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AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY TOPPING BAZIN

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Dr. Nancy Topping Bazin, on August 3, 2020, with Kate Rizzi for the Rutgers Oral History Archives. Thank you so much for joining me in this oral history interview.

Nancy Bazin: Oh, thank you for having me.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

NB: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 5, 1934. It was just before election day, and my mother was worried that they were talking too much about the upcoming election and not paying enough attention to her. [laughter]

KR: Let us start off today talking about your family history. What do you know about your family history, on your mother's side?

NB: My mother's mother, Grace McKissock, was one of three daughters who were Irish immigrants. My mother always told me her father, Charles Wishart Wilson, was Pennsylvania Dutch (meaning German, because Americans had turned Deutsch into Dutch). But since he had an English surname, perhaps it was a mother who was Pennsylvania Dutch and lost her last name when she married? That remains a mystery. I think his family began as farmers in eastern Pennsylvania and subsequently moved to Pittsburgh. Even in Pittsburgh, my grandfather raised chickens, but he gave each one a name and then couldn't bring himself to eat them. He provided a Sunday dinner for his wife and children, but he personally would never eat any of his chickens. [laughter] He was a self-taught fiddle player who had a player piano to accompany him. There was a big family of relatives in my grandparents' generation, but the only ones I met were my grandmother's two Irish sisters.

My maternal grandparents had six children--two girls and four boys. The oldest boy, Harry, drowned in a whirlpool in the Monongahela River while swimming. That must have been very painful for the family. My mother says her parents were extremely fond of their minister, and that is why she was named for this man--Luther Arnold. My mother's full name was Helen Luther Arnold Wilson [Topping]. I never quite approved of their having given my mother the burden of two male names. The family lived in a big old house that is still there in the Greenfield section of Pittsburgh. A steep cobblestone street came down right in front of their home. One day in winter, a horse descending the steep hill (with whatever he was pulling) slipped on the ice and came down the hill on his bottom and slid right into the bushes in their front yard. My mother was pushing her younger sister, Grace Wilson [Mosula], in a baby carriage and rushed around the corner to get out of the way. Grace was a late baby in the family, so my mother was a bit like a mother to her. They loved each other very much and remained close all their lives. When my parents were dating, Grace would get to sit in the rumble seat of the car when she went out with them.

My father's parents were Scottish immigrants. Many Scottish people emigrated to Pittsburgh because of the steel industry, but my Scottish grandfather, John Topping, was a blacksmith. He and his wife, Anne Callender, died before I was born.

My father, Frank Williamson Topping, had a difficult life when he was young. His father died of the Spanish flu when my father was only thirteen years old. Spanish flu was not unique to Spain. It was spreading in many European countries, but Spain was the only one not involved in World War I. Therefore, it didn't have censorship and could openly admit that they were having an epidemic. All the other countries were keeping it secret; they didn't want the enemy to know they were weakened by that epidemic. Because of my grandfather's early death, my father had to go to school at night, so he could work each day. Then, when he was eighteen, his mother died, so he had to take care of his two younger siblings. He even sent his sister, Betty, who was the youngest, to a teachers' college; and she taught music in an elementary school the rest of her life. His brother, John, became a specialist in the bricks that lined the extremely hot furnaces in the steel mills. So, my father took good care of them, but I think they ate stew often, prepared in advance for the week.

My father was always the one who told me to "get an education." He even wanted me to be an engineer or a high energy nuclear physicist. Education was very important to him because, as he said, "It's the only thing no one can take away from you." I think he drew that conclusion from living through the depression. He did lose his job during the depression; and ironically, it was a German man who helped him get another. I can remember going to visit this German family during World War II, and no one was speaking to them. They were shunned by everybody just because they were German, but my father felt a loyalty to this man because he had helped him during the depression.

My mother read a great deal, although we only had two books in the house, which is hard to imagine when I see how many I have. We had H.G. Wells' *The Outline of History* and the second book was titled something like *The Book of Knowledge*. It contained a lot of questions with answers to them. My father didn't believe in buying books because you could always go to the library to get them. So, my mother went to the library a lot. She was probably a model for me, because she preferred to read rather than to go to a bridge club, garden club meetings, or the Eastern Star (composed only of women at that time)--although she had done all of that, periodically. She loved to read and I can remember being embarrassed once, because my mother was reading so much instead of cleaning. [laughter] At that time, women wore "housedresses" which were often these very loosely cut dresses with flowers all over them; and I always thought they were ugly. When I think of the 1940s and 1950s, I think of these housedresses--and girdles. It was as if when you had a housedress on, you were never supposed to go out. If you got dressed up, you looked a lot better, but you had to wear this terrible girdle underneath your skirt or dress. Even we, as young girls, who didn't need a girdle, had to wear girdles to keep our stockings up. In addition, the nylon stockings were sewn together in the back, so there was a line down the back of your leg, which you had to keep straight, [laughter] while you moved around.

Besides housedresses and girdles, the third thing I associate with the 1940s and 1950s is virginity. As a girl, you were sort of taught or you somehow "knew" that if you weren't a virgin when you got married, your husband might reject you! Of course, that's still true in many cultures, but it was also understood in the United States when I was a teenager. I think it kept a lot of us under control.

Let's see, also when I was growing up, there was the Willows Pool, a great big swimming pool in my town, which was at least as big as a football field. I mean, I've never seen a swimming pool like that since. It was gigantic. A lot of mothers and children went there almost daily in the summers. We also had dances, every Saturday night when I was a teenager. I didn't realize it at the time, but Blacks weren't supposed to come to either the pool or the dances. But we were totally unaware of our white privilege. That blissful ignorance allowed us to have many happy years (from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade) in the pool and happy teenage years at the dances.

With the "threat" of integration, the Willows Pool closed in 1970 and the dances ended. Including the few Blacks living in Oakmont, a town of ten thousand, would have made little difference. But I am sure, the fear radiated out from the city of Pittsburgh, about thirty miles away. Desegregating the schools, neighborhoods, pools, and probably dances was bitterly fought in Pittsburgh. The greater reason behind the segregation in the city of Pittsburgh and the surrounding area was often the gulf of class difference but, behind the obvious class difference, was the ever present, less visible, systemic racism that determined education and hiring.

The impact of sexism on me did not wait until I had left home, but an *understanding* of it did wait until 1970. Maybe the virginity requirement for girls in the 1940s and 1950s was attractive to older men, because they were often guilty of touching young girls. I was in the eye doctor's office, for instance, and the eye doctor put his hands on my breasts with my mother sitting right outside in the waiting room, which astonishes me. Another incident was with my dance teacher's boyfriend. I took dance and art when I was young. In the basement of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, I was getting ready for a performance and he put his hands on my breasts, but I never told anybody. The third time, three or four of us had a small part in a Pittsburgh operetta. We were waiting to go on stage when one of the lead opera singers put his hands on my breasts. He did the same thing to a younger girl. She had told her mother, so her mother telephoned to ask me to watch over her. But the rest of us didn't tell, and that was and still is the problem. I learned later, from feminists in my classes, that you should speak up. I had a student who was in line to pay at the bookstore when she was touched on her bottom by the man behind her. She said right away very loudly, "This man touched me." So, you should not be silent about it. It was obviously very prevalent because those men were thirty, forty years older than I was. That form of sexism--the male privilege to touch without permission--was and is another problem between males and females.

I remember the divorced woman's house. That was the other thing. I don't remember the Jewish person's house, although there was only one, or a Black person's house. It was the divorced woman's house that had the stigma for me: in those days, you just didn't get a divorce. I got a divorce later. [laughter] That was a little frightening to me at the time. Anything else?

KR: What kind of neighborhood did you live in near Pittsburgh?

NB: Well, I lived in the pretty town of Oakmont with its streets lined with trees. It was famous for the Oakmont Country Club (which is still today number five on the list of America's Greatest Golf Courses). Oakmont is a separate town, not a suburb, thirty miles north of Pittsburgh on the Allegheny River. It was built on the side of a hill, like everything else in Pittsburgh. We were

almost at the top of the hill. Some people lived higher on the hill, and that was a class kind of thing. The people that lived higher on the hill were more upper class than we were. And we were higher in class than the people who lived closer to the bottom of the hill or across the railroad tracks. One of the things I learned from my mother was tolerance, because she was always tolerant. She never put down other people. At the same time, she felt when she went to church that the people were snobbish; so she quit going to church because of that. She was always very sensitive to class. Her family, of course, did not have a lot of money, so she was quite aware of class differences.

Her parents did not expect her to go to college, so she took the secretarial curriculum in high school. After graduating, she was secretary-treasurer of the Pittsburgh School Board. There was so much soot in Pittsburgh at the time--from the coal and the steel mills--that she had to wear paper cuffs on the sleeves of her blouses to keep them clean. I can remember big specks of soot on our back windowsills. So, that was the Pittsburgh we lived in at that time. Both the city and the rivers have been cleaned up a great deal since then. That area has changed enormously.

KR: What did your father do for work?

NB: He worked for the Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) most of my life, practically all of it that I can remember, and that was in New Kensington, Pennsylvania. Like Oakmont, it was on the Allegheny River, about eight miles farther north. He was what they called a tool designer. He designed tools to make other things. During the war, he had a very tiny role in making the atomic bomb. He didn't even know it at the time, but he got a certificate for it and was rather proud of that. Also, among Alcoa's employees, he was the checker champion. For that, he would get his picture in their newsletter.

I did live through World War II, of course. I was about eleven when it was over. I can remember putting up blankets over the drapes in the living room because we did have air raids. I can recall, too, dividing the butter into three pieces so we each had an equal share. As part of the "war effort," my mother would save grease, because they made soap out it. Even children were part of the "war effort." We bought our own savings bonds by taking money to school every week to buy a few stamps to stick in our savings bond book. That savings book eventually became a bond, which increased in money a little bit if you kept it long enough without turning it in. With time, you made a little money. Meanwhile, that was how the government was making its money for the war.

My uncle George "Buddy" Monahan, who had married my father's sister, fought in World War II, and he wrote to me often throughout the war. He was in the Pacific. I always regretted that my mother threw those letters out, because I would love to have had them later. He was fighting--he was in the Navy but he was on the ground (not on the ocean) in battle after battle. He would report to me how many "Japs" he had killed that day. They used that word, Japs, to dehumanize the Japanese people, just as we did by calling the Vietnamese soldiers the Vietcong. It made our troops more likely to be able to kill them because they weren't perceived as fathers or sons or brothers, they were Japs. I have often wondered why my uncle wrote to me so faithfully--although I did answer him faithfully. I would get a rundown of his daily life, but it must have been a terrible life for him. He was gone, I think, most of the war, so his wife and child did not

see him for years. Ironically, not long after he returned home, he died of lung cancer--too many cigarettes!

KR: What do you remember about the end of World War II?

NB: I was eleven, and I remember knowing immediately what it was when all the whistles went off in the steel mills, and we did have a steel mill near my town. I knew that the war had ended so we must have known it was coming. I know I was playing dolls on somebody else's porch and I ran home, happy that it was over.

KR: Do you have siblings?

NB: No, I'm an only child, and I was always content with that as I was growing up. As I got older, I think I would've liked to have had sisters and brothers, but when I was little, I was happy enough to have all the attention, I guess. My father doted on me; his brother got sick of hearing about me [laughter] from my father. He was always very proud of me, and he had always wanted a girl too, which is unusual. Although he wanted me to be a high energy nuclear physicist or an engineer, he didn't mind when I ended up with English and French. I started out wanting to study art at Ohio Wesleyan University. But when I took my first art course, I didn't like the teacher, his class, or his art, so I dropped the art idea and went with taking French and English as a double major. I had a wonderful French teacher, Miss McNall, in high school. I think it was because of her enthusiasm and warmth, in large part, that I wanted to learn French and visit France. She always said in French, "*Courage*," to help us have courage, and I still use that in my own mind all the time, or to other people. I wish them courage along with love or whatever. I wish them courage and think of her at the same time. So, a good teacher makes a difference!

At Ohio Wesleyan, there were two incidents that were rather revealing. Just about everybody there belonged to a sorority or fraternity. I joined Chi Omega, but while I was a junior, two of the older girls deactivated--as a protest--because Black girls were not permitted to join. Most of the sororities and fraternities were founded in the South, although it might have been the same had they been founded in the North. But those two girls were deactivating because of that rule, so I deactivated with them. The other position I took was at the barber shop. I picketed the barber shop in Delaware, Ohio, because they would not cut the hair of any Black students or foreign students whose hair they didn't like. So, those students would have to go an hour away to Columbus to get their haircuts, which was highly unjust. So, in college, in 1954-1955, there were tiny beginnings for us of the Civil Rights Movement.

Another topic was religion. Ohio Wesleyan was a Methodist college, of course. When I took the required course in religion, we had to read the whole Bible; and the teacher told us that the miracles were, in fact, rituals, not magical kinds of things. Then, I took philosophy, and, among others, we studied John Dewey, who said Christ was a great man but not a magical person. Someone asked me later to write a one-page piece for a university booklet titled *Is Your God Too Small?* They had several faculty and students write answers to that question, and what I said was that religion had to embrace democracy and accept science rather than rejecting it. That debate

is still relevant today with many Americans rejecting science and failing to notice political moves that undermine our democratic institutions.

Although the 1950s were conservative years, Ohio Wesleyan University still nurtured my more liberal views--perhaps because they were innate. Since I longed to travel (and never had), I tried to get to know foreign students. Few, if any, other students consciously did that. I think I was always interested in different cultures and diversity. My friends included a Cuban exile. His father was rich, because he owned all the juke boxes in Cuba; hence, they had fled Fidel's revolution! Another friend was Algerian, so we discussed the Middle East. Another friend was French, so, of course, I had lots of questions for him. I longed to go to France. A couple of my best friends were pacifists; one was a Quaker. Once I had a date with someone from China, and my roommate did not think that was "wise." I remember, I did a jitterbug, as we called it, with a Black student, and my roommate said people were going to "talk" about me. But I was interested in people who were "different." Those ideas for me were already implanted in my head, ideas which eventually joined up with the Civil Rights Movement, the Peace Movement, and the Feminist Movement.

KR: When you were going through schooling in your early years and then in your undergraduate years at Ohio Wesleyan, what messages were being sent to you about what you could do in your life?

NB: Well, I think majoring in English or French was not in conflict with what was expected of you as a female. Being a teacher was okay too, because you could do that later, while your children were in school, and still be the primary caretaker for the children. Certainly, girls in the 1950s rarely--almost never--majored in science, math, or engineering. I don't think I knew anybody who was doing that. There was an unspoken message that those subjects were for males. Getting educated was not the main problem. The foremost problem was our acceptance and belief that when decisions were made about where to go or where to live, for example, we "knew" that our husbands should always come first. There would be no discussion, no negotiating about where to live so both could have a career. As females, we were also expected to laugh at sexist jokes and find funny such indignities as "panty raids," which many girls probably felt were stupid antics. Females were not expected to rebel or protest; that was not ladylike; they were expected to be quiet and cooperate.

Girls had to accept other rules that I considered unfair: we had a time limit. We had to be in at ten o'clock every night, except for three "one o'clocks" during the semester. But the boys, who caused all the trouble, of course, they didn't have any time when they had to be in. It was the females who had to be not only *in* but *asleep* with lights out by ten. Because of that, sometimes I had to study late at night in my friend's bathtub. She had a bathroom that did not have a window in it, so the light I read by could not be seen from outside. They did go around and check the lights of our dormitory rooms to be sure all the lights were out. I remember reading one of Dickens' novels lying in an uncomfortable position on pillows in that bathtub all night, and my memory of what happened in that novel did not last long. I might have been able to read it over several days if I could have stayed up later than ten o'clock at night. So, there were problems that were caused by that restriction of ours, that we had to be in and asleep by ten o'clock. We were supposedly trained to be good girls in that way. Of course, if something did go wrong--if a

girl got raped or pregnant--she was the one shamed, not the male. And if there were two accounts of what happened, it was still somehow her fault, and it was her story that was not believed. There were also girls who went to the smoker--a lounge designated for smoking. I always felt they were sexually a little looser and they did smoke, so they were a little different from most of us. That was a kind of odd thing, the separation of the good girls from those who smoked.

KR: When you were at Ohio Wesleyan, what were you thinking about doing in your career at that point?

NB: Well, I always wanted to be a teacher, and I never deviated from that. I think I always wanted to teach on the university level. But for security reasons, I wanted to get a high school teaching certificate so that I could teach in high school if I never made it through the PhD and to the university. Therefore, during my senior year, I taught an honors literature class at the local high school. The regular teacher was there, but she let me teach all the classes. I did get the teaching certificate to go with my double major.

I was still longing to go to France; that was always my desire. When rarely I got to the Atlantic Ocean, I would want to be on the other side of it. I did get into Stanford University, but they allowed me to take a year to go to France first. So, I did go to France for a year before I went to Stanford, which was a wonderful opportunity. I still feel that was the best year of my life. It was just so wonderful. I loved it. I lived right in the Latin Quarter at *Le Foyer International des Etudiantes*.

But I came very close to not going to Stanford at all. The Dean of Academic Affairs Allan Ingraham, who also taught education courses, was my academic advisor; and he gave me the push that got me into Stanford. I was so exhausted from studying for an exam the night before that I hadn't filled out the application, and when I told him that, fortunately he said, "Well, just sit down and do it now." So, I sat down and did it and got into Stanford. I'm so grateful to him for his role in giving me the extra push I needed to do that.

But first, I fulfilled my dream of going to Paris for the school year of 1956-'57. Fortunately, I had applied for two scholarships to get there--one from the French government and one from the Alliance Francaise.

KR: For the record, when you were in Paris, you were a student in the Middlebury Graduate School for Language.

NB: Yes, the Middlebury Graduate School for French. They had equivalent schools for Spanish and Arabic and German, all the different languages, and it's a wonderful language school because you always have to speak in that language. They won't let you use English at all. To get your master's degree, you spend a year in Paris (or a year in the country) and you spend one summer at Middlebury, which is also wonderful. I had worked during the summer of 1956 before I went to Paris because I wanted to earn some money. I traveled in Europe and the British Isles in the summer of 1957. Finally, I went to Middlebury College in Vermont for the summer of 1958,

after I had finished my first year at Stanford. At the end of the summer of 1958, I went home with my master's degree in French.

But back to Paris--I loved the diversity of the people in the Latin Quarter. There were people of all kinds. Furthermore, the Hungarian Revolution took place in 1956, so there were people who had fled from Hungary to Paris whom I met. Being with a lot of people from different cultures, I just loved Paris. In addition, 1956-'57 was the year of the Suez Crisis, and during the Suez Crisis, there was very little gasoline, so people couldn't drive their cars very much. There were very, very few cars on the streets. I have pictures of the bridges in Paris with no cars on them. Probably it has never been as beautiful as it was during the Suez Crisis until the 2020 pandemic. During this terrible pandemic of COVID-19, once again, because of lockdowns, the cars were off the streets; and Paris is always more beautiful without the cars. As more and more French people could afford cars, they started parking on the sidewalks, the beautiful wide sidewalks, and there were so many cars that people who worked in Paris could only drive into the city a certain number of days during the week. Other cars could only come in on the opposite days. The right to drive in Paris was rationed. Indeed, the cars almost ruined Paris, but they could not quite ruin it. I have loved every visit to Paris since then. But during the year I was a student there, it was at its most beautiful!

I also met Maurice, my first husband, in Paris. I went to a party that was meant to be a "mixer" for the students who lived in the Foyer International and the students from École Polytechnique, which is France's most elite school, the most competitive to enter. Ecole Polytechnique offered its students, at that time, the equivalent of a master's degree in five scientific subjects--physics, chemistry, math, biology, and maybe geology (or astronomy). In 1804, it had been Napoleon's Military Academy. In 1956, the students still wore dress uniforms that resembled Napoleon's. I saw my future husband across the room wearing a cape, a sword at his waist, and white gloves. [laughter] He wore a hat, too, that looked like Napoleon's. Later that year, I went to a formal dance with him in that uniform. In 1956-'57, Ecole Polytechnique was still a military school. Therefore, he had certain restrictions like the ones I had had at Ohio Wesleyan University. He had to jump over a wall to come to see me in the evenings because *he* was not allowed out. [laughter] But at least *I* did not have that restriction in Paris!

KR: I am curious about your application process for graduate schools. You said you applied to Stanford and then you got deferred, so you went to Paris for a year.

NB: Yes.

KR: Did you apply to any other graduate schools?

NB: I must have, but I don't recall which ones. Applying for college or graduate school then was much, much simpler than it is today. We might have written paragraphs about why we wanted to attend a particular university, but we certainly did not have to write competitive essays. I suspect that graduate school admissions were heavily based on your past record, and I had an excellent record of grades and activities at Ohio Wesleyan.

I feel very lucky to have gone to Stanford. For instance, I loved the beautiful Quadrangle where the English Department was located. However, Stanford had one of the most conservative PhD literature programs in the country at that time. You could not even minor in American literature at Stanford, because they did not deem it "great enough." However, I *could* use French literature for my minor at Stanford, so that is what I did. I went all the way through a PhD program studying *every* period of British literature--beginning with Anglo-Saxon literature (including *Beowulf*) which we "read" in Anglo-Saxon by translating a section of it each evening. There were a few courses taught in American literature, but for me they would have been electives, not a requirement for my program. I studied American literature as an undergraduate, but I never studied American literature as a graduate student, which is incredible. We also had to take exams in three languages--Latin, French and German. I had one friend who repeatedly could not pass that Latin exam. She tried six times. Then she finally did it. [laughter] It was very, very difficult. Furthermore, the Chair of the English Department seemed to think that any literature written later than Shakespeare was *not*, in his opinion, very good. The most modern course in British literature was The Bloomsbury Group in the first half of the twentieth century. There was no course in contemporary British literature. So, being a little contrary, I think I picked Virginia Woolf for my dissertation because she was probably the most modern writer I could find in the curriculum--and she was a woman!

There were no women on the faculty at all when I went to Stanford. The Department had had three women at some point; but the Chair and other male professors never wanted to hire another woman, because they thought those three had caused them so much trouble. I recently looked at an obituary for Diane Middlebrook, who taught at Stanford for some time, and even in her obituary, they talked about this distaste for women, this desire not to hire another woman at Stanford. Somehow, that story was still around. It sounded as if the Department Chair had had some disagreeable incident with one or more of the women. [Editor's Note: Biographer and poet Diane Middlebrook (1939-2007) was a Professor Emerita at Stanford University, where she taught and held administrative positions from 1966 to 2002.] Nevertheless, I read an interview with John Steinbeck about his years as a student at Stanford, and what did he say? He said his favorite teachers at Stanford were precisely those three women!

When the Stanford graduate students had a meeting with the Department Chair about teaching positions, we were told that a woman would be hired by a university that was one level lower than what she deserved. They said that quite openly. Of course, I and the other female graduate students objected to that, but we felt it was just the way the world was. You just had to accept this, but the bias was obvious. I noted too that the male graduate students would have coffee or play tennis with the male professors, but the women could not do that. It would have been inappropriate. So, there was already a slight disadvantage to being female. Even at the end of my studies, my advisor asked me if I really wanted to teach, as if I were getting this PhD to do nothing with it. His question rather annoyed me, but maybe he was not so far wrong. I was going to marry and live in Paris where I couldn't start a real career. Furthermore, for better or worse, I still believed a mother should raise her own children, and I still had the attitude that my husband would come first, and I would go wherever he had to go; then I would try to teach someplace in that geographical area. That was standard. One woman from anthropology told me what her Chair told her. He said, "You know, your husband will always come first, don't you?" She had said, "Yes." We still had those ideas.

In my second year at Stanford, my French fiancé, Maurice Jacques Bazin, joined me at Stanford in September, and we were married on December 21, 1958, in the lovely Stanford Chapel. Maurice's mother was an Assistant at Coudert Freres, a super high-end American law firm on the luxurious Champs-Elysses. Many of their clients were American celebrities. Therefore, it was the film director John Huston who brought my engagement ring to the United States and then mailed it to us.

Maurice was going to be the high energy nuclear physicist my father had wanted me to be. The contrast between how humanities students are treated and how student scientists are treated became evident when he completed his studies long before I did. I was paid a much lower salary; yet I had to teach composition and that took away many hours from my own work. Maurice was paid about twice as much to do the research for his dissertation. But after I had completed my course work, I had a Soroptimist scholarship to allow me some time to study for the major exams that I had to take. I had a three-hour exam on each period of British literature: the Middle Ages, the sixteenth century, the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. [Editor's Note: Soroptimist International is an organization founded in 1921 that fosters empowerment for women and girls to have "the resources and opportunities to reach their full potential and live their dreams."] By the time Maurice was ready to move on, I had completed that week of a three-hour exam each day and I had my dissertation proposal approved, but I had not written my dissertation.

Whereas my parents had never been outside of the United States, Maurice and his parents had frequently traveled in countries outside of France. He now wanted to go to Paris via the Caribbean Islands, the three Guianas and Brazil in South America, Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, and Ghana in West Africa, and finally Morocco. I remember watching those two long airplane tickets print out in the travel agency. In part, we wanted to go just to see the world, but we had also become interested in what was occurring politically inside the United States and in our relationship with other countries--particularly those in the Caribbean and South America.

In those days, we were in the middle of the Cold War [1945-1991] and the threat of a nuclear war. The fear of communism and Communists was at an irrational high in the United States. For example, you had to sign a loyalty oath if you taught in a state university in California. So, the professors in the Physics Department at the University of California-Berkeley had, as a group, just up and moved to Stanford (a private university). I remember seeing a comic drawing of all those physics professors from Berkeley sitting in a convertible, an overflowing convertible, all of them going to Stanford, because they refused to put up with this kind of requirement that you must sign a loyalty oath to teach in a state university. From 1938-1975, the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joe McCarthy were hunting for communists in the government, in Hollywood, in schools. I remember that, even as an undergraduate, you would not dare sign a petition for fear of being called a communist. At Stanford, we saw a film called "Operation Abolition." It showed students from Berkeley and other schools protesting outside City Hall in San Francisco in May 1960. They were protesting the anti-communist investigative hearings being held inside by the House Un-American Activities Committee (abbreviated as HUAC). Suddenly, the authorities were literally washing the protestors down the steps of City Hall with powerful water from fire hoses. That film "Operation Abolition" was put together by

HUAC to show demonstrations as proof of communist subversion. To us, it was shocking to see how they were treating the student protesters. I had never seen anything like that before in the United States.

There was another incident in 1960 that had an impact on me. Gary Powers was in an American spy plane flying over Russia when he was shot down. I naively thought that American presidents always told the truth to the American people, but President Eisenhower denied that Gary Powers was a spy for the United States. Finally, he could not deny it any longer because the Russians had the plane and the "spy" in their hands. Everyone knew then that Eisenhower had been lying. As strange as it might seem today, that lie undermined my trust in our government. Oddly, I remember it as a turning point.

There were two Stanford University professors who taught us about politics--Paul Baran and Ronald Hilton. Paul Baran [1949-1964], a tenured full Professor of Economics, was a specialist in developing countries. We went to a few of his public lectures explaining world economics, imperialism, and how power worked internationally from a neo-Marxian perspective. He was born in Ukraine, earned a doctorate at the University of Berlin, had lived in Germany prior to WWII, and then fled to the United States when Hitler came to power. Ronald Hilton was a specialist in Spanish and Latin America. The United States was intervening in the affairs of Latin American countries. It was during the Cold War and the United States preferred a brutal dictator to taking a chance with any government that was trying to help the poor people; it might lead to having a communist country in "our" hemisphere. Ronald Hilton published *The Hispanic Report*, which was a collection of news articles from publications throughout Latin America. He simply wanted Americans to be better informed about these neighboring countries.

The Cuban Revolution [1953-1959] had upset the U. S. government. The U.S. much preferred having the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Baptista rather than Fidel Castro in charge. Our government thought it had a solution. Ronald Hilton was in Guatemala when he heard that the Americans were financing and training Cuban exiles to invade Cuba. He was so shocked to discover that our country was planning this Bay of Pigs invasion, that he told the *Los Angeles Times* what was going on. If I recall correctly, it was front page news. Despite this revelation, about which the American people had known nothing, on April 17-19, 1961, the invasion took place anyway. Some of the 1,200 exiles were killed; the rest were taken prisoner. The naïve Americans were sure the Cuban people would rise up to support the exiles; but that did not happen. Moreover, Cuba then invited the Russians to help defend them. That led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 (after we were back in Paris).

We had a friend at Stanford who was a Cuban psychiatrist who came to California to do further studies. As the Russians built missile bases on Cuba, tensions rose, and many Americans feared it would set off a nuclear war. Of course, our friend was very, very distressed about what might happen to his country. It is difficult to imagine today how terrified we all were then--that we might really have a nuclear war. We lived in constant terror of that, and this missile buildup in Cuba might well set it off. Some physics professors at Stanford had already built underground bomb shelters in their backyards. A couple we knew had loaded their car trunk with what they needed to take off for Canada if the nuclear war began. The newspapers reported that the schools in Los Angeles had asked the children to bring "paper sleeping bags" to school--in case

there was a war and they could not go home. A man in Los Angeles boasted of a bomb shelter you could build for only thirty-five dollars; he built one in his backyard but lost it in the next wildfire! I attended a lecture at Stanford one evening by the theoretical physicist, Edward Teller, known as the "father of the H-Bomb"--the hydrogen bomb which was much more destructive than the atomic bomb. He was talking about the fire storm that would follow a nuclear blast; and he somehow was making people laugh about that and about how many people would die.

A little later, when we left Stanford to travel to the Caribbean, the Guianas, and Brazil, the Spanish professor Ronald Hilton gave us journalist cards. He wanted us to send back news for the *Hispanic American Report* about what we saw. That provided us with one of our most interesting adventures. Because we had those journalist cards, we had the opportunity to ride in a small plane from French Guiana to Recife, Brazil. This was a plane carrying mail and providing nuns (who were Catholic missionaries) and peasants with local transportation from one place to another in the Amazon jungle. Instead of windows, this small plane had open portholes, like in a ship, but with no glass in them. I remember, we were all sitting with our backs against the sides of the plane as we flew across the Amazon jungle. I was pregnant at the time. I had gotten pregnant just before we left Stanford. I must've been four months pregnant. Anyway, I was sitting there with no ill effects from the bumpy ride. All these other people were getting sick, because we would go down in the jungle, let out some people, pick up some people, and fly back up again. We did this several times. Therefore, people were throwing up and it was running down a dip in the center of the plane. [laughter] There was also a peasant right across from me who had his arms out, and he was holding on to two of these empty portholes for his dear life. He probably had never been in a plane before, and he was scared out of his mind. [laughter] So, he was hanging on very tightly, as we flew over the Amazon jungle. That was one very special part of being a journalist. [laughter] I don't remember if we ever reported on that part of it.

We did stop in Cuba, however, so we did send back to Ronald Hilton a firsthand account of what we saw. We both had French passports to get us in. One evening, we sat outside with the Cubans and listened to one of Fidel's famous three-hour lectures, the purpose of which was to educate the Cuban people about economics. Soon after, we went to dinner with our Cuban friend who was back home. People thought we were Russian or Czech, and some of them were quite hostile. In one restaurant, they wouldn't serve us. As we sat there waiting, my husband had told us a story about his father, who had dropped a glass in a French restaurant, because he and his family weren't being served. His father finally became so angry about being ignored that he dropped a glass on the floor to get attention. So, our Cuban friend, a while later, more and more embarrassed and with that story in his head, put out his arm and swept the glasses off the table. I had to remove bits of glass in my legs after that. Anyway, it was because they thought we were Russian or Czechoslovakian that they wouldn't serve us. This happened in a wealthy town at the beach. Before the revolution, absolutely no Blacks of any shade from very light to very dark were allowed to go to a beach in Cuba. Cuba was an island with beaches encircling it, but Blacks were not allowed to be on those beaches. In the restaurant where we had stopped, they were used to the rich and elite eating there, rather than ordinary people. In the past, the visitors had been Americans, not Russians or Czechs. Now, after the revolution, our friend said his sister who was light Black could finally go to the beach. Fidel's government was also vaccinating all the children; and adults who could not read were being taught. Prostitutes in Havana, who in the

past were visited by many businessmen, had been taken to rural areas to work in the fields. There was so much rapid change that our psychiatrist friend had people lined up early in the morning, waiting for his help.

Cedric Belfrage was living in Cuba at the time. Originally British, he was formerly the editor of the *National Guardian,* a very liberal newspaper in New York City. At the airport, Americans had taken him and his wife off the plane. Americans were everywhere--policing. The Americans interrogated him and his wife while the rest of us waited. Finally, both were allowed back on the plane.

We went to Haïti [French pronunciation, with the silent "H"] or Haiti, I guess Americans say, and we were staying in a hotel right opposite the palace of Papa Doc. Papa Doc was Francois Duvalier, a terrible dictator. In the hotel, we saw a man sitting in the lobby listening to a speech of Fidel Castro's; it was playing very, very loudly on a radio. We couldn't imagine who would dare do this, especially right across from the palace of Papa Doc. We were so curious that we went over and started talking to him to find out. He told us his name was Trujillo, and he was in exile. At first, we thought he was the Dictator of the Dominican Republic Rafael Trujillo. [Editor's Note: Rafael Trujillo ruled from February 1930 until his death in May 1961--"one of the bloodiest eras ever in the Americas."] What we did not know was that the Dictator Trujillo had been assassinated; so this must have been the Dictator's brother Hector Trujillo, who had worked closely with the Dictator and, therefore, had gone into exile. He gave us a letter or something to take to his wife because we were going to the Dominican Republic. We carried his letter to his wife, who had about six guards outside her door.

Francois Duvalier had what he called the Tonton Macoute. He couldn't get the military to support him, so he had created his own military forces. You can sort of see that happening today with the federal people doing the policing, right? [Editor's Note: This refers to President Donald Trump deploying federal authorities to several American cities in response to ongoing demonstrations in 2020.] The name Tonton Macoute came from a children's story. In the story, this terrible person would come and capture a bad child, like a naughty child, put him or her in a bag, then carry that child off and eat it. What Haitians had feared as children, they would now fear as adults. The Tonton Macoute were terrible. I mean, they killed thirty to sixty thousand people. They would stone them and burn them and hang them up as a threat to other people, to make them afraid, so that no one would dare rebel against Papa Doc.

The United States was supplying, I believe, just about all the budget for Francois Duvalier, and most of it never reached the people. It just went into his pockets and his son's pockets. When he died, in 1971, his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, took over. He was called Baby Doc. The father was Papa Doc and the son was Baby Doc. He stayed in power until he was overthrown by a popular uprising in 1986. It was our taxpayer money that was supporting these dictators (including a two-million-dollar wedding for Baby Doc). Similarly, we had supported Trujillo when he was in power. The United States government, because of the Cold War, would *not* support anybody who endorsed a policy that seemed even remotely socialist. They were so afraid of communism that they lumped together anyone who wanted change--that is, anyone who wanted to help the poor in some way and get rid of corruption by the rich. They also did not pay any attention to distinctions between democratic socialists (with voting systems), other mixtures

of part socialist-part capitalist, or actual communists. So, the U.S. supported authoritarian figures--even terrible, terrible dictators like Trujillo (also called El Jefe) and Papa and Baby Doc, who had enriched their own families, stamped out criticism, and killed thousands and thousands of people.

Next, we went on to Guyana, which, as a colony, had been called British Guiana. We met Jan Carew there, who was the Minister of Culture. Jan (pronounced Yan) taught at Rutgers-Livingston for quite a while, and he had taught at Princeton University before that. So, we became friends with him, and Guyana is where we met him. Later, I was able to have Toni Morrison come to speak at Rutgers, because she knew Jan Carew and I knew him; I was able to persuade her to come because of him. In Guyana, Jan invited us to accompany him when he went out in the countryside to speak to the peasants. The Guyanese population is about half Black and half Indian (descendants of those who came from India)--all of them brought to Guyana as either free or cheap labor. Jan was Black--originally from neighboring Surinam (previously Dutch Guyana because it had been owned by the Dutch). It was amazing to watch Jan talk with the peasants. Jan was an exceptionally tall, handsome guy, very big, and he was talking to these very short Indian peasants who wore white, very light clothing--three-quarter length pants and a shirt. The peasants encircled him as he talked. It was a fascinating trip. Then, it became a bit dangerous. As we drove back, the brakes gave out. I was assigned to pull on the emergency brake to slow us down when necessary. [laughter] On the way, we stopped for a very spicy meal with an Indian family--I mean, it was so spicy, it was almost impossible to eat. At that time, the government in Guyana was led by Cheddi Jagan, of Indian descent. One of his biggest problems was to keep the country unified, because there was a lot of political conflict between the Blacks and the Indians.

Of the three Guyanas, one was owned by the Dutch, one by the British, and one by the French. They were adjacent to each other; yet the language of the colonizing nation dominated over any local languages that might have been there before. The same was true in the Caribbean. Each island spoke Spanish, French, or English, depending on which nation had imposed its language upon that island. The impact of the colonial past of each country was always evident.

Our next visit was to Brazil, where the people spoke Portuguese. In addition to our flight over the Amazon Jungle, we visited Recife and Rio de Janeiro. Then we went to see their new capital city called Brasília. There had long been a plan to build their capital in a more neutral location, namely, away from the coast into the middle of the country. The idea originated in 1827 and again in 1891 and 1922. Building did not begin until 1956. It was inaugurated as a city on April 21, 1960. It was then that various divisions of the government began to move there. When we were there in 1962, it was still "a work in progress."

Next, we went to Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, and Ghana in Africa. There was one strange night, which I would call a "happening," a word that came up later at Rutgers in the 1970s. To me it meant that several bizarre, unrelated things occurred within a short time or simultaneously; it was like a peculiar dream. We were in the capital of Liberia called Monrovia in the lobby of a small hotel. (We always stayed in inexpensive hotels.) In a room with a bar adjacent to us, dressed in Bermuda shorts (which were not yet popular), an American was dancing with a prostitute. We were in the lobby talking with a young couple from Spain. Like many young

men, the husband had come to Liberia, because he could earn more there than at home. She was expecting, and they told us that if you ate strawberries or drank coffee while pregnant, the baby would be born with red or brown marks on it. Next, a girl from Texas came in, and she had come to Liberia to teach music. While they needed good teachers in many subjects, music would probably be their last priority. She was dating a German guy, because there was nobody else her age (and white) in town to date. He, too, had come there to make more money than he could at home. Even though he did not really want to stay there, he stayed, because he wanted the money. So, he had stayed and stayed for years. Yet neither he nor the girl from Texas had ever been in the part of Monrovia where the native people lived. We offered to take them around the next morning. It seemed like a bizarre dream out of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

I had gone to a gynecologist in three different countries. Each doctor had told me something different. One said, "Take only showers." Another told me, "Take only baths." One said put the baby to sleep only on its back; another said to place the baby on its stomach; in Morocco, as in France, the doctor said to put the baby on its side with a towel rolled up behind it and then alternate sides. Once back to Paris for a few weeks, my son, Michel Francois Bazin, was born on October 4, 1962.

We had had a long, interesting trip. I later wrote articles about Third World women novelists, and I also wrote a piece about including Third World women in Women's Studies courses. My interest in teaching "Literature of the Developing World" was likewise sparked by all that traveling and being able to witness firsthand what was happening in those countries.

Life in Paris as a mother was quite different from life in Paris as a student. We lived in a town (or you might call it a suburb of Paris) called Anthony. Most of the French women worked, because they had Spanish and Portuguese immigrants who would take care of their children. In contrast to the practice in France, I still believed in my American way that I should take care of my own child. So, I wanted to do that. I had Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*, but I didn't really think they quite applied to me or I didn't quite tune into them yet, because I still believed that I should raise my own child--just like my mother had raised me. It was very lonely because all the other women were working. So, I didn't have anybody to talk to or be with, and the French come home from work late--at about seven-thirty at night. Therefore, all day long, it seemed as if I were waiting for my husband to come home. I was even glad when a Moroccan or Tunisian salesman would come to the door and want to sell me an Oriental rug. Anybody was a relief! [laughter]

At that time, the United States had picked up about seven or eight political people right off the street in the Dominican Republic. They flew them to somewhere in Texas and interrogated them with lights in their eyes and all that sort of thing, took their passports away from them, flew them to New York City, gave back the passports, flew them to Paris, and just dumped them in Paris, with no change of clothes and no coats. It was getting cool, and they had nothing. Nor did they speak French. My husband found out about this, and soon we had one boy, who was eighteen years old, staying with us. I could speak Spanish with him, so he was all right. My baby often refused to sleep from six to ten p.m. and screamed most of the time. Fortunately for me, several of these men would bring music, hold him, and do the mambo to calm him down.

KR: Nancy, if I could just cut in, why were these Dominican men brought over to France? Were they radicals?

NB: Well, I am not sure. After the death of the Dictator Trujillo, there was a great power struggle during which the two Trujillo uncles and the dictator's son came back but had to leave again. There was a lot of chaos. The men in Paris may have supported Juan Bosch, who, with his *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano,* was seemingly the most democratic. But he was not elected until over a year later in December 1963. When he started to make real changes, the Americans sent in 42,000 troops to fight against him, ignoring the fact that he was the first elected leader in many, many years. Between 1960 and 1963, there were two coups d'etat, the second one deposed Bosch. Obviously, the American government was meddling in their politics. What the difference was between these men and any possible government, I do not know, but I'm sure the American government felt they were radicals. It just illustrates, again, the way the United States manipulated the politics in many of the Latin American countries at that time. Cheddi Jagan in Guyana was a socialist but not a radical socialist; still, the United States tried hard to rig the elections in Guyana because of that. They tried everything possible to keep him from being elected. Arthur Schlesinger said at one point that American politicians fail to realize "that a Latin American version of socialism or even communism could be just an expression of an indigenous desire for social reform. It was not a monolithic Soviet-led international movement." People are extremely poor in most Latin American countries, and change is obviously needed. Yet, the U.S. would stop them from changing anything, rather than help them find another way of doing it. Seizing those seven or eight men was very organized, obviously, if they took them one place, interrogated them, took their passports, gave the passports back many miles away, and then just dumped them in Paris. We took in the eighteen-year-old because he had no home, no food, and no money. Whether his politics were right or wrong, he was trying to make his country a better place to live.

After living in Paris for about a year, my husband decided he wanted to teach. In the French system he would not be able to teach until he was much older. He wanted to teach right away, like other PhD graduates did in the United States; they usually became an assistant professor right out of graduate school. He sent one letter off to Princeton University and got a job in the Physics Department, which continues to amaze me. We then went to Princeton, New Jersey, for about four years. Many of the physics professors, both at Stanford and Princeton, were advisors to the United States government. During that nuclear age, probably two of the most influential physicists were Edward Teller ("father of the H-Bomb") and Robert Oppenheimer ("father of the A-Bomb"). I had heard Edward Teller's speech at Stanford, where he managed to make people laugh while informing them about the horrific possible futures they might have. At Princeton University, I attended a speech by Oppenheimer. Having been the leader of those creating the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos, when he witnessed the first test of the atomic bomb, he told us he was so horrified at what he had created, that he threw up. Teller advocated going on to develop the even more destructive H-Bomb, whereas Oppenheimer opposed it.

Princeton University was still all male. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf described how she felt when she went to the Cambridge University campus, where only males could study. I tried to work on my dissertation in the English Department room in the Princeton Library but felt too uncomfortable. The young boys would stare at me. Virginia Woolf's brothers and all her

male friends went to Cambridge, but she couldn't go to Cambridge because they didn't take women. She felt similarly awkward on their campus.

I also had the ridiculous idea that if I was not working, I could not afford to pay for a babysitter so I could work on my dissertation. It finally occurred to me that my husband owed half of the money for the childcare. I did then get a young woman to come two afternoons a week, so I could do my work. For the most part, I was trying to do it nights and during my son's naps, which does not work very well. But finally, while still living in Princeton, I completed my dissertation and went to Stanford to take an oral exam, not only on my dissertation but also on British literature written from 1850 to 1950.

Meanwhile, the United State was fighting the Vietnam War. With my best friend then and ever since, I joined a seminar on nonviolence that Margery Pratt, a wonderful woman, had organized. So, we read Gandhi and Martin Luther King and there was Gene Sharp, I remember, and some other writers like A.J. Muste; they were all for nonviolent direct action. I think I had been in a peace march or two in San Francisco, but in Princeton I became a little more active. On one of the corners on the Main Street, we had a table with information about the Vietnam War. We gave informative pamphlets to people, and I know I helped with that.

One day, we went to the people who were going into church, trying to appeal to their conscience. We had with us issues of *Ramparts* magazine about the napalm being sprayed in Vietnam. It burned off the foliage on the trees and the bushes, so our soldiers or pilots could clearly see the Vietcong. Well, of course, sometimes there were accidents, and there was a famous picture of a little Vietnamese girl walking along naked with her arms out because she had been burned all over by the napalm. It was a South Vietnamese plane that flew over and by mistake dropped it on their own people and on their own soldiers. Her clothes just burned right off. She put out some of the flames with her own hands and was screaming with pain as she went down the middle of the highway. I don't know whether that picture was in the issue of *Ramparts* we were distributing. But that image became the icon for Vietnam--the image of this little Vietnamese girl, who was about seven or eight, going down the highway, naked and burning--burning with pain. [Editor's Note: On June 8, 1972, South Vietnamese planes mistakenly dropped napalm on the village of Trang Bang in South Vietnam. Photographer Nick Ut then took photographs of villagers fleeing on the road. One of the photographs captured seven-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc, who was severely burned, running along the highway with her brother. After taking the photograph, Ut dropped his camera and helped Kim Phuc, who survived. The photograph was awarded the Pulitzer Prize.]

Anyway, we were offering the churchgoers copies of the special issue of *Ramparts* magazine about the impact of napalm. I can remember trying to give one to a woman and she looked at me with such hatred; it was not at all a Christian look. [laughter] So, I was getting used to being a little bit of a rebel and having people give me hostility in exchange for that. But we were not the only ones rebelling; many other individuals wanted the Vietnam War to stop. The anti-war protests became more and more intense as we went on to Rutgers. We certainly did not "win" that war.

My husband had been hired in 1964 or so to build and run a bubble chamber for Princeton University; but after four years, it must have been outdated and, therefore, they decided to dismantle it. I didn't even know then what a bubble chamber looked like. [laughter] But my husband had been brought to Princeton to build it. [Editor's Note: The bubble chamber was used in the study of high-energy nuclear physics and subatomic particles.] Physicists from Rutgers University, sixteen miles north of Princeton, contacted my husband Maurice and asked him to join the Rutgers Physics Department. That's why we moved to New Brunswick. To be more precise, our house was across the river from New Brunswick in Piscataway.

KR: What was your job search like that led to your position at Rutgers?

NB: Well, I was, initially, sort of oppressing myself because I thought that I wanted to have a part-time job, because I had had a second child, my daughter Christine Nicole Bazin. I still had this idea that I would stay at home with her part time. I thought they would only let me teach composition rather than literature, and I really wanted to teach literature. I went to a party one night, and somebody said to me, "Well, it's not going to get any better, is it?" Just that statement made me realize that I might as well just go ahead and do it. So, I did it. I applied.

The hiring, in those days, was done by what was called the "old boy" system. There were no strong affirmative action requirements yet, so department chairs were still free to do what they wanted. I think they never had a meeting to decide whether they should hire me, and I never was in competition with other people for that job. My PhD from Stanford undoubtedly helped, but department chairs just hired whomever they wanted, and often they exchanged students with their buddies from other universities: "I'll take your graduate student and you'll take mine." I noticed that most of the males at Rutgers came from Yale, so they had a loyalty system there. Anyway, the chair gave me the half-time job, and he said at the time that I could have a full-time job "any time I wanted it." Well, I decided, by my--what was I? thirty-six then--by my thirty-sixth birthday that I really did need to have a full-time job if I was going to do it seriously. So, I went to him, after a couple months, and said, "I want a full-time job."

He was very cold with me that time. He sat with his big, bare desk between us, and he was quite negative about being able to find another half line to make mine a whole one. He said, "I don't know if I can do that." I was so upset by his change in tone that I went back to my office and cried. Then, on Sunday afternoon, he called me up and he said, "Nancy, this is Dan" and I said, "Dan who?" He gave me his last name and said, "How many other Dans do you have in your life?" He was calling me up to tell me he had found another half line at Livingston; he had successfully put together a full line for me. Finally, I had a full-time job.

My first year at Rutgers College was 1970-1971. Some administrators had been discussing whether Rutgers College should go coed and, of course, there was a great deal of opposition. The alumni didn't like the idea, and the Board of Governors didn't like the idea. I'm not clear about the faculty. I think there was both pro and con in the faculty and in the student body. Finally, Phyllis Zatlin [Boring], who taught Spanish in the Language Department, became president of WEAL, which was the Women's Equity Action League. She may have been the one who contacted Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was teaching law at Rutgers-Newark at the time. WEAL asked Ginsburg to write a letter to the Board of Governors at Rutgers-New Brunswick--

about Rutgers College, in particular, because that was the all-male college. She was to warn them that, as a state university, they were going to get sued if they didn't go coed. We owe gratitude to Ruth Bader Ginsburg for her role in making Rutgers College go coed. [Editor's Note: In 1970, the Rutgers Board of Governors voted to admit women into Rutgers College, which had been a men's college since its founding as Queens College in 1766. In 1972, the first women enrolled in Rutgers College, graduating in the Class of 1976.]

One faculty male said, "Well, it'll be all right to go coed, as long as it doesn't take anything away from the males." Rutgers College did not want the girls to take any places from the boys. They wanted to have the whole class they would normally have, of boys. They just added some women onto the freshman class, and they did that each year for four years. Then, when they tried to base admissions on merit, they discovered that too many women would get in. Therefore, they decided to have a quota system of fifty-fifty. That's what they did, so the make-up of the student body would not be out of balance. When the girls finally came and they were playing basketball, the school newspaper *Targum* reported that people actually shouted out: "Get out of our gym. Go home. Whatever happened to motherhood?" [laughter]

When I started in the Rutgers English Department, there were 440 faculty at Rutgers College and only forty of them women, so only ten percent of the faculty was female. Interestingly, most of them were in the Language Department and in mathematics and some in the sciences, which was surprising. Very few of them, of course, were tenured. One of the male professors said publicly that discrimination against women was, "As it should be." For women faculty, there were regulations and practices that reflected bias against women. If you got a disease, your contract said they would pay for it, *unless* it was related to a woman's disease. Also, if you were seven months pregnant, you would have to go home at that point, and you did not get your job back unless it "was still available," whereas if a man went off to do military service, if he came back, he was guaranteed to have his job back. There were still many things like that in the regulations.

KR: Along with that, your line was half Livingston College and half Rutgers College.

NB: Well, not really, they shifted the half line from Livingston to Rutgers, so I was full time at Rutgers College.

KR: What other women were in the English Department at Rutgers College?

NB: There were two other women, neither of whom were feminists at the time: Alicia Ostriker and Bridget Gellert. I am sure Alicia Ostriker, the poet, became a feminist soon after I left, but her husband called me up once--she probably doesn't know this--and asked me if I would politicize her. [laughter] She wrote a lot of poetry that was very female, and I loved her work. I often had her come to my classes to read her poetry. One interesting thing happened to both of us. Alicia had a poem called *Once More Out of Darkness,* printed as a small booklet. I assume it was eventually reproduced elsewhere, but it was, at that time, a long poem published alone. It was about the birth of a baby, and it described birth in terms of football players running down a field. It was a very powerful poem, and she read it to one of my sophomore literature classes where there were both boys and girls. One boy raised his hand, and he said, "Well, if that's what it's like, I'm never going to get a girl pregnant." The girls started raising their hands, "Well, if

that's what it's like, I'm never going to get pregnant." Alicia and I thought her poem was just realistic. We didn't think of it as a negative description of birth. But nobody talks about birth. We get born as often as we die and people talk about death all the time in poetry and elsewhere, but nobody wrote about birth. Of course, men didn't write about birth because they hadn't experienced it; and earlier women hadn't written about it--perhaps because they were too embarrassed to do so. That poem of Alicia Ostriker's was very special. I also had her come to Old Dominion University to do a reading. The other woman was Bridget Gellert [Lyons], who was friends with the most powerful man in the department, maybe because they both lived in New York City. She was friendly and very nice, but she was not at all involved in feminism or women's events.

Two kinds of conferences had a major impact on my becoming a feminist. The first kind was literary, and the second kind was interdisciplinary and all-female. First of all, there were the Modern Language Association (or MLA) conventions for language and literature teachers in universities. Elaine Showalter (from Douglass College, Rutgers University's all-female college) gave several major speeches at MLA. She talked, for example, about how women writers were excluded from textbooks and how the titles of textbooks and pronouns kept the focus on men and omitted women. It was also pointed out at one of the MLA sessions that the three Brontë sisters initially had to choose male names so they could get their novels published. Charlotte Brontë was Currer Bell, Emily Brontë was Ellis Bell, and Anne Bronte called herself Acton Bell. Their novels were praised--until critics found out that women claimed to be the authors. Those critics then credited the one Brontë brother, whose name was Branwell, for having written them all. George Eliot is another example of a British writer who took a male name, and she's still known by that instead of her real name--Mary Ann Evans. So, that opened my eyes. [Editor's Note: Elaine Showalter, Professor Emerita of English at Princeton University, taught at Douglass College from 1969 to 1984.]

Then, I also went to an interdisciplinary conference called Women and the Arts, which introduced me to feminism and many well-known feminists. That conference was nine days long in Buffalo, New York. There I met Faith Ringgold, a Black feminist artist. I later invited her to exhibit her art at Rutgers and again at Old Dominion University. Pat Mainardi was there too. In her essays, she asked and answered questions like: Why weren't there more women artists? or Who were the great women artists? Jacqui Ceballos, an opera singer, also attended. She later served as President of Veteran Feminists of America. There was a quilt exhibit at the Women in the Arts Conference, and one of the things I learned was that quilts and needlework were female forms of art. There was talk of a needlework museum at that time in Pittsburgh, PA. At that conference, there seemed to be discussions of every possible subject related to women. Those nine days of being in an all-female environment had a major impact on me. It was a forerunner of many Women's Studies conferences I would attend in the future. Conferences were very important to my learning throughout my career. For that reason, I attended the Modern Language Association conventions every year. Women's Studies Programs were frequently started by women in English departments around the country, so there were always many talks, panels, and discussions about women writers. The annual National Association of Women's Studies conferences did not begin until 1977, but I attended them for years after that.

KR: How did that influence your developing courses in Women's Studies when you were teaching at Rutgers College?

NB: Well, first of all, conferences gave me a lot of contacts, so I could find out what people did at other universities. There was something called Know, Inc. in Pittsburgh, which sometimes gave out ideas to people who wanted to start Women's Studies courses or programs. The first couple of Women's Studies programs began in the late 1960s, around 1968. All of us were looking for novels, short stories, and poems by good women writers. The Feminist Press had started in 1970 to publish books by early women writers that had gone out of print because they were by women. Virago Press started in 1973 for similar reasons--to make books by women available to Women's Studies teachers and women readers. We were all looking for materials that showed what women's lives were like. There were also new ways of reading books we had previously read--before we had a feminist perspective. Suddenly, we were all seeing the world in a different way. Women's Studies was also allowing us to have the courage to think in multi-disciplinary ways. One did not have to be an expert in all fields to teach in an interdisciplinary way. We were learning about all of that from one another. Seeing each other and listening to other women at conferences was essential.

To be able to offer Women's Studies courses, I had to talk to the heads of the departments and, of course, I talked to faculty to discuss what kinds of Women's Studies courses they might do. I remember Ann Parelius in the Sociology Department as being the main strong support that I found. She did courses on "Sociology of the Family" and "Sociology of Sex Roles." There was a man, William O'Neill, in the History Department, who had published a book in 1969 called *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America*, so he offered a course on that topic. Another male, John Bird, taught a course called "Sex and Pregnancy," and we had Judith Stern offering the "Psychobiology of Sex Roles." Parelius, O'Neill, Bird, and Stern all received tenure at Rutgers. We also had a course called "The Black Female" taught by La Francis [Rodgers]-Rose, who had published a book by that name. From 1973 to 1988, she taught part time at Princeton, where Michelle Obama was one of her students.

I always told Department Chairs that Women's Studies courses would benefit men as well as women. I taught my first Women's Studies course, "Female Roles and Feminine Consciousness," to eighteen men and three women. The three girls had come over from Douglass College and the boys were from Rutgers College. It went well. Both men and women should be allowed to choose from the whole spectrum of activities and personality traits. Rigid sex roles are not good for males any more than they are good for females. We have to offer more choice to both sexes if we are to improve society. Another goal was to educate the community. I gave a lot of talks off campus to all kinds of groups--male and female. In addition, I was on radio and TV to discuss a variety of topics. For the same purpose, we offered a non-credit course for women in the community. It was called "Horizons for Women in the '70s."

"Women in Literature" was probably the second course I taught at Rutgers College after "Female Roles and Feminine Consciousness." Every semester at least sixty-five students signed up for "Women in Literature"; therefore, the English Department was happy to have it. They could count on a good enrollment in that course every semester. I also began to teach with Judy

Walkowitz. We team-taught "The Victorian Woman in History and Literature." (Judy's daughter, Rebecca, was head of the Rutgers English Department for a while, and she is now the Dean. My daughter and Rebecca were best friends at ages three and four while in nursery school!) I also taught "Twentieth-Century Women in Literature and History" with Dee Garrison, who was at Livingston at that time. By then, we had as many students in as many courses as they did in the more established programs at Douglass and at Livingston. When I was creating Women's Studies at Rutgers College, Kate Ellis was head of the Women's Studies Program at Livingston College, and I assume that Elaine Showalter started the program at Douglass College, but she soon moved on to other interests. I do not recall who replaced her.

By 1973, I was already printing the Women's Studies courses and course descriptions on a mimeograph machine and making them available for students. Also listed were the requirements for getting a Women's Studies Certificate, and we had enough courses for students to earn the certificate on our campus. Although I was doing the work of Coordinator of Women's Studies at Rutgers College, of course I was not getting paid or getting a course off for the work I was doing. Nor did I have a proper office, a secretary, or a budget or anything like that. But once we had enough courses at Rutgers College, I went to the Faculty Senate to get the program approved. Since it already existed, and it wasn't going to cost them anything (because I purposely did not ask for any money), they approved it. That's how the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers College became a reality.

I had another unique and exciting opportunity to teach while at Rutgers. There was a group of ten Black faculty from southern Black schools who did not have PhDs. There was an excellent federal program at that time to pay for their getting a PhD at Rutgers University, and I taught them for three semesters. They were all very bright and very interested, so that was a delight. One article that I wrote entitled "The Androgynous Vision," I wrote with one of those students; her name was Alma Freeman. That group got to have a seminar with Doris Lessing when Lessing came to the Rutgers College campus. That was a very special experience.

KR: Can you tell us more about how Rutgers College was adjusting to the major change of going coed?

NB: Yes. I began my teaching career during what we might call a revolutionary period of change for women. We have discussed my background, my education, and my personal path to feminism. The evolution of my consciousness led to my desire to create the academic field of Women's Studies at Rutgers College. That same revolutionary period of change for women also led to a demand that universities, high-level positions in government and business, and special opportunities could no longer be exclusively for males. Therefore, Rutgers College had to go coed. To help the campus to adjust, the Dean of the College created a committee to talk about "what to do when the girls come." Many men on the faculty and in the administration were rather frightened and nervous at the thought of their arrival.

As I mentioned, my first year at Rutgers College was 1970-1971. The committee was set up for discussions during 1971-1972. They were worrying, for example, about the dormitories. For instance, there were urinals in the bedrooms, so they were wondering what to do about that. The girls just put plants in them. They were also worrying about the absence of walls between the

showers in the bathrooms. I suggested that the boys would probably like to have privacy too, so they should definitely add some walls. Then, I was sent over to the sports department to talk to the faculty there. They were particularly nervous about having to teach girls. I went to see them, and they told me they had been taught that you couldn't throw a ball at a girl's chest. You might hurt her. They were also taught that girls couldn't roll on their stomachs. Moreover, she couldn't swim one week out of four. I tried my best to calm their fears by telling them that women were different now. They wanted their physical training to be more like the men's. They wanted equality.

For me, the most interesting day among our meetings was when a female graduate student in history--who was on the committee--came in and said, "Well, maybe we have to change the curriculum, because I looked in my American history textbooks and the Suffrage Movement is not in there at all. It's not in the index and it's not in the textbook." The dean was very upset by this and he stood up, slammed his hand down on the desk, and said, "If this curriculum has been good enough for the boys, it's good enough for the girls." [laughter] So, that was the end of *that* conversation. I went home that night and looked at my American history books. The Suffrage Movement (1848-1920) was indeed missing. It had either been omitted from American history or it had been removed from the history books. All those years of arrests and forced feedings to get the vote were treated as if they had never happened. Nor was the struggle for Black women to get the vote included. It was time to change the curriculum! I finally found a documentary film of the Suffrage Movement from McGraw-Hill to show to my classes at Rutgers College.

I was recently in Lorton, Virginia near Washington, D.C. There were two workhouses--originally both were for men. Later, one was designated for women. Today that huge women's workhouse has artists' studios in it, but there is a small museum there--much too small--about the history of the treatment of the suffragists with pictures of what men were doing to them *in that workhouse* in 1917, how they were force-fed with a tube. The abuse of these women reached its peak on November 14, 1917, now called the Night of Terror. Lucy Burns (1879-1966) was the woman who was arrested most and, hence, had been force-fed most often; so that little museum is named the Lucy Burns Museum. In the workhouse, she was also stripped naked, beaten, her hands were chained above her head, and she was forced to stand all night. These women had the courage to withstand this, because they believed so strongly in their right to vote. In that meeting at Rutgers College, we learned from that history grad student that the evil behavior of those men and the heroism of those women was being ignored. The motivation of the writer and/or the editor must have been to hide what their male predecessors had done. That must have been the motivation, too, for omitting much of the history of slavery from the textbooks. White males must have wanted to hide what their predecessors had done to Blacks. Like that history graduate student, I knew then that it was well past time to transform the curriculum.

Although the Dean was not ready to accept changing the curriculum, he did have a different great idea. He asked me to do a women's series and bring in a lot of outstanding women. He didn't give me any money to do it, but he said just find the money and bring them in. So, I did. I brought in people like novelist Doris Lessing, who rarely made public appearances, and later, in 2007, won a Nobel Prize, and Anaïs Nin, who lived in New York City and was famous for her published diaries. There was Diane Wakoski, the poet. We had Violette Verdy, a dancer, and artists Faith Ringgold and Eva Cockcroft who had art exhibits. Barbara Ehrenreich came. She

and Diedre English had written two small, amazing books called *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (1972) and *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (1973). The authors told us how women had been the healers and then were pushed aside by men who set up universities that women could not attend. Although medicine was still very primitive, a degree became necessary to practice it.

I remember, too, the night that Tillie Olsen came to do a reading and read her short story "Tell Me a Riddle." There was a male professor from Livingston, who attended the reading. He came up to me afterwards to tell me that Tillie Olsen's reading had made him cry, and he could not believe this--that a woman writer could make him cry. The typical male attitude was that women writers were inferior to even the second-rate male writers and certainly not as good as the best male writers, so they didn't even read them. At least this man had come to the reading and had been very, very moved by it. The others just didn't come!

We had marvelous programs. Another big event was a talk by the feminist Robin Morgan, which was held at Douglass College. She was speaking to the audience and suddenly said, "Let's go trash my daddy." We were all wondering, "What on earth is this?" Well, her father was an obstetrician in New Brunswick, and Robin Morgan, one of the main feminists of the day, explained that, before she was born, her mother had had a job helping immigrants. Robin's mother met her immigrant father, thought the relationship was more serious than he did, and became pregnant. By the time her mother realized she was pregnant, they had broken up. So, her mother contacted the father and asked him to marry her--at least to marry her for long enough to have the baby. She did not want her baby to be called a "bastard." To call an innocent child a bastard is just terrible, but people did that then. So, he told her, if the baby was a boy, he would marry her and if the baby wasn't a boy, he would not marry her. Of course, the baby was Robin Morgan, a female. Then there was also her mother's reputation. Her mother had fled to Florida to hide what was, in the early '40s, the *disgraceful* fact that she was having a baby "out of wedlock." The father did not accompany her. So, that's why Robin Morgan had said, "Let's go trash my daddy," that story of her father (Mates Morgenstern) abandoning her mother, because Robin was female, oh dear, and he was a gynecologist!

KR: Can you tell the story about Toni Morrison coming to campus and speaking?

NB: Yes, she was the first one I contacted. Remember I had no budget for this series, but I had received a hundred dollars from some campus organization. Therefore, I offered her the hundred dollars, and she was willing to come. She had written only one novel *The Bluest Eye*, at that time, and I invited her because of Jan Carew's recommendation (Jan, whom we had met in Guyana, was also a novelist). Afterwards, people were saying, "Well, she should've been paid more." Of course, she should have been paid more, but I had just started raising the money and I only had a hundred dollars. I can remember that there were some Black male writers in the audience who were annoyed that a Black female writer had been invited to speak and they hadn't; but it was, after all, a Women's Series. So, there was that. She was extraordinary. I taught her book *The Bluest Eye* for many years, and that novel was turned into a play, a musical, and a movie. She was always wonderful when she spoke, wonderful. She was the first speaker. The series gained some support from the Women's Caucus--perhaps because I became president of it? I don't recall how or why that came about.

KR: What was the Women's Caucus?

NB: Well, I believe it was organized in 1971 to ask for things for women. We were asking for five childcare centers on the different campuses. Each one was to be attached to an academic department. We hoped these childcare centers would open in Fall 1975. We were also asking for a university-wide Women's Center for educational and support services. We had been offered a building for the center on the Douglass campus and, in October 1974, the Caucus had voted to accept it. We already had a house on the Douglass campus for the Women's Studies Institute, and I was Director of it that Fall 1974 semester, when I was also Chairwoman of the Women's Caucus.

According to a November 1, 1974 article in *Targum* (the university newspaper), the Caucus included women faculty, administrators, staff, and graduate students. Guida West was a part of the Caucus along with Helen Grevin, who was then Assistant Dean at Cook College (renamed, in 2006, the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences), and Judy Walkowitz, who taught in University College, the evening school. People from all five Rutgers campuses belonged to the Women's Caucus. In that 1974-1975 academic year, the Caucus was also sponsoring a women's film series, including *Salt of the Earth*, a Senegalese film I often showed in my classes. But the films were shown only on the Livingston and Douglass campuses, so someone else was obviously in charge of that.

My focus that year was on a series of scholarly talks by our own female faculty, which I had organized as part of directing the Women's Studies Institute. These talks were also co-sponsored by the Women's Caucus. The goal of this series was to find out what research Rutgers women were doing and to give them a chance to perform, to have a day when they would have an opportunity to talk on a subject relevant to their research. My ultimate goal was to encourage them to publish (which was necessary for tenure). Here is a list of the first year Rutgers' faculty programs: Hattie Gossett and Barbara Masekela did a symposium on "African and Afro-American Women." Ann Parelius from the Rutgers College Sociology Department talked about the "Changing Sex Roles of Douglass Women." Ruth Whitney did a talk about "Women and Religion," and Ann Snitow from Livingston presented the topic of "Women through Diaries and Journals." The final spring program was Judy Walkowitz's talk titled "Prostitution in 19th Century England." As if that were not enough, Alicia Ostriker (Rutgers College), Helen Cooper (a graduate student), and Adrienne Rich (Douglass College) were in the process of planning a series of poetry readings.

The series of programs by outstanding, nationally-known women from elsewhere, or the talks by Rutgers women from all the campuses, or even the university-wide Women's Caucus--all three gave us all a chance to get together. There were not many women faculty on the Rutgers College campus. Somebody said to me once, "Well, where did you get support from?" At Rutgers College, there were no women faculty in art or music or history or psychology. There were only three of us in the large department of English and one woman in sociology; so, it was rather lonely if you were a woman at Rutgers College. The Language Department was the one exception in terms of hiring several women, but for some reason I only knew Phyllis Zatkin [Boring], who taught literature by Hispanic women writers. Surprisingly, there were some

women in the sciences and especially in mathematics, but they were in a totally separate location in Piscataway. The Livingston College campus was also across the river in Piscataway; and Douglass College was at the other end of New Brunswick.

KR: I would like to ask you about the very early years of the Women's Studies Institute, what is now called the Institute for Research on Women. You were talking about how this programming that you were doing with the speakers' series was tied in with those early years of the Women's Studies Institute. How did the Women's Studies Institute start? You were, in fact, a director of the Women's Studies Institute.

NB: Yes. I don't recall exactly how it started, but there were three Women's Studies programs at Rutgers University, perhaps each one created by the person listed here--Elaine Showalter at Douglass College, Kate Ellis at Livingston College, and me (Nancy Topping Bazin), who created the Women's Studies Program at Rutgers College. We three and Judy Walkowitz from University College, who team-taught a Women's Studies course with me, went to ask for approval to create a Women's Studies Institute. We thought a tenured faculty member should be the Director. Because Mary Hartman would soon get tenure, we had already talked to Mary about directing the Institute in the Fall of 1975, and she had agreed to do it. It was the four of us without Mary who went to Provost Kenneth Wheeler to get approval for our idea plus a place to house it. We probably made that request sometime during the academic year 1973-1974. We did get a location for it in a house at 132 George Street. While waiting for Mary to get tenure, I was going to be the Director during the first semester (Fall 1974) and Guida West agreed to do it for the second semester (Spring 1975). [Editor's Note: Margarida "Guida" West is a sociologist, activist and author who began working at Rutgers in 1974 in the University Extension Division. She served as the Coordinator of Continuing Education for Women, helping to establish the Women's Center, the Women's Studies Institute and, through a federal grant, the Training Institute for Sex Desegregation of the Public Schools. She then worked as a special projects administrator from 1987 to 1989 at the Institute for Research on Women (IRW), which was the new name for the Women's Studies Institute.]

As the first Director, I believe I was getting together a list of women faculty teaching on all the campuses of Rutgers University, finding out what their research projects were, and then setting up a series. I listed, in my earlier discussion of the Women's Caucus, the programs I created that first year. That series did go on for a while, because I found a list of the faculty presentations from 1976. Evidently this series did help get the names of the female faculty and their research projects out to members of their departments, their students, and the public. In Fall 1976, the Women's Studies Institute offered twelve programs during just one semester.

KR: Can you tell me some of the names of the female faculty and the programs in 1976?

NB: Yes. Let's see, Kate Ellis did "The Gothic Novel and Popular Fiction: Women Readers Then and Now." Barbara Goff, who had a PhD from Rutgers and later worked and taught at Cook College, did "Pre-Raphaelite Images of Women: A Presentation with Slides." There was a Women's Theatre Workshop of two of Megan Terry's plays [best known for her innovative plays in the 1960s], and on another occasion, they did *Futz* [1962] by Rochelle Owens. These dramatic presentations may have been linked to a drama course that focused, in part, on

innovative women playwrights of the 1960s. Judy Walkowitz did "Venereal Disease and Prostitution." Ruth Whitney presented "Is Women's Liberation a Religious Movement?" Poet Penelope Schott did "Poems from Iceland and New Jersey." Rita Heller did the "Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, 1921 to 1938." Phyllis Zatlin [Boring] discussed two Spanish novelists, Elena Quiroga and Carmen Martin Gaite. Cleo McNelly, whom I knew from Livingston, did "The Muse and the Family Romance or What Makes People Write?" Carol Smith, who later became one of the directors of the Institute for Research on Women (1986 to 1992), presented "Women and Hemingway." Larissa Onyshkevych, from Ukraine and on the Rutgers faculty, discussed "Courtship, Marriage, and Family Roles among Contemporary Slavic Women." In short, the local research series that I had created in the Fall of 1974 was still going in 1976-1977.

In the Spring of 1975, Guida West replaced me as Director of the Women's Studies Institute. Guida was writing a grant for sex desegregation in the public schools. That too continued well into the future. [Editor's Note: In 1975, the Training Institute for Sex Desegregation of the Public Schools, headed by Rebecca Lubetkin as the executive director, began at Rutgers to develop training programs to assist schools in complying with Title IX and eliminating sex discrimination and bias in education. In 1982, the Training Institute for Sex Desegregation of the Public Schools became known as the Consortium for Educational Equity.] I puzzled over that term "sex desegregation" a bit. Then, I remembered how my daughter's female physical education teacher was trying to adapt to Title IX but at the same time did not want to. I happened to be in the school and saw what she was doing with a class of seven and eight-year-olds. She had put the girls at one end of the gym and the boys at the other end and told them to do some kind of exercise. I asked the teacher why the boys and girls weren't together. The teacher said to me, "Well, you wouldn't want a little girl to bend over in front of a little boy, would you?" They were so little that it was irrelevant whether they were male or female. [laughter] So, that was the teacher's concern in 1979--to keep them separate.

I remember that this occurred even in less physical activities. For example, in a grade school bell orchestra, my daughter couldn't play the big bells, because she was female; she could only play the small bells. Only boys could play the big bells. Similarly, only boys could fetch something a little heavy for the teacher. This had to change, so the girls could be free to play or do anything they wanted, and the boys could do the same.

The female graduate students in the Rutgers English Department were learning to do what they wanted. They designed a feminist literature course. They chose which women writers they wanted to read, and they wrote the course description. Then they asked me to teach it. The advisor for the graduate students, however, told all of them not to take it, because it wouldn't serve any purpose later for teaching or for their degree. So, that was the attitude I was up against. Of course, the students signed up anyway. There were thirty people in that graduate course.

One wonderful thing about Rutgers at that time was what they called the free university. Faculty would teach an extra course that didn't have anything to do with their assigned teaching load. They would do that at night, and students would just go to it, even though it was not a course

they were taking for credit. The teachers were not getting paid to teach and the students did not pay anything to learn. People just taught and learned because they wanted to.

Oh, there was another amazing thing that happened! One night all the faculty and students went to a big arena--probably where the basketball games were played. The stadium seats were full and guess what happened: they did away with all the course requirements for the undergraduate degrees. In one night without any previous discussion, they just eliminated all requirements! Students could select whatever courses appealed to them to earn their degree. It is hard to believe today that such a thing could happen. It was an astounding event!

It was as if the Vietnam War was making us crazy! We had bomb scares all the time. We didn't pay any attention to them. When the alarm went off during a class, we didn't leave the building. We just continued as if nothing had happened. Then there was streaking during the Shakespeare class of about two hundred students in an auditorium. A few boys would put on ski masks and run naked down one aisle and up the other. There were bizarre "happenings" and drug overdoses and experiments. A student of mine who was on speed called me one night at three a.m., so I talked with him for an hour until his mind cleared.

In the 1970s, there was a group of students at Rutgers associated with the national Students for a Democratic Society, known as SDS. I think they had a group on most campuses. They were for "participatory democracy" and against, in general, racism and militarism. They were a major force against the Vietnam War (1955-1975). The local group may have been behind the teach-ins (that were against the war) at Rutgers. I heard that one of the Rutgers' deans was reporting on students who were political. The FBI also had spies among demonstrators who reported what was happening and who was there. Sometimes those informants were also instigators who would cause trouble and encourage others to join in. I remember that one evening the Yippies (always a more amusing and dramatic group), after a colorful gathering, went over to the police station, took down the American flag, and put it back upside down. Meanwhile, the police just watched from the police station. Some people thought the guy who came up with that idea was an informant for the police and not really a protestor. One Saturday a lot of people at Rutgers went to Washington, D.C. to a huge demonstration against the Vietnam War; the police rounded them up and put them in big cages. I mean, they had these big fenced-in places, where they put the protestors. As some of them looked out, they saw a guy that they knew well. They thought he was on their side, but there he was--getting out of a police car. He was obviously working for the other side.

There was also a sit-in in the president's office at Rutgers. The Students for a Democratic Society did not participate. It was the naïve, non-political people that went and sat in the president's office. Sometimes, if you know too much, you know what can happen to you. [laughter] If you don't know too much, you go and do it and become one of the new leaders. Those were crazy times!

KR: A quick follow up question, you said you started teaching at Rutgers College in 1970.

NB: Yes, in the fall.

KR: It was the fall of '70.

NB: Yes. My primary field was twentieth century British literature. Kate Millett's book *Sexual Politics* had a major impact on me. I think I learned a lot from her about what was meant by feminist literary criticism. I learned a lot too from Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex*. There was a chapter called "Independent Women" at the back of *The Second Sex*, and I particularly used that. A former student of mine, Irene Ronciglione, a very good writer and feminist, wrote for *Targum*, the campus newspaper, and she said my twentieth-century British literature course was a Women's Studies course because I taught it in that way. That is true, because a feminist perspective is a way of seeing that impacts how one views everything. Suddenly, the consequences of systemic sexism become obvious, whereas before, one had not recognized them. Well, whenever they gave me my evaluation after three years, they said they didn't need anybody to teach twentieth-century British literature, but when I pointed out that I was the only one who had taught it there during the last three years, they dropped that argument. My various activities probably scared them despite the fact that I was never wild or confrontational or improper. A couple of people have told me recently that I was "well ahead of my time," but that should be a virtue, shouldn't it? [laughter]

KR: What other recollections do you have with your time directing the Women's Studies Institute?

NB: Not very much. The one visual image that stayed with me from that experience was of me sitting in my office alone and feeling rather lonely. I keep wondering whether there was anybody else in the building. I had a committee for the initial women's series that I had started at Rutgers College, but I don't know whether anyone met with me to do the Women's Studies Institute programs or anything else. I read some papers that said I had helped write the grant that Guida West did for the public schools and then was on the Board of Advisors, and I did find one letter where she was asking some other people to join that board supervising the grant that she got. So, I imagine she did a lot of work on the grant during the second semester. I'm a little fuzzy on all that. The Women's Studies Institute building was a house on the Douglass Campus; and my teaching and office were on the Rutgers College campus, so I don't know how often I was over there, literally sitting there, but I just have that one image of my being in that office and nobody else being around. [laughter] I guess it was kind of a lonely experience being in that house all alone. But that was the very beginning.

KR: What was your experience at Rutgers College when you came up for tenure?

NB: Well, that was a rather unhappy experience. They would make remarks about my clothing, like, "Why aren't you in blue jeans?" That professor was suggesting that I was supposed to dress like their stereotype of a feminist, and I purposely did not do that. As I have often noted with other women, I was sometimes ignored as if I weren't even in the room. The problem was with the older men in the department, not the younger ones. I will certainly never forget this one incident. My book had just been published, and I was standing at the foot of the steps in the main English Department building with Nancy Edwards, the wife of one of the more powerful men in the department, and someone even more powerful than her husband was walking down the stairs. I said, "My book just got published by Rutgers University Press," because I was quite

excited about having the first copy in my hands. But he didn't even look at me. He walked right past me, so Nancy Edwards said, "She *said* she just got her book published," but he never looked at me at all and went right out the door. The non-tenured faculty had met once with the department Chair who told us that if you got a book published, you would get tenure. I probably should have had tenure. They certainly had a terrible affirmative action record. The upper administration had by then decided that a department should have on their faculty the same percentage of women as the percentage of women among those earning PhDs. For example, thirty percent of those earning PhDs in English were women and, therefore, in the Rutgers College English Department, thirty percent of the faculty should have been female. Well, of course, that affirmative action goal had just been decided upon the year before I came up for tenure, so they weren't used to paying much attention to it. They had the meeting, and I was denied tenure.

I had the right to look at the redacted materials afterwards. The Chair was supposed to choose two Woolf or early 20th century scholars to evaluate my work. The names of the two scholars were crossed out with black ink, but I could see through the ink and did not recognize their names as scholars on Woolf or the Bloomsbury Group. They were certainly buddies of the Chair because each of them had given a talk to our English Department the previous year. I believe now that he had sent them only a draft of a couple chapters I had written for a new book, and he didn't tell them about or send to them my book that Rutgers University Press had published--*Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*. I had published two articles plus an elaborate bibliography on androgyny since the book, and none of those publications were sent, I think, to those readers. It was an underhanded kind of thing. It was just like the response of the man who came down the stairs. He didn't want me to get a book published, because he did not want a feminist in the department. Probably most of them had never read Virginia Woolf. I don't know whether any of them had. She was still not that well known and, if she was known, it was mostly to feminists and people interested in women writers. So, they probably just thought she was not important. After all, Women's Studies *was* just a "fad," as the Graduate Student Advisor had said. Nor were they interested in the ideal of androgyny--a kind of wholeness that would eliminate inequalities in race, class, and sex. In contrast to how they treated me, there was a young man coming up for tenure next. I was told that they had called all over the country to try to find a press that would publish his book. When that did not work, they asked a Rutgers faculty member to read and evaluate the young man's manuscript in order to get it published by Rutgers University Press. That man had already read this young man's book to help him edit it, so he was to take his name out of the acknowledgements and evaluate it over the weekend for Rutgers University Press. They had evidently already asked the editor to publish it!

I wasn't sure what to do when I didn't get tenure--whether I should fight it or not. For some reason, the main person I talked to was Elaine Showalter, and she told me about a woman we both knew from the Modern Language Association who was so stressed out by fighting her negative tenure decision that she got cancer. I doubt that is *why* she got cancer, but that's what had happened. She was under stress. I was already under stress looking at the materials to see what had happened and finding what I thought was true, that they hadn't sent any published materials with the manuscripts. According to Elaine, the other reason not to fight the decision were the consequences when you applied for another job. They might not hire you, because you

had fought the previous tenure decision. After all, what would happen if they did not want to give you tenure.

In 1977, when I had to look for a job, there were almost no jobs at all. All the universities had major cuts that year. I don't remember what the political situation was, but there was very little gasoline. Cars were in long lines waiting for gasoline at the gas pumps; so oil was scarce and expensive. There were only two jobs at the associate professor level anywhere in the country. The Modern Language Association sent out a list of all the jobs available, and there were only two at my level--one in Texas and one in Alaska. I was on the short list for the Texas job, but I did not even apply to go to Alaska. That was too far away! There were almost no assistant professor jobs either; moreover, they were at the beginning level.

I applied for two hundred jobs, just about anything that had to do with a university--to be some kind of administrator or resident counselor or whatever. I had divorced in 1974. I had two kids, who were four and eleven when my husband left, so quite young yet, and I was raising them by myself. I really needed the money, but nothing was forthcoming. I was offered one full-time job in the New Brunswick area. It involved being on the phone all day trying to piece together a degree for people who had a course here and a course there at different universities. But that was not teaching and not even person-to-person interaction. It did not sound very appealing to me. In the end, my choice was between a full-time job talking all day on the phone or a half-time job that I would enjoy at the University of Pittsburgh.

Before I had those offers, I went to the Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration, which was at Bryn Mawr that summer. Cynthia Secor created and ran those Institutes. They were wonderful, but the people there were very ambitious. It was as if you were going to change jobs every two or three years to get ahead and all that. So, it was very success oriented, which was not my approach to anything. The kind of ambition I had was to change the world! [laughter] I was not in this business to succeed in the Institute way. As time went on, I realized that no one had touched me. Feminists were more affectionate, but most of the women there were not into sisterhood and so they didn't touch one another. Finally, a feminist came up behind me and another woman I was walking with and put her arms around our waists, and that was so wonderful because I had not been touched for six weeks. This kind of warmth from just that one feminist made me feel a lot better. It was a very tough time.

The Rutgers Graduate Advisor had told my students that Women's Studies would not help them at all in their future jobs. However, Women's Studies enabled me to get two academic teaching positions when none were available in English! At the end of July, I was offered the half-time position at the University of Pittsburgh, but it included a three-year contract and the opportunity to teach in addition to being the Director of Women's Studies for half the time. Since that was my home city also, I decided to do that rather than take that full-time job, which I envisioned as talking endlessly on the telephone. At least I would stay in the kind of academic position I loved by going to the University of Pittsburgh. But not getting that offer until late July, I had spent several months worrying about my future and that of my children.

When I went to the University of Pittsburgh, people were warm and friendly, and it was quite different. I mean, it was coed. It was really coed. As somebody said about Rutgers College, it

really was not truly coed in the early days, because there were over 6,700 males and maybe 670 females. They had not wanted to take up any of the places of the males for the females. I can remember sitting in the Rutgers College library, and a female walked by. It was so unusual to see female hips that my head did a double take to see who it was. That's because it was still unusual to see a female body, and you get like that. I mean, the boys, of course, were that way. We were all that way because there were normally only males around. It was four years before Rutgers made the freshman class fifty-fifty male-female--taking half of the male places for the females. It was probably close to eight years before one could say Rutgers was truly coed.

At the University of Pittsburgh, there were more women on the faculty and more women among the students. They had a well-developed Women's Studies Program, and I taught a new interdisciplinary course called "Introduction to Women's Studies," which they wanted to keep as their core course. One unique event was a celebration of the birthday of the first woman in the world to receive a doctorate degree. In fact, she was the first woman to receive any degree from a university. She was Italian and her name was Elena Cornaro Piscopia. When she was seven years old, she could speak six languages, and her tutors found her so extraordinary that they went to the pope to ask if she could get a doctorate in theology. He nixed that. He didn't want a woman in theology. Then, they suggested and the pope agreed that she could get a doctorate in philosophy. She studied theology and philosophy and mathematics, and she taught mathematics at the University of Padua in Italy for some time. There is a statue of Elena Cornaro Piscopia at the University at Padua in Italy, but there's also supposedly an image of her in a stained-glass window at Vassar. If I ever get to Vassar, I will look for this image. [Editor's Note: Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia (1646-1684), who was also known as Helen Cornaro, received her Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1678 from the University of Padua. The west wing stained-glass window at Thompson Memorial Library at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York is dedicated to her.]

KR: We have been going for two hours. Should we stop for today and continue with a second session tomorrow?

NB: Yes, let's do that.

KR: I was wondering if I can ask you just one final question for today.

NB: Yes.

KR: What was it like for you as a working parent when you were early in your career at Rutgers?

NB: Well, I always felt a little guilty about it, I guess, as most mothers do, about leaving my daughter, not having stayed with her a long time, like I had with my son. She was about a year and a half, maybe not even that old, when I started teaching. She had a Spanish-speaking babysitter for a while who was very good, so she did learn some Spanish. Then I had another babysitter who probably wasn't as good. I don't know, I just managed somehow; but, also, their father took them in the summers. I could travel or write when he took them in the summertime. For a short time, when he lived close enough, he took them every other weekend. But that can

create problems too. I sent them into New York City once and forgot to give them any money. The New York cab driver took them to their father. He had the address so, thank goodness, he took them to their father's address and got paid that way. It's not easy on the children. Divorce is very bad for children, I would say, but we didn't know that then. Before that, couples did not often get a divorce. I think it was partly because the contraceptive pill first came out in 1960, and it changed the mores for a lot of people. Suddenly, there were a lot of divorces. I mean, I could go around my street in Piscataway there on Ross Hall Boulevard and count how many people had gotten a divorce. Suddenly, it was not the house where the divorced woman lived (as in Oakmont); it was the house where the woman *didn't* get a divorce! [laughter]

I think it's very hard on children, and I think my children have been marked by that all their lives. They had every security. I felt that, despite my difficult year in 1977-1978, certainly as I went on at Old Dominion University, I felt they should feel secure. I had adequate money and there was no problem with anything that they wanted or that they wouldn't have enough to eat or whatever. But still, no one ever replaces the father, and it's just psychologically very hard. I think for my son, who was age eleven, it was very difficult to lose his father at that age. It's not a good thing, but you cope with it and you handle it as you must. You have to do it all, so you do it all.

On my license plate, I had "EQLRTS," equal rights. This was in Norfolk. I stayed late somewhere, and my daughter called the Old Dominion University police. The policewoman who answered said, "Oh, I know that license plate!" My daughter had become worried and I don't know whether she thought there might be a robber around or what, but I came home (it was still light out) and there was my neighbor with a rifle in the front yard coming to protect her. [laughter] I don't know what she told him, but at least she knew whom to call. It's tough. The children have to stay alone more than they would otherwise, and you're just not teaching them all the things you would teach them. I read to my son endlessly--long books, because he could sit and listen attentively a long time. I didn't get to do that with my daughter!

Anyway, she's a devoted social worker today, working with people, some of whom have had the COVID-19 virus, which makes me very nervous, and the hurricane is heading right towards her in Florida too. She works hard and she loves the people she works with, people who have disabilities. She's worked with just about every kind of disability, whether psychological or physical or mental or some combination of those. She's very loving. There aren't very many people who could do that, and she does it very well. My son teaches philosophy at a community college. They've done very well, but I think divorce leaves its scars. People need to be aware of that more than they are!

KR: Well, I think that is a good stopping point for today. I want to thank you so much for doing this oral history interview. It has been a real pleasure.

NB: Thank you. It has been a joy to talk to you!

KR: We will continue tomorrow.

NB: Yes.

----------END OF TRANSCRIPT----------

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