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Oral history interview with William S. Bartman, 2005 September 14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with William Bartman on September 13 and 14, 2005. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by John Zinsser for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JOHN ZINSSER: This is disc one of the William Bartman interview, for Archives of American Art. You getting any sound on that? Okay. Bill?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, sir.

JOHN ZINSSER: We are at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, and it is September 13, 2005.

Bill, because we're going to do an oral autobiography we can skip around, but I thought we should in fact start with some facts about your life, so—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Okay.

JOHN ZINSSER: —if you could tell us where you were born?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, at Pasavant Hospital.

JOHN ZINSSER: Hold on. I'm going to write down some—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: P-A-S-A-V-A-N-T Hospital.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Chicago, Illinois—Cook County, Illinois.

JOHN ZINSSER: And—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: 1946. October 14. That's if I remember correctly.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And according to my mother, it was a few minutes after midnight, and that was a problem because she lost a contest she was having with her best friend who was having a baby also that night, who won, and I was constantly reminded the rest of my life how—by this friend's daughter who was sort of a friend—that she was born before me.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you have siblings, right?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: A brother and a sister. Older brother, 16 months. A younger sister, six years.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what can you tell us about your parents? Your father was who?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My father was William Bartman, Sr., and I'm William Bartman, Jr.—William S. Bartman, Jr., which is not supposed to happen in the Jewish community. You can have one name in common but not exactly. I'm actually William Samuel Bartman, Jr., which is exactly my father's name. And they'd had some sort of discussion about that, but they decided fuck them—excuse me—we're going to call him whatever we want to call him.

JOHN ZINSSER: And—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So I'm a junior.

JOHN ZINSSER: You're a junior.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Complete junior.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what was –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That was always made a big deal of throughout my life.

JOHN ZINSSER: The name?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That I was the only Jewish Junior that people knew. It usually skips from William S. Bartman to William S. Bartman, II. So it made it very a special—[they laugh]—position for me, and also a horrible position between my brother and sister, which is bad already just going in because you're the middle child to begin with.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right. And what was your father's occupation?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He was an attorney.

JOHN ZINSSER: In Chicago proper?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: In Chicago proper to begin with. He ran—my father—my grandfather died at a very young age, and owned a clothing store called Hill Clothes. My father graduated—university graduated, got his law degree all in the same year. There was some kind of special program called—by William Hutchins [ph]—who was the director of the university at that time, and which allows you to graduate law school and get your law degree at the same time.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, was he part of a larger firm or did he have a specialty?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He was—originally, I guess that he had his own firm. Basically what he did was represented the family.

JOHN ZINSSER: In this—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, but they also represented people. Like he was the lawyer for Baskin-Robbins ice cream for 30 years, or 20 years, until they became something else—Food Corporation of America or whatever they became.

JOHN ZINSSER: And how would you describe him as a man or a father?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Someone who was obsessed with being liked, and wanting to be cared for and wanting to accomplish a tremendous amount in his lifetime. He was willing to do anything for anybody literally on a moment's notice.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was he a workaholic?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, he was a workaholic.

JOHN ZINSSER: Was he away from the home?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Not so much away from the home, but he brought his work home and we became part of it. There was always someone at dinner. I don't ever remember having—very rarely ever having dinner without having someone, at least one or two people there.

JOHN ZINSSER: Was he a formal man? Did he wear a suit at home?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He wore a suit home, but he got his necktie off when he came home—usually his shoes and socks, too.

JOHN ZINSSER: What can you tell us about your mother? What is her name?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Norma B—that's for Berkson—Norma B. Berkson Bartman, B-A-R-T-M-A-N. She and my father went out with each other in college.

JOHN ZINSSER: And that's where they met?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was the second child remember.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So obviously there was a first child, and he must have gotten—been a child right after they got married and then I came very soon after. 16 months is very soon.

JOHN ZINSSER: Both families from the Chicago area? She's from Chicago area as well?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, yeah, both of them from Chicago area. But my mother's more—part Cleveland also.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what type of family is she from?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My grandfather owned an automobile parts store. I'm sure it's one of the first automobile parts stores in the United States. Now, it's not a manufacturer. It's just a distribution store, you know, so people could come by and buy a spark plug.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So he bought generic stuff from people and they sold generic stuff back to people.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were they part of kind of society in Chicago? Were they both Jewish? Were they both—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They were both Jewish, but that wasn't part of their society because most of their friends were—that was not a big deal within the community. In fact, we were never baptized.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you didn't grow up going to temple?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We went to temple on Roshashana. We were Roshashana Jews.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were they part of a certain social class or kind of social milieu that existed in Chicago at that time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, upper-middle class, Jewish, intellectual, conservative, ingrained in them to be family-oriented. My grandfather was—I never met my grandfather. He died just before I was born. My father was raised as a strict Christian Scientist.

JOHN ZINSSER: Oh, really?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Went to Christian Science high school.

JOHN ZINSSER: But he didn't raise you that way. Did he carry over any sort of—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Christian Science thinking? I don't think I ever went to any Christian Science stuff. I don't think he liked it very much.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what type of neighborhood did you live in?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We lived in a hotel.

JOHN ZINSSER: Really?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Called the Park Shore Hotel, which was apartment buildings at the time.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you had a residential suite?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: And there were other residential suites in that building?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. It was full of residential suites.

JOHN ZINSSER: And so you were in a floor of that—was it a kind of large, sprawling space?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I don't remember much about the space because we left Chicago when I was 16 months old.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. Well, then we better get to that, okay. Alejandro, what am I missing here as far as salient information?

ALEJANDRO: I think at 16 months we can—

JOHN ZINSSER: Sixteen months we can keep moving?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I remember a lot of stuff before 16.

JOHN ZINSSER: You remember things in your memory from –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: —before 16 months? Such as?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Such as that I collected butterflies and I kept them in jars, and I kept them in the closet, hidden in the closet, so my mother wouldn't find them. And my mother apparently—I collected, actually, caterpillars. They weren't butterflies yet.

JOHN ZINSSER: But they became butterflies.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I didn't know that.

JOHN ZINSSER: So there was—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Don't blame me.

JOHN ZINSSER: But did it happen?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, it did.

JOHN ZINSSER: So there was this—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My mother came into the closet one day and she found this big jar of black-looking sort of things, and they started—and she opened the jar and a bunch of them flew out at her, and she screamed and didn't know what the hell had happened in her closet. And they decided that it was time to move to California.

JOHN ZINSSER: So it was your mother's decision to move to California?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, I was just joking. That was like, go west, young man. My uncle—my father's only brother, who had this love-hate relationship their entire life, screaming and yelling at each other all the time—had already moved to California some six or eight months earlier. Had moved the family business to California, which was a clothing business.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say it's a clothing business, a retail store? Stores?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They manufactured their own brand of clothing.

JOHN ZINSSER: Oh, really? And do you recall the name—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Hill Brothers.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Hill Brothers is a very—it's a street in Chicago. It's right behind Wrigley Stadium. You could see—my father used to say he could watch the baseball games when he went to work out of the window of the office.

JOHN ZINSSER: So when they moved to California, did the store remain in Chicago?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No.

JOHN ZINSSER: They pulled up everything—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And my father had now become a lawyer, and so his full-time job was handling the transition of the estate and moving the clothing store to California. I believe the clothing store. I don't know much about this part.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Although I do have very small jackets that say Hill Clothes on them.

[Laughter.]

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I had them.

JOHN ZINSSER: And does that brand or store exist today?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No. Well, I don't know. It may, just because there's somebody else named Hill Clothes, you know.

JOHN ZINSSER: But it's not a continuation of the same company?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No. My father made—they made clothes for Al Capone. You know, that whole gang of people, they made all their clothes.

JOHN ZINSSER: When—where did they move to in California?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Los Angeles.

JOHN ZINSSER: And do you have any idea how they chose Los Angeles?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because my uncle had made the decision already.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And your birthday year again was?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: '46.

JOHN ZINSSER: 1946. So we're talking about the post—

[Cross talk.]

WILLIAM BARTMAN: The beginning of World War II.

JOHN ZINSSER: The beginning of post-war Los Angeles, which was a time of growth and change for that city.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Huge, huge, massive change.

JOHN ZINSSER: So residentially, where did you move to at that time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We moved to a place—part of Los Angeles which is now Santa Monica.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Which is north of Sunset Boulevard and just west of what is now Westwood Village.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you lived in a single-family home?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Single-family home. Huge piece of property. It looked huge to me. Looked like every time I came into our lot as a child's point of view that we were coming on to some kind of farm or something.

JOHN ZINSSER: And how would you describe the house, its architecture?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was a one-story house. Ranch style.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was it a new house at the time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I don't know. It looked—you know, it looked like it had been there for some time.

JOHN ZINSSER: So it wasn't built and then you moved in?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, no, it definitely wasn't. We weren't the first owners of the house. The very first house that we moved into, we rented it, we didn't own.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right. But as far as the house that—this would be the house that you would live in for how long?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: About two or three years I think.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And so during that time, are there any changes in your parents' life or your siblings, any early childhood experience that –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, there was a change, and I never knew why except my—I had an uncle who for some reason until recent years I've been able to tolerate, but not my uncle, but my—but another uncle, my mother's

younger sister's husband—first husband—told me out of the blue about six or seven years ago that, you know, you know what happened to your mother and father? And I said, no, I don't know what happened to my mother and father. And I said, oh, come on, don't give me that bullshit. He said, your father had an affair with somebody and your mother never forgave him, but she wouldn't divorce him either.

JOHN ZINSSER: And this would have happened in that same kind of period of time. And was this something, to your knowledge, that was ongoing for many years or was it an episode—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Apparently. Apparently. It was one person, ongoing for a long period of time.

JOHN ZINSSER: And do you know who the person is?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, I do not know who the person is.

JOHN ZINSSER: And your mother was—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And my father was the least likely—he was the most "Ozzie" kind of character you'd ever seen in your life.

JOHN ZINSSER: And your mother was a stay-at-home mother?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Stay-at-home mother who was on a lot of school committees and school boards, you know, school—whatever she could join, she joined.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did they have domestic help working for them—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We always had a couple.

JOHN ZINSSER: —in the house?

JOHN ZINSSER: When you say a couple you mean more than one, you don't mean physically—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Usually a husband and a wife.

JOHN ZINSSER: A husband and wife who—would they live in?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They'd live in; usually from South America.

And then later it changed from South America to—no, usually—first it was black and then it was South American, and then it was black again. They would invariably be the couples of people who needed—that worked at our—either worked—that either worked at our house Monday through Friday and then left on the weekends, and it always sort of mysterious where they went to, or they worked at our house and then stayed—and stayed on the weekends but did their own thing.

JOHN ZINSSER: So—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So there were always additional people around, sort of.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were they also involved in child care? In other words, were you spending a lot of time with —

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: —these—was it the woman in particular who you would spend time with?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Later on. More later on as my father got busier and busier and he got more involved in public events and things. I mean, he was a very public person. My father was president of the coliseum commission, which was a huge thing then. Remember—

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say coliseum commission, that's the building of the coliseum [Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum and Sports Arena]?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That was the building of the—that's right. The coliseum did not exist. He was chosen as a 32-year-old person to be the chairman of the coliseum commission [Los Angeles Coliseum Commission]. That shows you how young California was.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, as far as the social situation in California, your parents being transplants, was there sort of a core group of Los Angeles—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was never as aware of that until I went to high school.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, okay. So we'll get to that. But—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I wasn't toted around saying he's from a better place than you are. We're coming to take over, you know.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, it wasn't that at all.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, did you have a since of neighborhood when you were living in this neighborhood? Were there other kids in the neighborhood that you played with or saw?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Very few memories of that. Oh, 99 percent of the time, kids came to our house.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And that reversed about when I was about five or six years old.

JOHN ZINSSER: Would you consider your childhood isolated? I mean, did you find a kind of aloneness?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, because I loved going to school.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And you started going to school when? In preschool?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Preschool.

JOHN ZINSSER: So probably around—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I remember preschool.

JOHN ZINSSER: —three? I mean, tell me about preschool. Do you remember the name, by any chance?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm trying to think of what it is. It's Sunset Day School, Brentwood Academy—Brentwood Day School, I don't know what it was. It was on Sunset Boulevard.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was this—did you wear a uniform?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No.

JOHN ZINSSER: Was it co-educational?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were there—was there—I know you say you have memories from that time. Can you remember—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I remember classes. I remember learning our names. I remember being taught our names. That we couldn't go out to recess after we woke up from our naps until we could write our name in printed letters. You know, I remember it wasn't very structured. It was sort of just mostly play.

JOHN ZINSSER: Do you have any way that you could characterize yourself as a—in terms of your temperament as a child or your interests?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was so much closer to—I thought I was much closer to my father than I was to my mother. I thought I was. It turns out I'm exactly like my mother.

JOHN ZINSSER: And do you—can you recall anything about your physical appearance, how your dressed?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was a little bit lumpy, but not fat.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you have—were you shy, outgoing?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, no, I wasn't shy at all. I was really—I had a best friend. I had a best friend all the way—he was my best friend all the way from—

JOHN ZINSSER: He stayed with you that whole time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Basically 'till high school.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what his name?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Irving. God, I haven't heard that name in years.

JOHN ZINSSER: And so what type of thing did you and Irving pursue?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, this is what I was telling you before. At a certain point, we was switched from people coming over to my house for the weekends in which, you know, we would furnish the extra room as a second bedroom so I didn't have to share my room with my brother because that became functionally impossible. They had just bought a new house and it had one extra bedroom—two. It had two extra bedrooms. One for the man and woman who lived there, and it was behind the kitchen, and then there was another extra bedroom upstairs, and it was just my sister—my sister being born, moving into this house, and me getting my own room are all at the same exact moment.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We moved out of the house, which I had been sharing our—well, this is complicated, too—where I no longer had a room—which was a great house, but I no longer had a room because my brother and I couldn't sleep in the same room.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, you're talking about a different house than this house that you were talking about in Santa Monica or this is the same house?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, this is a completely different house.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you moved again?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Twice. Once right after we rented the house and when bought a house.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And that was about three years I'd say.

JOHN ZINSSER: The initial one, right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Right. That was rented for about two to three years; maybe less. I don't know. Kids really don't have that much of a sense of time. And one—the next house was the one that they bought.

JOHN ZINSSER: That's the one you described that was in the same—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Right. My sister was a planned child apparently. She didn't come as a surprise. So they could plan it properly, and they found a house that was—they thought was just right for what they—it had two—I think that it was—it had an extra bedroom in it, which was going to be my bedroom. It was my—the thing was, I had came too quickly. And then when they just had to decide at which point they were going to stop having babies, they decided six years later that they were going to have one more child, and she got my bedroom.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right. And you didn't want to share a room with your brother?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I didn't care.

JOHN ZINSSER: You didn't care.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My brother hated me. I mean, my brother—we were so completely different from each other. I mean, his idea of a good weekend is to sit and read the Encyclopedia Britannica. I remember when the Encyclopedia Britannica was written, he'd read it like a best seller. I'm not kidding you. He'd say, "a new Chapter 18 of *Encyclopedia Britannica* came out," and he'd stay up all night reading it.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. Now, when you moved to this new house, do you know what area that house is in?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Westwood. Very beginning of UCLA.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And again, can you describe the house physically at all?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. It's almost exactly like the—second and third house were very similar within a couple of blocks of each other, and had exactly the same layout except they had two more bedrooms.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. So we're in kind of preschool to five-year-old type age. You've got your best friend Irving. Did you begin to make choices or reach a stage of self-awareness where you began to think of yourself and who you are? Did you begin to sort of have an identity you were forming?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, my therapist would love to be here—my real therapist, instead of my hospital therapist. He's going to kill me for telling them ever—getting out of me in one session which I paid him like for seven or eight years.

JOHN ZINSSER: So did you develop a sense of identity or self at that time where you felt yourself—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My identity and myself were a lot tied up in my father.

JOHN ZINSSER: In your relationship with him or how you—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We did things regularly. And I say things—things were done as a family or not as a family. And if they're not done as family, they're done this way or forgotten about; and if they're done as a family they are done this way, no matter what positive/negative value they have. Like family vacations: twice a year, required. Absolutely, we had to spend, you know, four weeks together.

JOHN ZINSSER: And where did you go?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We went to—first year we went to Washington, D.C.

JOHN ZINSSER: You pile in the car—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, we flew.

JOHN ZINSSER: —drive across the country?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We flew across the country, got in a car, and drove through—

JOHN ZINSSER: Wasn't it early to fly in an airplane? Were you in a prop plane?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. When I was—I was so young on the prop plane, I was clearly—other than the baby or something—where you had to go up steps to get into the plane.

JOHN ZINSSER: Yeah.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That when you got up the steps and the engine burst on, I ran out the door to the plane and ran down all the way to the entrance gate. They had to fetch me to get me back on the plane.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, when you said, you know, you're talking about relating to your father and going on these trips, you said, okay, so you had these family vacations.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, that was an illustration of a family moment, one of the things that were required family stuff that was ingrained in us as we do—we have two family vacations every year.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And we all go together.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We all go together.

JOHN ZINSSER: We behave.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And we all behave, and we all do the same things, and we don't cause any problems of course, which all we did was cause problems.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And individually then, when you're talking about your one-to-one relationship with your father—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: —how was that different? Is that—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I bought into it.

JOHN ZINSSER: No. But I mean is—did he do something special with you, take you aside, do one particular thing with you?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My brother didn't want to talk to anybody. My brother was reading—

JOHN ZINSSER: So your brother—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My brother brought with him on the trip the two latest volumes of *Scientific American*—or, his books were *Scientific American* and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and I never got to see those books. I want you to know that. I had sneak into his desk, into a bottom drawer in his desk when he wasn't in the room, and often—he would often find me looking at his books, and he would get furious and scream about how I was taking his stuff. And those were books addressed to both of us. They were subscriptions, but they became his books the moment they came in the house. So of course I'm curious about them. You know, I could have gotten interested in anything. Who knows what I might have done if I had been the first child.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Could have been a scientist.

[Audio break.]

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. All right. I mean, I was asking these questions about identity or sense of self.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Right.

JOHN ZINSSER: I mean, certainly in my own case I can—you know, in my early childhood experience I could feel myself becoming me—who I am now as an adult. And did you have that sensation that you were, you know, either different from other people, you had different quality of experience different interests?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, I get experiences because you're doing things, you're living. I was full of life. I was like my eyes were wide open, ready to burst out of the car every morning. My brother would have just as soon sat in the car and stayed reading his *National Geographic*.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was your father responsive to you because of your rambunctiousness?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because his family was like that apparently.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what about your mother?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My mother resented it.

JOHN ZINSSER: And she resented your father's affections for you?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And for this person that he was having an affair with.

JOHN ZINSSER: And she also had the baby at that time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: And all other—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That was to make up for—that was to tie him even tighter in.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. So now we're going to, you know, move ahead in school. You go to—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And that was a really horribly thing to say.

JOHN ZINSSER: What's a horrible thing to say?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That she had my sister because it tied him in more because I don't think that's why she did it. I don't think she knew why she had another child.

JOHN ZINSSER: Wasn't that the social expectation of the time, to have three children?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I guess so, yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: I mean the post-war years—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Right. I'm saying, but I don't think that she did it in an attempt to keep a hold of him.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right. But she did have that child as a—I mean, certainly as a focus of, you know—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: There was very little focus of this child, let me tell you.

JOHN ZINSSER: For the daughter.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was only a focus on my father.

JOHN ZINSSER: I see. Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Which was every—he didn't do a thing right in his life.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you felt that tension—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Constantly, because I was closer to my father.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did they physically argue with each other?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They would scream and yell, and every Sunday began—required Bartman tradition: you got up, the children prepared breakfast on Sunday morning, and it was always me that cooked. I did all the cooking on Sunday. I loved cooking, you know, so none of them wanted to do it, so I didn't have—consequently, I didn't really have to do any—much dishes, although I did do them, but, you know, they were the primary dish-doers, which seemed to satisfy them fine. It seemed they didn't want to know a hoot about anything else. My sister, remember, six years apart, which is quite a significant difference, so I can't speak for her experience because I wasn't even there for six years of it.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what about in the years when you begin to get a little older, say moving from five to ten or ten to 15?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Just sunk. More ingrained and more ingrained. So what happened is my weekend schedule was this. They would now have a regular Friday night thing.

JOHN ZINSSER: Yeah.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They'd go out to some benefit or some, you know, fancy party or something, which would always be—they'd be leaving the house shouting at each other, usually about my mother being late. They'd come home shouting at each other, about something that had happened at the party or that he didn't do or that he did do or that she did do or that—usually about the children, that she was still yelling at him for all the ride there, all the ride home, all the ride—whatever.

JOHN ZINSSER: Can I just skip into the present for a second?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: Is your father still living?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No.

JOHN ZINSSER: He died when?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: 1986.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm not—no, what did I say? 1986.

ALEJANDRO: How old were you when he died?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm trying to remember exactly when. That was a horrible thing around my father's death I couldn't deal with very well then and I sort of fell apart.

JOHN ZINSSER: All right. Well, let's stay in this time period of say five to 15. You're parents are in this routine with each other.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Routine of this really very unpleasant relationship.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what is—do you seek ways to escape from this? Are you into school or sports or activities?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Every—I did acting in high school. I was sort of the clown of the high school.

JOHN ZINSSER: And are you going to private schools or public schools at this point?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: At this point we went to private schools.

JOHN ZINSSER: And that's been the case—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Since the seventh grade.

JOHN ZINSSER: Since the seventh grade. But you went to public school—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And the reason we went to private school had nothing to do with the education. My father had—I heard him say maybe a thousand times, my children will never go to private school. They'll never go to, you know, this private this, they're never go to—they're going to go public, public, public, public, public, public. Well, my brother got something called the Asian flu the year of the Asian flu, and he was out of school for almost eight months. And although he had done all of his work at home, gotten A's in everything that he did at home—A's on all the tests, they failed him in shop because he couldn't do the shop at home, and so he was required to repeat the seventh grade. And my father said, god damn them, if he's going to repeat the seventh grade at least he's going to do it at a decent school system.

JOHN ZINSSER: So then you all—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: The whole story changed. The entire persona of my life changed.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you say he wanted you to go to a public school. Had he himself gone to private school? Was this a reaction against—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. I think that he—absolutely. He went to Christian Science.

JOHN ZINSSER: And he's a man of the people. He thought that—okay. Now—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He was—he's a very liberal conservative.

JOHN ZINSSER: Which means?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Politically very conservative.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Humanitarianly very liberal.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He's sort of like a John McCain.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right. And you think your mother shared his ideological—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She bought into it 1000 percent.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. So they were together—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because that put her right in the middle of the mix. She was included in everything.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Even though they were very—just devastatingly—

JOHN ZINSSER: All of his political work and committees and social action.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She loved all that.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She stood on street corners. You know, I think he ran for Congress once or twice. I mean she—you know, he was on these boards. He was on the—head of the coliseum commission. He was president of the University of California Colleges.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, you say—did you go to a particular high school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what was it called, do you know?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Originally it was called—the first when I—actually, I went before the seventh grade, because my brother had to go to the seventh grade, so I went in the fifth grade.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was called Ramsey [ph].

JOHN ZINSSER: And it was the same school—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Ramsey Military Academy.

JOHN ZINSSER: It was a military academy?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, absolutely a military academy, from A to Z.

JOHN ZINSSER: And that went—that was okay with your father or that was the only—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That's the—I think it was the only school they could find on one-month notice because he was never going to send his child back to these public schools. They could destroy his child's life.

JOHN ZINSSER: Did you have to wear uniforms to school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We did have to wear army uniforms. I wasn't good at it.

JOHN ZINSSER: That wasn't something you related to?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I didn't care one way or the other. I didn't mind it. I thought it was sort of like dress-up.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you have to—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I got bored with it, but—

JOHN ZINSSER: Did you have to march around and—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: So—and it was all boys?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was all boys. Of course all boys. There were no co-ed private schools.

JOHN ZINSSER: Private schools at that time, right, right. And were the teachers strict and stern?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Strict and stern, but male and female. Former—mostly former military people.

JOHN ZINSSER: But you were able to have some fun, some laughs?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, I don't remember—

JOHN ZINSSER: In theater or—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Not in that school. I still had my friend.

JOHN ZINSSER: You still had Irving.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Every weekend.

JOHN ZINSSER: But he didn't go to the same school as you?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: He went to the public schools I would have gone to.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what type of things did you and Irving do together when you had weekends?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Went to movies. We had grilled cheese sandwiches. We had French fries.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were you allowed to go out on your own out into the city?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, no, no. No, you didn't do things like that.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I remember going to—the focus of our weekend usually—whatever movie was playing.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And who would you go with?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Irving.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was the two of us.

JOHN ZINSSER: You could go un-chaperoned to the movies?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We would be dropped off, and told when we'd be picked up, and then we'd be usually eating a hamburger or something when we were picked up.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. So—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: At McDonald's, at the very first McDonald's. One of the first—not the very first one, but certainly the first five or six McDonald's.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, you're in this high school and—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I actually remember seeing Joan [Kroc]—not Joan, but I remember seeing his wife, whoever his wife was at the time, Kroc's wife.

JOHN ZINSSER: Joan who are you talking about now?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Who's the founder of McDonald's?

JOHN ZINSSER: Oh, Kroc. Ray Kroc.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: They were from Los Angeles?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: The third or fourth—the largest McDonald's that there ever was was a McDonald's was in California. It was right next door to a theater called the—I can't remember the name. Paramount? No. Something farther off. It was more westerly looking; a sign pointed west.

JOHN ZINSSER: So this military school went through high school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, the second school.

JOHN ZINSSER: This is the secondary school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: The second school went through military school.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And then what about the high school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I started high school in seventh grade. They called it seventh grade.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: My second school went through—the one after the Ramsey Military Academy was also a military academy called Harvard School.

JOHN ZINSSER: Harvard? Like the University?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: There was a big deal made, the connection between Harvard University and—in fact, it was founded by people who had gone to Harvard University.

JOHN ZINSSER: So that school went through high school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Twelfth grade.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you stayed there that whole time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: 'Till I went to college, yeah. They were founded by the Episcopal Church. They were the Harvard University of California.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was there an academic excellence in that school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I think there was.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were there humanities? Was there—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Not really humanities.

JOHN ZINSSER: Did you at this time or earlier develop an interest in visual arts?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: And how so?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Mama.

JOHN ZINSSER: What was her connection with visual arts?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She was obsessed.

JOHN ZINSSER: And she was a collector?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She was a collector of everything that you can think of that was related to certain kinds of things. And she would—we spent our weekends—my father would play golf every weekend, and so since we weren't included in the golf game as young children we were included—I was included—but my brother stayed home and read, which was perfectly acceptable. My sister wasn't born yet. But every time it was me and my mother, so we had a tremendous amount of time together because I happened to be interested in the same things she was interested in also.

JOHN ZINSSER: She took you to museums?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Museums, galleries. I knew all the galleries—

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say galleries, you're talking about—what existed in Los Angeles in the '40s and '50s?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: There was a fairly active art business in California.

JOHN ZINSSER: But what we would think of as galleries, I mean—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Patti Fohr [ph], that level of gallery.

JOHN ZINSSER: Existed in the '50s?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Asher Fohr [ph] actually was formed in the '60s, '50s.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And she was interested in contemporary art?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. She was interested in both contemporary art; very contemporary art; very, very contemporary art; and late 19th century, early 20th century art.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did she have any relationships or connections to artists who lived in Los Angeles at that time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She seemed to have very—there was always an artist at dinner.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you ever go visit artists' studios?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: All the time.

JOHN ZINSSER: And do you remember in particular who any of those artists would have been?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She and I took a trip to Europe by ourselves. She and I, by ourselves, took a trip to Europe in which we did nothing besides visit artists' studios all over Europe.

JOHN ZINSSER: And she knew these artists through their dealers or did—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Some of them. Some of them she'd known because, for instance, one of the artists—the big-deal artists at the time was an artist—a sculptor called Mario [?]—no. Whoever did the sculptures for the Olympic stadium in Italy for the Rome Olympics [1960]. Now, my uncle was—my father's brother was an Olympic family. They got to go to all these fabulous summer vacations. They'd go away for a month every summer, and the one summer that the Olympics were they'd always plan a four-month trip to Europe, or Australia, or wherever the Olympics was, that's where they'd be.

JOHN ZINSSER: And this trip—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So the artist who built the statues for the Olympic stadium in Italy was an artist whose studio we actually visited while he was making those statues, because he was recommended by somebody—we were on our own trip to Europe—our only trip to Europe I think as a family. And we spent—I remember spending two or three days at his studio.

JOHN ZINSSER: And so then—and that trip was during a summer holiday. Now, and then you came back to Los Angeles.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She bought several maquettes of the pieces from the Italian stadium.

JOHN ZINSSER: And so your house would be full of this kind of eclectic art?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. The artist that she owned the most of in the world—she was the preeminent collector of it—most people didn't know it. It was an artist named [Théophile Alexandre] Steinlen.

JOHN ZINSSER: Can you spell that?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: S-T-E-I-N-L-E-I-N [properly Steilen]. He was in the same circle as [Henri] de Toulouse-Lautrec.

JOHN ZINSSER: She told me about him.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: She was involved in the publishing of two of his books. He was Swiss—

JOHN ZINSSER: And he did an editions work in the same way –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Lautrec and he were like best friends. They were like—they did a lot of, you know, satire—a tremendous amount of satire, and restaurant menus. So there's an endless amount of this stuff available.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were your parents involved in the development of the Los Angeles Museums?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Not as involved as she'd liked to have been. But my aunt was, and that's what the problem was. That was a problem—always a problem between my aunt and my mother. And it was—she was always politically involved in things. My mother never was politically involved in things. She was behind the scenes.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, when you start to be a teenager, you're involved in theater at school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm getting a little burned out, John.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. That's fine, because we've gone a long way.

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JOHN ZINSSER: Today is September 14, Wednesday. We are at Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan. And this is our second session interview William Bartman for Archives of American Art. I'm John Zinsser.

Bill, we were talking yesterday and we talked about your childhood, and we got up to the time when you were in high school. You were at the Harvard School Military Academy. And what I'm thinking is, you know, at this time you're thinking about leaving for college, and I understood that you went east eventually to go to college, but I was wondering, one thing I was thinking we could maybe touch on before we get to that is what particular quality being in Los Angeles, or coming from Los Angeles, had for you before you embarked to the east; whether you felt that experience of being from Los Angeles has affected who you are.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I felt a little bit entitled.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I felt like I was—you know, that I could fit in anywhere because I was—you know, I had been—my connection albeit connected to the major university of the United States, and that we somehow—I was in

that sort of historical dimension.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you were aware of higher education and liberal education?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you applied to colleges, were you looking for a particular kind of college?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I wanted to get as far away from home as I could, as distanced as I could from my family, and as independent as I could be.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you ended up going to Williams, is that correct?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, Trinity College.

JOHN ZINSSER: Trinity, yeah, okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Hartford, Connecticut. They were both—both colleges were actually founded by the Episcopal Church.

JOHN ZINSSER: And this is when? The early '60s?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes. 1964.

JOHN ZINSSER: 1964. And that is certainly a year or a time period during which culture is shifting tremendously. Was Trinity at that time a co-ed college?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, it was not.

JOHN ZINSSER: It was a single-sex college?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was, amazingly, still single sex.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say it was Episcopal, was it—but it was a standard liberal arts—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was, but it was founded by—the colleges in this country mostly have a history of being founded by churches. And this was the church—this was a college that was founded by the Episcopal Church, so as Harvard University was founded by Episcopals, this was a college that was founded—the first college founded by the Episcopal Church.

JOHN ZINSSER: So when you got there, did you find that the college was being swept into the '60s as far as emerging culture, counterculture? What distinctions –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I loved the place because it was so—in a way, I was so—you know, I was so out of the mainstream on the West Coast, which meant I was sort of like—I was sort of an outsider on the West Coast, and which made me even more of an outsider on the East Coast.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you fall in with a group of students or begin any kind of study in –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was going to do theater from the very moment I started there. I went to—I was accepted at about five or six colleges and I chose the college based on their theater program. And at that time Trinity had built a brand new theater, which was the most upstanding theater in New England. You know, it had the most exciting—you know—[inaudible]—program, but they had—there was something called Eisenhower stages and design concepts that they were working with that were very different than anybody else, you know, in a way of manufacturing space and trading spaces around so the space became, you know, very moveable. And they had a brand new theater—brand new. It was going to open the year that I would start there.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were there any particular faculty there who were influential?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That wasn't an attraction—I only applied to one college on the West Coast, and that was the one of the Pomona colleges.

JOHN ZINSSER: So during your undergraduate years, those would be 1964 to 1968—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Correct.

JOHN ZINSSER: You know, the country is going through tremendous cultural changes.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Right.

JOHN ZINSSER: What was your experience with regard to some of them?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was the most wacky period of time in American history, I think. I mean, I don't think there's been any other historical precedent for the amount of political or emotional or historical or political change, or relationships between education and students and faculty and defining and redefining what an education was over and over and over and over again. We took over our college campus. You know, we took over the administration building. We ran the school for the last six months the school was there. There was no actual school going on. We became the faculty and the—not the faculty, but the administration, for all practical purposes. And we were actually shown the door and then re-invited back, and then shown the door and then re-invited back, and then shown the door and re-invited back, because basically the people who were involved in it were all the people that weren't involved in anything interesting in the school.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what about the Vietnam War?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: An unbelievable—it's the definition of—you know, you could not, even no matter how matter conservative you were or how liberal you were or how—you know, you couldn't avoid it.

JOHN ZINSSER: What was your status as far as being drafted or—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, well. There was no draft yet. A draft took place in my senior year.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did that loom over you at the time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh God, yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: And how did that work itself out?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They thought that 90 percent of people who graduated from college that year were going to go to Vietnam.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what was your experience with the draft subsequently?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Total panic. People were like—you know, it was the height of the Vietnam War antiwar movement and everybody was, you know, desperately, you know, sure that they were going to go to Vietnam to get killed.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were you subsequently drafted or did you get—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, I wasn't subsequently drafted.

JOHN ZINSSER: Did you get a number, is that how it worked?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I ended up—it's so weird. It was a very complicated system the year after I graduated from college in which they pulled the numbers based on your birth date. And it turned out that my—and you didn't know how they were going to do it eventually but—so you didn't how to prepare for this, but my number ended up being in the top—in the safe third.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: So I was no longer afraid of being drafted.

JOHN ZINSSER: And that weight was lifted off you?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: About that, only about that particular thing. It wasn't lifted off me about the—all the other people that were going to go who were going to be killed. They were friends of mine. They were, you know, involved in every other way.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were you involved in marches in Washington or any—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I wasn't involved in marches in Washington, but I was involved in campus politics.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did your theater activities or the art activities reflect that political climate?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Absolutely.

JOHN ZINSSER: How so?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I did the first production in the United States of Marat Sade [or *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of The Marquis de Sade*, originally published in 1966] which is a very, very, very political play in which this—it was the first play that students had directed or—it was a huge movement. It was an international theater, student theaters movement, and it was—everything was them against us.

JOHN ZINSSER: Them being the establishment or them being the school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: —the establishment, the school, the army, the Vietnam, the—you know, everything was against us, you know, trying to send us off to Vietnam to kill us.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right. And when you—you directed this or produced it? What was your role in theater?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was—they wouldn't let us do anything that was important. They wanted us to do "Three Men and a Horse," which is like a standard comedy like Tom Jones—I mean, Jeremy Jones or something, you know. And we decided that we wanted to do only plays of relevance, so first they wouldn't let us use the theater at all. Then we realized that we could—that the theater was run—the budget for the theater department for actually doing plays at the school was funded by student money. So we just took their money away. They couldn't do any plays. So we got them to let us do 50 percent of the plays ourselves. Then we decided what was going to be done. And we did like a production of Thomas More's—"A Man for All Seasons" with a black Sir Thomas More and a white More's wife and black and white son and daughter, and I think a black some other—different characters playing different people. It wasn't relevant to us to cast people according to their race.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you graduated in 1968 and went forth into the world, what was your thinking as far as where you were going to go?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I had no idea, because at that time when I—actually at the time of my graduation they hadn't yet decided what was happening with all of us, and they hadn't decided the draft issue yet.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: That was decided six months after I graduated.

JOHN ZINSSER: So geographically, after you got out of school did you go back to California?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: What happened was they were offering scholarships—not scholarships, but deferments—what they called deferments for people who taught in inner-city schools, and I got one of those teaching deferments and I taught at a school that had a program in the inner-city in Los Angeles.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you taught during that summer of 1968?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And was going to teach the next year in inner-city Los Angeles.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did that coincide with the riots in Los Angeles?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, it did.

JOHN ZINSSER: Was that the same summer of '68?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

JOHN ZINSSER: So were you teaching in—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Some of the summer I was teaching in a summer camp. And then I was to teach at a school in the fall.

JOHN ZINSSER: And once you—did you do that in the fall or did you reach your deferment—I mean did you get your number?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm trying to remember now whether it had been decided by that time. I think it was shortly after we started school the following fall that I was given a draft number, and it was a fairly high draft number, which let me—actually given me permission to teach rather than fight. Legally.

JOHN ZINSSER: But you would still have to fulfill that—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you did teach that fall?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I taught school for three years.

JOHN ZINSSER: For three years in Los Angeles.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, in inner-city Los Angeles.

Well, actually it wasn't in the—what it was, was there was a program set up by one of my former college teachers, or—I can't think if it was a college teacher or high school teacher—in which we ran a program that was subsidized for enriching the education of inner-city students for—you know, giving a huge enrichment program and sort of brought them up to the level of the rest of the students. It was called—let's see if I can think of the name of the program. I can't think of it right now.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. But what age are you teaching—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I had taught—when I was 20 years old I taught 18-year-olds, 19-year-olds and 20-year-olds.

JOHN ZINSSER: Wow. So they were—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They were inner-city—I taught inner-city sophomores, juniors and high school students. And I was teaching enrichment courses to them, trying to bring them up to the level that would permit them to carry on through college.

JOHN ZINSSER: So they could go to college, right. So they were in sort of specialty pre-college—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was a special advancement program.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. Are you no longer living at home? Where are you living at this time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: At this time? Oh, God. No, I wasn't living at home—definitely not living at home.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. But did you—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: In fact, I live at home for about a weekend when I got back.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Which is some very interesting stuff, by the way, too, because I literally moved out of home about a week after I got home, when it became clear that I couldn't live at home within the—and be anywhere near my parents.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what was their attitude toward the counterculture?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They were constantly in angst about everything I was doing because my senior year was a disaster. Everybody's senior year was a disaster. We took over the administration building. We ran the school for the last six months of school. I was giving speeches and demonstrating and almost—and it was—had my graduation taken away, and then returned, and then—there's a whole series of chapters in there that should be covered because it's really interesting stuff. I mean, where we had teach-ins and—it's the most—it's really incredibly interesting stuff—all, you know, firsthand stuff with all the real Mayo Klavo [ph] and those kind of people—Joan Baez.

JOHN ZINSSER: These are people who came through the school at that time?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. We had people coming through the school all the time trying to get us to activate against the war—become active against the war.

JOHN ZINSSER: And in Los Angeles, were your students politicized?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Everything was totally politicized. There couldn't have been anything more politicized. There was either red or black, white or black. There was nothing in between.

JOHN ZINSSER: So there was a—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, at the most conservative college in the country.

JOHN ZINSSER: But I'm talking about once you get to Los Angeles and you're teaching.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm telling you about once I got to Los Angeles on my teaching after college graduation.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was so politicized it was unbelievable. I mean, we were the youngest three faculty members. There were three of us who had gone to the same—we had gone—we were teaching at Harvard School and we went to Harvard School.

JOHN ZINSSER: Oh, so you returned to—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Harvard.

JOHN ZINSSER: —to your high school and were teaching these classes—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was teaching these classes in addition to teaching a full load of English classes.

JOHN ZINSSER: But the inner-city kids are being taught not at Harvard School, they're being taught somewhere else?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes, and then on the weekends we had an additional two days of education.

JOHN ZINSSER: Were you teaching at your own high school?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was an added program.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. And was teaching your full-time what you were doing?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It became my passion. It became what I wanted to do and what I thought made sense to do, and the only possible way I could make any kind of change in what was the incredible cruelty and awfulness that we perceived things were going down.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you feel that you were able to affect change?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Oh, yes. We felt very much so, because we actually saw people changing. You know, there was demonstrations and there was a war. You know, there were flags being burned and there were—demonstrations were ending in marches and, you know—I feel like we're like rushing like crazy. Can I stop a little bit?

JOHN ZINSSER: Let's just take a break.

[Side conversation.]

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WILLIAM BARTMAN: This is like—you know, it's like doing a fast summary of the most important moments of your life.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, we can stop and consider—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, I don't want to—

JOHN ZINSSER: —any particular moment that you—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, fine. That's fine. But I want to feel like this is not—

JOHN ZINSSER: I don't want you to feel like you're speeding through something—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm running downhill with my head cut off right now.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, then we can either—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I want to respond to some questions.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. Let's try that.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Okay. I'll answer—I'll go on. I mean, I'll be glad—I'll continue going on the way I'm going on, but I—

JOHN ZINSSER: No, you don't have to.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: —but I don't want to. I want to have, you know, more response to them than just to be, you

know, this ramshackle—

JOHN ZINSSER: That's fine. Then let's try to do ten or 15 minutes, and you choose. Do you want to talk about your time in college or—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Anything you want to. I'll talk about anything you want to, as long as I don't feel that this is it and goodbye, thank you, ma'am.

JOHN ZINSSER: Yeah, okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because I don't—this isn't it. I mean, this is not it.

JOHN ZINSSER: All right. Let's talk about your teaching experiences those first three years out of college in Los Angeles.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Okay. What about them?

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. Let's talk about—you're teaching inner-city kids. You are physically where, in a public school building?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I'm physically teaching at a private school. We are physically teaching at a private school, but we are teaching private school kids during the daytime and public school kids are added to that the second half of the day, so it's half and half. And it goes on—

JOHN ZINSSER: And are they brought into an integrated classroom situation?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah.

JOHN ZINSSER: And was there a tension between these groups of students?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Eventually.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because we were role-playing, you know, we were—

JOHN ZINSSER: So you brought your theater—when you say role-playing—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, we were people being brought in to give these people a quick make-up for supposedly the lack of education that they had had or not had been given by society that would permit them to carry on through college and stuff with the brightest people in the country.

JOHN ZINSSER: And you're teaching English composition?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, not composition. It was just English is what I was teaching.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They called it English. It covered theater and—a lot of it was theater.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when you say a lot of it was theater, how would you incorporate theater into your teaching method?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, it was improvisation. It was writing. It was performance.

JOHN ZINSSER: And can you give me an example of an improvisation technique that you would use, or what happened during one of those sessions?

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, this sort of crosses over because at the same time I was also doing the same program in a prison for young offenders—the largest prison for young offenders in the United States. And we would take a situation like the draft, which they didn't know about because the draft didn't—you know, you either were drafted or you weren't, you know. If you were drafted, there's no question about it, you know. And we did a series of improvisations about the effect of the war on their personal lives, and coming home, and stealing things, and selling stuff and stealing it and selling it and stealing it and selling it, and all kinds of stuff. Whatever affected their lives about—whenever they were doing stuff.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what type of roles would they play?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: They'd play the mother, the father, the son, the daughter. It was role-playing.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did this lead your thinking somewhere toward thinking about how you could re-integrate this into theater?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was doing it. That was the theater that I was doing.

JOHN ZINSSER: That's a live—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. I was doing it. I was doing those plays. I was doing some of the same plays on the outside as I was doing inside the prison, some of them with the inmates on the outside, some of them without the inmates, but you think—there were roles that they created.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, when you say on the outside—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: In public rather than in private.

JOHN ZINSSER: And in public it would be in a theater space or a school space?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Theater space.

JOHN ZINSSER: And these were open to the general public?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah, open to general public.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were they noticed or—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: There was this thing called the Small Theater Movement in Los Angeles, which began around the mid-'60s and we had them in those small theaters.

JOHN ZINSSER: And when they gave a play, would it be a scripted theatrical play based on—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Sometimes. And sometimes it would be, you know, an improvisation. Sometimes it would be, you know, an evening of improvisations, and sometimes it would be a scripted play where the script didn't make any difference what you did. I mean, this was the beginning of sort of like the theater movement—you know, of the whole theater movement also.

JOHN ZINSSER: Now, you said you were teaching for three years. Did you naturally then move into theater as an extension of your teaching activities?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Teaching gave me a voice, being able to "physicalize" and do actually what I wanted to be doing, but which I was not allowed to do because I—you know, sort of the structures of society wouldn't let me do them. I would never be the person who was allowed to do any of this stuff.

JOHN ZINSSER: Meaning?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I was not going to be trusted with these people.

JOHN ZINSSER: As a figure of authority?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: As a figure of authority, as a figure of a discussion within the—in any kind of leadership role or whatever.

JOHN ZINSSER: And as far as finding a voice within yourself, did you—are you okay?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. What was the next logical—are you okay, Bill?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yes.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: [Crying.] It's so weird because it's like being tortured right now, you know, because any time I say anything it's like something—someone is like sticking me in the spine.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, I don't think we should push it under these circumstances.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: But how can you do it or not do it, you know? I mean, I don't understand what—it's never going to be anything besides painful. It's always going to be the most painful thing I ever have to deal with. There are people that are dead now—that are dead, who I knew, who were trying to teach in this class and who got thrown out of the class because they weren't good enough teachers or the perception of the people.

JOHN ZINSSER: And then they had to go into the army?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And they ended up being killed in Vietnam, yeah. Every time I go to Washington I go to the Vietnam War Memorial. Have you ever been there?

JOHN ZINSSER: Sure, yeah.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It's unbelievable. I mean it's—every time I go to the War Memorial I burst into tears. I mean I—involuntarily, there's no question about it, I get to a certain point and I become hysterical. You know, I can't control myself. And I certainly don't want to. You know, you mix that up with all the other stuff involved in this and—there was no structure of word, we have no resolutions, we had no nothing, besides being told that we were assholes.

JOHN ZINSSER: Told by whom?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Society. We were blamed for the war, we were blamed against the war, we were blamed as traitors, we were blamed as people who had no right to be talking about that they weren't being killed for. I mean, there's a million things. I mean it's like, you know, it's just endless—endless, endless, endless, endless, endless, endless, you know. And there was nobody to talk to about it.

JOHN ZINSSER: But you had support within your group?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, not really because we didn't know any of these people.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you felt—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Nobody wanted to be identified and talked to about as a major—as their being traitors to their country, you know, or whatever.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right. But did you have a group of friends or—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, they're not friends. These are people I do not see and do not know and do not—but that we share the bondage of the antiwar movement, you know. I don't know their names, other than I read them out of a list in the newspaper or something.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right, right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I mean I can tell you that I had dinner with Joan Baez, you know, 15 or 20 times in between—you know, during—you know, during intermissions of concerts, with Barbara Dane—it was an incredibly emotional period of time. You know, it was just a—there were people dying. We're talking about people dying in Vietnam now. You know, 13 a week is a huge amount. They were dying, you know, 150 people a day on a brief day, you know, 300 people, 1,000 people a day. They're talking about, you know, body bags and—you know, it was unbelievable. And the word body bag—is as amorphous as the word, you know, canvas bag or a purse.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what about your students from the inner city?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, I maintained relationships with a lot of them, but I didn't with most of them. I mean it's impossible. It was an impossible situation because they were goody-goodies for participating, so they had to quit the program. They were literally forced by their committees to leave the program no matter what the program was doing because they were Whitey's boys. We were complete outcasts within our community—the liberal establishment because we were radicals. And I wasn't a radical. I was as radical as a piece of hamburger. [They laugh.] I had no political agenda. It wasn't about that. It was about people dying—waking up, walking out their front door and having their heads blown off. Not here in this country, but—

JOHN ZINSSER: No, I understand what you're saying.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: —damn close to it. A lot closer than it is now.

JOHN ZINSSER: So how did you move to an end of this period? Did the war come to an end?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, the war came to an end. I don't even remember that part.

JOHN ZINSSER: But how about in your own life with the period of teaching?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: How did it come to an end? I did a play.

JOHN ZINSSER: And that was the play that was based on—that was the play at the Small Theater Movement?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. Yep.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you become known—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, I became known as one of the directors of these small theaters.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you go on subsequently then to produce?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. I was certainly relatively well-known within the Small Theater Movement of Los Angeles at the time.

JOHN ZINSSER: And did you have ambitions to—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I had lots of ambitions. I wanted to change the world. I wanted where we live to be a different place. I want it to be different not today but tomorrow, and not ten years from now. I want it different tomorrow.

JOHN ZINSSER: And were you actively writing?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I wasn't writing. I wasn't considering myself a writer, although I did, you know, put stuff together. I conglomerated. One of the forms of theater at that time was sort of, you know, doing stuff about—you know, compiling stuff.

JOHN ZINSSER: Okay. That was all very good, Bill, because that's the real you talking, and you're very impassioned and that's important.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: John, you know what? That's nothing. Absolutely—

ALEJANDRO: It's just a step, we'll get to it.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, I'm just saying to you, that seems like so—such a tiny little thing to me. I mean, it seems like—I mean, do you realize that nobody has written—there's very little written about any of this? It doesn't exist. People have erased this whole period from our history.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, it will come. It will come.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: In spite of being totally and completely filled with the most interesting characters in the world? I mean, how much more interesting can you have as a cast? Bob Dylan, you know. I'm hearing names of people that I don't even think are being said right now behind my head. I mean very famous people who were—you know, who you thought about and talked about and ate dinner with every day. You know, and you just moved in and out of this—people strategizing, and it was like an ongoing railroad train.

It's not possible to describe what I'm talking about, I don't think, in the certain kind of circumstances we're talking about it.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, you just—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: And I'm not sure that anybody is going to, you know, want—I think that people want to know about it. I just think that nobody is going to take the time because there's so much that didn't get documented in addition to this.

JOHN ZINSSER: Well, I think you just described it in emotional terms successfully, and I do think that the forces of history are powerful and that people will consider these times and these moments.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, maybe and maybe not for 50 years from now, and maybe never, and maybe never really have the time to think about them. I mean, people don't get it. I've had meetings and talks with people who are famous historians and people, and they just don't get it. They do not get it. They lived through this period—intelligent people—as if they hadn't lived through the period. You know. And when you're living—when you are the cast in the play that's being performed, it's very strange.

One of the things we did was we were going to do a play—I met with my cousin Judy, Judy Fiskin, who was very involved with, you know, one of the Beatles. I forget which one. And we were talking about a theater project,

which is the most unbelievable theater project you've ever heard of in your life, where literally she—where like there was an artist, there was a writer, there was a playwright, there was a song writer, there was a visual artist, and we're talking about how to structure a play that would revolutionize the way people experience their existence in theater. You know, and where you never quite learned the difference between reality and where you were talking to, in essence, a live thing on the stage. It was actually live. I mean you were actually having a dialogue with something, somebody. And it would be different every night, because you were actually having a conversation with a—

JOHN ZINSSER: And did this ever move to any kind of fruition?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, it didn't. But we talked about it for like hundreds and thousands of hours. [They laugh.] You know, with lasers and with—reproducing things with lasers so that they—you could put people's voices into the face that they were talking to, and all kinds of stuff. Because all those laboratories were at Pomona.

ALEJANDRO: When did you start your own theater? Was it much later?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No. It was all at the same time.

ALEJANDRO: What year was that?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: 1964.

ALEJANDRO: What type of plays did you do there?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We had an experimental theater. We did some regular plays, and we did some experimental plays, and we did a lot of plays where the first performance of the play was our performance of the play. And a lot of them were never real performances. They were like—they were just there.

ALEJANDRO: And what was your role in the theater?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: At the age of 22, I was the managing director—artistic director.

JOHN ZINSSER: And what was it called?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: It was called the West Coast Theater Company. I was thrown into the position at the age of 21 and basically told, either you do this or you go to jail.

JOHN ZINSSER: Told by whom?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: By the powers that be.

JOHN ZINSSER: Go to jail for what offense?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: For being a radical. It's much subtler than that. It so cross-mingles with this project that it's unbelievable. And it's in a way how I feel—I guess the thing that made me most paranoid about this project is that I got coerced into doing it. Not your project.

JOHN ZINSSER: Right.

WILLIAM BARTMAN: But about, you know, either do it or you're going to end up in deep shit.

JOHN ZINSSER: So you had a theater building?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: We had a whole building. We had three theaters in one space and on any given evening there were three plays going on, and sometimes five plays going on. But plays that started in the afternoon at 5:00 that changed at 7:00, that changed at 9:00, that changed at 11:00, and that changed at 7:00 and 9:00 again in other theaters.

ALEJANDRO: Had you stopped teaching by then?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Yeah. Well, I didn't give up teaching for quite a number of years. I just wouldn't give up teaching. I continued to hold on to it because it was so empowering. It was the only thing that gave me any kind of structure in my life, or at least—I kept getting jobs teaching, and I kept getting offered better jobs. And I was like—I wasn't trying to—it wasn't about making more money or anything, but they were willing to give me more money than any other faculty member that taught at the school. So I was competing against these 60-year-old, 50-year-old, 40-year-old people, who really wanted to be, you know, grammar teachers.

JOHN ZINSSER: And these were college teaching jobs by this point?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, they were all high school jobs. I mean, you know—and there was a shortage of teachers and there was a—you know, it was a good job. It was draft-deferrable. So I don't know the—I don't remember all the details. I could figure it out, but I just can't—I've tried so hard over the years to sort of split up why these things happened the way they happened.

JOHN ZINSSER: Why they happened to you personally or why—how history—

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No, why it happened to society, why it happened to me personally, what was it that I contributed to it, why didn't I contribute more to it, why didn't I—you know, what was it that I was supposed to be doing? You know, was making films, which what I really wanted to be doing, the most important thing to be doing, rather than just, you know, working on a movie career, which is what I really wanted to be doing. I wanted to make movies at a certain point.

JOHN ZINSSER: And have you come to any conclusions?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: No.

JOHN ZINSSER: It remains an open question?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I haven't ever discussed it. I've never had a conversation about it.

JOHN ZINSSER: Do you feel that it changed you for the better or did it tear you apart for the worse?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I just don't even know how to answer that question. I think you've got to ask other people and see what is the consensus about that. But for me, I would have to say that—changed me? Of course it changed me. It changed everything in my life. There's nothing that was the same, is the same, would have been the same or could have been the same. It's something we did 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I lived in an apartment next door to the theater building that we worked in, and we performed theaters and wrote plays there like 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We did this 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

JOHN ZINSSER: And do you feel you helped change the world from one person's actions?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Can I identify one person's action? No.

JOHN ZINSSER: No. Did your actions—do you feel you affected change?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: I don't have a clue about it.

JOHN ZINSSER: But you changed yourself?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Sure, sure. But, you know, I think everybody feels that they've changed during a period of time.

JOHN ZINSSER: But perhaps not as –

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Because there were so many changes to be made.

JOHN ZINSSER: Not as wholly and completely as what you're talking about?

WILLIAM BARTMAN: Well, I don't know how other people felt about the periods that they lived in, whether they could have possibly lived in a period of time that had as much change going on emotionally and politically as we did, you know. And people constantly, you know, talking about it—I mean, you know, talking about it over and over and over and over and over again; reinventing the wheel.

JOHN ZINSSER: All right, Bill. I think we should stop there. That was a very good session.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]