

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Christine Jaronski

2015

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Christine Jaronski conducted by Frances Garrett Connell on September 26, 2015. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

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

Barnard Alumni Class of 1971 Oral History Project

Interviewee: Christine Jaronski

Location: Stillwater, NY

Interviewer: Frances Garrett Connell

Date: September 26, 2015

00:00:03 Q: This is an interview taking place with Christine Jaronski at her home in Stillwater, New York, on Saturday, September 26, 2015. The interviewer is Frances Connell. This is for the Barnard College Voices Oral History Project for the Class of 1971. We've lost a little bit of this interview so we're picking up with a few comments in the middle and then we'll go back and start with the chronology. Thanks.

(audio cuts out and then cuts back in)

Jaronski: —really shouldn't give up my Barnard education and I should try to go back in the fall, so I did. Barnard accepted me back, for which I'm eternally grateful. And what I had to do, though, in order to graduate with my class was petition to have my singing in the Barnard-Columbia chorus for four years counted as a half credit per semester. And that gave me enough credits to graduate with the class of '71, which I'm also very grateful for, although I think there's no—it certainly was legitimate to ask for credit for that work.

00:01:17 Q: I think so, too. It's a lot of work. Okay, I'm going to have to ask you to go back and repeat a few things because I realized that for some reason it wasn't recording the first fifteen minutes.

Jaronski: Oh gosh!

00:01:30 Q: My problem, my error—

Jaronski: Oh!

00:01:33 Q: So if you don't mind tell me one more time about your birth and your early years.

And I think we can piece together from there and go back to Barnard. So— (Jaronski laughs) So your mother and your father—

Jaronski: I'm the oldest child—

00:01:53 Q: I'm really sorry, (both laugh) this normally doesn't happen.

Jaronski: I'm the oldest child of a family of four children. My mother and father were children of Polish immigrants. They themselves were born here. And so my mother in particular wanted to be sure that we were a hundred percent American and did not really encourage me to learn Polish, which I wish I had learned as a child. And my two brothers, who are twins to each other, were born ten and a half months after me. So I remember my grandmother being a big part of my upbringing, helping my mother take care of us all. And then my third brother was born three years after me. So we were all—there were four of us within three years, which is kind of a lot. But—

00:02:41 Q: And you were in—the town again?

Jaronski: Excuse me?

00:02:44 Q: Your town?

Jaronski: Oh, I was born not far from here in Cambridge, New York. I was raised in Halfmoon, New York, which is also not far from here. And I still have a lot of family in the area, which is partly why I'm back here again at this point.

00:02:58 Q: And your father?

Jaronski: He worked for a paper mill as the assistant vice president, in Mechanicville, and my mother had gone to secretarial school, and of course during the war she worked, but once she got married she became a homemaker. And she was a real super-duper homemaker. (both laugh) She was an expert seamstress, and she belonged to several women's clubs, and she cooked and baked and she even started a 4-H club so I could have some girlfriends when I was a small kid and that was really nice.

00:03:34 Q: Okay. And we had started to say—so what was the neighborhood like? You said you were the only Catholic family.

Jaronski: Oh yeah, we were the only Catholic family and—well, I think that maybe you captured this where I was talking about JFK [John F. Kennedy] and— No? That's not on there either?

00:03:48 Q: Nope, we lost it all.

Jaronski: Oh, okay. Well, I remember in elementary school the year that Jack Kennedy was running for president, I was the only person in my class who voted for him in our little classroom election. And my parents were definitely pro-Kennedy. So—

00:04:09 Q: Right. And the schooling itself?

Jaronski: I also thought I went to a very good school; it's called Shenendehowa. It still exists; it's become a gigantic mega school now with many, many buildings for its campus. When I was there I was told that it was built only two years after the last one-room schoolhouse in our area closed and if I had been a little older I might have started my education in a one-room schoolhouse, which is mind-boggling. But I think I got a really great education and I liked Shenendehowa. So—

00:04:45 Q: And you said that one of the—really one of the pinnacles of your education was being able to sing in the chorus and one of your teachers, so—

Jaronski: Yeah, yeah, our teacher, Mr. Crowder, he was black and had a wonderful, warm way about him and all the kids loved him and I was really glad that I got to sing under his direction.

00:05:10: And that pinnacle moment when you almost levitated?

Jaronski: You're kidding! Is that not on there either? (laughs)

00:05:17 Q: I'm really sorry. I just started off wrong today.

Jaronski: Oh, gee! I had kind of a spiritual experience singing. At one point, we were in a concert; we were singing the Randall Thompson *Alleluia*, and I had the sense that all of us had kind of gotten out of our bodies and were floating above ourselves singing. And it was very moving to me, and our choral director, Mr. Crowder, left the room crying after we sang that so I thought it must have been real. So—

00:05:50 Q: Okay, and you—you were part of the above-average group academically.

Jaronski: Yeah, our school had this system where they separated out the top students and we continued together from fourth grade on through elementary school, and then those were my friends in high school as well, in junior high and high school as well.

00:06:13 Q: Okay. Now, you told me that you lost your mother when you were thirteen and that she had had cancer from the time you were in the third grade—

Jaronski: Second grade, actually.

00:06:21 Q: Second grade.

Jaronski: Yeah. So I knew she was sick but I was also really very shocked that she died because no one ever said the word *cancer* to the children. And no one ever let us know how bad it was.

So—

00:06:34 Q: But she had told you from an early—kind of groomed you to know you were going to go to college.

Jaronski: Yes, she definitely wanted us to go—me to go to college and my brothers as well, of course, and every time we got money for a birthday, it always had to go for a savings bond for college, so we had our little stash of treasure. (laughs)

00:06:52 Q: Okay. All right. Again, I'm really sorry I lost all that richness, but we will go forward to Barnard, because that's what you wanted to focus on from the beginning anyway. You had a guidance counselor who discouraged you initially but you still applied—

Jaronski: In high school, yeah.

00:07:08 Q: Yeah, in high school. And you got admitted, you arrived there, and you were put on Eight Reid [the eight floor of Reid Hall]—

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:07:18 Q: And those are friends you've kept up with, you said.

Jaronski: I had—not really well (laughs) but I said I saw Pat Auspice at the last reunion and the one before that I saw Marge Weiner also, but yeah—

00:07:32 Q: Okay, okay. And your major in philosophy—

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:07:35 Q: What pulled you to that?

Jaronski: Has this—is this—do I need to repeat what I said or—

00:07:39 Q: Yes. Just one more time. (both laugh) We'll catch up. I'm sorry.

Jaronski: All right. I thought—when I went to Barnard I thought I was going to be an English teacher. And I studied with Catharine Stimpson, who only gave me Bs, and I was used to getting A's, so I found that very discouraging. (laughs). And I also discovered that to major in English

you had to focus only on literature written in English and I was thinking world literature, everything; and I could have possibly done a comparative literature major with French and English, but I didn't want to do that. And so I thought, Those are the kinds of things I could learn myself, but one thing I really need a teacher for is philosophy, so I decided to major in philosophy.

00:08:28 Q: With a specialty in aesthetics, you said.

Jaronski: Yes.

00:08:31 Q: Right. Okay and I—just picking up again: you said you were very active in high school, you said you were involved in everything because your mother, after she was gone, it was necessary for you to kind of be the homemaker.

Jaronski: Yeah. And I just wanted to spend as much time at school as possible and not have to go home. We had a late bus and a late-late bus. And often I was on the late-late bus. (laughs)

00:08:51 Q: And that was literary magazine, you said—I'm sorry—

Jaronski: No, we didn't have a literary magazine.

00:08:55 No. Yearbook—

Jaronski: Yearbook, yeah, and sports.

00:08:58 Lots of sports.

Jaronski: Yeah, sports and I forget what else we did have, but whatever it was, I was on it.

00:09:01 Q: Right. And you even got a letter, you said.

Jaronski: I got a letter in sports—girl leaders—

00:09:08 Q: Yeah. Okay. Good. So Barnard empowered you. One more time—tell us. (both laugh)

Jaronski: Yeah, I felt very empowered. I liked the saying about New York City that if I can make it there I can make it anywhere. And so I was feeling like I was “making it” and I was feeling very great about that. And, you know, I loved taking advantage of the cultural opportunities in the city—the ballet and the opera—I think that maybe I did talk about later, though. Yeah, so, yeah, I felt satisfied that I was able to meet the academic expectations. I was singing in St. Paul’s chapel choir and getting paid for it, which was really nice.

00:09:52 Q: Okay. Say a little bit more about that—I wanted to ask you earlier. That involved a lot of practicing? Like once a week or twice a week?

Jaronski: Yeah, just once a week and then the service on Sunday morning. My roommate was Jesse Owens and she was an organist and she's the one who kind of got me—told me about it so I went over and auditioned and luckily I got in, so—

00:10:15 Q: I think it was skill, not just luck. (both laugh) And then you said you were able to take lessons in voice at—

Jaronski: Oh, and I started studying voice with Josephine Cooper who's—Mongiardo is her professional name—who's Ken Cooper's wife and he was the one who taught me harmony at Barnard. And I also studied piano with Joel Sachs privately because Barnard didn't offer any performance courses at that time.

00:10:44 Q: Okay, okay. All right, so we once more we'll look at the strike of '67. Earlier you said that you remember watching it from the top floor of—from the roof of—

Jaronski: —of Reid, yeah—

00:10:58 Q: Okay. And what were some of the things you saw?

Jaronski: Just a lot conflict and I don't know, it was really hard to tell what you were seeing; it was at night and there were flashing lights and people looking like they were combatting with each other. (laughs)

00:11:16 Q: Do you remember all those—I guess there were tons and tons of buses—police buses and things like that—

Jaronski: Is that—I don't really—

00:11:23 Q: and horses

Jaronski: —remember that. No. Yeah, yeah.

00:11:24 Q: Now, you said you didn't actually—you didn't feel you wanted to occupy a building but you were supportive.

Jaronski: Yeah, so I wanted to do something so I volunteered to work in the infirmary. And um—

00:11:36 Q: And you met your first boyfriend there—

Jaronski: That's where I met my first boyfriend, who was a former Columbia [College] student who had dropped out. So—

00:11:42 Q: Okay, okay. So we had gotten as far as—we had gotten as far as your junior year.

No? And you were—

Jaronski: Okay. Oh, when I dropped out and went across country—

00:11:53 Q: When you—yeah.

Jaronski: —with my other boyfriend, yeah.

00:11:56 Q: So let's start there once more.

Jaronski: Okay. So you mean back up?

00:12:01 Q: So you had—Yeah, just starting there, that story. You had stayed that summer—

Jaronski: I was living in an apartment and I wanted to stay in the apartment but I found out that if I did I would not get my financial aid for housing. I had to be in a dorm to get that, and so I couldn't afford to stay. I kind of got mad at Barnard because of that and I just—and I had this boyfriend who wanted to take a cross-country trip visiting communes and I thought, All right, I'm going to go with him. That's what I'm going to do. So I did and—oh, I can't remember the names of the communes we visited—one was in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and one—I think maybe one in New Mexico, I don't know. I think there might have been one that was maybe well known at the time but I'm not sure. And we ended up in a place called Cave Junction or Cave Creek—I'm not sure which—Arizona, and he decided he wanted to stay there and live with these people in the caves—they were actually living in caves—and I didn't want to do that, so I got a plane ticket to San Francisco and ended up living in the Bay Area, also on a commune but in a

different kind of commune, a house commune, in Berkeley. And after that spring and summer I realized I really didn't want to give up my education, so I applied to be readmitted to Barnard and I was and I'm really very grateful for that.

00:12:31 Q: Tell me a little bit about what it was like going from commune to commune and then living in one in Berkeley in those days.

Jaronski: (sighs) It was not that special. (laughs) I mean, yeah, I don't really know what to say. That—

00:13:50 Q: Was that sort of typical behavior for you or was that a real anomaly that you were—

Jaronski: Oh, well, I had gone to Woodstock also. I forgot to mention that.

00:13:58 Q: Oh, okay.

Jaronski: But that was—I think that was before that. That was maybe my sophomore year—

00:14:02 Q: Sixty-nine, our sophomore year. Yeah.

Jaronski: Yeah. So yeah, I had been to Woodstock and so I considered myself to be kind of part of Woodstock Nation and this wonderful free and open and loving community of hippies (laughs) so that's what I kind of identified with. Not so much in any political way but in a kind

of social movement way. And so yeah, I—I mean by the time I had graduated from Barnard and lived in Oregon for a while, my friends and I were starting to call those the bad old days, not the good old days because, you know, the idealism starts out great but the practical living together is not so easy, so—

00:14:59 Q: Mm, um-hm. Now, have you kept up with anyone from the Berkeley house or—

Jaronski: No, not at all, yeah.

00:15:05 Q: So how long had you stayed out there? You lost just a semester or was it longer?

Jaronski: I lost a semester and a summer and then I came back. In fact, I might have gone back to take up my summer job also. I can't remember exactly how that worked but—

00:15:19 Q: And what about your summer jobs? What were you doing during the summer?

Jaronski: I worked as a secretary for a camp in Rifton, New York called Goddard Riverside Camp. They have a program in New York City in the Eighties, on the West Side. And that's where I started out working, in their office there for the summer. It was a work-study job. And then the second year I was working for them, they invited me to come out and work actually at the camp, so I did that.

00:15:47 Q: Okay. And what kind of kids were these?

Jaronski: Oh, just West Side kids, you know. Some were not very well off and others were pretty middle class. It was a mixture.

00:16:04 Q: What do you remember of the sort of racial and social and, you know, contemporary popular things—things that were happening at that time that made an impression on you? You said you felt you were part of the Woodstock Nation. What do you remember of that whole sort of—yeah.

Jaronski: Well, it goes back a little further than that in that my mother made it a point to be friends with the only black family in our neighborhood here in upstate New York and to be friends with the only Jewish family in our upstate neighborhood. So my mother was very, very socially liberal and I agreed with her and—so that started then. And then I had enormous love and respect for my choral director, who was black. So I don't—I don't really remember having any kinds of struggles with that.

00:17:02 Q: Okay. What about the—just a little bit more about the strike—Do you remember how you felt about any of the positions? You know, there was the whole issue of the war, the whole issue of the—

Jaronski: Well, I agreed—I agreed the war was bad. So—

00:17:20 Q: Did you ever participate in any of the marches?

Jaronski: Nope. No, no.

00:17:25 Q: Oh, okay. But you knew the war was bad. Is it something that you discussed with your friends, your contemporaries, or was this—

Jaronski: At that time? Hm. Probably. I don't really remember. I feel like throughout my life I've kind of shied away from being overtly political. I'd rather not, you know, enter the fray.

00:17:47 Q: Okay. So I had asked you earlier what probably one of the happiest periods of your life was, or happiest events. And you mentioned childbirth?

Jaronski: Um-hm. My two children, and then also my grandson who was born in November.

00:18:01 Q: Okay, okay. And in terms of what you think was probably the greatest challenge or barrier that maybe was put in your way.

Jaronski: Before I answer that, I just want to go back and say—I have to also say that I am an ordained minister and my ordination was an extremely wonderful day for me, too. And I tend to think of a lot of what I've done in ministry as being extremely satisfying and a blessing to me. And maybe this is coming later but one of the peaks of my ministerial life was organizing a remembrance for 9/11 the year after. I was living in Charlestown, Boston at the time and serving the First Church in Charlestown. And I and the Episcopal minister and the two Catholic priests

all got together and organized a gathering at the top of the Bunker Hill Monument in the evening.  
And it was just really, really special, so—

00:19:10 Q: That's powerful.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:19:13 Q: That's really powerful. Okay. All right. I feel like I'm giving you short change here.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (??)

Jaronski: I cut you off, too. I don't even remember your last question—

00:19:22 Q: No. I'm going to turn this off real quick—

(interruption)

Jaronski: The light is on the outside. That's the fan. No—outside the door, right behind that switch. There. Which means also I should take her out pretty soon, before it gets dark. Would you want me to do that now or do you want to go on a little bit more?

00:19:50 Q: Um, let's just go a little bit more if she's—

Jaronski: Okay. No. She can wait.

00:19:5 Q: Let's go about fifteen minutes and then we can take a break. Okay.

Jaronski: Want to sit with mommy?

00:20:04 Q: So were you—Anything about the—Anything as a child—I'm sorry—anything—  
What would you say frightens you or you're most worried about at this point in your life?

Jaronski: At this point? Ah. (sighs) (pause) I don't know, I don't tend—I don't think I'm really a fearful person.

00:20:38 Q: That's good. Fine. And then the other sort of half of that was: what barriers do you feel or what—were there things that were put in your way as you were trying to move forward professionally, academically, or what have you, socially? Do you remember?

Jaronski: (pause) Well, this is kind of not very universal but in particular I was ordained as a Unitarian Universalist Christian, and the barrier was being a Christian because in that denomination it's very difficult for somebody who professes Christianity to find a pulpit. They're looking for people that are more—

00:21:47 Q: Secular?

Jaronski: Not—more humanist, I would say.

00:21:51 Q: More humanist, I mean.

Jaronski: Yeah. Yeah. So that was really frustrating for me the first few years after div [divinity] school of—searching for kind of a long time before I got my call. And—but it had to do with where that denomination was at that particular point in time. And it has probably continued that way, too, although now I'm more affiliated with the United Church of Christ [UCC] so—In fact, my call was to a UCC church.

00:22:23 Q: Hm. Good people. Okay, you mentioned earlier that—when I asked you what—what was something else that defined you at Barnard, you said well, you had been sort of heavysset your whole life and that had been an issue—

Jaronski: Yeah. Yeah. Actually at Barnard is when I did lose weight because I felt like—

00:22:42 Q: (laughs) It's that food—(both laugh)

Jaronski: Barnard was—well, for one thing I didn't have to prepare my own meals, and I could choose from the cafeteria and I also felt I was being mothered, you know, I felt I was being taken care of. You know, and I think that was what I needed. And I was pretty active—I've always been pretty physically active. And in fact—knock on wood wherever there is some—I've never had a serious illness so being overweight hasn't hurt my health. And I always feel kind of angry when people feel—act so critical about obesity and, you know, it's not the whole story.

00:23:30 Q: Of course not. Of course not. Right.

Jaronski: So actually at Barnard I lost weight. I didn't ever get thin but I was a healthy weight. And I did start gaining it back after the birth of my first son. I mean I never really lost the pregnancy weight.

00:23:49 Q: Okay. So when you were a student what did you want most out of life?

Jaronski: Ah, I think I just wanted love, I wanted to find a boyfriend and—that was really so important. You know?

00:24:02 Q: And you told earlier that in high school you had a friend and you wanted to go to the prom and he ditched you at the last minute.

Jaronski: Yeah. He was at Bard [College]; he was in college already—

00:24:14 Q: Oh.

Jaronski: And I kind of understand that. Why would he want to go back to his high school prom?

00:24:21 Q: So what would be something that happened to you at Barnard that just really affirmed—if you can remember a particular incident—that just really affirmed: This is where I

should be. This is where my life has been taking off? Do you remember anything in particular?

Jaronski: (sighs) Just that I felt like the other women around me were all just like me and I felt that I'd finally found my tribe, you know.

00:24:55 Q: Was there ever a point at which you felt disappointed? Like, Oh, I wanted more—

Jaronski: Well, I was disappointed when I found out I couldn't get financial aid and still live in an apartment, but that was the big thing. Other than that—

00:25:10 Q: This was down at 103<sup>rd</sup>; that was kind of—

Jaronski: 102<sup>nd</sup>.

00:25:12 Q: —very edgy.

Jaronski: No, it really wasn't—well, maybe a little bit, but not—it was on the border. Like Columbus Avenue and over was awful but—

00:25:22 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: —I was, like, between Broadway and Amsterdam, so—

00:25:25: Um-hm, um-hm. Hm. Okay. And what sort of life as an adult did you anticipate when you first started Barnard? What did you think you were going to grow up to be? You said at one point—you majored in English—

Jaronski: I still thought I would be a teacher.

00:25:41 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: And I thought that I could work for a private school that didn't require—

00:25:46 Q: Certification?

Jaronski: New York State certification, yeah. And I turned—And I almost got a job teaching in the Virgin Islands through Barnard, but somehow that fell through. And so I went to the West Coast and I volunteered teaching at a Free School, I think they called it in those days.

00:26:06 Q: This was in Oregon?

Jaronski: No, this was actually in Northern California.

00:26:10 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: I went back to San Francisco and the school was just a little north of San Francisco.

00:26:15 Q: Okay, so let's start again from your graduation from Barnard. You proceeded where at that point?

Jaronski: Well, I proceeded back upstate to Halfmoon where my father was sick and was needing surgery and I intended to stay there with him. He instead had a heart attack—it didn't kill him—but he was too weak to have surgery and so I decided I wasn't going to just stay there and take care of him—not that he needed a live-in caretaker—and I went out to the West Coast. My brother—my younger brother—was still at home. So I went back out to the West Coast again.

00:26:57 Q: And what did you do there?

Jaronski: I got a job in a printing company in San Francisco. And just, you know, a clerical job. And after a year of that I realized I—that wasn't enough and so I wanted to go graduate school and I applied to the only school I knew that didn't require a GRE [Graduate Record Examination] because I hadn't taken them. So I got into the University of Oregon School of Music [and Dance].

00:27:22 Q: Ah, music, okay. Because you said you had majored—yeah, a minor in music, a major in philosophy.

Jaronski: Right. So I actually went to graduate school *for* music education at the U of O, but it turned out—and I was assuming that I would just do really well and that I would get a scholarship for my second year but they had no money available. No scholarships.

00:27:40 Q: In music. (laughs)

Jaronski: Yeah, so they had an organ and something else—they had two scholarships available but not for music education or voice even. So—so I dropped out of graduate school as well. (laughs) And I—and the boyfriend I had at that time owned some land and we were going to have a commune out there, but that never happened either. So—

00:28:06 Q: And this is what? Eugene, Oregon?

Jaronski: Eugene, yeah. Yeah.

00:28:09 Q: Okay. It must have been a real happening place in the late seventies—early seventies.

Jaronski: Yeah, I guess it was. We did know other people that lived on communes so—

00:28:20 Q: What happened to that guy?

Jaronski: He's still there. We had a child together. That was my first son.

00:28:26 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: And we weren't married.

00:28:29 Q: And you were how old at that point?

Jaronski: How old?

00:28:33 Q: Twenty-four or something?

Jaronski: Yeah, something like that. Twenty-four, twenty-five; by the time he was born I think I was twenty-five.

00:28:38 Q: Okay. And then?

Jaronski: And then my brothers back here started getting married and having children. And I thought, I'll never know those people if I stay out on the West Coast. So after—My son was five years old; it took five years before I got to that realization. And I had already broken up with his father long ago. We—I decide to come back here to the East Coast. And in fact, this was through the Barnard—I was getting the alumnae magazine—a young woman was advertising a summer sublet in Cambridge, and I connected with her and I lived in her apartment for a month which made the transition much easier, and then I moved to Boston and got a job actually working for

the Unitarian—first I worked for MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] for a while, then I worked for the Unitarian Universalist Association. And my son went to school in Boston; he went to the Beacon Hill Nursery School and then to the public—Boston public schools.

00:29:48 Q: And you were living in what part of Boston?

Jaronski: I was living in the North End at that point. And then I moved to Beacon Hill.

00:29:53 Q: Okay. So how were you surviving out in Oregon with a five-year-old—I mean, up until he was five—

Jaronski: Oh, I had—I went back to work. I was working for the state, the unemployment office; I was a claims taker for the unemployment office.

00:30:08 Q: Okay. So you came all the way back—

Jaronski: And then I became a social worker for the welfare department after that.

00:30:15 Q: For the state as well—

Jaronski: I took the test for that and got and did that.

00:30:18 Q: In those days you took a test; you didn't have to come in with the little papers, huh?

Jaronski No, yeah, well, the thing is you could get veterans' preference points if you had been in the military, so you were always competing with these people who had extra—extra points, but I still was able to get a job, so—

00:30:34 Q: Did you enjoy that kind of work?

Jaronski: I did. I liked social work and I felt like I was good at it.

00:30:39 Q: Mm-hm. I bet you were. I bet you were.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:30:41 Q: So now you're back on the East Coast, your son is established in school, and you're doing what?

Jaronski: I'm working for first MIT and then Unitarian Universalist—I was doing secretarial work—

00:30:55 Q: —secretarial work. Okay.

Jaronski: —calling it administrative assistant, you know—

00:31:00 Q: And you're reconnecting with your brothers and their families.

Jaronski: Yes. And that was a good thing. And then I met my current husband and got married and after I got pregnant after about a year, I decided—we decided that I would take at least two years off completely from work, so I resigned from my position and became a mother—a stay-at-home mother. And—but after a little bit of that I started teaching piano at home and I became the church school director at our church which was King's Chapel in Boston.

00:31:38 Q: Which is a—

Jaronski: Is a Unitarian Christian church, yeah.

00:31:41 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: And—

00:31:44 Q: And how had you met your husband?

Jaronski: I met him singing in the choir at a Unitarian church.

00:31:51 Q: I see.

Jaronski: He was in the choir as well. (laughs)

00:31:52 Q: The singing is very much a trend. A theme.

Jaronski: Yeah, it is. Yeah, yeah. This was Arlington Street Church in Boston.

00:31:59 Q: Oh, okay. Okay, so you're married and you're—

Jaronski: And then we both wanted a child so I had my second son, Teddy.

00:32:12 Q: Second son, okay.

Jaronski: And I started teaching piano and being church school director and through the work as church school director, I had a mentor who I still consider my mentor, Carl Scovel—he was the minister at Kings Chapel at the time—who encouraged me to do kind of more than just administer the program and teach. I got to lead worship, I got to preach occasionally, I got to organize chancel dramas and direct them, and I really enjoyed that work and through that I developed a sense of call to ministry and he supported me in that and I applied to the local schools—I didn't want to relocate—and I got into Harvard so I went to the Harvard Divinity School and I got my master of divinity there.

00:33:04 Q: Okay, let's stop there because I know you need to take her out.

Jaronski: Yeah, I did, especially before it gets dark.

(pause in recording)

00:33:08 Q: You were just about to tell me. Oh, do you want to put the—

Jaronski: I did.

00:33:16 Q: Okay, so you were just about to tell me about your experience—you're at the church and you—I'm sorry, you've entered Harvard Divinity School. So let's go from there now.

Jaronski: And that was really fantastic because I realized that while I was at Barnard I was kind of fighting it, but I was really enjoying being an adult learner at Harvard. And it's a great place, so—

00:33:47 Q: Now, what—I'm curious what the class was made up of. Were there quite a lot of women at that point?

Jaronski: Yes, there were. In fact, there were quite a lot of women in their forties and fifties and—but I was also surprised there were a lot of Catholics who were not on the ordination track, Catholic women who were religious women who were working in social service mostly, or teaching. But the demographics has changed since I was there and it's much younger and much more balanced—male, female.

00:34:24 Q: And this is a two-year program or—

Jaronski: Master of Divinity is a three-year program.

00:34:29 Q: Three-year program. Okay.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:34:31 Q: And that is—what does it entail then other than studies?

Jaronski: Well, it depends on your denomination, but for my denomination it also required field work, so a year of part-time field work in a church and psychological testing and—I can't remember—you know, you have to—your course work has to fit into a certain pattern, too, that covers a lot of areas—other religions, for instance; I took a course in Hinduism and Islam also.

00:35:10 Q: Okay. And this is Unitarian Universalist at this point?

Jaronski: Yes. Um-hm.

00:35:15 Q: Okay. And what would you say was your most satisfying experience with divinity school?

Jaronski: Hmm. Well (laughs), I keep going back to singing. When I decided to apply for div school, I thought I would really have to give up my singing. I had been singing for ten years in the Tanglewood Festival Chorus. And—

00:35:39 Q: How did you squeeze all that in?

Jaronski: (laughs) That was—I really loved doing that, too. But I had stopped doing that before I applied for div school. But I thought I was going to have to give up all singing. I also did a lot of solo work in churches and weddings and funerals and I was really delighted to find out that I didn't have to give up anything, any singing at all for Harvard, and I joined the chorus and I did a lot of solo work with them, the Harvard—just the chapel choir they have there, which is a pretty small group. But I was really pleased that I didn't have to give up that part of me. So—

00:36:19 Q: Okay. So, what's kind of the progression then? You have two kids, you have your master of divinity.

Jaronski: Um-hm.

00:36:28 Q: You're married, your husband is \_\_\_\_\_(??). How did you then move from there into actually a call, a placement in a church?

Jaronski: Well, I took two positions that were kind of very temporary. One was part-time interim in a church in Quincy that had had a lot of conflict the year before over their church school

program. So since I have church school background, I was kind of a natural to go in there and try to help them heal over that year. And then the next position, which was also an interim of—a well-loved minister had moved to a location too far away to serve this church and I filled in for her for a year. And so—and then I—the church in Charlestown, which is right where I was living, I happened to be—I guess I was introduced to the minister there, who was quite elderly, well ready for retirement except he didn't—he wanted to turn it over to someone he trusted. He was a Harvard man, so it kind of was nice that we had that in common. And it was not the completely orthodox way of going about hiring a minister but it was a fit so I took it, and I stayed there for eight years.

00:37:52 Q: Eight years.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:37:53 Q: Okay. And what kind of things were you doing then? So you were running the entire church? Or—

Jaronski: Yeah, I was the senior minister.

00:37:59 Q: You were the senior minister right off the bat.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:38:02 Q: Replacing this man who had been there for a long time.

Jaronski: Yeah. But it was a small church; it wasn't very big and they had—the greatest thing about them is after going through a search process for a year—two or three years—and encountering all kinds of different church personalities, I was really pleased that this church had a very positive attitude toward ministry. Some churches don't, so—

00:38:24 Q: Can you say more about that?

Jaronski: They trusted their minister and they didn't try to oppose what he wanted to do.

00:38:33 Q: Ah, okay.

Jaronski: So I had a lot of freedom and I really enjoyed that.

00:38:37 Q: So the famous politics of the church didn't—there wasn't an issue for you there?

Jaronski: Not really, no, no.

00:38:44 Q: Yeah. And how were you balancing your family life with this career and this calling?

Jaronski: Um-hm.

00:38:51 Q: This profession.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:38:54 Q: How did you manage that?

Jaronski: Well, by the time I actually went to div school, my older son was in college and my younger son was in high school so—

00:39:03 Q: Oh, okay.

Jaronski: Or close to it, so they were pretty mature already.

00:39:09 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: And I didn't—it wasn't as if I had some small children to run around after.

00:39:17 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: So it wasn't that hard. My husband was a good partner and, you know, supported me also, so—

00:39:23 Q: Now, were there any particular causes that your church or you personally were sort of putting forward during those years?

Jaronski: Well, I was trying to promote racial harmony because of course in Boston that's a real issue. And my church is—was in a neighborhood that opposed busing in the time when that was happening. And so, you know, you try to be subtle and to be gentle about it but to, you know, promote tolerance and acceptance among peoples and also people of other religions, so—

00:40:00 Q: Now, was this—what about the demographics of that church? Was it primarily white?

Jaronski: All white. We had one black woman who came and everyone liked her but, you know, she was the only one.

00:40:10 Q: Well, I think there's certainly a tendency for black churches to attract—as you would know.

Jaronski: Right, right.

00:40:18 Q: Yeah, so this would have been—this was in the late eighties? So I'm trying to think of when—

Jaronski: I got the call in 2000 and I was there for eight years.

00:40:27 Q: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I'm sorry—two thousand and?

Jaronski: Two thousand period.

00:40:30 Q: Oh, okay. Two thousand period.

Jaronski: And I was there through 2008.

00:40:33 Q: Okay, okay. And other particular causes that you were aware of in terms of the politics of the world?

Jaronski: Well, 9/11 happened on my watch, you know, so—

00:40:45 Q: And how did you handle that?

Jaronski: —that was huge. Well, also to try to promote tolerance of Muslims, even though people were blaming the whole religion for what a few fanatics were doing, you know—

00:40:57 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: But also ecumenical cooperation; I went to clergy meetings with the Catholics in the neighborhood and all that. Yeah.

00:41:08 Q: Is there still that—I mean, I know Boston was Catholic. (laughs)

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:41:14 Q: I guess also—was there a lot of healing still to be done between Protestants and Catholics?

Jaronski: I was worried about that when I first took the call because Charlestown in particular had kind of fanatic people who supported the IRA [Irish Republican Army].

00:41:30 Q: Yeah, those Irish.

Jaronski: Yeah, I know. But, you know, this is America and it wasn't Ireland so it wasn't as severe a problem as I maybe worried it could be.

00:41:44 Q: That's fortunate.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:41:47 Q: Okay. All right, let's see what else we can prod you to tell us a little bit about. All right, so the whole women's movement—where did you weigh in there and—

Jaronski: Oh, I considered myself to be definitely a feminist.

00:42:03 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: My philosophy department were all feminists. I went to meetings where I heard Betty Friedan speak and, you know, I was gung-ho. (laughs)

00:41:16 Q: Now, at any point in different things that you've done over your life, did you run up against the wall—so many have—of being discriminated against because you were female?

Jaronski: You know, I don't think I've been conscious of it because especially in the music world, you know, you need females (laughs) and in ministry also. I think what I—the wall that I ran up against was my own idea as a young person that well, women aren't priests or ministers—because they weren't when I was a child, and certainly Catholics still don't accept women as clergy. But that was kind of an internal thing I had to overcome, but once that was done, I didn't really perceive that my difficulty in having—in finding a call was because I was a woman. It was really because of my theology.

00:43:14 Q: Your theology?

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:43:17 Q: Okay. And what about—I'm trying to think what else—I guess I wonder about your—what do you consider your greatest accomplishment, maybe?

Jaronski: I don't know, I think serving that church—I think—yeah, I'm really happy with what I did there and I think I had some wonderful opportunities and they were good to me and I had a sabbatical year—not year—a sabbatical period in which I got to travel to England and—because John—part of my attraction to this church is John Harvard was a member and a minister—

00:43:59 Q: Wow!

Jaronski: —when he was in the US, in America. And so I—my sabbatical trip was to visit places associated with John Harvard and to photograph them, and I made a PowerPoint presentation of that which I presented to my congregation and also to the community at the library. And I got to do a lot of creative things, which were really fun for me, so I think that whole period. I mean, that's how I've seen ministry from the moment I've been ordained is that you just keep having these opportunities to be blessed and there's nothing like it.

00:44:42: So, would you talk a little bit maybe about your actual—your faith and some of the things that have sustained you in that.

Jaronski: Well, primarily I believe in God and there's a big difference between people who do and don't, so—I mean, that's kind of the basis of my ecumenical efforts is that those of us who believe in God really have a lot in common. And I believe that—I was just officiating at a

funeral last week in which I—walking the dog, I had a revelation that God’s love is something like gravity: it holds you even though you don’t know it’s doing it and you may not believe in it but you don’t have to for it to work. And I’ve just felt that even through the really difficult times in my life God’s love has held me, and God can use me to spread that love also, so—

00:45:53 Q: And when—Can you remember the sort of, you know, Saul on the road to—

Jaronski: That I never had.

00:46:02 Q: You actually haven’t. Okay.

Jaronski: I never had the lighting bolt—

00:46:04 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: I just had sort of a growing sense that this was something I could do and I wanted to do and I was feeling really rewarded by what I was already doing.

00:46:14 Q: Um-hm. Working at the church. Good. So you started to say earlier, way back earlier in this conversation, that you had changed considerably from the time you entered Barnard. So what were some of the changes—I think everyone became different—

Jaronski: Well, I think all teenagers are incredibly self-conscious; I was. And I think I developed

much more confidence for one thing. And (sighs) I guess I learned to believe in myself and to not be afraid to take risks and—

00:46:52 Q: You took several risks.

Jaronski: I took a lot of risks; I took some crazy risks.

00:46:56 Q: You took a lot of risks.

Jaronski: (laughs) So—so—

00:47:02 Q: Okay. So more confidence, the ability to take risks, believing in yourself—Was there any—any of those things that you did—you know, the commune, a mother without being married—did any of that ever—did you ever have regrets? Did you ever feel like, Oh my gosh, this is not really me or—

Jaronski: Uh-huh. I don't know.

00:47:25 Q: Integrated as part of your life again?

Jaronski: Yeah. (pause) Yes, I suppose I had regrets but they're always mixed, you know, it's not all—I don't know, it's just kind of hard to talk about, so—

00:47:51 Q: Sure, sure. Okay. Again, you've mentioned several times as part of your ministry and then earlier with your mother being quite tolerant, did you have—do you have special friends of other nationalities or other races, other classes?

Jaronski: Well, I had one good friend who I met—I think I met her before div school—she was from India—her name is Shuma; she's also a UCC minister. (laughs) And—so—I don't know, she was just a unique individual; it's not like you could say that she's an example of an Indian person, so—(laughs)

00:48:32 Q: She was just an individual that—yeah—

Jaronski: And also in chorus I had a friend who was from Japan, so—

00:48:41 Q: Okay. Do you remember any of the racial strife that we experienced or that we were exposed to in our undergraduate days?

Jaronski: The racial what?

00:48:51 Q: The racial strife.

Jaronski: Strife?

00:48:53 Q: Yeah. There was a lot of tenseness between the black students and the white students at one point.

Jaronski: That I don't really remember too well. I did have a black roommate when—in my senior year when I was living on 116<sup>th</sup> Street—what was—I think it was in 120—

00:49:07 Q: Six-twenty [620 West 116<sup>th</sup> Street Residence Hall], yeah.

Jaronski: Six-twenty, yeah. And I had a black roommate and she had a boyfriend and she had a Siamese cat, which she wasn't supposed to have. So it was like—it wasn't because she was black that there was strife, (laughs) it was who she was, again, you know?

00:49:26 Q: Had she been there all four years?

Jaronski: That was the first year I met her.

00:49:30 Q: Because you know we had a huge influx of transfers—

Jaronski: Did we?

00:49:34 Q: Which I've just learned about from—

Jaronski: I don't think I was very aware of any of that.

00:49:37 Q: I wasn't either.

Jaronski: Yeah. But the funny thing about Harvard, though, is that there's also similar issues and at the div school I signed up for a class that was "Preaching in the Urban Context" and of course I was in the urban context so I thought, This is a great title. I need it. But I found out this was the course that all the black students took, and I was the only white person in that class.

00:50:02 Q: Interesting, interesting.

Jaronski: And it was—it was crazy, so—

00:50:06 Q: And how did that work for you? Did you actually learn something?

Jaronski: Oh, yeah, I thought our professor was really good. She was a black preacher also. I mean, I love a lot of the black preachers who really are very emotional and can pull at your heartstrings. It's—I like that. It's not what I do, but it's good.

00:50:26 Q: Yeah, but speaking of black churches, and as someone who had been in the ministry and probably always saw the church as a sanctuary, what was your reaction to the shootings in Charleston earlier this summer?

Q: Oh, just heartsick. Absolutely heartsick.

00:50:42 Q: Can you have imagined anything like that happening in any of the congregations you were with?

Jaronski: Well, you can always imagine the worst, but it's just beyond—beyond words.

00:50:56 Q: Yeah, absolutely. Okay. Were you ever—in terms of being part of a city or working in some ministerial outreach, do you ever feel yourself in danger or targeted because you were a white woman?

Jaronski: Well, in New York City traveling late at night I think anyone would feel—

00:51:23 Q: In those days, yeah?

Jaronski: Yeah. I remember coming home from babysitting and having been given cab fare but wanting to keep the money so taking the subway and feeling scared but, you know, I lived to tell the tale, yeah.

00:51:39 Q: Do you go back to the city much?

Jaronski: I wish I could go back to the city more than I do. It's just so expensive, and I really need to spend a night there to go to a show or even the opera.

00:51:50 Q: Sure.

Jaronski: So, it's too late to get a train back.

00:51:52 Q: Sure. So in terms of the whole women's movement again, do you remember—you said you were—you went to meetings, or you were aware of that; were there any mentors for you in those days?

Jaronski: Well, I would say Mary Mothersill, my philosophy adviser, was my main mentor.  
Yeah.

00:52:11 Q: And was she—I didn't know her—was she quite a bit older than we were or was she a relatively young professor?

Jaronski: Yeah, yeah, she was—I mean, it may have seemed older than she really was. Maybe she was only in her fifties, I don't know.

00:52:25 Q: Right. Right. Yeah, she had an excellent reputation.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:52:27 Q: Okay. All right. Well, we're getting there. (Jaronski laughs) And your concept of yourself as a woman—how has it changed over time? Is there an experience of when it changed

and confirmed your sense of yourself as a women? I've kind of gone around that and around, but—

Jaronski: Yeah. I'm not even sure what that means anymore.

00:52:52 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: You know? I think there's—I think there's too much of a tendency to want to put people into pigeonholes and it doesn't really work.

00:53:09 Q: Um-hm. Yeah, well, that's a good answer. Okay. Anything about any relationships that you feel were—really changed the trajectory of your life? Really pushed you into a—yeah, maybe where you are now? (Jaronski sighs) You've mentioned several boyfriends over the course of your life. (Jaronski laughs) I think I could name that many—

Jaronski: Oh, right, yeah.

00:53:42 Q: So you've been married how long this time?

Jaronski: It'll be thirty-three years in two weeks.

00:53:46 Q: That's a pretty long time.

Jaronski: Yeah, it is. Yeah. I'm not—I just—I'm not feeling very articulate about it.

00:53:59 Q: That's okay. It's okay. That's perfectly fine. I will not force you to do more than you want to.

00:54:04 Jaronski: Okay, thanks. (laughs)

00:54:04 Q: Okay, we are going to kind of wind down then. And I guess I would ask you if I haven't already—any particular people in your life that you particularly admire now or that you feel continue to be either mentors or influential? And they could be people you read; it doesn't have to be someone in body and flesh, yeah.

Jaronski: Oh. Wow, that's a thought.

00:54:30 Q: Yeah.

Jaronski: Gosh. No, the person that springs to mind easily is Carl Scovel, who was the minister of King's Chapel while I was church school director there, who encouraged me to go to div school, who met with me every month since then until I moved out here to kind of let me run things past him that were going on in my church or going on in my life and who was there when my older son was extremely sick and he came to the hospital to be with me at that time and who

I don't see as often now but when I do see it's just like old times. And last time I saw him he suggested we meet at the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts] and we had lunch there. He was just kind of—I mean, even though he's getting older, he's just still as interested and intelligent and lively as ever. And it was a fun thing to do—it wasn't just—not that I really need mentoring now that I'm retired, but it was just nice to—to continue to have that relationship.

00:55:39 Q: Um-hm. He sounds delightful. We didn't touch much on your family.

Jaronski: No.

00:55:45 Q: And your children. Would you like to share a little bit about them? Your children—

Jaronski: That's kind of a painful subject and I—

00:55:51 Q: Oh, okay.

Jaronski: —feel like it would take a lot of time to really talk about that.

00:55:55 Q: Okay.

Jaronski: But my older son passed away eight years ago, right before I moved out here.

00:56:01 Q: Oh, I'm sorry.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:56:03 Q: So sorry to hear that.

Jaronski: Yeah.

00:56:04 Q: So you have one left.

Jaronski: Yep. (laughs)

00:56:07 Q: Oh. That's hard; I can't even imagine how you deal with the death of a child.

Jaronski: It's not easy.

00:56:14 Q: I'm sorry. Okay, well, what—so what are you looking forward to happening in the future? You said you retired in 2008.

Jaronski: Um-hm.

00:56:25 Q: And you've been here.

Jaronski: Um-hm. I actually haven't completely retired.

00:56:29 Q: I didn't think so. You said you did a funeral recently.

Jaronski: I did. Well, I was substituting at that point, but I—when I first moved here I took a whole year off because it was right after my son's death. And then I took an interim position at Albany, which was a one-year position, and that church was kind of on its last leg and needed to close. That's what was—we were doing that year. And then the next year I took an interim position also at a church that had experienced a lot of strife in Albany and I only wanted to spend one year there. And then I kind of officially retired, although now I work for the United Church of Christ as what's called an annuitant visitor; my task is to visit retired ministers and see if they have any concerns that they want to pass on to the pension board. And there is available funds for people who are in need so it's kind of partly to try to identify that. That has been extremely part-time and I have a huge territory so it's really hard to manage.

00:57:31 Q: What's your territory?

Jaronski: Technically, I'm still doing that.

00:57:33 Q: What is your territory?

Jaronski: It's basically from Long Island up to here, maybe a little farther north here—but not western New York.

00:57:44 Q: Um-hm, um-hm.

Jaronski: Anyway, so, occasionally I'll accept a guest-preaching offer; I'm going to do that next week in Schaghticoke, but I'm not looking for it. I really—I really like not having a lot of responsibility. And I like having a lot of time to read; I do do a lot of reading. I belong to two book clubs. And I like being able to visit with my family in the area. I have a brother and his wife and their two daughters and one of the daughters is married and has children. I have an elderly aunt and uncle in the area, and cousins. So just being. You know, I just feel like being is enough. (laughs)

00:58:31 Q: And where's your grandson?

Jaronski: He's in Germany.

00:58:34 Q: Germany!

Jaronski: My son and his—his wife is German—and they've been there for seven years, but they just got married two years ago and they had the baby in November.

00:58:43 Q: Oh.

Jaronski: Yeah. But they spent a lot of the summer here with me. They spent about a month here

in the summer.

00:58:50 Q: And how about travel? Are you able to—

Jaronski: Yeah, I've actually been to Germany ten times.

00:58:56 Q: To see your son or just—

Jaronski: Mostly, I also have a good girlfriend who lives not where he lives but in Göttingen, which is a couple hours south. Excuse me. So—and I love European travel and I'm getting to the point where I don't have as much energy and cannot walk as far and am more tired, but I'm glad I had—I had three trips to Paris—and I was singing with the Battenkill Chorale and we had a trip to Vienna and Prague. I took a trip to Poland where we were celebrating Chopin's two hundredth birthday and visiting places related to him, which also included Paris, actually, and, so, yeah, we're planning to go to Germany for Christmas. So that's in the works.

00:59:46 Q: \_\_\_\_\_ (??)

Jaronski: But I'm feeling like I don't have as much of a travel lust as I used to.

00:59:53 Q: Sure, sure. Okay. So travel, more reading, some rest, less pressure—

Jaronski: (laughs) Yeah.

00:01:00 Q: That all sounds good. Continuing the book club. What about—is there anything else in your life that we haven't touched on that you would like to share?

Jaronski: My dog. You've seen her. (laughs)

01:00:17 Q: Right. Heidi! Where—

Jaronski: I don't know where she went. She went in the living room, probably. But I feel like walking her twice a day is what's keeping me really healthy (laughs) and she's just such a gift to me. And she's—she's not easy; she's too smart—she can think two steps ahead of me and do something bad to get a treat for stopping it, but she's really a big part of my life now.

01:00:51 Q: Oh, okay. And have you always been a dog lover?

Jaronski: No. In fact, the whole time—Well, I grew up with dogs. And the whole time I was an adult on my own I never had one, and when I lived in Boston and had my children, they had rabbits. So I thought it would be really unfair to introduce a dog into a rabbit home. (laughs) So after the rabbits died, then my husband was opposed to getting a dog. And when I finally moved out here, I bit the bullet and got myself a dog. (laughs)

01:01:27 Q: Okay. Great. All right, so I guess in closing I would just ask you if there's—anything you'd want to change in your life and anything you'd want to—Well, no, two

questions. The first would be if there's anything in the course of your life that you look back on and you'd like to see differently. You might have done—a different direction you would have gone on, gone into.

Jaronski: I don't know; some of the things that I wish happened differently I don't think I could have changed, you know, especially in relation to my older son's illness. It's just—we did all we could but it wasn't enough. So, yeah.

01:02:04 Q: Hm. That's very hard. Okay. And then: advice? (Jaronski laughs) Advice for the future, for—yeah, just—if you could go back and be whatever you were, eighteen, seventeen again in those gates of Barnard, starting all over again as a student, what would you say? What would you tell not just yourself but any—

Jaronski: I would do that Stewart Smalley thing in the mirror of, "You're good enough, you're smart enough, and people will love you." (laughs)

01:02:36 Q: I like that. That's beautiful. Well, thank you. Thank you so much, Christine.

Jaronski: Yeah. You're welcome.

01:02:40 Q: And we will stop from there and—

*end of interview*

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