

BARNARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1971 ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

The Reminiscences of

Katherine Brewster

2014

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Katherine Brewster conducted by Michelle Patrick and Robert Solomon on February 5, 2011. This interview is part of the Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Project.

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

Barnard Class of 1971 Oral History Collection Session One

Interviewee: Katherine Brewster

Location: New York, New York

Interviewers: Michelle Patrick and Robert
Solomon

Date: February 5, 2011

Q: Talk about your background, Katherine—where you're from, your family, what is was like, where you grew up.

Brewster: I was born in Bethesda, Maryland, but grew up primarily in Albany, New York. I'm the oldest of six living children—we had seven at one point—and there are things that I heard about the family and the ancestors that became important to me. They resonated with me—I guess is the way of describing it. And from my father's side of the family, the only thing I knew growing up is that we were related to William Brewster of the Mayflower, and what I remember learning over the years were things about him that impressed me. Like he was fifty when he came—he was the religious leader of the group that came here, and that impressed me that someone that old—at some point along the way, I realized, at that time, people didn't live to be all that old, and to make that kind of a change at that age. This was a pretty determined man and a pretty adventurous man, probably kind of an exciting—

Q: A pilgrim or a Puritan, or are those the same thing?

Brewster: I think there's a difference, and I'm not sure what the difference is. I'm not remembering.

Q: Is it Massachusetts that he—

Brewster: Yes. This was Plymouth. He was the religious leader of the pilgrims that came and founded Plymouth colony. And the other piece I remember being impressed about is he was a part of the community. They were so—determined is not really the right word. All I could think of was life must have become so unbearable that they had to leave family and friends and everything, and go to a place that had been unsettled and unknown. It would be like us going to the moon: pretty dangerous, pretty unknown. So a sense of acting on one's own principles was something that kind of came through the stories I heard and that I picked up on over the years.

Q: Did your parents pick up on them as well?

Brewster: Yes, primarily more my father.

Q: What were his principles?

Brewster: Both of them had the principles of, it was important to be involved in the community; whether that meant you volunteered, so there were a couple of things about that. One is you gave back.

Q: So maybe we'll talk about the legacy of community involvement that your parents inherited from their ancestors.

Brewster: It was the different pieces of community involvement, both volunteering and finding ways to help people that didn't have the same kind of life we did, and also getting involved politically. And the thing I remember particularly about my father is that he became involved in the first successful effort in Albany to change the democratic machine. When we were living in Albany there had been a democratic machine for fifty years, so the Democratic Party, in that part, had actually gotten very corrupt. He and a couple of men about his age formed this organization called CURE—Citizens United Reform Effort, and although they didn't get a mayor elected, they made some inroads in getting different city council members elected.

Q: So they were third party.

Brewster: They were third party, yes.

Q: Were they liberal?

Brewster: Yes, as I remember, they were liberal. And it was also, economically, anyone who decided to oppose them; the machine would then try and destroy their business. So he did take a risk. It was a huge risk at that time in Albany to have been a part of this. None of them were

affected economically, as I remember, but other people had in the past. There was something he believed in strongly and he stood up for it and he took a risk, and so that was a value that I picked up on.

Q: You said that you were taught to help people who didn't have the same kind of blood you did. What kind of life did you have? What sort of business was your father in? And what was your life like growing up?

Brewster: I would say our life was upper middle class, and primarily because of money from my mother's parents. My father was a life insurance agent, a frustrated musician; he really wanted to be a musician, so he struggled for a long time with putting his energies into supporting the family versus really pursuing music, at this point, on a non-professional level. My mother's parents, through her mother, had money, and that's the other part of the family background that goes back to Philadelphia and back to the court of Marie Antoinette. Through my mother's mother we go back there. And on her father's side, we go back in the Cammack family in Virginia. Her great grandfather—

Q: Your mother's great grandfather.

Brewster: My mother's grandfather had been very wealthy in West Virginia, so there was some money that came through that side of the family, and from my mother's mother's money, there was still money that supported my grandparents through their life, and then helped support us.

So our lifestyle was actually beyond what my father could have provided for us by himself, and it afforded us to—I don't know. Intelligence was important, breeding, education, books, music, arts. All of that was really, really important. We did have a family summer place that my mother's parents purchased first. We had that kind of a life. We were able to enjoy life pretty comfortably.

Q: Your parents, was it their idea for you to go to Barnard [College]? Was it your idea? Did they support your choice? What did you make your choice based on?

Brewster: I don't even remember. I'm trying to think of the sequence, because I graduated from high school in three years, and I didn't decide this until the middle of my junior year, which then became my senior year. So I don't remember how I actually applied to college, whether I applied the summer in between what became my senior year and going over to Greece or while I was over in Greece. I'm not remembering that piece. I think I applied to Swarthmore [College].

Q: Did you get in, do you know?

Brewster: I don't remember if I got in. I don't think I did. I think maybe Barnard may have been the only place that may have accepted me, is my guess.

Q: Did you make a lot of applications?

Brewster: I don't even remember. I'm trying to remember. I know I was interested in Radcliffe [College]. I don't know if I applied to Radcliffe, but I remember I wasn't as interested in the other Seven Sisters as I was in either Radcliffe or Swarthmore or Barnard, and I think what I was attracted to it was a certain intellectual curiosity and stimulation that I got from those—whatever I read about them. I don't remember. I didn't visit Radcliffe. I didn't visit Swarthmore. I don't remember that I visited any of the college campuses because my senior [year] I was over in Greece in this program called a College Year in Athens [CYA].

Q: Talk about your period of time in Athens because I know it had a big effect on you.

Brewster: Huge effect. So some of the pre-history of it is when I was fifteen, I had a baby brother who was born. He only lived to about fifteen months. The summer of '65, while my parents were on vacation in kind of a remote place in Sebago Lake in Maine, my mother gave him a carrot to chew on, which she'd been doing for months. He choked on the carrot, and there was not a clinic close enough for them to get to that had the resources to give him a tracheotomy, and so he died. The impact on the family was devastating in many different ways; my parents trying to cope with it, all of us kids trying to cope with it, and no real vehicles for communicating and talking about the feelings and dealing with the mourning and the grief and the trauma of this. This was the summer in between my sophomore and my junior year of high school, and I remember at some point in the fall going, "I feel like I'm living in living death. Everything is gray."

Q: Mourning.

Brewster: Yes. And something said there's more to life than this, and one of my cousins had gone to this program over in Greece called College Year in Athens, which is an immersion in Greek history and culture and language, both ancient and modern. So it's a whole program just about Greece. In thinking of education, it was one of those interdisciplinary [programs]. In the country, in the culture, part of the experience was taking fieldtrips to different parts of Greece, so a living sensory immersion, an intellectual immersion in that culture. Something about that excited me. So my plan that I hatched in my head is that I would graduate from high school—I would double up on courses—which I was going to have to do, because I had finished the first semester of my junior year. So, in order to go to College Year in Athens, I was going to have to complete all course requirements for both my junior and senior years of high school. The one benefit is that one of my father's sisters lived there in a suburb of Athens, so I was going to live with her and then commute into Athens to go to the school. I've forgotten how I convinced my parents to let me do this, because I did. I was able to do that. Then I had to double up. In addition to my junior year classes, I had to take senior year classes and I had to teach myself half a year of 12th grade history and 12th grade English. I had just enough credits to meet the New York State requirements. I was just kind of squeaking by in terms of doing that. For me, it was all about that I needed to find a different environment for me in which to thrive. If I think back, what was going on inside of me that the living death was just—I was feeling crushed. I was just absolutely feeling crushed.

Q: You wanted out.

Brewster: I wanted out. So the year began this summer when I had my—and I was all excited—first experience overseas. On the way over, I stopped in London and Rome with my Aunt Joan. London and Rome on the way over, and then began this whole year of living in Greece, and, of course, a lot of changes, difficulty adjusting, living with someone who never had any children. I didn't know her. She didn't really know me, so we had our own issues trying to get along and get to know one another. And then I was also the only student commuting; everyone else was living in apartments. So it was this kind of tenuous time getting to know the other—in different ways—knowing the other kids. So a whole bunch of things happened that year, and it kind of started I would say in Christmastime. I had developed some relationships with other classmates, and I kind of settled in. Most of the other people were college students, so part of what I began hearing or realized [I was] kind of getting a sense of is there were two people that were a couple, and they were living together. So this whole thing about sex, sexuality, and sex before marriage—I had necked, but I hadn't had intercourse with anybody. I didn't even come close. And I don't remember that being a huge issue that was talked about.

Q: In your home?

Brewster: In the home, but thinking back, just that I got introduced to this in the college year in Athens. And then I got introduced to it when I was coming back from Greece. I met up with a high school friend and we traveled around some of Europe together and connected with someone

he had met through NYU [New York University] film school through another high school classmate, a man by the name of Henri Helman. We met with Henri, and I fell in love with Henri. So then we did hook up, and we had a wonderful sexual relationship, and I lived with him and his family for a month, which is an unusual constellation of: his mother and father were separated. I'm not sure if they were divorced or not. His mother was a teacher at the Sorbonne [University of Paris]—about the brain. His father was a visual artist, making a living as a visual artist, and here we were in their summer home, Henri, me, Henri's mother and his father's with his mistress, and they were getting along. This was a really amicable—I don't remember the kind of tension, because I was really used to picking up tension growing up at home and just figuring it out, now who's feeling what? I don't remember any of that. So I was introduced to unusual and different ways of people living, and I don't remember being startled by it. I don't remember being totally aghast at it. I think I found it both curious and interesting—different, but I don't remember feeling there was something wrong with it or there was anything bad with it. It was just, "Oh, well, this is kind of unusual." From my experience, this is kind of unusual.

Q: And you were allowed to be with Henri in the home, which probably you wouldn't have been allowed at home.

Brewster: No, would not have been allowed at home, as I learned when I came back, but I wasn't as aware of the differences. So partly what began happening in Greece was that there were these differences of perspective and lifestyle between myself and my family, that then erupted when I came back. The other piece of the Greece experience was the introduction to

what was going on politically. What I was aware of politically was much more stuff about the civil rights, not on a real conscious, but an unconscious level. There were people I knew from church that had gone down to the south that were three or four years older than I was, and I remember hearing them come back and talk about their experience in the south, working in voter rights registration. I remember feeling almost jealous, that I wish I'd been old enough to be able to do that and to participate in that. I wasn't aware of knowing that there was—it's very strange, my awareness of discrimination, racial discrimination.

Q: Did you go to an all-white high school?

Brewster: I did, but the church we went to was integrated, and that was also a deliberate choice my parents made, that we went to this particular church. There were other churches that were closer to us, but they went to this one specifically because they wanted us to have an experience of getting to know people that were different background. Economically, there were different classes in the church. At that point, in Albany, the racial mixture—there weren't any Latinos at that point. One of my best friends was from church. I guess on an unconscious level I was aware that there was racism. Civil rights, what was going on made sense to me, but I'm not aware other than that.

The grade school was interesting for Albany, because there was a history of huge discrimination against Irish Catholics. That was really still prevalent in some ways. There was a certain district in town that they had lived in, and people still talked about it. The neighborhood I lived in and

the grade school I went to were mixed religiously, which I think was actually—we were the first generation where that happened. In other words, I went to school with Protestants and Catholics and kids were Jewish in the school. It was not mixed racially, but it was mixed religiously, and I can remember the Catholic kids going off to Catechism, and there were kids in the block in which I lived who went to the Catholic schools. High school, we moved out to a suburb, Slingerlands, and that was much more homogenous. So my grade school experience, both in school, and then with church, was much more of a mixture. The high school experience was much more homogenous. These are white Anglo-Saxon Protestants primarily, some Jewish people that I went to high school with.

But getting to the political strain and how it weaves into Greece was I wasn't aware of the Vietnam War. So I left for Greece in '66, '67, and I wasn't really reading U.S. newspapers. So where I did become aware of it was on a different level. One of the classmate's, in the College Year in Athens, brother was stationed over in Vietnam as a pilot, and he and his buddies came to Athens for R&R [rest and recuperation], and I remember we got together with them and, therefore, they got drunk, and they made up songs from all of our—not high school, but the childhood ditties; “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and stuff about bombing, and they were singing these songs about bombing the villages in Vietnam as they got drunk. At some point, I realized it was the only way they could cope with it. That was one of my experiences, was just watching these young men a couple years older than I was trying to cope with this kind of horrific situation that they were in, of one hand not seeing the people they were dropping the bombs on, and the other hand knowing that they were dropping bombs and killing and hurting people. The other

was in Paris. When I came back and was with Henri, there was a lot of stuff in Paris about the Vietnam War, and listening to him talk with his friends about the Vietnam War. So that was my introduction to there's something about this war that maybe isn't okay, and I might want to rethink. That was kind of what was going on unconsciously.

The other thing that happened in Greece was I was exposed to big disparities of incomes and way of living, greater than I had remembered seeing in the United States, in Greece itself. Most of the small villages were still very poor, at that point. We're talking not quite twenty years after World War II, and there was still a lot of rebuilding going on. I was on this street in Greece where there was no running water, where there was garbage. Their sewers were in the street. No electricity. I remember one trip was in the spring—it was cold—and I remember I was uncomfortable in this chill, and it was in the mountains. It was humid, that kind bone-chilling humid cold, and some part of me unconscious going, "Oh, my God, what is it like to live like this? This is pretty uncomfortable and horrific."

Then in the spring, I took a tour through the Middle East, and I went into Egypt, and we stopped in Luxor. One of the other people on the trip and myself rented a bike, and we took a bike ride around the outskirts of Luxor. When we came back we kind of lost our way, and we came back through one of these side streets, and this side street—God, I don't know, half a city block—and it was nothing but dirt, and everyone was out in the street with their little kettles or little fires cooking. I remember as we drove down this street thinking, "This is poverty worse than I remember seeing in Greece." So I had a real sense of these huge disparities that were going on

around the world, and not feeling real comfortable about that. The other political experience in Greece was being there, living there during the coup.

Q: Talk about that.

Brewster: The other background is that my aunt worked for army intelligence.

Q: She worked for army intelligence or she was army intelligence?

Brewster: She was army intelligence.

Q: She was army intelligence.

Brewster: Right. And a week before the coup, a girlfriend and I took a trip to Corinth [Greece], and before we left she said to me, "Make sure you take your passport with you. If and when you come back into Athens, if there are some roadblocks and stuff that you've got to go through, don't worried, it's okay." As a U.S. citizen, I would generally take my passport traveling in Greece, but she'd never specifically said that before, and I didn't think anything of this until the following weekend, when the coup happened. I was in the hospital because, in the middle of this week, I had fallen and broken my elbow. I had to have an operation and a pin put in my left elbow, so I was in the hospital. All I remember is waking up, and it was very clear something

was very different, the whole atmosphere. I was in the hospital, but something was very different.

Q: Now this was in Athens?

Brewster: This was in Athens.

Q: You're back.

Brewster: I'm back from Corinth, and I was well enough, at this point, to get up and walk down the corridor. I looked out the window, and the windows looked onto one of the main boulevards in Athens, and there were tanks going up and down the street. It was, for me, a very eerie, eerie sense to see tanks going up and down the street. And then one of the nurses yelled out the window something; she was clearly angry at what she was seeing happen, what she was watching. The next thing I knew the elevator door opened up and there were soldiers, and they grabbed her and took her away.

Q: Oh, dear.

Brewster: Needless to say, I felt frightened, and then my aunt came at some point later and told me, yes, there'd been a coup. The other piece is that [Robert S.] McNamara's daughter was one of my classmates, and he happened to be in Greece over that weekend—Secretary of Defense

McNamara. So I put these pieces together over—actually even then something was really fishy. She knew. My aunt knew this was going to happen. Somehow the U.S. government is involved with this. There's no way that something's not going on, that we're not involved, so U.S. involvement directly in foreign governments was something I had direct experience with, at least from that experience.

It was scary. At that point, I was dating a Greek man. His parents were in publishing, and he told me their business had been shut down. It was really hard for him even to traverse the streets and get to see me in the hospital. There was a curfew, and he said they were living on olives and bread. So the stories that I then heard later about the experience in Greece fit with my own experience and fit with what he was telling me about that experience in Greece, so I was exposed through just living there and having these different experiences to things. I was exposed to new ideas during my year in Greece, so I began to develop a sense of self while I was over there. Prior to going to Greece, I had been Miss Goody Two-Shoes in the family. I did not have a teenage rebellion. That wasn't part of what I went through. But when I came back from Greece, I had a sense of self.

Q: When you got home.

Brewster: My sense of self was strong enough that when I came home, first, it was just my beingness, but also as I began to talk about all the different beliefs I had or this whole thing, the

sex before marriage thing. What I realized then [that] was an anathema to my parents, and they were horrified by it.

Q: Did you tell them?

Brewster: Yes. Well, they knew because I stayed in France a month longer than I had planned to. So they knew. I had written them or something, so they did know that that was happening.

Q: But they didn't know that you were allowed to sleep in the same bedroom.

Brewster: I think I must have told them. At that point, I didn't know enough to not tell them what my life had been like. I had anticipated that everything I had experienced they would be thrilled with and delighted with, and that turned out not to be the case. So began a whole series of years of tension and friction, particularly between my father and myself. And part of the context of that is that his response—he and I once had a conversation about it—to my baby brother's death was to become even more controlling and terrified. He was terrified to think, for years, that something else was going to happen to somebody. He was absolutely terrified, and so his need to control just became even that much more, and here I was coming back with all of these totally different perspectives that I hadn't had before. He reacted, erupted in this just huge [way], wanting to shut me up, and he didn't want his other children, who were still young—my youngest living sibling is nine years younger than I am. So if I was nineteen, coming back, she was ten, so still impressionable brothers and sisters. He really wanted to keep me in wraps. So

we had about a five-to-six-year very volatile, intense relationship where we were just at each other's throats, politically and also in terms of lifestyle.

Q: What was his position on the coup and on the Vietnam War?

Brewster: He was very much in favor of the Vietnam War. I don't remember about the coup on Greece. I don't remember on that piece, but we did have many conversations about—I shouldn't say conversations. We had many arguments. We had many eruptions over the Vietnam War.

Q: So by the time you left for Barnard, you were already in a tense standoff situation with your parents, would you say?

Brewster: No. I would say the intense standoff came at the end of my freshman year at Barnard. It began when I came back, but I wasn't even aware of the friction, because there were only a couple of weeks between when I returned from Greece, and started classes at Barnard.

Q: So talk about those first few weeks at Barnard, those first few weeks and months, the fall of '67, September, October. First of all, when you got there, was it what you expected?

Brewster: First couple of weeks of fall, I have snippets of the fall. I don't have a lot of memories of that fall. What I remember was kind of a sunny day. I remember feeling a combination: a little scared, meeting all these new people, not knowing how I was going to fit in

or not. Those are the unconscious questions going on; and, on the other hand, feeling a little confident. I'd had some world experience having just spent a year at living in Greece and traveling around Europe and the Middle East. Well, that sure got its comeuppance when I met my roommate, Josephine [Josie] Drexel Biddle Duke, who seemed, to me, like even twenty times more sophisticated than I was.

Q: Talk about Josie and who she was and what she was.

Brewster: My memory is Josie was this absolute passionate ball of fire, really immersed in politics. She was very savvy with politics. She knew music. I'd missed a whole year of music, missed a lot of cultural things, which I didn't realize, and she was very savvy in those. She seemed to me really poised and confident within herself. I'm not sure that really was the case, but that, at least, was my impression of her. So, in comparison, one part of me kind of shrunk a little, but I thought, "Oh, well, I'm really not as sophisticated as I think I am." I remember kind of a cozy sense in the dorms. I liked living in the dorms. Although I liked having lived in Greece, I hadn't lived within the community of people. So, during my freshman year at Barnard, I really enjoyed being with the community of people.

I remember particular classes. I remember Professor [Barbara] Novak's class in art history. I loved it, absolutely loved it. I think I developed my appreciation for particularly modern art through her. I didn't really know about it and didn't have any appreciation prior to that. I think probably a way of looking and seeing things visually beyond just visual paintings; I'm not sure I

can describe all of it right now, but a visual sense and a design sense, [I got] an artistic sense through her class. And a Russian literature class, which I just remember loving it, wanting to go and loving reading all the work. I took physics for poets at Columbia [University]. I spent hours and hours and hours trying to get this, hours.

Q: Was it really not for poets?

Brewster: It didn't feel like it was for poets, for me. It probably was, but it was one of those where obviously my tendency was if I'm not getting something, well, I've got to make myself get it. That was really operating. I spent four hours trying to understand one thing, and I probably should have said, "No, forget it. I just need to move on," and I would become like a dog with a bone. I couldn't let go of it. So I have memories of classes. I have memories of the community sense at Barnard, and then I have memories of the strike, and that, for me, and since I didn't stay—I only came back for another semester after that. That was the biggest experience for me at Barnard—was deciding—I wasn't even part of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] up to that point.

Q: You weren't?

Brewster: No, I wasn't a member of SDS.

Q: How did you get involved in the strike?

Brewster: One would have been discussions with Josie. I don't remember them, but I know we would have had some discussions about the issues of the day prior to the 1968 Student Strike: What was going on with the Vietnam War, and what was Columbia's involvement, and what was going on in Morningside Heights and Columbia's involvement in the community, or trying to rape the community, in essence? So when I heard about it, when I heard that something had happened and buildings had been taken over, I remember that I thought about it. I don't know for how long, but by the time I had decided I was going to participate by going into one of the buildings, all the buildings had been closed off except Avery [Hall] and Fayerweather [Hall]. I didn't know much about Fayerweather, which was for the graduate students. What attracted me to Avery Hall, the building that housed the CU Graduate School of Architecture, is that the students themselves had decided to take over the building. It was a collective decision of the people that were students of that graduate school. For me, there was a psychological difference between going into Low Library and taking over, sitting in the administration building. In the Architecture School, was like the community of people themselves said, "We're going to participate in what's going on in the campus."

Q: How was that different from Low?

Brewster: Psychologically, for me, it made a difference. I'm not sure it made sense.

Q: You thought of Low as more what? People from outside the campus?

Brewster: No. As far as I know, all the people who occupied Low Library, the building that housed the administrative offices of CU, including the President's, were Columbia students who primarily members of the SDS chapter on CU campus

Q: Outside agitators?

Brewster: No. There was something about that building, psychologically. It's not going to make logical sense.

Q: Doesn't have to.

Brewster: But if the people working in the administration building of Low had collectively said, "We don't like what's going on, and we're going to participate," that would have been the same to me as the students who were part of the Graduate School of Architecture in Avery saying collectively, "We're not leaving." In Low Library, students took over the building and locked the administration out, so it had a different feel to me.

Q: Maybe that it was more spontaneous?

Brewster: Part of it was spontaneous, right. It was spontaneous from within that student body. So, anyway, I decided to go into Avery and spent however many days or weeks we were there.

Q: Were you there from the beginning to the end?

Brewster: Probably it was the second day. I'm trying to remember how long it took. I don't remember how long it took me to decide to participate.

Q: Was Josie in Avery?

Brewster: No. Josie was either in Low or in Math. I've forgotten which one. It was interesting. It had, for some reason, the same kind of thrill for me as some of my experience in Greece, because conversations that were going on among the architecture students were about how do we take these ideas and create new spaces for people to live in? How do we apply this in totally new ways of being and the spatial relationships? So this kind of integration of a political perspective or a new idea of how to live, and then how do you actually create it in the space we live in—and how we construct that space affects how we interact with one another. And it was the kind of conversations in Greece when you're studying the culture and the language and the history and you're seeing how they all are interconnected, and one's a reflection of another—for me, anyway. That was my experience with it.

I fell in love with a guy who was the one who had actually instigated the whole student group in Avery Hall to participate in the building occupation: Bruce Dale. And it was clear he liked me, but he was dating someone else at the same time, and he was pretty principled about that.

Although we had this kind of wonderful emotional, intellectual connection, it never got really consummated to my disappointment. It was real intense, and we have kept in touch over the years sporadically. And then I remember the bust, and I remember the decision that we were going to go down in pairs, and we could make a choice. We all had a choice to make whether we walked down or whether we were going to resist and have them carry us down.

Q: What did you decide?

Brewster: I decided to walk down with my partner. I think I saw someone ahead of us who decided to just go limp and have them carry him down, and the police were starting to get brutal at that point. Outside of Avery was one of the most brutal police responses, because there were thousands of students in front of the building, in Avery and, I think, Fayerweather. I remember being scared, scared approaching the police coming, in some sense, terrified, and scared walking down that we were going to get bludgeoned. I was not, and I don't think anyone from Avery was bludgeoned, although I may be mistaken on that. But I wasn't bludgeoned, and don't remember seeing anybody.

Q: Josie?

Brewster: No, because Josie was in Math or Low, so she was a totally different—

Q: But when you got back to the dorm?

Brewster: Well, the only thing I remember coming back to the dorm is I remember being in jail. We were in jail overnight. I don't remember being scared there. I remember some sense of camaraderie. I got all these horrible sandwiches that they gave us like bologna and cheese or something. They were horrible. I thought: prison. I remember part of me thinking prison food must be really bad. So the arraignment was interesting. My father showed up.

Q: And his attitude?

Brewster: Was something was going on I still didn't get; took me a long time to get, or we didn't erupt until later. He was upset, but he wasn't tight. Don't remember whether he was really—yes, he was angry. Why am I hesitating in this?

Q: At you?

Brewster: Can't find the words for how I would describe what I interpreted how he was feeling; upset with me, concerned. I think I was more getting a sense of concern than angry.

Q: Worry.

Brewster: And worry, and he was worried that I would have a record, and that he was concerned about how it would affect jobs, different things of life that, of course at that point, didn't even

occur to me would be a factor. But I remember him mentioning something about, “You have no idea what it’ll be like to have on your record that you’ve been charged.” And concern that if we were charged, the charges wouldn’t be dismissed, which of course, they were, but at that point, none of us knew exactly what was going to happen. So he was really concerned about what my life would be like if I had a record. I do remember that kind of a sense and that kind of a conversation. I remember coming back to Barnard campus.

There was something else already going on. I don’t even remember coming back to the dorm. I just remember shortly after that there was another huge demonstration on campus, and I remember that one being even scarier than being arrested, because the police came sweeping through on the horses and just started bludgeoning people.

Q: This was on campus?

Brewster: This was on campus.

Q: In the days after the strike?

Brewster: Yes. It was like a day after, could have been two days. I don’t remember exactly.

Q: And you were a part of this demonstration?

Brewster: I was a part of the demonstration, yes.

Q: And your dad, then, had left.

Brewster: Yes. He came down; he went back to New York City. I returned to my life, whatever was left of our life, at Barnard. It was April. I don't remember; we had like a month left. Actually, I thought it was just a month left.

Q: What were his parting words of advice, or did he have any?

Brewster: I don't even remember any parting words of advice, at that point.

Q: How long did you part? Was there tension? Do you remember, was there tension between the two of you when you parted?

Brewster: I don't remember being aware of a lot of tension, but I clearly had not gotten how tense things were.

Q: Did you become more politicized when you were in the building than you already had been, or was that an impossible—?

Brewster: Interesting. Say more about what you mean by being more politicized. I'm not sure I know what—

Q: More feeling an urgency about Columbia's change or general political change, a sense that something was impending, perhaps. I don't want to put words in your mouth. You were already very political.

Brewster: Yes. I think where I'm hesitating is if I thought back, I guess my own interpretation of kind of my own development, it was almost like these small, subtle, discrete steps, so I don't remember a huge epiphany or a huge cataclysmic—it was just these small, different things, and each one was confirming something inside of me that was saying yes, that I need to pay attention to what's going on around me. I need to take a stand. I need to ask questions about what is really going on, and, yes, there is something right now that I need to be involved with. So, at the time, I don't think I was even aware of how important the decisions all of us were making about the Vietnam War and the involvement of all kinds of different institutions in it, and the degree to which our own both educational institutions and research and businesses were all involved in supporting the Vietnam War. But certainly something was growing in me that said there is this huge involvement, and it's not okay with me that that's how we're spending, our resources as a government and as a people, and it's not okay for us to be trying to take over the lives of other people in other countries. It's like there was a gradual thing that was happening, so the next step just felt like, okay, the next step is for me to still stay involved. So when I came out from being

arrested, yes, I'm still going to be involved with the demonstrations. I now got more involved with SDS.

Q: Did you join?

Brewster: I don't remember that I joined, per se. I was around the offices. I was helping [with] leaflets. I was helping organize things when I came back, off and on over the summer.

Q: Did you stay in New York over the summer?

Brewster: I stayed in New York. I took a waitressing job, stayed in New York, lived in the Lower East Side.

Q: Where did you waitress?

Brewster: I waitressed at the Limelight Café, which was Sheridan Avenue & 7th, and then I waitressed at some other place.

Q: Where did you live?

Brewster: I sublet Bruce Dale's apartment; he took a trip over to Europe, and I sublet his apartment. It was East 7th Street between 1st and 2nd Avenue, something like that, 2nd and 3rd.

Q: Did you have a roommate?

Brewster: No.

Q: Just by yourself?

Brewster: No, it was just me.

Q: A lot of friends in the city?

Brewster: Through whatever was happening in SDS, yes.

Q: So you were still active?

Brewster: I was still involved in SDS.

Q: And how did your parents feel about the fact that you didn't come home for the summer?

Brewster: They actually expected me to work. I was expected to work and to help earn money to pay for my education. My sense from my parents was when you go off to college, you're leaving home and this is now your life, [now] begin to lead your life. I wasn't expected to come

home for summer. Wherever I was, I was going to work, let me put it that way. I knew that. So what did happen was I finished the job—and I think it must have been Labor Day weekend.

Q: Of 1968.

Brewster: Of 1968, and was with my family, family summer place, up on Lake Champlain, Essex, New York, and I remember something about—I didn't know what was going on. [I said], "Listen, I've got to get back home to pack and get off to school," and my father turned to me and said, "I'm not sending you back to Barnard." He said, "I'm not paying for your education, not if you're going to—." He didn't even say, "Not if you're going to be—," It was more like, "I'm not going to throw money away for your education if you're not going to be in school, attending classes, and I don't believe you are, so I'm not paying for your education."

Q: This was a shock.

Brewster: A total shock. We hadn't had any conversations. I had assumed I was going back to Barnard. I had assumed that the financial piece was taken care of. I was totally devastated. I didn't know what I was going to do.

Q: No words had been spoken?

Brewster: None. Nothing had been said, that I remember. I don't remember a thing having been said prior to this. If there was, I've totally blocked it out.

Q: Do you think that anything you said or did during that period of time in Lake Champlain might have—?

Brewster: Influenced that?

Q: Yes, his decision.

Brewster: I have no idea.

Q: Don't remember?

Brewster: No, I don't. It's a good question. I just don't remember anything.

Q: While we're on the subject of your dad, I did want you to tell the story about the skirts.

Brewster: Well, that's coming up, because that was later. That was when I came back. I also don't remember that—we had an argument about it.

Q: You had an argument about?

Brewster: About the fact that he wasn't going to pay for my—I think I must have said something, but then I went into a mode of, all right, what do I need to do? This isn't going to happen, so whatever feelings I'm having, I'm going to cut them off, and now I've just got to do what I need to do. So we got back to Albany, and I remember I contacted Barnard and talked to someone in admissions and someone in financial aid. Then I took a trip down to Barnard about getting back in school. And somehow we found a way. I had to take out a loan, and there was some way that I got back into school and, of course, by that time, there were no rooms in the dorm, so I was living in an apartment on Claremont Avenue, so not too far. I had a roommate, but she was never there. She was with her boyfriend, so I was basically alone, and started going to classes.

Q: So you got financial aid?

Brewster: I got financial aid from Barnard to come back, and for which I'm forever grateful to them, that they had the resources, and they were willing and able to do it. If I think back, another transition to saying, "Okay, this is my life, and I can do things and not be dependent on my parents, and what am I going to have to do?" So during that fall, when I was struggling with classes, and struggling also with balancing classes and the political activities—so I was still involved with SDS, at that point.

My father came down to visit me, and we went out to lunch, and I was wearing a miniskirt, and I was braless. I guess he was absolutely aghast, because the next thing I knew is I get a call, he says, “I’m sending your mother down to lengthen your skirts.”

Q: Hard to do.

Brewster: And my mother came down and she said, “I’m not going to do this. I can’t do this.” She was terrified. She says, “I have no idea what’s going to happen when I go back.”

Q: She was terrified to go?

Brewster: She was terrified of my father, what would happen between the two of them.

Q: What could happen? What was the range of possibilities?

Brewster: The range of possibilities, I think, went from everything—they were going to split up to they were going to have a really stormy time together, and I’m not sure what I—I’ve heard stories about what happened from my brothers and sisters.

Q: What did happen?

Brewster: So I wanted to pick up when you asked me about the politicalization of myself at Barnard. What I was thinking a moment ago is that I think what happened—and again, it was unconscious, I wasn't aware of this on a conscious level—but it was the experience at Barnard and being confronted for me with the take over of the buildings at CU in response to preventing the apartheid gym in Morningside Heights from being built and stopping CU's involvement in research creating chemical weapons for use in Vietnam—here's a situation like the civil rights had been in the South that's going on, and I've got a choice. I can participate or not. I can take a stand or not, and that's where all of my own family background about it's important that, as a citizen, you pay attention and we take a stand came into play. It's like I stepped into the political arena as an adult and said, "This is important. I believe it's important, and it's important enough for me to take this kind of drastic action about it." So, in a way, that was a very pivotal experience for me in my own political—and life as an adult, to be confronted with that, and then to take a stand. And that hadn't happened. I hadn't been confronted before, up to that point in my life, with this is clearly going on. Where do you stand?

Q: Did you point that out to your dad during any of these arguments?

Brewster: I don't remember at that point if I did.

Q: "Where do you think I learned this? I learned this at home."

Brewster: I did years later, and I don't think he'd ever gotten it before. If I pointed it out, he didn't, but this was about five to ten years ago, we had a conversation about it again.

Q: And you?

Brewster: And I did point that out. I said, "I learned this from you."

Q: And did he get it?

Brewster: He got it. He got it finally. It took many years, many years. So we kind of left off where he was so upset with how I was dressing and how I was that he sent my mother down, and I think this was the first time her experience where she had—so we were talking about that incident when my father came down to New York.

Q: Just go through that again to make sure that we have it.

Brewster: So he came down to visit. What he became upset about is how I was dressing, the miniskirts and braless, and he sent my mother down to lengthen my skirts. I've forgotten what else, but that was the main thing, was to lengthen my skirts. And I remember that lunch with her and that conversation and how scared she was, and I really felt how terrified she was.

Q: Of your dad?

Brewster: At that point, yes, and what would happen, and that it was like the beginning of her stepping into her own independence and relationship with my father, because she didn't try and lengthen my skirts, and she wasn't going to try to. And she went back, and I understand from my brothers and sisters that there were some pretty horrific dinners—huge arguments—around this and around what had happened. And I think there was something where she asked him to leave for a couple of days

Q: So this leads to my next question, which is at what point did you become aware of the women's movement a); and b) at what point did it become a part of your consciousness, a part of your life? At this point, were you aware of the women's movement in 1968?

Brewster: I was. I was beginning to be aware of it. I wasn't aware of it part of 1968. I don't remember being aware of it over in Greece. It was at Barnard. It was through SDS. It was through some of the discussions. I don't remember particular ones, but some of the discussions as women—we began to have that. I became aware of the women's movement.

Q: This incident with your mother and father, did you hook it up in your mind with anything that the women's movement was saying, or was that connection made later?

Brewster: On some level, yes, at that time. Again, it feels like it was one of those unconscious connections that I was making, that, when later, I became more conscious of it than fit with, "Oh,

yeah,” this was part of what we were doing, what I was doing, my mother was doing. Even though we may not have been on a conscious level aware of it, but this was all part of that kind of consciousness that was happening and we were living. I think I remember more. Again, I’m not remembering a specific incident in SDS, but there’s something that’s ringing in my mind.

Q: In the building?

Brewster: Not in the building, but in SDS over the summer and over that fall, some conversations about women in leadership in SDS, and there weren’t any women in leadership. I know by ’69, ’70 I was much more conscious of it. Because I remember hearing more about it and there’s this whole discussion of Black Panthers about women and hearing about that and women’s relationship and women’s role.

Q: We’re still in ’68 right now, right?

Brewster: No. I’m speaking about 1969 and 1970.

Q: Drugs. Did they play a factor in your life?

Brewster: Not a big factor at all, no. I had had a couple of experiences with marijuana, and my first experience, the two I remember, were enough that I said, “I don’t think I need to do anything else with drugs.” The first one I remember I got so high that I lost a sense of

relationship with my hands, with my limbs. I remember being a little bit scared. The second one was another scary one where I saw spiders on the wall.

Q: From just marijuana?

Brewster: Just marijuana, right. So when I heard about LSD [lysergic acid diethylamide] and the kinds of experiences you could have—good ones, bad ones, I was concerned I was going to have a bad trip and decided I wasn't going to experiment. I remember someone I was out with once talking about cocaine, and I think he may have taken some. For some reason, I was not really interested in experimenting with drugs, so that didn't play a huge—once in a while, I would smoke marijuana, but I wasn't a pothead. I was not smoking continuously. I wasn't smoking on a regular weekly basis at all. That just wasn't as big a part of—nor was alcohol. I wasn't a big alcohol drinker either.

Q: Your activities in the summer of '68 with SDS, what were you doing? Addressing envelopes?

Brewster: I don't remember.

Q: Do you remember where, indoors, outdoors, where you were demonstrating?

Brewster: No, I don't. That summer I was primarily more involved with my waitressing job. I would get back uptown and do some stuff. In the fall of '68 when I came back, again, I don't remember exactly what I was doing with SDS, but I just knew I was around the office. I was doing different things.

Q: Office work.

Brewster: Office work, things that needed to be done. Put it this way, I was enough involved that what was happening is that I wasn't spending my time—remember I started back in sophomore year about a month late. So I had a lot of stuff to make up, and given my previous experience doubling up on courses in high school, I could have made it up. But I was so much more involved in the political arena on campus that I was not spending my time making up my class work that I needed to make up, and I think I dropped out before taking finals. I kind of got a sense I'm just not prepared and I'm not ready. And the lack of being in the dorms was a big factor for me too. I was not feeling the community sense, and I was really wanting it then, really missing it. So that combination of factors I think led me to just say, I'm just going to drop out.

Q: You didn't go back over Christmas? What did you do Christmas? Did you go home? Did you stay in the city?

Brewster: I went home for Christmas, so I must have dropped out after Christmas, because I think finals would have been January then, not pre-Christmas, but after Christmas. And then I

kind of spent some time just kind of amorphous. I had gone to a SDS-like conference in Montreal, and met someone from San Fernando Valley State [College] [now California State University, Northridge], and we thought we might be interested in one another. San Fernando State was just starting to become political. So some time in the spring of '69 I then went out to San Fernando Valley State, stayed with him. We realized we weren't going to hook up as a couple, but he let me stay there, and I hung around on the San Fernando Valley State campus. I don't remember how I supported myself, any of that stuff, and then drove back cross-country with somebody.

Q: Alone?

Brewster: No, I hooked up with someone for a ride and drove back cross-country. I think while I was out there I also went to some conference—I vaguely remember something in New Mexico in traveling back with people from New Mexico, back to San Fernando Valley State. And then I remember hitchhiking, so it's coming back to me as a very painful memory, actually. I think it was someone I met in whatever was the SDS conference that was held in New Mexico who lived in San Francisco, and so along with a woman I had met from San Fernando Valley State, we decided to hitchhike up to San Francisco and see this guy, which we did. We hitchhiked up to San Francisco. Something coming back we were hitchhiking—I've forgotten how we ended up at this truck stop. Anyway, we were in the cab of a truck, and he stopped to eat, and we were on our way back from San Francisco to San Fernando Valley State. She was sleeping in the back

part of the cab, and I was about to wake her up and he said, “Don’t wake her up. She’ll be okay. She can come out when she’s ready.”

So we went in and he met some other of his friends, who were also on the same route, and we were eating, and he said, “I’m going to go out and go to the bathroom,” and the bathroom was a different house than the restaurant, for some reason, and he was gone a long time. I thought, “What’s going on? Where is he?” and his friends said, “It’s okay.” So he finally came back, and I was finished and I said, “Let’s go, and I want to check on my friend,” and when we got back to the cab, she had a crowbar out. She’d found something, and she was about ready to hit him. She was crying, and she said, “I can’t be in this cab. We’ve got to get out.” So we got out and got into another truck. It turns out he had raped her. I did not know what was going on. After we actually got back to San Fernando Valley and she was talking with someone else that I learned what actually had happened.

Q: She didn’t report it?

Brewster: I don’t know if she ever reported it, but for years, I had felt totally responsible for that. One of the cardinal rules when you’re hitchhiking is you never leave your partner; you never leave whom you’re hitchhiking with. It’s part of the safety, and I’ve carried that around for years. So we were talking about the women’s movement. If I think back, that was a pretty seminal experience for me in terms of understanding in a way I don’t think I had gotten before that the potential domination of women by men and the fear. This unconscious, underlying fear

of being dominated, by being raped, and of having one's whole sense of self just destroyed. That experience changed my consciousness about that piece, and the importance of a whole lot of what the women's movement was saying about not only our own self-respect, but standing up for ourselves. So that was a pretty important experience. And then when I came back to the East Coast, it was summer, and I was working in the neighborhood—

Q: New York? You were in New York?

Brewster: Back in New York City, living with a group of people on West End & 103rd. I think that's when I was involved with street theater, although the street theater may have been before I left for San Fernando. I'm a little unclear as to the exact sequence.

Q: Talk about street theater. What is it, and what did you do in it?

Brewster: Street theater is political theater, and you perform it on the streets, and it's more, if I remember, real caricature. It's total caricature, so there's no development. We're talking about a fifteen, twenty-minute, maybe a ten-minute skit, so absolute caricature. It's spread, like with comedy, by heightening the extremes you get what the conflict is or you get the absurdity, whatever was the point. I've forgotten what character I played. There were two people, Barbara and Bob, and I've forgotten their last names, who would write the skits, so we had this really incredible creative talent. Barbara was actually German, and she had been very involved in a lot of the German movement. They were about five to ten years older. Bob was working as a

teacher in New York City schools, but still very involved, and this was their main avenue of trying to heighten the political understanding and awareness of what was going on is through the street theater. I loved it. I loved doing it. I didn't mind being on the streets doing it. It's almost like a vendor. You stand on the street corner and start by just saying, "Gather around, gather around, gather around," for whatever was the name of the show.

Q: And they did.

Brewster: And they did, and we did it. So anyway, the summer of '69 was that plus—I've forgotten the name of the organization. At that point, there was money for programs in the inner cities in the summer, and I was teaching sex education to teenagers who probably knew more about the subject than I did. And, at some point, I got appendicitis and was in the hospital, and that was an interesting experience, because I don't even remember how the whole thing played out or how I even had insurance. I think my parents paid for it, and I'm very grateful that, despite what was going on, they responded, because they hadn't heard a lot from me.

Since the Fall of 1969 when my father sent my mother to lengthen my skirts, I had had very little contact with my parents, other than visiting them for Thanksgiving and Christmas in 1969. They didn't really know that I was going out to the West Coast, and I came back. There hadn't been a lot of communication, and I don't know whether I called them or whether a doctor called them and said, "Look it, your daughter's here in the hospital. Do you have any insurance?" or whatever. My mother came to visit. I was going to go to recuperate with one of her cousins, who

lives in Tenafly, New Jersey, and I didn't want to be with any family. I don't know if you remember Andrea and Richard Egan. They were the couple married in Fayerweather. So I've forgotten how I got to know Andrea and Richard, but they agreed for me to come convalesce with them, and I was there three to four weeks. At that time, with appendicitis and anesthesia, it was a four-week recovery. So clearly things were very tenuous with my relationship with parents, and I convalesced with Andrea and Richard. Somewhere in this time period, and I don't remember how I got to know a man by the name of Arthur Turco, who was a lawyer for the [Black] Panthers. We had a little affair, and through my relationship with him, got to know some of the leadership here in one of the New York chapters. I don't remember which neighborhood.

At that point—the Panthers were beginning to try and—my interpretation, what they were starting to do then is—they saw the economic, the class basis of the conflict in the country. They had started in Chicago. They had formed an alliance with a Spanish, Latino group in Chicago, The Young Lords, and they had gone into the southwest side of Chicago where the hillbillies from Appalachia were moving, and they had gone in and said to them, “Look it, our situation is the same. The only difference is color, and the wealthy are using that difference to keep us apart. Let's get together. Let's see if we can work through all these—.” So there was an organization working in the southwest side of Chicago. I remember it being called the Patriot Party. So from this experience in Chicago, the Panthers wanted to do this in New York City, and so I was part of the group. Arthur Turco was part of the group, and I was part of that initial group that began to form a group to work in the working-class neighborhoods of New York City. We were working in what's now called Yorkville.

Q: When you say working—

Brewster: Well, what we were doing is we were starting to organize people around tenants' rights. We started some breakfast programs like the Panthers. We were transplanting a lot of the Panther programs in the community into this really poor, white working-class area in Yorkville, which was where the breweries had been. They were the railroad tenements, and I saw some pretty poor people living in those. It was a collective. We lived together, so I put all my possessions into storage. Whatever friends I had, I lost contact with, because we were now living communally with this group of people in the Patriot Party in Yorkville in Manhattan. Actually I don't know how we made all of our money, but some of it we made hawking the Panther papers on street corners. I remember doing that, setting up the breakfast programs for kids. So I was doing that for, God, I don't know how many months.

Q: '69, are we going into '70?

Brewster: '69 into '70, yes. So, by this time, this had gradually moved into me committing my life to this political—at that point, that was my perception. I'm committing my life to a communal way of living. I'm committing my life to a way of life that's going to be always aware of issues of the day, organizing people to stand up for their rights and to claim their rights. I don't remember how many months into this, suddenly one night there was this meeting called, and two of us were told we had to leave, and the phrase that was used was a phrase from Mao's

Red Book [*Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*] that we were monks tolling the bell, not knowing what we were doing or why we were doing it, but just tolling the bell, mindlessly tolling the bell. I was one of the two people that were told, you've got to leave.

Q: Was there evidence marshaled against you?

Brewster: I don't remember. I have a blank if there was, if there wasn't. I don't even think there was any rebuttal. It was just like boom, this is happening, you're out.

Q: Was there anything to these charges?

Brewster: No.

Q: And this was a mostly-white group?

Brewster: It was an all-white group.

Q: When you look back can you think of any reason why you would have been isolated with the other person and expunged from the group, any differences between you and the other people in terms of background or breeding or point of view?

Brewster: No. What I did learn later that summer is what had happened is that meeting was the beginning of a political battle starting to happen between Arthur Turco and the guy from Chicago, Preacherman, who had moved from living in Chicago to NYC to start the NYC chapter of the Patriot Party. And the people that called me at the end of the summer, they'd spent a couple of months living together processing through what had happened, because they were devastated. The whole organization split up by probably June of '70. The Patriot Party had disintegrated by June of '70, and so what did help me was when—I don't know how they found me, because I was now back in Albany. These people called and talked to me, I remember feeling a relief that it wasn't me. It hadn't been me. There really wasn't anything that I wasn't doing that I just wasn't cognizant of. There wasn't any perspective. It was that there was a political battle going on, and I was the fallout from that political battle. Now I'd lost all contact with everybody in New York City.

Q: How many months did you live within the Patriot party commune in NYC? Six?

Brewster: I would say three to six, somewhere in that. Three to six is my guess. So I did the only thing I knew how to do which was to call parents and say, "Can I come home?" So I went back to Albany, and we're talking probably late spring of '70, and needless to say, this did not work out well. I had no idea what I was going to do. I don't even remember that I was looking for a job yet or not, but I was just kind of floating around and not knowing what—I was devastated by having been expunged from the group, because that had been my focus, my commitment in life, at that point, was this is what I'm going to do, and now how do I do that?

That was my question. I didn't know where in Albany to go yet. The way I was living or being in the family with my—let me see, how many kids were still home? Two, three were still home — two brothers and a sister were still home, and I don't know how or what, but this friction with my father and me, I guess big political arguments we were having at the dinner table that were just disrupting everybody. I don't know how many months it was I was home but something happened one night, and all I remember is my father stormed into my bedroom and he said, "I want you out of this house, and I don't know if I ever want you to be a member of this family again," and I remember feeling that moment of terror and devastation, like, "Oh, my God, what did I do?" And then that other part of me kicked in that went, "Okay, what have I got to do? Who do I know? Who do I know I can go stay with?"

Q: Did you have to leave that night?

Brewster: I don't remember if I had to leave that night, but I got the sense he just wanted me gone. I'd never seen him so angry, in my experience. This was really clear. "You're not wanted here."

Q: And your mother?

Brewster: She wasn't part of that, and I don't remember the next morning. I don't remember if I stayed around a day, but I just remember I got out as quickly as I could. An old boyfriend from up at the family summer place was back from the Peace Corps. He was working in downtown

Albany. I'd been in touch with him. I called him and I said, "Can I come stay?" I told him what had happened. I said, "Can I come stay for a little until I can find a job?" and figured I'd get a place to live, and he said yes. Thank heavens. So I packed up and I went and I stayed with him, and then he helped me find a place in the neighborhood, so I was living down in the slum of Albany. And then I found a job as a short-order cook. Here I was without a college degree. I had a high school diploma. I had a two and a half years of college, one over in Greece and one in Barnard, but nothing completed, and I didn't know what the hell I wanted to do or what I was going to do. I was just floundering, absolutely floundering, and also in survival mode.

It took me years to realize how devastated I was that within a period of about six months I had been told to leave from two different communities; one was the Patriot Party and the other was my family. So I was without community, without support, and very grateful for the man who I knew from summer who was around and was willing to support me to get started. And part of the process is there had been a priest from the church I'd gone to that was working in the Episcopal church in the downtown section of Albany, the slum of Albany, and I became a part-time member of a staff for programs with kids. It was through that that I met the man that became my husband, and then my ex-husband, Howard Jan Johnson. I knew Howard from church, growing up. He was about a year-and-a-half younger than I was, so he knew one of my brothers better than me, but I knew of him growing up. And when I went to work at this community program that the man named Father Barrett was running, Howard was on leave from the [United States] Marine Corps, and we connected.

Q: And Howard was a person of color.

Brewster: Two lost souls. Yes, Howard was African-American. Two lost souls trying to connect. Howard is an incredibly intelligent and smart man. I would say he's dyslexic; enough that school was always a problem for him. Because he was intelligent, he was then acting out, because his intelligence wasn't getting recognized. And he went into the Marine Corps and got his GED [General Educational Development] in the Marine Corps, and, of course, they sent him over to 'Nam [Vietnam], and he was in the northern part of South Vietnam, so he was in the Bamboo Forest, fighting the Vietcong in the Bamboo Forest up in the northern part of South Vietnam. So he was a mess. Of course, neither one of us felt we were messes. We thought we were fine. So we got together, and shortly after he went back to duty, he was discharged. So when he got back, we continued our relationship and began living together. Lo and behold, I got pregnant, and this is now around the fall of 1970. In the meantime, there was some way in which I had had some contact with my parents. I'd had some contact with my father, because, at one point, he came to visit Howard and me living in our apartment in downtown Albany.

Q: In the slums?

Brewster: Yes, in the slums. So there was some connection. It was tenuous, really tenuous. And it was shortly after Howard and I found out I was pregnant, we actually were going out to tell my parents, and I think as we were getting out of the car, he asked me to marry him.

Q: Was this a surprise?

Brewster: Yes, actually it was, and I said yes. I thought, at that time, I was in love with him, and I think I also felt relieved. Part of me had not thought about at all what would be the implications of having a child and not being married, or having a child, trying to raise her on my own without ever having been married. None of that had I consciously been thinking of. I definitely remember a sense of relief when he asked me.

Q: Did you ever think about not having the child?

Brewster: Had he not asked me to marry him, I don't know what I would have thought of. No, neither he nor I, I don't remember ever discussing that, thinking about not having the child. In the discussions with my parents about getting married, that came up. They actually raised the issue of would I consider an abortion? It was interesting the dynamics with my parents and with his parents. His parents were divorced, and he had not had an ongoing relationship with his father at all. He saw him very sporadically. So my parents raised abortion, and my parents raised the issue of racially being a mixed couple and what that might be like, and were we strong enough to withstand that? That was some of the discussion. And there was another piece of the discussion I don't remember as consciously, but I do remember that there was a sense that they had wondering about the class difference, and the fact that he didn't have any college education whatsoever. Nothing indicated that he had any interest in intellectual things. A lot of my life had been always about intellectual things and the arts, and so forth. And then the other was just the

basic—I don't even know to describe—class differences of just how do you view things and cope, and what's important.

Q: Can you give an example?

Brewster: The example I gave earlier was the one that comes most to the forefront of my mind: where do I spend my time? How do I spend my time? He spent a lot of his time drinking, and that's how I was spending a lot of my time with him. Knowing who I was over time, that wouldn't be where I would choose to spend my time. I would spend my time trying to go to a museum, go to the theater, get involved with political things in Albany, and there was nothing about anything he'd done that would indicate that he would have ever done that. Now on his mother's and his grandmother's side of the family, they were really concerned about the racial piece too, and his grandmother asked me, she said, "So what's it going to be like for you to look at a brown baby?" and I remember going, totally floored by the question, "I'm going to love her." It was an oxymoron. It just didn't make any sense that anyone would ever ask. Of course, "She's mine. I'm going to love her." That was my unconscious and immediate reaction to the question, but there was real concern on both sides about this interracial and class difference in our backgrounds. Then the wedding was a very interesting experience, because I was not allowed to wear white, because I was pregnant.

Q: Not allowed by whom?

Brewster: By my parents, and they were paying for the wedding, and my father wouldn't walk me down the aisle, and that piece still hurts more than I think the white wedding dress. That piece really hurt. I didn't feel clearly a full support of the relationship, or of me in the relationship. I still feel a hurt in that one.

Q: So you got married.

Brewster: Got married. We were married in February, and Ericka was born. My daughter was born on June 13, 1971, the year we would have graduated, and my guess is graduation that year was probably the weekend before, would have been first weekend in June. So forty years ago when everyone else was graduating, I was about to give birth.

Q: You were graduating.

Brewster: I was graduating, right, my life graduating. I was graduating.

[Interruption]

Brewster: So actually it took me years to put this together. When everyone else was graduating, I was graduating by giving birth to my daughter. So I was stepping into a whole new way, which is motherhood, and also a recent marriage relationship, because we were officially married in

February, and had been living together probably only about three or four months before that. So everything was kind of new, so I was stepping into a whole new part of life.

Q: So describe your life. What was the marriage like? What was it like having a little baby? Did you work? Did you not work?

Brewster: Initially I wasn't working. Of course, having a baby was definite change, an added pressure in our lives. Howard was having difficulty finding a job, and had somehow gotten in touch with a truck-driving program, and they assured him—I'm sure he had discussions with them about, as an African American, were they really going to support him after he finished this program to then find a job? And this was one of those training programs you pay a lot of money for. I believe his mother helped finance that particular venture. And he went off, and he had to leave for a couple of months, and I think this was after Ericka was born, so maybe it was only a month of going to truck-driving school. Then, of course, they didn't do anything about helping him find a job, nothing at all, which was devastating for both of us. But I think particularly, and if I think back, [it was] really kind of devastating for him, that he was probably running up against racism as an adult and how it was going to impact his ability to be able to provide for his family in a way that he probably hadn't experienced before. He wasn't old enough for it to be that much of an issue.

I would say that whole experience kind of began a process—process is probably the wrong word, but a time of difficulty in us figuring out how to work through difficulties of life. I was twenty-

two and he was twenty, so we were young. We were babies. I think it was in the fall of '71—there were two pieces, and I don't remember which came first. We did become involved in some of the political activities in Albany. We got involved in a food co-op. It was one of those early local foods and getting them out to the community and fresh food and stuff, and so we became involved with that. And there was an organization called the Brotherhood—the Brothers, which we became involved with, so we began being involved in those activities. I somehow got involved with the [National] Welfare Rights Organization [NWRO] in Albany and became part of the group that founded a daycare center in the low-income [area] in Albany, which at that point, was both. In Albany, the low-income area was still both white and African-American. There was a mixing there. So I worked in that for a while, and I was the director of education programs for the Welfare Rights Daycare Center, and then, at some point, I began working for this opera company in Albany. My father was on the Board of the company, and I had been involved with theater in high school, and also I was involved with theater when I was at Barnard. They needed someone to help sell opera programs to schools and kind of a jack-of-all-trades person, so my father asked the director and asked me if I would do this, and I did. So I started working some time around six months after Ericka was born.

Q: Had you thought that you would be a working mother, or was this a surprise?

Brewster: It was a surprise. I had not thought I'd be a working mother. I thought I would be like my mom, who didn't work, so it was a surprise, a total surprise.

Q: Was it disappointing?

Brewster: I don't know if it was disappointing. It's a good question, great question.

Q: When you had to leave Ericka wherever you left her.

Brewster: That piece I remember not feeling really comfortable with, and feeling concerned about who I was and figuring out who I could trust and not trust, and never quite sure if it was a particular individual. There were a couple of times it was individuals I was leaving her with. I felt more comfortable when there was an experimental pre-kindergarten program that she went to for a while, and that I felt much more comfortable with her being in. And there are some things that I missed that I wish I had been around for and been able to be more of an influence—like language. There are some things with language sometimes. I think that at a critical point in her development, she just didn't pick up. There's some funny things with language, and I remember the people who were caring for her during the day and thinking, "I wonder if there's an influence here of what she was hearing around her, how you talk, how you speak."

Q: A delay of language or a grammatical—

Brewster: It's grammatical. In the long run, I don't know if Howard and I had stayed together what choice I would have made, because there's a part of me—or [if] I would have liked to have had more kids. There's a part of me that really enjoys the intellectual stimulation of working and

being with other people and working and collaborating and doing things, that had I just been a stay-at-home mom I don't know what would have happened [if] I would have had a couple of kids. I don't know if I would have felt different or not. It was kind of how I responded to my father kicking me out. I had to do this to survive. I was surprised, I remember. Probably I was angry with Howard on some level. I felt I had to go do this, that we needed money to live, and it wasn't happening. At one point, we had food stamps, Medicaid. I didn't want to continue to live in the slums. I wanted our income to grow so we could live closer to the kind of life I had grown up with. So on some level I probably was angry with him that in order for us to have a decent life, I needed to work, and also, if I think back, I had no idea how to support him in this process, how to support him as an African American man meeting racism, trying to find a job, trying to support his family.

Q: Did he find a job?

Brewster: I don't remember that he did.

Q: He didn't?

Brewster: I'm not sure I'm right on that, though. That's interesting. I don't have a memory that he did.

Q: But he didn't take care of Ericka in the day?

Brewster: No.

Q: So what did he do in the day?

Brewster: I don't remember.

Q: Maybe this might have had something to do with why you were angry with him?

Brewster: Well, yes, but I'm not sure I'm remembering correctly, Michelle, but I don't remember what he did or what job. I don't remember that he gave up looking, but I don't remember what he was doing to get a job. I just don't remember.

Q: Do you think it was all racism, that he couldn't find any job?

Brewster: Probably not, but hard to tell, and I don't know. There were things that he was coping with from his experience in Vietnam, which he didn't realize. For years during Fourth of July time period when firecrackers would go off, he would say his initial instinct was to drop to the ground, that his whole body had been trained to do that. Any kind of a sound like that, you hit the ground for safety. I don't think he could have even described it the time all the different pieces of him trying to adjust, to be back in civilian life, and how to cope, and how to live, and how to be. So he was struggling with that, and I have no idea how that would have come out on

interviews, an underlying anger or frustration that he had. And, again, a smart man, but he only had a GED, so not a lot of, other than real menial kind of work. It's interesting; I could never imagine him doing real menial work. It's very interesting. I never had that thought before. So I don't know, and I don't know if I'm just not remembering.

Q: How long did the marriage last?

Brewster: The marriage lasted three years, so by the time I was twenty-five, I was one of those statistics: child, married, divorced within three years.

Q: So then what did you do? This is 1975, right?

Brewster: We're talking about 1974 when I divorced. A couple of things were happening at that point. First of all, a lot of my involvement in the politics of Albany was coming in—the more radical, political activity was winding down. It was an interesting time, at least in Albany, around that. This was kind of near the end of the divorce and into the early part of being divorced, and the reason I mention it is it had everything to do where my time was being spent and what I began to do. One of the big pushes of the Brothers in Albany was to have a clinic built in the—there was a whole new section of town that was being developed called Arbor Hill, and to build a clinic in that part of town for medical services for the poor—one that was going to be offering medical services that were affordable. I was on the Board of that initially, and once the city and the Albany Hospital said yes, a lot of the energy went into making that happen. It

was very interesting to see the radical energy, now involvement, actually having to build, then going from ground up. We were talking to architects; what are the designs for the building? What are the services? You're having to define that, having to work through the process of managing that, and then hiring the staff, then getting it running.

Q: And, at the same time, you're still working for the opera company?

Brewster: I'm still working for the opera company, right. But when my involvement with the Arbor Hill Medical Clinic to wind down, I started exploring finishing my college education. I was taking a couple of courses at SUNY [State University of New York] at different times, and I explored Empire State College, which was a university without walls. At that point, it was new. That was a new idea, and people were experimenting, colleges were experimenting with that. And in the process of that [I] talked to an old guidance counselor from my junior high school, Milne, that my parents knew, and he said, "Why don't you consider going to graduate school?"

Q: Without graduating from college.

Brewster: Well, I'd never thought about that, and he said, "Well, there are some of them that are considering life experience as the equivalent of college education, and you certainly have the kind of life experience, and you're also working. You're working in a managerial position, so why don't you consider this?" I said, "Well, I'll try it," and, looking back, I would say I didn't

really think about, what is it that I want to do? I kind of went, what is it I need to do to support myself and to support Ericka?

Q: What are the possibilities?

Brewster: Right. Again, what do I need to do to support us? It became clear to me that I was going to be the main financial provider for Ericka and myself, that my ex-husband was not going to be a big wage earner, and I might even have difficulty collecting alimony from him anyway. So I got really practical, and I thought of business school, and I thought of law schools. So I think I called a couple of them ahead of time and I said, “Look it, since I’m going to be doing this, can I come talk to you about it? If I have a 50/50 chance, this is worth it for me to take this avenue rather than going through undergraduate. If I don’t, let me know, because then I’ll get my undergraduate degree.” So I went to Harvard [University], and I went to Columbia, and I think I had a phone conversation with Wharton [School of the University of Pennsylvania]. I went to Harvard Law. I don’t remember if I talked to Columbia Law, and the sense I got was that law schools weren’t as interested. Business schools were interested, and they said you have a 50/50 chance. You have to do well in the GMATs [Graduate Management Admission Test]. So that’s the route I took. I studied. I did the GMATs [Graduate Management Admission Test]. Business schools—I did well on the GMATs, law school it was the LSATs, and Harvard said no, Wharton said, “We want you to retake the GMATs. Your math was a little low. We know you’ll do fine if you retake them, but it’ll be six months.” Columbia said yes, so I went to Columbia Business School.

Q: Were you overwhelmed, or was it pretty comfortable?

Brewster: At Columbia Business School? I was overwhelmed. I moved back to New York City. Ericka was five, so I was raising a five to seven year-old while I was in business school. It was an incredible challenge, and there were some lifestyle changes the first year that were really hard. In Albany we'd been living in a two-family home. We had the whole first floor on a residential street with a little grass plot in the front and a grass plot in the back. She was riding her bike up and down the street by herself at five.

[Interruption]

It's 1974 or '73, I think. I left the opera company I had been working for in Albany, and I went to work for Saratoga Performing Arts Center [SPAC], a summer arts center. The Saratoga Performing Arts Center is a house, and a house doesn't produce creative works. A house books in companies that perform artistic works, such as ballets,, symphonies, plays, etc. It booked in the Philadelphia Orchestra. It booked in New York City Ballet. The house provides all of the support and all of the marketing promotion. That year, SPAC decided to co-produce a creative work with the Cincinnati Summer Opera with Boris Godunov. Because of my opera experience, I was the production coordinator on the side of SPAC, and it was an incredible experience and a wonderful experience, both expanding my own experience with actually the nitty gritty of producing a big opera. And also working with an incredible creative team, which I love to do.

With Capital Artists Resident Opera Company [CAROC] I had produced smaller versions of operas, because I was so involved with that over the summer, when SPAC had—and I had correctly predicted that they weren't going to make money on this production. It was very interesting. It was my first experience having to do a budget and think through: what are our costs, and what's our budget, and how do we do that? It was very interesting. I correctly, almost to the dollar, predicted what they would probably lose given the area's exposure to opera, and it was relatively new exposure through this opera company, CAROC, that I had been working for. And the staff was not really involved in productions. The staff at SPAC was all involved in the marketing, promotion. Someone made a budget cut. Guess who got cut? I got cut, and that was one of those experiences that led me, when I was looking for a job, to go, "I don't have a degree. I'm having difficulty moving even laterally without an undergraduate degree, even though I have this experience now." So the next job was working for the New York State Bicentennial Commission. I was working with teachers in the State Ed[ucation] Department.

[Interruption]

Some of that's from right before I went to Columbia Business School with some of what happened later, and in talking about the experience at Saratoga Performing Arts Center and doing that little budget piece was part of what—and I'd never done that before for a business, so it gave me some confidence in thinking, well, maybe I could actually survive or do well in business. It didn't seem hard; seemed kind of easy, just common sense. The other piece was the job I had with the New York State Bicentennial Commission working with this group of people in the

Education Department, and we created workshops for teachers in New York State to help them think about how to integrate into the curriculum, the fact that it's the bicentennial of New York State. These were the top minds in the New York State Education Department at that time. The people who were working there were the top minds and thinkers of education in New York State. I don't know about the country, although I think some of them were. The workshops were interactive, and they were experiential, and it was my first exposure to that kind of way of learning. I just loved it. I remember being thrilled by this and thinking, "Oh, my God, I wish I'd been able to learn that way." And that, I think, relates to one of the things that worked for me, has been so exciting for me in the work I do now with people, the Phoenix Rising Yoga therapy work.

Q: First of all, I want you to say what you have to say about what it was like to be in school, and were you also working?

Brewster: No.

Q: To be in business school full-time and have a small child and be on your own with a roommate.

Brewster: It was a change. It was a shift from my life before, and I think before I was talking about how Ericka—the first year was really hard for Ericka, because her freedom, physical movement, was limited. I didn't feel comfortable with her walking out into the street by herself,

and here in Albany she'd been able to go out in the front yard by herself. She'd been able to ride a bike up and down the street, so there was a lot of adjustment for her. She'd been really close to my parents in Albany. Her father had come back. She had a year of her father being back in town in Albany and seeing him every weekend, so all of these were changes that happened when we came to New York City. So her grandparents—and she'd had a pretty close relationship with her father's mother as well, pretty regularly, so this whole support network she had had was she no longer had, kind of on a weekly or a monthly basis. She was totally dependent upon me, and she was making new friends. I remember making a decision after looking at some of the public kindergartens in the area, one of which was the one on Morningside Heights that was new. It was part of all the political activity at the time in '70, '71, that this community school be built on Morningside Heights for grade school, and there were guards at the door.

Q: Guards?

Brewster: There were guards, and I suddenly went to myself, "I don't feel comfortable with my daughter going to a school where there are guards." So I made the choice to have her go to private school, which was a financial burden. It was a financial burden all through the years—to really support this for her. And it was hard to manage the study groups at business school, figuring out when to set up times to get together when I had to worry about feeding Ericka, taking care of Ericka, homework, all those kinds of things that we do as parents, so it was quite a balancing act that I was living.

The roommate actually, Renee Bradford, was just wonderful. She was just marvelous. It was one of those serendipitous things. I was looking at the directory of apartments in the neighborhood at Columbia Housing Office, and Renee happened to be standing in front of me. I have no idea why or how. She also happened to be African American, and I said, “Are you looking for an apartment?” She said, “Yes.” I said something about, “Well, I’m going to be going to business school. Are you interested in trying to find an apartment together?” Neither one of us really knowing each other, said yes, and she was the one that knew of the apartment in the building where I now live at 104th & West End Avenue. So together we moved in, and she had not been married. She didn’t have a child. She was willing to move in with somebody who did. She was a trained social worker—she worked in probation in Chicago. Actually, it worked really well. We got along really well. We could give each other space. We came together when we needed to. She was really helpful with Ericka sometimes and coping with some of Ericka’s difficulty adjusting to moving and my tension, and she was really helpful to both of us, and we’ve kept in touch over the years.

Q: And after business school you went into banking?

Brewster: While I was in business school, I actually started a real estate development firm with a guy I was in a relationship with and had hoped that that would actually take off and support me, and unfortunately, it didn’t. We actually had the vision in 1978 to be buying property in Harlem and developing it. It was 842 St. Nicholas Avenue, was the property we were looking at, and unfortunately, the last piece of investment fell apart. We actually had the loan commitment.

From a standpoint of looking for a job, I had not done a lot of work looking for a job, hoping that this would happen, so that was kind of devastating for me. I felt devastated actually, and suddenly started scrambling around looking for a job.

On the other hand, from an emotional standpoint, had I been in business, had the business been successful, had I been in business with this man, it would have been worse breaking up with him later on. So, from that standpoint, this was a very good thing that happened. So it was more finding a job at Citibank at the last moment. The job started in credit cards. At that point, credit cards could only be offered in your local banks, by your local banks. Deregulation, the first stage of deregulation of the financial services was allowing credit cards to be offered nationwide by one bank. Citibank was the first to do it. They had just finished their first waiver, and I came in, and I was helping them. I was helping this unit. It was business reporting analysis. I did a lot of marketing. I did market research. I managed a little group that was doing market analysis for them. So I then began to move around a little bit in Citibank, always, though, in new product development. I never worked as a lender. I never worked as a branch manager. I was doing the marketing for new products.

Q: And how long did you do this?

Brewster: I did this for about twelve years.

Q: And so this takes us to the '80s, this, '86.

Brewster: This takes us to the '80s. And so it was about seven years when we get to the '80s, 1986, so started there in 1978, so '86 was about eight years. And what began, at that point, was what I call my kind of midlife crisis that I went through, and another shift in my life. Within three years, all the underpinnings of my life disappeared, fell apart. So the first thing that happened was the man I had started the property development firm with, I had been living with. We just continued to live together, and I broke up that relationship, and when I broke it up, it had a very traumatic ending, and it took me two years to really make the full break. And in that process, when I started saying, "This isn't working for me. I need us to end this relationship," he became much more emotionally threatening, overtly threatening, than he had been in the relationship.

The relationship, when I look back had been emotionally abusive, but not this overt. This became, if you're not with me, you're against me. I met him in business school. I say that to say things, I would think that there probably was some truth to them. His story had been that he had been in intelligence on very high level, covert intelligence operations. So when I started to end the relationship and he started making these statements, there was behind it a pretty impressive threat that he wouldn't think anything about, if I really broke it up, that he would kill me, or kill Ericka. And he told me enough stories about some of the stuff that he'd been involved with that—in part, I say that to also say that emotionally I think I was beginning the process of beginning to step into another level of me going, "This is who I am, and this isn't working, and I really need to do something about it," but meeting what felt like incredible opposition that was

frightening. I really did feel frightened. Then the last two months, there were two incidents when he started to get physically violent, and that was the final straw. I do know enough to know that this pattern will continue. I've got to get out.

Q: How did you do that?

Brewster: How did I actually do it without making this another long story? I finally said, "You've got to get out. When can you make it happen?" He got really, really upset, and so upset that I called relatives of mine, my mother's cousin, that lived in Tenafly, New Jersey. How it happened is he started to hit me again, and hit me in a way that said that this really was going to be—the relatives from Tenafly, New Jersey came, and I packed up myself, and I packed up Ericka, and we went to Tenafly, New Jersey. I didn't know, at that point, how long it would be, and this was my co-op apartment, and he was not on the deed. He was not part of that. But I'd already talked to a lawyer; it was not a good idea for me to leave the apartment. If I could stay there, I should stay there.

This said to me this was an emotional environment that neither Ericka nor I should be in. It was getting more abusive. So that began a process then of me having to take him to court and get him out of the apartment, and he tried to get me to come back, and it took from October of '86 until June of '87 for us to get back in the apartment. And in that process, I went through a job change at Citibank, because I had to stop working in order to emotionally recoup. I probably went close to a nervous breakdown. At one point, he very clearly threatened Ericka and me with

death. It was a very overt statement about it. So that happened. I broke up that relationship, and that was traumatic, and at that point, I said to myself, “I chose to be with this man. What was going on with me that I chose to be with him?” and I went into therapy. I was very clear. I knew I had chosen this, and I needed to work on whatever it was about me that was choosing someone that would be that detrimental to me, and then also potentially to Ericka. So I started in therapy, and I did find another job in Citibank, that I actually really liked, and I enjoyed the man I was working for.

Q: Through the therapy.

Brewster: So this job was about two years or so. It’s a long story, but I had to sell my first apartment, the one I’d been in since I graduated and went to business school, to get equity out to pay off the lawyers, and to pay off Ericka’s high school tuition. So we had to move about a year-and-a-half after we had gotten back into our apartment. In June of ’87, we got back to the apartment, and by the end of ’88, we were moving into this apartment I now live in. So we had a big move happen. The other piece, Ericka went off to college. I mean, now my life was changing. I wasn’t spending all my time thinking about my daughter. And then the last piece that happened is I got laid off from this job at Citibank that I had loved. What happened is, it was a joint venture between two different areas of Citibank. The area I was working in got bought out by the other area. I didn’t really get along with the new management of the product, and unconsciously I couldn’t deal with it. I absolutely couldn’t deal with it, and I did things that would have resulted in anybody laying you off.

Q: Really?

Brewster: I needed to be at work at 8:30 in the morning, and I couldn't get there at 8:30, and this was clear. I was now on the foreign exchange trading floor. It starts work at 8:30 in the morning. I didn't have a lot of leeway here, and there was nothing I was able to do to get myself there. I've forgotten what other piece I did, but I think underneath it, I felt totally out of control and totally devastated that a working relationship where I had been flourishing, I wasn't flourishing [anymore]. I didn't know how to make it work, and I was acting out, in a way, and so I got laid off from Citibank. In that final piece, I went into what I call about four years of the dark night of the soul where literally I was not only depressed, but I lived through some years of what I call somatizing. Every day I would wake up and my solar plexus was like someone was banging me with a hammer. I went on job interviews I should have gotten, and I wasn't getting them, because I just wasn't present.

And in addition to the therapy, I was now, through the church I was going to, bringing in my spiritual life. So there was a prayer group at the church, so I started becoming involved with, and some silent retreats that I went on. There was some support, but even with the support, there's about four years I literally had no idea what I wanted to do. I can remember in the office of a career counselor at Citibank her trying to get me to do a visioning exercise. It's like, what you can envision yourself being or doing five years, ten years down the road? Nothing. And [I was] crying. I just had no sense of where I was going or what I was doing. And as I was

struggling, and I had got part-time jobs as a consultant, or I had nine months working, helping to get a gift product into the market. I had fun learning about this new industry—not the new industry but, for me, an industry I didn't know about, and learning about it, but nothing was sticking. At some point, a friend said, "Well, why don't you take yoga? I think you'd really like it," and my first response was, "Yoga? What's yoga? I don't know anything about it." Also, my first response was, "Oh, my God, how does this fit with Christianity?" And I think it took me a year to take a class.

The other thing that was happening, which I think is a really important piece of the spiritual development, is the woman who was particularly in charge of the prayer group and the climate in this Episcopal church I was in was very open. There was not a mainline traditional—Christianity is the only way. There was an openness that was part of this whole exploration as well, so eventually I opened up, and I took the yoga class and fell in love with yoga. I just fell in love with it, and that piece brought my body into my whole growth. And the woman who was my teacher, at that point, trained in this work called Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy that integrates body, mind, and spirit in one session. For me, it was incredibly powerful healing that I began to experience and changes by having all three parts come together and be addressed. And interestingly, thinking back to that experience working with the New York State Bicentennial Commission and the teachers that the sense of experience and the body piece of learning and changing, that brought that connection in, that I was experiencing a kinesthetic way of shifting emotionally.

Q: And now you are?

Brewster: Now I've been subsequently trained in the work—Phoenix Rising Yoga Therapy—and the last twenty years has been working with people, individually, inviting them into a change process by integrating all body, mind and spirit. The piece I did finally get about myself in this four-year period, during one of those nights of literally screaming at God going, “What the fuck do you want me to be doing? Make it clear. I can't stand this ambiguity. I don't want any ambiguous answers. Tell me. What is important for me to be doing in this lifetime?” Two pieces came, and I don't think they were on the same night, because I remember screaming at God like this for quite a number of months. One is, empathy is a key characteristic, and I would now change that to compassion—which I think even compassion is broader, but it's a key quality or characteristic of me in that I need to be finding ways to express and share with others. And the other that came to me is, what matters to me are matters of the soul.

That's all that matters to me are matters of the soul, and that my work is about helping people hear for themselves what their soul is calling them to do. Anything can be about the soul. There are people, I'm convinced, whose calling from the soul is to be in business, to create things by making things, who can see connections of how pieces, like raw materials here and something there, work together, And there are people whose expression of the soul is telling stories, and the people whose expression of the soul is playing music or videoing or editing. Anything can be an expression of the soul, but what my work is about is helping people find what it is for themselves

and to live it, so what they're living is a really creative and meaningful and fulfilled sense from within themselves.

Q: That's very profound. When, in your life, have you been happiest?

Brewster: I would say in the past twenty years.

Q: Since finding your calling.

Brewster: Right, since finding this calling is when I've been the happiest, absolutely. I would say within that the moments—I'm thinking of a particular man, but it's with anyone—those moments [that] a connection happens.

Q: Between two people.

Brewster: Between two people, between people in a group, seeing it on stage, those moments when the sense is—and I find a lack of words—but there's a connection, there's an expression that is happening all at once. There's a sense of a life, energy—energy isn't the word—but a sparkle, and that's when I would say those kinds of moments. I've had them with clients, moments when it's just—what's the word to describe it? We are simultaneously in tune, and there's an exchange happening, and I am supporting them in a way that other moments I'm not able to support clients. The magical moments, okay. The magical moments are when I realize

that I feel the happiest. I've had some magical moments by myself—not many. I'm not a person that really likes to be alone. I'm an extrovert, and so most of my magical moments I think of being in connection with people. That's when they've happened.

On a sailboat, I've had magical moments. In nature, I'm thinking of a sailboat, being on the bow of the boat, and it's a gorgeous, sunny day. I've had moments skippering a boat. Again, it's like everything is just perfectly lined up in those seconds—I'm on a tack, and right in the slot of the wind. Again, it's just things line up, and they're magical in that moment.

Q: If you could go back to your first day of walking through the Barnard gates and tell that girl, that little, young Katherine Brewster walking through the gates for the first time, if you could give her one piece of wisdom, what would it be?

Brewster: I can't give her one.

Q: You only get one.

Brewster: I get one? Love yourself. Trust yourself.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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