

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Andrea Polk-Stephenson

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Andrea Polk-Stephenson conducted by Adèle Bernhard on March 18, 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: Andrea Polk-Stephenson

Location: Atlanta, Georgia, via

Skype

Interviewer: Adèle Bernhard

Date: March 18, 2015

[00:00:01.26] Q: The date is March 18, 2015, the time is 11:22 am. The interviewer, myself, Adèle Bernhard, will be interviewing Andrea Polk-Stephenson, class of '71. All right, so just for the first question, contextually speaking, what was your upbringing like, where did you grow up, family, etc.

Polk-Stephenson: Actually I grew up in Manhattan and Queens and let's see until I was 12 years old I went to PS [Public School] 61, which I'm sure you're familiar with and I think still exists, it's almost civil war or post-civil war, it's amazing, fortress-like. At the time, it was way before the village cracked open, because I understand there are a lot of cool places

there now in that area. My folks sent me to dance school down Henry Street [Settlement] and piano lessons and you know I was very lucky I had very loving parents, and everything was fine. A close family, not too big.

Q: And how did you hear of Barnard?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I'm sorry?

Q: How did you hear of Barnard?

POLK-STEPHENSON: _____ (??)

Q: I think the Internet connection may be—

POLK-STEPHENSON: I have you here.

[00:01:57:25] Q: Okay. How did you hear of Barnard?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Okay well, I'll go back a bit in junior high where I went to 104 — my parents moved to Queens and I commuted for a year to finish up. I was in the SP [Special Progress], so I skipped a year and then I was chosen to go to Hunter College High School. I had a big choice, commute from Queens to either Bronx Sci [The Bronx High School of Science] or Hunter College High School, so I went to Hunter. And I have some friends, close friends, from that particular time of my life and I heard about Barnard, because it was part of Columbia. To go back to my original discussion of my early childhood, I was brought up by progressive parents who had actually known the Rosenbergs [Ethel and Julius] and met them at least, and I am very proud of my parents' personal political history.

At Hunter I applied to three colleges. I think I got into all three and I chose Barnard, because I wouldn't be that far from home and I thought I would live there. But after a few weeks of commuting, my father called the school to try to find me somewhere to live. I happened to be, very fortunate to be put in a corner in Plimpton Hall just after it was built and opened and it so happened that when I was in my room, they asked us if George Plimpton could come and see it. So George Plimpton and his then new wife—who I think was the secretary that apparently everyone hated (laughs)—came and toured our rooms and that was very interesting. I went to Barnard because—well, I had gone to Hunter, which was an all-girls school and I knew just because it says all girls, doesn't mean you're not going to, you know, get together with guys at socials—we called them socials then—and I was head of the cheerleaders there, so I got to go and cheer for Stuyvesant [High School], which was our brother school at the time. I wanted the intellectual stimulation and being in a university filled with men didn't bother me at all at the time, and I was just very proud to be invited to an Ivy League College, at the time a Seven Sister.

[00:05:09.27] Q: Absolutely, and do you remember what that transition was like, those first few months of being at Barnard as a freshman?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Well you know, really it wasn't that difficult. I was already used to commuting, so that didn't bother me that much. What was really helpful at the time was, they had these meetings for students during the summer where they could meet other people in their class and some Barnard alums out on Long Island had invited a bunch of us out there from Queens and Long Island and I got to meet two or three girls, who I remained friendly

with for years. That helped, because the first freshmen week, I already knew a couple of people. That was nice. They still do that, right?

Q: Yeah.

POLK-STEPHENSON: I think it was very helpful.

Q: Absolutely. So, those first few weeks of being a commuter student, what were your impressions of the school, socially speaking, especially Barnard's relation with Columbia?

POLK-STEPHENSON: We were separate from Columbia and yet we had the opportunity to take whatever classes we wanted to there. The student union was open to us, if we wanted to go over and sit. I didn't have a problem with it being female classes and including guys. In terms of the intellectual ability, it was fantastic, because I was able to take a class at Columbia if I wanted to. I think I took Calculus. I am not quite sure if it was that year or the next year. As a matter of fact, one of the Sha Na Na was in my class. I don't know if you have ever heard. They were quite famous, a Columbia group that became pretty famous—singing group.

As a matter of fact, the few classes that I actually I wound up taking at Columbia wound up to be more like the lecture style kind of things where you're in a big auditorium looking down at your professor and there is absolutely no interaction. Where as the Barnard classes were very interactive with the professors. Except for Biology 101, which was pretty big. They were all just fabulous, fabulous teachers. I really enjoyed my work. I never thought I was good in English and I just learned all about English there and I write to this day, I do a lot of newsletter articles.

[00:08:11.01] Q: Were there any professors or courses that particularly stood out to you in your memory?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Katherine Stimpson, who you may have heard of, she was a real feminist and she was my English teacher. She really stuck out quite a bit. I don't remember the name of my anthropology teacher, but I loved him. I remember Dr. or Mrs. King who did the chemistry lab, even though I didn't like chemistry and wasn't very good at it.(laughs) They were kind people. It was a very good atmosphere to learn in. Barnard if you think about it, is a relatively small campus, as you know, and it's amazing that they kept building upon it and finding new ways to create new energy on the campus. Compared obviously to Columbia University, it is much smaller.

Q: What were some of the hardest struggles you faced while at Barnard?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Struggles? Well, this was an odd-ball time when people in my generation were either asked or going to be asked to fight an illegal war.

[audio drops out at 09:47:09 continues in silence until 12:40:13]

[12:40:13] POLK-STEPHENSON: You asked about struggles during freshman year. There were challenges of getting to know your roommates and one of the girls had real problems, which even to this day I shouldn't talk about. I was a young freshman hoping to do a lot of good things.

Q: In terms of just the community and the kind of support the community gave, where did you find, when you had challenges, support on campus?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I guess friends. There was a lady named Mrs. Roosevelt who taught gym, believe it or not. We had to wear those ugly uniforms back then. It was just gym, but as you know I was always interested in dance and somewhat in sports. I loved her and I think she was married to one of the Roosevelt sons or grandsons. She was an older woman, [so] probably one of the sons. She was really, really nice and I think I went to her once with something that was troubling me, but mainly it was hard work. We had to work hard, just like any freshman anywhere, but as I told you, I was always ready to sit in on what was happening on a national level at Columbia; I don't believe I joined any organizations, but I was concerned about the female place on college campus. It was odd, because Barnard didn't have some of the classes that freshmen were required to take at Columbia. I can't remember the name of the class, humanities, civics, classics, all rolled into one. We were not required to take it and I have always been sorry that we weren't required to take it, because I feel that a big chunk of my undergraduate education did not get taken care of. I don't know if you have that there now or not.

Q: It is still separate, the Columbia and Barnard requirements.

POLK-STEPHENSON: Well I think that should have been part of my early education, but anyway I was very concerned about the Vietnam War, I had been since high school.

Q: Going on to the Vietnam War, what was your source of news and how did you stay involved in keeping up to date with the issues?

POLK-STEPHENSON: We read the newspaper and we read the [*Columbia Daily*] *Spectator*. We listened to the radio. There was one TV in Plimpton Hall, but we rarely looked at the TV. Once in a while we would have a lecture from an editor from the *New York Times* who came

to Plimpton. Of course I had my parents who kept me abreast of things. Students were very aware at the time of what was going on. I already had been to several protests during high school and even in junior high on other subjects, like civil rights. I marched in Washington when Reverend [Dr. Martin Luther] King [Jr.] spoke his "I Have a Dream" speech. I think I was transported there on a bus in either junior high or high school, I don't remember. It was just a backdrop for me and many people at school, because we were being asked to fight in an illegal war. The draft had come up and people were randomly being picked to fight for a cause they did not believe in. So that was a really important part of my existential existence at the time.

Q: What kind of conversations were you having with your friends, peers, or even with administrators on campus?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I remember having a big fight, a verbal fight, with a young lady in the middle of Barnard Hall. People were either for or against the Vietnam War. During my freshmen year I was invite to an alumni dinner for a few freshmen to meet some of the older alums from Columbia. I happened to go to Mr. Lowell's house and in the course of conversation we were talking about the fact they only had male cheerleaders, which to me was kind of weird. At Hunter, we cheered with the Stuyvesant [High School] male cheerleaders, in a way similar, so I said why don't we make it coeducational, and he supported me whole heartily. He told me what to do, to go see Mr. Anderson, who was the assistant athletic director at Columbia. I went over there and we had a conversation. I then talked to Phil somebody, who was head of the male cheerleaders, and the male cheerleader supported it. Then we had to get administration approval and by then I was almost working

away from Barnard, because Barnard had nothing really to do with it. I imagine I had to get permission from Martha Peterson, I think she was the president at the time of Barnard, but I don't know that for a fact. Eventually, we came out with a co-ed cheering squad. As I told you before, my father put together an album about it.

[Pause in recording for technical difficulties]

Q: You were just talking about the scrapbook that your dad made.

POLK-STEPHENSON: You have to understand that it wasn't so much that we needed female cheerleaders as we needed it to be equal. We needed females in the university. Even though it was a college football team or basketball team, it was our university football team or basketball team. We needed to be able to be represented as females on that particular entity. It just fell into my lap in a conversation that I was having with an older alumna and I guess I had some experience doing something about it. This was before "women's lib" [the Women's Liberation Movement]. Women's lib did not exist at that time. I had never in my life been treated as less than a man. I just happened to have a very progressive father and a very bright and intelligent mother. I went through school being bright enough as the best of them, male or female. I went to all-girls high school, so I was never treated less than a man or discriminated [against as a] female. I was aware that men basically ruled the universe at that point in terms of corporations, presidents, and universities, and all that kind of stuff.

I was aware we needed to do something about it, but nothing had really coalesced yet, except that at Barnard there was always a feeling that women were, if not superior, at least on par with men and we weren't going to let them get away with it anymore. So anyway, this thing slipped into my lap. It was a day of protest and I was a protestor, because I didn't want things

to continue the way they had been and I felt that women had just as much right to stand up there and cheer for our university as did men.

I did start the cheerleading squad and I wrote a letter to Kenneth Germaine, director of athletics, on May 5, 1969, and explained that I was a sophomore and that for the past two years I had been gathering information to start a cheerleading squad. I also wrote to, because I had been told that the Ivy League did not allow female cheerleaders, Harvard University—Baron Pittenger, who was director of sports information. He wrote, “Your performance concerning Ivy rules and Ivy office is an error. There is no league office nor is there a league rule that prohibits girl cheerleaders. Each college is independent to make its own decision. There are not any girl cheerleaders in the league yet, but I suspect there will be before long.”

Then we started it and I got another friend, a gal named Karen Rosa, to help me a little bit. I had the boys behind me and this came out of the sports information office, September 10th 1969: “Girls Break Sex Barrier as Columbia Cheerleaders,” “Another Bastion of Male Domination has Fallen,” “Bars Down, Girls Had to _____ (??) Lion’s Cheers,” “Lion Cheerleaders Welcome Invasion by Andrea’s Army,” “Queen’s Girl Wins Fight to Cheer for Columbia.” It was really fun and important. “Leggy Lovelies Lead Lion Cheers.”

There were a lot of different articles and various newspapers about it. I did the *Spectator* prophets. At the back of the *Spectator*, I don’t know if they still have it, but they allow you to become a “prophet” about who will win the game the next week, so I was one of those. It was a fun time and I think a significant time. Fortunately, the women’s movement at Barnard was progressing and people were being taught by people like Katherine Stimpson and others. We had enough. We had enough of the Vietnam War. We had enough of the way women had

been treated by corporate America and by chauvinistic men in marriages. We had enough of being glossed over as not as important to our society and to our economy, and places like Barnard were ready to fight for our rights all over the country.

[pause in recording— technical difficulties]

POLK-STEPHENSON: The quote-unquote “Ivy League, which really doesn’t exist. At least it exists as an entity, but not as a physical entity. Traditionally, to pry open some of the traditions and allow women into some of the university’s aspects of university life.

Q: Going back to what you were saying about the need for advocacy for this women’s movement, were there any planned protests?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Not that I remember. I will tell you the truth; I don’t think that Gloria Steinem or the Women’s Lib Movement happened in that year or two. I am not sure; I would like to know when “Women’s Lib” was actually coined. I think they were trying to change the constitution, if I remember correctly.

Q: So Barnard was ahead of its time, would you say?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I would say that Barnard women just plowed ahead and just did what they thought was right and they didn’t stand for crap. They were taught that before they walked in the door and when they were in their classrooms. I think that we were ahead of our time. I think that probably classes before me were well ahead of their time and we had leaders that were being made as I walked into the door there. It was a real honor to be there.

Q: And how did you feel your gender views changed or were further developed by Barnard? Was it the people surrounding you? We talked about classes a little bit, but just in terms of the friends you had, how did they help shape you view on gender equality?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I had a young lady living in my dormitory and she was obsessed with men I guess. She was getting herself sick and it was very sad and it started some of us in our suite to think about what was this lady doing. Some of us were obsessed with our boyfriends or whatever it was and it just didn't make any sense. When you sat back and actually analyzed, at least afterwards, none of it made sense, because we were there to learn and graduate and go on to graduate school. I never knew I was smart. When I was in public school, I wasn't always in the first tier of classes. Apparently, I was a good test taker, because that's how I got into the Special Progress, SP.

The fact that I got into Bronx Sci and Hunter, whereas all these other kids who had been in the first classes didn't, was really amazing. I was very proud of myself at the time and very proud to be there. I felt the need to express, in a small way, my belief that women were equal and that they should have an equal part of university life. At the same time, there were more important things going on I'm sure in the women's movement and the protests against the Vietnam War.

I am not sure whether people noticed what I did. Obviously, the press did and Columbia did, but I don't think Barnard women in general recognized it for really what it was, a small part of a very large movement, which had nothing to do with me, but it was my small contribution. The fact that we wore small skirts and that we chose to wear little skirts, the fact

that we chose to do cartwheels and do whatever we could do, was because that's what cheerleaders did. It was relatively traditional. I did not think it was demeaning to women. Today, all you young women do a sport, go to camps, and do all sorts of things. It's a form of gymnastics, or I should say, it is gymnastics, so we were a beginning. From beginnings come more mature endings. What I am trying to say is that the Barnard women, who I went to school with, didn't necessarily understand that it wasn't because I liked to kick my legs and show my legs in public, this wasn't necessarily done. Once again, there were much more important things happening, but this was one small part of the movement, so to speak.

Q: Now shifting to those bigger issues that we've been talking about in the interview, spring of 1968, with all the protests and the photo of you in the *Spectator* on the front page talking to a policeman, what was your take on the campus energy and the vibe and the students' whole reaction to the sit-ins and the police?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Well first of all you have to look into why SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and other protestors got together to protest the policies of the university. For me, a lot of the core of it was the Vietnam War; our university was supporting one of the offices of strategic planning or defense in the United States government, which was partially responsible for the decision made during the Vietnam War. If I remember correctly, our university held stock, I believe it was stock, in South Africa, which at the time was totally in apartheid, so that's pretty bad, supporting a government like that or any businesses there.

Apparently, the thing that really set it off was building a gymnasium on public property in Morningside Heights by the university that at the top the Columbia students could get in and at the bottom the community could get in and we were really concerned. I mean this was

public property and they were afraid that the community and the community itself was afraid that they would not have as much access as the university. We were a private university and still are, so that was at the forefront of the protest if I remember correctly. There were other things going on as well. Now it said that Kate Millet, who I believe was a teacher at the time, well she wasn't a teacher, but she was writing her PhD at the time, and she was at the forefront of the movement. I believe she has said that these protests led the way to the women's movement.

Women did participate in protests and we had a lot of anger, because of what the government was doing and that the university was supporting the government. We are talking about lives here. A private campus taking over private land that belongs to the people and that community, so those were some of the things we were protesting at the time and it was in the air. There were some people who didn't care. There were a lot of people against it. We called them the "jocks," although some of the jocks got together and supported us as well. I mean jocks were just as easily recruited into the Vietnam War as non-jocks.

Q: What was your role in the protests? How did you contribute to these protests?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I was there and I just protested. I did not go into the building. They had already taken over the building before I really became aware of it, but I was outside of the building. I think there is a little building there, Dodge Hall, and we had windows open and we were screaming and crying, putting placards up and all that kind of stuff. A few days of that and a few days I spent supporting them. When we had found out what had happened, that they had brought a thousand policemen or something, 600 or 800, I don't know, they had really bloodied up a lot of our students and it could have been done much more peacefully

without hurting people. So everybody was walking around campus furious and I wound up on the steps of Ferris Booth, I think. I think the Student Union was there too at the time and I started arguing with the policemen and then that other young man started arguing as well, so that's the infamous picture that you found.

Q: Did you see any acts of violence between the policemen and the students or more learning about it through word of mouth?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I heard about it the next day, so I was not a witness to what had happened, but everyone was talking about what had happened the next day. Yes, you're right, word of mouth. I read a lot of papers about it and everybody pretty much said the same thing. There is no controversy about over what happened really and it was a decision the president, [Grayson] Kirk, was that his name? Made and I think that it was possibly the wrong decision.

Q: As the year continued, that spring, how did the protests die down? How did people, once the sit-ins ended, how did people fight against or react to the Vietnam War as Barnard and Columbia students?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I don't think it changed. There were those who were for it and those who were against it. I think that people became more against it as they saw that they might have to go or saw people who went over. There were terrible things in the news. You know, we protested when there were protests. We joined marches to Washington. We did whatever we had to do, but then again we were also students, so we had to keep up with what we needed to do to get into graduate school and figure out what we wanted to do with our lives. To this day, I was a biology major and I wound up going to the School of Public Health at Columbia. I made some poor decisions in my life, one of which was marrying the doctor

instead of getting the doctorate at the time, so I got another masters degree eventually in public policy and social policy. If I had to do it over again, I probably wouldn't major in biology. I think that was just an easy decision for me to make at the time, because there weren't a lot of counselors that I knew of and I knew biology, so I just thought I would do it.

Q: So looking back, if you could have changed your academic career path, what would you have done instead of biology?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Probably public policy or urban planning, something like that, but there wasn't any urban planning then and there probably wasn't any public policy, so it probably would be political science. I didn't know that much about political science, so I couldn't have made that decision.

Q: Was there a time when you were most proud to be a Barnard student?

POLK-STEPHENSON: At my graduation.

Q: And was there a time when you were least proud to be a Barnard student?

POLK-STEPHENSON: That's an interesting question. Probably during those protests, because we were angry at all of the administration.

Q: And during the protests did you feel like there was a difference between being a Barnard protestor versus being an undergraduate Columbia protestor? Or was it all pretty unified?

POLK-STEPHENSON: It was all the same. This was all the same. I mean there were GS [School of General Studies] students and there were engineers. In the University itself, there were other colleges that had females, like engineering, GS, Teacher's College, whatever, so it

didn't matter what college you were at, these were university policies. They have a lot of money and they invested in corporations and other things and their policies were what we were protesting.

To my knowledge, I don't know if there were students who were working with the administration, helping to make those policies. I mean those were the dark days, before students had anything to do with the administration in colleges. Once again, it was a male-dominated society, so that might have been part of the problem.

Q: And then looking back at your four years, was there anything that really surprised you in terms of how your Barnard experience formulated?

POLK-STEPHENSON: In 1969, so I guess I was a sophomore—I went in '67, so in December of '69 I was a junior. It was early junior year; I was on my way to a war protest in Central Park in Sheep Meadow, Strawberry Fields, that area, and I was run over by a car in Central Park, dragged for a block, and spent three months in the hospital, and three weeks in a coma. In terms of any time that was down, that was my downest times. I got to tell how wonderful, how absolutely wonderful Barnard and Columbia were to me when that happened. They helped me take tests either in the hospital bed when I woke up from the coma or to get credits, and I managed to graduate with my class by going to University of Pennsylvania in the summer on crutches where my boyfriend lived. I took an extra class; I think it was art, so I managed to graduate with my class.

Q: Do you think that Barnard sense of community, with that instance as an example, was pretty consistent throughout your four years, in terms of the support?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Yeah, when I needed to live there when the commute was too much for a college student, they helped me in terms of finding me a place there. When I was run over by the car, they were in touch with either my friends or my parents. As a matter of fact, I was in this coma at Roosevelt [St. Lukes-Roosevelt Hospital Center], and they didn't know how to get me out, I guess. I was an active coma, I wasn't going to sit still; my ex-husband the doctor says there is no such thing, but every other doctor I have spoken to says there is.

A Columbia friend of mine, Stephen Becker, who was in the pre-med program at Columbia, he went to the Columbia administration to get someone to Roosevelt Hospital, which I think was a teaching hospital at the time, and they got Houston Merritt, who was the number one neurologist and who had written all of the books. He came around on his rounds and they all came from all different areas to meet him, this is what my mother tells me, and said she needed to take whatever was in there out. I remember coming out of my coma, but you don't want to hear about that.

Q: No, I would love to hear about that.

POLK-STEPHENSON: Really?

Q: If you would like to share, I really would.

POLK-STEPHENSON: Well, I remember sort of looking around and—oh, he also said, when she comes out to have a physiatrist with her. I remember the physiatrist and I remember this doctor saying to me, do you know who you are? And I guess I did, and then he asked, what is the difference between a canal and a river? I said probably something like, “Well, you dig a canal, and you don't have to dig a river; one is man-made and one isn't.” Somehow that

was supposed to tell them that I was okay. I remember in the hospital room sneaking cigarettes. My parents didn't smell it. I stopped smoking years and years and years ago. That was one of my downer parts, but once again Columbia and Barnard helped beautifully.

Q: Just in terms of the school's reaction, this is going back to the protests, when you were in class, the faculty members, did they acknowledge the protests? Did you have any sort of dialogue with the faculty members or any sort of Barnard figures about the protests or what was really going on in Morningside Heights at the time?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I think that what I remember is that most people just wanted to get back to work, to school, and there may have been a little discussion in my English class, but I think the pros and cons of the protests were being debated outside of the classroom. People were just ready to get their degree.

Q: In what kinds of settings do you remember having those kinds of discussions with your peers about the protests? Was it in the dorm room or in the dining hall?

POLK-STEPHENSON: The dorm. I remember there were some relatively conservative people that I was friends with and we would start talking about it when we were supposed to be studying biology or something. It would get heated and it would get nowhere, because people were either for it or against it. Along with that a lot more religious people seemed, the ones I knew at least, like they were against the protests. I can't say that was the case all around, I am just saying my personal experience. This was the time of bellbottoms, though they mean nothing today, bellbottoms and long hair, which did mean something and you can't say you're the first rebel generation, because there were rebels in the '40's, there were rebels in the '50's. I mean look at the women who got us the vote, so I just think we were just

another one of those rebel generations and then there were those who didn't want to be part of that group. It didn't seem to change much; people weren't changing their minds much.

You either are or you're not and just get on with

_____ (??)

Q: Going to your point about the bellbottoms and the long hair—

POLK-STEPHENSON: Which hasn't changed—

Q: Exactly.

POLK-STEPHENSON: Except for the bellbottoms.

Q: Exactly, did you think of your appearance, in terms of making conscious decisions to make decisions to express your views on Vietnam or the Women's Movement?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Well, you know years and years later; I have been writing for newsletters and supporting teachers who support evolution. Believe it or not, there were people who were against that when I was in Tallahassee. I was a community columnist. I have done a lot of things since then, but at the time, it appears that the university limited some of its involvement with the gym and South Africa. I can't recall exactly what happened at this point, but I do recall that a lot of the protests died down, at least what I remembered. I was on Morningside Heights to get an education, and that's what I chose to do. There is a lot of work involved in getting an education. Then in the summers I had to work and some Christmases I had to work. I was not a leader in those protests. In some ways I was such a bystander, but a very active and vocal bystander and I never kept my views to myself. I am able to voice them as much as possible.

Q: In terms of your friends and the people you talked with most, when you talked about your futures in terms of life after Barnard, were most women thinking about grad school or settling down? What kind conversations were you having with your peers?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Everybody was into grad school. I was actually pre-med until I had my accident and then it was just too much to pick up after that, I didn't like chemistry anyway. I did take a class in ecology over at Columbia and this guy knew about the epidemiology program at Columbia and really pushed me into it. I was to get a full scholarship and that was really, really good. I was in a doctoral program, but once again I married the doctor and didn't get the doctorate, because he was not supportive of me getting a doctorate, because *he* was going to get the doctorate and take care of me for the rest of his life. Of course I divorced him, so that didn't happen. A lot of people were interested in graduate school. Now that I am thinking about it, I had my accident in 1969, so it was all that I could do to finish. I really had to concentrate on taking extra classes and taking classes in the summer and learning to walk again, things like that. I did go back to the cheerleading squad. I did what I could. I did come back and when I came back they all yelled, so that was nice.

Q: What was your recovery like at Barnard once you returned to Barnard from your absences?

POLK-STEPHENSON: I had crutches in my room, but I don't think I used them much. I think my recovery consisted of getting a cat that I wasn't supposed to have at Plimpton. Finally there were a few complaints, so I had to give my cat to my boyfriend in Philadelphia

and the cat got run over unfortunately. So part of the recovery, I think was the cat, but I thought Plimpton was the absolute greatest in the whole world. I loved it.

Q: What did you love most about Plimpton?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Having a kitchen, having the suite. It was very nice, it wasn't like having a dorm room and having go downstairs to eat. Where do you live?

Q: I am a first-year, so I am leaving in the quad, but I am just about to start my housing process, so I might be living in Plimpton next year.

POLK-STEPHENSON: I really liked it.

Q: Where you there for all four years?

POLK-STEPHENSON: All three years, or all three and half years. I was there the whole time. What's funny about Plimpton is that you sort of lose touch with your friends in the Quad, because it's just a different experience. Although maybe the quad is the same now, what do I know.

Q: Have you been keeping in touch with any fellow Barnard students?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Here and there yes. It's funny, one of the ones, Linda Ballagur Peyster Zapulla, I met her at that Long Island party and we weren't that good friends at Barnard, but I bumped into her in Boston and our kids played together. Both of our husbands were doctors up there. Then she divorced him and went on to somewhere else and I bumped into her in Florida and I bumped into her somewhere else and now I think she is somewhere in Kansas doing some kind of wonderful work, but we seem to bump into each other

everywhere. It's really weird, now with Facebook you can keep in touch with people you didn't talk to that often and I am very interested in that. I think it's a wonderful, wonderful social tool.

Q: Thinking back to your senior self and when you said that graduation was your proudest moment, was there any advice you would give your freshmen self having gone to Barnard for four years and making it to graduation?

POLK-STEPHENSON: Yes, don't be afraid to take classes you know nothing about and that challenge you. I think I had chosen my classes based on what I felt most comfortable with based on my previous experiences and I would have taken other classes, classes I knew nothing about. I was just afraid. I should have had better counseling.

Q: Right, in terms of choosing your major, as you said earlier. Do you have any other fond memories of being with your friends and taking advantage of New York City or did you mostly stay on campus?

POLK-STEPHENSON: It's funny, because I took advantage of Manhattan, the music, the theater, the village and everything else for my whole life, so my focus was more on Columbia life. When I went on to epidemiology, Columbia School of Public Health, I found it very upsetting that here we have a medical center and particularly the School of Public Health, which had absolutely nothing to do with the community, so I formed a committee and I got the dean involved and we started, as far as I know, the first community outreach program whereby students would get credits for working in places like the Esperanza Center or helping senior non-profits, so I was very proud of that at the time as well. It just goes back to my general interest in change and improving what a university can do for its community,

because it is part of the community and they can't ignore it or the needs of the population around them. They have to live with the community and within the community. They are not above the community.

Q: As an undergrad at Barnard, you were able to vocalize this through protests, but were there other ways to break down the barrier between the administration and the students?

POLK-STEPHENSON: The thing is, once again, after I got run over by the car, I was in my own little world. At that point it was, Andrea you need to graduate with your class, so I did everything I could to do that. I don't recall being that much involved and if I remember correctly, Nixon was president at the time, and I went into hibernation and I did the same when Reagan was president: I hibernated and didn't watch the news. There were other things I had to do to just get out of college already.

Q: Yeah, absolutely. In terms of people you leaned on during that time of hibernation, were you leaning on your parents or your friends? Who would you say gave you a lot of the support you needed during that time?

POLK-STEPHENSON: My parents, and my friends, and my boyfriend—I had a medical student boyfriend at the time. Some of my old friends from high school, who I still keep in touch with. One was with me when I got run over and we are friends to this day.

Q: So looking back, was Barnard the ideal school? Was there anything you would have changed about the school at the time?

POLK-STEPHENSON: It was a great school. It was a place for change. Change is what I am about and still about; I am still involved in all of this other stuff. I have always supported the fact that it should remain female. Not because I dislike males and not because I am afraid of them or don't want to go to school with them. It's because there is less distraction and females can feed upon each other. They give strength to each other in numbers. There is a certain intellectual discussion that goes on that does not go on in a coed classroom. You are really willing to speak your mind and your thoughts and feelings more I think. It is a deeper discussion. Less worried about what other people think of you.

Q: Do you have any specific memories of Barnard women during your undergrad experience coming together and really sharing that strength that you talked about?

POLK-STEPHENSON: You know I just don't remember. I lost some of my memory from those years after the accident. I have since got most of it back. It took many years to get it back and I was involved in whatever was around, but I don't recall that well. Once again, I was trying to heal. I wasn't 100%. I wasn't as flamboyant as I might have been. I really had post-traumatic problems that nobody really knew about at the time, so I was just dealing with personality changes and things like that. So after the accident, which was Christmas Eve 1969, a lot of the fight wasn't there. The only fight that was there was to get myself better.

There were some people, I have got to tell you my best friend at the time, she is a doctor now, I haven't talked to her probably since then, but she came down to Roosevelt Hospital to give blood, because I needed blood and apparently they poked her three times to get the blood and she doesn't know it, but they didn't get any blood out of her and nobody was going to tell her. I went to school with some pretty dynamic people. Mary Gordon was there and

she was best friends with my good friends and it was nice to know everybody, that is all I can say. I had friends across the street and in the summers I worked at camps. I was a camp counselor, a lifeguard mainly, so I maintained some of the relationships I made there and some of them went to Columbia, which was really nice. But I had to concentrate on my academics, that was one of the segues of the accident that changed my life, fortunately or unfortunately.

Q: This has been such a great interview, thank you so much, but as my last question, your graduation and the feelings you had while graduating, what was the day like? What were your parents like?

POLK-STEPHENSON: It was a day for celebration, because once again we didn't know if I was going to make it back to Barnard or could go to Barnard again. It was a family celebration. It was very, very nice. I think the person who spoke, I can't remember her name, she used to be the UN Ambassador. I think she was a Barnard alumna and a UN Ambassador, a very famous person, but right now her name escapes me. It was just very, very nice.

I will tell you, I couldn't believe it was happening. It wasn't easy getting back into school. I was proud to be going to graduate school at Columbia and it was fun. It was really fun. I remember the pictures they had to take for the yearbook. I had lost an awful amount of weight by the way. I was just nice and slim, so I liked the picture of me in the yearbook standing next to a tree. I think I said, "What is this of anger and discontent and drooping hopes degenerate sons and daughters, life is too strong for you. It takes life to love life"—something like that. It was by Masterson, who was in the '60's the star poet who we all quoted, and yeah, I was fine by that point. I used to get headaches. That was also another

thing, so they didn't go away for years, but now, knock on wood, I don't get them. I hate to say it, but in some ways my experience at Barnard was cut short by my getting run over by a car in Central Park, but I always say those are my war wounds and that's the way I put it. It was tough on everybody, my family especially. But everybody stood by me and here I am and I am protesting just like I always do.

Q: Good, I am glad to hear it.

POLK-STEPHENSON: One thing I felt was missing from Barnard was a push into politics and that for some reason was something I was very interested in. You know I ran campaigns, ran for office, didn't win, but I think the women at Barnard should be running for more offices and should be helping to run the country.

[end of interview]

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