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Professor Robert McCaughey  
Making Barnard History: The Research Process  
March 30, 2015

Transcript of Karla Jay's Interview

*Karla Jay, PhD, was a Distinguished Professor of English Literature and Women's and Gender Studies at Pace University. Currently she is retired.*

*The interview took place on Friday, March 27, 2015 at Barnard Hall, 4<sup>th</sup> floor. An audio recorder was used. The interview was approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes long.*

*Summary:*

- Binocular rumor: two girls expelled because they were making out. Sends a clear message young gay people.
- Excellent academic education, one of the best
- 1960s = Pre-Women's Lib and Pre-Gay Liberation
- Had a boyfriend from Yale
- First homophile group at Columbia founded in the '60s. Described as a "boys club"
- Isolated, closeted, went to lesbian bars but feared bar raids.
- When did it become easier to be out? After Stonewall.
- Student protests: 1) War in Vietnam 2) Columbia going to Morningside Park. No gay perspective on either
- Women in general, not just lesbians and feminists, were absent from the academic curriculum.
- Unable to join social groups/clubs at Barnard for mainly two reasons: 1) a commuter 2) working to put herself through school
- Trans admission should be decided by the students of today

00:00

**I was hoping that you could start by telling me a little bit about your time at Barnard. I took a look at your book and I'm going to ask you some things that are in there just because I think they're interesting parts of your story and I want them to be a part of the interview.**

As I said in my memoir, I came to Barnard and it was during freshman orientation that there was this story going around about the two young women...I think it was Reid Hall...who had been spotted by someone across the street at Columbia with binoculars. They were making out in the dorm room, and they were expelled. And this Peeping Tom is fine. There's an interesting postscript to this story because, you know, I thought about it when I was writing my memoir, and I couldn't find anything. I guess everything in there is research, and I wonder in the memoir whether it was just some kind of story people told to send out a warning. Then, I came back after my memoir came out, which

was '99...sometime in the first decade of the century...and I was a guest at the Lesbian/Bisexual Tea. I did a talk there they had with Alumnae. And a woman came up to me and she said oh I read your memoir and I knew one of those women. You speculate whether it was true or not, and it was a true story. They were caught and that did happen...that they were caught like that, that somebody was looking in their window. So I thought oh how horrible. I even felt worse that it was true...that it had happened to someone.

**And how well known was that rumor?**

It was certainly [well-known] among the upper class people. It had been a fairly recent story...from the year before, the year before that. And it was circulating among the students because the freshmen at that time were all housed in Reid Hall. These two women...at least one of them would have been a freshman. That was the point of the story.

During orientation since all the students hadn't arrived yet, we were all doubled- and tripled-up in Reid Hall. Barnard had a rule where they put this pin in the map...I think it was 50 or 75 miles. If you fell inside this little circle on the map, you had to commute. They did not have enough dorm space. They put us all in the dorm and we—the freshmen—were all there. That's how I met a lot of people I remain friends with to this day. I think it was a lot harder to meet other students as a commuter. That was one of the things that was a little more difficult...where in many ways I felt like quite the outsider at this school.

I really feel that I got a first rate education here. Most of the classes were excellent. There were one or two classes that were a little boring, but that's not bad if you think about an average. But unlike the average college student in the '60s, I was working. I had a scholarship from New York State, which is different from the ones they offer today. In those days the Regions Scholarship had a prize. Only a few people got it, so it was really quite a lot of money depending on your income bracket. But I still needed books. I moved out of my home and needed to pay for my apartment and things like that...so I was working. So I didn't have time to socialize much with other Barnard students at a time when the major way that students connected was through clubs.

5:24

The other thing...at that time I wasn't a feminist. I wouldn't have recognized the word. The only clubs I knew about were clubs connected with my major. I was a French major. Most of the young women who were French majors back then had gone to boarding school—in France or something (*laughs*). I really felt out of my league in that regard, too. I had never been abroad, so it seemed like they had come from this different world. I was really good at reading and writing, but I was not fluent in contemporary French. I had been fluent in 18<sup>th</sup> century French. They taught us in school...maybe 19<sup>th</sup>. I probably could have done Victor Hugo. I knew some words like...I don't know how far forward we went. In many ways, it was really a very different experience.

### **How would you describe the culture of Barnard during the 1960s?**

In terms of...now I know you're doing this lesbian thing...in terms of...I think that there was a lot of homophobia. Part of it...I meant to look it up but you could look it up yourself...was that Mary McCarthy had come out with this novel called *The Group*. And in *The Group* there was one character...it was made into a movie but the movie wasn't out yet. And in the group there was a lesbian character. And Mary McCarthy had gone to Vassar, as I recall. Underlined copies circulated, that was our version of the e-book. Somebody read the book and underlined the best parts so you could skip ahead. Then you get a copy and all of these juicy parts were underlined. And then someone actually did say something at one point...that if you're going to write a novel or a memoir—like that—please leave Barnard out of it (*laughs*). Because it was really a pretty racy book. Just apart from the lesbian aspect, and I know that someone who was actually in the class of '69. Her name is Monique Raphael. She calls herself Monique Raphael High...she's been remarried after that. I know that she has been working a novel in the late '60s. She's been working on a memoir about her life at Barnard...

### **During the late '60s?**

...Yes, during the late '60s. She was not a gay. She was a friend of mine. We actually double-dated a little bit.

In 1967 there was a homophile group that started across the street at Columbia. It was the first one in the country. And a lot of jokes were made about it at Barnard. There were always a lot of jokes made about Columbia men...like the longer you were at Barnard the better the men at Yale looked. The other one was kind of a homophobic joke was that of course Columbia would have the first gay group in the country. They didn't use the word gay in the 1960s. They used the word homophile or homosexual. And even the word homosexual wasn't really used in the New York Times regularly until later

And I did go over there...they were all men. I think that at one point Martha Shelly belonged to the group, but she wasn't there at the time we were. There were only men. They met in some little basement room. I'm pretty sure it was over in New Hall, which now actually has a name and it was the dorm that was on the corner of 114<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. And it hadn't...they were waiting for a donor to get a name on it. There was some basement room somewhere...we met either there or in another building. I later became friendly with some of the guys who were in that group. Particularly one of the founders was Steven Donaldson, who was usually called Donnie. He was a very interesting—and also a very strange—man. I met them because there was a gay and lesbian seminar for faculty members over at Columbia that Eugene Rice started probably in the 80s. Donny and this other gut...who's also in my memoir...his name will come back to me...they were kind of habituaries of Columbia. There's always people who come to a campus and never leave. This is true at Columbia and Pace...they go to school here, they get a job here...they never leave the campus. I've had students like this.

[Steven Donaldson] did go to jail during the Vietnam War and that's where he became really strange. He shaved half his body...because the men in the prison who were gay, they would shave them. I don't know if you'd ever heard of these practices...in order to rape them or have sex with them because they would be more female-like. In solidarity with that experience and other people he shaved but he shaved just half of his body. It was so weird because it was like you'd be sitting next to him and one arm was shaved down to the fingertips. He was very hairy...so the other arm was like a bear. It was very strange...having one half of his head and half of his...I don't think it would work. So those were some of the guys I met over there.

12:44

**Did you feel like there was a place for you in that community?**

No. Oh, absolutely not. I felt it was it was like a boys club—absolutely—and there was no place for me. I felt that there were definitely some gym teachers, as in P.E. teachers, I felt were lesbians. I felt that they just really...they were totally closed-off to any sort of question or anything like that. You had to take P.E. three hours a week if you were a freshman so you take a lot of these different classes...

**These are teachers at Barnard?**

...These are teachers at Barnard. Yeah, everything was separate. You had to petition to take a class at Columbia, and you had to prove that there was no equal class at Barnard. You had to prove that there was some incredible scheduling conflict...it was very difficult. For me, the only courses I took that were Columbia were some advanced Russian courses, which were not offered here...in those days. I don't think there was a Russian major yet, and also I took some advanced Religion courses, which were not offered here either in those days...so you could take them there. Other than that all of the classes were quite segregated, and you did not see Columbia men here in class.

So, no it wasn't welcoming. I felt often that the P.E. professors were—if anything—volunteering a fake life. In fact, one of them who I kind of remembered saying something about her boyfriend...I later ran into her at a lesbian bar. And that kind of thing. People felt that they had to say nothing...people often people felt that they had to cover who they were. There were lesbian and homosexual professors here. I had no idea who they were. They weren't out. Kate Millet, Catherine R. Stimpson—both of whom I later became friendly with. Kate Stimpson had a partner in a different department. I don't know how out she was...I'm not going to out her. I had the partner for class, and I had one of them for one day then I had to change my schedule. So it was a very isolating and also a very frightening experience to be here as someone who felt different.

I went to bars because the legal age of drinking was eighteen in the '60s. That wasn't a very conducive way of life either. You know...there were no coffee houses; there was no community center. There was absolutely no place—no clubs—at all for young lesbians in the 1960s to meet anybody.

17:03

**You mentioned in your book the threat of lesbian bars being raided. How real was that risk?**

Oh, it was...I know people who were arrested during the '60s for various things...either they were in the car and the cop pulled them over and didn't like their clothing they were arrested. Or they were caught in a bar raid...because the bars were owned by the mafia and the bars hadn't paid people off. These bar raids and people being arrested...the bars in Buffalo, there was a history of resistance to the bar raids that goes back to the '30s and '40s even. It was reported in a book called *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* that talks about resistance in these bars that went way back in Buffalo...where they had these working class women in bars. When the police came in they would fight back or the men came in, but here in New York...in part because most of us were more afraid of the mafia than the police, to tell you the truth (*laughs*)...I think there was very little resistance to the bars and the condition in the bars. We knew it was a risk. You tried to have I.D., look at your clothing before you went so you wouldn't get arrested as a cross dresser—which was illegal. You could be arrested for masquerading if you didn't have three pieces of women's clothing, so you had to count your clothing before you went out. But the other risk was—so you had a bra, you had women's underpants, you had a blouse that buttoned the correct way...because unisex clothing didn't exist. Still the risk was if you got arrested, or stopped, they'd take you out one by one and let you go...they still would write your information down. If you had a Barnard I.D. on you, or something like that, they would call the school. Or they would have called your parents if you lived at home and that was the address...

**...And that would have been followed by consequences.**

Yes, and if you had a job and you had a work I.D., they would have called your employer. If you were married you could lose your children. There were many consequences. There were no legal protections at all for lesbians and gay men and transgendered people. None...for anybody.

20:04

**So that being said were there any students were know as being out on campus?**

I knew of none. I mean I know people now who were lesbian then, but we did not know each other. We knew people who were partiers over at the fraternities...that was kind of known, but no I didn't know anybody who even hinted that she might be a lesbian or even bisexual. Nobody used that word. Experimenting...all these little code words. People didn't even hint, didn't even say, well, did you ever read *The Well of Loneliness*? Did you like it? Nobody even did that. There was nothing. Nothing—silence, you know.

**Even when you went to bars? Did you go by yourself on in groups?**

No, I went by myself. My roommate did not know that's where I was going. I had a straight roommate from Barnard. I think she had no idea. I had a boyfriend...conveniently from Yale. I probably saw him once a month or twice a month for four years. We met freshman year. In retrospect, I think that he was gay. At the time I thought he was such a gentleman, I was so pleased (*laughs*)..He never tried to sleep with me. I thought oh, wow, he's such a gentleman! Who knew in college, you know? But when you look back you think boy there was something unusual and weird about him...that he didn't at least try.

**Do you think he knew that you were a lesbian?**

No, I don't think so. I was very feminine, I had long hair, and I kept growing it longer and longer. I wore make-up, and I don't think *anybody* knew. As I thought people might be more suspicious I put on more and more make-up. [I thought to myself] I'll hide it.

**When did you come out? When did you first identify as someone who is gay?**

I felt emboldened. I joined the Women's Liberation Movement as a result of these uprisings here at Columbia. These men on the left were really just as bad as the men on the right when it came to women. I would strongly suggest you look at the documentary that's been playing around. It's called *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*. In that they talk about how one of the women was at an anti-war rally in which Marilyn Webb was talking about how men should support women's rights, too. During this huge anti-war rally, the men started screaming for her to be taken off the stage—and raped. Guys yelled, "Take her off the stage and fuck her."

It was things like those events that helped start Women's Liberation. It really was a big help for us. They were really pretty awful. The other person who wrote about this in a way that puts a finger on it was Andrea Dworkin. She was a very controversial figure, but she says that men on the right think that women are the property of one man and that the man owns the woman totally...that he has dominion over her, the religious right. But the men on the left, they think that the woman is everybody's property. The woman—especially after the advent of birth control—should sleep with everybody. For those men, they would call a woman a "dyke" whether or not she was a lesbian in an effort to coerce her into sleeping with them.

When I was in the women's movement, I would have considered myself bisexual. I finally found other women who started to speak out about lesbian issues. Finally there were women like me, not women I had nothing in common with except sexual orientation. I felt more comfortable speaking up about my own desire, and then when Stonewall happened I joined the Gay Liberation Front. Finally, here was something that spoke to me, and there were other feminists there.

Some of the feminists were homophobic also. And they still are. It really is surprising to me. Because around this film there has been a lot of chatter among the people in this film,

including me, and I don't participate in the chatter. Interestingly enough, there was a bad review. When the word *excess* was used to describe the women's movement, a number of the women on this chatter...in response to the reviews, they all blamed Rita Mae Brown. I thought—*what?* And I don't get into it. I don't have the energy. I don't want to be fighting with other women, and that's how I survived this long. To me the battle out there is with the patriarchy.

*(Someone knocks on the door. Brief interruption.)*

27:03

So the '60s really wasn't a conducive time to be a lesbian. After I graduated from Barnard I did discover there was a group called The Daughters of Bilitis. To me, as someone who was twenty-one, they seemed kind of old to me. I remember how people look. When you're that age. And now I kind of laugh because I'm far older now than those women were, but you don't know that when you're twenty-one years old. You go to meet a group of women—they're forty—and you think oh my god, they're like antiques in here (*laughs*). That's how the world looks when you're a teenager or twenty.

**I know that you've talked a little bit about the student protests and social changes that were happening on campus. What did it feel like to see that change happen but then to feel like the minority group you identified with wasn't a part of that and wasn't being respected?**

There were two issues: the war against Vietnam and a Columbia University gym to be built in Morningside Park, which is still in retrospect an amazing bit of chutzpah. They were going to put a gym in a public park. In regard to those issues...maybe today I think that there is always an LGBTQ perspective on everything, but in those days it never would have occurred to me that there was a perspective on that.

The only perspective that was relevant to the war in Vietnam was, again in retrospect when we look back at that era...being homosexual was one of the last good outs to get out of the draft. While there's no draft now, it's never completely gone. There's a draft in the Civil War, which caused riots, draft riots. The other part of this is that when there are drafts, the army starts to cut across class and social lines. You get out of college and your next stop is Vietnam or Afghanistan. If there were a draft, we would not have been in Iraq and Afghanistan for so long because the students who were entitled on university campuses, particularly white middle class students, would not have put up with this. They would have been marching in Washington, there would be throwing Dow Chemical and war recruiters and all these other people off the campuses. And the war would have probably come to swifter end.

In retrospect, there really wasn't much of a feminist or gay perspective because women, even now, women are just starting to make their way into combat positions, and that's usually fighter planes where they're from a distance. Maybe they're a few test elite units. Gays are in the military, but it was not something that was really...even when there was a

Gay Liberation movement...it was not something that was on our horizon. It wasn't something that was goal in the '60s first to get people into the military and the police force...to be killers...we would have looked at it that way. The first thing women were thinking wasn't oh let's see if we can get women on the front lines?

**So when did it become easier to be out? At what point in your life?**

After the Stonewall Uprising things started to change quite rapidly with the advent of radical gay and lesbian groups. Those groups were so different from the groups that had preceded them. The homophile groups were quite apologetic about being gay and lesbian. Their goal was acceptance. To quote Martha Shelly for the radical LGBTQ group, it was more like we'll never go straight until you go gay. We were not into being homogenized into the society, and that's a perspective that has now faded again...things go in cycles.

**Now on campus there's a group called Q, and it's a lesbian activist group. In the '70s, or maybe even in the '60s, it was known as L.A.B., or Lesbians at Barnard...**

Yes, I remember that...

**I wanted you to talk a little bit about what that looked like, even if you weren't a part of it.**

I have no idea. I'd heard of it. I'm the kind of person, to be honest, who...aside from the Lesbian/Bi Tea I'm the kind of person who...I just don't go to reunions. I don't go to high school reunions. I don't think I've ever been to a Barnard reunion. I don't go to reunions at the Guide Dog School either, even though that's an intense experience. The first time you're living there with a small group of people for twenty-six days. So, it's just me. I'm not backward looking; I know nothing about that group.

35:37

The only story that I wanted to share with you about the '70s is...and I think you could find this in the Barnard Alumnae magazine, but I don't know how. There was some point at Barnard where you thought things really have to change. In 1973, there was a group called the Gay Academic Union. Some of our earliest conferences were here at Columbia in the 1970s. I'm pretty sure they were over at the Law School, but you'd have to check. I'm pretty sure you could find a program at the New York Public Library or one of the libraries here. A lot of colleges and universities were forming gay and lesbian alumnae associations. I'd had this really isolating experience. They'd started to form something for undergraduates, and I thought wouldn't it be nice if there were a Lesbian Alumnae Association. So I wrote to the Barnard Alumnae Association—this is a wonderful story about the '70s—and I wrote a letter. Now, I think it was clear because I am an English Professor, and I can write a letter. I said I'm a graduate of Barnard, and by that time I had several books and they knew my books. I said I would be very interested in finding other people who are interested in developing or founding a Lesbian Alumnae Association at Barnard. And you know what they put in the Alumnae Magazine? *Karla Jay wants to*



*find others of her kind.* They put a little note. It was like I was looking for a date (*laughs*). Oh, I was so angry! I was furious. It looked like I was looking for a hot date. I mean, honestly, the way they phrased it...*to find others of her kind*...or something like that. *Looking to locate other lesbians*...it didn't say for what!

**So I'm assuming that the alumnae association didn't form...**

Not at that time, no. That was it. I said, oh, forget it. That's purposely misconstruing what I had to say in a very insulting way.

**I know that were an English Professor. Does your sexuality ever influence you academic studies?**

I'm not sure what you're asking. You mean in my life?

**When you were at Barnard were they're classes that focused on lesbian issues, although my guess that they weren't? Or when you were pursuing your PhD did you ever read works that focused on lesbianism and sexuality?**

I feel like I went to Barnard in the Jurassic Era. Interestingly enough Barnard turned out an amazing number of really famous women, particularly in areas like Anthropology and entertainers, like Joan Rivers and Martha Stewart. People who were majors in various fields. At the same time the people who were here prior to feminism...women were absent from the curriculum. I'm trying to think whether there was any course in which we read women writers. As a French major, certainly as a Russian minor, there was not a single Russian woman we ever read. Ever. As a French major we read *The Letters of Madam de Staël*. As a writer that was it. There were characters like Madame Bovary. She dies, she cheats and she has to commit suicide. You read Anna Karenina and she cheats and gets run over by a train. No, I mean this place was really...a lot of the professors were male. Some of the professors did not like women. They really didn't.

**How could you tell?**

It wasn't hard to tell. I took one class that I dropped in which the professor was slapping us. It was an Italian class, and if you got the wrong answer, he'd go behind and cuff you in the head. You touch me once—that was it, even then. It had nothing to do with being a feminist, but that was just it. I complained and [Barnard] said, *oh no*, and did nothing. I just had to take an extra class the next semester. He never touched me, but it really upset me that he was cuffing the other students, and I felt it was only a matter of time until it was my turn, so I dropped the class.

There was another guy who really didn't like women. I knew later that he was a gay man, and he didn't like women...but he did change. The Gay Liberation Movement came along and this particular guy...he's long dead. I'm pretty sure he died of HIV...but he really did change. He was one of those gay men who really did not care for women. Some of the men who taught here...not a lot of them, most of the men were really great.

My advisor Serge Gavronksy was wonderful. A lot of these guys were really great, but some of them were sexist, a few of them preyed on students, they were notorious. Every college has them. That's true everywhere, every university.

Some of them...you got the impression that they felt slighted by having to teach women. You just had that feeling that they would have rather been at Columbia. Not too many of them, just a few. The women were generally really wonderful about teaching women. There were a few who were in a misguided profession, you felt. They weren't great professors.

**And you can sense that.**

Oh, yeah. Can't you tell when somebody would rather be doing research or just isn't interested in you? You can tell.

There was kind of a common experience depending on your major and depending on how many professors there were. There were women professors who helped you out. There was one woman professor here who took me under her wing and got me my first job. She got me a wonderful job. Her name was Danielle Haase duBosc, and she got me a job because I could speak French. A literary agent said I'm dealing with French authors, so I'd be there picking up the phone and Jean-Paul Sartre would be at the other end. So there were nurturing professor too...and men too. There wasn't necessarily a gender bias.

44:59

**Did you keep in touch with any friends or professors from Barnard? If so, how did they react when you came out?**

I would run into Serge Gavronksy a number of times at conferences because I was in the Modern Language Association, and Catherine R. Stimpson and I...as I've said, we became friends through the Modern Language Association. She went onto a really glorious career.

I had a few friends at Barnard, one of whom I was on the freshman floor with and then moved in with, Margaret Groesbeck. She and I are still good friends to this day. I'm still in touch with some of the people I met but only a few...maybe two or three. I know other people who went to Barnard who I didn't know when they were here.

**Did those people who you did know, did they react positively when you came out?**

I think that they were surprised, and I think there may have been a period of adjustment for them. I think in the '70s it was kind of a strange idea. I have to say our friendship endured. Nobody ever said oh I really hated it when you came out. Mostly they said they were really surprised.

**When did you first realize that you weren't straight?**

As a small child, I realized I was different. I didn't have words for this, and I don't think I ever had words. We were really a different generation. Even in high school when I was experimenting with girls in my neighborhood and stuff...we didn't have words for it. If we had any word it was experimenting.

Finally I came across some French literature in which there were women who slept with other women. We read things like *The Nun*. But those words are very modern. It's really interesting because my generation really grew up in isolation and ignorance.

I don't think kids do today. I'm often approached by kids with projects in middle school and high school. It's really quite amazing...and they know who they are. I think, wow, I find it really quite wonderful. I just hope they're just open because...I don't know if you really know who you are when you're twelve...but I don't know how mature how a twelve year old is today. I can't judge that for others.

### **It's different for everyone...**

Yeah, a twelve year old today is a lot more mature than I was. My school...we were very sheltered. I'll give you a story to tell you how sheltered we were. In my school we were locked in during the day. When spring would roll around, the Good Humor man would roll around the locked fence. Of course, the school had a cafeteria because we were locked in there and had lunch at school, but we like the Good Humor guy. He would sell us the Good Humor through the fence.

They didn't want us to buy them, so they had two teachers give us a lecture. I guess, every teacher was supposed to give a little talk. One gave this obscure lecture about...we had this very hip teacher who got fired for teaching John Updike (*laughs*). She just said keep your grubby little hands out of the fence, but the teacher who was obscure said don't buy things from that man outside the fence he could be selling you drugs. So we got together at lunch and we put our heads together. We thought he was sticking Aspirin in the Good Humor ice cream bar because we couldn't imagine for 25 cents what he could stick in there. We couldn't think what the danger was that could be in the Good Humor ice cream bar. Today it would be a warning...*look out for the Salmonella*. We had no idea what they were talking about, and I don't know if they knew...whether they were referring to pot, or if they thought he could stick heroine in for 15 cents and get people addicted. We really didn't know.

51:01

### **Can you talk a little bit about leaving home and then your decision to go to college and your decision to go to Barnard?**

My options were really limited by my family's finances. I could only go to college where I could commute. I applied to Barnard, Brooklyn College and NYU. Those were the only...people didn't apply to a lot of colleges. The application process was very different then. Barnard was the only school in which I had an interview. Just to give you an

interesting perspective...in the '60s when you applied you had to clip a photograph onto your application because they wanted to know what race you were.

**Wow.**

Oh, yes. One of the reasons why I thought I had a chance of getting into Barnard was...Barnard was the only one of the Seven Sisters who did not have a quota for Jews. It wasn't spoken of a lot, but when I went to high school I was number two in my class. The girl who was number one was in many ways heads above me. We didn't have good advisement. She applied to Radcliffe, Cornell, and one other schools like that. She was really brilliant...she was turned down everywhere because of the quota. And Cornell had limited dorms for women, as I recall, so that they could keep the number of women down. She was rejected from every school. When spring rolled around she was devastated. I've always meant to speak to her...but it must have been the most devastating of experiences for her. She was number one in her class, and she was turned down from schools. Here I was with a scholarship, and I got into a Seven Sister school. And she was really better than I was. She did go to Connecticut College for Women, which was very good school, but it wasn't Radcliff.

Barnard was my first choice, if I could somehow swing it...I didn't know I was going to get a scholarship. I didn't think I could afford it. But my second choice would have been Brooklyn because Brooklyn College was better than NYU. Even though NYU put me in their honors program. NYU was really considered a third-rate college in the '60s and early '70s...it shows you how things can change. City Colleges were very good, but when I saw that I could come here I did.

I wish that Barnard had helped me more, but they did give me part-time employment...but I didn't have financial help from Barnard. Barnard was...my father ...I don't know whether he couldn't do it or whether he wouldn't do it...he would just never fill out financial papers. I had to file papers with the state finally in which I declared myself emancipated. So I didn't have to worry about his income. I didn't live with him after I was sixteen. I declared myself emancipated, which he didn't want me to do because he was claiming me as a dependent on his tax returns. He didn't want me to do that.

55:50

**So you go this scholarship and then you came to Barnard. What you first impression of the school? Your very first year.**

I thought it was really great. I was little nervous about...I knew that Brooklyn College had a great reputation. I was little afraid of large universities because, even though it had a good reputation, I had been stabbed in seventh or eighth grade over by our junior high school...I think it was the sixth grade, so I was nervous about large public school. And another friend of the family came home with a knife in his back. I think I may have mentioned him in my memoir. My mother and her friends were playing cards...see this is

the kind of neighborhood I grew up in. We knew not to take a knife out. I knew that as a kid. If you were stabbed, do not pull [the knife] out. We knew that by the time we were eight. Just go home with it...the worst thing you can do is pull it out. He walked with this knife in his back...and all the women fainted, I think (*laughs*). The high school turned out to be okay but that junior high school...it was really like terror time. I was a little afraid of something like this.

[Barnard] wouldn't let me live on the campus, so I lived below 110<sup>th</sup> street, which was like a little Cuba down there. It wasn't gentrified. It was like a little Havana. For those of us who were the commuters, we had to live in these scurrilous apartments. The apartment I lived in...there was a drug dealer on the corner of 108<sup>th</sup> street and Broadway. It was a Cuban restaurant...there were these places...they all had this combination Cuban and Chinese food. Because those were the people who came here. The man on the corner was a drug dealer on our corner, and he befriended me for some reason. I don't know why. [My friend, Margaret,] said, "Don't say hello to him." Every morning as I walked to Barnard he said hi, buenos días, and I said oh hi. She said don't say hello back!

Margaret got married as a sophomore, and she couldn't live in the dorm anymore...

### **Because she was married...?**

Oh, yes. You could not... She said don't talk to him. I said he says hello. It's better just to keep the peace. And he protected me over the years...he did, that guy. He name was Cuba...was what they called him. He just made sure nobody on the block bothered me.

It was really kind of funny going here [to Barnard] because there was this world up here at Barnard, which was very clubby, of girls who lived from my point of view a rather sheltered life. Then, I had this other world in which I worked a lot. I worked at Barnard, I worked in the Language Lab, and I worked two jobs in the summer—a day job and a night job. It was a really schizophrenic world. I had no time to join clubs, so I hardly knew anyone, and Margaret says the same thing. Because she got married and then she spent her junior year abroad, she knows no one who went here. She also feels she has no ties to this school. Because of having gotten married so young. She feels she knows no one. I said when you read the alumnae magazine do you recognize these people? No, she says, I don't know any of them. I said me either! Did we go to school with them? (*Laughs*). She says I don't know.

1:01:13

### **Who were the different kinds of groups on campus who you didn't know?**

There were some very rich girls who had gone to boarding school, who had come from other countries, who came from other states, who were having...just their college life. There were a lot of students here who really *grubbed* a lot. I'd never met people who just studied. That was another category. *Grubs* we called them back then, today you call them *nerds*. There were people who studied, studied, studied. They could be a little

sociopathic, a few of them. They were the kind who would ruin your chemistry experiment. So there was that category, and you never saw those people either because they were always studying.

There were people who came here and then they partied...and they went overboard. We had friends like that. They went over to fraternity row...they partied, partied, partied. There was always one of those. There was one woman and I won't mention her name, but she was the one who showed us all how to use tampons. Mothers wouldn't let you use that in the '60s because they thought it would ruin your virginity (*laughs*).

**My mom's told me the exact same thing from her childhood.**

Yeah, they had no idea. Blood comes out of somewhere. There's a space...hello. So they partied. It was interesting because we were very naïve, and Margaret and I have discussed this a lot...what we didn't know then. In the dorms where I talk about living there illegally for a while. We had a young woman from the freshman year...and she went home. We were told she had mono. Well we found out in subsequent years that she was pregnant. There were only two things that people had and they were mono and pregnancy. She went home and her parents locked her up in her house. I think the baby died is what I recall. She either had a stillbirth or a miscarriage. She didn't have the baby.

She lost a year, and we didn't know...know these things. And the other one who was the party person...she was always in the bathroom throwing up. Our one memory of her...she was in the toilet throwing up a lot. She was the roommate of a friend who said that all the time she was eating her food. We realize now—years later—that she was bulimic. We didn't know words like that...never even heard of bulimia or anorexia. Never—heard those words.

1:05:09

One of the only parts of the body that Barnard cared about was posture! The dreaded posture exam...the first week you came in they took your clothes off and photographed you. It was so horrible, and we've always wondered what happened to those photos! (*Laughs*). You had a bra and panties on...is my memory. This perv. of a doctor...she lined everyone up and took a photo. If she didn't like the way you stood, she put you in a posture class. Oh, it was horrible. First thing your freshman week. It was the very thought of it. It was like an army induction.

So there were these various groups of people [on campus], and I went out with this guy at Yale. There were a couple of us Monique and then Polly, and we all had these boyfriends at Yale. We would all commute together up there on a cheaper line. We'd spend the weekend up there maybe once a month or something, and we loved it up there. We thought it was really great.

**Can you talk about your family? What were their reactions when you came to Barnard and then later in life when you came out?**

My mother was supportive of my going to Barnard more than my father. I have a cousin on my maternal side of the family and that woman's daughter went to Barnard, so my mother thought it was quite wonderful that we're keeping up with the Jones. She was supportive of that.

My father didn't want me to apply because he felt that it would be a waste of money for a girl to go to such an expensive school. He didn't want me to. My brother had gone away to college, and as an out of state kid that was really expensive. But that was different and that was how it was. [My father] taught my brother to drive...he didn't want to teach me. He did say to me though that if I went to Brooklyn College he would buy me a car, which I felt was just a lie because he never taught me to drive, so what was I going to do with a car? Where will I put it in Brooklyn? There was no place to park it. I knew it was kind of a bait. Because he would have felt more comfortable if I was just a bus ride away.

**After you emancipated yourself did you stay in contact with you family?**

I did. There came a point where things were bad...my mother was rather schizophrenic. I don't know if she really was. There weren't diagnoses, there weren't treatment, and there was very little interest in middle-aged women. She would have been 55...almost a senior citizen. My father, by the time I was a college, was between 65 and 70. You also have to keep in mind that we don't really know when he was born, which is another story. He might have been born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because he filed his own birth certificate. He worked at the Board of Health and his birth certificate was in his own handwriting. He probably made himself younger to avoid WWI. If you look at the date of his birth certificate and look at the date he came up with...he was born at home. He came up with 10-1-1. What's easier to remember? My grandmother didn't know the Western calendar, so if you look at their perspective on life, it was different.

To get back to it...I left home. My parents weren't really happy. I did introduce them...I remember at one point I took my boyfriend home. His family lived in the South. He was a gentleman, but he had never met a Jew before. He did once ask me if I had horns, and I said yes but we had them removed at an early age. You don't know what to say to that. My parents really didn't like the fact that he was not Jewish.

1:11:18

**And how about later when you came out? How did your family react?**

I never told my mother. One of my evil aunts called her and told her...I think I talk about this in the book...I was on television and...my father knew...and he never really reacted too well to it. I said to my father I was going to be on this national TV show. I thought wow I better tell my father. I knew my mother slept with the T.V. on...that's how she liked to sleep—with noise. So I said to [my father] that I was gay...a homosexual. Oh, he said, I always thought it was your brother (*laughs.*) I didn't put *that* in the book. Oh no, I said, he's straight. It's me! (*Laughs.*) My parents were not very whizzy about sex either.

They were very Victorian. They did not talk about sex. It was so odd...you know...and I don't know how whizzy my father was about sex...at all.

1:13:24

He once came to visit me in New York when he moved to Florida. He came up for visit with my mother, and he took her the movies. He took her to this really sexy movie, *Last Tango in Paris*. Marlon Brando has anal sex. It was one of the groundbreaking films in terms of movie history, but they don't take their clothes off. It's just all implied. He grabs this bar of butter or something...to use as a lubricant. I said [to my father] what'd you do while you were in New York. He said we went to see *Last Tango in Paris*, and I gasped a little when I heard it. I said, well, how'd it go? He said your mother fell asleep, and I said what'd you think? He said I didn't know you could have sex with your clothes on...he didn't get at all what they were doing! He didn't even get it. I said why did you go to see that? He said it was cheaper than taking your mother to Bloomingdales (*laughs*).

1:15:00

### **That's one way of looking at it.**

I told [my father], but I could see he didn't grasp it. So [the night I was on television] I said take the T.V. and change it to another station. Make sure [mother is] not listening to NBC...so he did, and my aunt called in the middle of the show and she said your daughter's on television. It was in the middle of the night...the show started at 1am. *Your daughter is on television, and she is a queer!* My mother didn't know what this meant. She really didn't. So she turned on the T.V. and she saw me, and she called to my father who...unfortunately his nickname was Butch...*Butch get in here! Karla's on T.V. and she says she's a homosexual. What is it?* She just didn't know. She thought that homosexuality was something that men caught from hairspray because the only people she could identify were hairdressers. She had no idea.

I had an aunt who was bisexual...she had no idea. No clue at all...about women. This cousin who had gone to Barnard became a sexologist. Gerontology with a specialty in sexology. When she explained it to my mother, [my mother] checked into a mental hospital.

### **Wow.**

Yeah, that was her reaction. And that's why I hadn't told her. I said well how's she doing Dad? He says she's over at the mental hospital now...she's an inpatient.

### **What was it like for you hearing that news?**

I was sad. There's a certain amount of guilt you feel...and pain. My father just never accepted it. When he became a little demented when he was older, he started to deny that I was his child, which is part of his dislike of the fact that I was homosexual. He would



start to say to me...*I only had one child*. I would visit him and...*I only had one child. I only had a son*. Those were his last words to me. *I only had a son*. It was painful. It really was painful. *I never had a daughter—never*. And my brother never visited him...oh, I just wanted to kill him. [My father] was a little demented, but that's how it felt when I came out. You know, unfortunately. He could not deal with it. He really hated it.

My mother on the other hand rather came around in part because she never understood that women had sex...together. Then I had a partner who was very, very pretty in the '80s. She was from Texas. She was very...you know, she knew how to deal with my mother. And she would just let my mother rule her life in a way that I wouldn't. Now, she'd say to my mother, we're going out so which blouse do you think I should wear? She's holding up two blouses. My mother was really crazy. She'd say okay that one, and then she'd say no the other one, and then my mother'd say no this one, then the other one. And the one my mother would say the most, she would where. She would let my mother do that to her. I didn't have patience for that.

**And what about your aunt? Did your aunt ever talk to you about her bisexuality?**

I almost never spoke to the aunt who outed me again. I did find it significant that all of her children became therapists (*laughs*). To try and cope with her...to get over that. We called this aunt the Barracuda. Anyone who shined, she wanted to attack. The fact that I was on T.V...she had to launch an attack. I really wasn't surprised.

My aunt who was bisexual, Aunt Queenie, never told me about her preferences. I found out about Queenie's bisexuality from her daughter.

It was complex. At one point I really had to turn my back on my family because they wanted me to come home and be the caretaker for my mother. And I knew that if I did that my life would be over. I lived in the apartment on 108<sup>th</sup> and Broadway for 12 years, and I knew that if I went home...it would be like Orpheus looking back into Hell. If you looked back, you would just sink in there forever. I'd never get out, and so I never even stayed there. I visited but I knew that...the family doctor told me there was nothing I could do [about my mother's health]. I just had to make that space. It was a hard choice to make, but I had to save myself.

**I think that's very wise, and it also take a lot of courage. To maintain that distance in a way that is healthy for you.**

**We're just about at time, but I have a couple last questions for you. Obviously, a lot has changed. It's 2015 and gay marriage is legal...**

In most states. It's not legal everywhere.

**Yes, I was speaking too soon. So what do you think are some misconceptions surrounding gay people that are still prevalent?**

1:21:12

I think that the next big battlefield is going to be children. With marriage comes a lot of rights. People have the right to be the legal parent whether or not you're the biological parent. But the adoptions of children, fostering children...people still think that somehow we're going to convert these children. I think that's a big battle that we are going to have to fight.

The other big fight—and a group that's being left behind here—is transgendered people. Because of our focus on marriage. Sometimes with visibility, violence really escalates. I think that violence against members of the transgendered community has really escalated.

Barnard has recently had...and I wish I had been around for them but I was in Florida...they did have some forums for alums to discuss the admission of people who are transitioning or are transgendered to Barnard. It raises very thorny questions about whether or not Barnard is a co-educational institution in some fundamental way. These issues of gender identity and of family are fundamental issues.

The other things I think are really important issues that I used to talk about with my students...because I taught Queer studies. It worries me a lot—more so with gay men—that people think HIV is a manageable disease. That people have really slipped in terms of worrying about it and protecting themselves. There's also Hepatitis C out there, which can be treated but often goes undetected. It's certainly under diagnosed.

When you get into this mindset of post-liberation, you're in a real danger of things happening to you. And that's one of them. There's a rise in HIV among college-age men. Students also think that because they're in these really warm settings...Barnard has the Women's Center and has Women's Studies and there are Lesbian/Bisexual groups...that students think that when they get into the world that things are going to be okay. For women today, there isn't equality. Women are only making 81 cents to the dollar, if they're making that. It really still is a struggle out there for women to be fighting for their rights. Lesbians...whether or not they want children...one of the reasons that as a feminist I always fight for reproductive rights is because there's a spectrum. If women can't control our bodies, if women can't have an abortion...it's a spectrum. If you can't have an abortion when you want one...and most women who have abortions already have children...they're making this choice. They have too many children. They can't have another. It's not what the right wing would like us to believe. Then lesbians are not going to be allowed access to infertility insurance, to adoption, to all of the things that they want. This is a spectrum, and we have an interest in it.

1:26:22

If you look at my generation, we were really concerned with the war in Vietnam. I talk about how important the appearance of Malcolm X at Barnard was for me personally and for everyone who saw him...because he was killed two days later. In those days someone being assassinated was less common than it seems to be today, and we were very

involved in trying to fight for the lives of other people. People seem less concerned about other people. I think that Barnard is one of the schools that really values civic engagement, as it's sometimes called. I know that Barnard likes students to be involved in political elections. It's very important for people to be involved in the lives of others not just their own people.

**Absolutely. And I completely agree with what you said about the post-liberation mindset and how dangerous that is.**

That's the most dangerous thing of all...to think you've won the battle.

**That reminds me of how sometimes we think we're in a post-racial society...**

Yes, it's like a schizophrenic society. On the one hand you've got Obama in the White House and on the other hand you have Ferguson. Class is the real social divide of society.

**Lastly, do you have sense as to where you stand on the issue of trans admission at Barnard?**

I see the complexity in it. I see that for Barnard there is this implicit danger from an administrative point of view that someone who is transitioning and identifies as female who is a biological male has the right to change his mind and become a man again. This happens. And then what? What happens when that person has graduated as a man? Does Barnard then lose its right to be an all-women's institution. There aren't that many women's institutions in the United States that are thriving. It's a real treasure because society is not equal. I think we need to have women's institutions, and we need to have black colleges. We need to have these institutions until society is equal. At a school like this you teach women to be leaders of everything. And you're not going to do that at Harvard. It's just not going to happen there. It's not going to happen at the University of Wisconsin. It's certainly not going to happen at UVA. I don't care what happened at an individual case...still women are raped on every campus. That's sad that they focused on her.

Barnard is in a fix here. It's in a historical fix. And I really support the rights of transgendered people, and I don't know what to say. I think that history is changing and gender is changing. A lot of my feminist sisters would again try to hang me for this. They really feel that your early upbringing makes a difference. And I don't know...I think that times have changed. Barnard will have to examine it. But I also feel that—and I have to say I feel this very seriously and I used to say this when I taught—that it's not up to me.

At Pace, we called a minor Queer Studies. I would run into Alumnae my age—a little older—and they would say I am not giving money to something called Queer Studies. Because Queer is a fighting word. *When I was young and they called me queer, it was horrible.*

**Yeah, that hurts.**

It really hurt. And I would say to them you're not taking the classes and I'm not taking the classes. It's not for me, it's not for you, it's for the students of today, and *they* call themselves queer. And that's what matters.

I think it's for the student body of Barnard to make this decision, and I have to say, with all due modesty, it's not up to me. It's up to the student body of Barnard to decide who they want among them. It shouldn't be up to the faculty. It should be a vote of the student body, and that is how I feel. It's not me. It's not up to my generation to decide this.

**I think you're right, and there is complexity in that issue.**

When we called ourselves gay, the homophile group said oh no that's not a good word. Don't call yourselves gay; don't call yourselves lesbians. Those aren't nice words.

**When do you think the word *queer* made a comeback?**

Well, in the '80s it started to be used...there was Queer Nation and there were activist groups that started to use this word. In 1970, we did have a chant that said we're here, we're queer, get used to it. So we did start to use it in a kind of way to embrace it. But many of my friends—my generation—really hate that word. It brings up all these terrible, terrible memories. It's not...I don't have to call myself queer. If you want to call yourself queer, go right ahead. It's *you*. *You* have the right to define yourself as you want. It's not up to my generation to tell the next generation what to do.

**Alright, we're done for today.**

1:34:10