

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Karla Spurlock Evans

2014

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Karla Spurlock Evans conducted by Michelle Patrick and Robert Solomon on February 12, 2011. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

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

Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Collection Session One

Interviewee: Karla Spurlock Evans

Location: New York, New York

Interviewer: Michelle Patrick and Robert
Solomon

Date: February 12, 2011

Q: Tell me about your family background, about growing up, where you grew up, how—

Spurlock-Evans: Okay. I'm from Willimantic, Connecticut, but I'm the first generation of my family in Willimantic. My parents were from the South. My father was from Salem, Virginia; my mother from—originally from Brownsville, Tennessee, but she had lived in West Virginia and then Gary, Indiana. The two moved to Connecticut in—right after World War II. I believe the year was 1946, a year before a tremendous winter storm, very much like the winter storm we experienced this year. I was born in 1949 in, not a rural area, but not—it was not rural, but it was not urban. It was a small town, a mill town where there were chicken farms, and I think perhaps my father might have worked on the chicken farms at first, but then he worked at the American Screw Company and then—excuse me, he worked first at the thread company, and then he worked for many years at the American Screw Company. So he was a factory worker. My mother, who had had several years of college at a black college in West Virginia, was a secretary, a stenographer. She was proud of the fact that she was a stenographer, and she worked at the University of Connecticut, which at that time was an agricultural state university.

Q: Can you tell the story of what made them decide to move to Connecticut?

Spurlock-Evans: Oh, yes, that's quite a story! I like telling the story because it tells you a bit about my parents and the way they operated in the world. They were Southerners and of course had come up under segregation. They were not beaten down by that, but they understood the limitations, and yet they shaped their lives as if they could control their lives, and some of the guidance came from—well, it came from within, but their sense of who they were was shaped by what they saw, sometimes in the movies, sometimes what they read in a book, and my mother was especially guided in that way.

After my father and my Uncle Bert returned from the war, and he and his bride and my mother and her husband decided they would immigrate somewhere for better opportunities, my mother suggested that they move to Connecticut, because she had seen a film called *The Egg and I* with Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray. This was a young couple who were making their way in Connecticut by building a chicken farm. So my mother thought that might be a great idea for this young couple. What's amazing to me is that they bought that [laughs], you know, that they said, "Okay, let's give it a try!"

They took some agronomy classes, and they set out to find a homestead in Connecticut. At first they found a rural farm with—I don't know if it had running water, but the electricity was not what it should be, and the heat did not exist. The government—the G.I. Bill wouldn't approve their purchase of that home, and that was really good fortune for me. It was right in the middle of—it was in Chaplin, Connecticut—I don't want to cast aspersions on Chaplin, but it was pretty

“country.” At long last they found a home on the edge of a town called Willimantic. They made a goal of trying to have a chicken farm there, but they quickly learned that you needed a larger coop than the one that was on the property they had purchased. They applied to the city for a license to expand, and they were turned down.

At that point, my Uncle Bert, who had education and had been an officer in World War II, went back into the military and made a professional career in the military. My father went into the factories, and my mother, who had been among the first black women to serve in the federal government as a secretary, went to the university to, as I said, become a stenographer. That might seem just interesting and incidental, but it was very important for who I became that my mother had some education, but even more important, that she had intellectual inclinations. She was one of few women who had professional interactions with faculty at the university, and by that I mean women of any race. So she quickly bonded with other women on campus, many of whom—there weren’t many—but many of the women were faculty. Let me put that in another way. There were very few women—my mother was friends with those women—some of them were faculty members. They inspired her but also gave her advice about how she might direct her children, and I remember that a woman named Mary Mothersill, who later worked at Barnard [College], was a woman in philosophy. My mother worked in the philosophy department, and so she knew Mary Mothersill. The fact that I remember that name says to me that this was a woman who inspired me.

There was a woman named Domina Spencer, who was very important to our family. She became a family friend and introduced us to vegetarianism [laughs]. I remember going to Boston to visit Domina and really learning to eat things that were of a different texture and flavor and color than anything I had ever seen. That was remarkable, but Domina had a very large influence, and she was the first person to suggest to me that I might consider the University of Michigan—that I might consider Columbia University. Of course that meant Barnard College; and of course I should consider Oberlin [College], because she was a Quaker, and she knew that Oberlin had pioneered in the education of African Americans.

So these are things that I learned, sometimes firsthand from my mother's friends who were faculty members, and sometimes firsthand, you know, directly from my mother. So that's all sort of important to who I became. I very early began to like pencils and papers and typewriters, because that's what my mother—my mother trafficked in those goods, and she would bring home multicolored papers that I thought were just wonderful. Pastels, and pencils of—in sometimes colored packs of colored pencils; but I, you know, the gift that I wanted for Christmas when I was in the third grade was a typewriter, and so I got a typewriter for Christmas, and the race was on. I never stopped. I liked the world that my mother inhabited. Sometimes I'd go up, and we'd have lunch at the local restaurant; she'd take me to a women's shop that was high-end, and this didn't happen often, but every once in a while she would go—it would just be us two women, and I would be able to buy, you know, a nicer dress at Judith Harmon's Dress Shop in Storrs [CT]. So I began to see that being outside the home, interacting with others in an intellectual environment, was a very nice life; very appealing.

So, you know, that's the way in which my mother's connection to the university and my mother's own intellectual inclinations—and I have told many people that—my mother set me on the right path. She read *The Brothers Karamazov* for fun and *War and Peace*. She liked Russian novels. I didn't inherit that particular love, but reading—she was a wonderful reader, and I remember learning to love books, learning to read, and read out loud and enjoy animated dialogue. I remember my mother reading *Charlotte's Web*, and taking on all the different voices: Wilbur and Charlotte. So that's how I developed a love of books and learning through my mom.

From my dad—my dad was not an intellectual and did not have any pretenses in that regard, but he was very proud of my mother. He was proud, and it was clear that he was proud of her intellect and her interests, which tended toward classical music. His were a bit more fundamental, but they shared a love of jazz, but not avant-garde jazz; basic Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong jazz. But my mother liked classical music: Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, and I—I could sit and think for a minute about others, Rachmaninoff. Again, I didn't inherit my mother's great love of classical music, but because of it, I had exposure, and I could recognize music, and I do love it because I loved her, and when I hear it, it reminds me of my mother. So that's what I grew up with: a working-class home, I would say sort of modest financial means, middle-class aspirations, and a conviction that I would go to college. I often asked, "Well, how are we going to pay for that?" [They always answered,] "Oh, you don't worry about that. You just make sure that you're prepared to go, and you will go." That's what I was told.

Q: Did your parents have political persuasions?

Spurlock-Evans: [Laughs] Yes, they did. Yes, they did. My mother was the activist, but a very— what can I say? She wasn't a hell-raiser; she worked with a man named Bill Olds on the Willimantic Human Rights Commission. Willimantic was all of about twelve thousand people, but somehow she managed to find a group to belong to, an interracial group that worked for open housing and equal access for all people in the town. All five black families, I guess [laughs] would be able to rent or buy a home wherever they wished. I'm being facetious, but in fact, that was my mother. She not only had convictions and aspirations to live in a world of equality, but she wanted to do what she could in the little time that she had. So she was a secretary for many years on the Human Rights Commission. My mother became ill when I was about twelve or thirteen. She developed multiple sclerosis. I began to assist her in her secretarial duties, and so I also began to learn more about the work that she was doing because I did some of the typing and helped her with that. But I understood that it was important not just to have aspirations for equal rights for all, but that one had to do what one could in the way that one could.

Q: What did—what way did this human rights commission choose to operate?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, they—

Q: What were some of the things—

Spurlock-Evans: They worked for open housing; I think they might have done a little testing, sending people out to see whether various persons would have different experiences depending on their racial background. They worked with the Willimantic city administration—this was the kind of thing that they did, as far as I know.

Now, I don't want to move on without talking about my father. My father was not involved in civic organizations, but my father, who was a very sweet and—I don't want to call him passive, but he was a nonviolent, very loving person who, for example, would stop along the side of the road to give anyone a hand who might be struggling with groceries. So he and I knew that this was—no matter what our schedule was and where we had to be, if someone needed help, my father was going to stop and make sure that they got a hand, or at least were offered an opportunity to be assisted. He was always giving older women a ride home or carrying groceries, and that sort of thing. So, by temperament, he was just a really nice guy.

On the other hand, one of the things we did as a family was watch *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*—this was part of what we did, along with watching John Wayne movies [laughs]. So I want to let you know that there wasn't necessarily political, you know, preference one way or another. We were John Wayne watchers. But we would watch *Face the Nation* and *Meet the Press*, and it was very clear that my father came down on the side of, if you will—he didn't have these words, but I would say in my language today, he came down on the side of the oppressed. If the United States was involved in any activities in Central America, my father was skeptical. “There we go again! Messing around in other people's affairs!”

I got this sense that, in spite of the fact that he had been in World War II, had been to New Guinea, the Philippines—and he loved his country, he was a patriot; this was the high point of his life, leaving his small, segregated town and going out into the world—he loved his country, but he was critical of the way we interacted with others. And it was a green light for me to love my country but also step out and be critical if I thought that we were not operating in the world in a way that was consistent with our best values.

Q: Why Barnard? Why did you choose Barnard over—

Spurlock-Evans: [Laughs] Well, to be very honest, my dear, I had a very anemic social life in Willimantic, Connecticut. Those were times when interracial dating was frowned upon, and, you know, as an older adult I have found out that a young man who I considered one of my best friends, who was white, had wanted to take me to the junior prom. Now, he told me this a few years ago when we reconnected by telephone, and his father had frowned on that. I had no idea. We were just good friends, and as far as I knew, he had a girlfriend. But he told me that he had wanted to ask me [laughs]—I didn't know that. I did know, though, that interracial dating was not fully accepted, particularly white males and black girls. There later, some of the basketball players who were black males seemed to be able to date interracially without any—too much controversy, but it didn't seem to go both ways.

For that reason, and just in general, because of the times and the attitudes of the times, if I did not have a black date, I probably wasn't going to have a date. There were very few other black people in my town. Some of the other black guys were more like brothers than potential dates. It was a small pool. So I could name some names, but these were people who were really close to our family, and it just didn't feel comfortable at all. So I had to go looking for dates in other towns, and that—that didn't always work out. I managed to import someone for senior prom whom I hardly knew; he seemed to be a nice guy, but he was not a boyfriend. Consequently, in addition to being intellectually oriented, because I had a lot of time on my hands, and I wanted to make good use of that time, so I put a lot of time into my homework. I fantasized about the day when I could leave Willimantic and have a date! Have the potential to have a boyfriend! So I say with great—I'm not ashamed to say that going to college was also my ticket to a wider world of opportunity to find interesting men with whom I might commune.

The long answer to this question is, Barnard was in New York City, and it was a girl's school connected to Columbia University. I knew there were certain schools that had a higher percentage of black students; Michigan was one of them, I was told; Columbia was another. So these were schools on my list. Also, I had said that I wanted to go to a school that had a larger percentage of black students, although not necessarily a black school, and I had somehow connected with an organization called NSSFNS, National [Scholarship] Service [and Fund for Negro Students]—something about Negro students. It was a national service that matched students who had good background and credentials with colleges that were integrating and

wanted to increase their pool. NSSFNS had suggested to me that Barnard College might be a place that would meet my needs.

Now, I will tell you that I was skeptical, because the last thing in the world I was looking for was a women's school. You know, given my particular social handicaps, I definitely did not want to go to a school where I could not meet men. So I was very skeptical at first, but my senior English teacher, Miss Baldwin, knew that one of our leading students two years ahead had gone to Barnard—that was Madge Rafferty—she had been—she had gone to Barnard, and so when I mentioned Barnard, I didn't get that "Where?" It was like, "Oh, Barnard!" And I remember when I mentioned Barnard, she told the other students in my senior high-high-high class—we had tracking, although it wasn't referred to as tracking, but we had a group that was definitely being groomed for college—and none of the other kids had ever heard of Barnard, but she went on about Barnard. She seemed to know a lot about the Seven Sisters and that Barnard was highly ranked. Of course, after she went on about Barnard, some of my other choices began to pale by comparison, because Miss Baldwin, who was very strict and very smart, thought Barnard was a place for an intelligent woman to go. So that's how I heard about Barnard.

Q: I think you've probably answered this question, but just in case there's something you left out, can you describe yourself as the young woman who first walked through those Barnard gates with your suitcase—what was that girl like? Do you know what you were wearing?

Spurlock-Evans: No—

Q: Thinking?

Spurlock-Evans: I can't—I cannot remember what I was wearing. I can remember more clearly a day—another day, and that was the day that my father drove me down to New York for my interview at Barnard. I knew that I was going to apply to college early decision. I had decided that I didn't want the stress of applying to a large number of institutions. I wanted to make up my mind and get it out of the way, and so I had narrowed it down to Radcliffe and Barnard. I visited Radcliffe and that seemed to me too formal, too Boston. I think I've said enough. It just didn't—it felt too tight for me.

When I stepped outside of the car and looked up at multiple-story buildings—not skyscrapers, but just tall buildings in New York, I said, “This is it.” Even before the interview, I knew this is where I wanted to be, because I was a small-town girl, and I wanted to be part of a larger world. I wanted to brush the hayseeds off my shoulder, and I knew that I could do that in New York. I can't remember much about the interview, but it seemed to me that the person who interviewed me was sophisticated, and everybody I met gave promise that this would be an environment that wouldn't be cold, that would be warm, but wouldn't be smothering; that I would have a cocoon, but I wouldn't be confined; that there would be a nest, but that I would have the world. And that's why Barnard. So that was the person that I was. I was a small-town girl with big-city aspirations [laughs]. I wanted to spread my wings, and I thought Barnard would be just the right place: comfortable, a little nest, but with the world at my—really at my doorstep. So that was—

that was Barnard. I can't remember what I was wearing when I arrived, but I can remember a couple of fellows that I saw standing around [laughs] at the gates, helping people settle in, carrying bags, and I thought, "Oh, yes, I made the right choice. This is the place for me."

Q: Did you experience any culture shock at all, those first few weeks and months? Was it—

Spurlock-Evans: Not at all.

Q: —very comfortable?

Spurlock-Evans: I remember wanting to—I loved my parents dearly, and I loved my little sister. My sister is five and a half years younger. They were all there; I wanted to give them a hug and send them on their way so I can get out and start exploring. I never looked back. It was just like, "Bye! Time to go!" They got in the car and probably wondered why I wasn't a little more sentimental, and I got out there and started checking things out. So I never looked back, and I never felt—I didn't feel homesickness, and I didn't feel—well, maybe I did later on, but not in the first few months. Maybe by sophomore year I was starting to feel a little, you know, sad and a little disconnected, but at first, there was just too much to explore, too much to learn about and see and interact with.

Q: Who was your first friend? Do you remember the first friend you made?

Spurlock-Evans: [Laughs] Not really, but I—you know, at the risk of sounding like I'm just catering to you, Michelle, I think it may have been—who I remember is you and Dona [Summers Carter] and I can't—it's not all very clear to me, but I was in a single room on the sixth floor of Hewitt. I shared a bathroom with two other girls. I cannot remember their names; they were modestly friendly but not overly friendly. One was a little friendlier than the other, but it was hard to strike up a conversation. They were modestly friendly, but somewhat reserved. I settled into my single—I was a little disappointed that I had a single—settled in, and then I went roaming, and something—I don't know if it was music or just laughter that brought me to the fourth floor of Brooks, and I spent a lot of time on the fourth floor of Brooks from that point on.

You know, there were people, there were some upperclassmen on my floor, whom I, you know, later became modestly friendly with, but I found myself in your room and the rooms of a few other people—I would say Annette Adams' room was a place that I visited frequently, but that was pretty much it. So Michelle [Patrick] and Dona were two people whom I remember right away as friends, and I am pleased to say that that friendship endures to this day.

Q: It is good that it does endure. Did you have specific career aspirations when you first hit Barnard?

Spurlock-Evans: When I first came to Barnard, I had a strong interest in psychology, and real English ability—I mean, I loved to read, and I—I understood that I could write. I wasn't a creative writer. I could do it, but it was painful to me; it was not something that I needed to do.

My cousin really expressed herself through writing, so I knew I didn't have the joy that she got from writing, but it was something that I could do. I had thought, "Perhaps I'll be an English major or a psychology major." Those were the two areas that I had thought of originally. I took an anthropology class in my first year, I can't remember whether it was first semester or second—Professor [Morton] Klass; it may have been second—and I thought then that maybe I could do anthropology. I found that interesting. Lots of things were interesting to me. So I started off—

Q: So you say, "Do anthropology"—what would your career have been? [Crosstalk] Would you have been a college teacher?

Spurlock-Evans: I would have been a college teacher—I couldn't see myself digging up bones in Egypt. That was not—but I can tell you this. When I was in high school, one book that I read that was very attractive to me, and this was about Margaret Bourke-White, a *Life* magazine photographer, and her life excited me. I thought, "Wow, to travel the world and take pictures!" So maybe I could have dug up bones, but it wasn't something that was animating me. I had thought more of—in psychology, I thought clinical psychology, although I might not have the terms for it. I thought of counseling people, interacting with people, helping people find their—you know, their balance. That seemed to be very attractive. Writing would have brought me closer to reading, but as I said, I wasn't quite sure—if I had done it, I would have become an English teacher, and I should tell you that my mother would have been an English teacher or—and this is odd—but a business instructor, but the kind of business that she was inclined toward was really practical. It wasn't what we think of as business today, you know—it was much more

a commercial orientation, teaching people stenographic skills and other kinds of office business, and that's what she eventually ended up doing, taking her training—I think if she had stayed in college, she would have ended up being a business teacher as they knew business—business for women at that point was confined. I had no interest in that at all, but writing, teaching English might have been another thing for me. So the idea of becoming a college professor was sort of lurking in the back of my mind. You know, there was Domina Spencer, who I forgot to tell you was a brilliant mathematician and designed the lights on the turnpike between Baltimore and Washington. She was a prodigy, had been home-schooled and got her Ph.D. at nineteen, so she was a role model. I wouldn't have been Domina, but the idea of being a professor was attractive to me. That was sort of in the back of my mind.

We were at Barnard at a wonderful time, because doors and options seemed to be opening. And we were—we were on the cutting edge. It was clear to me that we could begin to think about professional careers in ways that my mother had not. It was all very rapid, but law school seemed like an option, and by junior year, I was beginning to think of going to law school. I would never have been able to go to med school. Why? Because I managed to do quite well in my biology course, and I probably would be prosecuted, but in part I got a wonderful grade because I took half of a diet pill, and I just really—I became so absorbed with biology, and for one day I was able to really just do brilliantly on that test. However, I crashed, and I did miserably in a subject that I knew very well, which is history, or whatever it was I was taking—I couldn't even think after.

So biology was not—it was so hard for me—my transcript wouldn't show that, but it was not natural, and I felt that whatever I did ought to—not have been easy, but it ought to come naturally. I shouldn't have to suffer to do it. Law seemed to me to take enough of the skills that were natural—that I had a natural gift for—that I could think in those directions. But I have to tell you, and this is the one knock I have on my dad: when I mentioned law, he frowned, and he said, “Law?” And I don't think he said too much more than that, but it was clear that it didn't excite him, and he couldn't imagine that his daughter would be a lawyer. I was my father's daughter, and acted dutiful, and I think that sort of put a pin in my balloon. I can't blame him for the fact that I changed, but I know it affected me. I wanted to do something that would make my parents happy. He said, “What about college teaching?” [Laughs] And that's how he put me back on the track that I was on before, and I gave up the whole idea of going to law school.

Q: Do you regret that?

Spurlock-Evans: No [laughs]. I'm so happy that I didn't do that! There was another aspect to it, too. I didn't have any money, and law didn't seem to come with financial—there was scholarship money—it just didn't seem to be in existence for law school, whereas Ph.D. programs, if, I was told, if you couldn't get money to get into a Ph.D. program, don't go. And so that seemed a more fruitful avenue, and so I thought, “Well, let me take this sort of undisciplined interest in the world and find a program that would give me the opportunity to just roam around with a free license.” I was influenced by you, Michelle, because you seemed so happy with American Studies. Also, the woman that we now know as Ntozake Shange was in American Studies, and

she was also another happy person in terms of her intellectual pursuits. So I thought, “I haven’t done much with American Studies, but maybe I’ll think about graduate school in that area, because it’s interdisciplinary, and I would be able to take political science, which was my major, blend it with English, blend it with history, and do something just interesting and hopefully fun.” So I decided to go on to grad school.

Q: What turned you away from psychology?

Spurlock-Evans: Rats [laughs]. I took, you know, the introductory course, and I realized that I did not like behavioral psychology, and there seemed not to be anything else at that time. So that was a very quick decision. I didn’t like rats. I wasn’t going to do rats, so I had to find—I wanted to do people, so I had to find something that would allow me to spend more time with people. The other thing is, I was a political science major, and that seemed to come pretty naturally, but I didn’t like—you know what I loved? I loved political philosophy. Professor [Dennis] Dalton was my favorite professor. Political philosophy turned me on. Plato and Aristotle—I know it sounds crazy, but I loved that. But I didn’t like, again, behavioral studies, voting studies. That was not any fun to me, and a lot of work to get a little bit of understanding just wasn’t—I couldn’t see going to graduate school in that. Professor Caraley was trying to move me in that direction—I won’t say he was pushing me, but he talked about opportunities, and they were wonderful opportunities, but I didn’t want to do that, even in a top-flight university. It did not seem like the way I wanted my life to go. So I decided to go into American Studies, and in part I chose a place that—I attended Emory in part for reasons that aren’t, I suppose, respectable—it wouldn’t have

been respectable for Barnard because Barnard was so intensely, I guess you'd say, intellectual and serious and professional. But I also wanted to go to a fun city, and the people I knew from Atlanta went back to Atlanta, and I had to go and find out what was so great about this place that seemed to attract people back home from New York City.

Q: Did you enjoy Atlanta when you—

Spurlock-Evans: I enjoyed it, Atlanta. In fact, I had to leave Atlanta because it wasn't—for me, it was a little distracting, and I felt that I'd never get any work done if I continued to live there, so—

Q: Partying?

Spurlock-Evans: Yes [laughs]! I had a great time, and that—yeah, parties were very important, and, yeah. I finally got over that problem of not having a pool of men to date [laughs]. It was a nice, deep pool, and I had a good life.

Q: What about Barnard? How was that in terms of men to date? And what were your romantic expectations, and were they fulfilled or not?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, you know, I told you about my romantic expectations, which were that I would have a richer pool, and I—but I have to tell you something. I was romantic, and because I

had been denied the opportunity in high school to develop as young people do and learn the lessons that young people learn, I was anxious to make up for lost time. I wanted a boyfriend, probably first—you know, there's the hierarchy of needs, I learned that in psychology—well, at the top of my list was a boyfriend [laughs], and then we can get to the secondary needs, which was of course, you know, academic engagement when I had a boyfriend. So I set about to accomplish that goal immediately.

I managed to—let's put it another way. A young man caught my eye on probably the second day I was on campus, and I then proceeded to see if I couldn't make him my boyfriend [laughs]. I proceeded to fall in love with this person, whatever that means. I don't know if I was really in love with him. I don't know if I was just trying to create for myself another comfort zone because I had left the security of my home. In retrospect, I think that was very much what was happening. But I became emotionally very attached. I don't think he even knew how much. We were oil and water in many, many ways—opposites truly attract, and this person was very much different from me. I—

Q: How so?

Spurlock-Evans: [He was] taciturn, seemingly. Yes, sort of reserved, very serious, very driven. I was driven in a different kind of way. I think that's probably in—emotionally, that's what I would say—deep feeling. So, in that sense, opposites aren't always unlike one another. So—very, very deep feeling. Probably—I don't want to use a negative word—but secretive is the

word that comes to my head. A private—very deeply private [person]—much more so than me. So that's the opposite, but the similarities were that there were deep feelings. I just wore mine closer to the surface.

This is a person from another geographic region, the South, and I was very much from the North. I was very liberal, and I would—I just characterized myself as relatively free socially, although when I arrived at Barnard I was not, say, sexually experienced, but I don't think many people would have guessed that, because I had a much more, what could you say, open-minded attitude [laughs]. I was down for trying a lot of things, but, you know, I'm a weird person because I really am socially conservative but I love people who are free-spirited, and I surrounded myself with people who were not overly repressed. Even though my own personal behavior was a little on the timid side, but I liked—I liked being around people who were adventurous and who were not conventional. Above all else, do not be ordinary and conventional around me.

I just remember loving to be around people, and—pardon me, Barnard—but loving to be around people who were high, even though I did not—I'm like Bill Clinton, I smoked once, and I did not inhale, you know. But I liked being around people who were entertaining ideas and flowing freely and interacting, and some of those people were people who were probably partaking of some illegal substance. You know, it wasn't a prerequisite, but it just so happened that the people who liked to sit up all night and talk sometimes were doing so under the influence. I had to be there. So that's how I was. Now, this person was somewhat socially conservative, probably did not smoke—I did not smoke, well, so we were alike in that way.

Q: How did it go?

Spurlock-Evans: How did the relationship go? Well [laughs]—oh, it's heartbreaking. It lasted for a year. It just slipped into the second year but petered out halfway through the first semester. I don't know exactly why it ended, but I suspect that he may have been wiser than I was about very clear differences between us. There were political differences—

Q: Such as?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, we'll get into this later, but I was a Takeover person, and he was not. I think that we both were people who wanted to see this country change, and he—I would say really in hindsight, he knew there were bigger fish to fry. This was his shot at higher—at a certain kind of elite education, and he wasn't going to blow it. I should've been thinking that way too [laughs]. I was thinking that way, but I had a little bit more security that I could land on my feet. I was in a way first generation in my nuclear family, although my mother had been to college, a different kind of college, a state college for “colored people,” but I had a cousin two years older who had gone to Howard University and had graduated. Her father was a college-educated person, so college was available. I mean, it was part of my worldview; I knew that I would go. I thought that the worst thing that could happen to me in getting involved at Columbia in the Takeover would be that I'd have to leave Columbia, but that I would go back home and go to one of the local schools.

But I think he saw this as an opportunity that one wouldn't take lightly, and so in some ways, one might think that he was socially more conservative, but when I think back on it, there was a depth of anger about societal inequality, racial injustice, that was much—even deeper than mine, because he had experienced it on a level that I could only dream about, and I—you know, certain conversations led me to believe, “Oh, there's much you haven't seen. Oh, you don't know.” So I can't say that he was a conservative, but his behavior was moderated by an understanding, maybe, of larger goals. I knew that one of the things he wanted to do was go home and develop commercial areas in the South, and I imagine that that would be in the black community, but he probably had an idea of being a part of that generation that would bring a change to the South.

So, it—you know, you can look back; at the time, you say, “Oh, you should be in the vanguard,” but I look back on it and I realize that I didn't know as much as I thought I knew, and that what was right for me at that time wasn't right for every person. There were other students from working-class backgrounds and from the South who also were much more cautious about getting involved in the Takeover, and I might have judged them—just judged, I won't say harshly, but just judged them on that basis. Now I look back, and I know that I have no right to judge, because I don't know everybody's circumstances.

[Interruption]

Spurlock-Evans: I just want to sum up what this relationship—it was very passionate on my part, anyway [laughs]—

Q: I can tell.

Spurlock-Evans: It was very—I was very passionate. But I was also passionate in wanting to be in a relationship but maintain my personhood and my independent thinking, and so it was probably a much more contentious relationship than was comfortable for him. In other words, I liked to kick up a fight. I was always ready to have an argument, and there were—toward the end, after we came out of Hamilton Hall, I remember getting into a fight with him, and I can't remember what it was about, but it was very public—on the street [laughs], on the street, in the public eye, you know. I needed to be—I needed to be adamant, and I needed to fight, but I don't even know what the fight was about. But somehow or other, I don't know—maybe I was fighting with myself, maybe I was fighting with being—suppressing who I was in the interest of being someone's girlfriend, and I just did not want that to be. Yet, I was heartbroken that our relationship didn't last, because I really did come to make that relationship something that probably was much more than it should have been. Except on a deeper psychological level, it took me a long time to get over that. But I did.

Q: Well, could you—is it safe to say that was your first love?

Spurlock-Evans: Yes.

Q: Yes?

Spurlock-Evans: Yes [laughs]. And since I hadn't had it at a younger age, I didn't have the time to recuperate from junior high school love or high school love, so this was real painful to me, and it took me a couple years, really, to get over it. Not that I didn't date other people in that time; but the heart, yes.

Q: Talk about the strike, and the takeover of Hamilton Hall. What was your experience of the strike?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, again, I will admit to having impure motives for going over to Hamilton Hall. I got the word, and I don't know how we got the word in those days because we didn't have cell phones, we weren't texting, but somehow I got the word that the Soul Syndicate was over at Hamilton Hall at a demonstration. So I wanted to be with the excitement, where everybody had gone, but I wanted to go hear the Soul Syndicate, and I'll tell you who the Soul Syndicate was. The Soul Syndicate was a musical group that played a lot of covers—you know, they covered a lot of Smokey Robinson tunes and maybe a few Temptations tunes, and they were—you know, they were our classmates, upperclassmen, good-looking guys who played instruments and were very cool, and I wanted to go and hear one of them who sounded like Smokey sing "Ooo, Baby Baby." So that's why I jumped up and ran over to the demonstration. It really wasn't initially a political motivation.

Now, on the other hand, once I arrived, I came to understand the seriousness of it. I was not totally out of things. I knew that Columbia was a major real estate owner, that we were involved in taking public land, or land that had been designated for public use in the park [Morningside Park], and that we were going to build a gym on that site. I was aware that—in fact, I might have turned this into a paper. It’s hard for me to remember, but I remember doing a paper on the selling of the gym—how it was a class—it’s very hard for me to remember. It seems like I was doing this paper on the advertising of or the public relations of how Columbia was selling the building of the gym, and it was clear to me that there were some aspects of how this was being sold that were—that was not pure. One thing I remember being insulted by was the idea that the community would have access only through a door that we regarded as the back door, and that there would be limited hours the community could have access to this public building. So that rubbed against my sense of fair play.

I have to say that even then, and especially in the years following, I came to regard my relationship—I came to regard my need to be involved in protesting this as my way of standing up against my own comfortable privilege as a member of the Columbia community. I felt that as a black person, I should be involved in struggles for equality, and being able to use that gym, having carte blanche, you know, as in having a “hangout card,” required of me the responsibility to articulate inequality towards people who didn’t have that kind of access.

So some of my desire to make my voice heard was desire to stand on the right side with people who didn't have the same opportunities that I had been given, and that meant that I didn't just go from being a silly schoolgirl who wanted to hear our on-campus Smokey sing, "Ooo, Baby Baby"—that was an aspect of who I was, but it didn't take much for me to realize I wanted to have a voice and take a stand and stand on the right side of history regarding Columbia's encroachment on community property. So the cause was right to me. At least that part of it resonated for me. I was a little bit less emotionally attached to the anti-CIA dimension of the strike. I had an admiration for SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], the anti-war protest—I was in sympathy, but it didn't resonate—it did not resonate emotionally, whereas a stand for what was right in the community felt like an obligation to me. So that's politically where I stood, and that's why I stayed—because it was the right thing to do.

Q: Talk about the schism with SDS and the white students.

Spurlock-Evans: Yes, the way I experienced that was, we—we went over for the protest, and that was all fine. We stayed into the evening, and I began to feel fear. I had heard rumors that, and I'll just say it—I had heard rumors that there was some, quote, "Brothers coming from Newark with guns," and that scared me to death. So I began to feel really ambivalent about being in Hamilton Hall. My friends were there and they all seemed committed, and you may not recall, Michelle, but I recall you telling me that if you could stay and stand with the people, essentially, that's a paraphrase, that I certainly ought to be able to get myself together and do that. I know you don't remember it, but that's what I recall, and that's one reason that I stayed, that you and

Dona said, “Are you kidding me? Pull yourself together!” [Laughs] It’s like, “We’re in this together.” So, being a part of a community that included my friends and even that, another circle of people who were my community—they weren’t my closest friends, but they were my associates—they were all there, and nobody was boohooing and getting cold feet, so I was emboldened to stay.

When I heard that SDS had been asked to leave [Hamilton Hall], I had ambivalent feelings. Somehow that moved against my sort of integrationist upbringing. Somehow we should have been able to do this together. On the other hand, there was at that time a reverse sense of pride that black students began to feel—we felt that we had a more realistic view of how to do protest, that we maybe understood what—how reactionary forces might move against these actions. I remember consciously thinking that because I knew something about the Civil Rights Movement and what had happened to young people who stood up against America’s apartheid system, that we were not going into this lightly, that we understood that if we stood for what was right, that we would be willing to pay the consequences, whatever those might be, and we knew that violence was a possibility.

We also knew that we had been raised to, quote, “uphold the race,” and we knew that we would manage our behavior in such a way that we would not bring shame upon our families and our community-at-large. We knew this. We knew we could count on one another to carry ourselves with dignity. We had those models before us in our parents and our communities, and, you know, I was not living in a consolidated black community, but I was an avid watcher of the Civil Rights

Movement on television, and I knew how one was to do this with discipline! So we felt comfortable. We knew what we were doing. We knew how we would carry ourselves, and so that persuaded me that, well, if our leadership, who happened to be one or two seniors and a group of graduate students who were in this hall with us—these are black men and one or two women who are older and were in graduate school, law school, business school, that if they felt this was wise because they, quote, “couldn’t control SDS,” didn’t know what they were going to do, that maybe—who was I to say that we should make another decision? So I—you know, I went along with it, although it bothered me, and I have certain continuing feelings of guilt that we were the instruments of creating a separatist kind of protest.

Q: Talk about life inside the building for those—[crosstalk] Was it a week? Seven days?

Spurlock-Evans: It was seven days, and it was seven days that changed my life.

Q: Tell us about that.

Spurlock-Evans: Yes, I will. I told you that I came in there being, I guess I was about eighteen. I was eighteen, and I had some of the immaturity of an eighteen-year-old, you know. I was a pretty decent person. Cute guys brought me into that building, but cute guys didn’t keep me.

[Interruption]

Q: —Life inside Hamilton Hall for seven days.

Spurlock-Evans: Okay. Seven days in Hamilton Hall were seven days that changed my life. I went in there at least initially for the wrong reasons—my friends were over there, and a couple of cute guys were going to be playing the bass guitar and singing “Ooo, Baby Baby”—but when I got there, I realized that there were important statements that we could make, and I wanted to be a part of that. I felt a part—I felt that I could trust the community of others that I stood with. So when it was decided that we would barricade, that we would stay in, I was committed to staying, and I had no idea that we would be in there seven days, almost I think going into eight days. But it changed who I am—

Q: In what respect?

Spurlock-Evans: It changed who I am. I don't want to answer that question immediately, because I'm not sure I have the answer immediately, but I will tell you about those seven days and what happened in there that caused me to think of myself in a different way. I think—well, first of all, there was organization that had not—it was not pre-planned, but we of necessity divided up responsibilities, delegated tasks, operated in a disciplined way—I don't know if there were rules laid down or just—

[Interruption]

Q: Hamilton Hall?

Solomon: —what it was like there. The nitty-gritty of running it, not the stuff before that.

Spurlock-Evans: Hamilton Hall, as I said before, that was seven days—you talk about the shot heard round the world, but this was seven days that changed my life, and I can't answer how, but I will describe what that seven days was, and then perhaps out of that I can then summarize how it changed my life.

First of all, we were kids. I mean, we didn't—we would not have been negative about ourselves and called ourselves kids, but when I look back on it, we were kids! Yet I was—I felt secure. I felt that we had older young adults—these were the graduate students—who were standing in the place of parents. They weren't, of course, parental age; they were probably mid to late twenties, maybe early thirties, but they treated us respectfully, and they treated us—at least, I was scared, and I know that Bill Sales took care to make sure my voice was heard, or that I felt that I was being heard. I think he knew that some of the students were fearful and that they might not move to the most radical position, but these were leaders who had studied the Civil Rights Movement; they knew about SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, later renamed Student National Coordinating Committee], they knew about the principles, the sort of democratic structures and consensus—this is how I came to understand the meaning of consensus. We had lots of time, so consensus worked very well. We had hours to talk about what we might in theory do if any of our demands were not met [laughs]. So we talked and talked, and that's how they

kept us occupied. We're talking about what our position would be, and what we would—what concessions we might make, and would we stand, would we agree to terms if we couldn't get—

Q: Amnesty?

Spurlock-Evans: Yes. We talked about the terms of our demands, we talked about what we would accept, what we wouldn't accept, and whether or not amnesty was non-negotiable. We spent hours upon hours. There was not very much unstructured time in those halls, because these meetings of, in my memory, over 115 people—I would have said that at one time or another we might have had as many as 140 in that hall. But we spent hours processing, and the leadership was attentive. Bill Sales knew everyone in that hall, and I judged that by the fact that he knew what was going on in my life. I'm just going to declare this right now, I just have to say this—I saw him years later, after graduate school, I ran into him on a train. I was at SUNY [State University of New York] Albany in the department of African and African-American studies, and so that must have been at least, what, how many years later? Maybe it wasn't as many as I think, but it was probably about eight years later. He asked me about my boyfriend. He didn't remember his name, but he knew who I was going with, and this—as I told you, the guy I was going with wasn't in the hall. But he was aware of my social life. He knew that I was—he knew—he was watching. He was paying attention to everyone, and it appeared to me that he was attentive to the mental state and the sort of experience that the students under his protection were having. Maybe I'm endowing him with more care than actually existed, but I was astounded that he—of course, knew my name, and then knew what was of interest to me at that period of time.

So I go back to being in that hall. [We] ate three meals a day, ate well. The community, the Harlem community, was feeding us. I was—if I had to characterize my role, I wasn't one of the strong women, I will say that—I felt more like one of the children in that I was always lining up to eat, and I helped put my plate away and maybe helped clean up, but I don't remember being one of the more responsible women on the kitchen brigade. I do, however, remember that there was some sex-typing to the roles that were divvied up. In the inner council, it appeared to me that there were very few women—Mary Jane Barthwell was one of those women, and Carolyn Anderson, who was in International Studies, was one of those women—there were a few others who were in closer to the inner circle. Dona was a little closer, but not one of the, you know, one of the inner circle women, but she was closer. For the most part, men were in charge, it appeared to me. However, this was not a time when I would have taken my balls and run home because of that. It was just something I noted. Not something that made me feel altogether warm and fuzzy, but I accepted that, and in those days we were learning that “our men needed to take their place at the front because they had been suppressed in this patriarchal society where they were deemed to be a greater threat to the status quo” and to, you know, “the hegemony,” “the hegemonic forces.” So I understood politically why it was important for the men to take their role at the front. So I was quiet about that.

As I said, I took more the role of—a more childlike role, I will admit. It was thrilling, however, to see that sophomore guys had roles that were important. Mark Durham, as I recall, had the keys to the shower room. I believe it was Mark who had those keys [laughs]. But he was a sophomore,

he was only a year ahead of us, and he had an important role, because you know the man who had the keys to the bathroom [laughs]—he controlled a lot. So there were different roles, and some people, you know, had mop duty, and we were very concerned about leaving that place as clean or cleaner than we found it. That was coming up out of our social training, you know, our “home training.” We also knew that if there were a paper out of its place, if there were a glass broken on the floor, that much would be made of it and that we would be stereotyped and characterized as dirty, as destructive, as not respectful of civilization and public order. So we endeavored to be better than the best and tried to leave that place—as best you can with 125 people in a building—we tried to leave it cleaner than we found it [laughs]. No cleaning supplies, right, but we did our best coming out of there. There were some people who were probably mandated to take showers. You had a certain time when you had to go and use the shower, the one shower we found in the building.

What did I learn from all this? Well, one thing that just amazed me is that the men and the women treated one another as brothers and sisters, literally. Really. I felt that my family had been enlarged. I felt—there was not bickering. There might have been bickering, you know, maybe a couple people had some emotional sort of discharges [laughs], but for the most part, there wasn’t—there were no fistfights; there was none of the kind of stress acting out that you might expect with people in a—in a building for seven days. We treated each other kindly. There wasn’t, from what I could see, there was no explicit sort of crossing social mores that would be—that would be—would offend the sensibilities of the people who lived together; we were in close quarters,

but there was not, say, explicit sexual behavior. We were just really behaving in ways that our parents would have wanted us to behave [laughs].

So, that's the way I saw things. I felt—I felt cared about and cared for and heard. In those meetings, when it got close to the end and it was clear that something was going to go down, as we would have said in those days—“about to go down tonight,” you know—and we got afraid, we became afraid. I got the sense that the leadership cared, and we went through a ritual that—I guess I thought maybe it could be useful, but it involved the men on the outside, the women in the middle to protect them, Vaseline for the possibility of mace—we were preparing ourselves to have the barricades stormed, and to get hit, and to be hurt. I just got the feeling that, you know, it was sort of like a Claude McKay poem, and I don't think I knew Claude McKay at that time, but [as he wrote] “If we must die, let it not be like hogs.” We were going to go down with dignity, and there was this sense that we were a family. It was powerful.

When that night came that we were taken out, and again, I could be romanticizing, but I remember tears in the eyes of some of the officers that came in through the tunnels to take us out. We had an unusual situation in that some of the students had parents who were lawyers or in other well-placed professions who were in touch with officials in New York City. I felt in that regard that we got good counsel. Some of the parents came and were in consultation with the police commissioner on the outside and with some of our leadership on the inside. I just got the feeling that we weren't going against our parents, we weren't going against a certain element of the power structure in New York City, that they—there were people there, and I can't remember

the name of the police commissioner, but I remember thinking that this person is concerned that we be handled well. So it was a bit of a surprise—but now that I think about it, not really—that the police that I saw were black, who came in. I know that there was not a majority of black policemen in New York City at that time, so I think they had been identified and selected to come in to take this group of black students out of Hamilton Hall.

Remember that Harlem had been feeding us, and we were in collaboration with political organizations in Harlem. In fact, the night before, the community was out to protect us from the police coming in to bust us, and a local, quote, “leader”[Jomo Kenyatta] suggested they all go home. This was a person who probably was at least a double agent—at the very least that’s what he was, heaven knows where he was getting money from—but he dispersed the Harlem crowd. But we had that connection, and we felt that tangible support would protect us from being maybe brutalized.

When the community dispersed and we were told that we were going to be taken out that night, you know, well, we hoped. We hoped that they would treat us a little more carefully than maybe students had been treated in other circumstances, because Harlem had just exploded over the assassination of Martin Luther King. So we had that context of Harlem just having been in flames, and everyone was walking on eggshells regarding power, our takeover, and the support we were getting from the community. Nobody wanted to trigger, you know, another set of rebellions because of mistreatment of black kids who were standing in solidarity with the black community.

So when those officers came in there, you know, it was just moving to me. Many of them had tears, and it felt as if our older brothers, our cousins, our uncles had come in to take us out. And, so I had—of course, it's bittersweet, is all I can say about those final days in the hall. One of the things that made me so sad was getting the news that *The New York Times* mischaracterized us—they characterized us as—of course, they were talking about the whole strike, but from our point of view, we felt that we had not been characterized fairly. They characterized us as, in a sense, as lawless, and as not respectful of order, and we did everything possible to carry ourselves with dignity. We felt that story was lost. The policemen who came in there seemed to know who we were, to know that we were an extension of them. So, you know, we went peacefully, and they took us out peacefully. It was quite an experience. So I will end there.

There was another meeting that occurred after we were released from the Tombs, where we had been taken. We went up to Harlem to a public meeting, and one of the graduate students frightened me out of my wits. This was one of our leaders—talked about the person who we characterized as a turncoat. I'm forgetting the proper political terminology for such a person [agent provocateur]. We had those names. But he was—you know, this person was deemed to be an infiltrator, and so this graduate student talked about isolating him, and I thought he was going to say isolate him and tell him he'd better not do that again. But instead he said that he should be isolated and killed. Well, let us say that that was probably the last demonstration, activism in the tangible way, that I engaged in. It scared me out of my wits. I was perhaps ready to be killed, but I certainly was not ready to kill anyone, and when we finally all landed back on campus, after the

summer and the charges were dropped—hallelujah—it was very difficult for us to come back together again. We would always have a bond, but politically, those words killed—killed my spirit, and I believe there are others who heard that and realized, “That’s it. I am going to redouble my efforts to be a good student, and I will find a way to contribute to the struggle, but it will be nonviolent.”

So, in summary, I was changed. One—this is the main way that I was changed—I have a deep-seated conviction that all things are possible when people who have pure spirits and common goals come together to support each other—that all things are possible. That is one reason why the recent triumph of the Egyptian people, the young people in Egypt, has resonated for me. It reminded me of us. The naïveté of talking in front of the camera about tomorrow, and we’ve got to get everyone out tomorrow and talking to the foreign press, not understanding that their pictures were going to be recorded and there might not be a tomorrow if the secret police got a hold of them, but they didn’t care, and they felt that if this is my day to die, then so be it. I will die in the cause of liberty. That reminded me of the way we felt at that time in 1968. So that’s one way that I was changed. I believe in the power of democracy, pure democracy, and I believe in the power of listening to others and compromise and—this is going to sound hokey, but politics engaged in with love.

So, that’s how I changed. I became a college administrator after starting down the path of being a faculty member, but I loved working with students, and I loved fomenting revolution [laughs]. I’m joking about that, but I—if you can go and check on every campus I’ve been on, I have

helped students organize nonviolent protests that have yielded positive results, and it's an extension of our unfinished struggle, so that I can say at Haverford I was part of that, and at Northwestern I was part of that, and those are the moments—and even at Trinity College [laughs], a bastion of conservatism in some ways, I have tried my best to help students organize, focus their demands, follow through, and work with willing faculty and administrators to accomplish goals that will not destroy institutions but will make them stronger. And so that is how I've managed to work out these things in my professional life.

Q: That's wonderful. You mentioned before that you had come to Barnard in search of other black people with intellectual interests. Do you want to speak to that?

Karla: Yes, I do. What did I expect at Barnard? I expected to step into a world—well, maybe I didn't expect it. I did think I would have dates, but one of the unexpected consequences of coming to Barnard was that I found women who were like me. They were not me. We were all individuals. They came from different class backgrounds, different geographies, different cultural experiences, but they were universally bright and interested in learning, in ideas, in making an impact. That was—that was thrilling to me! I was so busy meeting all of these black women that I forgot about integration for a minute.

Some people were really upset about the separatist look of the dining room. We had a black table, or a couple of them, with one or two white people who were very good friends with one or two black people who were—became part of that, but it was—they were sort of tokens in a way,

you know, in the way that you reckon tokens. You know, it's like, "Who is that?" "Oh, that's just Allison!" [laughs]—people were virtually black because their interests—their social world—was so, you know, "down."

But I got caught up in really—it's very self-absorbed, it's all this self-absorption, but it was such a difference and such a thrill to be normalized in a world where there were others like myself. I had grown up in Willimantic, got to be quite well-known in that small town as a smart black person—read: exception to the rule [laughs]—although most other black people were also exceptions to some mythical rule that black people weren't smart.

Where did that rule come from? Sandra Moore is smart! Karla is smart! Everybody's smart, so where did that rule come from? Well, I don't know, people you see on television, they're not smart, you know, scratching their head and saying "Yassuh, boss" or something [laughs]—I don't know where the dumb black people went, but somehow they weren't in Willimantic, but, all right. So what I'm saying is, I was accepted and known for being able to do something with myself. I'm trying to think of the little thing they put in the yearbook about—"Much she knows and much she wants to know" or something or another—so that was my calling card. Not by accident; I worked hard at it [laughs]—I wanted to be known. If I was going to be "the colored person," I wanted to be known as the smart person as well, so that was by design. Getting to Barnard, though, was a totally different experience. I could for at least half a minute forget that I was a black person and live not as somebody's role model, because there were so many other

people who could carry that. So we—you could have the luxury of doing things that, if you were carrying the banner for the race, you couldn't do.

Q: Like?

Spurlock-Evans: Like pick up your watermelon [laughs] with your hands. I joke about that because my mother talked about being self-conscious about stereotypes that were projected by the media, and so she had told me that as she moved into integrated circumstances, she felt self-conscious about eating watermelon in public, or eating chicken with her hands. Now, I didn't—I'm joking, I didn't come to school with those particular handicaps. I knew how to eat watermelon to get all the juice out. But in a very intentional way, I felt free to be me because there were so many other representatives of our community who were exemplary. I didn't have to be stuffy, and I could be smart without being bookish and standoffish. I could “boogaloo down Broadway,” Goddamn—excuse my language—but I could do those things and be smart, or not be smart if I didn't—I could miss class even, sometimes, because there were so many other people who were holding up their end of the sky. So that was very freeing for me.

That's something that's not often talked about—that aspect of being among the first to integrate into historically white elitist institutions. We came in sufficient numbers that it could free those of us not to have to be role models all the time. Yes, and I took great pleasure in being just a little naughty, because I could. I knew there would be somebody who was going to be a straight arrow.

Q: At what point did you become aware of the Women's Movement?

Spurlock-Evans: Probably Paulette Williams [laughs], who we now know as Ntozake Shange, might have been the person who made me most aware. Well, no, that is not true. I knew about the Women's Movement, I'm not sure exactly when, but sometime in my second, third years at Barnard. I became more aware that women needed to act up, to move against rigid, confining roles. I was a ripe candidate for this kind of rebellion because my mother had always worked, and I knew that at times she made more money than my father. He cooked my breakfast and washed my clothes, and my mother cooked the dinner—you know, we came from an egalitarian background, of necessity. I'm not going to romanticize too much. I know that my father caught a lot of flak from some of his brothers and my uncles because he was so egalitarian. He set a bad standard for them because their wives would expect them to carry the load equally, as my father did. But I came out of an egalitarian home, and that's what I wanted for myself.

I got to Barnard. In my personal [life]—the fellow that I was seeing didn't seem to have any heavy-duty patriarchal ideas. He had strong sisters, and he even told me that some of my behavior would get me in trouble unless I, you know, could—I know you want to know what, but he was just talking about, "Don't leave home without having your own money," for example. I mean, he had lots of things that he had learned from his mother and from hearing what his mother had taught his sisters, that I was [clueless about]—my parents didn't teach me much of anything. They didn't have to worry; I didn't go on dates. So they didn't have to worry about my having money. But he said, "Don't leave home without at least a dime! You've got to be able to

take care of yourself.” And so I didn’t have any conflict in my relationship, except that, as you sort of dream about what the future might be, my career takes me here and yours goes here, what happens then? But that was never explicitly debated or talked about. So I would have a dawning sense that the more training I get, the more committed I get to a particular career direction, the more conflict I may have about this traditional role thing, which I didn’t even call traditional, it was just your role as a woman, which was beginning to bump up against a role as a student and a mind that was growing in me. But it was all on the back burner. “We’ll worry about that later.”

The most important thing, of course, was finding a boyfriend [laughs]. You worry about what happens when you become a wife later. In my practical life, that—the Women’s Movement didn’t touch me. But around me it was clear that there was an incipient movement. I later learned that it may have grown out of white women’s involvement—to some extent, it grew out of white women’s involvement in the civil rights struggle in the South, and they were consigned to the mimeograph machine. We now have Xerox and fax and everything, but that machine you had to run by hand. The women did a lot of the secretarial, supportive activities in the South, and they rubbed up—their leadership wasn’t always respected. I—this is what I’ve heard later, and reading history—many of these women, when the coalition fell apart between blacks and whites in SNCC, many of them brought some of their hidden resentments about their ill-treatment to their own struggle as they moved forward into, say, struggles against continued occupation in Vietnam, and the radical struggles of the ’60s. They were fighting for their voice and recognition of their power.

However, at that time, because of the sort of inculcation of a black nationalist agenda, and—I bought some of it, I was wearing red, black, and green shoes [laughs]—I had my little outfit, my black pants and the green [blazer], you know—no, I was buying some of the nationalist idea. At that time I thought that, well, there’s a difference between the white women’s movement and a sister’s struggle, because we want to be liberated to sit at home and have our man go out there and earn all of the keep so we can enjoy the mothering, we can stay home and take care of our children.

For a while, that—I bought that, and that seemed pretty cool—“Hey, wouldn’t that be nice, to take a few years off after giving birth?” My mother hadn’t, and I hadn’t expected to, but then, you know, I could deal with that. Our liberation sounded like liberation to become upper-middle class and be able to enjoy the benefits of having a husband who could pull in—bring [home] the bacon. I’d fry it up for sure, you know [laughs]. But that was not to be expected.

[Crosstalk]

So, you know, on one level, the nationalist and even the more progressive wing of what we were about as young black people meant that we were trying to open up options for our community and “support,” quote, our men as they move forward, and that might mean that we take a more traditional role, and that would be quite wonderful, not something I’d grown to expect. On the other hand, there were among us women who knew better. Paulette Williams was one of those women. You know her now as Ntozake Shange. But I on occasion read her poetry [in public],

and I've always loved a person who—I love the wordsmiths, sometimes when I don't even understand or even resonate with the message. If a person can put those words together, they've got my heart, and then I'll think about what they've said later. But she began—she was the first black woman close to my world—I'm not saying that we were thick as thieves, but she was close to my world, and she began to talk in ways that rebelled against this idea that it would be liberation for us to grow up to become conventional homemakers and wives. So that began in me the idea that one can be moving along a revolutionary track in racial terms and also think about a liberation from a traditional role that could be confining, and it would, right along with my own egalitarian upbringing, fit right in.

I remember at one point when I was out there looking for another boyfriend, a young man who seemed to have good prospects—he was headed to medical school—and I had heard that he liked me or I knew he liked me or something—and he said something to me like, “You'll never get a husband with that attitude!” [Laughs] I don't know if he asked me to hand him a plate of food or what happened, but I remember he said something like, “You'll never have a husband if you continue with that attitude!” [Laughs] And I'm thinking, “Well, I guess—” I don't know what I said; it was a rebellious response. I would like to think that I said, in my dim memory, I'm going to pretend I said to him, “Well, under those circumstances, I don't want a husband!” [Laughs] Well, I just remember, it was the strangest thing, because I knew he liked me, and I don't know whether he asked me to get him some food, and I said, “Well, the table's right over there.”

I don't know what happened, but I just remember it was the most curious exchange [laughs].

Even though I was buying the nationalist line, there was rebellion in me. I just didn't know how to be a proper, deferent woman. I just didn't know how to do it.

Q: Talk about whether the [Vietnam] War impacted you. Did it impact you through people being afraid of being drafted, people actually being drafted, did you know anybody who was drafted?

Spurlock-Evans: I did, but it wasn't a—indirectly, I knew about this. My cousin Pat had a boyfriend who went to Vietnam, and we knew this was a bad thing. My uncle—I had several uncles who were in Vietnam. My Uncle Bert, the man who I keep referring to, he was a commander, actually, at a base, and—what did I know? I knew that I couldn't really talk as openly around him or I felt awkward because I knew he was committed to this. When he returned—this was much later—he came back from Vietnam, and we truncated our conversations around that kind of stuff, because I didn't know—I didn't want him to feel upset or hurt, but he came back with—even as an older man, not exactly cannon fodder, but he came back with post-traumatic stress, with some symptoms of that. You know, jumpiness, and later on, he became anti-war. Not—he wasn't out in the street, but you could have a conversation, and he would talk about that, it being not a good war, because he had been in many. He'd been in World War II, he'd been in Korea, he'd been in this one [Vietnam War], and this was not—he talked about the pain that he had in watching young people killed. It wasn't a good experience.

So yes, it did—yes, I was impacted by—I must admit, the Civil Rights struggle was much more resonant for me than the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War was an evil; I was never for it; I was so sad at what it did to young people who I didn't personally know, but who I later heard came back mentally not what they were, addicted—these were young people from Virginia, from my father's town, who my sister knew and who my cousins knew. My sister had—one of the loves of her life was a young boy named Danny. Danny Q. just loved my sister, who had skinny legs [my sister won the "skinny legs" contest at the Joe Tex concert at the Salem/Roanoke Civic Center]. I mean—my sister was maybe thirteen when she first met Danny. Well, Danny went off to Vietnam, and he's still alive, she's still in contact with him, and I'll say, "Oh, how's Danny," and she'll say, "He's lost. He's been lost since Vietnam. He's addicted and mentally unstable." So yes, it did affect me, and I was interested, but I wasn't—my greatest passion was reserved for the Civil Rights struggle.

Q: At Barnard, what was the best time you ever had?

Spurlock-Evans: [Laughs] Oh, I'm just laughing because it was—it had to be in my first year. That first year was truly amazing. 1967-68—I had some good times. Well, I can give you some highlights, but I think—what stands [out] in my memory is really "boogalooing down Broadway" [laughs] in the common room at Brooks-Hewitt-Reid. We took over that common area, screwed in a little red light bulb or a little blue light, I don't remember what color it was, but it was dim in there, and the black folks at Columbia and Barnard used to get down! I remember there were—some white students came, Junie Mee was there [laughs] with her

boyfriend [Bruce], who was on the basketball team, but it was—I have never had so much fun in my life, and we would have these Soul Train lines. That was great fun, so I remember that very fondly.

There were wonderful times with you, Michelle, staying up all night, talking about everything under the sun, including “Amiri Baraka and the religious significance deeply embedded in Black Magic Poetry” [laughter]. We could make anything intellectual, we tried very hard to make sense, make meaning out of esoterica. Yes, those were wonderful times, sitting up all night.

There were times over at Plimpton I remember very fondly. It involved talk. I was not a card player. I remember the people who sat around playing bid whist, and I’d be on the outskirts of it, but somehow or other I’d find someone who wanted to talk, and we would talk. There were some times later, it seems to me, when we used to get dressed up, and I—at that point, the height of fashion with my little gele. I would put on one of my little dresses, I only had a couple, that were somewhat refined, and I would put on a gele and look like, I thought, an Egyptian queen, and we would venture down to—was it 95th or 96th Street or 97th Street, one of those clubs [Slug’s] down there. We’d hang out and talk to men who were older and more experienced. They were probably twenty-six [laughter]. Oh, God. But I remember Jackie [Fleming] was with us—we used to go out, and that was great fun. We used to—some things that weren’t fun were jumping—going to parties in the Village, or going up to Harlem to parties that we weren’t supposed to be going to. Either they were somebody’s birthday party—we’d say, “Oh, excuse me, we heard there was a party”—the cake and, “Oh, you’re welcome to have some,” or—

Q: Why were we were going to those parties—

Spurlock-Evans: Well, we were going to those parties in search of the elusive boyfriends—the boyfriends that just never seemed to pan out or materialize. Yes, road trips, looking for those boyfriends. But that did expand the world. I got up to Dartmouth that way. I visited Dartmouth, and many of you visited Princeton and Yale—at that point I had a boyfriend, so I wasn't going on those trips, but those were fun times. There were sad times too, you know, and I remember thinking of transferring, not because I didn't like academics at Barnard—I really had—I really enjoyed my classes and my instructors, great teachers—but social life after the first year began to get a little—wane, let us just say began to wane, and I was looking for greener pastures, for something new. However, by the third year, one got into one's major in a major way, and it got better. Things got better our junior year, and senior year it was all over, and of course there's the anxiety of finishing the senior thesis and getting all that work done and thinking about the future and planning what the next step is, so—it was sophomore year, it was truly the sophomore slumps.

Q: When you left Barnard, the day you left Barnard, what did you envision that your adult life would look like, and does your adult life look like that?

Spurlock-Evans: I didn't—I've never been as much of a long-range planner as perhaps I should be. I was always afraid of interviews where the person would say, "Could you give me your five-

year plan and your ten-year plan”—I did not think that far down the road. So I must tell you, I did not have an idea of what my full life would unfold to be. I just knew that my next four years would, I thought, be spent in Atlanta pursuing a graduate degree, and that after that I might find a place to work. I hoped that I would find a husband [laughs], although one of our classmates had told us that “if you didn’t have a ring on your finger by the time you were a junior, you could ‘hang it up’” and that was in quotes—so by senior year, I was resigned to the fact that I might never marry, because I sure didn’t have a ring on my finger. But I was going to go off to Atlanta and try to have a good time nevertheless and develop my mind and my professional skills.

So I didn’t have a clear sense, but I knew—this I knew, and this was partly related to the seven days in Hamilton Hall—and Angela Davis, who I respected intellectually—I knew I was not going to bust anybody out of jail [laughs]. I was not going to be able to be that brand of a revolutionary. I was not going to participate in a jailbreak and get Jonathan Jackson or one of the Jackson brothers out of jail. I wasn’t going to be able to pursue the desire for freedom and equality and justice in that way. I was going to have to leave the Black Panthers on the side of the road. I couldn’t go there. I had great admiration for those in struggle, but I could not do anything that involved guns or the possibility of killing anybody. So I knew that whatever I did that would advance the aspirations of a larger community that had not had opportunities to fulfill their destiny would have to be done in a nonviolent way.

I figured that, what do I like to do, I like to read—I don’t like to write, although when it’s done I like to read what I wrote [laughs]—but I’d better play to my own strengths, and that’s when I

decided that—at one point I thought I might be a journalist, even though I don't like to write, but my guess is that [it was that] Margaret Bourke-White impulse to go out and capture what's going on in the world. Then graduate school in American Studies became an avenue that I might follow. I thought I'd be a professor, and in that way I might help open up doors for students who had not had the kinds of advantages that I'd had academically, and that I could in my own way open up a crack in the door for those to come after me, who might be able to fulfill their greatest potential and change the nation in the process. So that's what my ambition was—

Q: And that's what you do, yes?

Spurlock-Evans: And that's why I'm very happy. Really, I'm very happy to be doing what I'm doing, and Barnard and Columbia—the Columbia Takeover, which I've resisted calling it—I know that's very limited—but that takeover forced me to think about how I was going to participate in change and the way that I would do that, and then of course, Barnard gave me the tools to be able to go on to graduate school. It was part of what enabled me to do what I do today.

Q: Talk about—a little bit about what you do today.

Spurlock-Evans: Okay. I've been working in multicultural affairs—I have the title of dean of multicultural affairs. At one point, my first job, I was dean of minority affairs, and that title in a different location sort of morphed into multicultural, and I'm sure if I had twenty more years of work, I'd be intercultural or I'd be diversity—these terms change, but what I do essentially is, I

have a license—again, I don't like having just one job, just like I didn't like having one field to master, so I'm sort of a jack of all trades. But I have freedom to sort of roam within the institution, and push the institution toward making changes that make it a place where a diverse range of students can find themselves, can hit their academic stride and go on and achieve.

I also have that charge now at Trinity, and I don't know if you want me to go through this, but I have worked at SUNY Albany, first as a professor, an assistant professor. I left that, went to Haverford and became the first dean of minority affairs. After that I went out to Chicago and worked at Lake Forest College as an assistant dean of students, then after three years, went to Northwestern. I spent a long time there, about eighteen years, as associate dean of students and director of African-American student affairs. It's all the same kind of work. Wherever I am, I'm trying to open up the environment for students of color to achieve their aspirations, you know, and to raise their skill level so that they can go on and do—be what they want to be, but in the process transform our society. That's what I do now at Trinity. At Trinity I have the opportunity to influence policy at a little bit higher level because I report to the president as part of the president's cabinet.

I also have another title that is a real challenge, and the work is yet to be accomplished, but that is senior diversity officer. So that involves attempting to diversify the pool so that the faculty—again, faculty recruitment is not really my bailiwick, but I partner with the associate dean of the faculty in trying to create an environment where we can attract more faculty of color. But mainly, my goal is to make sure that we are doing our—what used to be called affirmative action, that we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. Some of those early strategies seemed to get in the

way of the hiring process, and so many people ignored them because it seemed like it wouldn't work, but right now I'm trying to get us to revise what we do so that we don't make it impossible to hire a person of any stripe, but that we continue to remember that our society is not where we want it to be, and that unless we make a concerted effort to enrich our pools, we will continue to replicate our past. If we have been traditionally white, and in a place like Trinity, male, we're going to continue to be that if we don't adopt new ways of reaching and enriching, you know, the pool of applicants. So that's sort of another part of the job.

Q: Just a few more questions. In life after Barnard, when have you been happiest and least happy?

Spurlock-Evans: Great question. I was least happy when I was unemployed. I married my husband when I was at Haverford College. I had met him in my previous job at SUNY Albany, my first real professional job out of graduate school, and you know, we married and he moved to Chicago. I decided to join him. I left Haverford and was unemployed for a while. It's hard to remember. I think it was only a year, but it felt like an eternity, and I began to wonder if I would ever work in my chosen field.

[Interruption followed by request to repeat]

I married my husband when I was in Haverford. I'd met him in SUNY Albany, and he came down, lived with me, we married, and he then moved to Chicago. At the end of the year, I moved

out there and had a hard time finding a job for about a year. I began to worry that I would never find a job teaching or doing multicultural affairs, and so that was—that was the least happy time of my life. On top of that, he earned very little, although we lived very well, I have to say, but I didn't like getting an allowance from him—

[Interruption followed by request to repeat]

I married, I moved out to Chicago with my husband, who was working for the government, and he was entering government service at a fairly low level, so his pay was fairly low. We had a wonderful apartment, probably one of the nicest places we've ever lived, in a community that was well-taken—the building was a three-flat, well taken care of, so it was a lovely apartment, and it cost almost nothing, like \$250 a month, so we could live on his salary. But what I didn't like was that I got an allowance of \$10 a week from him, and I've never been so unhappy in my life. So after I got a job a year later, I swore under no circumstances would I ever be unemployed again if I could help it. And that may be the reason why I have not been following my husband, who likes to move. So I just [say], you know, “Hey, I'll see you when I see you,” because I couldn't do that again. That was the most miserable time. So that was the least happy.

The happiest I've been since leaving Barnard—I had a good time in Atlanta, hanging out, that was great, but I have been so happy since I came back to Connecticut. I am five minutes away from my sister and forty-five minutes away from my dad, lots of cousins. Family is very important, and I have been quite happy. I've also been happy at Trinity, even though there's

much to do because the tradition at Trinity is not as open as one would hope, so it's two steps forward and five steps backward, but I have colleagues who at least pretend to respect me and the work I do, and I have a chance—when I can find the words, I have a chance to articulate my concerns, and people who nod and act as if they're listening [laughs]. So I feel that I can make an impact, and that is gratifying.

Q: Do you want to speak—next to last question—do you want to speak to the differences between your children, who are—are they very different from you?

Spurlock-Evans: My children. My daughter is very different from me in many ways, but as she gets older, some things that are important to me are becoming important to her. She—you're talking about my children, that's two more hours—I know, I'm not going to go two hours, but my daughter's very shy, and I think some of it's genetic, because her father has a bit of a shy gene or something. She has picked up from both of us intellectual abilities, but she's got them combined, so she has her father's mathematical and abstract kind of capacities to see objects in space, and she's got my capacity to read and my enjoyment of literature. So she's able to do both things. Good for her. She has his concern about being on time and being reliable in that way, and she has—well, he's got a heart too. She's got a big heart, and I think she gets it from both her mother and her father. She's got my love of—she's boy-crazy, just like I was. She had an unhappy social life in high school, like I did, and she chose her school in large measure because there were lots of muscular, good-looking (incidentally), black men in North Carolina, where she chose to go to school. She has had second thoughts about that as a criterion for selecting a school

[laughs]. Since graduation she said, “You know what, maybe that wasn’t such a good idea.” But it was fun while it lasted, so in that way my daughter is very much like me.

She is increasingly becoming oriented toward community development and community uplift and maybe more in a practical way than I ever was. I’m much more theoretical, and I do my community uplift within the small confines of a college. But she’s becoming interested in community service and opening a clinic that helps people with public health and those kinds of issues. This is growing; this is developing in her; and it’s growing stronger and stronger, and she now works with the Urban League as a tutor and has done lots of that kind of activity, worked with homeless people. So that’s my daughter, and right now she’s preparing to be a teacher in Baton Rouge through a fast-track program to get her certification, and she’s going to teach.

Some of this—yes, some of it is she wants an income, but also there’s an idea of serving that motivates her. She’s just finished a year as an Americorps volunteer. It maybe sounds better than her level of satisfaction suggests that it was. It’ll look good on her resume, but she works with young people who have ability but who have difficult home situations, and so she’s in a home. She wanted to be an in-residence counselor, but instead she got the Americorps position, which meant that she’s the coordinator of community resources or volunteers or something like that, and she doesn’t like that, because it’s not direct service. Nevertheless, she’s in an environment where helping people is the primary goal, and I’m thrilled to see how she’s developing in that way.

Q: And your son?

[Interruption]

Spurlock-Evans: My son is like me in many ways. Particularly, he's a procrastinator. His strong suit seems to be words. Although he's not a talkative guy, he pays attention to words, and he—if he wanted to be, he could write. He could be a good writer. If my son wanted to be, I believe that he could develop into a very perceptive and fluent writer. Somewhere along the lines, I think it was when he was about seven, and he stopped reading animal books [laughs], he lost an interest in reading. But he does enough to get by, and he's in college, but he does not—honestly, frankly, does not like to read.

On the other hand, he's more of a new media person. He and his sister are just very comfortable operating in the world of—that has been, you know, developed with the advent of personal computers. So his love seems to be “mixing,” whatever that is—I don't know what he's doing, but he spends a lot of time doing it. He's got some programs that allow him to steal people's music [laughs] and put it together in new ways, and he gets great joy out of that. He also writes lyrics. I have not heard these lyrics. I am worried about these lyrics.

I think he wants to make a creative contribution, and I think he wants to be famous too [laughs]. He wanted to be a basketball player when he was in high school, but it became painfully clear toward the end of his four years that that would not be how he'd make his way in life, either

monetarily or in terms of, you know, being known. So he gave up basketball. He then became even more absorbed with this idea of hip hop, being something—I don't know what; I don't know if it's still a dream or not.

I've been talking about teaching lately. I've been trying to convince him that he doesn't have to say that he's going to be a teacher and feel great passion, but that would be a wonderful way to support himself while he pursues his career dreams, whatever those are. I think he's beginning to get comfortable with that. He's now taking some classes at Trinity College. He was at Maryland, and he left after two years, and he's now taking classes at Trinity involving education. That put him in classrooms, and he loves being in the classroom. He now has a class on movement and education, of all things—he came home dancing. “I had a good day today!” And he put his hands up in the air and started [waving his fingers]—so I don't know what the future brings, but I'm hoping that he will come out of all of this with some kind of certification, a degree, and a day job which will allow him to pursue his dreams. So that's my son. He's a great kid.

Q: You were just talking about some ethical concerns—

Spurlock-Evans: Ethical? Well, I don't know if it's really ethics. It might just be behaviors. You know, drinking and other kinds of things that teenagers do. I toyed with the idea that maybe I hadn't done my parental best in structuring my children's lives so that regular church attendance was a part of their lives [laughs]. I don't know—I went to church, and I won't say I rebelled against it, but when I went to college, my church attendance sort of fell by the wayside, but I take

comfort in whatever it was that I absorbed in a home that was semi-religious. We had the spiritual orientation in my home of origin. Church provided a social, I don't know, a social environment with people who were trying, endeavoring to be better people—

Q: What kind of—what sect of—

Spurlock-Evans: Oh, what was my denomination? It was Congregational. It was sort of loose, and I really loved the music. I was in a choir, and it gave me activities with kids whose parents I guess were trying to raise them with similar values. But when I got to college, I didn't do much of that anymore, and so when I married and had children, my husband had been Catholic at one point, but he also—I mean, he has faith and convictions, but neither of us were adamant about church, and we didn't expose our children in the least. So I begin to wonder whether they're missing something, even in terms of historical references [laughs]. You need to know something about the [Bible]—if you're going to study English literature, you should know something.

So I don't know. I sometimes wonder whether I shouldn't have done something a little bit more structured, but on the other hand, I watch my daughter evolve, and I am beginning to think, no, it's okay. The way she's conducted herself this past year, having graduated from college, has been entirely ethical in all the important matters. And sometimes I see Mari understand that in the work world, you have certain obligations, but you do not have to stay on a job forever if you do not feel you're being treated well. “But the students, they need—” She's feeling guilty about leaving this current job after she's done her year, because the young people—these are young

people who had troubled backgrounds, they have a hard time with separation. And so my daughter is feeling bad that she's leaving the job. I say, "It's okay. It's okay. You can come back and help them. You don't have to work there to do that. You can keep in contact."

So I'm feeling, well, it's good. She is a good person, and she has feelings of responsibility, and she does have an ethical core. Maybe this church thing is overrated or maybe I didn't make a mistake. So that—I'm sorry to have gone down that road—and even—I shouldn't say, "And even my son," but my son has been involved in some activities that I sometimes wonder about, and I would say that as he matures, I too see in him goodness and a concern for others, and loyalty, fierce loyalty, sometimes misplaced. So I think they're going to be okay with or without the structure of church.

Q: If you could go back to your first day at Barnard and give a word or two of advice to that girl that you used to be, what would it be?

Spurlock-Evans: That's a great start. [Long pause] I think I'm going to transform the question and just say to you that I will tell you the kind of advice I give my own children, who I stay in contact with because of the new media. So we're, you know, in touch through the cell phone and Facebook, and when she has concerns and issues, I've given her advice.

[Interruption]

That was a surprise to me, that question. What would I tell that person? I wish I could think about Mari [my daughter], and then I could pretend I'm telling myself. It's really hard for me to go back and advise that young woman, knowing what I know now about her inexperience, I would say, "Don't for a minute doubt your instincts. Go with it. Do what you feel in the moment you need to do." I have advised my own daughter, based on my experiences, not to be too cautious. Don't be too cautious. That even disappointments, and this is in matters of the heart, even the pain that, you know, a failed love affair can bring, will bring you greater wisdom. It will deepen your life, even as it brings you, momentarily or even for years, pain. It helps you make better choices in the future. It helps you to value good times because you had bad times. So I wouldn't change anything. I don't think I would change anything about my Barnard experience.

Having said that, now I want to back up and say this. Today, knowing now what we know, HIV [human immunodeficiency virus]—I would have different advice for myself—I mean, we were lucky. We were really, really lucky, but who knows how long that virus was floating around, so I probably would have cautioned that one should always use a condom [laughs]. I think I would probably say that, even though I was one of those early people to venture down to the gynecologist to get birth control pills, and I thought that was going to cover everything.

Q: That brings up a question I haven't asked you. Did you or anyone you know have to have an illegal abortion?

Spurlock-Evans: I knew of people who had illegal abortions. I did not have to have one. I used birth control religiously, and as it turns out, I may have actually had a pituitary tumor that may have prevented me getting pregnant anyway, but you never know those things until many years later. I never got pregnant, and I always used contraception. But I did know people who had illegal abortions. Some of them were at Barnard, or at least one of them was at Barnard, and several other people I know very, very well, who were not at Barnard. And, do you want to know anything about—

Q: —the experiences that were recounted to you—

[Interruption]

Spurlock-Evans: I must tell you that I've never really talked in depth with a person who had an abortion, an illegal abortion, about the terror of that or the negatives of that. What I observed was—I think that these things caused disturbance and pain, so I saw some of the emotional impact, but I didn't really sit down and talk about the details, but I saw individuals struggling with the consequences of their decision. I must say, I haven't talked with anyone who expressed regret at having had an abortion, whether that was legal or illegal, and I think at some point there was that borderline in the '60s where illegal became legal, but it was never easy. It was never easy for people that I knew, and—I would never want to go back to that period of time, where people had those terrible decisions to make, and that's one thing that our generation—I mean, our generation

knows, the younger generation does not know, what that was. And they do not know how important it is politically to protect the right of women to choose.

Q: Is there anything I haven't touched on that you want to say?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, I—this topic takes me back to the whole issue of sexuality, and we didn't talk too much about that. And that was—that was a major challenge, and—

Q: How so?

Spurlock-Evans: Well, you know, some of this is me trying to think and some—I came into the college not sexually active, with a belief that I would not have sex before marriage, although it wasn't nailed in stone. But I think I had this sort of loose expectation, and certainly that I would be in love. That was for sure. That's why I say—I'm not sure I really loved that first love, but I sure enough wanted to have sex [laughs]. Eventually I got—it's not easy to say which came first, the chicken or the egg, whether I needed to love him in order to have sex, and so I, therefore came to love him, or—but I will say that as monumental as the changes that took place for me politically were the changes that took place in coming into an embrace of who I am as a sexual being. And it occurred at least with Barnard as the backdrop.

I will say this, Barnard didn't make it easy to become a sexually active woman. I remember going to the nurse when I decided that I might move in this direction, and this was after knowing

this person, this man, for about three months. I may have consulted my girlfriends about this, but how one should manage this in terms of contraception? I remember one young woman who was a friend of yours talking about diaphragms, and I think I had a chance to look at one, and it looked much too complex and much too difficult, the idea of inserting the diaphragm. That was not anything—I was not even really into tampons at that point, so I was just like, “Oh my.” That was just much too challenging, although I knew that my mother used a diaphragm. She never showed me one, but she just told me that she used a diaphragm. Go figure. So I thought, “Well, that’s not going to be me, not now anyway.” The pill seemed so much neater and cleaner, but to get a pill, you had to have a gynecological exam, and—so I went to the nurse at Barnard, and that was a bad experience!

Q: What happened?

Spurlock-Evans: I can’t give you word for word, but I got the feeling that I was a bad person for even wanting to get, you know, pills—that I should go away and never come back. I mean, I *really* got the feeling that this was not, in spite of the [Alan F.] Guttmacher lecture that we had that was so progressive that first week of school that we all were herded in to hear, I got the feeling that this was not done, and bad, bad. So I withdrew. I did not go back, and I found someone who referred me to a private physician, and I went to Park Avenue and was examined by a male gynecologist. That was the beginning of getting my regular gynecological exams. Not pleasant, we all know what that’s all about, with the stirrups and all of that—God, you had to have wanted to have sex to go through all of that. But I got my pills and gained weight, you

know, all the negatives surrounding that. However, that was truly a revolution to have pills, and that opened up agency in a way for me as a woman. I could make choices, you know, I could make choices, and I could make decisions without fear—without fear of being trapped, without fear of bringing shame on the family, and that was the worst possible thing one could do, was bring shame on the family.

So there followed after that first year of monogamous sex, which incidentally didn't occur with that great frequency [laughs], but after that, in my pursuit of another enduring relationship, I did have sex. Safely, I suppose. Maybe not safely, because I wasn't using a condom, but safe from pregnancy, let's put it that way. That was an adventure I could probably do without, but that was not good. It was not fun. It was empty and very, very discouraging. But I don't know what the answer is. I suppose I would not have had sex with some of the people I did in hindsight, but those were times when we didn't think it was that big a deal. We didn't realize that there might be some psychological consequences to trying to hasten a connection that was never really going to be—or did not work, or wouldn't have worked.

I guess I now have to rethink my answer to your question about the advice I would give that young woman. And there's no academic advice that I would give; she already did that right, and politically she was taking life at her own pace, staying back from dangerous political activity—good job, keep it up. But with regard to getting involved with people sexually before knowing them deeply, that I would caution her about. “Try that again, do that differently, because there are consequences, psychologically, and it only deepens the sense of isolation and loneliness.” Yes, I

would change the advice or I would change the behavior if I could—if I were giving that twenty-one-year-old Karla some advice, I would say, “Hold off before getting involved, because—people influence your psyche, and if you become physically involved with them, it’s even deeper, right away.”

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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