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BARBARA BURNS INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

Barbara Burns
Coal Miner & Activist
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Interviewed by Nancy Armstrong
Total Running Time: 43 minutes and 23 seconds

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ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Barbara Burns
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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

We're just gonna start out talking a little bit about your family, where you grew up, what your upbringing was like. Talk a little bit about that.

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I'm the oldest of eight children, five girls and three boys. And we started out in a little mining town called Carlisle, West Virginia. And then the mines played out in Fayette County, so we moved to Nicholas County. And my dad again worked in the mines and plus all these brothers and all these cousins, and we had like a little community because there were so many in our family, his brothers, and they all had large families, like us.

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And my dad and his brothers, they liked to party too. And so, they did drink a lot, but then that was typical of the miners back in those days.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was that like being the oldest of eight children? How did that influence you, what, who you were like as a little girl?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, of course, being the oldest of eight, I had a lot of responsibility and I always babysit for my brothers or my sisters, until I got married and left home. And one of the things that made me the person that I am now was- My mother is a real mild meek person, and she would let people run over her. When I was about eight years old, I thought, I do not wanna be like my mom.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So did you identify with your father more than-

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BARBARA BURNS:

Yes. I did, I identify with dad more than mom, because I liked the things that dad did. I liked the mechanics, working on cars and the outside work and things like that, where my mom was real quiet and kept house and that, I just didn't care for that. So I actually followed my dad around.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

And what was his or both of your parents' vision of a woman's place in the world?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Dad, he didn't want me to end up like my mother. I mean, he said it. And so he told me I could do anything that I wanted to, that I had the brains to do with, and that I had the nerve to do it, and if I would try, I would go places and I could do anything I wanted to. Now, my mom, on the other hand, because we had so many kids, she said, "Daddy's wanted boys so bad." But she would say

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every time that she had another girl, “Well, thank God they won't go into mines or join the Army.” I did.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was school like for you? What kind of a student were you? Did you like school?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I did. And if I wanted to, I could make straight A's, but I made A's and B's, mostly. And we moved around a lot, which the miners did. And I was pretty good at adapting to the moves and the different schools. And I made friends really quick. So, it didn't bother me.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So when you were growing up, did you think that boys and girls were treated differently?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I noticed early on that the boys in our family, my cousins and even my brothers were treated different than what we were, and they could do

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anything. And it was okay, but, my mom and my dad on that too, he'd say, now, "Girls aren't supposed to do this and girls aren't supposed to do this It's okay for boys." But I didn't see it that way. I thought that if they could do it, why couldn't we?

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And I'd go do what I wanted to, and I knew I would get punished for it, and after a while I'd just stop and get a switch on the way home, so that I'd get my whipping and I could go ahead and do what I wanted to. And I did.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How would you describe yourself as a teenager? What kind of a teenager were you? What was your personality?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I had a lot of responsibility. With the kids and whatnot. But I also knew early on, I didn't wanna be poor like my parents. So I started working real early and just- But I liked to have fun too. I worked hard and I played hard.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How old were you when you had your first job?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I was a waitress in a restaurant whenever I was 15.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What did you worry about as a child? Did you have concerns? Was there anything pressing on you? You seemed pretty carefree, but what were you worried-

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BARBARA BURNS:

I just- Whatever came that day, we just dealt with it, and I still- I don't worry about things, I deal with things. Whatever comes, I deal with it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about being pretty? Were you aware, growing up as a young girl, that it was either helpful or a hindrance to you?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I didn't try to do anything to make myself pretty. I wanted to be like the boys so I could do things that I wanted to do.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What did you do immediately after high school?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Actually, I got married while I was in high school. That's sort of a sad story. There was three girls in my class and we got married. Well, my husband and I got married one week, and then my girlfriend, after she found out I got married, she got married. And this... Well, I think I was telling you about this. When we have our 45th class reunion, I will be giving out the gift for the "being married the longest" to my girlfriend. Now, I'll no longer have that role.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

You got married, you had children right away, and you worked, right? What, what types of things did you do?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I worked in a restaurant. I worked for BFGoodrich. Gosh. I worked in the grocery store. And then I went to work in the mines.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was the main variable in that decision? When did you come to that decision to wanna be someone working in the mines?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I read about those ladies in Kentucky, going to work in the mines, and I thought, "My goodness, what could I do at home?" And, down at my mom's and dad's, I know I could work in the mines. And then, I wanted to be a nurse since I was a little girl, and I thought I can go to work to mines and make enough money, put it aside to pay for my nursing.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was the reaction to your wanting to do that from your family?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Oh, my dad, it just upset him to know and my mom just- She's gonna do what she wants to do. My husband Sam, he didn't like it very much, but he didn't say much either because he knew that I was gonna do it anyway.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So, what was the first job that you had in the coal mining industry?

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BARBARA BURNS:

My first job was as, general inside labor, and we rocked dust, we timbered, we shoveled belts, and then after six months, we could go up to what they call the face and work up there. So it was just basically- just called general inside labor, whatever needed to be done.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Were you the only woman or were the other women?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I was the only woman working in this particular mine for a while.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What were the upsides to that job for you?

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BARBARA BURNS:

You did your job, you went home, you forgot about it. And then payday.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was the pay and what was the good thing about working that job as opposed to being a cashier or some of the other things?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Oh, you probably made about four times as much as you would as a cashier or working at BF Goodrich or anything like that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What were the downsides?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Cold. 65, then I would get cold real easily. That's about the only thing that I thought was the downside was just being cold.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Did you think it was hard?

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BARBARA BURNS:

No. It wasn't any harder than anything I did at home, because we built houses and I helped with the mechanic work, plumbing, anything that needed to be done, yard work. I just always helped with that, or a lot of times, just did it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about the danger of the job? Were there dangers?

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BARBARA BURNS:

There was, but I didn't think about them.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What were the dangers?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Explosions, getting crushed sometimes maybe by the machinery. The roof falling in, caving in on you, things like that. Floods, Sometimes, if you were

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working the mines and someone else had worked beside in another mine and didn't tell you about it and you were cut into it, and the water would come and flood the mines.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Was there any reaction from the men you were working with?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, this one particular man in particular, Brent Gross, he was a miner operator and he said, "You all bring that woman in the muds and I will quit. And I didn't never want her up here with me and I mean it." And he was one of the top operators. Well, of course they had to send me up there. And anyway, I worked with him. And you kept the mind cable out the way and did everything that needed to be done. Well, he went out that evening, he said, "Don't send anybody else up there but her."

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about the wives of the miners?

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BARBARA BURNS:

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Some of the wives of the miners, whenever they found out that I was going to go to work in the mines, they were gonna set up a picket line, but they did not do it. And then after I worked with them and gradually one by one, different ones would come around. And even today, after all these years, I'm still friends with a lot of the wives and their husbands, and we still visit.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Can you tell me a little bit about your relationship with the men at the mines, in terms of some of the things that happened to you?

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BARBARA BURNS:

There was one incident where there was this gentleman that I worked with—and I'd rather not say his name—but I also went to school with him and I thought he was a friend. And he would come up at night and talk to me and ask me how my husband was Sam and how my sons were, Bill and Bob, and he would even give me candy bars and candy to take home to the boys. Well, what I didn't know is that he was going around to all the other miners and tell them that he was gonna take beds with him, that he was gonna get into my pants.

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Well, one of the fellas that—and his name is Earl Jones, and he's no longer with us anymore—but he became very, very angry about it. So he came and

told me, and he was gonna do something about it, and I said, “No, see, it is not worth losing your job over. I will deal with it.” He said, “What are you gonna do?” And I said, “I don't know, but-” This was like on Friday when I found out we worked the third shift. I said, “By Sunday, I will know what I'm gonna do and I'm gonna put a stop to it.”

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So anyway, my sons and I were in G.C. Murphy at Richwood buying candy, and I don't know if you all have ever seen these great big pink panties that women used to wear, and my grandmother called 'em bloomers. Well, I thought, “Hmm, I'll give those to Sid.” So anyway, I bought a pair, did not tell my husband anything about this, and I took it to work. And in the bathhouse I wrote on it, “These are Barbara's bloomers and Sid will wear them.”

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So anyway, I told Mr. Jones. I said, “Whenever we go up there, Sid is going to get in my pants tonight.” He said, “What are you doing now, Burns?” And I said, “Don't worry. I'm going to do something, put a stop to this.” So anyway, I tucked the panties in my cover offs and overall. We went up there and- Well, we didn't live in the trailer, but there was a trailer, and the lights were in the trailer and Sid was getting his light.

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And I just walked up to him, I said, “Sid, how you doing?” He turned around and said, “Well, hi, fine Barbie doll.” And I told the guys, I said, “You guys come near me and I wanna show you something.” I said, “I hope you all brought some money.” And Jones said, “Why Burns?” I said, “Well, Sid has made a brag

that he's gonna get into my pants, and tonight is the night." So I pulled these pink panties out and put 'em over his head. So anyway, that story went everywhere.

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And of course Sid, I mean, I think he would've probably killed me if he could have, but he quit there, right after there, and went somewhere else. So that was one of the ways I dealt with sexual harassment. Needless to say after that, very, very few men ever—until this episode of Smoot Coal Company—ever said anything out the way with me, and they called me Miss Barbara after that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Why do you think they were pulling those kind of pranks on you? Why do you think they did that?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Men just do things like that. They do it on each other. Whenever, especially when a new person comes to work in the mines, they always pull pranks for the first few days. And a lot of it, I think that they do is just to see what your attitude and how you're gonna handle working with them, and if you're gonna be someone that would be easy to work with or someone that they aren't going to like to work with. But once they see that they can't- And they

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love to tease, and once they see that they can't get the best of you, they quit and they move on to the next one.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

But you knew instinctively how to handle that. How did you know how to handle that?

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BARBARA BURNS:

My dad used to be a coal miner and he did the same thing and he would tell us about things that he would do with the mines. And he really- he coached me, once he got over being upset with me, what to expect. And that was one of the things is- And also, not only did they tease you that way, they would grease your dinner bucket, your clothes, things like that. And he said, "Just pretend like they didn't do it." And that's what I did.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So you didn't feel that that was just because you're a woman, you thought it was just 'cause you were new?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Just because I was new.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So, what happened at- You worked at a couple of places and then you got a job offer from Smoot. Can you tell me about how that came about?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I'd worked at several different mines and had gotten my mine form of papers and just different certifications for mines. And this mine called Smoot Coal Company opened up and the president of it, who was Paul Fazenbaker, called me and asked me if I was interested in a job, 'cause I had worked with him previously and we had a really good working relationship and he was a gentleman and I've known him probably my entire life, and his family.

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So I took the job at Smoot and at first, I was a lab technician. And then after that, he promoted me to be safety director, which I didn't feel that I was qualified for, but I thought, well, it'll be a challenge, I'll try it. So I went to the Beckley Mine Academy and took every class and course that I could, and studied the books and just anything that pertained to safety.

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I tried to learn it and I took my job very, very seriously and found out later that he thought that I would just be like a token person and wouldn't really

take my job serious. And I started going underground and checking the equipment and different things, and doing what was necessary to keep the men from being in danger, and that wasn't what he had in mind.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So what happened with the next promotion that he offered you? When did that occur and what were the circumstances?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I'd been there probably a year or so, and I don't know what happened to Mr. Fazenbaker, just like- he just changed overnight and he started being real bossy and overbearing with not only me, but the other ladies that worked there. And things just kept getting worse and worse. And then my husband became very ill and had kidney failure. And then, of course we were only one income family, and I had tried and tried and tried to get a job at other places to get away from there.

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And he would call and tell him that he couldn't do without me. That the mines- I was what was holding the mines together, and I was his best employee. Couldn't get a job. And finally he just kept harassing me and trying to kiss me, and so I had heard about Betty Jean and I called her and told her

what was going on and we decided to file a complaint with the West Virginia Human Rights.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Who was Betty Jean?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Betty Jean Hall was an attorney out of Washington D.C., Dunphy, Virginia, and she had started this organization called Co-employment Project that helped women miners with problems and would help women get jobs. And then if it was any other non-traditional job, if any women was having problems, then she would help that. She was an advocate for us.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So was that rock bottom when you called her? You had hit the bottom of that?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The bottom bottom.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Was that the first time you had ever experienced that kind of sexual harassment, assault, stalking?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Like that, yes. I mean, there was kidding at the other places, but nothing like that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Who did you file a complaint with and what was the claim specifically?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I filed a claim with the West Virginia Human Rights and Steve Rutledge was the investigator. And I just filed it, just a sexual harassment suit. And whenever I did it- Well, before I did, I said I tried to get a job and other places and I couldn't. And then I had asked Paul Fazenbaker if he would just put me in the mines and let me do my work and not bother me. And he said my place was gonna be right in the office with him.

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So anyway, I filed the suit and even in the original suit, I asked for him to leave me alone and just let me go underground and do my job. And that was it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What happened after you filed the claim?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Probably just a week or a few weeks after I filed the claim, and of course they found out about a- My husband had been on dialysis and he got called for a transplant. And while we were in Columbus, Ohio, and he was getting the transplant, I got a notice in the mail, which I didn't know until I got home, that they had fired me. And whenever I got home, got the mail, not only did I have a very ill husband to take care of, I had no job.

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So of course, I called Betty Jean Hall, and she came down immediately and she took care of it. She took it to the circuit court in Webster County, and got an order to put me back to work or put me back on payroll with no lapse in the pay. So they- the judge over there ordered them to put me back on payroll and give me my insurance back, but they wouldn't let me go back to work.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Did Betty warn you about how difficult it would be to pursue this type of case?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, Betty Jean told me that once we started, that it would not be easy and that they would try to defame of character and some just- really try to make me look as bad as they could. And we would probably have some more harassment, but we had talked it over and we decided that we were going to see it through. So we did for, I think, it was 13 years.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Were you ever threatened by people at work for causing all this trouble? Who was on your side during this thing?

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BARBARA BURNS:

There were several employees that were still there, and they kept me informed of what was going on at the mines and were on my side. And no one other than Fazenbaker ever threatened me. But he didn't threaten me physically. He threatened with the job and that he would rule me, and I never

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worked in mining industry, or probably wouldn't work anywhere in Nicholas County again.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So can you take me through the case now? The case starts, and what happens?

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BARBARA BURNS:

They were trying to outman us, intimidate us out, out-money us, and using me for scapegoats so that no one else would ever file a lawsuit against the non-union mines. But we may have been quite turned, and two females, but they didn't run us off and we're still standing and they're going.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Can you tell me about some of their tactics to break you down so that you would settle or stop fighting the case?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, of course, they tried defamation of character and they did a deposition that lasted- it was over a matter of days for 32 hours. And there was- I think it

was Betty Jean and Chris Hedges, another lawyer from Spencer, and Heidi Kasooth from the Attorney General's office joined in, and then later Davet McIntyre did. And they were just trying to scare us and money us to death.

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But likely, before Betty Jean had the co-employment project and we had a lot of different companies out there that would provide grants. They tried to out money us and they would get on their airjet and fly to different places, and they stayed in the Marriott, just places like that. And they did this for, gosh, I don't know, a couple years, but we kept up with them and through snowstorms and bad weather, good weather.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

If you would, Barbara, just tell that story about Fazenbaker's work about the women in black.

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BARBARA BURNS:

We were to do a deposition on Mr. Fazenbaker, and one of the things that Mr. Fen Baker did not allow was for any women that worked with him to wear black. And if you were black, he would tell you to go home and change and not to ever wear black. So anyway, when we were getting ready to do the deposition on him, I mentioned that to Betty Jean. I said, "Betty Jean, I think

we need to wear black." So, we went to the store and we dressed totally in black.

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And at the time, instead of them letting us do a deposition at his house or in a courtroom or something, they waited till he was in the hospital. Then we had to go. And I suppose that was to make us look like we were hard and callous and whatnot, but they said that was gonna be our only chance to do a deposition with him. So anyway, we walk in the hospital dressed in black, and when he saw us, he went crazy.

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I mean, he just absolutely- and almost refused to do the deposition. He was so messed up. It took probably half an hour for him to regain his composure, to even know who his name was.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was his feeling about women in black?

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BARBARA BURNS:

He just said he did not like the color black, and he did not think that women should wear it. And all he ever thought about was women would wear black whenever they became a widow. And he didn't want anyone ever wearing black around him.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about the courtroom? Did you testify? What was that like?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I had to get in the witness stand and testify to a lot of different things. And the lawyer- it was Morty Sachs, he tried to intimidate me and just say things and try to scare me. But he would get things mixed up, like I was stupid. And he was asking- One of the things that I remember, it was about the air velocity in the mines. And he kept Sammy saying, "Well, Ms Burns, did you know what FMC is?"

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I said, "No, sir, I don't. Do you know what FMC is? No sir, I don't." "You don't know what FMC is?" I said, "No, sir, I don't." And we did this for probably 15 minutes and I figured out what he was after. "Funny," I said, "Are you talking about cubic feet per moment?" And he was wanting to know what's- He was saying FMC instead of CFM finding. I said, "Mr. Sachs, are you talking about CFM?" He said, "What's that?"

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I said, "That means cubic feet per moment. Is that what you were trying to ask me?" I said, "Yes, I do know what it is." And he just quit, he just- Whatever he was going to ask me later, he just totally lost it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Why did the suit take nine years?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The judge, Booney Sommerville, didn't want to rule 'cause he did not want to rule against the company. And he just dragged it on and drug it on and drug it on. And he kept telling us to settle, to settle, to settle. And they didn't wanna settle at that time. And they'd made their brags that Betty Jean, my lawyer, and I would never see a penny from that company, and I would never have a job back there.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What happened with the circuit court ruling?

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BARBARA BURNS:

We knew what the ruling would be once he got mad. And of course, he ruled against me. And then Betty Jean took it to the Supreme Court and they- the Supreme Court of West Virginia then fed it in another courtroom with a judge

in Fayette County. And he heard it, and immediately he ruled and reversed it, Mr. Sommerville's decision.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Going back to that circuit court, what was the dynamic there? You weren't surprised when they ruled against you?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The judge, Booney Sommerville, and Fazenbaker were good friends, but- And the judge also- he said that he didn't approve of women being in the mines, but he still thought he could do a fair ruling. So we stayed there, and off the same time, he had no intentions of ever doing what I would consider a fair ruling.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was your feeling when the Supreme Court ruled in your favor?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Oh my goodness. We were just- Betty Jean and I, whenever we heard that, we were just wild with happiness and felt that justice had been done and that it

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was worth it at that time. Prior to that, it's like- I gave up a couple times, I really did. And Betty Jean said, "No, no, we are not giving up. We went this far, we are not giving up." And thanks to her, we didn't.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What did you receive in terms of damages?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, number one, they made it that there was no affair, and that, yes, he did- He sexually harassed me. And then I think we ended up with like \$20,000 a piece, because the company had filed bankruptcy and due to Betty Jean, she kept filing papers and filing papers so that what monies was left was divided among us.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How many other people from Smoot Coal testified?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I don't know how many people testified, and what was really funny about it is that they would pull these employees from Smoot to testify for them. Well,

once these people would get on the witness stand, they wouldn't lie. And they ended up testifying in my favor cause and they would tell the judge, "Sir, I am not telling a lie. I'm gonna tell you just how it was." And then they did. They would tell what was really true and it helped me and hindered them.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Were they male or female?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Both.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What was it like for your family during the trial?

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BARBARA BURNS:

During this whole time, the entire time, whenever we were having the lawsuit, which lasted 13 years, it was very hard on my family at first. And especially, out in the public and my boys going to school and different things like that, it really bothered them. But I sat down and talked to them and

explained to them what was going on, and they were very, very supportive. And the boys and my husband did everything that they could to help me.

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Like the boys would babysit Betty Jean's children. They cleaned her car for her, my husband. He would be our gopher. And if we needed supplies, paper, whatever we needed, then he was- So, in a way it brought my family together and made us stronger as a family. And even now, with my sons, we're very close. And I think that that did have- that was a positive impact of having the lawsuit.

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And I've often wondered what our life would've been like had we not done it. But I guess I'll never know that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Why were you so determined to never give up?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, one of the things- the reason that we continued on, even after the company filed bankruptcy, is the fact that the accusations that he made against me, and I wanted them to admit that they were false, and also, if I quit other women that had the same thing I did, or worse, then they'd say, "Well, if

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she quit, there's no use for us to even try." So it was very important to both, Betty Jean and I, both, that we see this to the very end-

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-and send a message out to other women that once you try- if something's going happen to you, and you get to the point that you feel like you need to do a lawsuit or whatever, to not get scared and quit. Just to keep it until the very end.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What did you do after the case was finally settled?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I can't really explain how happy we were. We were just happy and just laughing and congratulating each other and hugging. When we finally did get together, after that, it was wonderful. It was. And it was worth it, to both of us.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What do you think the long-term impact of the case has been for women in coal mines? I mean, you didn't give up. You could have given up, you kept going. What do you think was the impact of your determination to fight that case?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I feel that the impact of me- or not just me, but Betty Jean and I both, like you say, riding out the entire fiasco of this case, that it gave other women the courage when they needed to, to do what needed to be done if they were sexually harassed or didn't get a- they would qualify for a job and they didn't get it.

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And I think that they would look at our case and say, "Well, they did it for that long of time and finally won." And I think it really paved the way for women and it made it a lot easier on others. And I think it also made, like, lawyers that were against women going to work stop and think before they would take a case against the women because of that.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Do you think your case and others like it paved the way for women to have a better environment?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I feel that- but me having this case and it being made public really helped other women, and made the companies open their eyes, instead of harassing

them. And it made them much, much more aware of what sexual harassment actually was. At the time, there was really nothing much that defined sexual harassment. Now, there've been lots and lots of literature on how sexual harassment is.

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And almost every company that I've worked for, including the hospital that I worked for, you now have training on sexual harassment and what is- and I really feel that, especially through the efforts of Betty Jean, that that came about.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Tell me about your life today. What are you doing now?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I'm a civil nurse and I farm. My husband passed away two and a half years ago, and I'm still trying to run the farm the way that he would like for it to run. And I spend time with my mother and my grandchildren, and try to help people. And one thing that I especially do is try to help people that had kidney failure... get a kidney transplant.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

We're gonna change topics now and just talk a little bit about your personal life. When you grew up, did you think that getting married was a given? Did you expect that you would get married?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Until I met my husband, no. I didn't even like boys. But then after I met him, things changed and I knew probably for the second night that I went out with him that I'd like to spend my life with him, even though I was very young.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How did you meet him?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I went to work at a drive-in as a waitress and was spending the summer with my grandmother and he was working in Pennsylvania, he came in for the weekend and he came down there and just started talking to me and asked me for a date, and I told him I didn't know him and I didn't go. And then they came in the next weekend, by that time I'd already asked everybody about him and pretty much knew that he was a nice person, and I just started dating him and we were together from 1964 until 2009.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How hard was it to balance your family life and working?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I've always been a very lucky person that I have a lot of energy and I don't need a lot of sleep. And I could get up early in the morning and do work that needed to be done. And then my sons, I started them—Bill and Bob—I started them at a very, very young age to teach them how to cook and clean, just... So that whenever they grew up, that they could manage on their own if they needed to.

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And so they really helped. And they would do work, trying to get things ready before mom and dad came home, as they got older. And we did a lot of our stuff together as a family. The projects around the house and if we needed a fence built, we all did it. Or washing the cars. Just whatever needed to be done, we just did it as a family.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

And no complaints from the kids on working on fence?

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BARBARA BURNS:

No, no. They were both energetic kids and liked to work.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Do you think that your children or your grandchildren will grow up with different ideas about gender and what women can do, than you did?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Oh, I know that my grandchildren will, of course. They've given a different world than what we did. And they see more of men and women being equal in different jobs and different phases of life. And women are more into non-traditional jobs, like even doctors, lawyers, astronauts, and things like that. And they don't really see that gender difference that we had whenever we were younger.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Let's talk a little bit about the women's movement. Were you aware that the women's movement was going on, at around the time you started working in the mines? And things were really heating up around that. Were you aware that that was happening?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Yeah, I was very much aware that there was a women's movement and that is really what prompted me to apply for the job in the mines. Before then, I would've never thought about it if it had not been for the women's movement and them- different agencies and people helping women break into the non-traditional jobs.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

So you thought it was positive?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Yes, I did.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Did you consider yourself a feminist at the time?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I didn't even know what that meant. No. I did not know what being a feminist meant, and I still- I don't consider myself a feminist.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What do you define feminist? How do you define it?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, I always thought that was someone that was a man hater, but actually, it's not. That was just, what we- it was perceived, with the- Actually, it was through the television and news media, that they would show women that were really men haters mostly. And I certainly wasn't a man hater.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Knowing that it's not that, so you don't- you still don't identify?

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BARBARA BURNS:

No, I don't. I just- What I did is, with the job in the mines, I would've stayed as a waitress or at BFGoodrich if I could have made the same amount of money. But I knew that I couldn't and I couldn't afford really at that time to go to college without having some money to pay for it. And that's what I saw the job in the mines as an opportunity to go for nursing. But once I got to work in

the mines, I loved it. And I would've stayed, had the mining industry not went down the way that it did.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Why do you think people consider feminism to be a dirty word?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Well, it's not so much now as it was a man did not like the idea of their wives working and making their own money was what a whole lot of it was. And I think they were threatened that the women may divorce them, they could get their own cars and just make up their own mind and do what they wanted to. And the men wanted to be the providers and I don't think it was always a really negative thing that the men felt that,-

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-and it wasn't so much to control the women. It was that I think a lot of times that they were really afraid that they were gonna lose their wives.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What do you think's the biggest change for women since you were a young woman?

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BARBARA BURNS:

That we are able to support ourselves. And that we can get jobs that we couldn't before, and it's not so hard to. It's not hard. I mean, and it's not like if you wanna go to mechanic school, you're accepted now. And if you want to go, well, say, to even be a TV producer, women can do that now. Where before, that was just unheard of.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Do you think there's a difference when women lead or when men lead? Do you think there's a difference in leadership style or one is better than the other? Do you have any opinion on that?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I feel that as a general rule, women are more compassionate and more understanding if you have a family, and like if your children really get sick or something, that you need to be there with them, and they're more flexible and will let you be more flexible with your work schedule than what men do.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

Still today?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Yes, still today, I do. With women, family is first and the job is second. With men, it's usually the job first and then—not always, but usually—the job first and then the family.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What do you think is the toughest thing about being a woman?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The toughest thing I think about being a woman is you still got these guys that'll say, "You really do a good job for a woman." And that irritates me. How I come back with it now, I say, "Well, you do a terrible job for a man."

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What's the most meaningful or useful piece of advice you've ever received?

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BARBARA BURNS:

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The most meaningful and peaceful advice I ever received was from my dad whenever I was younger and followed him around, he would tell me that I could do anything that I set my mind to, and to be honest, and always remember that I was no better than anyone else, but I was no less. And not to worry about things, to deal with it. And that's really my philosophy in life and that's the way I feel.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What one piece of advice would you give to a young woman on balancing work and family?

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BARBARA BURNS:

What I would give advice to people, to women that's trying to work and have a family is to get your entire family, your children and your husband, involved. And don't try to boss them, just try to make it fun for them to help you. Say, "Let's do this job and then we'll do- we'll go have fun or we'll play. But let's get our work done first," and make them feel like that they want to help you more than they have to do because you're working.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about a piece of advice on making marriages work?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Just treat your husband or your wife the same way you did on your first date and you'll stay married. And make them the number one person in your life. And that's what I always try to do with my husband. Sometimes it was hard, but I tried it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What about a piece of advice on pursuing your dreams?

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BARBARA BURNS:

Go for it, baby. If you're- Whatever dream you have- First of all, you have to be realistic. I mean, you can't pick up something like, I'm going to sprout wings and fly. But realistic dreams- And don't just dream it, do it. Start and make a plan and carry it out, and when you get discouraged, just take a deep breath and wait a day or two and just start over, and usually your dreams will come true.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

How do you think you raise a strong, confident, self-assured girl?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The way I feel like with my granddaughter—and if I would've had daughters, I would've done the same—I would've encouraged them that regardless of what they wanted to do and thought they couldn't do, to try to do it and not give up on it. And just like my one- Well, I have two granddaughters, but this one in particular, she's turned a lot like me, and when she was about six years old, she decided she wanted go to beauty pageants and now she's almost 13 and she is a junior in Ms. West Virginia.

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And who would've ever thought that she would've ever done that in those few years? So that's why I say that if you have a dream, pursue it.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What did you wanna be when you grew up?

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BARBARA BURNS:

I wanted to be a nurse and I am a nurse, and I will be until I retire.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

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What was your first paying job?

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BARBARA BURNS:

My very first paying job that I had when I was 15 years old, was working in a restaurant as a waitress.

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NANCY ARMSTRONG:

What three adjectives best describe you?

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BARBARA BURNS:

The three things that best describe me from my perspective is I'm strong-willed, I like helping people, I guess I'd be compassionate, and I'm spunky. Now, from other people's point of view, who knows?

END TC: 00:43:23:00