BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Janet Price

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Janet Price conducted by Kelly Reller on March 24, 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: Janet Price	Location: Butler Library, Columbia University, New York City
Interviewer: Kelly Reller	Date: March 24, 2015

[00:00:16.19] Q: It is 12:36 p.m. on March 24, 2015 at Butler Library at Columbia University, and this is Kelly Reller, Barnard College Class of twenty-sixteen, and I'm going to be interviewing Janet Price from the Class of 1971.

Price: And I'm Janet Price of Barnard College Class of '71. Currently live in Brooklyn. I'm a recovering lawyer, and I was a high school history teacher and a principal, and a coach of coaches. Now I'm an education consultant.

Q: Excellent. So, Janet, can you tell me about your childhood—where were you were born, what got the start of Janet Price?

00:01:01 Price: Well, I was born in Chicago, as were my parents, as were my grandparents. And if you're a connoisseur of accents, you can hear that I still have a pretty heavy Chicago accent. You can tell on the A's; I can't tell the difference between Mary, marry, and merry—like the Virgin Mary, "Will you marry me?", and Merry Christmas all sound the same. So, that's the telltale sign. And, so I'm from a long line of Chicagoans, and when I was six we moved to a near suburb—Skokie, Illinois—which was a very large village—much bigger than the town where you grew up. [laughs] I think the reason I still have my accent is kind of like Henry Kissinger. He came here with his older brother from Germany at the same time, and his older brother speaks almost accent-less English. So I think it's a subconscious connection, an identification with the Midwest, that causes me to keep my Chicago accent.

So, I went to public schools, and I had a brother and a dog, and my grandparents lived with us, and my parents were very—my grandmother was very active in local democratic politics. She would get a Christmas card every year from Mayor Daley, and she was very popular in the neighborhood because she could fix parking tickets. But my parents were like FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] or Adlai Stevenson Democrats. When JFK [John F. Kennedy] was president, they dragged my brother and me to the forest reserves on Sundays to play touch football [laughs]. So very, you know, left liberal—not all that far left liberal—Democrats. They were very concerned about Civil Rights and supported the Civil Rights movement in small little ways.

I grew up in a Reform Jewish temple. The ideology—the theology—in Reform Judaism is that what it means to be a member of the chosen people is that you have a special responsibility to bring about social change. So, a lot of my politics and ethics comefrom that upbringing, and that was really important to my parents. And my dad was a CPA. My mom

did all kinds of things. She was the editor of a newspaper, she taught in the temple Sunday School—she said that she taught Zen Judaism. I have no idea what she meant by that [laughs]. But later on, after we were grown, she found her—she really blossomed, and she became a program officer in a foundation and did good work.

It was a very friendly neighborhood. We were like the first people on the block. This was like a new suburb. We moved in in ’56 and it was just being built up. You could see—you know how it’s very flat? Illinois is very flat, I think, flatter than Minnesota even.

00:04:24 Q: Yes.

Price: And so you could see like four, five, six blocks away, and then slowly houses got built. I mean, my playground was houses being constructed. My best friend Robin Sasso and I would just go play in these houses. If my parents knew about it, they would have had conniption fits, you know, half-done houses. That’s what we did. Whenever new neighbors came in, the other neighbors would get together and welcome them.

The schools were very good, but it’s a very different experience. I mean, there’s just so many cultural differences between the Midwest and New York.

Q: Right, right. Can you tell me about what kind of a student you were in high school?

Price: Oh, in high school? I wasn’t at the very, very top of my class —partly because I refused to take Honors Science and Math. I was just a little lazy. [laughs] But I did—if I was really into something, I threw myself into it, and if not I just did what was required. But I was considered very bright, and I was the editor of the school newspaper and the literary magazine, and I helped write the school talent show, and I sang and danced in the talent

show. So I was kind of a big woman on campus, and I had a lot of friends in like different groups, you know? So I wasn't one of the popular girls, but I had friends who were popular girls, and I had friends who, you know—I wasn't an artist but I had friends who were art people, and I had friends who were in the honors classes. I had a very nice high school experience, although I have to say that, by senior year, I was just itching to get the hell out of there.

Q: Is that what attracted you to the East Coast, or what made you think Barnard?

00:06:23 Price: When I was sixteen, the whole family—we drove east—my mom, my dad, my brother, and I—because I was in a Bible contest. [laughs]

Q: Explain! [laughs]

Price: You study the Bible and you basically memorize things, and then it's sort of like a spelling bee, only instead of spelling, you have to give, you know, who begat who kind of thing. But I was very interested in the Bible, so I was in this Bible contest, and I won in Chicago and I won in the Midwest, so I had to go to New York to compete nationally, so the whole family went, and it was the first time I'd been East. And it was the first time I'd seen mountains. When we went through Pennsylvania, I flipped out—oh my god! Yeah—and I loved New York—we all loved New York, and we saw *Fiddler on the Roof*, and we saw a play that Sammy Davis, Jr. was in because my dad was his accountant, and we went to the World's Fair, and we went to the Museum of Modern Art, and we went to The Cloisters, and I just thought. We went to Asti's, where all the waiters sing opera, and—I don't know if it's still there—

Q: I think it's called Ellen's Stardust Diner? I'm not sure if it's the same, but I think I've been there. They sing to you.

Price: Oh.

Q: Yeah.

Price: Oh, no, it's a different—it's the same idea but a different place. This was Italian food.

Q: Oh.

Price: And they sang opera.

Q: I'll have to try it.

Price: Yeah. They dressed me up in a hood, and I had to march around with them when they were singing the Pilgrim's Chorus. [laughs] I remember that I had lobster for the first time. Yeah, I just loved New York. So that's how I got interested in going to school in New York. I applied to Barnard, University of Chicago, Antioch College, and University of Illinois, and I got in everywhere, so I had then to decide where I was going to go. My mom really encouraged me to have an adventure. You know, it would be more of an adventure if I went away. And I decided that I'd have a more serious education at Barnard than I would at Antioch. I was dating somebody who went to Antioch, and that's why I applied there, but it wasn't serious. I thought I would get the most serious, you know—the deepest, most rigorous education at Barnard. We didn't know at the time how I would be spending my spring, the spring of my freshman year but—[laughs]

Q: Where did you spend the spring of your freshman year?

00:08:55 Price: Well, I got arrested in Fayerweather [Hall].

Q: Oh, that was—that's one of my later questions [laughs]. I figured it would get to that.

Price: My dad had gone to college under the G.I. Bill [Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944], and my mom had maybe a semester or two of junior college, which is what they called it at the time, but then she married my dad and went to work to support him, so he could go to school and become a CPA. And, a couple of cousins, distant cousins, had gone to the University of Illinois, but I certainly was the first person to go east to school. (except for my second cousin Maralee who went off to Brandeis a year before I went to Barnard). And everybody made fun of me—people in my family, because all my family was in Chicago. Tons and tons and tons of cousins and aunts and uncles, and they all thought it was hilarious that I was going to New York, and teased me incessantly about it once I was there.

Q: What was move-in day like? Did the family come with you?

Price: Oh, yeah.

Q: Were you shocked?

Price: Oh, they were shocked. I was—I at least pretended to be——well, you know what it was? We got there with my big trunk on the roof of the car, all strapped.

Q: Did you drive?

Price: We drove, yeah. We drove to New York with the trunk strapped to the roof of the car—notice I say “”ruf” not “roof.” We got there and there were all of these handouts about crime in the neighborhood and being careful, and my parents were a little flipped out. Yeah, that was back in ’71—no ’67. ’67. Things actually got worse in the city in the seventies, but I

don't know—I wasn't afraid of anything back then, you know. I was immortal back then, right?

Q: Right.

Price: So I just thought everything was so cool. [laughs]

Q: And at—so, at this big moment in your life, you just got to college, unpacked the trunk, what was your dream at that point—what did you want to turn your Barnard education into at that point?

00:10:52 Price: You know, I think I was too in awe and too scared have been able to answer the question at that time. I think I was very, very thirsty for knowledge and experience, and I just wanted to get into the deep end of the pool, and swim and swim and swim, but I didn't have any particular goals in mind. I was very interested in journalism at the time, so one of the first things I did was start working at the *Columbia* [*Daily*] *Spectator*.

Q: Sure. And can you explain your role at the Spectator?

Price: Well, I was just the cub reporter. You know, just whatever assignments they had, I went out and did. It was fun. Sophomore year I worked with a guy who was the editor of—they had a culture supplement, and I did movie reviews and cultural articles and stuff. And my writing was well known enough that one of my professors was very, very disappointed when I went off to Israel for my junior year of college. One, I was sick of New York, and two, I'd always wanted to go to Israel. My parents were *rabid* labor Zionists, so I'd always wanted to go to Israel, and they make it really easy. And Hebrew University is a very good school. I actually had a great experience there, but anyway, he was very disappointed. And

one of the things he said was, you know, you're ruining your career at the *Spectator*. So I guess I wrote enough that he noticed that I was writing for the *Spectator*. But I enjoyed the feature writing a lot more.

Q: Good, good. Did you have a friend group out of *Spectator*, or where—what activities were your friends involved in?

Price: Well, by Thanksgiving of my freshman year, I had my posse in place. I had this very tight-knit group of friends, and I'm still friends with all of the ones that are still alive. My freshman roommate died of lung cancer in her forties. But, let's see— Ania was a linguistics major, Susan was a philosophy major, and Caroline was a religion major. I was the only one who really in an activity. I do remember that Ania took me to—and this was during the strike—like maybe the first meeting of women's liberation [movement] at Barnard. Kate Stimpson and Kate Millett organized it with Serge Gavronsky and it was at the West End [Bar], and it was a meeting. So, I think Ania got involved in that. I don't know—we just hung out. We were pretty serious students, at least about the things that we cared about, but we just—*hung out*! [laughs]

Q: [laughs] All right.

Price: Oh no, Caroline came on the *Spectator* with me—she also did some writing for the *Spectator*, yeah.

Q: Sure.

00:14:20 Price: Susan and Ania were on my floor, Caroline—Q comes after P, so were in the same orientation group. I think we huddled together for warmth, you know, because although

we were all from different—Susan was from Montreal, Caroline from Connecticut, and Ania from Buffalo and Florida—we all felt a little bit like fish out of water.

Q: Sure.

Price: And so we huddled for warmth, yeah.

Q: Sure. And so, let's talk about now your big spring. You talked about political activity a little bit—how did you get involved in it? Was it that first initial meeting that spurred that, or did you have kind of an itching, seeing your parents and how they were? You said they were Democrats and very active, and Grandmother too, as well. Is that something that you think rubbed off on you?

Price: Oh yeah, well definitely. Definitely their idea that it was important to be involved in politics and that government could change things. But I was very interested in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and the idea of participatory democracy, and I did attend some SDS meetings early on in the fall, kind of looking for my niche. I met somebody really cool there named Nancy Biberman, who went to Barnard, she might have been a senior that year. I've run into her since, she's a very good public interest lawyer. I liked her a lot and I thought she was kind of a good role model, but on the whole I didn't find a place for myself in SDS. I think part of it was that it was a very male-dominated organization, and you had to be extremely forceful and knowledgeable in order to be heard as a woman, and I was just this little pip-squeak freshman, you know? So I kind of wandered away from it, but I was very interested in what they were doing.

In November, I went with a friend of mine who was going to a different school in New York, to the March on Washington. That was the one that Norman Mailer memorialized in *Armies*

of the Night. That's the one where there was a lot of tear gas. It was like November of '67, an anti-war demonstration. I was not tear-gassed. However, my big problem was there was no place to pee, and I think I went 18 hours without peeing. But—so, I wanted to be politically active. I was looking for a way to be politically active.

When Columbia came around, when the takeover came around, my friends and I all followed it avidly. We certainly agreed with the demands. I think what particularly struck me then—it certainly is what particularly strikes me now—was the gym in Morningside Park. It was so obvious that it was wrong to mess up a community park with a gym with a backdoor—a sort of quasi-apartheid arrangement for the residents whose park you were messing up. This is the story of universities in general in large cities—NYU [New York University] and Columbia and Yale [University] and so forth. There tends to be this kind of arrogant, "We'll do whatever works for our university." Flexing the muscle and being superior, but it was so blatantly offensive. And I think Martin Luther King's assassination had a big effect on my friends and me. It made us want to do something constructive. People don't talk about [the assassination]—connect [it] back [to]what happened in '68 as much as they—it probably gave us a little more motive to do something, right? And then, of course, I was violently anti-war, or at least anti- the Vietnam War. It seemed very wrong to me. And the war research that Columbia was involved in—I believe it had something to do with Agent Orange and other toxic substances that were being used, like essentially chemical warfare—it was subsidized by Dow. That was kind of an easy thing to be against. Some of the other demands, like recruiting on campus, seemed less something to get arrested about, you know, than just things to fill up the page of demands. But those two things were very compelling to me.

00:19:36 But there's another side to why we got involved—to be brutally frank, it was *so* much fun! And it was hard to meet guys. Even in my classes, it was—I'd always had a lot of male friends. Not just dated, but had a lot of male friends in high school. And at Barnard, even though we took classes at Columbia and Columbia guys took classes at Barnard, there just wasn't the opportunity. If somebody wanted to get you in bed, that was one thing. But otherwise, it was really hard to meet guys. And hard to include guys in your circle of friends. And when I did eventually, it was because of people that we were dating. But freshman year in particular, it just seemed like the best party in town, you know?

The other thing is, at that time, we had a system of parietals in place, and a notion about *in loco parentis* that was really oppressive, so it was really easy to stay out too late and miss a curfew and be stuck outside a locked dorm and not know what to do. That happened to so many of my friends. And you couldn't have a boy in your room with the door shut, you know? So one thing that led to was ridiculous displays of affection in public place. There were these rooms where you could hang out with a guy that we called the "passion pit." They were all over each other, it was disgusting. I need to cough—you know what? I need some water. Is there a place to get—?

Q: Sure. I think just around the corner here there's a drinking fountain.

Price: All that talking.

00:21:33 Q: That's fine. We'll just let that run—

[pause for break].

00:22:48 Price: I usually carry some water with me. What a silly time not to.

Q: I should have brought you some now that I think about it.

Price: Well, if you do another interview you'll know. [laughs] So, I really think that part of the motivation—mine and others—was, it was so exciting and we were feeling so downtrodden and suppressed and over-supervised. And even though it wasn't on the list of demands, one of the things that had changed by the next year—and Columbia first and then at Barnard—were these outdated parietal rules. Because everybody was doing it, you may as well let us have the dignity of doing it in our own rooms, right? And certainly it even seemed to me at the time—not so much during the takeover, but during the strike afterwards, that a whole lot of it was just youthful hormones run wild. So it was this combination of real political beliefs and there were things that we urgently needed to take action around. And the despair at King's assassination and the need to do something constructive in response to that. Especially after the riots and the fires and destruction in African-American communities afterwards—the need to do something constructive. And frustration with the oppressive feel of the university—oppressive to us, as well as the Vietnamese and the residents of Morningside Heights and Harlem. And just youthful hormones. [laughs]

Q: That accounts for a lot of things.

Price: Well, it was that cocktail.

00:24:58 Q: Sure. Communicating back in Chicago now, what were you telling them? Were they aware of everything that you were getting involved with?

Price: Hell, no. [laughs] Actually, a funny story—and my friend said, "You must tell the story of your aunt and uncle"—I had this aunt and uncle who lived in Mississippi. They were from Chicago, but they'd moved for business reasons to Mississippi. And they were in town, and I had to meet them for, for lunch. So one of the reasons that we were in Fayerweather was because it was really easy to get in and out of. [laughs] You've probably taken some classes in Fayerweather. There's a nice big window—even I could get in and out of it. So, I crawled out of Fayerweather, went back to Reid, took a shower, got dressed in my best bib and tucker, went to see my aunt and uncle, had—you know, like a nice, dutiful niece—had my lunch with them, did whatever it was we did together, whatever sight-seeing we did, then went back, put on my jeans, and went back into Fayerweather. [laughs]

I only spoke to my parents about once a week. There was no Skype then, no Internet. Phone calls were expensive. We did write. I did a lot of taping—I would send them tapes. And somewhere, I have a collection of tapes. I just don't have anything to play them on. I'd tape sounds, I'd tape people saying, "Pigs, eat shit! Pigs, eat shit!" All that stuff. And they were pretty shocked by it. They were really shocked at my using four-letter words. That was not how I was brought up. And they thought they were sending me to some kind of finishing school.

But when I was arrested, and their idea of—even though they admired and supported the civil disobedience that had happened in the South, it never crossed their minds that a child of theirs would get arrested, right? So when I was arrested, I had the most *amazing* stroke of luck, and I didn't have to break it to them. They got a call from my lawyer, who was a young man who worked for the ACLU and, through an *amazing* coincidence, was the son of a very good friend of my mother's. Like what good luck! So he told them, "This is what's

happened, Price's fine, she's out of the hoosegow. She'll probably have to go back this summer for a preliminary hearing. The charges aren't serious, and you should be very, very proud of your daughter because X, Y, and Z." So they made it a lot easier for me.

My parents had a great deal of faith in me that I wouldn't bite off more than I could chew—that I wouldn't do anything self-destructive. And, of course, you prefer to hear good news than bad news. It took them a little bit of getting used to this, but I walked them through. After he spoke to them, I spoke to them, and I walked them through it, and "This is what happened," and "This is why I did it."

They weren't angry at me. My dad, at least, was very proud of me because I remember that summer his sister was married to a guy who we loved very much. He was a wonderful husband, father, uncle, family man—but he was, you know, to the right of Genghis Khan. This guy was *so* right wing, and he and my father were fond of each other, but they would have the most amazing political arguments, you know. And my Dad's ears would get all red. So he was defending me and what we did and how important it was. Uncle Teddy was saying what savages the students were, and my Dad's ears would get all red, he was very proud of me. My mother, I think, thought it was okay because her friend's son the lawyer thought it was okay. [laughs]

Q: You're a lucky woman.

00:29:22 Price: What luck! Otherwise, I think my parents would have seen that they made the bed I was lying in—that I was acting on principles that they made me develop, you know? However, that summer I was working in Chicago and they did not let me anywhere near the Democratic Convention that was held in Chicago that summer where heads got

busted. They strongly encouraged me, because I was working, to go to bed early every night, et cetera, et cetera. And you know what? I was glad to take some time off. I was exhausted from the takeover and the strike. It was exhausting.

Q: Would you be willing to describe the atmosphere of when you were in Fayerweather, what that was like among the students?

00:30:15 Price: Yeah, it was wonderful. It was a little bit like I imagine the Occupy Wall Street felt like. Because there were committees to do things. I remember I was in charge of making tuna fish sandwiches. We would have these meetings, endless political meetings, but they were very interesting to me. There were a lot of graduate students and I think law students in Fayerweather, so there was a lot of interesting—for me, very sophisticated—conversation going on, and I was just delighted to just sit and listen. But it was also just a lot of fun. We had a wedding while we were there, a couple got married. The chaplain from St. Paul's came, officiated, and the bride borrowed my friend Caroline's "wheat jeans" —that's what we called white jeans, wheat jeans—for the occasion.

So we had a *lot* of fun. I remember giving a lot of, backrubs. And folks were very respectable of the *stuff* in Fayerweather. There was an article in the *New York Times* after the bust that showed offices being turned over in Fayerweather. And that might have happened in other buildings, but I know it didn't happen in Fayerweather. Either they labeled it wrong, or somebody—somebody from the police, counterintelligence—went in and messed things up and took the picture. I was outraged when I read this story in the *New York Times*, because people were very mature and careful, and everything was led by people in their twenties, you know, not little pip-squeaks like me, you know?

I just loved it. I had the time of my life. It was so much fun. In the building—when we get to the strike it's a little bit different—but in the building, I really liked the people I was with. I liked the leaders and respected them. I felt I was learning a lot. I felt like what I was doing was important, even though part of the reason I was doing it was to have the time of my life. And, it was just a wonderful experience, yeah.

Q: So can you take me through the not-so-great part of the, the strike? The arrest?

00:32:43 Price: Sure. Well, first of all, the arrest: I think that the people who were outside, not being arrested but watching things go on, saw a lot of blood and gore, and were probably much more traumatized than most of us who were arrested. In Fayerweather, there were three groups of people—people who didn't resist arrest, and I was in that group, I saw no point whatsoever to be resisting arrest—people who passively resisted arrest, in other words, they just went limp and wouldn't walk on their own, but they let the cops carry them out—and then people who chained themselves to furniture and stuff.

So, I did hear some banging around, and I was very concerned that some people were getting hurt, but my friends and I—our arresting officer was a narcotics detective who was a real cool dude who certainly wasn't afraid of us. He'd seen some tough customers, so he wasn't afraid of a few Barnard-Columbia students. And we actually just chatted him up because we were interested in his work—which, by the way, was a big mistake because back then, even though it was a minor misdemeanor, they had preliminary hearings for everything, and the purpose of the preliminary hearing is to see if the cop can identify the perp, and he remembered us all right! [laughs] Big mistake. Never—if you ever decide to get arrested, don't talk to the—don't, you know—keep your head down.

Q: It's a Midwesterner curse. Making conversation.

Price: There you go. But my friends weren't from the Midwest, and we were all chatting him up. But right, being friendly, right. But don't let it get squashed out of you either because even though people make fun of us, they secretly admire us.

Q: Okay, we'll go with that!

Price: I got actually some advice. This is parenthetical, but later, much later, I was working at Norton, and somebody said, "Play up the fact that you're from the Midwest. It's a huge advantage. People like Midwesterners."

Q: Huh—look at that. On the record.

Price: There you go. So, what happened the night of the arrest—I was the night editor, which, I can't remember exactly what that involved. It wasn't really editing, it was a mechanical job. You had to—

Q: Production.

Price: Right. Some kind of production job over at the *Spectator*. And I told them in advance, "You better have a backup for me because if arrests are going to be made, I have to go back and get arrested." So I felt very strongly about that, that I had to go back and get arrested. *Why* did I feel so strongly about that? Well, I knew that that was part of the deal. That getting arrested, and then people seeing the arrests and the numbers and stuff was how you made an impact. So that was my principled reason for it. The other reason was, my friends would have made fun of me and been mad at me if I hadn't gotten arrested with them, so there you are.

So, I did go back, and I don't know what they did about the night edit, but they weren't mad at me.

Being at the *Spectator* at that time, by the way was very interesting because, when I wasn't in the building, I was working at the *Spectator*, and all the big shots would come in. All of the leaders would come in with their puffed-up chests and would be talking, and I formed some opinions about who was totally full of crap and who wasn't. Sadly, my favorite of all of them was Ted Gold. He was very thoughtful, very interesting, and he later on became a Weatherman, and blew up in the Greenwich Village townhouse that got blown up when bomb-making went terribly wrong. Very sad. He was the best of the bunch.

So, anyway, that was the bust. So they took us to—I think they took us first to the women's House of Detention, which is no longer there. It's a basketball court now. It was right by NYU. And then they took us to the Tombs, which also doesn't exist in the same way today, so I was the—

Q: The Tombs?

00:37:02 Price: The Tombs, T-O-M-B-S. What they used to call the detainment center where they took people before they were arraigned. And both places were really, really disgusting. Like, there was vomit on the benches, and they gave us—it's funny, the things you remember—they gave us sandwiches that were stale white bread with one piece of bologna and weak, sugary tea. We were really crowded, but on the other hand, I wasn't—I'd been with other people who'd been arrested. And we sang, and we had a lot of fun. Linda LeClair was in my cell. You know who Linda LeClair is? Well, she's very famous because she got expelled from Barnard for living with her boyfriend.

Q: Yes, okay, yes I do.

Price: —which is a perfect illustration of how incredibly repressive and ridiculous things were back then. And it was kind of fun. It wasn't fun being sleepless and eating bad sandwiches and bad tea, but—and then we got arraigned. I was not particularly frightened, you know, I was just sort of more tired and a little bit in awe, you know, because I'd never been in a criminal court before. I don't remember being frightened. I just had this confidence that there are so many of us, it's all going to work out, you know? I was 18, what did I know? Right? I was fearless, like you are when you're 18.

Then the strike started. And when I missed my classes—some of them met outside, some of them didn't meet—I missed going to class. I loved going to class. I loved my classes, you know. I loved being a student.

But, what really bothered me was, it was all of these young men going around with megaphones, bossing me around. So if it's not Columbia and Barnard administrators bossing us around, it's these young men. Who did they think they are? And they used a lot of four-letter words, and although I had come to—enjoy using four-letter words— I realized that they were using them in lieu of ideas. You know? And it was just cheap thrills. And I got really, really, really repulsed and disgusted, and I spent most of the strike here in Butler working in the microfiche room. Back in the day, that's what you used—microfiche. Doing a paper on Emma Goldman, the anarchist. [laughs] That turned me off of politics and political action until 1977. That's when I got involved in things again.

I take that back: I did get involved in some women's issues. I remember pamphleting for the women's ERA [Equal Rights Amendment], which we never got, but it seemed very important

at the time. And then I got very interested in reproductive rights. So, after that, when I did get back involved in politics, my first interest was women's issues. But I was very, very, very turned off by the—particularly the macho thing, you know?

And I was insecure. I felt a little bit like a country bumpkin coming to Barnard, and I wasn't particularly brash or confident, but I knew how smart I was. And I didn't like being treated like a bimbo. I didn't like it, even then, you know, in the very early days of the second wave of feminism, I just knew, That's not the way I want to be treated. That's bullshit. These guys aren't any smarter than I am, and I'm not taking this.

Q: So coming back the fall of your sophomore year now, you had taken a summer off to work in Chicago, and you were back at school—did you have a sense of returning to normalcy, or did that—?

00:41:46 Price: Sophomore year there weren't any takeovers. The following year when I was away in Israel things heated up again, so in 1968, '69 there was plenty of political action on campus, but no big sit-ins or takeovers. And I had nothing to do with politics again. I switched over to the features section of the *Spectator*, and I was all about that—culture.

Q: Sure. And what factors played into your decision, then, to go to Israel besides that?

Price: Well [long pause] I found New York City and Columbia and Barnard to be a little bit gray and oppressive at that point, and I just needed a change of scenery. And they just make things really easy for American students, particularly back then, I don't know if it's still true, how it is now, but they were really trying to get people to move to Israel—which I didn't have any intention of doing. But it was easy as pie to get in and make the arrangements. And, it is a really, really good school and they give lots of courses in English. I took one course in

Hebrew in my field. Couldn't understand a word the guy said, but all the reading was in English, and I used a friend's notes—he was fluent in Hebrew but took his notes in English—so I passed the course. I wanted an adventure for some of the same reasons I went to New York.

My parents were strong Zionists, and I had been raised to think that Israel was really important, so I wanted to see it for myself, and this was the perfect opportunity.

Q: And that was through the entirety of your junior year?

00:43:39 Price: Yeah.

Q: Okay, and when you returned for your senior year, what was the climate like at school, then. Had things changed, did you notice, in your absence?

Price: Like the French say, "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"—the more things change, the more they stay the same. [long pause] I lived with the same people. I was back in Plimpton. One of my friends had graduated, and I don't know if she was living with the guy she was going to marry, but it was as good as, and we became friends with all of his friends, and that was my social circle, which was great because they were a hoot, so I think I had a more interesting social life senior year.

I took some really interesting courses senior year. I took a literature course with Edward Said, whom I was particularly interested in studying with because he was a Palestinian activist as well as a fantastic English literature professor—a very, very important thinker in both fields. And so I was interested in taking a course with him because he was a Palestinian,

but it was like a real intellectual awakening. Like I learned to read literature in a different way because of him. I was just crazy about him.

And I had another professor, Hester Eisenstein, who didn't get tenure. I think she was too informal for the stuffy Barnard faculty. For some reason she had a big tire in her office to give you a sense—but she was very, very encouraging of my intellectual interests, very supportive. So, it was actually quite a wonderful year. I was very glad to be back in the States. [laughs] A year in Israel cured me of any Zionist tendencies. [laughs] But I had a wonderful experience there, it was a great adventure, and it was really nice being back. But I did notice, even more—there's something very grim about Morningside Heights back in those days—which, it seems less so now. I remember once we dropped acid—it was the only time I ever did that. Tried everything once. [laughs]

Q: For the record.

00:46:40 Price: For the record I haven't since. And the statute of limitations has passed. But the whole experience was like out of some black and white Czech movie. It was a very interesting experience, it wasn't unpleasant, but it was all so black and white. And that's kind of what New York and Columbia and Barnard seemed like to me. Like, void of joy, void of color. I remember a friend from Cornell came to visit me, and I was skipping down the street to see him, and he said, "You're the only joyful thing in this whole neighborhood!" and I was sort of taken aback by that, but it was kind of true. There was something so, so sad about the city.

Q: Do you think that was in reaction from just your perspective of what you'd been through, or do you think that was the university reacting as a whole to what it had been through?

Price: I don't know how much it had to do with the events in '68 and '70, but partly, I think that nothing had changed, except that we got to screw in our rooms. Nothing substantial had really changed in the university because of that. It was depressing. So it was that. Part of it was that New York was on a decline. By '75, you have the headlines in the *Daily News*, "Ford to City: Drop Dead." Part of it was that the war didn't seem to be ending, and the Civil Rights movement was changing, and there was more separation of blacks and whites— partly because of black power—and less unity among people on the left. That was depressing. So, as all things are, it was a combination of things.

Q: So having this kind of gloomy atmosphere in your senior year, were you ready to move on and get outside of Morningside Heights and graduate, or what was your focus at that point?

00:49:01 Price: I was already becoming interested in education. I was thinking about teaching in an alternative school. But my parents really, really encouraged me to go to graduate school. And Hester Eisenstein was encouraging me to apply to a program at Santa Cruz in intellectual history. And I probably should have. But I stayed and went to Columbia, so more Morningside Heights, But, you know, I had friends and I'd laid down roots. And I stayed in New York and never left.

Q: Sure. And can you tell us a little bit about how your life overall has evolved since Barnard, what you've taken on in your life, where you're at right now?

Price: Well, after a couple of years in the Graduate Department of History, I finished my master's and I finished my coursework for the PhD, and I decided, Oh this is crazy, I'm not a scholar. I really liked being with people all day, not in a dusty library. So I got a job at W. W. Norton in their college department, which was actually a lot of fun. It wasn't a very good

career move, I found out later, but it was so much fun. It was it was writing and designing the brochures for their college texts, and I did that for a bunch of years. And Norton was a very interesting place because on the one hand, it was full of really smart people and congenial people, and it paid better than other publishing companies.

On the other hand, like most places of the time, it was still pretty sexist. There was a book written while I was at Norton in the seventies called *Room with No View*, and it was about women in publishing, because we had the offices without windows, and guys had the offices with the windows. I was very into fiction writing at the time, and I was churning out short stories. And I was very into reproductive rights. There was an organization called "CARASA"—what did it stand for? [Coalition for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization] Well, whatever, it had two things: one was the right to choose, and two, was particularly fighting the Hyde Amendment, which restricted federal funding for abortions. So, in other words, if you had health insurance or you were a person of means, you could get an abortion. It was legal by then. But if you were a poor woman, you just had to have those babies, you know? You didn't have any choice in the matter. That really pissed me off and got me back in the saddle again, because it just seemed so unjust. And a friend of mine in Israel had had an abortion, and that experience had upset me and moved me in a certain way.

So, anyway, I was involved in politics, I had this job at Norton, and I was writing. And I decided to go to law school. And my rationale was that I wanted to pull everything in my life together. I wanted my job to be my political work, and I wanted to have more experiences so I'd have more to write about. So I went to law school.

Q: Where did you go to law school?

00:52:42 Price: I went to NYU, which was a really, really nice experience. They have very, very strong clinical program, and I took a criminal defense clinic and I got to represent mid-level felony suspects, people who were charged with mid-level felonies. So, I got to—do everything, you know? I mean, with a professor standing by my side to make sure I didn't sell somebody down the river. It was an amazing experience. There were some wonderful professors there, and it was challenging and interesting, and I had great friends, a couple of whom I'm still friends with. And we would go out disco dancing all the time. And as usual, I had a good time. [laughs]

One summer I worked on the Navajo reservation, so I really did have new experiences because of choosing the law. And one of our clients was the local School Board, so I got interested in education law. I was either interested in education or health law. Those were my two interests, and I happened to get a job at Advocates for Children because I had a friend who worked there—I called her for help, and she said "Oh, we have an opening." And so that was education law, and that's what I did. It's not everything that's sufficient to live the American dream, or to break out of the ghetto, but it's necessary, a good education. It's not enough, particularly in this economy, but it's necessary.

And it's just really interesting, you know? I'm very interested in how institutions work, and how you change them, and over time I got very interested in all the inadvertent harm that lawsuits caused, particularly in creating a boom in special education, you know. And, therefore over time, I got more interested in education than the law, and realized that all of the lawsuits we were winning were pyrrhic victories because they didn't particularly change anything. So then I worked for Dinkins when he was the Borough President doing education and policy. Then a classmate of mine, Beth Lief, was starting an organization which was

called The Fund for New York City Public Education. She asked me to come and help her, so I did. It became New Visions for Public Schools, which helped start a whole lot of small public schools—linked to a whole range of partners from a health care union to museums, universities, community-based organizations—some of which went bust, but most of which are still really good and effective schools. So, this was a wonderful job, and I was very well-paid and it was really interesting work, but I met a whole lot of educators, and I finally realized that what I wanted to do was be a high school history teacher.

Q: There it is.

00:56:11 Price: So—that's what I did. My midlife crisis was to become a high school history teacher, and I got a job at a high school for recent immigrants. Through my connections through all this work, I got to work at a really good school. So, I didn't have a typical new teacher's experience at all. Not only because I was older and wiser and had a little bit of self-confidence, and I was used to running meetings with the union, keeping union presidents in line, so how could I fail to keep a class of sixteen year-olds in line? Let me tell you, that was much harder. [laughs]

Q: Really?

Price: Well, I taught at an international high school, and there were kids from all over the world. And they were actually much more respectful of teachers and those in authority than American-born kids are, so it wasn't hard, but it was a wonderful adventure. And, the best job I ever had—the best job I could imagine having. And I taught for seven years. But that was a time in which places like New Visions and foundations like the Gates Foundation were getting into breaking up big schools into small personalized communities, and that meant

they needed more principals. So I kept getting calls: “Price, do you have a license? Price, could you get a license? Price, we need you to be a principal.” So, I said okay, and I did an alternative certification program called New Leaders for New Schools, and I started a small school, a small high school called Brooklyn Preparatory High School. Now that, of course, that wasn’t the best job of my life, but that was the best achievement of my life. Can you imagine starting a high school from scratch?

Q: I cannot!

00:57:54 Price: And, so, I will never achieve anything like that ever again. And I never would want to try. [laughs] But that was amazing—it was like being in labor for six years. But it is still going strong, and it’s a nice small high school that is totally unscreened. It’s very funny: one of the things that I worked on when I was a lawyer was fighting unfair admissions practices in public high schools. I wrote an expose called “Public High Schools, Private Admissions” that actually led over time, to some serious changes. By the time Gates was funding creation of small high schools, the powers that be had gotten wise, and they didn’t allow us to be selective. Kids listed their choices, and then it was by lottery.

So, I got hoisted on my own petard, and my school was totally unscreened—so whoever picked me, and got in through the lottery, got into our school. It was quite a diverse population, and from the very beginning we took in kids with special needs—Special Ed students with individual educational plans, Special Ed kids, most of whom were very well-served by the school, much better off than they would have been in a segregated Special Ed setting—some of whom, we were clueless how to serve, so maybe they needed the specialized setting. But for the most part, it worked out really well.

I was able to recruit some experienced teachers, which was unusual for a new school. They tend to open up with inexperienced teachers, which is a problem. [laughs] Because I'd been in the business for a while, I was able to recruit some experienced teachers, and we did very well—we were an "A" school, and it's still doing really well. Kids have graduated and gone to Cornell [University] and Spellman [College] and all kinds of good schools, and gotten full scholarships, full posse scholarships to all kinds of good schools. It was a real eye-opening learning experience. So I did that for six years.

And then I retired from the Department of Ed[ucation]—happily, because I hate bureaucracies, you know? And I went back to work at New Visions for a few years, at another dream job. Not as good as being a teacher, but pretty close. We had all this money from the Gates Foundation to hire outstanding teachers to coach other teachers, on the new Common Core standards. And so that's what I did for a bunch of years. I recruited coaches, and I coached them, and helped them figure out what schools to work in, and helped them build teacher teams in math and literacy. And that was my last full-time job.

01:01:03 But, I'm still working as a consultant. I'm going to Syracuse tonight to work with the Syracuse school district, and what I'm working on now is trying to find more time for teachers during the school day to be out of the classroom, because one of the big problems in American education is, pre-service training doesn't prepare—there's just not a good match between what we expect teachers to do and what they learn to do in Ed School.

And even if there were a good match, there's just not enough support for teachers once they start, and just not enough understanding of how many years it takes and how much support you need in order to be effective. And that's not fair to the kids. And it's not good for the

economy that ineffective teachers are educating our young. So, we have to find more time. For instance, the average for American teachers in the classroom is 71% of their work day. In Shanghai, which is one of the top districts internationally—on the international tests, they call the PISA Tests, 35% of their time is spent in the classroom.

Q: Wow.

01:02:35 Price: Yeah. We don't have to get that low, but it should be more like 50/50, or 60/40, and the time they spend out of the classroom should be really, really productive with time to collaborate with other teachers and learn how to do their craft better, so that's what I'm working on now. That's my career.

Q: Wow. That's amazing. So, looking at that, can you imagine—every step in your life has gotten you right to where you are right now—can you imagine how it would have been had you decided not to come to the East Coast? Do you think you would have made these same decisions, or do you think that coming out here and experiencing what you did at Barnard shaped who you are and who you would later become?

Price: Well, it's hard to say. And I have a feeling that I would have wound up in education ultimately, and that I would have been interested in women's rights issues ultimately because of who I am, and what the world is like. But, I probably wouldn't be as well-educated if I hadn't gone to Barnard and Columbia, and the year at Hebrew University, also I had fantastic professors there. So, I might not have had as good an education. And it would have been sad not to have the experience at Columbia in '68. That was a great experience to have for a whole bunch of reasons.

It's interesting, when I went before the Character Committee [as part of] the bar [examination], I said, you know, I was arrested in '68. And he said, "Well, that really qualifies you to be a lawyer, you know. You should wear that with honor." So, at minimum—I suppose if I hadn't gone to Barnard, I would have gone to another good school—and maybe I would have gotten just as much of a good education at University of Chicago. But one is I would have been too close to home, so I wouldn't have been able to blossom and become myself and separate from my parents and decide what parts from them I wanted to keep and what parts of them I wanted to reject. At least not as easily. So it's good to get that far away, you know?

And it's good to be in a different culture. I don't know if I would be as Midwestern, and as proud of being a Midwesterner, if I hadn't gone to school in New York. [laughs] So, being in New York and figuring out what part of New York I wanted to make my own, and how I wanted to *stay* like my peeps back in Chicago—that also was part of what made me what I am. But I think maybe the most important part about going east was being a part of the events in '68. And I can't exactly say how they shaped me, but it was one of the top ten experiences in my life. Yeah.

Q: Wow. And with that, I'm out of questions, but do you have anything you'd like to add to the record for the oral history that you feel is important?

01:05:43 Price: Well, one thing I want to emphasize is how different—well, not surprisingly because their buildings weren't being occupied—but how differently the Barnard administration treated its students from how Columbia treated its students. The night that we were arrested, even before the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] lawyers came and

divvied us up and represented us all, Barnard's law firm came down to make sure all the girls were okay. And they were there at the arraignment. And I was really—I was touched. I thought that was really nice, you know?

Q: That is nice.

Price: And the other thing is, it took a while—Professor McCaughey has these seminars on the making of Barnard, and we had one on the events of '68. One of my classmates was there, and reminded us of something I'd forgotten. In sophomore year, when we were in Plimpton, there still were parietals—you still couldn't have guys in your room, or at least not with the door shut or whatever. And I remember—there was some sort of sit-in at Plimpton that caused Barnard to change its policies. So by the end of sophomore year, they had loosened up on these in loco parentis, somewhat repressive, somewhat hypocritical policies. So, for instance, sophomore year, my friend Susan's brother, Peter—who I just visited in Israel—came to visit, and we had to put a babushka on him and smuggle him in. But the guard got wise. Somebody tipped him off that we had a guy hiding, and he came looking for him, and he was hiding in my trunk. You know the same trunk—

Q: The same trunk! [laughs]

01:07:39 Price: Whereas senior year my brother came to visit me, and he spent a whole week in Plimpton just living with me. No muss, no fuss. The sad change at Barnard is the end of Greek Games—well, I think you have them again, right?

Q: I think they got—no.

Price: I know they were revived for a little while.

Q: No, they cut—

Price: Well, they're kind of corny. [laughs]

Q: I haven't seen any advertisements. I've seen the pictures of the past—

Price: That's the sort of thing they probably should once do every four years, so everybody gets the experience, you know? Corny as heck, but it's fun. Things like that kind of died. If anything, I was happier that I'd chosen to gone to Barnard as opposed to, say, Radcliffe, which I hadn't applied to—probably wouldn't have gotten into—a school where there wasn't a separate women's college. I felt like I had the best of both worlds, and the experience at Columbia made me feel even more that way. I got to go over to Columbia to do whatever I wanted to do at Columbia, but I had this safe haven across the street, where it was okay for women to have opinions and to express them.

01:09:21 Q: Well said. And with that, we had Janet Price, Class of '71, and Kelly Reller, Class of 2016.

[End of interview]

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