

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Heather Kurze

2014

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Heather Kurze conducted by Michelle Patrick and Robert Solomon on February 10, 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: Heather Kurze

Location: New York City

Interviewer: Michelle Patrick and Robert  
Solomon

Date: February 10, 2011

Kurze: I was born in Los Angeles and moved around a little bit as a small child, but basically grew up in Los Angeles. My father was a neurosurgeon and very much a classic early neurosurgeon to cowboy macho tough guy, and my mom, she actually was in the Navy during World War II. They met when she was in the Navy, and she was a lieutenant, and he was in the Army. He was a private, and he was a medical student, which is why he was a private because basically the Army took over the medical school. She was a lieutenant.

Anyway, they had this courtship. She was a little bit older, so it was this bizarre sort of asynchronous sort of combination. And then they had four children. I was the second. My father was not home much, because he was doing his residency and all that kind of stuff, and then he was practicing, and then he was publishing and doing surgery, and doing whatever he was doing, so he was not around a lot. There was a lot of competition for his attention; not an enormously comfortable childhood. My joke with my own family now is that Carol's the oldest, Janet's the youngest, Peter's the only boy, and that I had no real role, and so I think I was sort of a misfit. We moved a fair number of times, always in the Los Angeles area, but I changed schools several times, and I was never any place more than a few years. I didn't feel very connected to that community, and so I was happy to go to New York.

Q: What kind of girl were you, that girl that hit Barnard [College] in the fall of '67? Could you describe her? What was she interested in? What did she look like? What did she wear? What music did she like?

Kurze: She wore only things that were too cold in the winter. I had no idea. I had never been to New York. In fact, I had really never been anywhere when I went. I didn't visit the school. That was before the days of school tours. My parents put me on a plane, and I went to a hotel in midtown and spent the night there, and got in a cab and took myself to school with my two suitcases.

Q: Nobody came with you?

Kurze: Nobody came with me. Everybody else was there with station wagons and teddy bears, pillows, and weeping parents, and whatever, and I just tipped the cab, and that was it.

Q: Were you homesick? Were you lonely?

Kurze: I don't know. I think that my whole family situation was sort of so ungratifying emotionally that I think I had all that pretty well buried. I don't think I really knew what I was, and I went next door and introduced myself to Leslie Thomas, who lived in the room next to me.

Q: So was Leslie your first friend?

Kurze: She was my first friend. She introduced me to everybody I ever knew at Barnard. I never made any friends beyond the people that Leslie introduced me to.

Q: And could you describe Leslie? What was Leslie like?

Kurze: Well, she was very impressive to me. She was tall and beautiful, and she was from the East Coast. She had some idea of what was going on. I was so clueless. I felt like I was coming in from the airport and looking at all the stuff you see in Queens and all the way into the city. It was like I had never seen anyplace other than Hancock Park and San Marino, both of which were very sheltered, homogenous communities.

Q: Why Barnard then?

Kurze: I had intended to go to [University of California] Berkeley. I had a boyfriend at Berkeley. I had not really thought about it much. I wanted to go there. I was a bit rebellious. I was maybe very rebellious, and I intended to go there because I had this boyfriend there. I went, and I visited my cousin there, and she was there, and she took me to a party, and I thought that was great, so I was going to go to Berkeley. Then the headmaster of the school—it was a very small private school—he said, “Well, you have to apply someplace else,” and so I opened up the book, and I said, “Okay, I’ll apply there.” It was that thoughtful a decision. I liked the idea that it was New York. It was far away. It was exotic. My parents kind of gulped when I said it. I liked how it sounded; it sounded bold, but I had no idea about New York, and suddenly I was looking at all these places, and everything looked so different, and I didn’t have any idea how

you dealt with the subway or how you dealt with the buses. I knew how to drive. That did a lot of good.

Q: Why Barnard instead of Berkeley?

Kurze: Well, then I got in, and I think, in the meantime, I stopped going out with the guy I was going out with, and I thought, “Well, I’m never going to have a chance to go to New York, have somebody just send me to New York, so maybe I should give it a shot.” And I had a cousin who, a year old than me who I liked a lot, was a freshman at Columbia [University], and I called him up, and I talked to him about it. He liked it. I didn’t know him that well. He lived in Idaho. I don’t know. It was just sort of a fluke. It was not a very thoughtful thing. They had a tiny little square for the application essay on the card. I don’t know if you remember that or not, but you basically didn’t have to write anything, anything that couldn’t fit in this little tiny thing. I liked that. It was nowhere near the kind of decision that it is for kids today.

Q: Aside from the subway and the buildings, was there any other sort of culture shock that you experienced, in those first few months I’m talking about before the strike—September, October, November?

Kurze: Well, I think I was like any kid does when they go off to college; they start to sort of look around and see how other people do things and try and sort of find who they are.

Q: Who did you think that you might be?

Kurze: Well, I said I really only made friends with the people that Leslie introduced me to, and you were one of the people Leslie introduced me to, and Jane was one of the people that Leslie introduced me to. And then they had roommates. [Victoria] Vicky Taylor I think was your roommate.

Q: I had four roommates.

Kurze: I don't remember now everybody, but that was kind of my little group, and some of them were more sort of political, and some of them were more girly, and some of them were more academic. It was like suddenly I didn't have to go to class. There was nobody making me go to class. There was nobody making me do anything, and I just felt like I was kind of wandering around with my eyes this big, shopping for who I was.

Q: Were your parents political? Did they have a political persuasion?

Kurze: My father was fairly conservative and fairly biased in a lot of ways. My mother was very liberal in a very idealistic way. She was incredibly principled. Her first husband had been killed in the war a month after they were married, and so she joined the Navy, because she said, "If it was worth his life, it was worth my time." She would never lie. She ratted my sister out when my sister used her address to get her kids into a better school system. She didn't call up, but when they called and asked her, she said, "No, they don't live here." She was incredibly principled. You did right. You didn't speak ill of the President because the office deserved your

respect, whether or not he did. It was like you can object to his politics, but you don't speak ill of him, because he's this figure that represents more than just him.

Q: Did your mom work outside the home?

Kurze: She did. She had done public relations in the Army, and she worked all the time my father was in school. And then when he began practicing, she stayed home. She went back to work briefly when I was in elementary school. She wanted to teach, and she went back, and she started teaching, and she taught for a few years, and then I understood it anyhow that he wanted her to be home, and so she was home.

Q: Did you think that you would have a career, or did you think that you'd be a stay-at-home mom?

Kurze: I think I thought I would do something. I told myself I was going to be a premed major, because basically in my household, unless it was a neurosurgical problem, it wasn't really important, so I wanted to matter. My older sister actually did become a doctor, and I think the relationship with him had a lot to do with it.

Q: What was the most fun that you had that first semester at Barnard, or if you ever had any fun?

Kurze: I really loved coming to visit you guys. You had a wonderful room. There were people in there that were fun, and I felt good about those people.

Q: So girlfriends.

Kurze: Yes, girlfriends.

Q: What about romantically? What did you expect? What were you hoping for romantically?

Kurze: I wanted to find somebody that loved me and idolized me and all those things and, of course, didn't. I had had relationships with people in high school that were sexual but were not particularly committed or not at all committed, [I'd] been dating people and having sex with them, and I sort of really wanted to have a boyfriend. I would meet people, and that didn't work out. It always seemed like anybody you had a relationship with, it was always just about the sex.

Q: From the very beginning?

Kurze: From the very beginning.

Q: The strike, did you have a position during the strike?

Kurze: No, I didn't know what to think.

Q: So what did you do during the strike, and what did you think during the strike?

Kurze: Well, some of the people I knew were in the buildings, and some of the people I knew were in the lines around the buildings trying to block them, the jocks. It was like I knew people in both categories, and I kind of didn't know what I thought, and I didn't know enough about it, frankly. I knew I was opposed to the war, but all this other stuff—IDA [Institute for Defense Analysis] and the gym—I didn't even know they were building a gym. I've still never seen the drawings. I have no idea if it was a horrible idea or not; probably was, but I don't know, and I didn't know what to think. And then I went one night to something, and I don't know what it was, but it was a meeting to talk about issues of some sort, and so I said, "Okay, I'll go and I'll see what they have to say," and I sat there, and I listened, and all these arguments seemed really important and seemed like something that I could kind of get behind. And then suddenly we were supposed to go off and take a building or throw rocks at something and I thought, "Wait a minute, I don't know that much about what I'm doing here." So I felt I didn't know enough about it, and I kind of would look to my friends to sort of help me understand the various points of view, and they didn't agree, and probably didn't know much about it, the details of a lot of it anyhow. So I was just sort of confused by it.

Q: Were you lonely during the strike?

Kurze: Well, I think I was lonely from the day I got there.

Q: Speak to that a little bit.

Kurze: I was in a single, and I'm not a person who makes friends easily. I've married a person who makes friends for me, and then I get to know them, but I don't make friends easily, and I don't sort of know how to kind of open up to people that I don't have some sort of connection already to. So that wasn't easy for me. That first day I was sort of thinking, "Well, shit, now what am I going to do? I'm in my room. I've put everything away. I've unpacked my two suitcases, and there're still all these people everywhere with their parents and stuff. What am I going to do?" And so I sort of screwed my courage to the wall, as they say, and I went next door and introduced myself to Leslie, and her mother was still there. Her mother was very nice to me, and they took me around. They kind of pretended she had two daughters for the rest of the afternoon, and then she left, and that was very sweet. I think I was pretty lost from the moment I got there.

Q: Did you ever feel a connectedness aside from that first year in a room with girlfriends? Was there ever a moment when you thought, "Okay, this is what I'm here for?"

Kurze: Not in relation to the school. I had a boyfriend in my sophomore year who lived in an apartment off campus with some other people, and they were all very politically active, and they were very welcoming and very nurturing. We would cook together. We would eat together. We'd read the Sunday [*New York Times*] together, and there was a real kind of sense of community, and that was a great time. Then that fell apart. And then I started working. That is a whole other issue, but my parents basically were completely non-communicative about money, and so I left home, and I had \$500 cash and no conversation about there'll be another \$500 coming in a week, in a year, ever. I eventually spent the \$500, and I didn't have any money, and

they didn't seem to be interested in sending me money. So I started working, and I ended up working in the Gold Rail, which sort of had a political component to it.

Q: What was the political component? I didn't know the Gold Rail.

Kurze: The Gold Rail was where the jocks were, the football team and the athletes and the fraternity brothers, and so they became the people that I knew in the sort of latter part of the time I was there. This is long after the strike, but when I had been with this little community of people that I was talking about before that was fairly political, we would spend a lot of time at the West End. Now I had a job at the Gold Rail.

Q: Talk about the difference between the West End and the Gold Rail.

Kurze: Well, the Gold Rail was for the jocks and the West End was the pukes, as we used to—

Q: The pukes?

Kurze: The pukes and the jocks. The sort of politically active, hippier, more kind of hippies, questioning things, letting their hair grow, wearing more casual clothes, and the jocks would wear shirts and ties to their games. It was a very sort of preppy group, and so just by virtue of the fact that I had that job, I became part of that community, and the people that came in there knew me to be part of that community and people I served. Most of the people in the bar were students. Many of the people at the West End were students, but not all of them, but at the Gold

Rail almost everybody was with the exception of this amazing community of old people at the bar, and that was a whole other experience. But these people would come in every day. They would be there all day long. They were all clearly alcoholics, and periodically one of them would go into a period of decline and disappear, but they were these dear, dear old people that you would talk to, and I remember arguing with them about politics, and them sort of saying, “What do you know?” I was so sure I knew.

Q: Talk about the old people. How old were they? Like our age?

Kurze: Probably, yes. They were I think probably almost all of them really serious alcoholics, and they were all—this was their community. In some cases, they would come in in the morning. In some cases, they would come every afternoon after work. They all had a routine, and depending on which shift you were working you knew different characters, but we were their community. They came in to be around people, and we were the people that they were around, and there were people who would always sit at my table. There were people who would always sit at Jane’s table. There was this very dear little guy, never said boo, never said anything; told me what he wanted, and that was all he ever said to me, and he always left me a huge tip, huge tip. He’d come in and he’d have a plate of French fries and a beer, and then he’d leave me a big tip, and he’d always sit at my table. Then over time he began to deteriorate. At some point, he lost his house; and he lost his job, then he lost his housing. He wanted to sleep in the bar. He did sleep in the bar a few times. We let him sleep in the bar, but then he was drinking, and the owner got upset and wouldn’t let us let him sleep in the bar. So then he wanted me to take him home, and I took him down to the Bowery to a mission one night after the bar closed because he didn’t

have anyplace to go, then arranged for a social worker—for him to see a social worker, and he never showed up for the appointment. It was just this strange kind of extended family where it was like you were the children who were going to take care of them in their old age.

Q: Were their politics similar to yours?

Kurze: No, they were very conservative.

Q: They were more conservative.

Kurze: They were very conservative. I don't think I was conservative. I think I was unwilling to commit to anything, because I felt like I didn't—I was very clear about the war. I was very clear about the Civil Rights Movement.

Q: And when you say you were clear, I know what you mean.

Kurze: In that I was opposed to the war. I knew friends in high school who had been drafted who wrote letters home. I remember at a party one time there was a pair of twins, and one of them was in Vietnam, and he had sent home a letter, and all the girls had to leave the room because they were going to read his letter, and it was not appropriate for the girls to hear.

Q: What was not appropriate, do you know?

Kurze: The content of the letter, and I know it was about what horrible things he had seen and done and what was going on around him. It was like we were all very concerned about—

Q: This was a friend of yours?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: Because one of my questions was: did you know people who lived in fear of the draft?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: Did you know people who were actually drafted?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: People who actually went?

Kurze: Yes. I knew people in high school who went. I knew this one person who was there; his twin brother was somebody I knew, and he was sending letters to his twin brother. There were people in my class who volunteered and went. They were not people that I was close to, but my class was only twenty-nine people, and one of them was killed in Vietnam very shortly after graduation, but I think the majority of them went off to college, and, at that point, college still meant an exemption. But everyone worried about the draft. My cousin who was here worried

about the draft. I tangentially knew the boyfriend of one of the waitresses at the bar, and he shot his toe off, because that would make him ineligible. And then I dated one of the people at the bar who basically ate his way out of the draft, and then never could really deal with the weight again. He was big, he was heavy, and he just made himself obese so that he would be unfit. My brother had asthma as a child, and so he went and worked in a hop yard so that his asthma would just go nuts. People just did all kinds of things.

Q: You mentioned to me the racial polarization that happened after the strike. Talk about that.

Kurze: That was hard. That was really hard. It was hard, in some ways, because I didn't know what was going on. I didn't really understand. There was a split between the blacks and the whites, and I had some people who were in the buildings that I was in touch with that would talk about what they were concerned about. The people who were in the buildings that I knew that were black, they were gone. I was very attached to you and to—was it Anita?

Q: Karla [Spurlock Evans]?

Kurze: Karla? I don't remember now the right name.

Q: Very friendly.

Kurze: But I really liked hanging out in your room, and suddenly I wasn't welcome there, and that was really hard.

Q: You didn't feel welcome there?

Kurze: I think I was told I wasn't welcome there.

Q: Really?

Kurze: I think so. I remember it that way. Who knows if it really happened that way, but I feel like I went looking for you and was told that.

Q: By me?

Kurze: No. I don't know that that's true, but that's how I remember it, and that's how I felt anyhow, whether it happened or not, and that was weird. I had an experience as a child where we lived next door to a family that was African American or black and very successful entertainment family, and the only reason we could afford to buy the house was because they lived next door and it had been vacant for a long time,. They had a daughter my age, and I played with her, and we were friends, and there was a daughter across the street who was my age, and the three of us played together. And it was a little bit cumbersome playing with the black girl, because she had obligations. They would travel, and she had a nanny, and there was kind of more structure to her life than there was to mine, so you'd always have to kind of go over and ring the doorbell and talk to the nanny. It was not so easy, so I didn't spend as much time with her, but I liked her.

Q: Is it someone we would know?

Kurze: Yes. So I had that friendship, and then something happened, and I was told that I couldn't play with her anymore, and I understand afterwards that the white girl's parents had said that if I was going to play with the black girl, I couldn't play with their daughter, and that I had chosen their daughter. It was kind of like if you want to play with her, then you can't play with our daughter. I always played with their daughter. The other one, I had to talk to the nanny, and sometimes she wasn't there, and that was really awkward. I was not that comfortable socially, so it was like I had already done this terrible thing of choosing a friend in a situation that was racially charged, and I had chosen, not knowing what I was doing or anything else. But I always sort of felt like, well, wait a minute, this isn't right. And so anyhow, suddenly it was happening again. It felt like I'm a bad guy because I'm white, and I'm just me, and I'm stupid, and I don't know what's going on, and I don't understand. Where have my friends gone, and where has my little group of people gone. It was just very hard.

Q: Did you have career goals when you left Barnard? Did you know what you were going to do? Did you have a plan?

Kurze: No.

Q: So talk to me about what you did.

Kurze: When I left?

Q: Yes.

Kurze: Well, I ended up working in the bar a lot, and I stopped going to class. At some point, I left and went to Europe. I think I was in Europe during the time of the Kent State killings, and I went to Europe, and I came back, and I was dating somebody from the bar. In the winter we rented a house in Vermont and went skiing, and I managed to keep my schedule such that I could always be skiing three days a week. Then in the summer I would play tennis in Riverside Park. I was completely aimless.

Then gradually around me people started leaving. Other people graduated and left, but also the people in the bar started leaving. People started getting real jobs. I went down to the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] and got a job in the programs office. I was an art history major. That had nothing to do with my getting the job. It was basically a sort of administrative thing selling tickets, helping organize the events, and I did that for a while, and then I just sort of felt like everybody was disappearing, and I needed to figure out what I was going to do, or I was going to just be there as a waitress the rest of my life. So I decided to go back to California, because I decided I needed to go back to graduate school—that I would need to go to graduate school. I was sort of toying with the idea of architecture. When I went to Italy, I spent a lot of time in Rome and saw a lot of major architectural things in Rome, and so then I came home and took an architecture class, got very interested in that, and I thought, well, maybe I'll do that.

There were a couple of people who always used to come into the bar, and they were architecture students, and they had this incredible air of superiority, and they would talk about how they were the 2%, that there were the other 98%, and they were the 2%, and I would have this argument with them that they weren't any better than me. If they were the 2%, I was the 2%, and they were going, "No, you're not an architect. You don't understand." Somehow or other that sucked me in. It was like I should have just gone running. So I sort of was thinking about architecture, thinking I would have to go to graduate school, and I thought, "I don't want to do it in New York. It's too difficult. It's too depressing. It's too hard to live here. It's too expensive." And so I went back to California thinking that I'd figure it out there, and I did.

Q: And you did. This period of time at Barnard, did you or anybody you know have to have an illegal abortion?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: And do you want to speak to that experience?

Kurze: Yes. I didn't know about it ahead of time. She was another person that I met through somebody I had met through Leslie, and a Catholic girl. She had a very solid relationship with somebody, and then she was in the hospital. I went to visit her in the hospital, and she was in the hospital because she'd had an illegal abortion that had gone awry, and she was okay, but it was touch and go, and that was really startling.

Q: When have you been happiest in your life?

Kurze: When I met my husband.

Q: Do you want to talk a little bit about that, how you met and what was real romantic about it, and what made you so happy?

Kurze: I feel like I had a lot of relationships that were either sort of skewed by the kind of strange dynamics of the time, the sort of macho '60s thing where—.

Q: Hugh Hefner thing?

Kurze: No, not Hugh Hefner, but just free love, that if you were politically enlightened, then you would sleep with anybody, and so I didn't really have relationships that were connected in any good way, and I had relationships from the bar that were not that healthy. It was quite a bit later; I was thirty-six I think when I met my husband, and he was completely different than anybody I had ever met, and part of that is he's significantly younger. He's from a completely different generation. He doesn't have that baggage that came with all those other issues, but he's happy. He's happy to be alive. He's happy to be out and about, and I'm not necessarily very good at being happy, but I really like being around somebody that's happy.

Q: Was it at Barnard or afterwards that you became aware of the women's movement? Were you at all aware of it when you were at Barnard?

Kurze: Yes. There was all this strange stuff happening when we first got there. We couldn't wear pants on campus. We had to have white gloves and hats for tea with the president on Fridays. I don't think I ever went, but I know I had my hat and my gloves. I later needed my gloves when I started breaking out in rashes, and I put cream on my hands with the gloves at night.

Q: Were the rashes a result of nervousness?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: Talk about your nervous rashes.

Kurze: Well, I don't know. I was so lost. I had no idea. I have kids now who are in college, and I look at them, and I think somebody let me just wander around like that without anybody sort of saying, "Hey, can I help you? You want to talk?" I didn't have any connection to anybody in the faculty at all. The only time I think I spoke to my adviser was when I wanted to graduate, and I tried to get her to sign off on my ridiculous selection of classes, as if that had really met the requirements. I didn't have any sort of real guidance except the guidance that I got from this funny group of friends that basically kept kind of falling apart, and the people I met in the bar.

Q: Talk about why you didn't go home.

Kurze: My parents' marriage was not doing very well. I think they separated while I was a sophomore, and I did go home after my first year in the summer. After that, I didn't go home. I did meet them one time for a ski trip in Denver or something at Christmas, but I didn't go home again. Part of it was that it was expensive, and I was paying for everything, at this point, so I didn't go home; and part of it is it wasn't much fun to be there, because there was a lot of tension in the house, and there never had been much kind of supportive stuff in the house. So I just didn't go home. Then when I came home from Italy, I did go home, and my parents had divorced and sold the house, and whatever wasn't in those two suitcases when I went to Barnard was gone. So there was this sense that this world doesn't exist anymore. My father had moved into a sort of bachelor pad in Marina del Rey, and my mother had moved into a little sort of house, like a grandmother would live in someplace. I don't know. It was very weird. It just felt like I had no life there.

Q: We're almost finished. When were you most unhappy? I know there are lots of choices.

Kurze: I think I was endlessly unhappy in that little room by myself thinking what am I doing here? I had fantasies about what going to college would be like, about friends and doing stuff, and I think I was just incredibly lonely.

Q: Do you want to sum up kind of what your career was as an architect up until the time that you started teaching?

Kurze: I did my graduate work at UCLA [University of California Los Angeles] and was hired to work in Frank Gehry's office shortly after I completed that, and worked for Frank Gehry for maybe, I don't know, a year-and-a-half or something like that.

Q: Say who Frank Gehry is.

Kurze: Frank Gehry is a very well-known, very kind of cutting edge, or was cutting edge—I mean, he's eighty or something. His work is very adventurous, and I worked there for a while. I had a lot of really good connections through my graduate program and the faculty there, and the faculty was very supportive of me, so I had a lot of opportunities to work on interesting projects with interesting people. Very quickly—very soon after I graduated, I started teaching as well, and I was practicing and teaching pretty much my whole career. I started a small partnership with two friends from graduate school, and we had an office with about, I don't know, five or six people in it for six or seven years, and that was okay. That was going. That was pretty substantive, that and the teaching, and I was pretty content with that. Then we had a fire in the office, and, at the same time, both my partners were pregnant, or both my partners had kids. I guess, at that point, they already had kids, but they had both suddenly gotten married and suddenly had kids, and I was the only single person, and I was working in this office by myself, with the only person coming in was the mailman, letter carrier, whatever. So then I kept teaching. So the partnership fell apart, because basically one of them moved here, the one that is here now, and so the three of us split up. We sort of sorted through the mess of the fire, and that was kind of a graceful end to the partnership. Then I started practicing by myself and continuing to teach, and I have done that ever since. That was in the late '80s.

Q: What sort of structures did you design?

Kurze: Early on we sort of did anything—residential stuff, we did some work for the California state schools, we did some apartment renovations, just anything, bathroom remodels, whatever, kitchen remodels, lots of kitchens. Then, at some point, I became kind of the architect for a small experimental film studio—not experimental film, a special effects group—and so I did their 1,000-foot office, and then I did their 6,000-foot office, and then I did their 9,000-foot office. They continue to be my clients, and periodically they would spin off a new startup company, and I would oftentimes be asked to work on their projects. So most of the work I've done in the last twenty years has been for either this one company or companies that have come off of this one company. But because I teach, I don't practice full-time all the time. Basically when they have a project, I do it, and when they don't, I'm just teaching.

Q: Where do you teach?

Kurze: Now I teach at Pasadena City College, and I don't teach architecture there, I teach design, which I really enjoy. Prior to that, initially I taught at a school called Southern California Institute of Architecture, or SCIARC, and I taught there for, I don't know, probably ten or twelve years. Then I moved into administration there and stopped teaching. I was there maybe eighteen, nineteen years, and then I took a position as the Dean of the School of Architecture and Design at Woodbury University. At that point, I sort of stopped practicing, because the administration was

really—they're too consuming, so I didn't really practice then, and I pretty much—work that came my way, I sort of passed it off to people I knew.

And then in 2006, they decided to restructure and eliminate my position, so then I didn't know what I was going to do, because I didn't have the practice anymore, and I wasn't teaching, so I sort of looked around, and I started applying for dean's positions. Then I thought really I don't want to do that. It sort of felt like I needed to do that to prove to them something, whatever, and I just finally figured out what really what I wanted to do was teach. So there was this wonderful position at this community college two-and-a-half miles from my house, and I'm teaching in the art department, and there's all these wonderful artists, and there are no architects around and all of their sort of ego issues and kind of control issues. Instead I have a wonderful friend, the ceramicist, and a friend that's a sculptor, and a friend that's a painter. It's really fun. I just love it, and the students are great.

Q: Was there a particular challenge to being a woman architect?

Kurze: Yes.

Q: Could you speak to that?

Kurze: Architecture has been much slower to include women than medicine and law and other professions, and that's partly because of the nature of the people in the profession, and this issue that you have to be able to kind of convince people to—basically you have to be sort of self-

assured enough or convincing enough that you can talk somebody into spending a huge amount of money for something really big that is going to be there for a long time based on [the fact] that you think it's a good idea. So that's less easy—it's a little easier now—but it was really not a role that women were cast in normally, so that was a little tricky, but we had this little practice going, and each project was leading to other projects, and that was okay. But we were interviewed for a project with the Navy, and it was a phone interview, and, at some point, they said, "Well, really we have a project where we need to pick a lot of pillows, and the colors for the pillows for the PX [Post Exchange]." I don't know what it was, but, anyhow, they were basically saying don't apply for this project. This is architecture. Apply for this other one, which is picking the colors for the pillows.

Q: Did you pick the colors for the pillows?

Kurze: No, we didn't. We just sort of fumed and stomped our feet, but there was a lot of sort of reluctance. Then when I went to work in Frank Gehry's office, I was building models, and I thought, "Okay, I'm the youngest person, or newest person, so I have to do the low-end stuff. I'm the bottom of the totem pole," and so I never got to do anything other than build models or sort slides, just sort of the lowest of the low. I didn't have a project assigned to me. Then after I'd been there a year or so, somebody else who had just graduated was hired, and he was given a project, and, at that point, I realized that it wasn't about doing your time, it was that I was a woman.

Q: Do you have a hope or a dream, something in the future, something that you haven't done that you really want to do, or something that you did that you want to go back to?

Kurze: I don't know. I am very happy about my family, my husband and my kids.

Q: Talk about your family.

Kurze: I have two kids. I feel like they are good people. They have their issues, and they have their struggles, and they've inherited all of our worst things, and they like to blame us for them, but they're wonderful people. They're good people with good hearts who will do right by whatever it is that they end up doing, and I feel really good about that. I feel good about sort of the life that my husband and I made for them.

Q: Talk about the switching off that you did.

Kurze: When my son was born, the elder of my two kids, I taught an extra semester, so then I had an extra semester off. I would teach two out of three semesters, and so I taught straight through so that I could have two consecutive semesters off. So I had a good chunk of time to be home with him. Then when I went back to teaching, which was really only three afternoons a week, my husband arranged his work schedule so that he would be home in time for me to leave to go to teach. So he worked an early shift, and then came home and did the afternoon shift with my son, and it was a great experience for both of us. It was hard to kind of give it over.

Whoever it is that he had been with for the last couple of days was who he wanted to be with,

and so he'd be very attached to me, and I'd hand him to my husband, and he would want to come back to me and cry; and then when he'd been with my husband for a couple of days, then he would do the same thing. He'd want to go back to him instead of being with me, but it was a wonderful thing. We knew we had done it, because we were both there doing it.

Q: Is there something I haven't hit on that you want to talk about, or something you want to expand on?

Kurze: One thing. After we talked and I agreed to do this, we were up in Seattle, and I picked up Mark Rudd's book [*Underground: My Life with the SDS and the Weathermen*], which I had never read, and read it. I couldn't help but think of the Tea Party, and these people who think that they have these sort of quick responses, these sort of slogans, these sort of simplistic answers to complex questions, and it just kept feeling like that. I know there were more substantive things behind it, but we were really young.

Q: Do you ever reflect on whether it was a good thing or a bad thing that you happened to go to school, go to college, during the period that you went through?

Kurze: I am so jealous of my kids and their experience, and this is what I would wish for. I would wish that I could go back to school, and I could go back to school. I've taken classes. I could go back and I could take more classes, but what I really want to do is go back and be a freshman and live in the dorms and make new friends, and have people expose me to new things.

I feel like I so missed this incredible formative experience where I had it in such a sort of fragmented and kind of dreary way.

Q: I understand.

Solomon: It's really interesting how many people say that, that they wish that they could have a more traditional kind of college experience.

Kurze: I see my kids, and they have these friends, and they get together, and they do all this stuff, and they go to the library and study. I never went to the library and studied with anybody —or maybe twice. I don't know. I didn't know from libraries.

Q: It was a very difficult time to be in school, to be young. So should we wrap up?

Kurze: Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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