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AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANE CROTHERS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Diane Crothers, on February 4, 2022. I am Kate Rizzi, and I am in Branchburg, New Jersey. Diane, thank you so much for doing this second interview session with me.

Diane Crothers: I'm delighted to be here, Kate. This has been an exciting, illuminating process.

KR: For the record, can you state your full name and where you are located?

DC: Sure. Diane Crothers, Brooklyn, New York.

KR: To start off today, I want to circle back to a couple topics to talk about from your upbringing.

DC: Okay.

KR: What role did religion play in your young life?

DC: My dad was raised by a devout either Methodist or Presbyterian, I'm not sure, so this was a sort of garden-variety Protestant, his mother. My grandmother, his mother, wanted him to be a minister, one of her career choices for him. She was somebody for whom the Bible and religion were very important. The only document that she left when she died that I'm aware of, besides she did a painting that I have seen or have somewhere, but she marked up a Bible with all her annotations about patriarchy in the margin. That was very interesting. My dad was very hesitant to show that to me many years ago, but I do somewhere have a xerox of it. That was Edith, Nana.

Then, as my father came long, he kept a very strong but not intrusive Protestant faith. He was somebody who raised me with a sense of obligation to one another, a sense of community, a sense of morality. He and my mother were both very strong about just sort of this internal compass about right and wrong and that you didn't have to check in with anybody about that. You had a sense of that, and you were supposed to act on it.

My mother had the same kind of background. She grew up in a Protestant home, one of six children, and she passed on this sense of empathy, which I talked about before, this sense of responsibility for other people, and that other people were certainly as good as you were, and not this sense of privilege that many people have. They gave me a strong basis in that.

Then, we were a member of a Congregational Church in New Britain, Connecticut. New Britain, at the time, had enough upper-middle-class, upper-class people to fund a private school named Mooreland Hill. Mooreland Hill has since gone out of business, and one of the things on its website is that it no longer has the demographics to support it. When you look up New Britain on Google, it says it's a working-class city, so that's interesting. So, I was in this church in the upper-middle-class, white part of town, but I noticed that there were no Black people in the church certainly. Obviously, there weren't any Jews in the church. There was one family of Armenians. They had Black hair like mine, and so I noticed them because everyone else is either

blonde or trying to be blonde, when you look out in the congregation. My sister and I were briefly Sunday school teachers in it.

When I was about in ninth grade, we had to go through something of joining the church, and you wrote what was called a credo. I think there were about seventeen topics, which I don't remember any, except what do you believe about God, Jesus, and the sacraments? I wrote about that and whatever the other thirteen things were. I had already heard about the Holocaust at that point and was very affected by it, and that was sort of the extinguishing of my belief in a deity because I couldn't understand how the Holocaust could happen if there really were anyone in charge of human behavior. I said as much. I said I didn't believe in the divinity of Jesus. He was a good man, but that was it. The sacraments, I did not attach any significance to. I had a very bright minister at that point, a guy named Ed Dahl. Because we lived only a half an hour from Yale, we got a lot of the benefits of Yale graduate schools, like my dad being in medical school there. Ed had gone to Yale Divinity, and he gave me an "A-" on this and welcomed me to the church. [laughter] So, I don't know what I thought about it at the time, but, okay, I didn't feel that I had any opinions that were not accepted. Nobody was trying to hem me in or set me on the right path, none of that, so that went on. Now, many years later, I'm a Unitarian, so that's just to the left. That was important.

Just recently, when I was looking at all these old documents, I was looking at my pitiful college transcripts and law school, and when I went to Jackson, which we'll get to, I guess, next, my first semester, it was such horrible grades that I was a 1.06 average. I got on academic probation, and I had to go to this little supervised study hall the second semester. One of the courses I had was this thing on the English Bible, and that is the only course I actually failed in college. I don't know if it is related to these odd ideas that I had in 1964 and whether this guy, the professor, was not pleased about it. This class was Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, at eight a.m. You would drag yourself out of bed on Saturday morning to get to this class, and we were in Boston, in Medford, Mass, and he would start talking about Red Sox ball scores. [laughter] It was part of my growing disillusionment with who male academic leaders were.

I went to five colleges in my undergraduate work. I was looking at these transcripts, and do you know how many female professors [I had]? This is such a sea change. I had three female professors, or two, something like that, in five universities. It was overwhelmingly men, and of course it was all white as well. Maybe there were two in undergraduate. When I got to law school, there were three women in three years. Ninety percent men. That had a huge impact on the question I would put to you today that I want you to help me with and I know you can, which is--did the behavior of many of these men sexualize or genderize my life as a student, or both? That's part of where I got this illegitimacy of male privilege is the behavior of all of these academic men toward me. There's a big question for a rainy day.

KR: That can be our underlying theme of today.

DC: Okay. [laughter]

KR: On the topic of Jackson, Jackson is the coordinate women's college to Tufts.

DC: Right.

KR: What was your college application process like coming out of high school, and why did you choose Jackson in particular?

DC: It was one of many bad decisions I've made in my life. [laughter] I was an "A" student, occasional "Bs" in high school, so I was on the radar of you should go to a good school. My dad had enough money to send me to a good, expensive, selective school, and I was the first child. We visited colleges. We visited Swarthmore, where my dad went. We went to see the athletic director there, who still remembered my dad and said, "Chic!" I said, "That's it. I'm not going to a place where I'm Chic's daughter." Now, that was not a great decision, because even though Swarthmore, at that time, did wash the athletic uniforms of the boys and not the girls', I mean, they were not perfect, but they did have a lot of people who went into civil rights agitation. It would have been a very good fit of very bright people who were weird in their own ways, but I didn't know enough to know that. I applied to Pembroke early decision and did not get in. I applied to Jackson, Barnard, Hollins was my safe school, which fell off the map when their acceptance thing was all about my gym uniform and I thought, "This is not going to be my place." [laughter] So, it was Jackson, Swarthmore, Barnard, Hollins, and I guess then Pembroke that fell off the [list]. Barnard would have been a good fit. But when I was interviewed there, the woman who interviewed me was like a hundred years old and she had this white hair in a bun, and I thought, "I don't think so." Another bad decision. [laughter] That's how I got to Jackson. We went to each place, and we looked at it. What else can I tell you about that? I think that was it.

KR: The classes at Jackson were coed at that time, right?

DC: They were. They were, but I had fallen into a place [that was not a good fit]. What they told us constantly at Jackson was basically, "You're much smarter than these Tufts boys. You have a different set of admissions criteria. One in eight of you got accepted, and these boys are not worth it to you." [laughter] Then, we were living in a dorm situation, Metcalf East, I lived in this dorm, and all the rules for girls started to play out. You couldn't go out of your dorm shoeless. You couldn't wear pants, unless it was under thirty-two degrees. You had to come in at ten-thirty and sign in. The boys could stay out all night. You had a housemother who was enforcing all this. She contacted parents of one girl because she was dating a Black African. The parents came to the dorm and took that girl out of college. They were from New Hampshire, I think.

I did make friends with three girls, as we were called then, who were bright and interesting and willing to push the envelope. When I first got there, they had a freshmen directory of little thumbnail pictures of all the girls and all the boys. The boys took it upon themselves to rate all the girls' physical attractiveness. I was a nine and this girl, Lynn, in the next room to me was also a nine, and nobody was a ten. Both of us thought this was outrageous that they would rate us and then think they could not even give women [a perfect rating]. Lynn and I bonded over that.

Lynn was a free spirit from Rutland, Vermont. She and I got together and led the lie-down strike against the ten-thirty [curfew]. All these girls came in and fell on our bodies. This really upset the housemother, who said, "Martin Luther King has them all stirred up and that the officers in the dorm have to protect me in the middle of the night." Meanwhile, we had this beleaguered dean of Jackson, Myra Herrick, and she said to us, to me anyway, "If you don't like it, leave." That was the response to wanting change. There was sorority rushing. There was stuff about toilet paper in trees. It was not a good fit for me. I'd already been through the sorority stuff in high school, and I knew that that was not for me. I can take you through that year. I don't know if you want to ask any questions.

KR: You finished your freshman year at Jackson, and then you did the voter registration project in Alabama in the summer of 1965 with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the SCLC.

DC: Right.

KR: That civil rights work was your first real foray into activism, and then after that, you would continue your social justice work in many different areas, which we will delve into today. What was your takeaway from that civil rights work in Alabama? What were your lessons learned?

DC: Okay. Well, one thing, before we quite get to that summer, I was dating somebody from high school who was very attractive and smart and had a lot of great attributes. However, he believed in the double standard, and so our relationship came to an end in March of that year. I realized that I needed to get my grades up so I could get out of Jackson. I concentrated very hard that semester on my grades, but that semester is when I had those two professors, one of whom grabbed me and kissed me and the other told me I had a beautiful soul.

One of the things I found that I wrote, in time much closer to that, I wrote it in '71 or something, I'm talking about the difficulty of women writing, "I remember the response of two of my most respected professors, when I hesitatingly showed them my diary." This is probably like a journal also, I'm thinking, because it's academic. "One told me I had a beautiful soul. The other took advantage of the opportunity to kiss me, warning me, 'I hope you don't misunderstand this.' I was eighteen and I did misunderstand. It was only later when I found myself unable to write that I began to understand all too well." Issues around self-expression also were coming up from that period.

The way I got to Birmingham was there was a notice up at Jackson about going to a civil rights demonstration, and, again, I found something I wrote about it, which has me going and standing in the rain with a lot of confused people, about ten people, not knowing what to do. Then, there was this notice about going south to work, and that's how I got involved in this. In [*The New York*] *Times*, of which I was still a devoted reader, there were these pictures of--my memory says it was firehoses and dogs, but that doesn't line up with the history, so I don't know what was in the paper. I showed it to my friends while we were all studying for spring finals, and every single one of them said, "I have to study. I have to study. I have to study." I was the only one that thought, "No, no, really, this is important." I kept being distracted about these issues about

civil rights and women's rights, lying down in the foyer, et cetera. That's how I get to Birmingham.

When I got to Birmingham, one of the things I've found, I read that I just found, was about this minister, "Twenty-five years ago in Birmingham, I had my first experience of a minister soliciting sex. I was a summer volunteer in a church-sponsored voter registration project, meeting local ministers with wives and children and roving movement ministers operating out of motel rooms. While it took me most of that summer to learn that I was supposed to find such overtures personally gratifying and ego enhancing, it would not be the last time men in positions of spiritual leadership would try to exchange their role of stewardship for that of lover." That was written in 1990, so that was happening as well. I am eighteen; this is very young.

Your question was about what I took from that summer going forward. It was the first time I saw women--so many people have written about this, that white women going into the freedom movement experienced women's leadership in a way that they had never seen before. I lived in a house which was owned by, or rented, by a middle-aged Black woman and her daughter, who had just graduated from Miles College, which hosted our project. When I went to mass meetings at the churches every week, the ministers were dominant, but the women were the ones who led the singing, did the backup, did the food, made the whole thing go, and gave impassioned and supportive testimony about the importance of what we were trying to do to get people to be able to vote.

That summer, in going door to door in Fairfield, Alabama, I met people, old Black women--old to my eighteen-year-old eyes--whose birth records had not been kept because they were not important enough. You see that in different cultures and countries, and that was a revelation to me, that a country, a government, could designate you so insignificant that you would not have a paper trail of when you came on the earth.

The activism, the leadership by Black women, and also the sense of the incredible difference in privilege and opportunity and advantage that there was and meeting people who had to scramble so hard to put food on the table and have shelter and have their kids go to an HBCU [historically Black college/university], which is what Miles was, and then to see the life that I had in Connecticut, where my mother and father could be in this country club. My mother could play golf. She had come from a hardscrabble existence. Just to see the range of economic disadvantage and advantage was hugely important to me and revelatory.

KR: What came next for you after that summer?

DC: Well, I had managed to transfer to NYU [New York University]. My father had opposed it, saying that he did not like the fact that I was going to be in a dorm that had been a hotel once. He didn't think that was proper. I had requested a roommate of color and they gave me this daughter of a Taiwanese general who had more pairs of shoes than I've ever seen in my life. [laughter] So, that's not exactly what I had in mind. There I was at NYU, and this is very typical of people who were in the southern movement, it was very hard to get back into academic life. I had some philosophy course that was about, "If a tree falls in a forest and no one's there to hear it ..." and I just couldn't. But I did have one of those women professors. There's a book called

History of Art by [H.W.] Janson, which is a staple in the field, and Mrs. Janson taught this course at NYU. She would take us into a dark room, in our classroom. She put the lights out. She put a painting up on the wall, and she would take us into the world in that painting. That is the only class, I think, in college, that I not only took notes but typed up my notes later. This was incredible. I don't remember her first name anymore, but that was an amazing course. For that course, I had to go to the Frick Museum and do some paper. I went to the Frick, and I started looking up who Mr. Frick was. Mr. Frick was somebody, I think, who funded the crackdown in the efforts to unionize, I don't know if it was a coal mine. It was the Pinkertons in Pennsylvania. He had a terrible labor history, and that's where he made all his money was squeezing the life out of these people. I wrote a paper about it, that I couldn't do it, these two worlds of disadvantage and privilege just kept colliding. [Editor's Note: Dora Jane (Heineberg) Janson was an art historian and author who co-authored several books with her husband H.W. Janson. Henry Clay Frick founded H.C. Frick Coke Company and was involved in the consolidation of Carnegie Steel Company and later U.S. Steel. When workers at the Homestead Works of the Carnegie Steel Company attempted to unionize in 1892 by going on strike, Frick brought in hundreds of Pinkerton detectives, and violent clashes broke out between the Pinkertons and the workers.]

Then, maybe the first week or so of November--I've looked it up since because I wrote about it in my novel--there was the blackout in New York. That day, I was in my dorm at NYU, and the whole city went dark. I went downstairs and I walked down to the student union. That is where I encountered somebody who would be very important in my life, who was an extremely attractive, tall, dark, Black man from the Caribbean, who had been looking at me in the hallways for the last couple of months. Every time I would see him, he was in graduate school at the business school, I think, but every time I'd see him, he would turn around, he was bearded, he would turn around and just stop what he was doing and just look at me. I just found it tremendously erotic and interesting. I walked up in the student union building and he turned to me and he said, "Are you lost?" So, we started a relationship. I just was enchanted. This was somebody who would speak at Vietnam teach-ins. I would sit next to him, and I would be aware of the tension and the stage fright he might have, as he stood up and he would make these impassioned speeches about colonialism, imperialism and the war, and racism. He was also a poet, and his father was politically involved in the Caribbean. I was smitten.

I was taking a course at the New School on Friday nights, I think it was, called "The New Radicalism" with Nat Hentoff to try to bridge this gap of coming back into an academic undergraduate life. Each week, he would bring in some activist to talk to us, and so he brought somebody from the northern student movement one time. Then, one time, he brought Tom Hayden in. So, Tom Hayden comes in, in his little flannel shirt and jeans. He was very unprepossessing physically and as a speaker, but he talked about this project he was having in Newark, in the Ironbound district. This is the fall of '65, so it's around when white people are being exited from the civil rights movement, so that Black leadership can come up. This was going to be probably a predominantly white project in Newark that I could work in. I talked to him after the class and said I'd been in Birmingham. He was interested, so I'm ready to drop out of school and go to Newark.

I went home for Thanksgiving, and I told my parents what great things had been happening in my life, that I wanted to drop out, that I would try to continue these NYU classes at night, so that

we wouldn't lose tuition money, but that I wanted to move to Newark and do this organizing and that I had met this wonderful man who was so interesting and he was a poet and he was this and he was that, and he was Black. My father found this completely objectionable. The roof caved in on all my plans at that point, and I was stopped from doing any of those things. My parents drove me to New York and picked up all my things, and we stayed in Connecticut at their house for six weeks while he and I negotiated what I would be able to do as a result of having really stepped over all these borders. I was reading something recently that was talking about aggressive policing of borders, and that's what was happening at that point, that up to that point, I had dated Catholics, I had dated Jews, I had dated a boy from a project, but now I had really gone over the edge and this was just too far. Let me take a quick break. This is intense material.

KR: Yes, sure.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording.

DC: Okay, great. I think first I would say that in the decades since that horrendous year, I made peace with my father. We talked about that period. I came to understand his motivation a lot better. I came to understand the social context of what he was doing and why he was doing what he was doing. But at the time, it was a huge break point in my seeing him as anything other than an adversary and a controlling figure. Also, it began formulating my interest in law, because he had all the legal power on his side.

What he wanted to do was, in the best interest of me and his family, to hospitalize me so that I could get help from these deranged decisions I was making. At that time, there were articles in psychiatric journals about white girls who went south into the civil rights movement and who were clearly self-destructive, that that was a piece of proof and definitive proof of their self-destructiveness. He would say this to me, and I would roll up my sleeves and say, "Where are the marks? I'm not self-destructive. I'm not suicidal. What are you talking about?" We went back and forth with that.

At that time, the law in the State of Connecticut was that you were a minor at eighteen, unless you had lived outside the state for six months not as a student. I found this out when he began to try to hospitalize me. He's a doctor, so he knows what he's doing. I called a friend's father to figure out if I had any legal rights, and apparently, I didn't and that's how I found out that I was a minor. That meant that if he did sign me into a mental hospital, it would read as a voluntary admission because the law would presume that he was acting in my best interest. As a voluntary admit, as opposed to an involuntary admit, I would have fewer due process rights. All he had to do at that point was find two doctors to sign to put me in, and there was a psychiatrist in his clinic who he had had me see as a result of my acting-out behavior, insisting on breaking the rules and curfew and stuff. This doctor, the psychiatrist, showed me this little booklet of what the rules would be if I were in one of these hospitals, and they would review and open all your mail. Anybody that you corresponded with would be decided by them. You would have to request the use of toenail scissors. When I'm reading this booklet, I'm thinking, "I really have to figure out a way out of this."

We did go on interviews with these couple of hospitals. We went to one in Port Chester, and as we pulled up to the grounds, the beautiful grounds, upper-middle class definitely, there was this long building. My mother was extremely distressed during this period, and she was being medicated by her psychiatrist and basically staying in bed as much as possible. We saw this long building, and I said, "I wonder what that is. Do you think that's where they put the people who try to run away?" So, I was really trying to work with her to get her to counter this, because she knew that this was a very bizarre happening, but she didn't have any power in the marriage to be able to stop it. Years later, she was complaining to her psychiatrist about why I was so mean to her and why I appeared to hate her, and her psychiatrist, who was Jewish, said to her, "Well, you betrayed her. You abandoned her." This was extremely difficult.

We got to that place, and there were all these Antioch work-study types in the reception area. I was thinking, "This could have been me. I just could have been one of these interns." My father went in first and told the director the state of affairs, and then I went in. But it was clear that it didn't matter what I said, and so I just cried through the interview. Then, the director said, "I think we can help her here." That was going to be a done deal.

Then, we went to St. Vincent's, which was open then in Manhattan, and there were these nuns with the flying nun hats. I don't know the proper word for that [cornette]. We weren't even Catholic and I'm thinking, "Really? You're going to put me in a place with the flying nuns." [laughter] I don't remember the interview about that one.

I thought, "Okay, so we need to develop a strategy." My sister and I sat at the kitchen table and tried to imagine how I was going to get out of this because she knew that this was nuts. One plan was I was going to dye my hair red and go to Texas and become a waitress and just disappear. Then, we thought, "Well, he'll come to find me and my roots would have grown out and I'll look so seedy and he will look like this Yale Medical School [graduate] and I'll lose in court."

Finally, there were three options that I was able to develop with him. One was I could go to some school for wayward lassies in Vermont and I thought, "This was not going to be good. I hadn't even been to Vermont, and this was in the woods, no, no, no." I knew that I wanted to be in New York eventually, so we needed to stay away from that. Then, the other one was I could stay within the State of Connecticut, work at Yale, see a psychiatrist my dad picked, and see if I could calm down in terms of all these radical ideas I had. So, we agreed to that, and that's how I avoided being hospitalized. But it gave me a great interest in psychiatric hospitalization as a method of social control over women, and then when you read stuff like *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, or later, when I worked on the first issue of the *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, the book review that I wrote was on *The Manufacture of Madness* by Thomas Szasz, and it's about social control. It's about powerful men deciding that some woman has just jumped the rails, and in many cases, it's wives, but it can be daughters as well. So, I got very interested in that as an issue.

Then, years later, I found out [laughter]--there were many ironies about that time in New Haven--the woman he placed me with to keep an eye on me and to get me back into the fold was a Communist. [laughter] I guess a vetting didn't really cover everything. I worked as a secretary

at Yale in all of 1966 and met all these Yalies and dated Yalies, and this was before they let women in as undergraduates. So, it was really a very male-centered world I was in, not a lot of fun.

KR: After that year, the next year in 1967 is when you got involved in labor organizing in North Carolina.

DC: Right.

KR: How did that come about?

DC: Well, in '66, I'm at Yale working as a secretary in the public health school. It must have been that year--Stephen Minot was an English professor at Trinity College and he was running for the Senate--and I don't know what race this was--but as a peace candidate. I got involved in his campaign. I met this stunningly handsome [man]; I was still picking men by how stunningly handsome they were. This took a while for me to grow out of this. [laughter] I met this very good-looking guy in a basement in a Connecticut church who was working on that campaign. He had been working in Mississippi for SNCC, and so we had a lot in common. In '66 in the summer, I took a couple of courses at the local teacher's college in my parents' town, and then that fall, I returned to school full time at the University of Hartford. So, I had a year there, '66-'67, and that's when I was dating this radical whom I had a lot in common with.

At this point, I'm nineteen, so I've got two years left before I am out from under my father's control, unless I live out of the State of Connecticut as a non-student. This very strikingly good-looking guy wanted to live together and go work on this textile strike in North Carolina. I talked to my parents about this, and they absolutely refused that I would live with someone without marriage. I said, "Fine." So, we decided to get married. We got married that June of '67.

I sent you that little memoir thing, in which my mother is expressing her irritation that I don't seem to love him enough. This was a very overdetermined marriage. I needed to get out of town, get out of the state, hook up with my previous political developing identities, so that's what I did. So, we went to North Carolina.

KR: Let us talk about your time doing labor organizing in North Carolina. Can you give me a little bit of the backdrop in what was going on? This was a Textile Workers Union of America strike.

DC: Yes, TWUA.

KR: What is some of the background to that strike? What were the workers striking for? What was your role?

DC: Well, you know, I'm twenty years old at this point, and I've come out of a really difficult period. I think that I probably had more than the usual obliviousness to other people's concerns and issues. I think what I knew at that point was that they were striking for better conditions. This was the National Spinning Mill in Whiteville, North Carolina. There was a sister spinning

mill in Washington, North Carolina, and my husband and I would be working to develop strike support there, as part of our work. The strike had started. I filed a FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] request when I was working on my novel about this period, so I know more about it than I knew then. These were first-generation people off the farms in North Carolina. Many of them had just been able to purchase a home, but it was definitely mortgaged. There were Black workers there.

I met a Black woman, Nancy Hill, who was very impressive, who was one of the organizers. Three years ago, I set up a panel looking at that summer, at the Labor and Working-Class History Association annual conference. Nancy Hill came to that, so I got to see her again after all these years. But she also made a big impression on me, because, again, she just had this air of, "These are my issues. This is what's in front of me. What can I do to make this move?" That's really what I had become. So, I had these models of people, of women, who were doing that, and she is still fighting about voter suppression a million years later. She's a mayor in a little town in North Carolina.

I think that's about all I knew coming into it. I knew that my first husband, who was also from Connecticut and who went to school in North Carolina, through his work there, we got this opportunity. There were three married couples living in a little concrete house, and I was the youngest. Everybody else had more political experience than I did in the civil rights movement and in stuff like [the underground newspaper] *The Great Speckled Bird*. It was a great group of fascinating backgrounds.

I was a wife, as were the other two women, so we did not get paychecks. The men got paid, and the women also just worked alongside. My husband and I would drive over to this little town, Washington, North Carolina, and go and see all the people who worked at that mill and try to develop support for the strike. So, people would pull down their shades when they saw us coming. Sometimes, they would let us in. We were followed by people from the security apparatus of that mill, and that is how this gun that we had been given for our wedding was part of our feeling not entirely vulnerable to these people who were going to be violent with us. There was violence at the strike as well.

One day, when we were going down to see the picket lines at the mill, this white woman was screaming at somebody who was scabbing, and she said, "You heifer!" [laughter] I will never forget that, having entered a culture in which calling someone a heifer was this huge insult. So, I am always fascinated by that sort of thing, about how different people's lives are and how interesting the variety is.

I met a woman that summer whose face had been scarred by burning fat in a frying pan incident. She was thirty-three years old. She was white and she was a grandmother. I had never met a woman who was a grandmother at thirty-three. She talked about getting married at like fourteen and the doctor advising her husband to stay away from her for a while. Maybe she got married at twelve, but the doctor said her body wasn't mature enough to bear children and to leave her alone for a few years. I had never met anybody who got married that young. That was fascinating as well.

The official from TWUA would come visit us from time to time, and the men dominated that whole discussion. I was, again, part of a group where my voice is not heard, and also the other two women who were more experienced than I was. I sat there and I sewed orange linen curtains during those meetings and I just watched. That strike was male run. The women, except for Nancy Hill, were not a big part of what I could see, although when you look it up, when you look that strike up, the people who were fired for union organizing were all women, I think. I don't remember having met any of those women. But I was adjusting to life as a wife too, so it was a very difficult summer.

KR: Do you think it struck you at the time that it was unfair that you were not getting a paycheck, or do you think it was looking back, in reflection, that you realized, "Oh, I didn't get paid and I was doing the same work as the male labor organizers"?

DC: I think it was the first time that I associated having a paycheck with independence, because at some point during that summer, I'd had enough of how I was being treated by my husband and the general second class-ness of the whole thing. So, I went to look for a job because I thought, "If I have a paycheck, I can exert more of my own independence and self-determination." I looked around and the only jobs there were--there was a waitress job and that was like a dollar an hour plus tips, and there was a job in the chicken factory, I think, and in a mattress factory. You stood in chicken guts all day long in these huge boots, these rubber boots, or you were in a mattress factory, where they locked the door and it was incredibly hot. I don't know if I knew about the Triangle Shirtwaist [Factory] Fire at that point, but certainly that was not attractive. There was really no job I could get that would help. I think I did connect independence and self-determination with the paycheck thing. Oddly enough, as soon as we were married, I stopped waiting on him. I have no idea what was in my mind except probably, "I'm done. I've been this person. I've got this result. I'm getting out of town. I'm with someone I have things in common with." I somehow stopped the subordinate behavior, the nice, the submissive stuff.

As a sidebar, when I was in high school, this English teacher took me aside--and the way I have remembered this incident over the years is without a gender referent, but when I looked at a document I wrote five or so years after it, it does have a gendered referent--she said to me, "When I look at this class, you're the only girl from whom sunshine doesn't overflow." I think that when I married my first husband, [laughter] the sunshine, I dropped some of that, whatever the remaining sunshine was, and I just said, "Okay, now, who am I? What do I need to do? What do I want?" I was a little more I-focused. He began, on the honeymoon, to use four-letter sexual insults towards me, which I had never been exposed to before. On the drive down, he would very matter-of-factly refer to me with the "S" word, four letters, with the "C" word, and so I was really stunned by this behavior. I'm trying to figure out, "What is this about?" I had bigger problems that summer than whether I was getting paid, but it was wrapped up in what it was to be a wife. I'm sure that we did all the housework, because in the fall, when we were in Durham, I began to try to get my husband to share housework and he was furious. That became a huge bone of contention.

KR: I read in one of the documents that you sent me that there was federal intervention in the strike, in that the National Labor Relations Board sent a lawyer, and that lawyer made an impact on you. Can you tell that story?

DC: Sure. She did. Yes, this woman lawyer, this is probably the first woman lawyer I ever saw. At that point, women were three percent of the legal profession. Now, they were more in government than other places, but I did not know that. This woman shows up. We take her around to different people's houses, the mill workers, and she interviews people. The look on folks' faces that someone from their government, this was actually from their government, this was stunning, that people felt listened to and they felt responded to, and it was so impactful in their physical being while she was asking them questions. I don't remember what she asked them or what they said, but I remember the change in the body tone of being listened to, and she was very matter-of-fact. Her tone was very matter-of-fact, very authoritative. She was there to do a job. She was going to do it. She was going to listen to people. She was going to be professional. She was going to get them in a place that they could be good witnesses. All the skills that I would later develop, I was seeing for the first time in someone in the middle of a very chaotic, violent situation. It was very remarkable.

KR: What was the outcome of the strike, and did that happen while you were still there?

DC: I think it was in that September when we were leaving--and I'd have to go back and look at the exact chronology--the strike was broken, and people had to go back to work, I think, without a contract. I've read the legal papers on the other side, on the spinning mill. One of the things that was terrific about my first husband was that he thought that we should take the strike--this was something you learned in civil rights--you would take the strike home to the people who were in charge of the policy decisions, and so the family who owned that mill were liberal New York Jewish philanthropist types. My husband thought we should go up on Yom Kippur to New York, and that's the day of atonement and get up in the synagogue and point out this guy, who had a great reputation in New York, what he was actually doing in North Carolina. The union leadership, TWUA, would not let him do that; that was outside the bounds. I thought that was a great idea. That was the kind of thing that bonded the two of us. Years later, I followed that family [online], and when that owner died, he had been a major funder of the 92nd Street Y, here in New York, which is a Jewish, very important cultural venue, and he had a great reputation in New York. That insight of bringing the war home, of making it uncomfortable for the people who were doing these things, where they lived, where it mattered to them, where the public opinion mattered. This guy didn't care what people in North Carolina thought of him, but he would care about Manhattan. [Editor's Note: National Spinning Co., Inc. was established in 1921 by Phillip and Carl Leff in Brooklyn, New York. In 1967, Joseph Leff served as the president of National Spinning.]

It was broken, yes, and people were about to lose their houses. I remember this one family living in a house that was shoddily put together. This was the first time they had a house off a farm. They were going to get it foreclosed. They were going to lose their home. People couldn't tolerate it. At that time too, what the company was doing was saying to the white women, "If the union gets in, you'll have to ask a Black man for permission to use the bathroom." This was kind of a precursor to Phyllis Schlafly and the bathroom issue about the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]. [laughter] This was huge; white women having to talk to a Black man about something involving bathrooms was huge. That was a revelation to me, just watching how this stuff is used and what tropes it addresses, what the dog whistles are.

KR: What other recollections do you have of the experiences of the workers who worked at these spinning mills? I am asking this in light of the fact that your grandfather worked at a textile mill, maybe possibly in management, but struggled nonetheless over the course of his career.

DC: Right. I wish I remembered more. I was really drowning in this wife stuff at the time and I was on such unsteady ground, having been feeling very attacked by my father, by my family of origin, escaping into this marriage, which now was looking like I was out of the frying pan into the fire. I don't have any other memories of the people other than the ones that I have shared, yes.

Years later, that's when I really heard about my grandfather, and in digging into that, that's really when I was working on my novel, that I was looking at what the interviews were with the South Carolinian mill revolts in the '30s. When I did this FOIA request about the National Spinning Mill strike, one of the things that I got was a letter from two mill workers, a man and a woman from the National Spinning Mill, who had written to the TWUA asking for help to organize. I think the woman had died in the intervening years, but the man was still alive. I contacted him and I tried to interview him. He was very accommodating on the phone. He was a grandfather. He was working in air conditioning supplies or something at this point. But when I made a date to talk to him more, he never picked up the phone. I left messages and I tried to assure him. Then, there's a book called *A Fabric of Defeat* by Bryant Simon, which is about the disappointment and despair of the efforts to organize textile mills in the South. That's what I felt this man was feeling, is that he didn't want to talk about it. He didn't want to go back into it and revisit and reexperience the disappointment, because it was not clear how you could have won that strike or how this whole industry, which was getting squeezed and jobs were going out of the country, it's not clear without national leadership, which wasn't there, how this could have ended differently. They were trapped. One time, I went to an academic conference, and it was somebody doing a paper about North Carolina transportation development. He talked about how decision makers at the state level decided to lay roads, highways, in a particular way, so that mill workers would not congregate after the shifts and talk, so that they could get a way back to their homes and that it would kind of deracinate that community in such a way as to disperse organizing. That was fascinating.

KR: Next, you ended up in Durham.

DC: Yes, yes, I did.

KR: What were you doing in Durham during that period?

DC: My first husband had gotten an OEO grant, Office of Economic Opportunity, to try to accomplish the dream of the Left for a long time to have an interracial coalition of the poor. This was a poor white organizing project in Durham. He and a friend from college, who had also been active in the civil rights movement, had this grant. I went to work at a local non-profit in the higher education field as a secretary and then sort of supported him in this work. When he would come home at night, I'd make him dinner and he'd eat that and then he'd go to these

community meetings. Then, when he came home from that, I would have another dinner [for him]. So, I knew those people. I knew who he was organizing and I met the people he was trying to build into leaders, or who were already leaders, and developed relationships with them.

They were doing the kind of Saul Alinsky stuff about first you start with traffic lights. They were taking the kind of bibles of the '60s of the Left at that point of how you do community organizing and meshing them with the civil rights movement, unfortunately also meshing them with patriarchy. So, they started to have problems with that. Certainly, I had problems with that, with them. First, you get a traffic light, then you get a playground, all the things you build to build a community, and that was going on in Durham. There's a book by, I think, Christina Greene, about Black women in Durham during that period, which takes a particular view of the sexism within it, so that was there as well. [Editor's Note: The book being referred to is *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*, by Christina Greene (2006).]

I met wonderful people. One woman taught me how to make southern biscuits, gave me all those magazines about movie stars, gave me things, introduced me to her children. I made some friends there, but it was not going to be my world. A main person that my first husband was involved with, that he was trying to build into a leader, was a guy who was a paregoric [anhydrous morphine] addict, and we would drive from drug store to drug store and sign out paregoric for him because you couldn't get much. That man once cut up all the clothes of his wife. So, you would keep running into stuff like this. There has been literature written about this, about how white male New Left people anointed or picked the people they thought would be revolutionaries and they were often on the bottom economically, but they were often highly dysfunctional or misogynist. I mean, this guy was very troubled. The children in his family bore the marks of this; his wife certainly did. I was really starting to identify more as a wife than much of anything else, because my life was quite circumscribed by being a wife.

KR: You did end up going to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

DC: I did, I did, yes. My husband was about two courses short of a B.A. at another university, and so we ended up taking two courses together. He had refused to let me accept any money from my parents to continue my education because he was my husband and he would take care of all my needs, and then we didn't have any money for it. But he needed these two courses, so we took these two courses together at UNC at night, I think it would've been. I knew, by then, that I had to get one grade lower than he was going to get, so I did. I could do that, but that was my first foray of going back into an academic environment. That was the spring semester of '68. I went to work over there in the Urban Studies Department as a work-study student at some point during, I guess, late '68, it would've been, after I left him.

KR: You were basically living off campus and then going to UNC-Chapel Hill.

DC: Yes. We lived in a little log cabin on Andrews Road, at the end of a street. In that little cabin, there was a claw-footed bathtub in the bathroom and a train had been very artfully painted on this bathtub. It was really charming. We knew when we moved in that the previous two

couples who lived there had gotten divorced. We were hoping that this wouldn't happen to us, but it did.

KR: What were your educational experiences like at UNC-Chapel Hill?

DC: Well, I finished my undergraduate degree there with many a bump in the road. I had an advisor who was a very good-looking, tall, preppy guy from Yale, who had told me that one reason he was in an academic job was that there was a fresh crop of girls every year. This is a very blue-eyed, good-looking guy, so that was my advisor.

I came into the American Studies program, which was, I think, both new and very exciting, and so this was something that was built for somebody with my kind of mind. It was not until I was in law school that I understood how irritating it would be to my professors who were, in general, much more linear, than my mind, and they were trying to convey information and it goes from A to Z and my mind keeps cutting across categories. The American Studies thing was perfect for me because you took English and jazz and history and political science and sociology and one from every column. By that time in my academic life, that's how I had gone to college when I'd had a choice. At the University of Hartford, I took a semester of history. I took a semester of sociology, and sociology, I got to the statistics part and realized that I would not be doing this. [laughter] But when I did a semester of history, I hit historiography and I knew that this really was going to be important to me. By the time I got to Chapel Hill, I had much more freedom across these disciplines, and that worked much better for me. I was there for, say, '68 to '69.

Then, there was--I don't know if it was Confederate Day or what it was, but there was something in maybe June or July where all these men dressed up in Confederate uniforms and women in hoop skirts and were downtown. Also, around that time, or maybe this is when it irritated me, I'd had to sign a form for Chapel Hill that said that I would always comport myself like a lady. So, this was less and less possible. [laughter] Then, I had a history professor who said that he'd felt--and I think he might have been from New York--but he said he'd felt like there could be a revolution somewhere else and it would take six months to get to Chapel Hill. I didn't see how I was going to make a life outside of New York or outside of the North, and this was starting to really become obvious.

I had a wonderful therapist at that time, when I was married, and I used to sneak this book *The World of the Formerly Married*. It had just come out. It was just surfacing that you could get divorced and live through it, and this book was about people who had. I used to read it at work, and this was when I was a secretary in the psychiatry department at Chapel Hill. This would have been, I guess, '68. This terrific therapist I had, who's still practicing there, he's a wonderful guy. One day, when I was still married, I was entertaining somebody from the community, and I was bringing food into the living room in our little log cabin. This fellow was talking and he was talking about having been in prison and licking sugar pops off someone else's male genitalia. I do remember standing there with this food in my hand and thinking, "How did I get here?" It turned out that that guy had served time for slitting his brother's throat, so really not a good person to have to be around. I would go into therapy and tell my therapist that, and he would laugh and he would say to me, "You live in a circus." That was so helpful to me to put in context that you do not have to be doing this. That was helpful to be able to make a path out.

I'm in Chapel Hill. I'm trying to be a lady. I've got these American Studies courses. It turns out that what I'm doing, the papers that I've got from that period, I'm trying to make sense of all this stuff that's happened. I'm trying to bump my personal experience up against the developing literature that's trying to explain these social changes. Some of my professors are clueless, and so I have their little comments. I wrote this paper called "Desdemona: Then and Now" about interracial marriage, in which a white professor assures me that, "Interracial marriage is no big deal. Nobody would even look." [I thought], "You are so clueless." [laughter] Then, I'm writing something about coming of age in America female, so I take this book by Edgar Friedenberg and I bump it up against being a girl and John Stuart Mill and all these different writers about female subordination. That professor was just kind of nonplussed. One of professors wrote--and they don't sign their names, so I don't know who this is--but, "I feel somewhat presumptuous in commenting on your paper because you obviously say what you think." I thought, "What else would you be doing in a paper?" [laughter] So, there was all this confusion about that.

It was the first time I was ever assigned to read Black writers. There was an anthology that came out, *Black Voices*, which was really important to me, that I was all of a sudden introduced to like three hundred or four hundred pages of Black writers. I wrote a paper about that, this one by Ann Petry, "In Darkness and Confusion," about the Detroit riot of '43.

It was a very fertile time at Chapel Hill. I was living off campus, so I didn't have anything about the girls' rules, except this lady stuff. But then I see this Confederate Day and I said, "You know, I think I need to leave. It's time to go back to New York." I left and I had incompletes, which then I had to finish when I was up in New York, but then I got to the next phase, which was a lot freer.

KR: I have a couple of follow-up questions about your time at Chapel Hill. First, I have a question about something specific. You said your husband was taking a couple classes at a time. Was he trying to maintain his student deferment to avoid being drafted?

DC: No. I think he was just trying to finish his degree, and he did become an academic. He needed to get that degree and be able to go to graduate school in the future. As to the deferment, at one point, we were talking about whether we should go to Canada or not. I overheard a conversation that he had with his father, who was quite a difficult, destructive man, and I heard my husband say, "No, Dad, she loves me." Apparently, the dad was saying, "You know, if you go to jail over this, she's not going to be there." So, I think he might have had a low number. We talked about Canada, but then the marriage got more and more violent and finally I was able to leave, so that was no longer my issue.

In terms of law, once we were getting divorced, going to court for a separation hearing, it was stunning to me--and I think it is to most wives--to find out that when you get married, you think it's a private agreement between you and this other human being, and you will make of it what you can or what you will. But when you get divorced, you find out there's a third party, and that's the state. The state had all these rules about marriage. One rule was that it's adultery if you sleep with another person before you're legally divorced. So, you could be separated for

eighty-eight years and living your own life and it's adultery. If you go to court, you're going to be tarred with [charges of adultery]. I encountered that because I had slept with somebody else after we were separated and thought that it was my business. [laughter] We get to court, and I was trying to get my lawyer to say basically that he wouldn't challenge me if I lied on the stand. Of course, he can't give me that reassurance. He can't suborn perjury. It was very interesting to learn the legal system being a litigant and watching the hearing officer and watching all these parts play out. [It was] an education.

KR: You talked about in your American Studies curriculum how you were reading Black writers for the first time. I am curious what women writers you were reading, if you remember. Did you read Betty Friedan, for example?

DC: No, I never read Betty Friedan, until I went to a workshop years later and she had pulled that "lavender menace" stuff, no, and then I wanted to figure out, "Who is this woman?" I saw her on a panel, but that's a later thing. Well, Ann Petry was one that sticks in my mind that wrote this one that I just mentioned. I don't remember anybody else from that period. It was still overwhelmingly men and white men. [Editor's Note: Betty Friedan, author, feminist activist and co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), referred to lesbians in the organization and in women's liberation as a "lavender menace."]

I should say, when I'm still in North Carolina, Sara Evans, who wrote *Personal Politics* and is a women's history historian, she was married to my first husband's close friend and she came back from Chicago, where they had been in graduate school, and she said, "Well, there's this thing called a women's group, and maybe we should start one." So, we had a women's group, and it was all wives of organizers in Durham. That was problematic because it couldn't really be very forthcoming because you were giving information to someone who worked with your husband. I've written about this other places. The first thing we did was read this book *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* by Andre Gorz, this French Marxist. Then, finally, we staggered our way into consciousness-raising, and that was just the most compelling intellectual experience that I had ever had. It certainly just shaped how I saw the world, to be able to learn from the depth of other women's lives and experiences, both the variety and the similarity, and that really gave me courage to do what I needed to do. It was really very helpful, even though I wasn't getting support from anybody about leaving. It was just that by the time I was in that women's group, things were deteriorating so much in my marriage that I wasn't sure I could control my anger anymore. I thought, "Well, this is really going to go out of control and you need to be taking the risk that you can survive leaving," and I did. He went into a deep depression and was really not able to hurt me. So, I was able to leave.

KR: What else do you remember about that consciousness-raising in the women's group in Durham? Do you remember any discussions about defining language, for example, that had not been defined before?

DC: I don't. Again, I was so awash in my own problems that it was very difficult to get up over them. Also, all the women in that were contacts or friends in my husband's world. I was, again, the youngest and was very much feeling unsure and unclear about what I had a right to. It was not really until I came back to New York and was in Redstockings and New York Radical

Feminists that all those things could come to my consciousness because I wasn't afraid anymore. I was free, as free as I could get.

KR: I will come back to the consciousness-raising in New York City in a little while. I just had one more question about your time at Chapel Hill. You started college at Jackson in '64 and you are at Chapel Hill in '68-'69, and the college landscape during that five-year time period really drastically changed. How did those changes manifest at Chapel Hill? What do you remember about that?

DC: Well, actually, one thing that we did--I was back in New York and I decided to come back to Chapel Hill for a summer to try to finish this education. I came back with my sister, and we stayed with some friends for this summer. We all took this class together with this wonderful sociology professor. He was very open-minded, so that's one thing that changed. He was entertained by differences of opinion. He was stimulated by that. So, this was news to me. I had not had that kind of experience in class. We were studying something about women or men in this class and we read this article, this scientific article, that men thought that nurses were sexy because they touched human bodies all the time. We thought this was hilarious. One of us had been a nurse, and she was still married to a guy who would ask her a technical, scientific question that she couldn't answer and then he would say, "Bzz," like it was a quiz show. [laughter] So, she was just about done with that marriage.

There were four or five of us taking this class. What we decided to do was take all these stereotypes of women and dress up like them and embody them and go to class next time. One of us was a PTA [parent-teacher association] mother. One of us was a nurse. We just picked all these different ones. There were fishnet stockings involved. Nancy, the woman who had been a nurse, she had a nurse's uniform. I think she's the one who wore these ghastly fishnet stockings, on top of this nurse uniform. What we did was we didn't give the teacher any notice that we were going to do this and we just walked in and we sang. We walked in, in a chorus line. School was a lot more fun then than it had been. [laughter] We started singing that song, "I'm strictly a female female, and my future I hope will be, in the arms of a proud and free male," et cetera, which is really nauseating. I don't know what that's from, whether it's *Flower Drum Song* or what it's from. But we sang this song about female-ness and femininity, and it was clearly a mock. I can still see this guy standing in the doorway. He had this odd little lisp or some kind of little mannerism around his mouth, and he was just going [mouth moving], making this face, totally entertained. [laughter] Yes, that had changed a lot. You certainly weren't able to do that [before].

That gives you ideas. Then, when I'm in law school and dreadful stuff is happening, I think, "You know, what can we do with this?" I'm still very much attuned to the possibilities in a group setting when stuff is happening that you don't like and that is over the top, what can you do? But also, it's a southern school, so I remember like one Black student on campus, not in a class. There was a quota for women. There was a quota for out of state. North Carolina still has huge problems with political control by the state legislature and that it is a Communist oasis, Chapel Hill. Look at the stuff with Nikole Hannah-Jones. I mean, that's Chapel Hill. Tough stuff. Can I take a break?

KR: Absolutely. Let me pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on and recording. On the topic of the Vietnam War, in the groups of people that you knew, your family and friends, how were people affected by the Vietnam War, if at all?

DC: Because I was in and out of school so many times and working and everything, I didn't really have contact with a cohort of male students my age all the way through. I'd have to think about it, but I don't know that I had more than political interest in it. Right around the period we're talking about, I was trying to determine if I could be in any mixed-sex political organizations or whether all this misogyny and patriarchy was going to make it impossible for me to do it. The anti-Vietnam stuff and the New Left was being horrible towards women and saying, "Take her off the stage and f*** her," and just stuff that was kind of a deal breaker. [laughter] I was more and more estranged from it. I went to demonstrations. It would've been '65, in that fall of '65, in New York, yes, but that's it.

KR: Did you actually witness misogyny at the anti-war demonstrations that you were at?

DC: No.

KR: Okay, you just read about that.

DC: Well, one of the things that I found the other day--I can't believe with all my moves over the years that I have any documents, but I have this one, which has my married name at the top of it, when I took his name, "Toward a Radical Movement," Heather Booth and then two other people. Then, we have, "What Can Be Learned?: A Critique of the Miss America Protests." That's '68. At the time that I entered the women's movement--do you know who Heather Booth is, by the way? Do you know that name, Heather Booth?

KR: Can you say it for the record?

DC: Sure, okay. Heather Booth was from Chicago, a liberal, Jewish background, very much *tikkun olam*, to repair the world. She and who became her husband, Paul Booth, I think they might have met in Mississippi, but she was a SNCC person. She founded the Midwest Academy. Oh, she's in local movies--that's why she's on my mind--she's in these movies called *Jane*. She worked in that group in Chicago that got women abortions before it was legal. I met her when I worked in Washington and worked with her a little bit.

She came out of the Left, out of the civil rights movement and then the Left, and she was married to someone who was the AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] chief, whatever, for many, many years, and so very much in the left wing of labor movements. When the women's movement was getting started out of the Left, Casey Hayden and Mary King wrote a memo on women, and this is the famous one where Stokely Carmichael said, "The position of women in SNCC is prone" and all that. These women that were coming

out of civil rights, out of the New Left, into what became women's liberation, the stories very much were about why they couldn't operate, why we couldn't operate, in male-led organizations anymore. So, you heard a lot of this stuff at early meetings, as these very radical women-only meetings started to be formed in places like New York, New York Radical Women, Redstockings. Then, you began to have the right to meet separately, but at the beginning, in, say, '68-'69, it was very much having to share stories so that you established why you were having to be a separatist movement. It changed the dynamic radically, once you don't have whoever is sleeping with the man controlling things. I mean, it's as recent as the CNN scandal with Jeff Zucker, this stuff with who's sleeping with whom. It's always a big deal. Of course, it would be in a lesbian organization, too, but we didn't know that yet. [laughter]

KR: That leads me into my next question. You moved to New York City. What, at that point, drew you into the women's liberation movement and then into the radical elements of it?

DC: Well, when I was in North Carolina, as I was saying, I was in that women's group with Sara Evans and other folk there. That was '68, and I don't know whether I was still in that group in '69 or not. By the time I get to New York in the fall of '69, there is a lot more published about the women's movement starting to hit the media. There was this article in *McCall's*, of all things. I guess *McCall's* has died a death in the interim, but at that time, it was like a *Redbook*. It was like a women's magazine, *Ladies' Home Journal*, that ilk, and they had an article about the women's movement. It referred to this woman named Joyce McDonald, and she was living in New York. She was a feminist--well, we didn't have that word then. I came back to my parents' house in Connecticut. I called her up and I said, "I'm trying to move to New York. Have you got any suggestions?" She said, "You can come stay with me." [laughter] She had a little boy who was four or five. I mean, this is amazing. It would never happen today. She lived on 13th Street and First and Second, somewhere around there, and so I went to stay with her. Then, my sister was having a hard time at NYU. She wasn't happy there, and so she was dropping out. I guess I joined Redstockings somehow, and then my sister and I, they let us live in that apartment on Third Street, between First and Second. I don't know whose apartment that was, but we had a place to live anyways and I was there with Redstockings. Can you pause it for one minute?

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on recording.

DC: I'm in Redstockings, yes. That's where I was really introduced to the technique of consciousness-raising, and there really were people who became stars in that room. There was Kathie Sarachild, who had been Kathie Amatniek. She was from Radcliffe, which I think I only knew later. She developed this thing, consciousness-raising as speak bitterness, from Mao Zedong. I don't know that it's about the Cultural Revolution, but it apparently came from Mao. The other people in that room were people like Shulie Firestone, Anne Koedt, Ann Snitow, Cellestine Ware, Ros Baxandall. So, these are all people who were going to write books about this or seminal articles. That was very heady. Once again, I'm the youngest in the room. [laughter] That's how I got into Redstockings.

Then, you start to see schisms and splits and ideas about what needs to be done, and how much theory needs to be developed? Do we need to combine it with action? What's actually changing the lives of women? That's really where I started to build my identity as a separate person, as a feminist and then as a radical feminist and to be exposed to some of the best minds of my generation in this area.

Jane Kramer from *The New Yorker* then began to come to our meetings, when we formed New York Radical Feminists. She came to all our meetings for a year and then wrote that profile on us. This is very heady stuff. Then, you'd get calls from the media, and then you end up on [*The*] *Dick Cavett* [*Show*] and coaching on David Susskind and things that sharpen your skills and develop you and give you confidence.

KR: When you were in Redstockings and you were going to these consciousness-raising sessions with these people who went on to be intellectuals and leaders and you did not have to be guarded, or did you have to be guarded?

DC: I didn't know enough to ask that question. [laughter] What do you mean guarded?

KR: You had talked about the women's group in North Carolina, where you were with a bunch of women and you all were in the same social circle, so you were limited in what you could say.

DC: Right.

KR: What were those consciousness-raising sessions like in New York? What do you remember about them? What did you learn? Did you feel like you could open up more, because you had been through a lot?

DC: I was one of the only people in that group who had been married. I think Ros had been married. She had a child. I was also the only person in that group, as far as I know, who was married to a Jewish man who was violent, and I was assured by the Jewish women in the group, "Oh, no, that would not happen." That was interesting. There were all these things that were very interesting.

The group in Durham, it was really more the political connections because every husband had a project. So, this one was trying to organize used car salesmen. This one's doing the OEO project. This one's a labor [organizer]. Anything that could be passed to those husbands could be used against anybody, so it was more the politics of it.

In this setting, I never met any significant other, husband, whatever, of any of these women. Alix Shulman was in that group, who wrote "A Marriage Agreement" with her husband and then *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*. We went to her house for meetings. It was a very well-developed group. One of the things, I noticed it yesterday in a conversation, what you're asking about, about the quality of the conversation, is that I developed in that group a style of talking to women, which is as free as I can make it. You're going around the room and you're asking, "What did growing up as a girl mean to you?" "What does being a woman mean to you?" Menstruation, pregnancy, sex, whatever the topic is, people are drilling down as far as they're

comfortable going or as far as they're aware of. So, you're getting a lot of interesting material. Yesterday, I happened to meet somebody, and it came out that she had been shot recently in New York City and had fallen on the ground and that the mayor had called her to a panel to be on TV. You get all this stuff by just listening and probing, and just listening, that women's lives are typically so un-listened to, and I am endlessly curious about this stuff. That was a group that fed that.

Shulie, Shulie Firestone, was raised as an Orthodox Jew I don't know where in Canada, maybe Toronto [Ottawa] or someplace. When we would go to Ratner's together, this deli on Second Avenue, she would show me who was an Orthodox Jewish woman by the wigs, by where the hairline was. Shulie originally was a painter, and so she was very visual. She had these paintings of these women with these hairlines. I had never seen an Orthodox Jew before I came to New York, and she would educate me about that and about what the rules were. So, some people were more or less forthcoming than others. It was years later, just recently, that I learned that Anne Koedt's parents were Danish resistance people. Well, Anne Koedt was really kicking over the traces when she wrote "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm." That would make some sense that that's who her parents were. A very heady time, yes.

KR: What led you to co-found the New York Radical Feminists?

DC: Part of it was the beginning of my awareness of power politics within a group, about who could control an agenda and how that worked, and personal magnetism. Those things were as prevalent in the women's movement as in the male Left. It was fascinating to begin to watch that, to watch who could control and influence how a discussion went. I and Shulie and Anne and Minda Bikman and Ann Snitow had begun to feel that there was an exclusive focus on theory building in Redstockings. Theory was certainly important because we didn't have a lot of theory. We didn't have theory that was contemporary about women's position and we needed to develop that, but that was going to be an ongoing thing. That wasn't going to be something you could do for six months and be done with it. But we wanted to also have action. There was this third thing too, and I'm trying to remember what it was, but I think there were three things. It was theory, action, and something.

We founded New York Radical Feminists so we could begin to seed small groups within New York City. We developed a guide about how to do that, and we would go out and meet with these groups and set them up. We named ourselves. We were the Stanton-Anthony Brigade. Then, we weren't aware enough or skilled enough to figure out that other people were going to see us as the leaders and as the dominant call on this. When we set up all these small groups--I was reading that Jane Kramer article in November 1970 in *The New Yorker*, and in it, she picked up all of our stuff about, "Wow, this is a group, it's married women. It's women over forty. It's mothers." None of us was any of those things. So, we had various communities. Different people would or would not go and help those groups get started. We started to set up a structure. We had these small groups, and then we had a city-wide monthly group.

I'm going to that on a Sunday afternoon someplace. I'm living on the Lower East Side. I picked up a book at the newsstand when I got *The Times* and it was called *Gangbang Swap*. It was a pornographic book. I pick it up, and I'm looking at it. For some reason, I'm just thinking about

sex and coercion and how to build something around that. What is that? How does that work? You flip through the book and the gangbang swap becomes a gangbang rape inside the book and it's clearly coercive and it's a bunch of men and one woman or whatever. It's a group thing. There's this line where somebody says, "Your pussy is money in the bank." I thought, "Well, that's a clear statement of the commodification of sex."

I bring this to the meeting, and we started talking about rape. They set up a commission on abortion in New York City to talk about it or figure it out, and it was thirteen or fourteen people and one was a woman and she was a nun. This was kind of stunning. The women set up a, "We're the experts on abortion," and then they took hold of that issue. [Editor's Note: In response to hearings held by the New York Joint Legislature Committee on the Problems of Public Health on abortion, in which the only woman testifying was a nun, the Redstockings held a speak-out on abortion at a Greenwich Village church in March 1969. Twelve women testified about their experiences getting illegal abortions, and that led to dozens of audience members joining in and sharing their experiences.]

We were just following in those footsteps to set up something on rape, to do a speak-out, just find out--what are all the types of rape that there are? We're sitting at that meeting and figuring out who can do what. We just picked half a dozen kinds of rape, and each person was willing to cover hitchhiker rape, therapist rape, Alix picked up pants-ing, which was done in her elementary school to get little girls ready to be violated, I picked marital rape. Then, we put it on.

A couple of years ago, I had to go over to Brooklyn College to somebody who's about my generation, who was teaching a film class, and I was asking her about something else. She was one of the named plaintiffs in the City University of New York sex discrimination case, the women faculty. I said, "I don't know if you remember me." I told her my name, and she said, "Oh, I remember you." I said, "Well, okay." She said, "You did the rape speak-out." Then, from fifty years ago, she starts telling me this intense story of going to that speak-out, she's Catholic-Italian, how it changed her, she had been raped, what it meant, and we are like back in that moment. That's the kind of experience that was, to do for women, to make it talk-about-able, acting.

Then, I was in the West Village group, when the Stanton-Anthony group self-destructed or got destroyed, and Susan Brownmiller was thinking about writing a book. We were having this argument about rape. She had come out of the civil rights movement. She had the whole take on it that it was white women being used to lynch Black men. We had this argument that there were other kinds of rape than the use of white women against Black men, and she credits that argument in *Against Our Will*, the book that she wrote, which was huge, about men, women and rape.

You had theory, you had action, and you had the two, and it changed people's lives. It made them freer.

KR: Take me a little deeper into this speak-out against rape. Where was it?

DC: I've got some stuff somewhere on it. It might have been in Washington Irving High School. I'm not sure. I've read people talking about where it was and that memory. I don't think it was at Judson Church. I think it was in a high school. I don't really recall. [Editor's Note: The New York Radical Feminists held a speak-out on rape at St. Clement's Episcopal Church in Manhattan, on January 24, 1971. Later that year, on April 17, a conference on rape was held at Washington Irving High School.]

One of the things that I have learned in the women's movement is this brainstorming thing, where you just ask a group of women, "So what would the world look like if …?" whatever it is, and then you take notes. We were doing that one day, and I said, "Well, what would the State of New York look like if women were in control and women wrote the laws?" I'm a fast typist. My mother was a typing champion in three states. I sat there in Susan Brownmiller's kitchen and typed and did the thing in brainstorming where you don't comment. You just take it down. Then, I organized it by topic. There's one section on prostitution. There's one on childcare, employment. The one on rape, I think our plan was--I read something recently which I might have written--our plan was to take it to the legislature and try to get this [passed]. [laughter] I have no idea. When you look at the one on rape, a lot of that's been changed. That was a successful one. At that time, you had to have corroboration of identity, penetration and something else [proof of force]. So, you didn't have any convictions, because if somebody is standing there to identify you, you probably are not raping the person, unless it's a gang rape. That was a New York Radical Feminist project, and, again, that conceptualizing what would the world look like is such a big part of theory building.

KR: What were some of the other actions that the New York Radical Feminist undertook?

DC: I think January '70--is that right?--was the rape [speak-out]. Do you have a date? Do you know when that was?

KR: No, I actually do not have a date.

DC: It's January '71. Yes, I've got my application to law school, which is January '71, and I think I'm talking about [that] we're about to have this. [Editor's Note: Diane Crothers reads from her application to the Rutgers School of Law-Newark.] "My small feminist group is presently at work coordinating a feminist speak-out and conference on rape to be held in a few weeks." Okay, so that's January '71. You're asking what do I remember from that night or about the other activities.

KR: Yes.

DC: Then, we kind of stepped in it, in my view. I was less and less involved because I had just applied to law school, and so that meant that I was already working on the *Reporter,* the *Women's Rights Law Reporter.* That meant I knew Ruth Ginsburg. That meant she was writing me a letter [of recommendation]. This whole legal thing is about to take off for me.

The New York Radical Feminists did a conference on rape, a more academic conference. I don't know if it was papers, and I don't even know that I went. Then, they turned to the very hot-

button item of sex work, and they did a conference on prostitution, which got a lot of negative coverage and began the whole thing about sex-positive feminists, Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon, Ellen Willis, Ann Snitow. There's a book that came out at the time, *The Powers of Desire,* and Ann Snitow is one of the people [who edited it, along with] Christine Stansell, who's a women's historian, and Sharon Thompson, who I taught with some years later, and so that starts to split out those two pieces about feminism's take on sex. There's a wonderful collection of essays by Ellen Willis, *Beginning to See the Light*, and she's in the sex-positive frame of the movement. Just parenthetically, my Rutgers Zoom group from law school is now about to discuss a Kimberlé Crenshaw article about teaching anti-racism alongside dominance theory that comes from Catharine MacKinnon. Fifty years later, the roots of this continue. I was, at this point, working full time on the *Women's Rights Law Reporter*, trying to get that published, and trying to get that funded, and going to the Ford Foundation, and trying to raise money for it. So, I had other things to do.

KR: I will get into the *Women's Rights Law Reporter* in more detail at a later point. You also did a sit-in at the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

DC: Oh, yes.

KR: Can you tell me about that?

DC: Sure, sure. Again, I'd have to look up the date, but that was something that brought into play some of the conflict between women in the women's movement who were already journalists and then the rest of us. Susan Brownmiller, Vivian Gornick, Lucy Komisar, there were people who were working journalists who then became activists. Actually, I don't know that that's true about Vivian, but I know Susan and Lucy. Of course, because you're in New York, it's the center of publishing, you're very focused on what the media is saying about this movement. Did you ever look at *Ladies' Home Journal*? Do you know what I'm talking about?

KR: I have, yes, but you could describe it for the recording.

DC: Okay. Women's magazines, which were very conventional at the time, [were] very much about beauty and cooking and motherhood in very traditional senses. *Ladies' Home Journal* was even more so. They had this great column, which I thought was very entertaining, called "Can this Marriage Be Saved?" This is around the time when divorce is just absolutely off the table, and so I go through *The World of the Formerly Married*, managed to get separated, if not divorced, when here we go with *Ladies' Home Journal* and what it was saying about women. We were starting to notice in New York Radical Feminists that men ran the media as well, and so John Mack Carter was the editor of a women's magazine. We thought, "That's interesting." Then, there was Lenore Hershey, who had hats, little pillbox hats, and gloves, and I don't know what her position was, maybe managing editor. We decided to have this [sit-in]. I think we met in Saint Patrick's--where is Saint Patrick's Cathedral? Is that on Fifth? Do you know? [Editor's Note: St. Patrick's Cathedral is located on Fifth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan. On March 18, 1970, over one hundred women occupied the headquarters of the *Ladies' Home Journal* in Manhattan, demanding changes in the media's portrayal of women.]

KR: I do not know.

DC: I'm not supposed to ask you questions.

KR: No, that is okay. I know New York City fairly well, but I do not, in particular, know where that is.

DC: Yes, I think that's where we met, in a church on Fifth Avenue, which was near *Ladies' Home Journal*. Then, we all went over there and sat in. Shulie was about five-feet tall and she had black hair, a lot of it, down to her butt, and she had these little round wire glasses and she was just intensity to the max. Shulie gets there and Shulie gets up on a desk in John Mack Carter's office. She's lecturing him and throwing her arms around and stuff, but she's tiny. This is not a threat. They didn't call cops or anything. There was nothing like that. We were all women and white probably.

What we did was to take it over and say, "This needs to change. Women need to be running it. The copy needs to be pro-feminist and not conventional anymore." Then, my friend, Jan Peterson, who was a founder of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, her approach to something like this is deal with the workers. She was dealing with all the people who worked there, the women, and asking if their childcare needs were met. She's organizing this whole thing about what do these actual women need? Jan was in our West Village One group as well. She remembered this whole rape argument that [I] had with Susan.

We got a settlement that we would get ten thousand dollars, which was a lot of money then, to write a supplement to the *Ladies' Home Journal* about feminism. Then, we met in all these small groups and then all the carrying on of, "Who's a journalist? Who isn't a journalist?" Name calling, "You're all political hacks." I remember that one vividly. People are trying to write these articles. That's what that was, but that was a lot of fun.

Again, when you're doing these things, you have such a sense of, "You can change the world. Just get a group." Around that time, we decided to integrate all these restaurants that would not [seat a woman who was unaccompanied by a man]. If the two of us went out for a drink, you and me, we would be defined as alone. [laughter] It's only funny now. [laughter] If you went to the Café de la Paix, which is a very upscale place on Central Park South, they wouldn't seat you because you were a woman alone, if you were without a man. We thought we needed to do something about this. We made a list of all these places, and we went from place to place, like on a Sunday, in a group. Unfortunately, I made the mistake of having a drink at each of these places. [laughter] I'm not sure how useful I was, but I didn't get arrested or anything. [laughter] I remember P.J. Clark and I remember Café de la Paix. That's the kind of feeling that you then are building, is that you don't have to put up with this stuff. Wherever you are, you are bringing your consciousness with you, and all you need is two or three people who you catch eyes with and you can figure out what to do. I wouldn't be who I am without that year, and I was so fortunate to be in the right place at the right time.

KR: We have been going for over two hours today.

DC: Okay.

KR: How does it sound if I ask one more question today?

DC: Sure.

KR: How did you bring your radical feminism to your family? When I say that, how did you convey to your family what you were doing, the theory, the action, and how did you involve your family?

DC: At this point, my family is my parents, my sister, my brother, that's it. My sister and I moved into this apartment on the Lower East Side in like '69, '70, somewhere around there, '70, I guess, early '70. My sister was working with me on the *Women's Rights Law Reporter* as well. We lived in this ratty apartment in a ratty neighborhood and invited my mother to come down while we were trying to paint it. When I say ratty, a disbarred lawyer owned the building. A junkie was the super. My dad came and built us bookshelves in this apartment. I don't remember any criticism from my parents about this weird life that their daughters were leading at this point, so that was very good. [laughter] Maybe we had just worn them down, maybe I had, by then.

My mother came to see us this May weekend in about 1970, and that was the--hold on one second. See this old piece of paper that's yellowed. It was called the [Second] Congress to Unite Women, and this is a description of some kind of political fighting in it called the "Congress to Divide Women?" My mother was here to help us or to watch us paint the apartment. This conference was on, so we all went. We were sitting in a workshop. My mother, at this point, was a major amateur golfer who had won a lot of championships, and she had met some lesbians doing that. I don't know whether they were married or not, but they were in the closet. We're sitting there at this workshop. Rita Mae Brown comes in with all these lesbians, and they all have lavender t-shirts on that say "Lavender Menace." They're pissed about Betty Friedan's thing, that the women's movement has to watch out for lesbians and they could take things over. You see these quotes by Friedan, something I was reading about, "We want to be pretty."

That year, I went to a panel that the New York City Bar Association did called, "Has 'Women's Lib' Really Liberated Anybody?" Friedan was one of the speakers, and so was Steinem, Gloria Steinem. Anyway, Betty Friedan had this blouse on with this big ruffle down the front, this white blouse. She's talking, yada, yada, on this panel, and then she breaks into the middle of her own sentence and says, "I love men." I thought, "Oh, just shoot me now!" [laughter] The New Women Lawyers, I was part of this group that was taking over that session. [Editor's Note: The New Women Lawyers took over the meeting of the Bar of the City of New York on March 25, 1971.]

Anyway, we're in this workshop. Rita Mae comes in with all these lesbians and they are so great. They are energetic, well spoken, articulate, passionate feminists. The pro-woman line was one thing. The radical lesbians was another. I can't remember whether they had something to hand out that said some of this. My mother was just absolutely taken. When we left there and

went home, she said, "Nobody talks about this. This is amazing." She was just so struck by the freedom to express who you are.

My mother was somebody who never felt of a place. At one point, I got the family together, and on her seventieth birthday, we set up a scholarship in her name for women athletes at this college in her town. She cried so hard that day that her eyes disappeared. I found something that I wrote not too long after that, where she said that that was the best day of her life. This is a woman who loved being a mother, who used to call me on my birthday and tell me the story of my birth. But she said that she realized that year before that there had been no institution that had built her and that my father had Swarthmore and she did not. What my mother taught me by the things she didn't have and the things she recognized she needed and the sense of bereftness and abandonment and all the things that come from that and lack of her own voice so shaped me. When I was able to share some of this--I have this picture of me talking to her, it's on my wall now, I'm looking at it, where I'm speaking at this state teacher's college in her town, and the headline, I think it's on the front page of this paper, is, "Radical Feminist Rocks Hometown Audience." Then, there's a picture with me and my mother and I'm gesturing and she's sitting there and it says, "Cause is a family affair," and it talks about her interest in this.

Round about this time, my parents were entering a very rocky period in their marriage, and so this is all related to that. How much room is there for her within that marriage? They managed to weather it, but the early '70s were tough for her. My dad, I have a note from him after that "Radical Feminist Rocks Hometown Audience" thing, where he says, "You were great. Jeff [my brother] and I and Tad [who was the dog] all think you were great and we are all boys." He was moving along, but, also, he was surrounded because my mother was a natural feminist, my sister and me. For my brother, the thing that my brother got out of all of this, one thing, he said he learned to take women's studies courses in college, so he would meet the interesting women. [laughter]

KR: Does it sound good if we wrap up for today?

DC: Sure, that's fine.

KR: Thank you so much for doing this second interview session, and we will talk off the record and schedule a third session. We will pick up and talk more about radical feminism and your appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show*.

DC: Okay, great, and law school. Law school's ahead.

KR: Then, we will go into law school and many other topics. Let me stop the recording.

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

Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 4/13/2022
Reviewed by Diane Crothers 9/18/2022