Connell: A litigator, yes, thank you. I knew it was one of those “gators.”

02:41:34 Q: Right [laughs]. Uh-huh.

Connell: As a litigator at a very intense, competitive Washington law firm. Became—he was—rose to partner quickly, took it all very seriously. And claims he hated every day of it.

02:41:54 Q: Excuse me. [Coughs]

Connell: So I think there was a reason for resentment there, that he had to make those sacrifices and I seemed to be just doing what I wanted to, which wasn't completely true, but it was the best I thought I could do—yeah. And I would plan these amazing vacations for us because, you know, we could go—we went to Europe twice and it was kind of like something out of an 1880s novel, except we didn't have any servants carrying our trunks. Galan, our youngest, was—the first time he was just—well, he turned a year old—no, he just turned a year, so he walked when we were in York, England, I would remember. I would rent these houses for a week and we would stay in a little village in Italy or France or in the north of England, and it was quite lovely. And these were always things I had dreamed of doing and it was possible to do them with Tom—yeah.

02:42:49 Q: So tell me what stands out, that you remember about—you know, the—the break up happening.

[Crosstalk]

Connell: I was totally shocked, I was completely shocked. What had happened is that he had accepted a job in London. At this point, our youngest son, who had—had the fortune—because I had the kids learn another language, they were in a French immersion program, our oldest was—his third year of Harvard, the middle son was—just starting his freshmen year in college, there's three year between them—is that right? Yeah, three years between them. The youngest was eleven, twelve, and we had just—and he had been able to—he had been—a child actor. So in addition to everything else, he was—I spent time with him driving him to auditions, between Silver Spring and—

02:43:50 Q: Hold on a second—hold on a second—

[Interruption]

02:44:01 Q: So you were talking about Tom—

Connell: The break up, yeah.

02:44:04 Q: Yeah, the break up.

addition to everything else I was doing or not doing. Yeah, so my youngest had been—was in the movie *Chocolat* with Dame [Judith O’] Judy Dench and—yeah, and just—amazing. So I—and it was because he spoke French and—was a cute little curly haired blonde kid at ten. So we—I was teaching then and I just dropped my classes and got someone else to cover it and went over and spent three months in a little village in France and then in the South of England, where they were filming and that was wonderful. But Tom was back at home with—at that point—yeah, just one of the sons was home, I guess. And—gee, that’s weird, I can’t remember now. So anyway—I had also been trying to sort of facilitate Gaelan—‘cause he loved doing it, he loved shooting movies, he’d always been the one who starred in all the plays, in class. He was in musicals all through middle school, he was the lead; he was just a very sort of performing child. And you know, so I wanted to see him do what he wanted to do.

But anyway, in the middle of all of this—Tom was offered a job in England through his firm to work at the office there and this was 9/11 [September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001], and his mother had just died in October of that year and soon—right after 9/11, I guess, his mother died. And suddenly, I was confronted with this man who was just furious at me. Actually, it literally happened at her funeral. He wasn’t gonna have me come. I’d known this woman—his family adored me, had always loved me—he wasn’t gonna have me come to the funeral. And I said, “Of course, I’m coming,” when I got there, he wouldn’t pick me—I flew into Providence, he wouldn’t—they were in Boston, he wouldn’t pick me up, he just—he was just vicious, I had never seen him be vicious before. You know, he had been angry with me—anyway, he was vicious. So by January

arrangements so that—apply to school for our youngest son—

02:46:41 Q: Wait a second, hold on, before you get there—so after he was—when was the funeral again?

Connell: The funeral was on October of—I guess it was October—no, yeah—October—soon after 9/11, yeah. And—

02:46:52 Q: Okay, so what was—what was going on between the two of you—so he was vicious for the funeral and then what?

Connell: I don't know, he went back to work; I continued doing what I was doing. But there was tension there and I didn't really know what was going on. But then, he decided he was going to take this job in London and I began to make arrangements first to move overseas. At that point, it was only gonna be one year and I wanted—you know, Gaelan was gonna be in eighth grade, seventh grade, I guess—so of course, he needed to be put in school. I wanted him to be—he said, “Mom, please, if we go, I want to continue acting and being in musicals and can you make arrangements—find me an agent?” Because he had an agent. So I mean, I did all that homework. We flew over there. Oh, meanwhile—in the middle of all of this, my mother at ninety was having a hip operation, had been kind of left—it gets complicated, but I don't need to go into all of that, but she was gonna move in with us and then, of course, that wasn't possible for a lot of reasons, but I did help her get through the hip operation.

We—I guess we—I can't remember the sequence now, but once Tom arrived in London, I heard almost nothing from him. I mean, it was—he didn't even send us his address or anything, it was very—it was as if he just—all right, that life's over, I'm in a new one now. I persisted, eventually, I found out where he was, we—but it was always very tight—tight in terms of him communicating with us. Gaelan was devastated—I mean—our youngest, because Gaelan, of course, was—you know, this was—he thought he was the apple of his dad's eye—they're very similar, they're both brilliant, great performers. So I guess—yeah, Tom came back for Brendan's graduation at Harvard—again, it was hell, it was the most awful experience. He didn't want anything to do with me, he didn't—he just didn't want anything to do with me. We had a huge scene while we were trying—in Harvard Square, getting on the train, before going into the yard for the—whatever it was—but it was very ugly. And I didn't like confrontation, remember? So it's like—what's going on here? At this point, I had—earlier, then, I had flown over there, ready to have Gaelan interviewed for these schools that we were hopefully going to accept him. Again, he [Tom] didn't—he didn't—I met him at his apartment, he didn't do anything. He was like, “Oh, you're here, okay,” he hadn't made any arrangements. He just was very cold and not at all the person I remember. And he was clearly—he was focused on something totally different, and I—neither I nor Gaelan had anything to do with that world. He eventually told me that, you know, he had become involved with someone and he this was it, he had finally found the “love of his life,” although I was still the “love of his life,” but this was *the* “love of his life,” and it was over. You know, goodbye, you're not coming here. You're not moving to London. I have my new life now. So I went back—I mean, I—the specifics of it were quite traumatic—

02:50:10 Q: Well, when did he really tell you? When did he tell you?

Connell: So I think we must have gone over—my mother had just had her operation, my sister was there with her—it was probably May—May of 2002—2002—yeah—

02:50:24 Q: —2002—you're right—

[Crosstalk]

Connell: 2002, yeah. Meanwhile, Afghanistan had been invaded, I mean, it was—not invaded, but *we* had—*we* had invaded Afghanistan. I mean, there were just parts of my life that I just—they were too sad to even deal with, I just like—I didn't want to think about them bombing all those little villages and those poor people and what had happened to all my students. But anyway, this was my personal life, which was very dominant, obviously. But I was also trying to juggle my mother, whom I dearly loved and I really was supposed to be helping her. And this joyous occasion with—you know, “Oh, we've got a son who's graduating from Harvard, yay.” So I just really fell apart. I just really fell apart. And I think I just cried for the next three years, although, I got a [full-time] job right away. I continued to nurture Gaelan, but he was a young teenager, he was going through a terribly difficult stage; he was very frightening at times, and Tom wanted nothing to do with it. And then, eventually—but I—constantly, I bombarded this man with letters about his kids so he couldn't lose—he couldn't just drop us, I'm sorry, you weren't going to drop us. So I'd sent him letters—and anyway, that was my psychology—and I

had other affairs, but this was different.

02:51:43 Q: He had had other affairs?

Connell: Yeah. He had one other affair when I was—just before I got pregnant with Gaelan—I think that was the only one. Yeah, so it’s “only” the second one. But this wasn’t an affair, this was—he was cutting everything off, this was it. And yet, ironically, we had the best sex of our lives when he’d come back, he was, like—but not really, not really. What I mean is there was this warmth there on my part that I probably had—I finally let down the guard, I was like, “I can do this,” but anyway, it was—we don’t have to get that into it. It was—it was a very difficult situation and I really—this great, strong woman who had been through everything with my siblings and my mother and my father just felt, “This isn’t fair. This isn’t fair, I’m a good lady, why—why, you know, why is he doing this?” I couldn’t really accept that, you know, it was a midlife crisis, he had been miserable in a lot of ways. We had communicated on a level that was very academic and yet, he was—he had—I guess we both had guards on things we did—I mean, I shared everything, I thought, but he thought I didn’t—and he didn’t really share that much. Anyway, so—I got a job and ended up, you know, doing a lot of really interesting things in terms of my employment—to Baltimore, and then I ended up working with refugee resettlement, which was very satisfying—

02:53:13 Q: Hold on, hold on, slow down. You started to go—you started going—

Connell: Yeah, no, it was—yeah.

02:53:24 Q: Okay, so—so the job that you—

Connell: So we had been married at that point thirty years, so it wasn't like, you know—this had been going on a while, guys.

[Interruption]

02:53:44 Q: So the marriage fell apart, you fell apart and—

Connell: I fell apart, but I never quite gave up on him. I kept thinking, “Oh, he's gonna come back, he's gonna come back.” Which was ridiculous. Yeah. Which was ridiculous, yeah.

02:53:57 Q: Well, so—

Connell: I took up running, I lost thirty-five pounds in a hurry, which was great, that was a really good thing because with the last child, I had had a little trouble losing the weight and it bothered me, I didn't want to be fat.

02:54:11 Q: All right, so some changes now were happening for you, you—



Connell: Yeah, I am forced to do things that I had just not bothered with. Like, I had never done my own income tax since I had been a student—or I had done those when we first married and then he took over because he thought I didn't know math [laughs]. You know, so I grew again, I had to grow.

02:54:29 Q: And—uh-huh, okay. So growth is starting and part of that is—so slow down about the job that you found and some of the things that you've done in the last fifteen, fourteen years?

Connell: Yeah, so I had to—I had to cut back on a lot of the volunteer things I was doing. I was now working full-time, commuting to Baltimore, working in an organization—which had contracts with the State Department to do—well, initially—the State Department—Office of Refugee Resettlement and Health and Human Services, so government grants—

02:55:04 Q: Refugee resettlement? Okay, and health and human—okay.

Connell: Yeah, and Health and Human Services—to repatriate Americans, which was an amazing network whereby—if you were to die overseas or if you had lived with your boyfriend in Greece and he suddenly threw you out and you're now sixty-five, the U.S. Government will pay to bring you back. And to get you into a social services program so you can—get your life going again. So there were—often—a lot of our clients were children violated—violated children. Their mothers had gone off, had a boyfriend, a Mexican or Central American boyfriend who had gotten them pregnant and now they had this child and they were only sixteen and you

social workers in my office, real social workers. And meanwhile, I was working on a program for getting money for a huge conference that was gonna be taking place in Guatemala, in Antigua, Guatemala, on children and migration, which was basically this whole thing which blew up last summer with children coming—unaccompanied children coming across the borders and what to do with them and why they were coming and could we get the governments and each of the tiers, each of the levels to do something so they didn't all land in our border and have that much recourse? And a couple other things.

So I was—I enjoyed that work a lot, I loved my colleagues, I had a crazy boss—very crazy boss, but we don't have to go there. But—I enjoyed the energy of kind of commuting from Silver Spring to—I mean, I don't know how I did it because Brendan—Gaelan was in school downtown, near the White House, we lived in suburban Maryland, which was north, maybe twenty miles from—twenty-two miles from Baltimore, I'd take him to school, I'd go up to my work, I'd go back down, I'd often drive him to an audition, often in New York, then we'd go back and start all over again. He'd do his homework in the car. Anyway, I don't know how we got through those years, but we did. Meanwhile, you know, Tom's over the edge there, but I'm really focusing on myself now. I'm not letting anyone know that I don't have a husband any more. I'm not letting anyone know that I go home and cry every night—except Gaelan, who is watching this strong mother crying behind closed doors for way too long and is struggling himself with—you know, just being a teenage boy—or pre-teenage, and whose brothers were all in college now, so he's on his own, too.

Connell: So I got to—

[Interruption]

Connell: So I got to do a lot of traveling; there were conferences all over the world—social—social service conferences in—well, in Central America, I got sent on a UNICEF [The United Nations Children's Fund] grant to Guyana—worked with orphans, a survey of orphanages there. I did this thing in Antigua, Guatemala, I—

02:58:19 Q: Now is the survey for the orphanages part of the same job—about repatriating?

Connell: Yes, it was—actually, it was a grant that we were gonna get from UNICEF and I needed to do the preliminary work.

02:58:26 Q: Okay, all right, uh-huh.

Connell: I had been to the—Third World Conference on Women, United Nations—[in Beijing] that was in '96, the same year all my brothers—two of my brothers died. So I wetted my appetite for travel; clearly, I was doing that all alone. Did presentations at conferences, loved it, met people from all over the world again—go back, you know, manage what I had to do. And then, that job ended for various, weird reasons—which I actually wrote a book about. And I then

again—down in Virginia. And that was very unsatisfying, because now I was old enough to be working as an adjunct with people who are the same age as my son. So it was like, “Oh, gosh,” this is like—every day—you failed, what are you doing with these twenty-two year-olds? You know? You’re—it was very unsatisfying. So I left that and I ended up getting a job—again, for a very quirky organization, based in Arlington, Virginia, which did refugee resettlement and I loved doing that. But I was also supervising five other projects.

02:59:44 Q: As part of the job? Okay.

Connell: As part of the job. One of them was an HIV/AIDS program from the—funded by—CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. Another was several breast cancer education programs, because the focus was on—New Americans, on African-Americans in the Metropolitan DC Area and health issues. I had, at some point, and I think the reason they hired me was not my Barnard degree, not my doctorate, but the fact that I had taken a certification in epidemiology and biostatistics on-line and got the certification. That’s what they needed someone to—

03:00:14 Q: Um-hm. Um-hm. Right.

Connell: So I did that for a while. And then I got kind of burned out and then I moved up here. And meanwhile my kids went to college and did pretty well. And Tom came back after, I guess, two and a half years. Moved into an apartment. Because of him, Gaelan was able to go to a good

graduated, Tom became much more mellow and got along well with his sons. He was always respectful to me, but I—even now when we get together I’m sort of the shrinking sweet lady in the corner, and he dominates everything. You know, he’s just a big—big performer.

03:01:00 Q: Um-hm, um-hm.

Connell: Bigger than life sort-of guy, you just want to listen to him. Anyway. Too much Tom in this whole discussion. I—I don’t know what to do. I mean it’s like thirty years of my life. It’s shaped in everything I ever did, that guy was there. So I can’t like talk about anything without bringing him up and yet—

03:01:12 Q: Of course.

Connell: —I’m like, gosh, I sound like some ‘50s housewife, like you know, the little mommy there, the little wife who’s—but it—it was my life. So anyway.

03:01:26 Q: So say a little bit more about the move to come up here and then what it’s been like. But so you were having this life in Silver Springs, Maryland, right? And then sounds like the refugee resettlement job ended, or not? Or you decided—

Connell: No, I resigned—

Connell: I did—I ended up moving anyway. It was, again, complicated. One of my brothers, my little brother who really was—I adored, I still adore, just—[was a political officer] in the policy area of State Department, like my father and is way too politically outspoken. So he ended up losing his job, he didn't get tenure after being in Nepal. I mean I traveled a lot at that time. I visited him. My—my middle son was in the Peace Corps in Morocco. I visited him. I visited my—one of my dear in-laws in Australia. I did a trip to South Vietnam. I—you know, I just traveled whenever I could.

So anyway the move here—what was the question?

03:02:28 Q: What would you—you said your brother—

Connell: Oh yes, so why did I move when I did. Yeah. So I was really—I was really being abused by my agency, just because if you asked me to do it, I'd do it. Just—and we weren't getting the funding. We didn't get the funding renewed for one of the major grants. I was having to cut back staff. I discovered I really—I was way too soft to be a strong manager. I had the skills and know how but I just didn't have the personality to, like, say, "Do your work." So there was—so I end up doing a lot of people's work, instead of—

And then balancing that or unbalancing that was the fact that the way the—this may be true for lots of NGOs [Non-governmental Organizations] and I just didn't know it. But the way the grant

to be able to facilitate those. But when it really came, the grants came, the staff was me, plus a cut that would go to the treasurer, plus a cut that would go to the organization, plus a cut that would go to the national office. So they—they didn't hire. They didn't hire the three social workers I needed to do the resettlement. They didn't hire someone—a statistician to work with, you know, the—writing the—the grants. I was doing all—everything. I was doing everything.

Plus I was literally going to the airport, meeting the refugees, driving them home, you know, putting them in their houses. Helping—finding someone to help furnish their houses. Bringing things out of my house, like, oh gosh, they could probably use this—let me go. I just—I was out of control. But I didn't know how else to do it. Plus I was getting up at 5 every morning to commute to Arlington, Virginia, to avoid the traffic, the wonderful traffic in the DC area. Getting home at eight.

Anyway, so I started to say about my brother. So my brother lost his job and he—he still was kept by State Department but not in an overseas position. He moved in with me with his Tibetan refugee wife and his—his daughter who was born—had been born in Tokyo. I had visited them. I had this big empty house. It made perfect sense. But what I didn't realize was that I couldn't quite be fair with him about the expenses of maintaining the house. It—it was a lot of money to maintain that house. I wasn't making a lot of money. We hadn't gotten a settlement financially from Tom yet. In fact I waited forever for that. And I think my kids just—all around, I was basically not living in the house, but I was always out doing these other things. I'd come back and sleep.

And I just—I reached a point, and then there were some issues with—with them insulting my youngest son, not meaning to, but just doing it. And he never really quite forgave them. And I—I was really—again, I was torn between people I loved, and yet—so I talked about it with my oldest son, my middle son, and decided maybe I just needed to close the house up. And you know, move on. I had always wanted to go back to New York. I—I just always—I wanted some time to finally write. I could do it now.

So we end up doing that. I ended up having to literally move my brother out. I helped him find another house. I helped him pay the—I helped him with the down payment. I paid for a month while they stayed before that house was available. You know? I did what I could. But it didn't end well in terms of his relationship with the rest of my family, which makes me sad.

So anyway, so I came up and I was enthralled. I found this lovely, I called it an Italian beach apartment in this one hundred year old building on Riverside Drive, at the—the very beginning of Washington Heights. They were having their 100th anniversary. I—I took in everything like that. I came to programs at Barnard. I—I just had a great time. And I was very disciplined. I wrote—wrote some books. I meanwhile was teaching on-line for the University of Maryland, which was something I had—I had done even when I was running the refugee programs because it's—you do it when you want and it's always—you can travel with it as well. And I'm still doing that.



really enjoy living in New York. I will never forgive Tom for letting me grow old alone, of course. I've not been good at finding, you know, another companion, and I don't think—I likely won't. Probably could have when he first left, but now, no. And I think, you know, there's that old fashioned desire in me to just have someone to bounce, a male to bounce just simple things off of, not that I really need it. I've been very independent in the last twelve years. Done tons of things. Walked across Spain last year. Bicycled down the Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam. I've done lots of fascinating things. I don't think that I've suffered, and—once I stopped crying those three years. Yeah.

03:07:39 Q: So what are some of the other—so when you—so you walked across Spain, where—what was this—

Connell: So last summer I did the Camino de Santiago.

03:07:49 Q: Ah, Camino de Santiago, right, yes, yes.

Connell: From the Saint Jean Pied de Port in France, over the Pyrenees and then over to Santiago de Compostela.

03:07:57 Q: Right.

the rest of my life, just finding a trail and walking it. I liked it, I think, because of the simplicity. And the fact that you're—part of a moving international group. Every day you met someone from somewhere else in the country—the world. You heard their stories. Got me ready for the oral history project. You—you could live very simply. You really had nothing to do every day but get up and walk and listen to people's stories and sleep. I—you know, I kept a pretty vigorous journal. So I—I feel like I was also doing some writing which rightly or wrongly is something that I—has always been a part of my life. Yeah. It was great. I loved it.

Since I've been here I've done two marathons. So I've been running. I run in small races on Sunday in—in Central Park. I've done half marathons. I've done all the—I've done a bunch of bikes with Ride NYC in—yeah, New York City. This is the tomboy in me, or maybe it's sublimation for not having any more sex. I don't know [laughter]. I think that's probably part of it as well. But I love it and I love to do that with my sons. One of them will be running the Brooklyn Half Marathon with me next week. So.

Yeah, so things that I had not—as I said, I was a great runner back in middle school.

03:09:33 Q: That's right, that's right.

Connell: And I just never ran again.

03:09:36 Q: Right.

Connell: [Unclear]. Yeah, so I mean some—some of those themes that were never quite developed are getting—

03:09:40 Q: Are getting—

Connell: I'm getting to do them now.

03:09:43 Q: Um-hm.

Connell: You know.

03:09:44 Q: So you mentioned the Ho Chi Minh trail, biking down the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Connell: Yes. I was part of a group, which was run—mostly people from Britain. And people my age didn't want to bike it. So I ended up being booked with—and also most of them were in groups that—chunks who shared rooms. I was with this wild twenty-one year old Danish—no, Dutch girl who was about 6'7". She and I were the main bikers. Everybody else were like, you know, "Oh, I don't want to do it today." Or—it was a really rich experience though. I think we were transported more than I wanted to be. I wanted to just be on the bike all the time. But we saw a lot of Vietnam. We—we were up in Sapa—the mountains that—the ethnic neighborhoods, ethnic villages way up by the Chinese border, which was particularly interesting. Yeah. Beautiful country. Very moving though, to think having come full circle now visiting there.

Our guide, we had a guide who had been the son of a—whatever company—now I'm losing my language.

03:11:03 Q: Viet Cong?

Connell: The Viet Cong, yes. And his father had been injured. He—he and his family had been impoverished and he had somehow worked his way up and gotten educated. And he was wonderful. And again I—you know, everybody else on the bus is like, oh, you know? And I'm having these wonderful conversations with him. It—it was very rich. And—when we were on the bus, you know, they would bike us every—bus us between various parts of Vietnam, the various cities that we were able to do tours as well as biking. Yeah. It was a wonderful experience.

03:11:35 Q: So what other unusual places have you been in the last twelve years? So there's—

Connell: What other unusual places have I been—

03:11:44 Q: Um-hm, 'cause that's—yeah, that's not normal. I don't—that I'm aware of. Ho Chi Minh trail. Camino de Santiago.

Connell: Yeah. Yeah. Well I—I went to—I wandered all around a little bit of Japan, when my son— my— my brother was stationed there, was in the State Department. I—yeah, I—I was in China. But that was more than twenty years ago. Eighteen years ago.

03:12:14 Q: Japan, China.

Connell: Australia, I've been to a couple times. New Zealand—oh, I took a trip to New Zealand when I also—when I was visiting Australia.

03:12:24 Q: Okay, Australia, New Zealand.

Connell: That was interesting. It was fun. It was beautiful. Last fall I got to be a nanny granny and go to Mexico, which I had actually never been to, with my son, he was at a medical conference—

03:12:44 Q: So Mexico.

Connell: Yeah. I don't know, where else have I been? I'm going to Greece in a month. And Czech Republic, Bohemia, which I want to look up—I just want to see others with round square faces, like me—in the Czech Republic. So I'm gonna be there for a week and I'm actually gonna be biking part of it. I don't know. Belgium. Morocco. A day or two in Qatar. I had the chance to go back in Afghanistan for an EU [European Union] project run for the EU. But my kids said, "You're not going mom, please don't go. Please don't go. Please don't go." And again I'm sorry I didn't 'cause, again, it's like I endlessly defer to please people [unclear], who knows. I'm sure it would have been—I wouldn't—I would have missed the freedom and living in barricades and

03:13:45 Q: Right, yeah.

Connell: Travel having to be in unmarked cars. And who knows? But I didn't do it. So. Nepal, I spent some time in Nepal when my brother was there. Where else have I been? California?

[laughs]

03:14:05 Q: Right. Good, okay.

Connell: Yeah, no—and I'd really love to—what I would really love to do still is to see more of Africa. And I would love to do the Inca trail in Peru, see more of that. I seem to have some sort of connection with people from Colombia. They're all so gregarious and happy and they celebrate New Year's Eve by running around the block carrying suitcases, which seems to be a motif that should be in my life somewhere. So I really want to visit Colombia.

03:14:31 Q: Colombia, on your bucket list. Right.

Connell: Yeah, anyway.

03:14:36 Q: Good. All right, so one other thing we haven't quite gotten to which is you're now a grandmother.

Connell: Oh yeah.

03:14:42 Q: And you have three—

Connell: Two.

03:14:45 Q:—two grandchildren. So what stands out for you about being a grandmother?

Connell: Wow. That's a big one. I think the un—just the—the unmitigated, the free love that they are able to give. And you know, you don't find that anywhere anymore. You know? They're just—they're so loving. It's just so fascinating to watch their development, you know? I mean I remember that sort of with my own kids, but I was always, you know, so many other things to do, too. So there's—and then you can leave them at the end of the day, go back and do a little bit of your own life, which I couldn't do as a mother.

03:15:25 Q: Um-hm, right, right.

Connell: I—yeah, it's—I enjoy it. And I like where they live so I can—I'm an outdoor person as much as I can be, so barring the winter, you can wander around and I'd be walk—walking around outside anyway. Yeah.

Again, they live in an area, which has amazing number of racially mixed couples with young kids who are just—they're just gorgeous, they're just so pretty. Yeah. So I'm meeting people

wonderful experience.

But on the other hand, on the side, on the other side of it is I—I have some real fears because how do you raise a child in New York? So many complications that you don't have in suburban Maryland like—well just the, you know, crossing streets which I never was worried about, but—the education, getting into a school. The system sounds insane unless you have a lot of money that you want to put into a private school and then they're set.

But you know, I worry about them being overly taxed in order for them to get into these elite programs or [unclear] set for life. And I also worry about the state of the world and our politics and what—what are we—what are we giving to these precious creatures? So that's a concern. Anyway, I think I've said everything there is to say. I think we've covered everything. I didn't—yeah.

03:16:57 Q: Well, so is there—yeah, is there anything else that we haven't quite covered? Is there anything about—I don't know. Anything about being a woman that you would pass onto the next generation of women?

Connell: That's funny. When I've interviewed other women they often say that they would have been—they would have found a mentor. They would have spoken up more and asserted themselves. And these are people who have been more direct in their trajectory. I think—I think I'm comfortable as a woman; it never bothered me that I'm a woman. I think I was quite



needing to be a people pleaser, number one. Number two, avoiding conflict and any form of confrontation. And third, just you know, my sexuality, in terms of it not being something that liberated me, but something that I was—I was always—I remember this dear friend of mine, the one we—you know, who helped me when I first came to—to suburban Maryland and had—a small child and was beginning to work and had left the—a really lovely job at the University of Pennsylvania.

I remember Tom would—would always laugh—we would laugh about it. Like she was always multitasking. And we would—someone who was being critical of her would say, well, what does she—‘cause she’d be learning Quetzal and she was doing research on something or other, she had—her kids were just—they were into everything and knew everything. She was a great home schooler. She was organizing things, etc. And then, we would wonder, “what is she thinking about when making love?” And I think maybe there was a little bit of me—a little bit of that in me as well. I don’t know that I—you know, just my sexuality, I don’t know that I focused on it as being as important as it—as it is. I think maybe my mind was always, oh, well, what else for tonight, that was fun.

But I—I didn’t put it in a scale of being something really that should have built in my life. And been a source of pleasure, but also a source of—of strengthening my relationship, my intimacy with my husband. And you know, he’s a smart kid. He figured this out. Yeah. So that would be one thing that pertains to being a woman that I—I didn’t resolve properly.

one who was an actor. He's now running his own company and he's done a lot of PR work for small start-ups and other companies. He landed a contract with Western Union and basically, this is amazing; he was given six days to go to—to go all over the United States and to do—and to interview people about what—what was their version of the American dream. Well, anyway, in the process, you know, he called mom, “You know, do you know anybody in Texas? Do you know anybody in New Orleans?”

So I gave him my mother's last surviving relative, who is an eighty-eight year-old—she's eighty-eight. She's seventeen years younger than my mother. And she still runs a ranch in Hamilton, Texas, near Waco, Texas. And she—

03:20:25 Q: Wow.

Connell: —gave him the name of a cowboy who's a good friend of hers. So my son went there. And this woman, at eighty-eight, having survived breast cancer and lost her husband many years—maybe five years ago, still runs this ranch. And she—she insisted on putting my son and his girlfriend on a tractor and driving them all over her 1,002-acre ranch. And you know, then she wanted to make them a full course meal.

And my mom—my—so my son e-mailed me and sent some pictures and had a great time and got great footage for this little video thing he's doing. And he said, “Oh, she reminds me so much of grandma; but you know, she also reminds me of you.” Wow. You know? That's—that's two

said enough. My gosh. A whole afternoon I've been talking. You can cut a lot of this.

03:21:24 Q: So is there anything you would say to—

Connell: Oh, to—

03:21:29 Q: —to the you that either entered Barnard or graduated? If you—if you were to give her any advice or wisdom? Wisdom. Think of it as wisdom. Is there any wisdom that you would —

Connell: I think there'd be a lot of wisdom. I think, one, I would just say don't be so shy.

03:21:47 Q: Don't be so shy.

Connell: Take advantage of your talents. And—I ended up doing that. I did that at Barnard.

03:21:53 Q: Assert yourself; you have talents.

Connell: You have talents. You're as good as anyone else.

03:21:57 Q: You're as good as anyone else.

now. You need to be able to—you go step-by-step and you add—you're going to add to it. And each step is a little bit easier. You know? Your goal is—it's there and in time, you'll reach it, so.

03:22:16 Q: So life is a journey. You go step by step. And what was the last part of it?

Connell: That your destination—your goals—you know, it's not elusive. You'll reach what you want to do. You'll eventually do what you want to do.

03:22:27 Q: So you'll eventually do what you want to do.

Connell: Yeah. You'll become who you are.

03:22:30 Q: You'll eventually do what you want to do and become who you are.

Connell: Yeah. I always use the quote from [Thomas Stearns] T. S. Elliot, "In the end is our beginning—And we arrive at the place from which we started and know it again for the first time."

03:22:42 Q: Say that again, a little bit slower and a little bit louder.

Connell: In our end is our beginning. We arrive at the place from which we started. And we know it for the first time.

03:22:53 Q: Frances, thank you so much for doing this. Thank you so much.

Connell: You're very welcome.

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