

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Deborah Veach

2015

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Deborah Veach conducted by Frances Connell on October 2, 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: Deborah Veach

Location: Teaneck, NJ

Interviewer: Frances Connell

Date: October 2, 2015

00:00:01 Q: Okay, this is an interview taking place for the Barnard College Voices Oral History Class of 1971 Collection. I am interviewing Deborah Veach at her home in Teaneck, New Jersey. Today is October 2, 2015, and the interviewer is Frances Connell.

Okay, Deborah, first of all thank you for taking time from your schedule to be part of this. We look forward to being able to share your story. So the first thing we start with, usually, is some background about growing up, where your family was from, early schooling, experiences with other friends.

00:00:43 Veach: Okay. I want to thank you for rescheduling also. You've been very flexible, and I appreciate that as well.

00:01:49 Q: You're quite welcome.

00:00:52 Veach: I was born in 1949 in a displaced persons camp in Munich, Germany. My parents were from Poland and almost all their families were killed in the Holocaust. My father had something like eleven sisters and brothers, some of whom—I might tear up—some of whom were married and had children, and they were all killed in different ways and different places. As was my mother's family.

So basically I grew up—I was born in the DP [displaced persons] camp. When I was approximately nine months old, my parents were allowed to emigrate to the United States because my mother's sister came shortly before. The two of them had survived the Holocaust together. [Showing emotion] I'm not sure if anyone can imagine the horrors and evils of that time. I find it hard to believe.

My parents, I think, were very brave and started their lives all over again. They settled in Bayonne, New Jersey, which I have to say was not a very good choice for them. But be that as it may, my father got a job as a factory worker—Maidenform Bra Factory, which was in Bayonne, on Avenue E. We lived close to Avenue E on 29th Street, across the street from Bayonne Hospital. After having moved from an attic in someone's home, to an apartment in an apartment building, to another apartment in an apartment building—and somehow they managed to buy a two-family house with my mother's sister and her husband.

I grew up in Bayonne for the most part and, unfortunately, I experienced a lot of anti-Semitism in Bayonne, which just reinforced my parents' experiences during the Holocaust, where they described people whom they knew all their lives just turning on them. I guess I wasn't surprised about the anti-Semitism, since I grew up with such horrible stories. I went to the neighborhood public school. There were hardly any Jewish children in that school. I felt it. I was very conscious of the fact that there were almost no Jews in the school. I was very popular—I have to say that. I was always Class President, despite the fact that I experienced anti-Semitism, with some of my classmates calling at home and making anti-Semitic remarks or handing me notes. It

was very strange. I was well liked and at the same time hated for who I was. It was just always unclear how people felt about me.

00:04:30 Q: Let me just stop and let's go back a little.

00:04:31 Veach: Sure.

00:04:32 Q: Tell me a little bit about your parents, coming from such an insane tragedy. What do you remember about them, your early years with them and them adjusting to this country? You've already said you've had to move a lot—clearly there's a lot of financial pressure.

00:04:49 Veach: Yes. My mother didn't work. My father—I remember how he got paid—he got an envelope with cash in the envelope, and I guess that was either every Friday or every other Friday. And they would put the money on the kitchen table, and they would count it, and my mother would record it. I remember when my father got a raise, it would be in pennies. He would get an additional three cents an hour, and if he got a nickel an hour, it was cause for celebration.

Money was tight—I was always conscious of that fact. In those days, everybody walked home for lunch—which I did. And I remember having a lunch that was much different from what everybody else had. I didn't realize it—in first grade I remember, I was in a different—I also moved around schools a lot. And in first grade, I think there was a chart on the wall where the teacher would ask every child what they had had for breakfast. People had pancakes, they had

waffles, they had cereal, and I had never even heard of these things [laughs]. And I had farina, which they had never heard of.

So it was—and my parents didn't speak English. At home they spoke Yiddish, and I clearly don't remember speaking Yiddish, but it had to be my first language. I learned English playing out on the street with whoever I happened to live near at the time. My parents—my mother in particular was very self-conscious about her accent when she spoke English. She never went to a PTA [Parent Teacher Association] meeting. She was always very self-conscious about it, so she never participated in much. She was big on self-improvement. When I was in college, she took classes at a nearby college. She got her GED actually, and then went on to take other college classes. I remember helping her with her homework and her public speaking assignments.

My father, despite the horrors, was a relatively content person, didn't have high ambitions, and—jumping ahead a little bit—had no clue what the difference would be in my attending Jersey City State College, which would have been a bus ride away, versus going to an Ivy League school like Barnard College. He basically went along with me—and I have to say my mother encouraged me to do that.

00:08:01 Q: Okay.

00:08:02 Veach: Thinking about my parents—we had no books in the house, we had no magazines in the house. Whenever I had a school assignment in, let's say, grammar school—and those assignments always required cutting out photos from magazines and pasting them on a

board—and we never had any magazines. So I had to find some magazines—they gave me a dollar or two to buy some magazines and it was just—I had no help for my schoolwork. As I said, I changed schools quite a few times. And I was a terrible, terrible student up until fourth grade. I just couldn't catch on as to what was going on. I remember going to kindergarten and learning the alphabet song and having absolutely no clue that the alphabet had anything to do with reading or writing. To me, it was just memorizing nonsense syllables, which meant nothing to me. So it was sort of even hard to learn the alphabet song [laughs] since I didn't know what the alphabet was [laughs].

00:09:12 Q: Did you have any siblings?

00:08:14 Veach: I had a younger sister who was born in Bayonne. She's five years younger than I am. So I was basically sort of a pioneer when I—a couple of things. In fourth grade—

00:09:31 Q: So fourth grade things were beginning to click.

00:09:34 Veach: Yes. Exactly. In fourth grade, I had a teacher, Mrs. Mack, who I remember being in the school library, which was in the basement, dark and no windows—a room no bigger than this room, with walls of books. And she came over to me and handed me a book, Charlotte's Web. It was the first book I ever read. It was just eye opening to follow a story and be touched by the story. You know, I cried when Charlotte died, [showing emotion] and that just changed everything. I became a frequent patron at the local library. I just woke up to this whole world of—I wouldn't call it literature, but reading. And I became an A student after that. I caught

on to math. Before that I had no clue what minus and plus meant. [Laughs] I didn't even understand the words. I had no one at home to explain anything. It wasn't a very good school either, so it wasn't as if other kids were doing much better than I.

00:10:54 Q: It sounds like they let you sort of slide till fourth grade. That's pretty late to—

00:10:56 Veach: This would have been my third school when I got to fourth grade.

00:11:03 Q: Well that was part of it too.

00:11:04 Veach: Yes. And that was my first year in that school and somehow Mrs. Mack [pause] [laughs] was great.

00:11:13 Q: Bless her.

00:11:14 Veach: And I also had a good friend at that point. I remember sleeping at her house, and it must have been Hanukkah—she had three sisters—and her father took her, the three sisters and me to a toy store, which also had books. It was the first time I'd ever been in a toy store. It was amazing. And we were allowed to pick out anything we wanted. I remember getting a Nancy Drew book. I just wanted a book.

I became obsessed with Nancy Drew. I got all of the books out of the library. And then I discovered Louisa May Alcott and I read all of her books. I just—it was like an awakening.

00:12:03 Q: Tell me more about the Jewish part of your life. Was your family able to be observant?

00:12:08 Veach: We were sort of observant [laughs]. We were not Orthodox, but it was—they chose certain things. We kept a Kosher home, but I'm not sure they really knew the laws of keeping a Kosher home. Certain basic laws we observed. We didn't use our car on Saturdays. It was sort of hit or miss.

I just wanted to say one other thing about grammar school, which made me a big fan of public schools because I had to take home economics. I learned how to make grilled cheese sandwiches, and I brought that home to my mother and we had grilled cheese sandwiches [laughs] almost every day after I taught her how to make that.

00:13:07 Q: That's a great story.

00:13:09 Veach: She never heard of macaroni and cheese, and we started to make that. And French toast. She loved French toast. So all these sort of American dishes—I taught her how to set a table. We did that with a ruler. I don't know—I had a good experience in public school on one hand, yet the anti-Semitism in that particular public school was painful.

00:13:36 Q: And what was the demographics? What other ethnic groups were there? Was this Italian or Irish?

00:13:41 Veach: Italian and Polish.

00:13:42 Q: Italian and Polish?

00:13:43 Veach: And Polish.

00:13:44 Q: So you weren't accepted as having Polish roots, it was the fact that you were Jewish Polish.

00:13:52 Veach: Yes. Yes.

00:13:53 Q: Catholics too.

00:13:54 Veach: I never identified as Polish in any way. And my parents never spoke Polish in the home. I chose to go to a Yeshiva high school, as a result of the anti-Semitism. There was a brand new Yeshiva that had opened in the nearby city, Jersey City. That Yeshiva I think just had two—they had started with one class, so they had—by the time I entered they only had three classes. Each class moved up. So I was a freshman, they had sophomores and juniors—they didn't have any seniors yet. And in my class, there were only nine of us.

The school was unaccredited, we had no library, we had no gym. Our teachers were, for the most part, not certified to teach. And I got a terrible education, terrible. But I was unaware that it was

terrible because I was flourishing. On my own, I remember ordering *Harpers Magazine* and reading every single article in the magazine. Whether I was interested in the article or not, I read it. And each article I read, I underlined every word I did not know, and I sat with the dictionary and looked up every word. As the years progressed, I looked up fewer words, because the words started to recur.

That was sort of how I prepared for SATs. I'm not even sure if there were any college preparatory classes at that point. If there were, I did not take them. I took the PSATs and was shocked when I got something like over 700, which was better than the seniors in the school. Then I realized I could apply to good schools. The valedictorian the year before me at this high school went to Barnard, and I spent a day with her at Barnard. That was the only Ivy League school I'd ever heard of and it was in New York. That was the only reason I applied to Barnard. The only other school I applied to was Jersey City State College, which is where my father wanted me to go.

The other thing that happened while I was in high school—because there were no electives, there was no music, there was no drama. There was absolutely nothing other than academics, and the academics were not on the highest plane. Lincoln Center had just opened. I guess they were trying to get people interested in attending events there, so that year—I guess my senior year—there was something called a Lincoln Center Student Award. They gave it to me, in our school, because I was doing so well academically. That was also a game changer for me because I got free tickets to go to one philharmonic concert, one opera, a play—I don't even remember what else—oh, a ballet.

What I did was before the philharmonic, I went to the library and took out the record of whatever work was going to be performed and listened to the orchestra playing whatever it was I was going to hear, read the notes to it, and went to the concert—went to Lincoln Center by bus. And I did the same thing for the play. I remember the play was called *The Alchemist*. I remember I got it out of the library, and I read as much as I could about it and went to see the play at the Vivian Beaumont. The ballet—I'm not sure how I prepared for the ballet—there were no videos at that point. I read about the opera, I got that out of the library as well. I basically discovered New York City, which was also a reason I wanted to go to Barnard.

00:18:51 Q: So who would you say was most influential in your life during those early years?

00:18:56 Veach: Mrs. Mack.

00:18:57 Q: She really turned things around for you.

00:19:00 Veach: That and getting this Lincoln Center award were life altering for me.

00:19:03 Q: Absolutely. And then, how aware were you of other events going on in the world at that point? Civil Rights Movement—you had your own civil rights movement going on. Assassinations—

00:19:18 Veach: In preparation for the SATs, I started to read the *New York Times*.

00:19:23 Q: So you are already reading *Harpers*, which is—

00:19:25 Veach: I was reading *Harpers*, and I was reading the *New York Times*. I remember learning how to fold the *New York Times* when one commutes. It made me feel part of society, well read society. And I did know what was going on. My mother also followed current events, so we talked. We talked about the war in Vietnam. And Israel was always—Middle East was always a big part of our discussions. I have to say my parents were bright. Even though they were uneducated, they were very bright. My father basically had a fourth grade education, and my mother did go through high school before the war.

Anyway, as I said, I did well in high school and I wound up being the Valedictorian in Hebrew and in English. I applied to Barnard. And at that point, I remember very clearly, interviews at Barnard were optional. I knew I had a great academic record, and I did well on the SATs, so I chose not to have an interview because I thought I could only make it worse for myself with an interview [laughs]. Another girl in my class in high school—as I said there were only nine of us, four girls and five boys—and another girl applied to Barnard. So what are the chances that two of us from an unaccredited high school would get into Barnard? And we both got into Barnard.

00:21:04 Q: Oh my. Who was she?

00:21:05 Veach: Her name is Esther Ribner. She's married to Richard [M.] Joel, who's now the president of Yeshiva University. We stay in touch. We see each other, not often, but periodically.

00:21:21 Q: That's quite amazing. There must have been something right at that school.

00:21:24 Veach: I don't know—it was nurturing. It was very nurturing because it was so small. Many of the students were children of Holocaust survivors. So it was comfortable. Some of the teachers in the Hebrew classes were Holocaust survivors. I wouldn't—in the English studies, not everybody was Jewish—they were terrible teachers, but I don't know. It was comfortable.

00:21:54 Q: Was that a topic of conversation? Did you speak about what your parents had told you about their experiences and the loss of their families?

00:21:02 Veach: No, never.

00:22:03 Q: In those days, people didn't talk about it.

00:22:06 Veach: Never.

00:22:07 Q: But you said your parents told you stories.

00:22:08 Veach: Not in great depth. It's too painful to talk about. As a child, there was always sort of an air of sadness in the air. Nobody was ever joyous and gleeful and worry-free. There were moments of happiness, but gloom was right around the corner. Gloom and doom were always right around the corner.

00:22:37 Q: How did your aunt do? Your aunt who came with your mother.

00:22:42 Veach: My aunt—they lived upstairs, it was a two family house. They had one daughter, who was a year and a half younger than I. She was born in the States also. She and I were like sisters—the good and the bad of sisters. There was sibling rivalry. After we both went out to college, we sort of grew apart. I wouldn't say recently, but over the past—since we both have children, we're close again. We're very close again. My sister, as I said, was five years younger, and she went to Barnard.

00:23:25 Q: This is quite a distinguished family tree.

00:23:27 Veach: She went to Barnard and her daughter went to Barnard. I can't say I have positive feelings about Barnard.

00:23:36 Q: No. We can get to that, too, of course. So let me just go back a bit. There wasn't a lot of academics in high school, lot of nurturing. You were obviously very close to everyone, since you were such a small group.

00:23:48 Veach: Yes.

00:23:49 Q: So you had a lot of friends.

00:23:51 Veach: Yes.

00:23:52 Q: And they came from a similar background as your parents.

00:23:55 Veach: Yes.

00:23:56 Q: Do you remember any other activities—? You had the Lincoln Center Arts Award, which is great. Do you remember other activities, things you were exposed to culturally at that point? Writing, journalism? I don't know, that's just what you do in high school.

00:24:15 Veach: No, there was none of that.

00:24:16 Q: None of that.

00:24:18 Veach: Absolutely—well though, I and somebody else started a school newspaper. I had taken a typing class when I was in high school. Not at the school, but at a secretarial school, the Drake Secretarial School on Journal Square. I have a ruler from them actually, still. And I got a certificate in Excellence in Typing, and so I learned how to type in columns, which made me interested in starting a newspaper. And we started it and we had a contest to name the newspaper. I was the editor. I did write a column about the Lincoln Center Student Award, whenever I saw something. I might even have issues of it someplace.

And I started a debate club. I never participated [laughs]. I never was in a debate, but I started the debate club and other people debated. I don't know where I got that idea from. No clue.

00:25:28 Q: Were you doing public speaking in any form then?

00:25:30 Veach: Absolutely not. As a matter of fact, anytime I had to speak, my heart would pound so that I—I was actually very shy. The last thing I wanted to do was debate [laughs] or do any public speaking. But I could do a newspaper. I could write and type it up and get it mimeographed. Nobody knows what that means anymore.

00:25:54 Q: We'll have to explain it.

00:25:55 Veach: Yes. When I got into Barnard, I got in as a commuter student, as did my fellow classmate, Esther. We both got in. She was commuting from North Bergen, and I was commuting from Bayonne. Looking back, I can't imagine how dangerous that was. I would take a bus to the Port Authority and then a subway up to Barnard, which was fine. It was grueling. But going home, I would go back late at night and Port Authority was eerie, the subways were eerie. And it was a dangerous time in New York City then. I remember we were warned not to go to Morningside Park, not to go to Riverside Park. It was just not—New York City was not what it is today, which is absolutely wonderful.

But, then, you had to really watch where you were going. And I was conscious. I remember walking through subway tunnels going to the Port Authority from the subway and there would be

absolutely no one in these long subway tunnels. You could hear your footsteps and you look behind you, make sure no one was following you. And then even when I got to Bayonne, I had a long three block walk and it would be dark out. I just can't imagine doing that again.

It was hard. I was on scholarship. I applied to get a dorm room for second semester, and I got into the dorms, which to me was just unbelievable. First of all, I didn't have to do that commute. Second of all, I was living in New York City. And while, I told you, I was thinking about what I was going to say, I found a letter to my mother at three A.M. the first night I stayed in the dorm, thanking her for that opportunity.

00:28:12 Q: And were you in the dorms in Broadway?

00:28:13 Veach: Reid [Hall].

00:28:14 Q: Oh, you were in Reid. Okay.

00:28:15 Veach: I was in Reid.

00:28:16 Q: Which floor, do you remember?

00:28:17 Veach: No, but I remember my roommate. My roommate was Eleanor Klein. I have no idea where she is now. She and I were from two different worlds. She was from Boston. I believe

she was from a very academic family and had gone to a very good high school. We got along very well, but we had very little in common.

00:28:47 Q: So you arrive at Barnard. That night, you stay up late to tell your mom thank you. Do you remember some of what you were feeling and thinking?

00:28:59 Veach: I was just so happy.

00:29:00 Q: Even when you first arrived, during the orientation week and after this arduous commute for whatever how many months that was—now you're in the dorms.

00:28:10 Veach: Orientation I remember clearly because I realized that everybody else was Valedictorian also [laughs]. They were much better prepared academically than I was. I think it sort of had a chilling effect on me, because I went there with a great deal of self-confidence, and I lost all that self-confidence at Barnard freshman year. I remember, you had a required English class everybody had to take, and people discussed books and poetry—I had no clue what they were even saying. They were just talking on a level that I had never participated in. I never said a word.

00:30:07 Q: Do you remember who your freshman English teacher was?

00:30:08 Veach: [Lucyle] Hook.

00:30:09 Q: Oh, I don't know.

00:30:10 Veach: Mrs. Hook. She was older. I didn't know anyone in my class. I didn't make any friends. I found everyone very intimidating. And that was a small class, if I remember correctly.

I took Spanish my first year. I had taken Spanish in high school, and I loved it and I did very well. So I felt comfortable in Spanish. I had Senor Cano. I made a friend in Spanish, I remember very clearly, Marlene Nadel. And I remember her going up to the blackboard to write something in Spanish, and I remember seeing her shoes. It was the first time I realized what a big deal shoes were [laughs]. They were expensive shoes, I think. I realized, boy, I would like shoes like that. We became very good friends, and we're still friends. She was very instrumental in my life. She went to law school. And I can skip ahead saying I wound up going to law school as well. She worked in the Manhattan DA's office, and I wound up working in the Manhattan DA's office. And we see each other quite often. I'm her older son's godmother. So I made a very, very good friend. I made a lot of good friends, actually, at Barnard.

00:31:43 Q: So were you—you said you had some negative things. I'm assuming, at least in the beginning, there was no nurturing at all. No mentors. This sense of intimidation from other students, who appeared to be so much better educated.

00:31:57 Veach: I didn't do well, academically, and I didn't even really try that hard to do well. I guess I concentrated on my social life more. I loved being in New York City. I had to work, also,

and weekends I took the bus back to Jersey City to teach Sunday School. My father—I think my father drove me back to Barnard every Sunday afternoon.

00:32:36 Q: So you're still very much grounded in your home, with your family for the weekends.

00:32:41 Veach: Yes.

00:32:42 Q: You're not going all around New York on the weekends doing wild things.

00:32:46 Veach: No. Not at all. Not at all.

00:32:47 Q: And what kind of work were you doing? This was work-study program, as part of your scholarship?

00:32:51 Veach: No, I did have work-study, I guess the summer after my freshman year. No, this was a job at a Hebrew school, or a Hebrew religious school that I had found. I always had to work.

I guess one of the main things that stood out in everybody's freshman year were the riots. By that time, I was in the dorms. And I found that period at Columbia and Barnard fascinating and intimidating at the same time. I was sort of an observer of the events. I went to a number of rallies. I remember going to an event at Columbia where H. Rap Brown—and I don't remember

who else spoke. I remember going to an SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] meeting where Mark [W.] Rudd spoke. I remember, I guess one of the mantras, was worker-student alliance. I remember thinking that everybody who was speaking had no clue what it was like to be a worker. It was very cavalier attitude about workers and students, because workers had really nothing in common with students. My father was a worker. I just knew factory workers. I knew what it was like to grow up in blue-collar home.

So I sort of watched, and there were a lot of things that felt compelling. But I was also very conscious of the fact that I was on scholarship, and I didn't want to do anything that would jeopardize my scholarship. I was also very conscious of the fact that if I had gotten arrested, my parents would have absolutely no clue how to get me out of jail, or how to make any charges go away, and I would just be lost in the system. So I never was in a place where I would get arrested.

I was interested in what people had to say, so as I said, I followed the events. And I also remember going up on the roof at Reid and watching buildings burning. I remember crying because I found it so upsetting that this place [showing emotion] that I'd worked so hard to get into was burning down. And I found it hard to understand. I understood the issues about the gym and the separate entrance. I identified with the underdog—I always identify with the underdog. But it just didn't seem the way to go. I guess it changed things. It was effective in many ways. I just couldn't risk my scholarship or anything.

00:36:10 Q: Did you have friends though who were occupying buildings?

00:36:12 Veach: My roommate. My roommate did. I had another friend who slept through the whole thing. I remember running down to wake her up, and she just went back to sleep.

00:36:26 Q: Did you watch the actual bust, the arrests, when the police came, or any of that?

00:36:34 Veach: No. I know they came on horseback

00:36:36 Q: Various vehicles [laughs].

00:36:38 Veach: It was very upsetting.

00:36:43 Q: What about when you are going home on weekends, telling your family about this?

Are they following this at all?

00:36:46 Veach: No.

00:36:47 Q: No. Not in their daily life.

00:36:48 Veach: One thing was, I think I did better freshman year because I didn't have to take exams [laughs].

00:37:00 Q: The good old pass-fail option.

00:37:02 Veach: I think I would have done much worse if I'd had to take those exams. But it was a strange way to end the year. It was so disruptive, to everyone I guess.

00:37:16 Q: Yes. You work so hard to get there, and then suddenly—then you see the people speaking are not necessarily representative what you know about things. That's also upsetting.

00:37:25 Veach: They were from a different world.

00:37:27 Q: So what did you do that summer?

00:37:28 Veach: That summer I had a work-study job, through Barnard at the PAL [Police Athletic League]. It was a secretarial job on 14th Street. It was very isolating, and again I had to commute from Bayonne. I took the bus and the PATH. It was very—the PAL was doing very good things at that point. They were closing off blocks, streets, and they had street events and they ran the fire hydrants for the kids who had no place to go to a pool. They were doing really good things, but I was in the office, which was boring as anything. I guess I answered phones, I don't really remember.

I remember being very miserable and my mother, again, was very sympathetic. I quit. I quit after a couple of months and I wound up going to Israel—was that the summer I went to Israel? I think it was. I'm not sure.

00:38:47 Q: Okay.

00:38:48 Veach: I do remember—I'm sure you remember, Take Home, on the corner, a couple blocks down on 115th—whatever and Broadway. I worked as a cashier there.

00:39:05 Q: Ah, okay.

00:39:06 Veach: At least I didn't have to commute. I worked at night. There was a gun in the drawer underneath the register. I was the only white person who worked there. I worked off the books, and I made \$10 an hour, and I was so happy to make that. I don't remember what I made a week, but I had spending money finally.

00:39:42 I don't know what else to tell you.

00:39:43 Q: Okay, so let's look at a few of the other years at Barnard. I guess one of the questions is your awareness of other current events going on then. I know there was a lot of racial tenseness after the occupation of Hamilton Hall. The black students at Columbia were quite militant, and we had sisters in Barnard who formed a group as well.

00:39:06 Veach: BOSS [Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters].

00:40:07 Q: BOSS, yes. Do you remember any of that, or interaction with African-Americans, blacks, at that point?

00:40:17 Veach: Actually, I do. Not freshman year—I believe it might have been sophomore year, I chose to have a single because I had never had a room of my own. I was in Brooks [Hall]. This might have been—I don't think it was a separate floor that the BOSS had at that point. I'm not sure.

00:40:42 Q: It may have been our junior year, I don't remember either.

00:40:45 Veach: But there were a number of African-American girls on my floor, and I became friends with them. I remember there were about five African-American women in Brooks, and they were good friends with each other. I hung out with them. I was the only white girl with them. As I said, I always seek out the underdog, and am quite comfortable with them. They were my friends that year. I don't remember their names.

I spent my junior year in Israel.

00:41:29 Q: Okay, so junior year you're actually gone.

00:41:31 Veach: I'm gone. I'm gone during Kent State, during Cambodia; I'm gone during a lot of things, and did not keep up with the news that year.

00:41:43 Q: Tell me about your experiences in Israel then that year. A full year?

00:41:47 Veach: A full year. A full year. I attended Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Some classes were in English, other classes were in Hebrew. A number of my friends were also in Israel that year.

00:42:04 Q: These were friends from where, from Barnard?

00:42:08 Veach: From Barnard.

00:42:09 Q: Was Janet Price one of them?

00:42:11 Veach: No, I don't know her name. She might have been, but I don't know her name. Ellen Birnbaum was there, Sara Laufer was there, Cheryl Neuman was there, Chaya Schwer was there—oh, Freda Klapperman.

00:42:30 Q: Oh this is big group.

00:42:31 Veach: It was a very big group. I wasn't necessarily friends with everybody, but quite a few. And that made the year there very comfortable, because I had colleagues. I made other friends as well. And I had family there. I had an aunt, my father's sister, who had emigrated to Palestine, before it was a state of Israel. So she was not in Poland during the Holocaust. I had my mother's first cousin, who had also left Poland. She met her husband in Palestine and they formed a kibbutz. So I had that family. I had my aunt and her husband. I also had other cousins

in Tel Aviv—I had more family in Israel than I did here in the United States. Between having friends—

00:43:27 Q: And had you seen any of them before?

00:43:28 Veach: The summer I went to Israel I met them. So when I went back for my junior year, I had already met everybody. I just loved it. I did well academically. And when I got back senior year, I had finally found myself, and I finally did well academically senior year at Barnard. I had cracked the code, so to speak. I didn't feel intimidated anymore and just found myself.

00:44:04 Q: And what were you majoring in at this point?

00:44:05 Veach: Psychology, which two of my friends also majored in. I chose psychology thinking—I took a psych class thinking that would cover my science requirement. Then when I wound up majoring in psychology, I had to take a science anyway [laughs]. So it defeated my whole purpose in taking psychology. But it turned out to be a very good major for me. I enjoyed it. They had a very good psychology department at Barnard. I finally caught on. I finally caught on.

I also met somebody at Columbia my sophomore year, whom I wound up marrying once I graduated. I never found a mentor at Barnard. That would have really changed my life. I did have a senior advisor. I always wanted to go to law school from high school—

00:45:21 Q: When did you—from high school on?

00:45:25 Veach: From high school on.

00:45:26 Q: Must have been the Nancy Drew.

00:45:28 Veach: I don't know what it was. I guess Nancy Drew, Perry Mason, I liked to argue with my parents. I did go to one Pre-Law meeting and just never followed up on it. It was also right before women had found their voices to go on, I think. Very few of us went to law school or medical school or to the professions. Most of my friends at Barnard went into the "female professions." My mentor steered me to one of those professions, which was speech therapy, speech pathology.

00:46:09 Q: So this is the person you are working with your senior year at Barnard?

00:46:12 Veach: Yes.

00:46:13 Q: Who was that?

00:46:14 Veach: I don't remember her name.

00:46:16 Q: So were producing a paper, is that something you were working on with her?

00:46:21 Veach: I don't remember. She was in the psychology department. Apparently she had been a speech pathologist before. I was marrying a doctor, or somebody going to medical school—and she gave me a brochure about speech pathologists and one of the things—they do a profile of somebody who loves the profession and this woman was married to a doctor and it was the perfect career because you could take care of your kids and do speech therapy part-time and help your husband [laughs].

00:46:59 Q: Help your husband [laughs].

00:47:01 Veach: So I applied to speech pathology programs. I didn't know what else to do. My husband-to-be was going to Harvard Medical School, so I applied to programs in Boston. I got in and I moved to Boston—

00:47:22 Q: Were you at Harvard too?

00:47:23 Veach: No, Harvard doesn't have speech pathology. I applied to Emerson, Northeastern, and Boston University. Those three schools had speech pathology programs. I got into all three. And my interview with somebody at Emerson really clinched it for me. I loved the person who interviewed me. I guess I always go for a personal connection. It wound up to be a very good choice for me because I did super-well. I just aced everything there. It took two years to finish the program. I worked in the field for three years. I did not enjoy the field.

00:48:14 Q: This was all in Boston?

00:48:15 Veach: Two years at Emerson, one year in Boston. And then my husband interned at Mt. Sinai, so we moved back to New York. And I got a job—let me think. Two years for the program, one year in Chelsea, Massachusetts, which was a Title I program—it was a depressed area—which just by happenstance reduced my loans. I didn't even realize it would reduce what I owed in student loans. So that worked out well, just by chance. Then when we moved back to New York City, I worked at the Queens General Hospital for two years. As I said, I never really enjoyed the field.

My sister was at Barnard at that point. She was graduating and had no clue what she wanted to do. I suggested to her, law school, because it was something I had always wanted to do. Her friends were going to law school, and were going to medical school. The world had changed in only five years; everything had changed. So her going to law school was not beyond the realm of expectations. She took a Kaplan class to prepare for the LSATs, and as she finished her materials, I borrowed the materials from her and I went through them on my own, unit by unit, as she finished them. I took the LSATs with her, at the same time. We both applied to law school at the same time, and we got accepted to mostly the same law schools, and then we both wound up going to law school at the same time. That was nice.

She chose to go to Brooklyn Law School, and I chose to go to Rutgers, in Newark, here in New Jersey. And I chose Rutgers because I had spent a day there, and I just felt very comfortable there. Half my incoming class was women.

00:50:31 Q: Great.

00:50:32 Veach: A good part of the class were people who were not going directly from college. So they were older, and I was already five years out of college by then. I was one of the few people who loved law school. Most people hated it. I felt like I had been given a second chance to do what I always wanted to do, and I loved it. There were a lot of clinics, which I took my last year there, and I found I loved being in a courtroom. I loved standing on my feet. So the person who had been so afraid of public speaking, was all of a sudden [laughs], eager to be in a courtroom. And that's where going to the Manhattan DA's office worked in.

00:51:23 Q: This was part of the three years of law school, or this was after law school?

00:51:26 Veach: Through my friend Marlene, who was there, I got a summer job at the Manhattan DA's office. That's where I wanted to be. And I got a job there, right out of law school. I have to say, it was like the best job I ever had in my life. It was better than Law & Order, which is based on that office. Better than it. I have been on the set of Law & Order, and it's a duplicate of the Manhattan DA's office and the courtrooms, an exact duplicate.

I often forgot to cash my paychecks. That's how much I loved it. I would have worked for free. I absolutely would have done it for free.

00:52:13 Q: And what were you doing that was so engaging? Well, I guess Law & Order would answer that question, but you can be a little more explicit.

00:52:18 Veach: Well, I started out in the Appeals Bureau, and I did appellate argument and a lot of writing. That did not appeal to me. So soon as I could, I applied for a transfer to go to a trial bureau. In the trial bureau, you are immediately in courtrooms. I just love the atmosphere in a courtroom. I love the job. I love the discretion. I love the responsibility. You got to make decisions soon as you were in the courtroom. You had very few people looking over your shoulder, a lot of responsibility, as I said. And I moved through misdemeanors, which are the lower levels of crimes, up to felonies. So I went from Criminal Court to Supreme Court. I tried felonies. I remember my first actual trial was a gun case, possession of a weapon. It was my first—no, I had jury trials as misdemeanors as well. I loved picking a jury. Loved it. I was very good at it, because I'm a very good judge of character.

00:53:34 Q: Psychology comes in now [laughs].

00:53:35 Veach: Yes. You feel it almost. You know who is going to be a People's juror versus a defense juror.

I remember moving up to homicide trials. I was a little reluctant to do that and had even told my supervisor—they move you up based on how well you're doing, and I was doing very well. They wanted me to do homicides, and I was just questioning whether I really wanted to do something like that. You got called to the homicide scene. You actually got called to the scene and saw the

bodies. You interviewed the defendants one-on-one on videotape. You read them their rights and then you questioned them. It was a big responsibility, and I questioned whether or not I wanted to go up. My Deputy Bureau Chief said, “You know what? You’re prepared. You’re going to do great. Go ahead and do it.”

The first homicide scene I was called to—you get a call from a detective. I got dressed, and I remember wearing these beautiful Spectator shoes that I’d gotten at Bergdorf Goodman.

00:54:59 Q: Finally got the shoes!

00:55:00 Veach: I got the shoes! [Laughs] Yes. Getting dressed and winding up in a—some sort of an SRO [single room occupancy] in upper Manhattan. I don’t remember what precinct. I was so inappropriately dressed because I was basically stepping through garbage, going up steps, and tiptoeing through blood. I can’t say I really looked at the body.

I remember interviewing the defendant, sitting across a table in a small interview room. I remember the detective left. He wasn’t supposed to leave me there alone. I was thinking, this person could reach across the table and just put his hands around my neck—which he did not do. But once I got that thought out of my head, I basically got the person to confess to the crime. From then on, I did homicides and I just enjoyed it. I really could speak to the witnesses and the victims in a way that I think they found empathetic. They were able to tell me everything that happened and I was able to put them on the stand and they got to tell their stories.

I saw the trials as plays, almost. I got to tell a story through these actors, in a sense, and I would think how to present the witnesses so as to tell a story in a way that would be compelling. Each trial was a play that I put on with my witnesses. I don't think I ever lost—I lost one trial. I did lose one trial.

00:57:05 Q: Oh my gosh. Unbelievable.

00:57:06 Veach: And that was a trial I happened to take my parents to [laughs]. My parents had no clue what I was doing, absolutely none. And this was a case that I knew I was going to lose, so I wasn't particularly nervous about it. So they came into New York City and then I met them and I brought them to the courtroom, and they sat and they watched me put my witnesses on and question the witnesses. Then we went to lunch, we took a break. Then we came back for summations. The defense attorney made his arguments first, then I made my arguments. And then I left with my parents. My father's reaction was, "I never saw you talk so much." [Laughs]

00:58:07 Q: Amazing.

00:58:08 Veach: I don't know if you want to hear this story, but—

00:58:11 Q: Sure, please.

00:58:12 Veach: I also remember trying to explain to my parents—to my father on the phone—when I had a homicide case. I separated from my husband, and I moved into my own apartment.

I don't remember what year this was. And I remember calling my family—I guess when I got assigned to homicide—so it was a very big deal, even though I was reluctant. And I was on the phone telling my father that I got this promotion and I was doing homicides. I said "homicide." Of course he didn't know what the word "homicide" meant. So I tried Hebrew, and I'm saying, "*Rétzakh. Rétzakh!*" And he didn't understand what I meant. Murder, I don't remember how to say murder in Yiddish. I tried it in Yiddish. And then I tried it in English. He was also a little hard of hearing at that point. So I'm screaming in my apartment by myself, "Murder!" [Laughs] "Murder!" I'm not sure if he ever understood what I was doing.

So there's always a disconnect between me and my family, which I appreciated. I think it made me a kinder person.

00:59:40 Q: Yes, you always had to sort of tend—reach out for them, look out for them. Your sister was also going through law school. Were you comparing notes and did she end up doing something similar to you?

00:59:50 Veach: Yes and no. We were both so busy, we hardly got to compare notes. We did study for the Bar together. She wound up going to a firm. I don't remember what kind of firm. But she ultimately ended up in the Queens DA's office, which is where she is now. She went to their Appeals Bureau. She started there, and she stayed there. She did not want to be in a courtroom. That's what she's still doing, appellate argument. I think she's a supervisor there now.

01:00:30 Q: Okay. So what about—these are a group of questions about personal events. They're a little bit of the superlative—what was the most this, or the most that. Respond any way you want, obviously. One of the questions is a moment that really changed your life. You've actually touched on several, so I don't know if there is anything else there to say.

01:00:53 Veach: Well, in some ways I think moving to Teaneck was a big life changer for me. My sister moved to Teaneck. She got married. She married some law school classmate and they moved to Teaneck. As I said, I was separated, and eventually divorced and I wound up marrying someone I had met in the DA's office. We moved to Teaneck also, to be close to my sister. I got pregnant here [laughs] in this house.

01:01:37 Q: How old were you at that point?

01:01:40 Veach: Just about forty.

01:01:41 Q: Okay, so you'd gone through a full career already.

01:01:44 Veach: Just about forty and I wound up having a difficult pregnancy and had to take a leave of absence from the DA's office. By then I was a Deputy Bureau Chief and had every intention of returning to the DA's office. My hope was to become a judge. That was my career goal. I took a leave of absence because of the pregnancy, and I wound up in bed for a number of months. My one and only son was born, and I wound up staying home with him for seven years. I never went back to the DA's office. He turned out to be a pure pleasure, this little baby. He was

just—I can't say I ever had these maternal instincts [laughs], but he just brought them out in me. We hired a housekeeper, and I had every intention of going back to work. And then I told the housekeeper I wasn't going back to work and she left. And I stayed home, as I said, for seven years.

01:03:00 Q: Were you still keeping up with colleagues at the DA's office?

01:03:04 Veach: No.

01:03:05 Q: Not at all. You really made a clean break [laughs].

01:03:07 Veach: I did because the break was so abrupt and unexpected. I'm still friends with one or two people from that office that I see. And I have gone back for reunions. One of the persons that was in my class from the DA's office was Sonia [M.] Sotomayor, who is now on the—

01:03:31 Q: What! [Laughs] Okay, that's a good contact.

01:03:32 Veach: —who is now on the Supreme Court. When I was in the office, we were very good friends. Unfortunately, I've lost contact with her.

01:03:43 Q: I'm sure she would remember—

01:03:44 Veach: And I have seen her since, here and there. Trying to think—we had other personalities in our class as well. I can't remember anymore.

01:03:56 Q: Well, if it comes to you.

01:03:57 Veach: She was the most illustrious. Of course the DA at the time was Robert [M.] Morgenthau, so you couldn't have a better boss than him. When I got pregnant, I was still in the DA's office. I wasn't the Deputy Bureau Chief then. I was still in the Trial Bureau. They wanted to start a child abuse unit, and they wanted me to head that up. And knowing I was pregnant and knowing this whole thing with my history of the Holocaust, I just felt like that would not be a mentally healthy thing for me, so I turned that down. Then I became the Deputy Bureau Chief of the Special Prosecutions Bureau, which is essentially white collar crime.

I moved to Teaneck, got married, had Zachary. And moving to Teaneck and having Zachary was life altering. I remember he was starting kindergarten—he would have been five. My husband and I went to our first PTA meeting. It's a centralized school district. Teaneck is not a small town. It's 40,000 people with a very diverse population, a large African-American population, a growing Hispanic population, a dwindling Jewish population, a fairly large white population. When we were at this—it was a sort of like an introductory PTA meeting. So there was a huge auditorium filled with people from every walk of life, every socioeconomic level. They were trying to fill positions and they needed a Co-President, so I raised my hand. I thought, I did homicide trials, how hard can a PTA co-presidency be? Well it turned out it's not easy. It turned out there are lot of petty things going on. If you don't mention somebody in the newsletter who

participated in the bake sale, you get a phone call. And there were politics, which I was unaware of. It turned out to be a lot of work.

I wound up enjoying it because I had a friend in the African-American community, who sort of mentored me in the ins and outs of PTA. I learned that the African-American community felt very disenfranchised. They didn't participate in PTA, they really didn't feel like the schools were open to them as parents. So with my mentor's guidance, I reached out to everybody.

Traditionally in PTA, people sign up for things, and when they sign up on a sign-up sheet, nobody ever reaches out to them. Either they show up or they don't show up. And I made it my mission to call everybody who signed up. I made sure I had phone numbers. Before every PTA meeting, I made calls.

I think I was thinking about my mother, who never went to a PTA meeting. Because of her accent, she didn't feel welcome. I wanted the African-American community parents to feel welcome. And I called. I made sure I remembered everybody's names, and I made sure that when they volunteered for something, they were brought into it. They weren't just marginalized. We had more parents at PTA meetings at the Bryant School, which was the centralized kindergarten, than they had ever had before. Our events were always well attended. It was always a mixed group. It was always a diverse group.

I guess given my background, I looked for an issue, and bake sales never appealed to me. Selling—what did we sell?—we sold wrapping paper, we sold cookies, we sold all kinds of things. I just left that to everybody else. One time I went on the class trip, and I noticed that there

were no seatbelts on the school buses. What struck me was the bus driver had a seatbelt [laughs]. The bus driver buckles up, and he lets all of us in our seats. Another parent took an interest in this issue of seatbelts on school buses, so I coordinated with him and that was going to be our cause, was getting seatbelts on school buses. And we wound up doing it.

01:09:09 Q: Wow.

01:09:10 Veach: We went to Board of Education meetings. I did research on how many school bus accidents there were in town. I got to know the people on the Board of Education. It was sort of like putting on a trial. I orchestrated a presentation where parents testified—not testified—came to a Board of Ed meeting and talked about their experiences. I had some children testify. They couldn't say no, and we wound up with seatbelts—before it was state-mandated—in Teaneck, as a result of that.

I got involved in town politics, in a sense, by doing that. Partially because it was centralized, I got to know so many people in town that I came to appreciate Teaneck. I came to appreciate the diversity and—it's unusual for a suburb to have diversity. It's usually either all white, or all black, or all this. And Teaneck was just not like that.

Then, my second project in Teaneck was starting a farmers' market. And again, I drew on all my contacts from schools, so I had a diverse committee. I got to know the people on the Town Council, because I had to make presentations there. I met members from the business community. Again, I had someone from the Board of Ed, I had Chamber of Commerce. I just

created a group and again, made the same kind of presentations, and again, like a trial—like we did with the seatbelts—put together presentations and witnesses. And we have a farmers' market going since—God I don't know when—2006 maybe. It's over twenty years now.

01:11:16 Q: That's a record.

01:11:17 Veach: 1996 maybe. I don't remember.

At that point, I was fully part of this community. Zachary, our son, is in public school. He's flourishing as a result of the diversity, which is a gift, an absolute gift. It's hard to find. I guess moving to Teaneck turned out to be life changing. I ran for Town Council, and I was Councilmember. Then I became Deputy Mayor. I guess I ran in 2000, so the farmers' market must have been in '96. I ran in 2000, and then I ran again in 2004. Halfway through my second term—it's a four-year term—the Municipal Prosecutor became a judge. I had a law practice in Hackensack with a friend from PTA—we had closed that practice. I became the Municipal Prosecutor here in Teaneck, which is what I do now.

I'm talking too much, aren't I?

01:12:32 Q: Not at all. No, no, no. You are doing a good job. This is the kind of information that's important. So you were away from the law for seven years, but you are incredibly involved in everything else. So what was the process of going back and starting a practice at that point?

01:12:50 Veach: I started a practice with a friend, from PTA.

01:12:51 Q: So Zach is now seven, or a little older.

01:12:52 Veach: Something like that, yes. This friend had been treasurer of the PTA. As I said, we became friends and it turned out she was a lawyer, I was a non-practicing lawyer. We were both eager to do something outside of the home. We came up with this novel idea that we would share one practice. We would work part-time. We would share clients. We decided to do real estate because there were no court appearances required, and you could work it around your calendar. She worked Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, I think. And I worked Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. So we overlapped on Wednesdays. Wednesdays we would—she would tell me what had happened on our cases, and then I took it from there. Then I would leave her notes for Monday, so she could pick up. We'd leave each other notes, and we'd conference on Wednesdays. And that worked for quite a while. We were written up by PTA magazine, and we were written up in the *Record*, the local newspaper, the *Bergen Record*, because it was such a novel thing. *Law Journal* did an interview also. I'm very good at public [laughs] relations and advertising. I guess that's how you get elected also.

I guess Teaneck has been very, very good to me. Very good to me. My license plate used to read, "ILUVTNK" [I Love Teaneck] until I became Prosecutor and realized I don't want everyone to know which my vehicle is [laughs] and where I lived. Being the Prosecutor has turned out to be wonderful. Wonderful. I use all my skills from psychology, to trial skills, to people skills, to my social conscience. I have basically turned what is a routine courtroom into something else.

People come in with traffic infractions, and instead of just plea-bargaining—I will plea-bargain—but if people are willing to take a defensive driving class and come back, I will reduce their charges even more. So I have people taking defensive driving classes and getting a better plea-bargain. On domestic violence cases, I have a lot of people going to anger management classes. And I actually see changes in some people. Not everybody, but some people. Some people do wind up back in the courtroom. I have found some drug education classes online. I have people taking those. I have people taking classes on shoplifting. My goal is to not have people have criminal records for aberrations. You have middle class people sometimes taking something at a CVS, and they are so remorseful and they don't know what got into them. They take these shoplifting classes and sometimes I ask them to do community service, and I dismiss the charges very often. I see a lot of low level marijuana cases—and it is predominantly African-American youths, but not necessarily all—and my heart goes out to them.

I don't want to see somebody with a criminal record. I feel like I'm helping people. I'm not just prosecuting them. I'm helping them. The judge is so happy with what I have been doing in the courtroom, so he's happy to go along with it. I just—I enjoy my job. I get thank you notes, I get cookies, I get flowers. I get people in the street telling me that they so much appreciate what I did for them. I have people kissing me in the courtroom. It's not your traditional view of a prosecutor by any means. If anything, my friends would have always expected me to be a public defender, never a prosecutor.

I go back and I remember my first case, when I was an assistant DA and I was doing misdemeanors, and it was a shop lift. I believe it was something like diapers or formula. I

remember having tears in my eyes [showing emotion] and thinking, “You know what, I should have been a public defender. This is not really the place for me.” And then I realized I have all this discretion that I could do so much more than a public defender. I don’t know whether it’s the Holocaust, wanting to be the person making decisions on who gets prosecuted and who doesn’t, or just this wanting to do good, but I feel like I couldn’t have found a better vocation.

01:18:46 Q: You’ve really seen both sides.

01:18:50 Veach: I see both sides.

01:18:51 Q: Which is a gift. Definitely. So what would be the most joyous day of your life?

01:18:56 Veach: Oh my god [laughs]. I remember it clearly because it was this time of year—I told you I had a very difficult pregnancy.

01:19:12 Q: Ah, yes.

01:19:13 Veach: My son was born somewhat prematurely. We brought him home. We had a baby nurse for a couple days. I also was sort of out of it. I had no self-confidence with what to do with this baby.

01:19:31 Q: There are no instruction books [laughs].

01:19:32 Veach: No instruction books. I didn't have any parental support—I don't think they ever figured out what to do with a baby [laughs]. I had this baby nurse and it was the first day I had been outside. He was home with the baby nurse. And my husband and I were in the driveway and it was fall and all the trees outside the house, the leaves were orange and red and yellow. And I remember looking at those trees and sighing and thinking, "It is so good to be alive." I hadn't been outside in months. I had this gorgeous baby in the house, I was happily married, I had a house, and I don't know—I just felt good to be alive.

01:20:26 Q: Yes, it's a beautiful picture. What about obstacles, of which you've had many—any particular obstacles as you're reaching your current—as a prosecutor here? As a woman? Balancing a child and a career?

01:20:42 Veach: I can't say that I ever felt that. As a woman, I feel like I've been very lucky. In high school, I never felt like a second-class citizen at all. In college, obviously, not at all. In law school, I chose a law school where I didn't feel that at all either. The DA's office—my class was half women as well. I have a husband who is very big on women's rights, so he never would encourage me to stay home or do anything other than what I wanted to do. I can't say that I have.

01:21:32 Q: That's great. Good.

01:21:33 Veach: And when I ran for Council, there were three seats open, and there were two other women running with me and we all got elected.

01:21:42 Q: I'm going to tell my son about this town [laughs]. Seriously.

01:21:49 Veach: Oh, I love this town.

01:21:50 Q: He's in Brooklyn now, and he really can't afford it.

01:21:51 Veach: And he's married and has children?

01:21:52 Q: They're about to start kids, yes. They're hoping to.

01:21:54 Veach: I have found exactly—and it is just by chance that my sister lived here. When I moved here, I had no idea what it has to offer. We're right outside New York City, as you know. I just couldn't have found a more perfect place to raise our son, and to grow up and develop as a person. When I started the PTA with my friend who helped me negotiate my way, I learned so much that I would have never learned, I think, anyplace else. My friends are a diverse group of people. It's hard to find that.

01:22:40 Q: Absolutely. Anything in your life that you would have changed? Any decision that—yes, you know what I'm asking [laughs]—a decision that you might have done differently.

01:22:52 Veach: You know what, I don't think so. I did get divorced after fifteen years of marriage.

01:22:55 Q: Oh you were married quite a while then.

01:22:57 Veach: Quite a while. I met my husband at Columbia, and I think it was a good fifteen years. We wound up parting ways, but he was always supportive. I went to law school while I was married to him. I worked in the DA's office while I was married to him. I grew as a person. When it was time to leave, I left. And I was lucky to find someone else who was also very supportive—if I wanted—I remember the look on his face when I volunteered to be co-President of the PTA. He was like, "You've never even been to a PTA meeting, why do you want to—?" He almost like pulled my arm down. That turned out to be—

01:23:56 Q: Another opening for you.

01:23:57 Veach: Yes. I don't know. I never got to be a judge. Maybe that's my one disappointment.

01:24:02 Q: Is it too late?

01:24:03 Veach: It's never too late, no. I'm still hoping.

01:24:07 Q: Is that appointed around here?

01:24:08 Veach: It's appointed. Actually, I have been offered some judgeships here. But the timing was wrong, and the courtroom was wrong. I follow my gut. Even though I'd like to be a judge, I want it to be the right spot. I have to say I've been very lucky.

01:24:33 Q: You've earned it too. The day that you left Barnard, going back, all those years ago, what kind of adult life did you see for yourself? What did you think was going to happen? What did you anticipate? You are already sort of off in another career, because you've been counseled to go that way, the speech therapy.

01:24:49 Veach: I pictured, then, a very different life, maybe not a happy life. I was going to become a speech therapist. I was going to marry a doctor. I got married, and I thought I would wind up in someplace like Larchmont, as a housewife.

01:25:11 Q: That's very hard to imagine [laughs].

01:25:12 Veach: [Laughs] I know. When I imagined it, I knew I wasn't going to be happy. My in-laws encouraged me to be the receptionist in my husband's office. My parents were adamantly against my going to law school. Adamantly. I had no support whatsoever. Everybody was on my back to have a child, because everybody wanted to be grandparents. My husband's family were also Holocaust survivors, so—

01:25:49 Q: This was your first husband.

01:25:51 Veach: My first husband, yes. There was a lot of pressure on us to have children and to lead a very traditional kind of life. In my gut, I knew I wouldn't be happy. I guess that was really the underlying cause of my leaving.

01:26:10 Q: Sure. That makes a lot of sense. If you could go back to your first day of Barnard and whisper words of wisdom into the ear of the girl you used to be, what would they be?

01:26:25 Veach: Don't be afraid.

01:26:26 Q: Don't be afraid, okay. Are there things now that you are afraid of?

01:26:30 Veach: Now? No. Getting old and dying [laughs], that's about it. But I feel like there'll be something—I don't know what it will be—but something happy will happen.

01:26:51 Q: What do you feel was probably your biggest accomplishment? I mean, you've done so many things.

01:26:56 Veach: You know what? I'm going to answer what is a non-feminist kind of answer. I think my biggest accomplishment is raising a son who is kind, [showing emotion] gentle, not a hint of hatred or racism, and just graduated Yale.

01:27:21 Q: Congratulations.

01:27:23 Veach: From their school of architecture in May.

01:27:25 Q: I love architects.

01:27:26 Veach: He's opened up a whole new world of architecture to us as well. Just helping to produce such a wonderful human being.

01:27:38 Q: Well that's not to be short changed.

01:27:39 Veach: And also, not burdening him, I think, with the Holocaust. I was very conscious of that, because I didn't want him to have that sadness.

01:27:57 Q: So he is aware, obviously, of where your parents came from and all that.

01:27:58 Veach: Absolutely aware. Yes. But he's a happy young man. Good person.

01:28:08 Q: I'm sure. Well, look where he came from [laughs].

01:28:09 Veach: [Laughs] Thank you.

01:28:10 Q: And your husband continued law as well?

01:28:11 Veach: Yes, he's working today. He works in Manhattan. He works in lower Manhattan. He was in the DA's office. He left—I'm not even sure when he left—forty years ago. I don't know. I'm losing track of time.

01:28:34 Q: It's easy to do [laughs].

01:28:35 Veach: [Laughs] He's a lawyer and we're—he's going to be sixty-nine in January. I'm going to be sixty-seven in May. So we're thinking about retiring. I'm not sure what we'll do—traveling. I guess everybody travels. I don't know.

01:28:57 Q: That's hard to imagine. You are still in the middle of so much.

01:29:03 Veach: I don't know what we'll do.

01:29:04 Q: Have you done much traveling up until now?

01:29:06 Veach: Not that much. We just came back from a trip to Israel. We spent three weeks in Israel in August—the two last weeks of August and the first week in September. And this is a good way to come full circle because I reconnected with friends from Barnard that had spent their junior year in Israel with me, and that I have not seen for forty-five years.

01:29:32 Q: Okay.

01:29:33 Veach: And some for thirty years. It was like I had never said goodbye to them. Just caught up from where we last saw each other. Just the best trip I ever had in my life. My husband came with me. He had never been to Israel before. He doesn't speak a word of Hebrew, and he sat through hours, listening to Hebrew, Russian, Yiddish—doesn't understand a word of any of these languages. He was just so happy to be there with us—with me. And our son joined us halfway through the trip. It made me want to travel more.

01:30:23 Q: Did you go all over? Or you must have stayed in a particular area.

01:30:25 Veach: We went, not all over, but we did quite a bit of sight-seeing. We saw these friends that I mentioned. I met family members I had never met before, including a first cousin. I don't know—it was a great combination of visiting cemeteries, as strange as that may sound. I had a first cousin—I mentioned I had an aunt in Netanya, she had gone there when it was still Palestine. She had a son and they were there during the War for Independence. He volunteered and he was killed almost immediately. He was sixteen years old. I had never really—she'd never talked about it, and I never really focused on it as a young person. As a sixty-six-year-old, going back to Israel, I found his gravesite [showing emotion] and it was very meaningful. Another cousin, whom I did know—I had met during my junior year, '69-'70. He was a year older than I. He was killed in '73 in the Yom Kippur War, so I went to his gravesite. And my aunt who had been so kind to me from Netanya.

So there was closure on those, and reopening with the friends from Barnard, and meeting their husbands and hearing about their children, everything they've done. And meeting a first cousin

who's eighty-seven years old [laughs], that I had never met before. He spoke Russian and Yiddish, so that he was interesting.

01:32:17 Q: Now, do you speak Russian?

01:32:18 Veach: Not a word of Russian. I do speak Yiddish, brokenly. It seems to me there was something else.

01:32:30 Q: What was going on at the time of the visit? Were there conflicts in any of the areas you were in? Were you conscious of that as well?

01:32:36 Veach: There were rising tensions in Jerusalem. There was rock throwing, and I knew we could not go to the Mount of Olives because there had been an incident earlier in the day. It's so unfortunate. It just seems like nobody can solve this problem that's been going on forever, it seems. That little tiny piece of land that's called Israel now has been conquered and re-conquered and taken over by different peoples since Biblical times. It seems like everybody's fighting over this really desirable piece of real estate that everybody—at least the three major religions—associate with God. There is something magical about the place.

01:33:30 Q: People always say that. I've never been there.

01:33:31 Veach: Before I left, I had all these aches and pains. The entire three weeks I was there, I was miraculously [laughs] pain free and care free. Pain free, happy, totally immersed in meeting people and seeing the country. It's a beautiful country, it really is.

01:34:03 Q: In that same vein, what about, over the course of your life, spiritual, religious supports or beliefs that you've pursued or continued with?

01:34:14 Veach: Can't say. I'm sort of marginally involved—I belong to a Reform Temple now, but I hardly ever go. It hasn't been a source of comfort for me.

01:34:34 Q: Okay. Your parents, are they still alive?

01:34:35 Veach: No. My mother died fourteen years ago, about a month after my son's Bar Mitzvah. That was 2001, shortly after 9/11. My father died eighteen years ago.

01:34:58 Q: You've mentioned a number of—I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. It's always hard to lose parents, and we never forget. What about specific other causes after the PTA and as part of career that you might have kept up with? I don't know how you would've had time, but I'm going to ask anyway [laughs].

01:35:24 Veach: I think I basically stayed local. All my causes, so to speak, were local. When I was on the Council, I guess my main focus was quality of life for people here. Teaneck is also unusual because the main highway or main thoroughfare is Route 4. Every other town along

Route 4 is commercialized, there are gas stations, there are strip malls. It's basically a very ugly roadway. And Teaneck has a Greenbelt. We are the only town along Route 4 that has no development; that has this beautiful greenway. It feels like a parkway. And those are the things—that and railroads idling in Teaneck. That was a cause of mine. Keeping the Greenbelt was a cause of mine. Basically local causes.

01:36:33 Q: Quality of life is basic, absolutely. Now I want to kind of wind down, but—let me just check again here. You told me how you met your spouse. You told me about your wonderful son. What are you looking forward to in the future? You're hoping to do some traveling. Other things?

01:36:56 Veach: I'm still hoping for that judgeship [laughs]. You never know, you never know. And I just really value friends. I think my trip to Israel underscored that because I really enjoyed reconnecting with friends. And I just want to spend as much time as possible with my friends and my family. That's really what I want to do.

01:37:19 Q: Okay. Any particular hopes or dreams or fears—you said you have no fears, other than mortality, which we all have to face [laughs].

01:37:37 Veach: Yes.

01:37:28 Q: Okay. How do you feel—in terms of the state of the world right now, what gives you hope and what discourages you? Having been in politics locally—

01:37:40 Veach: You know, I read the *New York Times* still. Ever since high school, I still read it every single day. And I find it very discouraging. I often think of not reading the papers. I often think of not listening to the news. I find it not a happy way to start the day. I can't think of anyplace in the world where things are going well. I'm discouraged with the politics in the United States right now. We watched the Republican debates, and they are appalling, absolutely appalling. Local politics here are discouraging as well. The local Council now—the only thing they seem to care about is keeping taxes down and saving money. I wouldn't be surprised if the greenway turns into a strip mall. They've already okayed billboards. I see the quality of life going down, even in our town. Hopefully that doesn't happen.

Around the world—what's going on in Africa is painful. The Middle East is even more painful. ISIS, Nigeria, the kidnappings, Mexico, South America. I can't think of any place in the world—Western Europe, which is grappling with immigration and people turning their backs. It's just like another mini-Holocaust, the way the people don't want the refugees streaming into their countries. "Anywhere but here." It's just—I can't think of anything good happening in the world. Maybe that's why I'm focusing on friends and family now.

01:39:40 Q: Okay. If you are reflecting back on your experience at Barnard, is there one decision or event that you would have done differently? And we are kind of circling around here again, but these are the closing questions.

01:39:55 Veach: That's okay. I might have chosen to go to law school right away, instead of feeling like I can't do it. I might have just went full speed ahead and done that. I don't know.

01:40:13 Q: Was there anything at Barnard, you think, that might have predicted or nurtured this desire to go to law school and to continue in the trajectory you had in the majority of your career?

01:40:32 Veach: No. [Laughs] I don't think I ever spoke up in any single class at Barnard.

01:40:34 Q: Oh really.

01:40:35 Veach: I don't think I ever said a word. And now, as my father said, he never saw me talk so much [laughs].

01:40:42 Q: I love it. You were saving it for important discussions. Forget about that absurd literature stuff. Are you still an avid reader?

01:40:52 Veach: I am, actually. I don't read as many books as I'd like to. Interestingly enough, I'm enjoying television a lot. I think television has a lot of great shows on it now. I find that very relaxing and also a good way to escape the newspapers and the news of the world.

01:41:19 Q: We need that. How about the whole—you sort of touched on it when you said as a woman, you never felt a second-class person—anything about feminism in general? Your awareness of it, or lack of awareness of it?

01:41:32 Veach: I look back—when I was in the DA's office, I started, as I said, in the Appeals Bureau. I can think of one or two things that happened that would qualify now as sexual harassment, which I was oblivious—I remember feeling uncomfortable a few times. That would have been 1979. Then, I guess, it was overlooked. Now, I look back and I think, "Gee, I should have said something." And I didn't. I remember once being in a drycleaner and getting something hemmed and feeling like I was being inappropriately touched—not quite sexual touching, but something—and it didn't click at the time. Now I look back and I remember that. But I don't know if it was the era or my being so young, but now I definitely speak up. There's no question about it. Absolutely.

01:42:56 Q: You are an excellent advocate. Okay. There's something else—again, you started very emotionally—obviously with excellent reasons—talking about your family from the Holocaust and what they lost, the incredible losses and that horrid, horrific period of time. Did you ever, over the course of your life, have counseling, or become part of a group that looks specifically at that, to figure out ways to heal it? You said you were able to keep your son away from that.

01:43:31 Veach: At some points in my life, I've belonged to groups, which they call Second Generation, which are children of survivors of the Holocaust. There would be group discussions

led by social workers. So that has been areas I have explored at great length. While I was raising Zachary—he's going to be twenty-seven this month—while I was raising Zachary, I was in therapy the whole time, basically to help me mother. I talked about him a lot, and didn't want to repeat any mistakes that my parents had made—inadvertently, never purposefully.

01:44:20 Q: No, of course not.

01:44:21 Veach: Just to—she just helped me navigate. And also, of course, the Holocaust—it's always in the background. So I've had [laughs] a lot of therapy to deal with it. A lot.

01:44:40 Q: The next generation is being spared, to some extent.

01:44:42 Veach: I hope so. I didn't name him after anybody who was killed in the Holocaust, which most people do. I just didn't want him to be touched by it.

01:44:56 Q: Where did the name Zachary come from?

01:44:58 Veach: [Laughs] The name Zachary comes from my first year in the DA's office. Our class—I don't know how many were in our class—fifty lawyers. One of the lawyers was named Zach Chafee. He was the son of the Senator from Rhode Island.

01:45:20 Q: This was quite a distinguished group.

01:45:25 Veach: Oh yes. Absolutely.

01:45:26 Q: Yourself among them.

01:45:27 Veach: [Laughs] No, I was very lucky to have that job, and like I said, I didn't even cash my paycheck sometimes. The name Zach stuck with me. So in 1979, Zachary was not a popular name, by any means. When Zachary was born in 1988—by that time Zachary was quite a popular name, and I just always loved it. His name is Zachary Adam Veach. Zachary is a name I always loved, Adam is like the first person who's not going to be touched by this Holocaust, and I did take my husband's name.

01:46:11 Q: What was your maiden name?

01:46:11 Veach: Lifschitz

01:46:12 Q: Oh yes. Okay.

01:46:14 Veach: So this is my third last name [laughs].

01:46:17 Q: That's very good. I guess in closing, I'll ask if there's anything we haven't touched on in this interview that you would like to speak about or share.

01:46:29 Veach: Well, I do feel like I was sort of negative about Barnard, even though I feel like it turned out to be a very important part of my background. The fact that I graduated from an Ivy League school has always made me feel good about myself. My sister had a better experience than I did, five years later. She was not intimidated about going to law school straight away. Her daughter, who went there, loved it. Absolutely loved it. So I would venture to say that it has become—it grew over the years and became more and more nurturing. And I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Barnard, even though I myself [laughs] didn't have the greatest time there. I did walk away with many good friends, a degree I'm proud of, a major I enjoyed very much, and a first husband [laughs].

01:47:27 Q: Very good. Okay, well thank you. This has been really, really good. I appreciate so much you taking the time.

01:47:32 Veach: Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

01:47:35 Q: So this is a little addendum. Deborah's going to share with us two things that were significant in her early life. The first is the student award from the Lincoln Center, that she referred to in our interview. And that was given out in 1966-1967 as a high school student in her Yeshiva.

The second is the letter she wrote when she first arrived at Barnard, her first night, staying up until three in the morning. Do you want to read it to us?

01:48:04 Veach: Sure [laughs]. “I was just thinking that I ought to thank you—” this is to my mother—“thank you for everything you are doing for me. Going to Barnard is something fantastic and I still find it hard to believe that I belong here. I am very happy and the dorm is great. I will never be able to thank you enough. Just remember I love you all the time, and someday I hope to make you as happy as you have made me. With all my love, Debbie.”

01:48:31 Q: Oh, that’s great. Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

B

Barnard College, 1, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23,
25, 26, 27, 29, 47, 48, 50, 51, 55, 56, 60, 61
Barnard Organization of Soul Sisters, 23, 24
Bergen Record, 41
Boston University, 28
Brooklyn Law School, 29
Bryant School, 38

C

Chaya Schwer, 25
Cheryl Neuman, 25

D

Drake Secretarial School, 14

E

Eleanor Klein, 16
Ellen Birnbaum, 25
Emerson College, 28, 29
Esther Ribner, 11, 15

F

Freda Klapperman, 25

H

H. Rap Brown, 19
Harpers Magazine, 9, 11
Harvard Medical School, 28
Harvard University, 28

J

Janet Price, 25
Jersey City State College, 4, 9

K

Kent State University, 24

L

Law Journal, 41
Lincoln Center, 9, 10, 14, 60
Louisa May Alcott, 6
Lucyle Hook, 17

M

Mark W. Rudd, 20
Marlene Nadel, 18

N

New York Times, 10, 11, 55
Northeastern University, 28

R

Richard M. Joel, 11
Robert M. Morgenthau, 37
Rutgers University, 29

S

Sara Laufer, 25
Sonia M. Sotomayor, 36
Students for a Democratic Society, 20

V

Vivian Beaumont, 10

Y

Yale University, 48
Yeshiva University, 11

Z

Zach Chafee, 58