

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Michael Hart

2014

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Michael Hart conducted by Michelle Patrick in January 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: Michael Hart

Location: Interview by phone (New York,
New York to California)

Interviewer: Michelle Patrick

Date: January 2011

Hart: I went to the same school from kindergarten through high school, and by the time I hit high school, I was sort of at the top of my class, and that's where I kind of got my strokes in life was being a good student. So by the time I hit high school, I was pretty bored. It was a wonderful school, but I had been there since I was five, and I was just aching to get out. I grew up in Princeton, New Jersey. I was originally born in England. My father was English, my mother was American, and we had moved back to the United States, because my mother couldn't stand the English climate. So we moved to Princeton because that's where her sister was, not because my family had anything to do with the university.

And so it was a very good school, but I was tired of it, and I had a boyfriend at Princeton who said, "Well, why don't you skip your senior year and just go to college?" and I thought, "Why *don't* I skip my senior year?" No one had ever done that at my school, so I didn't get a lot of support from my school in doing that, but because I was kind of top of my class—in my junior year I got a 726 in the math and a 753 in the English on my SATs [Scholastic Assessment Test]—I could kind of push them to go ahead. And I had given the same idea to another classmate, who was also one of the top students in the school, so

there were two of us, so that helped as well. Although, of course, we had to stay totally apart from each other so that they would take each of us seriously.

So they kept saying, “Well, you could get into Radcliffe [College]. If you wait a year, you could go to Radcliffe,” but I really needed to go. I figured if I didn’t go a year early, I would probably not go to college at all. I was that ready to get out. So I went to the college teas, and I visited the colleges. When I went to the Barnard [College] tea, it was held by the wife of the dean of the graduate college, or one of the graduate colleges, at Princeton. I watched those women, and all of those women were professional women, they were doing something in the world. They weren’t just housewives. They weren’t just having little teas like the women from Wellesley [College] or other places. I thought, *This is an exciting group of women.* I did apply to Radcliffe and didn’t get in, and I think I got in pretty much everywhere else, and so there was just no question in my mind. It was Barnard. Plus living in Princeton, it was an hour out of the city. New York City was the center of the world. So that was why I went to Barnard.

Q: What did you pack?

Hart: What did I pack? Well, as I’ve told you in my novel, I packed my little preppy schoolgirl clothes. I had a quilt that I loved that was, I think, from England, that was a feather quilt—we called them poofs—that was sort of like mattress ticking. It was pale

blue with little rosebuds on it. I know I took that. I probably took a teddy bear and a stuffed tiger. I was your real little prep school girl.

I actually had fought my parents *not* to go to boarding school. My father, being English, felt that every child should go to boarding school, the girls at fourteen, the boys at fifteen, I think it was. I actually had to pull some shenanigans not to get sent to boarding school, because my family was pretty dysfunctional, and as I said, the place I got strokes was school. So although I was bored with it by my sophomore year, up until then, at the time when they wanted me to start applying to boarding schools in eighth grade, I was very attached to staying there. It was my safe place. It was the place that I got strokes for performing.

Also, at that point, I wanted to be a ballerina, and I knew I couldn't do that if I went to boarding school. So finally the deal was that I had to give up doing the ballet in order not to be sent to boarding school. So I was actually quite experienced, both in not getting accepted and in getting accepted. I went to those boarding school interviews wearing all the jewelry I owned and all the makeup I was allowed to wear, and I remember my father saying, "Why are you doing this?" and I said to him, "Because I don't want to go."

When they would ask me, "Is this your idea or your parents'?"—because they would eventually catch on that I didn't want to go—I would say, "It's my parents'." So we would go out to dinner, and my father would dress me down, and I would say, "Well, you don't want me to lie, do you?" So anyway, that's my story of how I ended up at Barnard.

Q: What did you expect to find at Barnard in the way of college life, social life, academic life?

Hart: I think I expected actually to find, in some ways, a more rigorous academic life. I think that was a mixed bag for me. Academically my high school was very hard, and of course, I was trying to skip a year, and we had fabulous teachers who had known us all forever. So I worked harder in high school than I did in college, and I did find the Barnard English department a little full of itself.

Now, having said that, I had [Katherine] Kate [Murray] Millett in my freshman basic English writing class, and she was amazing. I couldn't believe that I could get a C+ on something I wrote. I was so used to getting As. Then when she would read an essay by Elizabeth Langland in our class, who got an A, I was like, "Oh, oh, oh, so that's what good writing is." So I kind of got taken down a peg in her class, and in some of my other classes; but as a whole, I felt the English department at Barnard was maybe—I mean, my interpretation, at the time, in my young and arrogant youth was that they were maybe needing to compete with Columbia [University] to keep up. I knew from the start I wanted to be an English major, so I took quite a few courses at Columbia, and I had studied Russian, so I even got to take some graduate Russian drama courses, and got to take world literature, so I did all I could at Columbia. When I came back to Barnard and they wanted me, for instance, to do sort of 16th, 17th-century English, I told them I had

taken that in depth in high school, and indeed, I think I took a better course there than I got at Barnard.

So academically it was a mixed bag, but it was also such a turbulent time, and I certainly made up for what I didn't find at Barnard at Columbia, so there was that freedom to go across the street.

Socially, I don't think I had a clue what to expect. The school that I went to from kindergarten through fourth grade had boys and girls, and then in fourth grade, the boys went to Princeton Country Day School, which only went through I think it was ninth grade, and then they were all expected to go to boarding school. So from fourth grade, nine years old, through fourteen years old, I had not much contact with boys, other than my brother, family, friends, and things. Then in the year that I started my sophomore year, at fifteen, the two schools, the one that had both of us, and then just girls, and the Princeton Country Day School for boys, merged, so we were the first class to have boys again, and we were so shocked. We were kind of, "The math teacher *yelled* at one of the boys!" We were just incredibly shocked by the behavior of boys. We had lived in a study hall where it was all honor system not to talk.

Anyway, so I think I came pretty innocent and ignorant about social life, although I had spent the summer in Mexico. Again, my family was pretty dysfunctional, and so one of my goals had been to get out of it, which was another reason to be leaving to come to

college a year early. I had found this summer program at the Universidad de Guadalajara [University of Guadalajara] and used my savings to go and live there for six weeks in the summer. So I had sort of met guys there and had some incidents there, and so I had a little bit of experience.

Of course, in the summers I'd had boyfriends from a place we went, where our family sort of was related to a bunch of other families, on the Jersey Shore [pause]—

So I think socially I didn't know what to expect. But I got paired up with a woman—amazingly enough, because I had written “meticulous” on mine, and she had written “messy” on her little questionnaire for roommates in Hewitt Hall—I got paired up with a woman who immediately became my best friend; and that was huge for me. That was wonderful. I also made other friends on the hall or through the school. Having been with the same group since kindergarten—and again, in spite of wanting to stay there because it was what I knew and it was safe, I really knew that I was sort of a duckling in a swan's nest—I didn't fit in with very many people at the school I had been at forever, so Barnard opened up a whole new vista.

Also, I had been sneaking off to New York with the other girl from my school who also skipped her senior year—who also went to Barnard—and the two of us had been sort of sneaking off to New York [City] at night. We'd spent the night at a friend's house whose mother was away, or when we got older I think we were allowed to stay at my house if

there were two of us. Whatever, but we ended up sneaking into Greenwich Village, and we would speak French and pretend we were French, so we had a great taste for the city and were just eager to get there. So that was a part of what I expected to be my social life, the culture of New York and being there. Indeed, I knew, for instance, there was a man in New York whom I'd known from Princeton, and he and I went to all kinds of plays and exhibits and stuff during my sophomore year at Barnard; so there were connections there that allowed for a social life.

I think I expected more people of like mind, and I also expected to be dazzled; and I was. I didn't expect the close friendship with my roommate that was so wonderful for me the first couple of years there.

Then I met a woman standing on a subway platform. I don't know where I was on my way to, but there on the subway platform was this young woman who was in tears, and I went over to her and said, "Well, I have two tickets to this Brooklyn Academy of Dance," or some show, somebody in Brooklyn, "do you want to come?" and she did. We ended up traveling to Europe together in 1969, which changed my life, and hers. She was actually a student at the general studies school, the sort of adult ed[ucation] school of Columbia, and she ended up working with Joseph Papp, and I think now works for Hallmark.

Anyway, we're still in some kind of contact.

You could meet people all over New York, on a subway platform, in your dormitory, and I think that's what I expected, that I would have no idea what to expect.

Q: So in terms of the level of discourse and the charisma or the electricity that went through groups of people or conversations with one, that met your expectations then.

Hart: Yes. And there were teachers—Christine Royer, whom I don't think I discovered until my last year, year-and-a-half, two years there, she was electrifying to me as a teacher. There was a man who taught art history, Doris or something, I thought he was a wonderful teacher. So there were also some extraordinary teachers. The man who taught the graduate course in Russian drama at Columbia was an incredible teacher, who started off telling us, "Well, I'm assuming that you're here because you're all really good students, and you're all going to get As unless you show me otherwise," which I thought was quite wonderful.

In terms of the discourse among students, absolutely, I was never disappointed in the sophistication and intelligence and open-mindedness of the people I met there. I wasn't a group person, I was a one-on-one person, and so I didn't find, as some of us did, as many of us did, sort of groups to hang out with. There was sort of the hair-pulled-at-the-back-at-the-bottom-of-the-neck-with-the-big-bow sort of group, and a lot of those were commuter people. There was a whole sort of Jewish-New-Yorker contingent; but there wasn't one, there were two. There was sort of the bow-at-the-back type, which was more

of what I had come from—it was kind of like the preppy group—and then there were sort of the people who ended up creating the revolution. I really have always, since Barnard, considered myself an honorary New York Jew, which I am not, and you’ll see when you see this, I’m quite waspy. But I loved that, I loved that culture, that life, that excitement, as you say, that readiness to talk about anything, and think about anything.

Q: Are you referring to mostly Barnard commuters or people in the general Barnard/Columbia community, or New York itself, when you talk about New Yorkers?

Hart: I was speaking definitely about the Barnard/Columbia community. And the commuters, by and large, I didn’t know as many of them and they seemed to be more the sort of preppy ones, but again, what do I know, it was just an impression. Although they were New York Jews, they were more like the prep school kids I had hung out with my whole life. I don’t know, there were just a bunch of people, and again, I say “New York Jewish” as if that’s the culture, but it was more like the culture was Columbia/Barnard.

I have to say that I came from a town where I went away one summer when I was sixteen—I went to the Connecticut College School of dance, where Martha Graham and Jose [Arcadio] Limon and Paul Draper, amazing people, were teaching, Pauline Kael—and that was the first time I’d ever seen a *bagel* in my life: so that’s perhaps why I include the adjective, “Jewish,” but it’s not a religious or a racial thing for me, it’s a cultural thing,

one that opened up a whole world of fun discourse, of ease, of mothers who could nag their kids and still be loved. I don't know, good stuff for me.

Also, I kept going away for the summer. So I had done Connecticut College, I had done Mexico, and one summer after I was at Barnard, I did the Université de Montréal to sort of perfect my French. I had met a young girl at Conn[ecticut] College who lived in Montreal, and I'd gone to dinner at her family's place, and they did a whole Shabbat dinner, and so that was my first experience of some of those rituals. I had always been someone who really appreciated the *whole way of life* that Catholicism could be, that Judaism could be, but Protestantism really wasn't, in those days.—Now, unfortunately, it's too much of a way of life, in some regards.—So I liked all that. I liked the sense of a cultural identity, I guess, that was very open and welcoming and accepting. That's how it's always felt to me, the New York Jewish culture. At this point, I should just say New York culture, but in those days, the Judaism was a very positive part of it for me.

Q: Did you carry that with you from Barnard?

Hart: I think I carried parts of it. Like I can say, “You wanna cup of cawffee?” [in NYC accent] and just a real love for certain things. I guess when you spend five years in New York, because it's such an intense place, there's a part of you that's always a New Yorker. But by the time I left, I knew I would never live in a city again, and I was very unhappy in New York by the end of my time there.

Q: Why?

Hart: I think a lot of it had to do with my personal discovery. When I was nineteen, in '69, between my sophomore and junior years, with this woman I had met on the subway platform in tears, the two of us had saved our pennies and we had each saved \$3,000, and we made a three-month trip across Europe and back. Which had been a long-time dream of mine. I kind of think I talked her into having it be a dream of hers too; it always was for her too, but I don't think she thought she could really do it, until we made friends. So we went off to Europe. And anywhere we had a connection, we *went*, because of course, my father being English, I had English relatives, and we had some connections here and there. Then we threw in a few of the places we felt we absolutely had to see that we were willing to pay for, but it was a very sort of shoestring trip across Europe and back.

One of the places we went was a place where a friend from my summertime town had told my sister we could stay with her, which was an island off the coast of Spain; but at that time, it was very primitive and very little-known. We went there, and after four days there, I knew I was going back. So I actually dropped out of Barnard for that semester and lived in Spain for that term. And I happened to come back to make a trip to see family and friends in the following January, and it just so happened that I met a boy who was a friend of that girl I had traveled with all summer, and fell in love with him. He was of Italian/Sicilian origin, and the first in his family ever to go to college, and he was at

Columbia, and it was very important to him to finish college. So because of him, I registered. I happened to be there at that time, and I ended up finishing college because of him, and I'm so glad I did. But that was sort of a struggling relationship.

And I moved off campus. I lived in the new hall, Plimpton Residence, over on Amsterdam, the first sort of suite hall that they ever built. So I did that with Norman Mailer's daughter, who was a good friend of mine, and a few of her friends, in that suite situation. But then I moved off campus into apartments. I moved to 105th Street. The apartment got burglarized twice before I'd even really moved in. And then I moved to 123rd, and every month I would be attacked on the street or in the apartment building.

So it wasn't an easy place to live in those days, on some levels, and I just think I wanted to be back on Ibiza—the island off the coast of Spain. That was my true home. When I lived on Ibiza, I spent, that first year, six, nine months there. Then I went back each summer until I graduated—so I didn't actually graduate until February of '72—and then I went back for good for three years, and lived in the country on a four-kilometer dirt road where you didn't see any other houses, and there was no running water and no electricity. So I really became a country person and really have never lived in a city since then, although I now have a flat, and have for decades, in London. I love going and having my month of city, and I love New York when I come back to visit it; but, in the long term, something in me needs the spaciousness of an extended view.

I lived for twenty-five years in places—in California, on Ibiza—within sight of the ocean, and then I moved inland about fifteen, sixteen years ago to a town in the wine country—well, not really the wine country, but in Sonoma County, which is a wine-country county—but I have five acres and a pond, and you see nothing, no other houses from any of the windows in my house. So I feel like I need that spaciousness of vista, wherever I live; and I think even in London—which I love, where I have a home, and we're on a garden square—even there, I don't think I could live there for a year. I don't think I'm a city person anymore. I'm pretty much a hermit.

Q: Talk a little bit about the changes in the zeitgeist, in fashion, in behavior that you experienced while at Barnard, when they first dawned on you, how you reacted to them.

Hart: What fun. I think that there was a part of me that kind of held on to what I knew, because so much was different at Barnard, so there was a part of me that stayed pretty straight for a while. Maybe this would be the place to read you those two paragraphs from my novel.

Q: I'd love to hear them.

Hart: Would that be okay? I think that would sort of set the stage for this. So the character is a young woman based on me. It's not all true, but this part is definitely true.

[Reading from novel]

“At last Anna left for university, and her fledgling courage took her to the women’s college of Columbia in New York, city of cities, center of the universe. In one sense, her distinctions had been small, her rebellions microscopic. She’d spent her entire life in a milieu that was soon to become virtually extinct, completely sheltered and entirely unprotected at once. She knew no one outside her privileged circle, she knew no other way of life. But she had come to value thinking things through. She had a kind heart and a good mind, she knew pain, and she knew what it felt like not to belong. She knew she didn’t belong where she came from. She left for college with her Bonwit Teller clothes and her good education, aiming her small life outward, not knowing she was heading toward the direct opposite of where she had been, into the heart of a revolution.

At Columbia, she didn’t become actively involved with the student insurrection going on all around her, but one night when she was walking to the library, a crowd of students came rushing around the corner of a building toward her. They scattered, flowing to all sides of her, hundreds of them, and policemen with clubs hurtled after them, lashing out at anyone who came within their reach. She realized what had caught her up, and turned and ran, in time to avoid being hurt; but the sudden awareness that she could have been swept up, hurt or killed, in such violence, in a cause or event that had nothing to do with her, while walking innocently down a street—down a path within the private confines of an Ivy League university—shook her to the core. Not that the student revolt was wrong:

it just wasn't hers. Yet she could have been killed for it! And as far as the world was concerned, she would then have been a symbol for it, for something she didn't even have any opinion about. Her horror was dismay rather than fear, a feeling of impotence to protect a value she held dear. With this thought came the consciousness that she hadn't had time to be whom she was, to stand for whatever she did stand for—it was the stripping away of her identity, as well as the imposing of someone else's—and it was the nudge, the push that said, *You'd better do something, be something, before you become something else by default.*"

[Ends reading from novel]

So that was a huge realization for me during the revolutions at Columbia.

But I think where I learned what I wanted to do and be was when I left, and lived on Ibiza. So I think it wasn't really until my third year there [at Barnard] that I came back after the six months in Ibiza a totally different person. Well, a totally different person, a person that was beginning to express who she truly was, I guess. And that's when my clothes changed, and my style changed, and my way of being in the world changed.

So I was definitely still at Barnard, and it was part of that; and I think the seed was planted in that very moment, coming around the corner of the library and finding myself in the revolution. Then it blossomed in the adventures on Ibiza, so that what I brought

back to Barnard was someone who was able to say, “I think these women in this little cloistered English department in Barnard are trying to keep up with the men at Columbia, and they’re imposing rules and strictures that aren’t helpful, that aren’t taking into account the individual, that are sort of self-satisfied.”

For instance, I handed in the same paper for one of my—I think—senior theses in the English department at Barnard, in Columbia as a comparative religion paper, and I think I got an A on it in Columbia and a B-something, B+, whatever, in Barnard. I found the comments on it—and I have it to this day and I still go back and read the comments and think, *This was not a great teacher*—this was a person who was more interested in her own status and her own arbitrary stylistic choices than in nurturing a brain that was looking to be nurtured, a mind that was looking to be encouraged. So I don’t think I would have been able to make those judgments when I was there, before I had that revolution in my own thinking, which, again, was planted by that incident.

Of course, I didn’t really need to, because when I was there in the first two years I had people like Kate Millett, or the first year anyway. The second year, as I say, the sophomore year, I had a really serious sophomore slump, so I wasn’t happy then.

And I don’t know exactly why that was, but I think that some of it was emotional, in that I had reconnected with a different boy from Princeton, whom I had gone out with when I was fifteen and sixteen. The one who had suggested I skip my senior year had come back

into my life, because he had ended up doing his Master's work at Columbia, which we didn't know, because we kept splitting up and getting together over a period of four years. So I ran back into him, and I think that was a difficult relationship. So I think that was some of it. I think that was a lot of it. By the time I went to Europe, we had had some real ups and downs, and the war was going on, and he was afraid of being drafted; and that's one reason he was doing a Master's program. He was looking to teach, when he came after that summer that I went away, and then I went away and stayed away, and we broke up. I think that's when we broke up for good, so I think my slump had a lot to do with my personal life.

As I say, my family continued to be very dysfunctional. My mother was an alcoholic, and that summer before I went to Europe, when I'd gone to Montreal, she had been institutionalized for a while, and that was huge. That was a one-time thing. It wasn't something we were used to, and when she came out she was sober, but within six months she was drinking again, and I knew it, so I think that also made me very sad. So I had pretty much cut off from my family, but still I think that affected me, that and the relationship, and I was really thinking about things, really thinking about the messages we convey by what we say to each other.

I think I thought, *Well, there could only be one interpretation, and I'll figure out what it is.* I don't think I had yet progressed to the point of realizing that different people follow different logics, and that what seems in integrity to me, and seems the only choice in

integrity, may not look like someone else's integrity at all. Those are lessons we learn later in life. But I was at least beginning to really think about things, really examine things from a psychological standpoint, from a spiritual standpoint a little bit—although not much—certainly from an intellectual standpoint.

I want to say that although I've kind of criticized the English department, at that time, at Barnard, or certain people in it, certain women in it, there were some like that at Columbia too. There were some people who took themselves very seriously, and I wasn't saying Columbia was in any way better, just that I felt that I was looking for the cause of it, and perhaps there was a rivalry. But there were great teachers in both places.

Q: When you started to see the person that you needed to be, the person that was forming at the time, who was that person?

Hart: Well, I think I've always been a seeker, and I think I've always wanted to, as I said in the novel, think things all the way through. I really valued people who didn't take whatever the common thought was as truth, without examining it.

So one thing that had had happened to me in New York, I think during my first year, in my Bonwit Teller clothes, was that I met that man Lev, who used to hang out around campus. He was an older guy with a beard, older probably being thirty, who knows, who—one night I was walking across Broadway, and it had that divider, it was somewhere

near the West End bar, and I hit this center divider, and this man with a beard picked me up off my feet and swung me around and said something to me. That's how I met Lev. And I would run into him at the West End. We weren't, like, close friends, and he was kind of a crazy guy—I think he once gave me some kind of a vaguely soft-porn kind of a book and said, “You *have* to read this”—but I began to meet people who startled me, who didn't follow the kind of logic I had grown up around, who didn't have a culture that I knew at all; and I think that was really important to me. And also in the relationship with the young man from Princeton that extended over four years, he was a philosophy major, and I also took some philosophy classes at Barnard that were very good. And I studied all these languages. So I think that I've always been interested in looking at things from various points of view. Being half English in Princeton made me as different as someone who was half Arab would be where we all live now: I was never considered totally an American. So I liked that exploration of differences and of different ways of thinking. So I think that was something I really learned, both at Barnard and on Ibiza. As I say, a lot of these seeds were planted, I'm now realizing just as I'm speaking, in those first couple of years at Barnard, by these little incidents with revolutions, with Lev, with meeting extraordinary people.

My roommate, the one I became such close friends with, had come from Pennsylvania. She had gotten pregnant in her senior year in high school, while her mother was dying of cancer, with a thirty-five-year-old Black man, and she loved him to bits, and I got to know him over the years. That was pretty extraordinary for me, a girl from public high

school who had gotten together and had a child with a Black man—and she had gone through with it. I don't think abortion was legal yet, and so she had had this child and put it up for adoption. Then in the hospital when he came to visit her, they had decided, "We don't want to put this child up for adoption," and they were literally running through the halls to find their baby and save it; and it turned out that his mother brought the child up. I have no idea, I've completely lost touch with her, and so has Barnard. I don't know how to track down that person.

Q: This was your roommate?

Hart: This was my roommate my freshman year at Barnard.

Q: What was her name?

Hart: Margaret Baisley, "Baisley like paisley," she always used to say. I'd love to find her again. But we were friends for many years, and I loved her dearly, and so it was pretty amazing for this waspy, preppy girl to be thrown in with this young woman who'd had this adventure in her life. So that was the kind of thing that could happen at Barnard. She was brilliant, of course, and she ended up graduating late, taking time off, I think to go back and take care of her father. I think he may have died eventually too. And brother, she had a younger brother she cared a great deal for. Then she did finish

Barnard, and she went on to law school in Queens or somewhere, and that's when I kind of lost touch with her. In 1980, I think I lost touch with her.

Q: When you were walking across Broadway and this man picked you up and twirled you around, what was your response? Were you frightened? Were you enchanted?

Hart: Both. I think both. I was frightened. He was older. He had a beard. I had no idea what he intended to do. But I was also enchanted. Perhaps I should explain.

Perhaps the reason I was enchanted, what's coming to my mind, is that the boy from Princeton whom I was involved with for four years—and that was from fifteen to nineteen, so I was pretty young, I was a sophomore in high school when he was a sophomore at Princeton—I met because my school had privileges to do our research papers when we were in high school at the Princeton University library. I was there doing research on some high school paper, and he came and tapped me on the shoulder and asked me to come out where we could talk. And I sort of looked at him, and I was less charmed and more frightened by *this* stranger tapping me on the shoulder. He said, “It won't hurt,” and so I laughed and I went out with him, and we ended up dating for a long time. He was actually the son of a Superior Court Chief Justice in Pennsylvania, but I've totally lost touch with him. Oddly enough, when I rediscovered him in my first year or second year at Barnard, I walked into the Columbia University library, and there he was. So I ran into him in the library, and it turned out he had gone there for his Master's. He

didn't know that I had taken his idea and skipped my senior year; I didn't know that he had gone there for his Master's work.

So I had had some experience of these startling meetings with people, so I think it probably equally frightened me and charmed me.

Q: Did you go on to have a relationship?

Hart: Not a sexual one with Lev—no, not at all. I never would have. He didn't appeal to me in the least, and I don't really think he was seriously angling at that. I think he was kind of a local figure. I don't think he was crazy or what we would call a street person, but he was *kind of* a street person. He was just a local—he probably liked to hang out with the university kids, liked to kind of poke them in the ribs and say, “Don't take yourself too seriously.” But, again, he was just another one of those seeds that opened me to really thinking, *What do I choose to stand for? Who do I choose to be in this moment, in this life, in this place?*

So that's who the young woman who came back to Barnard from Ibiza was: someone who had not lost her critical eye, but was looking for more positive ways to use it.

I think one of the sad things about the way many of my generation grew up, and it's probably still happening in many places, is that we, in my family, and in most of the

families that I knew, were brought up to think of humor as sarcasm, as something at somebody's expense, and of the critical mind as the one that finds the flaws. So it's certainly been work in my life to release judgment as a sign of intelligence, to release criticism as a sign of intelligence, or sarcasm as a worthy kind of humor.

Q: Why? Why is sarcasm not to be desired?

Hart: Because it's at somebody's expense, somebody else's expense.

Q: That's your definition of sarcasm.

Hart: Yes.

Q: And that's what you'd been raised with, or that's what you found at Barnard?

Hart: Absolutely. No, that's what I was raised with. No, I don't think that that's the case at Barnard, and I don't think that, I would hope in any college. I do think that in education in general there is a tendency to nitpick, to show how smart you are by finding the flaws in someone's argument, in someone's book, novel, history, whatever, in philosophy. So we are taught to kind of find the flaw, and there is a kind of a thing about that age group of being cynical. I think in my life I don't want to live being cynical. I want to live in joy and gratitude.

Q: Did you find that it was possible when you came back to that third year at Barnard, that it was possible to be that open, non-critical, non-sarcastic person?

Hart: No. I think that came years later. I think I was open, and I met some amazing people. There was a woman on campus who was selling lunches, and they were kind of macrobiotic things, those odd kinds of what we called cookies, sesame seeds and walnuts and carrots and things, out of a baby carriage on campus. She hired me to be her assistant, and I did that for a bit.

I continued to meet some kind of oddball people, and I valued that. I think that was the beginnings of openness and of not writing off someone *different* as *less than*.

Q: Tell me about how you phased out of the dancer mentality, so that when you started out you were pretty sure you were going to be a dancer. What happened there?

Hart: Well, that's a sad story for me. I had studied ballet as a little girl. My sister got the piano lessons, and I got the ballet lessons, and I had a talent for it. My Princeton ballet teacher told my parents that she thought I could be the best dancer she'd ever taught. My mother had encouraged me to keep on when I was ten or eleven, when I wanted to quit — because I'd discovered some neighborhood kids, and it was the first time I'd kind of found a group—because she had said, “Oh, Audrey says you can be the best, and you

need to do it.” And I got to be Clara in *The Nutcracker*, and all that kind of thing. She told me that when she had been a child, she had wanted to dance ballet, but her parents wouldn’t let her, because she came from a kind of upper-crusty background, and in those days, there was no way they were going to have their daughter go on the stage. She said she would never do that to me; but in the end, she did.

Again, she was alcoholic, and our particular relationship, I think there was a dynamic that made her often take things away from me that she knew that I loved. So when it came to going to boarding school, it came down to they would let me stay home if I gave up the ballet. And I couldn’t do the ballet, I couldn’t prepare for a professional career, from a boarding school anyway. Even if I went to a boarding school near a city, you remember how there were all those curfews even at college, so at boarding school I would get in for maybe one class a week, on the weekend, if my parents gave me special permission to do that. There was no way I could pursue it. So I gave up the ballet. Although I went that summer to Connecticut College School of Dance, because they had no idea what modern dance was, so they figured it wasn’t ballet, so it was safe. They didn’t realize it was at the level that it was at. Again, they usually didn’t let kids under eighteen go, but because of my background in dance they let me go at sixteen. But that was it. Then I came back home before college and took dance classes, and it was just too painful, to be in the back of the class, because I was only allowed to take one a week. I wasn’t allowed to do it seriously.

Q: So was it that a career on the stage was unseemly?

Hart: No, I think it was more about my father just wanted me to go to boarding school, this was his pattern for us; and I think my mother, I think that she wanted control of me. I don't know what there was in her, but she always wanted more of me than I could give her. She was not a healthy person, and I think she wanted a relationship, so she would punish me by taking things away from me. So she took the dance away from me. I never got a straight answer from them.

Long after my mother died, I asked my father one time, "Why didn't you guys let me do ballet?" and he said, "Well, because although Audrey said you could be the best she'd ever taught, she said that you might only ever get into the Corps." And I was like, "So?" I would have been so happy to be in ABT's [American Ballet Theater] Corps [de Ballet]! But I don't think that was really the truth. I think that they were having a pretty tough time of it. There were four of us to deal with. Who knows? I'll never really know the answer to that. So I came to Barnard, and I did take some dance classes to fulfill my PE [Physical Education] requirement, but it was too late by then. So I didn't do that.

But I still do it now. I actually still do ballet for exercise twice a week, even though I have back and neck problems, I'm kind of a cripple in the class. And I get a lot of pleasure out of it. I volunteer at the San Francisco Ballet, and I get to see the whole season, and I love it. I actually get a kinesthetic feeling, from watching great dancers, I

actually can feel what they're doing in my body. So it is really true that you're never too old, even to do something like ballet. I actually do get a physical pleasure out of watching it now, which I never expected.

Q: Talk to me about romance and love in a time where dating and courtship rituals were changing or being scrapped all together, and a time when the Pill had just hit.

Hart: Yes. I grew up thinking that I would keep my virginity until marriage. It was something I would save, it would be a gift. I had no question about that.

In the school that I went to, there was only one girl who had a divorced mother. There was only one father I ever heard of losing his job. Very few people had had sex. There was one girl I knew of who had sex and actually got pregnant, I think, before she finished whatever school—she didn't finish at our school. So that was an extremely old-fashioned environment. And then, as you say, the Pill came along, by the third or fourth time I got together with my boyfriend from Princeton.

And we were going to get married, and I was never going to have sex with him until we got married. And he could have sex with other people. He went away one summer and met this woman in Greece, older than I was, and they had an affair. He came back really wanting to have sex with me, now that he knew what it was about, and I said, "No, no, you can do that with her but not with me." So it was kind of everything but.

Then finally, by the last time we got back together, I actually felt I was fed up with my virginity, and I wanted to get rid of it. So it became something of a burden, it became this old story. And so I went to I think it was Susan Mailer's gynecologist, on 5th Avenue, and got pills. Though that was after the first time, I didn't have them the very first time. And it was with my boyfriend from Princeton that I lost my virginity. And to him it didn't mean a whole lot by then, because he'd made love with other girls. I thought, *Well, gee, I saved this big thing for him, and now he's not even sure I'm going to be the one he wants*. But that was a huge change, a sea change, in people's lives, and so I immediately did go get on the Pill. Thank goodness I didn't get pregnant the first time!

Yes, then I went off to Ibiza, and I still was a person who had to talk myself into believing that whoever it was, this boy might be The Man for Me, before I could have sex. I couldn't do recreational sex. It just never has been my way. I had to feel an emotional possibility there as well. But I certainly did my share of one-nighters on Ibiza, and back in New York, when I came back.

Q: One-nighters, did you think, at the time, that they were one-night romances, or did you know that they were one-nighters?

Hart: No. As I say, I couldn't really do recreational sex. I had to talk myself into thinking maybe this was The Man. There were one or two in Ibiza where I went into it

knowing this probably wasn't going to last, but then it would turn into a recurrent, lovely relationship for as long as the guy was there. And there were certainly one-nighters, as I say, but they were ones where that's how I found out, no, this isn't going to last. But I never would have started them if I wasn't really, truly excited about the person and engaged with them. So it was an amazing time.

I have a very funny story about my first orgasm that I think is kind of relevant to the times, which is that when I came back to Barnard and met this guy who got me graduated, who was at Columbia, we explored a whole lot sexually—and that was totally new, to think that it was okay to explore sexually, to play with it, to let it be just sex and not about children and marriage and all that. So we tried everything we could, and I felt like I was never having an orgasm, and I don't know what people think now, but in those days, it wasn't taken for granted that a woman *would* have an orgasm. You were really lucky if you had orgasms, or if you had a guy who knew enough to bring you to orgasm. We didn't believe in vaginal orgasms. There were only masturbatory or clitoral orgasms. So I thought I'd never have an orgasm.

So finally I went to my gynecologist on 5th Avenue and said, "You know, we've tried everything. We've done everything either of us can think of."

And he said, "Well, how does it feel to you?"

I said, “Well, I kind of rise and get more and more excited, and then he comes, and then it just goes away.”

And he said, “Well, you know what? I think you are having orgasms, and you’re just expecting more of it.”

I went back to my boyfriend and I said, “Guess what? I’ve been having orgasms all this time!” And guess what happened then? I had my first orgasm.

So I think that kind of takes in a lot of things that were part and parcel of that time. And I’ve never had any trouble since, but it always has had an emotional content. If I’m not feeling emotionally connected and safe with a man, I won’t have an orgasm, but I definitely can.

Q: Are you married? You have been married?

Hart: I was married. I was with my husband for fifteen years. We were married for fifteen years—no, I think we were *married* for thirteen years, but together fifteen; and I had two sons with him.

Q: Was this someone you met at Barnard?

Hart: No. I met him out here in California, and we're still really good friends. And he's actually remarried to someone who is a good friend of mine also. So I think he kind of has two wives now, although I left him. But he's a good friend.

Q: Tell me who you were the day you graduated from Barnard and what kind of life you thought you were going to lead.

Hart: The day I graduated from Barnard I was already back on Ibiza, and I thought that I was going to lead a life—I just don't think I even had any idea!

I knew that I wasn't going to be the English teacher I'd assumed I would be. I had assumed I would graduate with an English degree, and the only thing you could do was teach. I thought I would teach high school English. I was kind of excited. I had great high school English teachers, as I said, so I thought that's what I would do. And then I would get married, and someone would support me. But by the time I left Barnard that idea was completely gone, and I don't think I had a clue what I would do. I didn't, at that time, set a lot of store by my degree, because I hadn't expected to graduate when I dropped out to go to Ibiza, to live on Ibiza. I thought that was it, and I didn't care, as many of us didn't. We didn't value our university degrees as much as we learned to later. So I don't think I really had any idea for my future. I just knew that I belonged in that [Ibiza] community, that I had friends there, that I was learning there, that these were people who had changed their whole lives around, and that there was no limit to what I

could do in my life or where I could end up. I had no idea where I was going to end up. I don't think I thought I would stay on Ibiza forever, but I knew that that was my heart. It was as if my heart was out of my body when I wasn't there.

Q: How did you support yourself?

Hart: My parents gave me \$200 a month. When I first went back, they allowed me to continue my allowance, which was what my allowance was when I started at Barnard. When I first spent that six months there, they were kind enough to do that. I think they probably knew that I needed to support myself, to sort myself out. And also I think things were pretty bad with my mother, and it was just easier to let me be away. Then when I went back to Ibiza, I did a little modeling and a little editing for people, and I sewed clothes for people. But what happened is, when I was nineteen, my mother died, and she left some money to each of us, and it had been in a trust fund, and I immediately put it into another trust fund; and so I got a couple hundred dollars a month from that, and four times a year maybe \$400 or \$600 as a quarterly bonus. In those days, that was enough to live on Ibiza and have a car and rent a house and get by, so I was a trust-fund girl on Ibiza, but not a terrifically wealthy one.

In fact, when I moved to California, part of it was that I felt that during the five years I had spent on and off on Ibiza, I had really been learning how to just *be* in the world. By the time I left, I felt maybe I was ready to come back into the world and see if I could

learn how to *do*. So I moved to California, because of a series of events, and started working. But, in those days, I rented this beautiful little studio apartment right on the water, right on the bay in Marin County [California], in Tiburon, one of the most expensive towns in Marin County, for \$235 a month, so it was still pretty easy. We were very lucky, our generation, because you could do that. You could travel around the world. You were allowed to stay in places more than you are now. With a British passport I still have that liberty, but for an American it would be pretty difficult to do what I did—live in Spain, live in London. You could travel, and you could support yourself on next to nothing. You could find jobs easily. My children can't do that. They have to work just to survive, just to feed themselves. It's a lot harder now to have that wandering hippy, revolutionary existence that we all were so lucky to have.

Q: Have you ever had what you would refer to now or think of now as a very consuming career, job, or has it been more of a development of your voice as a writer and yourself as a person?

Hart: [Interruption] So in terms of passion in my career, that didn't start until after I got married in 1980. What happened was a boy I had met at Columbia—Now at this point I lived in another one of those magical little places, called Bolinas, which is on the coast of Marin County here in California, and a lot of the people from Ibiza also ended up in Bolinas—when I first moved to California, I specifically *didn't want* to live there in that town because there were so many Ibiza people, and I felt I had left island living—Bolinas

is not an island but kind of like an island—but I did end up living there [pause]—and this boy I'd known in Columbia, just a friend, said he liked the sound of it so much that he was moving there. And he did, and he bought a house in Bolinas. After I got married—he'd always thought I was going to write the great American novel—and after I got married, I sort of said, “So what do you think my husband's going to do?”

He said, “Oh, learn to play more fiddle tunes, and maybe you'll have some kids,”

I said, “What do you think *I'm* going to do?”

He said, “Well, you know, be a good wife to him and have some kids,” and I thought, *Uh-oh, I've gone from the great American novelist to housewife and mother. This is no good.*

So at that point I decided I had to start a career, and I ended up in market research, as a consultant, and that was a career that gave me what I wanted—the independence to live where I lived and work mostly from home. I supported all of us for a long time on it. I did it for eighteen years, and then I really wanted something more. I wanted to give back to life, and I wanted to feel that my life had more meaning.

In the end, I became a spiritual counselor in what is called Religious Science or Science of Mind, which is a New Thought philosophy. The man who founded it came from Emersonian thinking, it was a development of the transcendentalists. The basic principle

is that everything is one, that everything that there is, is—if you want to call it—God, or Life, or the Force, or the Universe. That there is one, and that one expresses through contemplating itself, *is* everything that we see in the world of form. And that through its self-contemplation, it can create, so similarly through *our* thinking we create our experience of life. So that's the basic tenets. So I'm a licensed spiritual practitioner in that philosophy or religion. And I teach the final year to become licensed, so that is a real calling for me.

Q: Tell me what your spiritual discipline is called, where it comes from, and what it involves.

Hart: The name of the religion is Religious Science. The name of the philosophy, which is what it started as, is Science of Mind. The founder is Ernest [S.] Holmes, born in the late 1800s, died in I think 1960, and he studied with people who had a Christian-Scientist background. He studied Emerson. He studied all the world's great religions and tried to synthesize what he thought were the common threads through all of them. So it's very loose, very open. We have practicing Buddhists, Catholics, Jews, whatever, who also are Religious Scientists. And he did not want to make it a religion. It was just a philosophy, a way of life, but those around him wanted it as a religion. It has two names, Religious Science and Science of Mind, and now what we used to call churches are called centers for spiritual living, so the actual name is United Centers for Spiritual Living, that is sort of the home office name.

Q: And the practices have to do with meditation, chanting, yoga?

Hart: So the practices—we call them spiritual practices, and certainly a huge part of our living, our way of life, is our spiritual practices—there are five basic general ones that we encourage. One is praying, we do affirmative prayer. We believe that prayer, it's our core function as a licensed practitioner. It's the tool that we use to help people shift their whole consciousness, or the subconscious, to a new way of experiencing life.

Q: Do you pray to a deity or to the cosmos in general?

Hart: We believe that everything is the deity, as it were. There is no separation between us and Spirit, or God, or Life, or the Universe, or the Force, or whatever you want to call it. So, as I said, we believe that everything that there is, is Spirit contemplating itself, that each time God thinks or reflects upon itself, something falls into form—whether it's the floor, me, a blade of grass, a universe, *whatever* it is—that that's all Spirit's expression.

So we believe that there's sort of a triune nature, it's like the seed, the soil, and the plant.

So there's an idea in the mind of God, or a self-contemplation of Good, that moves through what we could call the law of cause and effect, or moves through the undifferentiated substance, the undifferentiated form, material, to become the plant—whatever the condition, the actual effect, the actual form, is. So that would be the

creative process in Spirit, or in the Universe, which is very much in line with current physics.

We're very interested in the new physics, because it kind of supports everything we believe. In the individual, it would be that I plant a new seed in my consciousness, and if I can get my subconscious to believe it, if it's what I really believe, it will out-picture in my life in some way. So we believe we create our lives by our thinking. So the most important spiritual practice is what we call spiritual mind treatment or treatment. It's our form of affirmative prayer, through which we claim that movement of mind that opens us to know in a deeper way—or to align with, or just surrender into—what is already true, which is that we are one with all the power, all the peace, all the joy, all the abundance, whatever it is, of God. So we don't pray for conditions, and we don't beg or beseech or ask. We remind ourselves of the truth, which is that everything that we are is a cell in the body of God, and everything that I am is a movement in the mind of the Source of everything, so that the Source of everything is both within me and all around me, and available to me at any time that I actually know it to be so.

Which is very much in line with Christian Science, although they don't consider themselves a New Thought church, and we don't have any of the strictures about doctors or medicine—because we think it's all God, so there's nothing wrong with taking a pill if that's going to help you believe that you're whole.

We don't believe that curing is necessarily healing; you can say the patient died, the patient was healed. So it's all about consciousness. So to get back to your question about practices, just, before we lose that, our most important practice would be prayer treatment; then we do also encourage meditation; study of some kind—reading or taking classes; giving from a tithing consciousness, which is that giving to what spiritually feeds you, not giving to get something; and serving. So those are sort of the five basics. But anything can be a spiritual practice—taking a walk in the woods, dancing, laughing, whatever, can be a spiritual practice for someone.

We also honor all modalities. We are very aware that everything from crystals to psychology has worked for some people sometimes, and we're also aware that what we teach works for some people some of the time. It's really according to what you believe, so if you really believe something is going to work, we see no limit to its possibilities for healing in your life, for the revealing of truth.

Q: When did you begin to be drawn to or interested in this system of thought?

Hart: Well, one of the major things that happened to me on Ibiza was I met a man with whom I had a practice of kind of a dual meditation that took us immediately to a mystical state of “now,” of bliss, where time stopped and space didn't matter, and we knew that if we stayed in that space, we wouldn't need to eat or shit or drink or whatever, that it was a completely different place. But we also knew no one has ever stayed there indefinitely.

With this man, whom I've always thought of as my teacher, we thought about everything: cause and effect, and how people are motivated to do what they do. It was an amazing time for me with this man.

And so I feel that when I was nineteen, with this man, I actually developed the philosophy that I now adhere to. I just didn't know anyone else who'd developed it anywhere, so it wasn't until 1994, when I had moved inland from Bolinas, from that little coastal town in California, inland to the town I live in now, and I had two children who were four and nine, two boys, and I wanted them to at least know some of the stories of religion [that I discovered Science of Mind].

I was looking for something that was not so denominational, and another family I knew had the same thought. I thought maybe Quaker, but there weren't any Quaker groups close enough by. And they found a Religious Science church, and they said, "Oh, we found this great place, and it has great music," and I said, "Oh, I want to go too." So I went with them. And I walked in the door, and I thought, *Oh, my God, I'm home. There are other people who think what I think!* And before that, the closest that I'd come to it were the "Star Wars" movies, with the concept of the Force—because we think of God as an "it," as an energy, not a person.

Q: So are you saying that you walked into this place and you could actually feel the spirit?

Hart: No. I walked into this place, and I heard a message that was what I believed, what I had come to, this philosophy that I had come to with my teacher on Ibiza at age nineteen; and until then the only thing I had heard that came close to my belief was the “Star Wars” philosophy, that there’s this energy that we can tap into, and with it we can do anything.

Q: How much of your time now do you spend either teaching or practicing this philosophy or religion? Incidentally, just define for me what, in your mind, is the difference between philosophy and religion.

Hart: Well, philosophy is how you think life works, and so if you live according to a certain philosophy, then you’re living according to an idea of how life works. Religion usually has rituals and dogmas and specific behaviors attached to it. That’s why religion is kind of an odd name for my religion, for my denomination. We think of it more as a spiritual system than a religion, because we’re not very dogmatic at all. We do have the treatment. Our form of affirmative prayer does have a technique to it that follows five steps. Other New Thought philosophies might have eight steps or three steps, but we are trying to do specific things—but that’s just the logic of reminding ourselves of what we know, to get ourselves ready to actually allow our subconscious to have a change in our belief system. Because you can *want* to believe that all the abundance of the universe is

yours; you can *wish* you believed it; but if you *don't* really believe it, you're not going to find yourself adequately supported, perhaps.

So where our real belief resides is really in our subconscious, what we call the subjective mind. So the difference between an affirmation—we're all familiar with affirmations, where you say, "My life is good," or, "God is good all the time," or, "I live in a universe that supports me," those would be little examples of affirmations—it can take you thousands of times of repeating that to get yourself to actually believe it. But if you do a treatment, we set up the steps, the argument of the treatment, the logic of the treatment in a way that will help you actually shift your belief and have one of those revelations, those a-ha moments.

Q: Tell me what a treatment is.

Hart: That's our form of affirmative prayer. So, again, we don't treat for conditions. We don't treat to get something specific. We treat to align with or remember our oneness with certain qualities or aspects of God. So if someone says, "I need a job," we'd say, "Well, what would a job give you?" What's behind that desire for a job? Is it about feeling supported by the Universe? Is it about feeling safe? Is it about an outlet for your creative expression? So we would be treating for the consciousness that would cause a job or something else that would fulfill that underlying need, and we would be looking

for the belief that you have that is getting in your way of having that thing, that quality in your life fulfilled, that experience of life. We're getting really deep here.

Q: I have a couple of more questions. I want to go with your practice now, because one of the things—

Hart: So you did ask me, Michelle, how much of my time? It is really a way of living for me, so if I'm talking to one of my sons and I find myself offering unasked-for advice, I will immediately pull back into remembering that everything they need to know is within them; and that is a spiritual principle, so that's part of my belief system, so I will say something like, "But, of course, you're going to know better than I am what's going to work for you in this. There is that within you which knows everything you need to know." So every moment of every day. I might be not feeling so good, and then I get in my car and I drive into this beautiful valley that I live in, and I see a goat on a hill, and I'm filled up with a remembrance of the beauty, a reminder, an alignment with God as beauty, with Life as the miracle that it is. So every moment there's the opportunity to live life in that way, with that awareness.

Q: I want to try to make a parallel that may not exist. For me, it does, but I think of being the girl that shipped off to Barnard in 1967, and I think of a woman who's just turned sixty-one.

Hart: Sixty.

Q: And to me I feel like these are both really very critical junctures, stepping-off points. Are you experiencing any of this at all?

Hart: Absolutely. I'm only sixty, because I skipped that year, but it's been huge turning sixty, and in fact, I didn't like turning fifty, and I loved turning sixty. I was very excited about it, and I actually, for the first time ever, let a friend sort of organize a birthday party for me, a birthday brunch. And I had my sons videotape each person talking to me, so I have a record of this moment of celebration.

Part of it is that I have some serious physical challenges now, so I really appreciate getting to be alive, and still being able to walk, and even, in a crippled way, going through a ballet class. So part of it is that, but I do think there's a parallel. I think that there's a sense in me of, what next?

And I'm alone. I've been single since 1992, and over my whole life I lived alone [a lot], in the country in Ibiza, as I said, miles from anywhere, with no running water and no electricity; so I've thought a lot about the life alone. There have been years, of course, when I've dated madly, but I haven't in a long time. So I think about things like sadness and yearning, and how much of that, when I experience sadness or yearning—I'm very available to all feelings, so those as well, and also very available to laughter and joy, but

—there’s a way that allowing myself to feel the sadness of people’s lives—and I hear a lot of that as a spiritual counselor and as a teacher of people wanting to be spiritual counselors—and allowing myself to empathize with that, [allows me] to be in the flow of the world’s sadness.

There’s certainly a lot of really sorrowful, unhappy things going on in our time that I would have hoped wouldn’t be happening now, like America doing torture and whatever. Or yearning, there are times when I yearn, and I think, *Well, is there some cultural thing that I’m supposed to have a partner, or at least a best friend, that I’m supposed to be the most important person in the world for somebody on the planet?* There are times when I get caught up in that and think that there’s part of me that yearns for that. But I don’t really think that’s it. There’s a way in which yearning is simply—because I don’t think that I want that—I think that yearning is something that is yearning for *more*, just for *more life*. And so there’s something very healthy about yearning. Our minister was talking about the seasons a few weeks ago, as we came into fall. She was talking about how in the fall, we turn within; and then in the winter, we rest; and then in the spring, new life buds; and how yearning is yearning for whatever’s coming next. And I think it’s more like that: it’s more a thirst for life, which is a very healthy thing.

Q: Part of the human condition.

Hart: Yes, and yet, at the same time, there are times when I think, *Well, is this it?* Because I live quite a hermit-like life. And I'm very blessed in that I have these various communities—my writing class, my student class, my church community, my ballet people, my San Francisco Ballet Shop volunteer group—so I've got a lot of different little communities, and some friends in each one of them who are just so important to me; and, of course, London and friends and family abroad. So I feel very blessed in that; and yet there are times when I'm in pain and I think, *Well, is this it? What makes me want to keep doing this every day?* So I think, in a way, that yearning is a really healthy thing. It's a movement. It's an open embrace, an opening of the arms to say to life, "I'm here, and whatever my place is, I'm available and I'm willing."

Q: That's very beautiful. Do you have a picture of where you'd like to go from here, not necessarily physically, but how you would like to develop from here?

Hart: Kind of and kind of not—in some ways, yes. There is a physical component. There are two actually. One is I've been trying to sell my house for about a year and a half, and I'm not willing to go so low that I sort of take off a third of my estate, because I don't *have* to move. But I would like to move closer in to Marin County and be closer to all of my communities and not have to drive so much. That's, again, with my back issues, a struggle. So on a physical level, I would like to move closer in. I'm also a little bit afraid of it, because I've been in this beautiful country rural place for so long, and I

find it so soothing, that when I do go out and about, I just can't wait to get home. So who knows, maybe that's why the house hasn't sold.

But there is a physical piece there, and there's also a physical piece with my body. I do believe that I can actually improve rather than deteriorate, regardless of whatever. I don't want to go into my diagnoses, but regardless of whatever western medicine may believe

—

Q: You said you didn't want to go into diagnoses.

Hart: No.

Q: Do you have a physical challenge that you're dealing with?

Hart: I have several, but I do believe that those could actually get better and not worse, so that's also a goal physically.

In terms of the rest of it, I've made certain commitments. I'm on my third novel, and I have committed to myself to doing a final revision of the first one, which I think I finished in 1999—or started—that's the one I read from. So I'm committed to, when I've finally done that, to actually at least looking for an agent, at least trying to do something

to get it published. I have had some poems published, or they've won little honors, little prizes.

Q: Moving closer to a community would probably be helpful in getting the work out there.

Hart: I don't know that that's the case. I think it's mostly done long distance nowadays. It's just a matter of my motivation. I think of having been a market research consultant, where I had to market myself, and I did that very successfully. But it's not my favorite thing to do. And the writing, it's not like I *have* to do it to support myself, so it's kind of more about, I want to feel that I've at least *tried* to publish.

Q: Clearly you have a great deal to say, and people who have a lot to say usually want to be heard.

Hart: There you go. So I do have goals for that, but more my goals are I want to arrive at a place [pause]—My sons are twenty and twenty-five. We've had a very happy family, and I want to continue to strengthen the ties between us, between myself and each of my sons, and between all three of us as a family, and then with other people.

I want to continue to learn to release any judgment, and just to learn to love better. To be able to know that whatever the conflict, or whatever my judgments are about someone

else, and theirs about me, that there is a way that we can both be happy, that we can both feel “fed.” I don’t need to know what that way is, but just living and knowing that there’s always a way that something can be resolved, or become “right,” or come to a place where you can love each other again.

Q: Very, very lovely. One question. If looking back now, as you are, at a girl who has to go to Barnard, if you could say one thing to her, alert her to one danger or to one possibility, what would you say to that girl?

Hart: Well, what came first to my mind was, “It’s going to be okay”; and what came second was, “You are kind.”

Q: You would have to tell yourself that? You didn’t know that?

Hart: Not then. I think that with all the stuff with my mother, I was in a lot of conflict around that, wanting to give her what she wanted, but unable to because it would have been me.

Q: Back on your married life and your having to have this huge, really kind of very straight career, market research—I know it’s been a little bit less corporate than totally corporate, but certainly kind of—“suits.” Did you resent having to play this role?

Hart: No, actually, because I was a consultant, I was always a freelancer. I was trained by a man I met on Ibiza, who was English, and he ended up in San Francisco being the head of market research for a big advertising agency, McCann-Erickson, and he then went back on his own. He'd been a freelancer in London when I met him, and so he kind of trained me very loosely to do it. It was a very in-the-back-door job.—I was choosing between writing, psychology and business, and I didn't want to go back to school to become a psychologist; and writing was too scary; and so I'd always been interested since I inherited some money when I was so young. I'd tried all different kinds of investments, and so I was kind of interested in the money world, the business world; so I wrote down a list of everyone I knew involved in business in any way, or in money in the world—lawyers, stockbrokers, whatever. When I called him, he said, “Well, let's have lunch. I might have some work for you,” and that's how it evolved.

So, no, I felt very free. I never wore the navy blue suit, I never did—but I might have a raw silk navy jacket. I could do anything. I could be a little different, because I was a consultant, and I was selling myself. If I had to find new clients—as opposed to referrals—I needed to show them what was special, what was different, about me, and I was very much being hired for myself, for my mind, for my writing skills. So it felt very free and very powerful for me to be that kind of a businesswoman.

Q: You weren't trying to conform to a military, cookie-cutter idea of what a market researcher does or working for a hierarchy.

Hart: No. [Also] I was a qualitative market researcher, I wasn't a quantitative one. I wasn't doing questionnaires. I was interviewing focus groups or one-on-one, high-level people, in depth, and I was creating those interviews, and I was handling the subcontractors, so I wasn't doing quantitative. It was all in-depth interviewing, so it was fascinating; and I would learn about things before they even came on the market—ATM machines, IRAs, things like that. And because it was primary research, it was almost all for Fortune 500 companies, because they're the only ones who can afford primary research. So it was fascinating. It was ad agencies, corporations. I got to do a lot of work with Pacific Bell when AT&T split up, one of the Baby Bells, and they were defining their own corporate culture. I did a lot of in-house employee work for them, for over a decade, so I got some really interesting projects. It was fascinating.

Also, you have to remember that I had come from being a hippy in Spain, so for me the idea of being a corporate person was quite glamorous; being someone paid lots of money to wear a suit and high heels and come in in my silk shirt was quite different than what I had been doing for a long time—since I had left that whole prep-school world. I think I left it so far behind I didn't think I'd ever get back to it, so to get back to it in some regard was a positive thing. I don't live in much of a corporate-type world now. Most of the people I'm involved with—some are wealthy, but not many.

So I'd left the Dupont, Johnson & Johnson kind of world, and so to be able to use my education and to infiltrate that world, I think I thought of it that way. Of course, because I lived in Bolinas, which is a great joke in California, everywhere I went, when clients or potential clients found out I lived in Bolinas, I would always get the joke. Because it was the town that tore down all the signs to itself, and it kept taking down the signs to Bolinas, because it didn't want visitors and tourists and stuff. So even just my address made me a bit of a renegade in the corporate world, in their eyes, So, no, I saw myself as kind of lucky to infiltrate that world and get what I needed from it.

Q: Now the one thing that I have not heard from you at all is politics. Are you apolitical? Were you at any time political? Have you ever been political?

Hart: Not actively, not nearly so actively as I feel I *should*. I am definitely a lefty, a progressive, and theoretically I think that the wealth should be redistributed. I'm more into sharing, and I'm certainly leaning towards socialism, although I'm not into huge government. I do think the wealthy ought to be taxed, so I'm definitely of that persuasion; but I've never been as active politically. That's not been a place where I put my feet. I put some money there, but not my feet.

Q: During all this turmoil in '68, you must have felt—well, how did you feel? I know the part that you read, you felt like you could be swept up by ideas and people that you

had no connection with, and that your fate to be determined like a raft lost on the sea, but beyond that, did you have sympathies?

Hart: I had sympathies for the students. I didn't have sympathies for violence, but I definitely had sympathies for non-violent protest, but I think two things. One, I was just beginning to grapple with my own psychological healing, and my attention was just so much on myself because of that. And also it was very scary, I think, the idea of standing up to authority; because, again, you have to remember that I didn't get strokes at home, I got them at school, and I'd done enough standing up to authority just to get [to skip] my senior year. I pretty much relied on the authority in my life, and then, of course, I'd done my naughty things, but I don't think I really [pause]—

Again, maybe it's because my father was English, but it was such a cookie-cutter mentality. I remember being so shocked reading in a magazine something about "preteens," and in my growing up no one had even paid attention to teenagers, let alone preteens. We were just possessions, and we were supposed to keep silent unless spoken to, and all follow the same path, and, "Here's what you're going to do."

So it was such a huge leap. I had had some exposure to these kinds of things, but very little. I think my Princeton boyfriend had maybe smoked marijuana a couple of times towards the end of our time in Princeton. I had gone to hear Timothy [F.] Leary speak once. I love the Beatles. But, for instance, I never would have liked the Rolling Stones,

because they were just too far away from what my life was. The Beatles, I could follow. They led, or represented, symbolized, the path that I took—but to go faster, dirtier, I couldn't have done it.

Q: It sounds to me as if beauty is an important part of your life in terms of your surroundings, in terms of listening to music, as opposed to jarring cacophony. Do you want to expand on that? Is there anything I missed that you really feel strongly about or you really want to say? Because clearly you're a person with very, very much to say, and I don't want to keep the category or thing that you feel that you want to put out there.

Hart: I guess only that the idea that people could completely change the influences of their background was important to me; and the idea of other cultures and a world awareness. Those were two ideas that were important to me. For instance, on Ibiza there was a whole group of people who had come from pretty blue-collar, low-class backgrounds, and yet there they were wearing preppy clothes and had exquisite taste—and taste was a big thing in my mother's upper-crusty world. So the idea that people could *acquire* that, that you didn't have to be born into it, that there was a mobility not just of money, but of consciousness, of awareness, of appreciation, of participation in life and in spirituality and in the deepest things in life, that's been important to me.

Similarly, I think the idea of being in touch with the world as a world, and not just as an American, but as a global citizen and not just an isolated citizen.

So I think maybe one of the reasons I didn't get more involved with the revolution at Columbia and stuff, or the politics, was because part of it was cynicism or a lack of faith that it would have much effect, and part of it was because it was so specific, it was so local. But the Vietnam War thing, I just think a lot of it, as I say, I was just so struggling to begin to get a grasp on my own life that I was not as conscious as I should have been. And I was away. I was in Ibiza for a lot of that stuff. I wasn't here during Watergate. But I did go out with a boyfriend who was trying to escape—a couple—who were trying to escape the draft. That was a huge threat to my brother, to my boyfriend—to my Columbia boyfriend. It's so different now. These wars we don't pay a lot of attention to on one level, because there isn't a universal draft.

Q: It's true.

Hart: So the people who are fighting have chosen to do it.

Q: Iraq was a complete fiction.

Hart: Well, so was Vietnam, the idea that we had any right to be there.

Q: But we knew that. We knew that Vietnam was a fiction.

Hart: Well, we knew that Iraq was.

Q: I think there was a period of time when even liberal—and I'm thinking about [Thomas] Tom [L.] Friedman and other editorial writers of the time, there was a period when that weapons-of-mass-destruction story was really bought by even the left-leaning journalists.

Hart: Not out here.

Q: To me, I didn't care what they had.

Hart: It wasn't bought out here.

Q: I didn't care what they had over there.

Hart: I listen to a radio station for my news, and they never bought that. And Jon Stewart. Nobody believed it out here. We knew it was crap.

Q: They believed it out here in New York, they did. When you talk about Tom Friedman rallying for war, I don't think I'll ever forgive him for that. I didn't care what they had. I didn't want to go to war with them, but there was a scare, like the boogeyman is coming, and it wasn't true.

Hart: Well, again, amongst my circles, we didn't buy into that; so, for us, it was similar to Vietnam. But I have to say, see, that's an example. I don't read any newspaper, let alone the New York Times. I get most of my news from Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert, and then the local Berkeley [California], very progressive radio station.

Q: You're not alone in that. That's pretty much our generation's doing that. I just do that because my husband is a news junkie. Left to my own devices, I'd probably never watch it. Now this is where I'm starting to talk, so this is where I have to go, because this isn't about me. If you feel tomorrow or the next day as if there's something that you want to say that you've left out, please put it on. If you feel that there's another passage from your novel—the one you read was wonderful—that you want to read, do that. Send me whatever they're called that you put this on. If there are photographs that you can loan us, and loan me, because I will be responsible for your precious items.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Index

Baisley, Margaret	6, 7, 19, 20
Draper, Paul	9
Ex-Husband of Michael Hart	29, 54
Father of Michael Hart	1, 3, 25
Graham, Martha	9
Holmes, Ernest S.	34
Kael, Pauline	9
Limon, Jose Arcadio	9
Mailer, Susan	11
Millet, Katherine Murray	4
Millett, Katherine Murray	16
Mother of Michael Hart	1, 16, 24, 25
Papp, Joseph	7
Royer, Christine	8