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University of California
Berkeley, California

Mimi Feingold Real

*Mimi Feingold Real: Activist, Educator, and Historian*

Bay Area Women in Politics

Interviews conducted by
Amanda Tewes
in 2021

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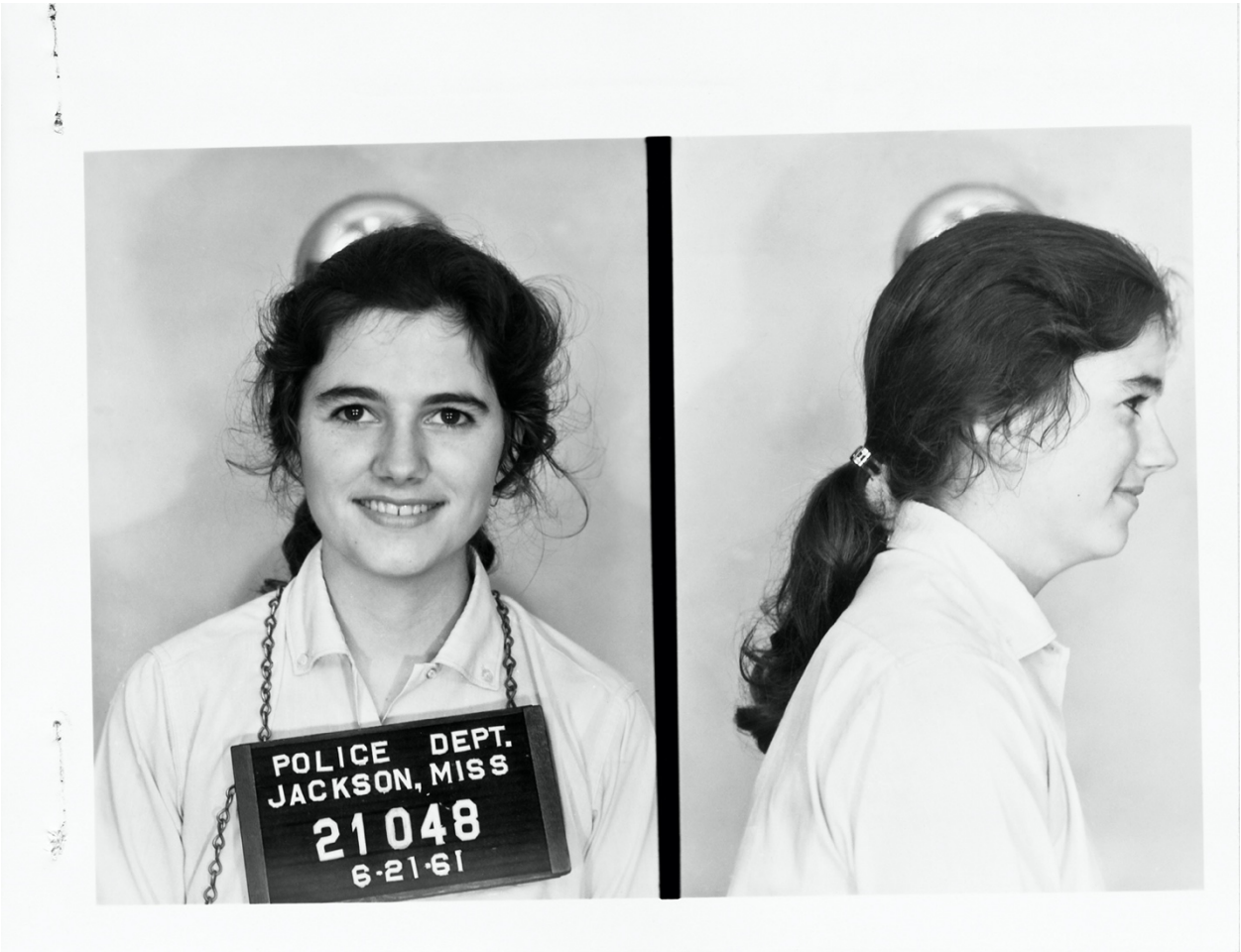


Mimi Feingold Real's Freedom Rider mugshot in Jackson, Mississippi, 1961. Courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

**Abstract**

Mimi Feingold Real is an educator and historian, as well as an activist in the Civil Rights and women's liberation movements. Feingold Real was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1941. She joined the Freedom Rides in June 1961; registered Black voters with Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Louisiana; was a member of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS); and helped start what became Sudsofloppen, the first women's consciousness-raising group in San Francisco, California. She is also a member of the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement, and continues to speak about her memories of civil rights work. In this interview, Feingold Real discusses growing up in Brooklyn, and the community's demographics; her family's background, including their communist politics; an early interest in social justice; attending Swarthmore College from 1959 to 1963, including campus culture and the Swarthmore Political Action Club (SPAC); volunteering at CORE headquarters in New York; participating in the Freedom Rides, including travel, meeting resistance in the South, and imprisonment in Mississippi; activism in Baltimore, Maryland; joining CORE's Black voter registration efforts in Louisiana in 1963; earning a master's in history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1966; collecting materials from CORE offices in Louisiana for the Wisconsin Historical Society; joining SDS and working with the white working class in Hoboken, New Jersey; moving to San Francisco in 1967 and joining the draft resistance movement; forming a consciousness-raising group with Chude Pamela Allen and other women in the New Left in San Francisco; leaving social activism in 1968 but eventually becoming an early woman mail carrier for the US Postal Service in San Francisco; joining the then-Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) at UC Berkeley, and researching and conducting interviews for the Earl Warren Era Project; finishing her doctorate in history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1976 and writing her dissertation on Warren's prosecution of the King-Ramsey-Connor Case; establishing Oral History Associates and conducting oral histories for corporate clients like Standard Oil; becoming more connected to Judaism, including mentorship of Rabbi Pinchas Lipner; meeting and marrying her husband, Bob Real; teaching at the Hebrew Academy of San Francisco; raising her son, Joshua; researching the history of the Hebrew Academy and finding an oral history which formed the basis for Rabbi Lipner's libel suit against Richard Goldman; involvement with the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement and continued interest in social justice; and the legacy of the women's liberation movement in the Bay Area.

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Interview 1: February 9, 2021

01-00:00:00
Tewes: This is a first interview with Mimi Feingold Real for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on February 9, 2021. And Ms. Real joins me in this remote interview from Mill Valley, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you so much for meeting with me today, Mimi.

01-00:00:23
Real: Delighted.

01-00:00:25
Tewes: Starting at the very beginning: can you tell us when and where you were born?

01-00:00:30
Real: Okay, I was born in Brooklyn, New York, on May 31, 1941.

01-00:00:37
Tewes: And did you grow up in Brooklyn?

01-00:00:40
Real: I grew up in Brooklyn, I lived in Brooklyn. I didn't leave there until I went to college. But basically, I guess right after I was born my parents were living in an apartment, but they moved within the first couple of years to the house that I grew up in. I hesitated at the word house, because it was what in San Francisco would be called a pair of flats, and that isn't the term that was used. There was a two-family house, so we occupied the upstairs, and the owner of the building occupied downstairs. But yes, that is where I grew up.

01-00:01:32
Tewes: That is really interesting, the regional difference between the housing styles.

01-00:01:33
Real: Yes, yes.

01-00:01:35
Tewes: Can you tell me a little bit more about what it was like growing up in Brooklyn in the forties and fifties?

01-00:01:43
Real: Well, on one level it was very ordinary. This was a fairly residential neighborhood, tree-lined streets. We could play maybe not out in the middle of the street, but play on the sidewalk, sometimes even in the street. It was primarily a middle-class neighborhood, and in those days we weren't even aware of these things, but it was predominantly white. And also, more important to my identification, it was predominantly Jewish—as was a good deal of Brooklyn and a good deal of New York in those days. But again, it was just something that you breathed in with the air. You went to the little shopping neighborhood nearby, and on practically every street there was a

kosher butcher, and there was a Jewish delicatessen every couple of blocks. There were elements of a much smaller city. We didn't feel like we were part of some great, big, huge urban sprawl with all kinds of problems.

01-00:03:06

There was a park nearby, Prospect Park, which is Brooklyn's equivalent of Central Park, and we used to go there all the time for a variety of things. In the summer, there was a lake and you could rent paddleboats and go out on the lake. In the winter, there were little hills, and we used to pull our sleds over there and sled down the hills. Prospect Park was one of our hangouts. And then close by to Prospect Park was the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, and we also spent a lot of time there. Gorgeous, gorgeous flowering cherry trees. It was a gift of Japan. It's still there to this day, and it is still one of the great prides of Brooklyn. But my mother always used to take us every spring when the cherry blossoms were in bloom, and we'd walk up Cherry Lane and admire the beautiful blossoms. That would be about the time—and even earlier than that—some of the very, very earliest of the bulb flowers would come up, little bluebells, and then after that daffodils. And so we'd go to the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens to look at those.

01-00:04:35

And then sort of right across the street or very nearby to both of those parks was the Brooklyn Zoo, and I spent a fair amount of time in the Brooklyn Zoo, also. Which I do have to say is—I'm thinking about it now—it may be that some of my earliest social justice feelings were born in that zoo, because I always felt very, very sorry for the animals. And this was a very old-fashioned zoo, so they were mostly—they weren't in cages, but they were in fairly small enclosures, and it was obviously very artificial. I remember writing a story when I was in elementary school about how a magic spell descended, and the animals all were released, and the human beings were all put in the zoo enclosures. So I obviously felt some stirring of something at the time.

01-00:05:42

And then I went to public school in Brooklyn. Well, I went to a public elementary school. The schools in New York City, at least at that time—thereby avoiding this problem that San Francisco seems to be having with its schools—the New York City schools were not named, at least the elementary schools; they were all numbered. I went to P.S. 241, and there was nothing strange about that. I have very fond memories of that school. And that was, at the time, one of the few remaining K-8 schools in New York. New York was just in the process, at that moment, of transitioning to junior highs. And junior high school in New York at that time was seventh, eighth, and ninth grade, so then you entered high school in tenth grade, which was a little bit weird. But I didn't go through that because P.S. 241 was K-8, so I graduated from eighth grade and then went into high school in ninth grade. And then, of course, when tenth grade came around, our class just blew up in size—probably more than doubled in size as all the kids from the K-6 schools came pouring in.

01-00:07:25

But anyway, I went from P.S. 241 to Erasmus Hall High School, which at that time was one of the best academic high schools in the city. It wasn't a specialized school. It was just a regular public high school, but in large part because of the demographics of the area that it covered, it pulled from a lot of middle class and also a lot of Jewish neighborhoods. It tended to have a fairly bright student body and it tended to offer a fairly rigorous curriculum. There was a kind of a triangle of three schools: there was Erasmus, Midwood [High School], and Madison [High School], and all three were excellent, excellent regular public high schools. We weren't talking, at this point, about the Bronx High School of Science or something. These were just regular neighborhood high schools, but they all had great reputations. Kids could graduate from those schools and go to really good universities, and they came out with just a superb education.

01-00:08:46

Erasmus was probably the most diverse of the three schools, because we pulled from a number of different neighborhoods, but it was also—and this again was politically correct, and it was the way things were done in New York at the time—Erasmus was what they called [makes air quotes] tracked. In other words, there was a college-bound academic track, and then there was a kind of an intermediate track, and then there was—I can't remember what they called it, but it was the kids who took shop and who had no intentions of going beyond high school and going to college. Vocational, that's the word I was trying to think of, vocational track. And I was in the college-bound academic track.

01-00:09:50

Tewes: You've given me so much to think about right now, but I think one thing I want to tie back to is the fact that you were born during World War II—[laughs]

01-00:09:59

Real: Yeah.

01-00:09:59

Tewes: —and that that must have shaped the stories about your early life. Did your family have stories about this time or what that meant for the community?

01-00:10:09

Real: You know what, that's an interesting question, because the simple answer to that is no. My parents—my father, [Abraham Feingold], was too old at that point to have been drafted. I think the major impact was something that I never even was consciously aware of, and that is that my mother's obstetrician, who should have delivered me, was drafted, was sent off to serve in the Army as an Army medic, and so she, [Elizabeth French Feingold], was turned over to another doctor. So it was some other doctor that she didn't really know who delivered me. And the other thing, because I was too young—I was a baby, you know, I was a toddler—the thing I do remember

were the signs. There were signs indicating where there were bomb shelters or—and I don't even remember now what the signs said, but I can remember various shapes. Like there was one sign that had a big triangle on it, and most of the signs were yellow with black printing, but I was too young to even read. So that's the only impact that I can remember.

01-00:11:29
Tewes: Well then of course, years later more discussion comes out about the Holocaust, and that part of World War II. Was that something that impacted your family thinking about—as a Jewish family?

01-00:11:44
Real: Again, you know, it's really interesting—again, the simple answer to that is no. Because we didn't have any—aha, I know why. We didn't have any family that lived in Germany or even in Eastern Europe. And to the extent—my father came from—was born in Russia before the revolution, before the Russian Revolution. He was born in the Ukraine, but his family managed to escape when he was only seven years old. So he had family in Russia, but the story had been that during World War II, in anticipation of the German occupation and the German invasion of the Soviet Union, a lot of the people in the Ukraine were relocated to the other side of the Ural Mountains, and that included my father's family. He had managed to keep in touch with them. He had actually, I think, gone back to visit them in—before he met my mother, back in the 1920s or 1930s. By the time of the war, he had lost touch with all of them, because they had all been relocated. Again, that's the family lore.

01-00:13:24
And even then, I guess there were mass, mass murders in the Soviet Union, but whether any relatives of mine were victims of that, I don't know. So I guess I always knew about the Holocaust. I don't remember it being a big thing that my parents talked about. They were more concerned with what was happening in *this* country.

01-00:13:56
Tewes: [laughs] Yes, and I do want to get to that.

01-00:14:00
Real: And also, my mother was not Jewish, so—and again, that was—I was always aware of that, but it was never something that was bad. It just *was*. And interestingly enough, my father's father, who was an Orthodox Jew to his dying day, when his health deteriorated and his wife had already passed away, he came to live with us. He had three sons, and of the three sons, the only one who would take him in was the one with the non-Jewish wife, which I always thought was interestingly ironic. And so he lived with us. And even then, he never talked much about the Holocaust.

01-00:14:58
Tewes: Thank you, that's good background. I think now is a good time to ask you, for the record: what was your given name, your birth name?

01-00:15:06

Real: Okay, so my birth name is Miriam, and I was named for the biblical Miriam. But I was almost never called Miriam, even as a young child. The only times "Miriam" was ever used was when I was about to be disciplined, and my father would call me over. You know, "Miriam, come here." And I would associate "Miriam" with being in big trouble about something, so that there was an assortment of family nicknames. But by the time I got to elementary school and high school, I was—actually, the way New Yorkers pronounced M-I-M-I, at least at that time, was "Mihmee," so I was "Mihmee" all the way through high school. And then the story there is that another girl from my class at Erasmus was also accepted at Swarthmore [College], and her name was also Miriam. And her nickname, of course, was "Mihmee." And she descended upon me and said that here we were going to this small college, and it was high time that we distinguished ourselves, so one of us had to be—could stay "Mihmee," and the other one had to be "Meemee." It was clear, by the way she said it as to who was going to be "Mihmee." So that's how I became Mimi. [laughs] So from college on, I was "Meemee" and she remained "Mihmee." And I don't know what ever happened to her. [laughs]

01-00:16:56

Tewes: But it seems to have worked out. You already started speaking a bit about your parents and your family, and I was wondering if you could just tell me a little bit more about them and their backgrounds, and then of course their livelihoods?

01-00:17:09

Real: Let's start with the livelihood, because that's the easiest one, and that is more or less how they met. My father, at that time when they met and married—and for most of my young childhood—was a high school math teacher. He taught primarily at a school called Manual Training High School—I don't even know if that's still in existence—in New York. My mother had majored in college in English, and through a very, very sweet line of reasoning that she went through, she wanted to do something that was useful and that would help people, and at the same use her English background. She made two lists: one of them of how to use the English background, and the other was how to be useful. Apparently, the only element on each—that was on both lists was librarian, so she became a librarian. And then she worked for many years as a high school librarian, also in Brooklyn, and that is how she met my father. I don't think she was at the same school, although I'm not absolutely positive. But I think they met at a party, you know, some sort of a get-together of teachers. Anyway, they hit it off and decided to marry, much to the distress of both of their sets of parents, but they went ahead with it anyway.

01-00:18:52

The other major important thing to know about them is that from fairly early on, for both of them in their adulthood, they had become very progressive and left wing in their thinking. And I don't know exactly when they joined the Communist Party, but they were members of the Communist Party, which at

that time was not—did not carry the stigma that it carries today. Obviously, they were still very much outsiders and radicals. But what the communists were in that period, where it was a period of pretty much political conformity, the communists were some of the only people who were fighting for social justice, who were fighting for civil liberties and civil rights. Communists founded, or were members of, a whole range of organizations, which would later get smeared with the name of communist front. But they were not trying to overthrow the government of the United States by force and violence; they were not trying to eliminate capitalism. The Communist Party internationally, at that time, as I understand it, had moved away from that agenda, from the agenda of world revolution, to working within each country and working with the prominent issues of the day.

01-00:20:31

And because they were both in the school system, they both were members of the [New York City] Teachers Union. Now, at this time—even at this time—I mean, even today, I think, there are two different organizations of teachers, but they don't differ in the way that these did. Back in that day, there was the Teachers Union, and then there was whatever the other group was called that was affiliated in some way with the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations]. It was much more mainstream unionism. The Teachers Union was much more radical, and they took on all kinds of unpopular causes, and they stood up much more for students, and particularly for underprivileged students and students who were struggling. There's an excellent, excellent history that was written of the Teachers Union, which I have downstairs, written by one of the members of the Teachers Union. But this was maybe another manifestation of communist influence, in the sense that I think that a number of members of the Teachers Union, particularly in the leadership, were probably also members of the Communist Party, but they weren't trying to use the Teachers Union as a way to indoctrinate innocent little minds into communist/Marxist theory. They were standing up for teachers. So anyway, my parents were members of the Teachers Union.

01-00:22:13

And then by whenever [Sen. Joseph] McCarthy came along—early fifties? Late forties, early fifties. Anyway, things had been getting progressively more and more tense, and the House Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC] had been holding its hearings. And the New York City public school system decided that they probably had this same problem, of supposedly [makes air quotes] innocent teachers preaching communist doctrine to these innocent young children, and it was their job to get rid of them. So they formed a miniature committee. I now can't remember the name of it, but it was along the lines of the McCarthy committee or HUAC. And they started hauling in teachers who they had any reason to suspect of so-called [makes air quotes] communist sympathies, because they had membership in so-called communist-front organizations.

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So first my father was hauled in, he was the first in the group. It was a group of eight teachers who were the first teachers to be brought before this committee, and they were called "the first eight." He was part of that group. The ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], of course, refused to defend them, which is what the ACLU did in those days. They were trying as much as they could to distance themselves from anything that reeked of possible communist contamination—God forbid. So again, there was a parallel organization called the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, which was also an organization of lawyers, and they defended these teachers. So the teachers were hauled before this committee, and they were asked all kinds of questions. You know, "Are you a member of this group, are you a member of that group? Do you know this person, do you know that person?" And this would go on for hours and for days, and they hauled up all kinds of witnesses.

01-00:24:41

My father, being a good civil libertarian, refused to answer the questions on the grounds of self-incrimination, and so he was summarily fired from his job for insubordination, for refusal to answer questions. In other words, heaven forbid that they should be accused of firing somebody simply because they had communist inclinations. No, they were being fired for insubordination, because they refused to cooperate with the committee of the Board of Education. So he lost his job. And then within months, my mother was called up, and she also then lost her job. So then my father basically reinvented himself, and he—

01-00:25:42

Well, there's one family story that my mother used to tell. I don't remember it, because I don't know that I was home, but—I mean, I probably was still at school. But my mother came home from work, or came home for lunch from work or something, and found my father lying on the sofa. He should have been—well, he should have been at school teaching, but these hearings were going on, so he had—and well, no, actually he was back at school. So he should have been at school teaching, and here he was in the middle [of the day], and my mother's first thought was, Oh my God, what happened? Is he sick? Literally, they were fired and hauled out of their classrooms, and told to just pack up their—take their stuff and leave, leave the building. God forbid you should spread your radical germs one more second to these high school students who are sitting there trying to learn math.

01-00:26:44

I might also add—and I think this had a profound influence on me in teaching me what people did—my father used to help kids, like he'd have kids come over—kids who were struggling in math, he'd have them come to our house, and he would tutor them. This is long, long, long before anybody had private tutors, and he would do this out of the goodness of his heart. He wasn't paid for it. I remember it mostly, because as a young child, I would be told to stay in the back of the apartment or the back of the flat, so as not to make noise,

because Daddy was tutoring in the front—actually in the master bedroom. They set up a little table, and he'd be tutoring these kids.

01-00:27:36

So anyway, my father reinvented himself. He saw a need of children who at that time—the term, anyway, that was used then was mentally retarded children; I don't know what they're called today. But he saw that the high-functioning mentally retarded children could make it in public schools, but when you got beyond that, kids who could not function in a public school environment, they were literally institutionalized. That's what was recommended, and my father thought that was absolutely inhumane.

01-00:28:25

He and one of his fellow "first eight" teachers, a man by the name of David Friedman, started taking courses at Brooklyn College. There was very, very little, at that time even, instruction in the education of learning-disabled children. He wanted to know more about how you went about teaching children with these kinds of challenges. Virtually nobody was teaching anything. The only place that anybody was teaching anything was at Brooklyn College. So these two men went to Brooklyn College and took a whole bunch of courses with this one professor, and then they established a small private school for mentally retarded children. These were children who could not—who were too retarded to go to public school, and who, as I say, otherwise would have been institutionalized. And they absolutely performed miracles.

01-00:29:30

My father actually eventually wrote a book: *Teaching Arithmetic to Slow Learners and Retarded*, that was the name of the book. But he developed, on his own, all kinds of methods of teaching kids who did not have the mental capacity to get their hands around mathematical concepts or even simple things like addition. I look back on it and I am just in awe of what he did. He just created whole curricula for these kids, and then he also taught them a lot of life skills. Like, they ate a hot lunch at the school, and they learned how to set a table and how to use a fork and knife, and how to stack the dishes, and how to take the dishes into the kitchen, and stuff like that. And for the first number of years, my mother, of course, helped him out. Oh, and then they also ran their own little private bus system. So the very first car we ever owned was a station wagon. At the beginning, my father, and then my mother—that was her first job in the morning: she would drive around in the station wagon picking up some of the children and delivering them to the school, and then at the end of the day she would reverse that. I think she did a lot of the bookkeeping. I don't remember if she ever taught at the school.

01-00:31:21

It was clear that that was not her calling, shall we say? She was not happy. And by this time, I was old enough to fully understand what was going on. I was probably in upper elementary school or high school—probably upper elementary school. I was at—oh, this is another neighborhood landmark I

should mention. The main branch of the Brooklyn Public Library, which is Grand Army Plaza, which if you ever watch *Judge Judy*, [laughs] in the intro there are shots of Grand Army Plaza, and I just go all nostalgic every time I see that. But anyway, I practically spent my school years in that library. And so I was at the library one day after school getting books for some paper I had to write or doing some assignment, and I saw on the checkout desk that there was a sign saying that there were positions open at the library and people should apply.

01-00:32:38

So I went home, you know, I ran home—I was so excited—and told my mother, because I knew that she wasn't happy working at the Rugby School. That was the name of the school, the Rugby School. She wasn't happy working there, but that was, again, that was her duty. She never complained. I mean, she never made a fuss with my father or made—went into these guilt trips of, "Look what I'm doing for you. You should buy me a beautiful gift," or something. She did it all out of the goodness of her heart. That was what you did. She was supporting her husband. And at first, she thought, No way. Here she had been fired by the New York City Board of Education. No way would another branch of the New York City government hire her. But finally, she figured, What the heck, I'll just give it a go.

01-00:33:42

She applied, and of course they just grabbed her up, because she had an advanced degree in library science; she had worked for years in a high school library; she was already a very, very experienced librarian. I'm sure they were just so happy to see her. I don't know whether they knew about her history in the school system—they must have. But whether that just wasn't important to them, they didn't give a hoot, or—I don't know. But she went to work for the Brooklyn Public Library, and she was just as happy as a clam. She rose very, very quickly in their bureaucracy and ultimately became a district librarian, so she was in charge of a whole district's worth of—

01-00:34:42

Interestingly enough, the district that she was assigned to was the Williamsburg District in Brooklyn, which then, as it is now, is very, very heavily ultra-Orthodox. She would come home with stories about the children who would come to the library, and they were very, very well behaved. What her concern was, was that they never got outdoors. They would sit inside in the library, and they all—by the time they were even young children, they all had glasses, and they were just too studious. And so that kind of imprinted in me for a long time a kind of an internal prejudice, if you will, against the ultra-Orthodox, which is ironic. Not that I'm ultra-Orthodox now, but I'm certainly part of the Orthodox world, and I understand completely where these kids were coming from then. But I can also *completely* understand my mother's reaction, because she had, of course, no understanding of that community. But anyway, she worked in the library for many, many years, until she retired.

01-00:35:54
Tewes: This is great, Mimi. I think what was really coming to my mind, though, is: as a young child, how aware were you of this political machinery happening behind the scenes with your parents?

01-00:36:08
Real: Very. I was very aware of what was happening to them, on a very, very direct level, particularly when my father was being questioned by this committee. We were given very explicit instructions, my brother and I, that if the doorbell rang and we went to answer it, and if it was the FBI or other similar people who were asking for my mother or father, we were to tell them in no uncertain terms that they were not at home. I mean, we were very, very aware. I was very aware that my—but I didn't look at it as a bad thing. I mean, in my eyes, my parents were heroes, and they were battling against an evil system that was out to get them. And there might be evil people lurking in the alley next door or spying on our house, but that was just part of—that was what went with the values that they were teaching us.

01-00:37:19
And then all through elementary school—I mean, from the time that I was old enough to be able to do this, my parents would take me and my brother—when he got old enough—to May Day parades and other similar demonstrations, but I particularly remember the May Day parades. I didn't understand, really, exactly what it was about, but all I knew was that here we were marching down the middle of the street with a whole lot of other people. And then when I was a little bit older, when I was in high school, I remember my father taking me to NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] meetings. That must have been NAACP meetings, or there were some sort—it was something. It took place in a Black church, that's all I remember. I was kind of overwhelmed. I'd never been in a context like that. That was what was normal for me.

01-00:38:18
I always felt like I was an outsider at school. Like for example, there was a political party in New York called the American Labor Party, the ALP, and that would later be called a communist-front group. It certainly had very, very, very progressive leanings. And they ran Vincent Hallinan for president. I don't even remember what year it was, but it was when I was in elementary school. So I hear his name being talked about at home, that was who my parents voted for. And as far as I was concerned, Vincent Hallinan was a great hero, because he was running for president. He was the head of this wonderful political party. And so I remember, in the way children have of not really knowing what they're talking about, but riding the bus—and we didn't have school buses, you didn't need them in New York City; there were city buses. So we were riding the city bus, I was riding the city bus home, and of course surrounded by a whole lot of other kids from my school. And everybody was talking about, "Who would you vote for president, if you could vote?" And you know, various people were saying whoever it was, Eisenhower or

whatever it was. And I pipe up and said, "I'd vote for Vincent Hallinan." And they all turned on me and said, "But he's a *communist*." You know, I felt my outsiderness very, very much at that—I mean, like, I had no way of defending myself, because I didn't know enough about him or—not that any of us did, could have argued for any of their choices for president, but I was kind of dumbstruck. Like all I wanted to say was, "Well, it's not bad to be a communist," which only made people look at me weirder.

01-00:40:39

So I might also add along those lines that by the time I got to high school, it was clear to my parents that I was not on the same wavelength as most of the kids I was going to school with, but it was important for me to have friends from the same milieu as I was. So my parents and an assortment of their friends, mostly from the Teachers Union, all of whom had children about my age, organized what came to be called the Teenage Club. We used to meet once a week, and those kids were my friends. And not that I saw them all that often. A couple of them, I think, went to Erasmus and lived in my neighborhood, but several of them didn't. I don't know where they found these people, but they would find young professionals, young people, college graduates or college students to lead our group. And again, it wasn't even indoctrination. I can't remember doing anything more in that group than singing folk songs.

01-00:42:06

But it seems to me that somebody who later on in life became very famous—and I'm tempted to say it was Alan Arkin—was one of our group leaders. It was when he was still a struggling actor. He finally, finally broke into theater in an off-Broadway production of a play called [*Heloise* by James Forsyth]. How I remember this, I have no idea. But we all trooped to see it, and we were so proud. This was *our* Alan, who led our teenage group, and here he was up on the stage singing. He had this major part in this play and, oh, we were all so thrilled. And then of course later on, that was the, I guess, the start for him, and he went on to fame and fortune.

01-00:43:03

Then another member of our little group was a girl named Joan Wallach [Scott], and her father was Sam Wallach, who, like my parents—and his wife was Lottie? Anyway, they had also been teachers, high school teachers, and they also had lost their jobs. But Sam Wallach had a brother who was Eli Wallach, the very—who was, I think even then, a well-known actor and became even more well known. And I remained friends with Joan for years, and actually through graduate school, because she was a year ahead of me in school, and she ended up doing graduate work at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. And so she was already there when I went to Madison, and I knew nobody. I didn't have any place to live. I didn't have any—I had nothing. She loaned me her car, she helped me get on my feet. So anyway, I don't—

01-00:44:16
Tewes: What an amazing connection there that—and community that sounds like you all built together.

01-00:44:20
Real: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

01-00:44:23
Tewes: Well, Mimi, you've been describing a family that seems to really relish social justice issues.

01-00:44:29
Real: Absolutely.

01-00:44:31
Tewes: When did that click for you, that that was of interest for you?

01-00:44:37
Real: As I say, that's the way the world was. Like, if you were born and raised in a Catholic family, you didn't think, When did Catholicism click for me? It just *was*. It was part of the atmosphere, it was part of the water I drank in the house. What clicked for me was that all of it was fairly remote, in the sense that any of these issues, even marching in May Day parades, it wasn't connected to a specific issue that was close to home. Oh, I do know—well okay, my parents were very active in protesting the trial and execution of the Rosenbergs, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and so they went on a number of marches to Washington, D.C. I didn't go with them, I was too young, but I was aware of all these things. But again, it's all very, very remote.

01-00:45:38
To the extent that you can call anything clicking, it's when I was in high school, the Supreme Court came down with the *Brown v. Board of [Education of] Topeka*, *[Kansas]* ruling in 1954. And again, I thought that was a wonderful thing, but that was also very remote. The schools I went to—I mean, New York City schools were integrated, but somebody—and I have to suspect it was the NAACP, but I don't know—somebody organized something called the Youth March for Integrated Schools, and this was going to bring young people—primarily high school kids—from around the country to Washington, D.C., to express their support of *Brown v. Board of Education*. And I thought, Aha! Finally, here's something I can do. So I organized a group from my high school to go, and that is all I remember of that. I don't know if I was responsible for getting the bus or if that had been—if I was working with some other larger organization and they supplied—but in any event, I did all the organizing and the logistics, and we all rode down on this bus to Washington. I have no recollection of the march whatsoever, but that *finally* I was doing something. That was, I guess, click number one. And click number two was in college, and that was with the sit-ins and the impact that that had on us.

01-00:47:46
Tewes: Yes, let's get you to college then.

01-00:47:48
Real: Okay, I was going to say, because we have to back up to college.

01-00:47:51
Tewes: [laughs] You started at Swarthmore College in 1959?

01-00:47:55
Real: That's correct.

01-00:47:58
Tewes: Okay, and tell me about your decision to attend. What was it about Swarthmore that interested you?

01-00:48:04
Real: Because it had a reputation for political—I don't want to say activism. It was a Quaker college, and Quakers were known for their support of the peace movement and for having the courage to espouse unpopular ideas and to stand up for social justice. It had that reputation, and I really liked it. There were a number of schools I applied to. The three major ones that—the only ones I would have considered were: Swarthmore, Oberlin, and Antioch. And the reason I considered Antioch was that it also had a very liberal reputation, even back in those days. And Oberlin, to some degree, also. Also, I should add, coming out of Erasmus, which was humongous—I mean, I'm tempted to say there were something like 6,000 students in the school as a whole. There were something like 14 or 1,500 kids in my graduating class. It was huge, it was absolutely huge. And so the one thing I wanted going to college was a small school. I did apply to Cornell as kind of my backup, but I wanted to go to a small liberal arts college where there would be much more of a tight-knit family feel, where we could really get to know the teachers, the classes would be smaller, and we could get to know other students. So, as I say, that my top three choices—and then of those three, Swarthmore was, by far—had the reputation then of being the best academically of the three. To make a very long story short, those were the two reasons I chose the school: one was for its activism and for its orientation in the peace movement, and the other was because of its academic reputation.

01-00:50:22
Tewes: Well, let's start with the easier version there, the academic side of things. What was your major?

01-00:50:29
Real: Well, interesting that you should ask that. I went in majoring in biology. Now why biology? Because when I was in high school, for some reason or other—I have discovered this much, much later—the Advanced Placement program was in existence when I was in high school. You would think that New York, and particularly the good academic schools, would have adopted it, but apparently not. Well, it was mostly that we were tracked, so that all the classes

that I took were at a higher level, an honors level. In high school we took biology, I think, in sophomore year. And then in senior year, if you did well in biology in sophomore year, in senior year you had the option—there was an elective of advanced biology, and I took advanced biology and I loved it. I just *loved* it. We actually had to conduct an experiment, so I dabbled even in a teeny bit of laboratory science. And I loved it, in part because it was probably the most intellectually challenging course that I had taken in school. And so I went into Swarthmore all gung ho to major in biology, and that's what I did freshman year.

01-00:52:07

Two things derailed that path. [laughs] One was political. I became involved immediately at Swarthmore in the Swarthmore Political Action Club [SPAC], which was the—well, the name describes what it was. But a good many members of that group, and particularly several members who came in from my year, were also from Old Left families, and so we had sort of a parallel thing going. We had a Marxist discussion group, and we would read all these papers from these Marxist academic journals. I didn't totally understand them then, and I now understand why I didn't understand them, because they were basically a bunch of hooey. [laughs] I exaggerate. But anyway, our whole focus as members of SPAC and as good Marxists was that we had a higher purpose. We weren't there just to be in academia and fill our brains full of wonderful facts and theories, but we were there to make a difference in the world, and we were there to improve the world.

01-00:53:46

Somehow, at that point in time, all of us felt that biology was—that was real, real ivory tower, that biologists were stuck in their labs. If World War III broke out, they wouldn't know it, because they'd be so busy running their little mice through mazes or something. So biology was not [makes air quotes] politically correct. We didn't use that term; whatever term we used, biology was not the field to go in. What you wanted to be in was history, because if you understood history, you would understand how the dialectic worked and how to go about organizing.

01-00:54:39

Now, I say that there were two things that derailed me. Okay, the other thing was the academic side of majoring in biology. So the first one was, of course, to major in biology, you also had to take chemistry. Let's say I finally found my sea legs in chemistry, but it wasn't me. My brain and chemistry—but if my brain and chemistry did not mesh, I really met my match with calculus. I mean seriously, I could not get my brain around calculus. I even had an older student trying to help me, and I realized, This is beyond me, this is not me. I am not a math/science person. And here I am, the daughter of a math teacher, for heaven's sakes. And I had always done very, very well in math. But back in those days, calculus was not introduced in high school. What did we have? We had trigonometry, and there was something else that today would be called pre-calculus. [phone rings] But even then, it's pre-calculus, it's not

calculus. So I abandoned biology and switched my major to history. So starting in my sophomore year, I was a history major.

01-00:56:33
Tewes: Do you want to pause for a second while the phone rings?

01-00:56:36
Real: Oh well, if that's going to—no.

01-00:56:39
Tewes: We're good. [laughs]

01-00:56:41
Real: You know what I will do, though—let's pause it for a moment.

01-00:56:47
Tewes: [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break. And, Mimi, you just told us about your decision to eventually become a history major, and the challenges therein.

01-00:56:54
Real: Right.

01-00:56:56
Tewes: But before we move on to your activism, I did just want to quickly ask about what it was like being a woman on a college campus in the late fifties and early sixties.

01-00:57:09
Real: You know, I'm almost puzzled by that question, because at Swarthmore—okay, one thing that was probably a reflection of my parents' general world view was that I was never brought up with this idea that I was a girl, opposed to a boy, and therefore expected to behave in certain ways. And expected to dress—I didn't know from fashion, I didn't know from makeup. I didn't know, I think even at Swarthmore—pretty far along in elementary school I was still wearing my hair in braids. It was long, and I just wore it back in a barrette in college. To me, it wasn't even that I didn't know about that, but that was bourgeois. That was beneath my dignity. You didn't waste time; it was so self-centered. It was so narcissistic to be worrying about how you looked, and about flirting with boys and going on dates. That was how I had always been, and that's how I was at Swarthmore.

01-00:58:35

And of course, at Swarthmore, the thing I think particularly in my freshman year that totally overwhelmed me, as it does—I warn my students—when I'm tutoring high school students, I warn them of this all the time. You know, you may be very, very, very bright in the high school you go to, but you're going to go to a very, very, very challenging—a very elite university or whatever. I got to Swarthmore, and here I am surrounded by people who, as far as I was concerned, were so much brighter than I was that it was some sort of fluke

that I even got in. I mean, what was I doing there? I had no idea. I mean, as far as I was concerned, all these people were walking geniuses. And they were men and women; I didn't distinguish.

01-00:59:27

There was no distinguishing between—in other words, except for the fact that there were separate dormitories for men and women, and there were these archaic rules at Swarthmore—in loco parentis rules about men visiting women in women's dormitories, and the six-inch door rule. Have you heard about that? Well, first of all, men could only visit women in the dormitories in the lounge on the ground floor, except for Sunday. Sunday afternoons was kind of visiting hours, and so you could have a boy in your room, but there were two rules that were enforced by the hall proctor. And one was the six-inch door rule, which was that the door to your room had to be open at least six inches, and the proctor presumably carried around a ruler to measure that your door was open. And there was a three-feet-on-the-floor rule, that of the two of you, boy and girl, three of your feet had to be on the floor, which was to discourage obvious activities. [laughs] So anyway, aside [from]—but we all laughed at those rules. We considered them archaic, but of course we abided by them.

01-01:00:55

Oh, and then of course—okay, I have to tell you the May Queen story. So even at Swarthmore, even among this intellectual elite, there was a whole part of the student body—and the boys, of those boys, they belonged to the fraternities. None of our crowd ever joined fraternities. Swarthmore had no sororities, for a variety of reasons which we won't go into. But there were girls who were associated, who were the girlfriends of the boys in the fraternities, so we'd call them the fraternity girls. Okay. So every year there was an event, there was a May Day celebration at Swarthmore, which had nothing to do with the political May Day. This was May Day, as in English country dancing May Day. There was a May Queen who would be crowned, and she would have a court made up of attendants from each class, and she would be crowned. And then the folk dance group would perform a series of English country and Morris dancing, culminating in a maypole dance. As a brief aside, I was in the folk dance group, and so I participated in that event every year.

01-01:02:26

Well, there was one year—it was probably my junior year, sophomore or junior year. So this event, up until then, had been totally dominated by the fraternity crowd. In other words, the—oh, I have to add—the May Queen was elected by the student body. There would be this big vote sometime in the spring, and everybody would vote for the—I think it was certainly the queen, and it may have also been her court. So every year, that had—as I said, it was understood that that was the possession of the fraternity crowd. And so some perky, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, long blonde hair, gorgeous thing from the fraternity crowd would be chosen to be May Queen, and she would be crowned. And then I and the rest of us in the folk dance group, we would do our little number, which we'd been rehearsing all spring, and it would be very,

very—the maypole dance was quite impressive, as were—and then the men would do Morris dancing. It was really a lovely, lovely ceremony.

01-01:03:39

Well, one year we in SPAC decided to hijack the May Queen ceremony. So we launched a huge campaign to elect me May Queen. I think it must have been my whole court, the whole court, as well, so that—and we really, really campaigned, and really, really got out the vote. And lo and behold, we won. So that year, I was May Queen, and I had a court made up of all these other SPAC girls, I think. A little girl who was the daughter of one of my history professors, actually, who I had babysat for—and she was the little crown bearer. It was absolutely adorable. And so I was crowned, and we saw this as this great political victory, that we had established that the May Day ceremony was not just for the fraternity crowd, that we could participate, also. And we did, much to the chagrin of the fraternity crowd. I don't remember what happened after that, but certainly after that, I think to the extent that it continued, it opened up who won. It wasn't necessarily a little, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, WASPy fraternity girl who won.

01-01:05:09

But how did we get off on that?

01-01:05:14

Tewes: Oh, we were just thinking about your experience being a woman on this campus, and that story was something that brought both of those together.

01-01:05:21

Real: Well, that is another manifestation of that, but it is—we were coming at that not because I had been lusting from the day I got to the school to be May Queen, because this was so wonderful and I'd get a crown and I'd get to wear a lovely white dress. We never saw ourselves as girls versus boys; we were all equally talented students and equally capable of doing anything that was put before us.

01-01:06:06

Tewes: Well, thank you. That was a great story. Oh, go on!

01-01:06:06

Real: And the other thing is that that's how the school treated us. Apart from, as I say, these archaic rules, the professors did not treat their girl students condescendingly. They expected exactly as much output from us as they did from the men. As a matter of fact, I can remember my chemistry teacher, when I was floundering in chemistry, coming over to me and delivering basically a little comeuppance speech and basically saying, "You know, come on. You're a bright girl. You shouldn't be flunking your quizzes." And it was because I had dug in my heels and I absolutely—I thought that this was like academic freedom. I refused to memorize, and we were studying the elements. And you know, with each element we'd have to memorize everything from the atomic number to the uses of the element, all this kind of stuff, and I

absolutely refused, so I'd flunk the quizzes. He came over to me, and basically he gave me—he said to me what he would have said to any boy in the class, "You know, straighten up and fly right. You're bright." And I did. [laughs] So I ended up doing very well in chemistry. But I, as I say, I did not enjoy it, and I—

01-01:07:37
Tewes: {inaudible} the way.

01-01:07:41
Real: Yeah.

01-01:07:39
Tewes: But I also want to get back to your political organizing during these years. Was this only through SPAC that you were working on certain causes, or were you involved in outside groups?

01-01:07:52
Real: No, no. And one of the things about SPAC was that we were very, very intent that it be independent of any outside group. So, for example, the only real thing that was going on in the way of active[ism]—if you would even call it protest—was anti-nuclear protest, [National] Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy or SANE, as we called it then. In the very early days at Swarthmore, we would schlep into Philadelphia every once in a while, I think, and participate in—and these would be organized by Quakers, but we were not a chapter of SANE. We were not a chapter of any national student organization. We were our own independent entity, and so everything we did, pretty much, was through SPAC.

01-01:08:56
Tewes: And what kind of causes were you taking up?

01-01:08:59
Real: Well, as I say, at first the only real case was protesting nuclear—or calling for nuclear disarmament, which was a big issue then. I mean, that was the arms race with the Soviet Union, and much rattling of chains and whatnot.

01-01:09:19
The turning point, which I alluded to earlier, which was sort of my second spark, were the sit-ins. And we, of course, heard about the sit-ins through a variety of sources, but that totally, totally galvanized us. I mean, here were kids our age who were actually *doing* something. They weren't just marching in picket lines, they weren't mounting court cases. They weren't being gradual about it, but they were also doing it in this enormously dignified nonviolent way. They weren't being rabble-rousers. They would go down to the lunch counter very, very well dressed. And so the contrast between them, and the white punks who spat on them and ground cigarette butts into their heads and hit them and knocked them off their stools at Woolworth's and stuff, that contrast was just so vivid, and we were just galvanized.

01-01:10:43

So the main thing that came out of the sit-ins, as it affected us—well, it was sort of twofold, but the main one was the NAACP responded to the sit-ins by organizing a nationwide boycott of Woolworth's and Kresge's, which were the two main five-and-dime stores—whoever has even heard of a five-and-dime store today. You know, you're lucky if you have a dollar store. But the Woolworth's in those days all had lunch counters. They were a full-service store: they sold everything from toothpaste to clothing, and they also had these fairly extensive lunch counters. Woolworth's and Kresge's were the two biggest chains of these stores, so the NAACP had organized a boycott of these stores. And we, of course, immediately, immediately signed on, so to speak.

01-01:11:56

So the nearest store was a Woolworth's in the town of Chester. And I guess something that we were aware of—but at that point nobody was protesting—was that that whole area, suburban Philadelphia, was very, very segregated; not by law, but just by design. So a town like Swarthmore, apart from maybe some Black faculty members, was pretty much lily white, and Chester was where the Black people lived. There was a Woolworth's in Chester, so we would go every Saturday and picket the Woolworth's in Chester—rain or shine, snow, sleet, hail, whatever, we would be out there picketing. And again, it would be a nonviolent picket line, not that anybody ever tried to attack us or protest. So that's what we did for—and let's see, I'm trying to remember the sequence of things.

01-01:13:25

I had an aunt, my mother's sister, who through her professional work, knew Ella Baker. And so my aunt knew of the meeting at which SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] would be organized, and Ella Baker played a very prominent role in that. My aunt actually said—offered me the possibility of going to that initial SNCC organizing meeting. Interestingly enough, that thought scared me. I don't know why, but I don't even think—it wasn't so much traveling alone, it was being so close to something that was right on the edge of happening. I didn't feel I was up to it. I didn't have the leadership skills, I didn't have whatever it was going to take. And so one of the other members of SPAC went. We stayed in touch with SNCC. We were very, very aware of what they were doing, and also with the sit-ins.

01-01:14:53

And as the sit-ins began to work their way north, we began to participate in—basically, at that point, they were still picket lines. But one of my closest friends in college lived in Baltimore, Maryland, because her parents both were professors at Johns Hopkins, and she knew what was happening in Maryland. And it was quite a bit, because Maryland was, for all intents and purposes, a Deep South state, I mean, it was totally segregated. And so we would go down to the Baltimore area and picket. It seems to me we must have been doing something more than just picketing, because I got arrested and spent the weekend in jail, in wherever this was in Maryland. I had brought my

schoolbooks with me, my backpack with me, so I remember sitting in the cell in that jail trying to study, and realizing that that was not an ideal study environment. I couldn't concentrate. But anyway, I made the attempt.

01-01:16:10

But I remember getting back to school and being called in by the dean of women, and getting a very, very gentle Quakerly talking to about how I should just understand that—oh, I had missed school, because I was sitting in jail—that it was very noble of me to participate in these demonstrations, and that I could afford to miss a day or two of school, because I was—academically, I was doing very, very well, but that I should realize that I was a role model for other students who weren't necessarily doing as well academically and could not afford to miss school. So I should be careful in encouraging other students to join me when we went on these little excursions into the South. And I nodded, I made the appropriate polite noises, and of course went right on doing what I was doing. I don't think anybody's academic careers suffered, because they did or did not participate in a demonstration or two. But so we did that.

01-01:17:37

And then came the Freedom Rides. So do you want me to get into that?

01-01:17:46

Tewes: Sure. We only have a little bit of time left for today, but I just want to ask: so just with the early activism in Baltimore, you had been a freshman or sophomore then, right?

01-01:17:56

Real: That's right, that's right.

01-01:17:57

Tewes: Wow, you were so young.

01-01:17:59

Real: Yeah, well—I mean, yeah, we thought of ourselves as having—as being invincible and having—we were fighting a moral battle, we were soldiers on this battlefield of social justice. And so we didn't think of ourselves as young.

01-01:18:25

Tewes: [laughs] Of course, youth is wasted on the young. But yeah, let's start in with the Freedom Rides today, and see how far we get. You went in June of 1961, but can you tell me the impetus behind this, how you became involved in it?

01-01:18:42

Real: Okay, okay. Meanwhile, meanwhile my aunt, the one who knew Ella Baker, also somehow she set me up with—whether she knew—she probably did know people at the national headquarters of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], which was in New York, 38 Park Row, in Lower Manhattan. She suggested to me that that would be a great place to volunteer when I was home on school breaks. The one thing that can be said for college is that it just

seems to be like one long break. I mean, you're in school for a couple of months, and then you're home—particularly intercession, which would go on for weeks. Anyway, so that's what I did, so I volunteered at the CORE office. You know, I was manning a typewriter, whatever it was, typing address labels, sending out mail, whatever, but I was volunteering. But I was, again, a little soldier, a soldier ant, but in this much larger battle and working with CORE, so that there was a purpose in this. I was making something possible.

01-01:20:09

That was the spring that the Freedom Rides were organized. And so, of course, I was sitting there hearing about this and thinking, Oh my gosh, this is it. I mean, this is the break I've been waiting for. Finally, this is really doing something. This isn't just picketing, just going from Swarthmore down to Baltimore and whatever it is we did—they told us to stop picketing, and we didn't, so they arrested us—whatever it was. I mean, this was a much bigger, this was a commitment, this was going right into the lion's den. So I thought to myself, This is absolutely fabulous. I've got to do this. So at some point—and I think it was when I was still volunteering there—they sent—well, let's see. I don't know the exact chronology, but I made it known to them—I asked for an application to go on the Freedom Rides, and I filled out the application and I was accepted.

01-01:21:30

My only condition, my only proviso was that I had to finish out my academic year. In other words, I don't know if the words of the dean of women still stuck in my head, but I was still—I was a very, very focused and devoted student. That was very, very important to me that I do well, that I—so I had a commitment with myself and with Swarthmore to finish out the year. So that's what I did, and so I was scheduled then to join the first Freedom Ride group that was scheduled for after the school year ended. So I basically went almost—obviously I went home first, but I basically went almost straight from the classroom to Mississippi.

01-01:22:33

Tewes: And what did you understand this project was going to be about?

01-01:22:41

Real: There was obviously this glaring, glaring example of segregation, of segregated interstate transportation facilities. But not only were they glaring, they were in direct violation of two Supreme Court rulings in previous years. What we were doing—it was twofold, again—we were testing the system, doing a little stress test. But we were also, by the time I joined, we were also doing sort of a jail-in in Mississippi, that one of the ways to create pressure on the State of Mississippi was to have—first of all, to have all these Freedom Riders flooding into the state. But we all, as a condition of our being accepted, we had to agree that we would stay in jail for forty days. And that had to do with a quirk in the law in Mississippi, that you had forty days to post bail, and if you had not posted bail by forty days, you forfeited that right. So CORE

was going to bail us out, but we were going to stay in that full forty days. That would force Mississippi, of course, to house us and clothe us and feed us and put up with all the national publicity that would arouse, and that would be one more way to pressure, at least the State of Mississippi, to discontinue this odious practice of segregated interstate transportation facilities.

01-01:24:30

We were given very, very extensive training by CORE. Before we even left, one of the other things we were signing on to was the fact that it would be nonviolent, that we were committed to nonviolence, and no matter—and that we very likely might face violence, and that we were to react in a nonviolent way. We actually underwent some training in—when our Freedom Rider group had already gathered and we'd all actually gotten as far as Montgomery, we underwent some training that evening where we acted out various scenarios of being beaten and shoved to the ground, and how you got yourself into a fetal position with your arms over your head. [covers head] We were told what to expect once we got arrested, and what we were required—the information we were required to reveal to arresting officers, and what information we did *not* have to reveal, even though we would be asked. It was very, very carefully done and very extensive, so that not too much came as a surprise. We didn't know if a surprise would come out of the woodwork, if our bus would get burned or something.

01-01:26:00

As luck would have it, by—the timing of my particular group was such that—I have to back up again. As any student of the Freedom Rides knows, after the bus burning in Anniston, [Alabama], and the beatings, the Governor of Alabama got out a restraining order against CORE, restraining CORE from doing any Freedom Rides through the State of Alabama. Well, I don't know whether he thought that that would put an end to CORE, and so he only did two weeks, or whether that was the maximum amount of time that he could get in the law in Alabama. I don't know. But it was a two-week restraining order. The restraining order expired just before our group left, so we were the first group that was going to go through Alabama. Up to then, CORE had merely rerouted all the Freedom Ride groups around the State of Alabama to get into Mississippi. But we would be the first group to go through the State of Alabama to get into Mississippi, so that was the big, big apprehension hanging over our heads: was whether, on the one hand, Alabama would realize that the eyes of the nation, and particularly the eyes of the federal government, were on it and there better not be any hanky-panky or funny business, and they had better behave themselves; or whether they would just take this as a further opportunity to show these commie, pinko, hippie Freedom Riders—teach them a lesson. So we sort of held our breath.

01-01:28:10

There are a whole bunch of stories I can tell about what that was like, because we actually spent the night—our group gathered in Atlanta, Georgia. I had come down from New York—again, as I say, I finished out my year at

Swarthmore, went home, gathered my belongings. And then CORE paired me up with another white college student who was also joining that ride, who was from Boston. She came down from Boston and met me in New York, and then the two of us rode the bus together down to Atlanta. And in Atlanta, Georgia, our group formally coalesced, and, as I say, we were given some training then and some background. The next day, we got on a bus and got as far as Montgomery, Alabama—that was the plan—and we would spend the night in Montgomery, and the next day we would go from Montgomery to Jackson, Mississippi. And so on the one hand, we were very apprehensive, needless to say, the minute we crossed the Alabama line from Georgia, because we had no idea what was going to happen. Nothing happened in—the bus was not molested, we were not molested. But when we pulled into Montgomery—okay, do I have time for this one story?

01-01:30:08
Tewes: We've got a few minutes left, sure.

01-01:30:11
Real: Okay, okay. I'll just tell this little anecdote. By this time, of course, the bus driver understood exactly what was going on in his bus. I mean, this is a regular Trailways Bus, it's the regular run from Atlanta to Montgomery at whatever time of day it was. And he realizes, of course, that he is potentially driving a death bus or a firebomb or something. When we started to pull into Montgomery into the Trailways terminal, the first thing everybody saw—us included, but certainly the bus driver—was that there was this mob on the other side of the road. It was being held back by a very slim line of—what are those things called that they use in parades, you know, to hold people back?

01-01:31:16
Tewes: Oh, barricades?

01-01:31:18
Real: Those wooden barricades.

01-01:31:21
Tewes: Okay.

01-01:31:23
Real: I mean, it's the flimsiest—and these people, this mob did not look friendly. And as I often describe them: seriously, they looked like right out of Hollywood central casting. You know, beer bellies hanging over belts, cowboy hats, and they're—[raises arms] they were all waving their arms like that and their fists at us. There was a line of state troopers all along this wooden barricade, but there weren't that many of them. And if this mob had chosen to break through, they certainly could have. The bus driver saw that. He stopped at the Trailways terminal and let out all the regular passengers who were going to Montgomery. That was the end of the line for that particular run. He ordered us to stay on the bus, and he drove us down the street and pulled up behind a dry cleaners—and I think it was a Black-owned

dry cleaners—and we got off the bus there. We were now far enough away from this mob that it would have been difficult for anything to happen. We were met there by—CORE organized this very, very, very carefully, so we were met by a group of Black leaders from Montgomery and by the people who were going to be housing us overnight. We were farmed out to various Black families in Montgomery, and we pretty much hustled from the bus into their cars.

01-01:33:14

The one thing—and you might even want to include—well, I don't know if it's relevant. I was apparently approached by a journalist from the leading Montgomery newspaper. I have no recollection of this whatsoever. Needless to say, that was not the top thing on my mind. I was much more worried about getting the heck out of there and getting into somebody's house and getting away from this potential mob to have even noticed a journalist. This guy's name was Bob [Duke], I think. Okay, I only mention him, because apparently, he took some sort of a something to me. He decided that I—he says this to me later in a letter—that I was the most [makes air quotes] normal-looking person in this group, so he chose me to write a letter to. So when I was in Parchman Prison later on, one of the few pieces of mail I get, of any length, is this three- or four-page letter from this guy spelling out the most incredible—I mean, spewing racist jargon, but from a journalist's point of view. So he's talking about how wonderful things are in Alabama, how, "We treat our negro people very well, and until you rabble-rousers came in—" and he's quoting Gov. [George] Wallace all over the place or—and [Gov. Ross] Barnett, what was his first name? Roy Barnett? And he's quoting these people and he's talking about all of us hippie, deranged, pinko communists come to upset their wonderful way of life, in which everybody has been very happy. And, "Our negro people are very happy here." And then he ends the letter by saying, "Someday you have to come back to Montgomery just on your own so that I can show you what Montgomery is really like and show you how wonderful things—" I mean, but this goes on and on. Anyway, there's three or four pages of this, in which he just spews all, as I say, all kinds of jargon about CORE, about civil rights workers, about Freedom Riders. But with this line that I was the most "normal looking," and therefore wondering why I was a part of this. But I didn't get that letter until weeks later.

01-01:36:05

Tewes: Well, that's an auspicious start to your Freedom Ride journey. As we close up for today, is there anything you want to make sure you add that we haven't yet discussed?

01-01:36:17

Real: From what we've talked about so far, I can't think of anything, I can't think of anything. If I think of anything, I'll let you know.

01-01:36:25

Tewes: Sounds good. It's part of the joy of this ongoing conversation.

01-01:36:28
Real: [laughs] Yes!

01-01:36:28
Tewes: Well, thank you so much, Mimi, for your time.

01-01:36:30
Real: You're very, very welcome.

Interview 2: March 2, 2021

02-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a second interview with Mimi Feingold Real for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on March 2, 2021. Ms. Real joins me in this remote interview from Mill Valley, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you for joining me again here today, Mimi.

02-00:00:23

Real: Delighted.

02-00:00:24

Tewes: When we left off last time, we were just starting to talk about your work in the Freedom Rides in the summer of 1961, and you had mentioned a pretty harrowing experience pulling into Montgomery, Alabama. And I'm curious where you went after that, because you went to stay with some sympathetic families in Montgomery, but what was your next destination?

02-00:00:49

Real: The next destination, in terms of the bus ride, was Jackson, Mississippi, and we stayed in Montgomery overnight with local Black families. I stayed with one family, and along with me was Judy Frieze [Wright], who was another white woman from the North. She was from Boston. And then the next morning, we reconvened at the Trailways Bus Depot in Montgomery, and there several somewhat harrowing incidents at the bus terminal.

02-00:01:38

But the first thing we did was, as long as we were there in our integrated group, we, of course, attempted to test the lunch counter in the terminal, so we all went up to the lunch counter to order coffee. At that point, I think everybody in Alabama—the law-enforcement people and the white people in general were on tenterhooks, because this was two weeks after the bus burning, and this was the first group of Freedom Riders to come through Alabama since the bus burning. I think that they were desperately trying to avoid another situation like that, not because they had suddenly become enlightened, but because they, I think, desperately feared some move by the federal government. So anyway, we attempted to desegregate the lunch counter, and we actually all sat down. The guy behind the counter was extremely, extremely nervous, and he insisted that we show a ticket that we were interstate travelers. So it was like, they were following the letter of the law, and the letter of the law was that federal law only applied to interstate travel. So we all, of course, produced our tickets that showed we were bound for Jackson, Mississippi, and so he very reluctantly served us coffee.

02-00:03:17

Then, there was a delay, because the driver of the bus that we were going to be on—this is a regular Trailways run, this is not some special bus or something—he showed up for his shift and discovered what he was going to

be driving and fled, I mean, he literally refused to drive the bus. So there was a delay while Trailways desperately tried to come up with another bus driver, and they finally did produce one. He made it clear to us that he was willing to drive the bus, but that we were to—all of us, white and Black—were to stay in the back of the bus, number one. And number two, we were not allowed to get off the bus. And this bus, believe me, stopped at every little corner, every little rural junction between Montgomery and Jackson. At each one of these places there would be a teeny-weeny gas station and a little convenience store that had restrooms, but we couldn't get off there. We were not allowed to get off the bus at all, in other words.

02-00:04:43

Then there was one final delay where there was a series of popping noises, and I don't remember if we had actually boarded the bus—I tend to think we hadn't boarded the bus yet—but there were a series of popping noises, and of course the fear was that it was gunshot or explosives of some kind. And so the police came and did a very thorough search of the entire area and a search of the bus, and it turned [out]—they determined that it was probably firecrackers, and it was just somebody trying to scare us. So in any event, we eventually got on the bus and took off to Jackson.

02-00:05:31

I guess for me what was so remarkable about the ride itself was just my introduction to life on the ground in the South, as it were. Because I knew all about how terrible segregation was and how evil the system was on a very theoretical level, but I had never actually seen it in practice. So as the bus moved along—this particular route started in Montgomery, so when we got on the bus it was empty. And as the bus stopped at all these little junctions along the way, more and more people got on until—and of course, all the regular passengers, the Blacks were—they didn't even have to be told where to sit; they knew to go to the back of the bus, and the whites were in the front of the bus. Eventually, all the seats in the bus were taken, and it became standing-room only. I mean, it was like a New York City subway car by the time we got into the State of Mississippi.

02-00:06:42

What overwhelmed me—I mean, here we all were sitting in the back of the bus. The Black passengers, by and large, figured out who we were. I mean, it was extremely unusual to see white people sitting in the back of the bus and sitting side by side with Black people. And the response was unbelievably overwhelming. I mean, it still brings—I still tear up thinking about it. People were so incredibly grateful that we were risking our lives. We had come from faraway places, had come to their teeny-weeny, little neck of the woods to risk our lives for them. They just couldn't thank us enough. I found it hard to believe. It overwhelmed me then.

02-00:07:43

But there was one young man in particular—he was military. He was stationed in Hawaii, I think, but his family lived in either southern Alabama or northern Mississippi. He was taking the bus to Jackson, where he would catch a plane back to wherever he was stationed in Hawaii. He was carrying a large picnic basket, and I—he explained to us. I figured out, I guess, that this was typical, because if you were going to go on a fairly long bus ride, you had to assume that you would not be allowed—if you were allowed to get off the bus, you couldn't go into these convenience stores. I mean, you certainly couldn't go in the front door; you'd have to use some sort of a window in the back, if they would even serve you. So his mother had packed him a huge picnic basket full of food to last him on his trip, not only, I guess, to Jackson, but also on the plane ride. He insisted on giving us all the food in this basket, and that included—I mean, I can remember it to this day: it was fried chicken and corn bread and greens and a chocolate cake, or at least it had chocolate icing, in one of those pink bakery boxes with string around it, but the mother had baked it. He insisted that we have the food to eat, because of course we hadn't eaten anything since breakfast in Montgomery. We said, "No, no, no. This is food for you!" And he just absolutely insisted, so we ate it, and it was very tasty. He insisted on giving us the cake, and I ended up as the carrier of the cake. And this became a huge thing, [laughs] because this cake became sort of symbolic. I was clutching this pink box to my chest the entire time for the rest of the ride and all the way through. I mean, that box and the cake went with me into the Jackson City Jail and the Hinds County Jail, where it was finally consumed by all the white women Freedom Riders.

02-00:10:29

But anyway, that was absolutely overwhelming. And so there we were, in the back of this bus, people packed in. And we had been told ahead of time that CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] had arranged things in Jackson so that it was—the whole thing was totally choreographed in Jackson. There had been this agreement reached with the officials in Jackson, that they would ensure that we would not be attacked if we would just submit voluntarily to arrests, which is what we did. So as I say, we knew exactly what we had to do.

02-00:11:22

When the bus pulled into the Trailways Terminal in Jackson, we filed off the bus directly into the white waiting room. And once there—this was an era where everybody—I didn't smoke, but everybody smoked cigarettes. So assorted members of the group attempted to go up to the counter to buy cigarettes. But of course, waiting for us in the white waiting room was the Jackson City policeman, whose name momentarily escapes me. I could dig it up for you if you needed it. But he played this role with virtually all the Freedom Rides, and so he met us there. Again, it was like a choreographed script. He told us that we had to leave the terminal or we had to go into the colored terminal, and that if we didn't, we would be arrested. And we went through that charade three times. Of course, we didn't move. Those of us who weren't trying to buy cigarettes at the counter had sat down on one of the

seats. So the third time around he said, "Okay, you're under arrest," and led us out the front door.

02-00:12:49

There was—something right out of Hollywood—a black Mariah, a black paddy wagon sitting right outside the front door. He led us all into the paddy wagon, and the paddy wagon drove us to the Jackson City Jail, which was in—it must have been the Jackson City Hall, and it is one of these typical municipal big buildings. We were led into the lobby, and we had to go up to the booking area. And here again, there was this ridiculousness. There were, I think, two elevators—or maybe there was only one elevator. But in any event, they would not allow Blacks and whites to ride up together. Our group could have all fit in the elevator all at once, but no. So the elevator made a number of trips up and down. I don't remember if we were separated by sex, as well as race. But anyway, that was where we were booked.

02-00:14:09

And again, CORE had trained us very, very well about what to expect and what our obligations were and that we were also under no requirement to answer, so I knew all these things. It was fairly nerve-racking, because they, of course, took us in one by one to be booked. And the, whoever it was, deputy sheriff, I guess, looked like something right out of Hollywood central casting. I mean, I don't remember if he had a cowboy hat, the beer belly hanging over the big belt buckle, and Southern drawl. He proceeds to question me. There's a litany of questions, starting with your name and your address and all that stuff, which name and address we were told we were required to give them. But beyond that, we didn't have to answer any questions like: were we a member of the Communist Party? Were we a member of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]? And a number of questions that got worse than that, like did we sleep with—and then they'd use the n-word—and questions of that ilk.

02-00:15:43

And then he asked me—so one of the routine questions was religion, and we had also been primed that we would be asked that so we would know what to answer. And I had, again, a seminal moment, an identity moment, as it were. I knew enough to know that in addition to rampant racism, the South was also noted for rampant anti-Semitism, and I'm Jewish. And I thought, Well now, if I say I'm Jewish, am I going to be led out the back door and subjected to heaven knows what? That was a concern of mine. So I thought, Okay—and I'm thinking all this in that split second before I answered—and so I thought, Okay, I have several options. I could say I'm agnostic or an atheist, and avoid the question of religion. But that, of course, raised another specter, that agnostics and atheists were not looked upon very kindly in the South either. So I figured that wasn't a good route to go. Or I could lie and say that I was Christian, pick some denomination. There was something in my gut, I just could not do that, I just could not. I don't know, it just went against everything in my soul. I just couldn't. So I said, "I'm Jewish." He looked at me with this

sneer on his face and said, "Oh, so you're a Jewess." Kind of—with emphasis, kind of spitting out the "ess."

02-00:18:00

Quite frankly, I was then, what, a sophomore in college? I had maybe read some Shakespeare, but I don't think I had ever, *ever* come across the term Jewess in a modern sense or had any idea that this was a term that people used in ordinary conversation. And I was absolutely taken aback and gave him this puzzled look. He said, "You know, the people who you *say* you are." I mean quite honestly, I didn't know where he was going with that first remark, but once he said that second thing, I realized, Oh okay. [laughs] This is the "chosen people" situation, and this is a typical anti-Semitic misinterpretation of that concept. So I faced kind of a double problem. One was I was Jewish, but I did not have that much in the way of Jewish education, so I was not prepared at that moment to really discuss with him what the concept of chosen people meant and where it appeared in the Bible and what God meant by it and all that stuff. I wasn't prepared. I didn't know enough to discuss that. But I also figured the last thing I needed at that point was to engage in a theological discussion with a deputy sheriff in Jackson, Mississippi, who wasn't going to understand anyway, who was—I mean, it was absolutely clear that he was totally, totally prejudiced against me—not personally, but I represented to him all these hideous things: commie, pinko, radical, every kind of term that you could think of like that, troublemaker. I actually said nothing and hoped that the conversation would take a different tack, which mercifully it did. He didn't pursue that. But I do have to say that was one of my more nerve-racking moments, not knowing what the repercussions of saying that I was Jewish was. But he let that pass. He, later on, proceeded to give me a little lecture about how—and I don't know how this got—he got onto this from Jewish, but he did—how Blacks were not equal to whites and they were inferior, and everybody knew that and that's how God intended it. That I might as well learn that, because I was very misled if I thought anything else.

02-00:21:24

And then we were led off to—it was sort of like getting your driver's license, where first you pass the test, and then you go off and get photographed and fingerprinted. So okay, so then I got fingerprinted and photographed. This is where a lot of people, when I give talks to classes and stuff, and so they've seen my mugshot already—invariably, one of the kids will ask why I'm smiling in my mugshot. And I have very, very distinct recollections of why I smiled, and I suppose part of it was an automatic reaction. You know, you have a camera stuck in your face and you smile. I mean, like at the DMV. You don't want to look like a criminal, so you smile. So I smiled, but there was something deeper than that—and I was aware of it at the time—that I deliberately wanted to smile, because it was my way of thumbing my nose at them and showing them that I had—I did not consider myself a criminal. They might be treating me as one and I had the number hanging around my neck and they might have wanted me to think of myself as some kind of lowlife,

but I was there to tell them that I wasn't the lowlife! [laughs] Their beliefs were the lowlife, and there was nothing that they could do to scare me. I was going to show them, and so I did. And there I am smiling at the camera.

02-00:23:28
Tewes: That's amazing, Mimi.

02-00:23:31
Real: So—

02-00:23:31
Tewes: Before we move on, I do just want to ask: about how many people were with you, these Freedom Riders?

02-00:23:39
Real: We were a group of eight, as I recall.

02-00:23:40
Tewes: Okay.

02-00:23:42
Real: And I think we were fairly equally divided, men and women, and white and Black. Of the women, three of us were white and one was Black. And the men, I think there was one white guy that I remember—I mean, I could look it up. I have the book right next to me, if you want to. But anyway, that was the size of our group, and that was a typical size. Some of the groups were a little bit smaller and some of them were a little bit bigger, but that was, generally speaking, the size of our groups.

02-00:24:24
By this time, it was fairly late in the day. We were taken off [to], like, temporary holding cells, we were taken off to cells in the Jackson City Jail. So I'm thinking that all three of us white women must have been in a cell together; and then the one Black woman, who was Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker's wife, [Theresa Ann Walker], was in a cell by herself, although she was just down the hall from us or down the row, so we could call back and forth. She had a worse time of it than we did, in the sense that she spent the entire night kind of fending off mice and assorted other vermin, because she was all alone in her cell. It may have been the fact that there were three of us in this other cell, the mice were too scared—although we still had the chocolate cake.

02-00:25:28
And then the next day, we were transferred to the Hinds County Jail, which is where all the Freedom Riders ahead of us were already ensconced. By the time we got there, there had already been any number of rounds of Freedom Riders. And of course, we were split up by race and sex, so the three of us white women were thrown into the white women's cell. It was one big cell, which was designed for eight women, and there probably were, I don't know, fifteen or twenty of us—maybe not quite that many, but there were a lot more

than the bunk beds on the wall accounted for. So each of us was given a thin mattress and a sheet and a pillow, and that's it, I think. And so at night, we would just—the floor would be covered, completely covered with mattresses. I don't remember how the four people who were in the bunk beds got them, but it was people who either were older or had infirmities or whatever. But we were the only ones in the cell; there were no regular prisoners. I guess there just hadn't been any white women arrested in the last few weeks or something.

02-00:27:10

I'm trying to remember, I think we were in shouting distance of the Black women. We could sing back and forth. So I don't know if you want me to describe what life was like—I'm sorry, what?

02-00:27:32

Tewes: Just, yeah, that would be really wonderful to hear about that experience. And again, just for reference, you were nineteen years old. [laughs]

02-00:27:40

Real: Yeah.

02-00:27:41

Tewes: But, yes, go ahead.

02-00:27:43

Real: I'm thinking about it also in reference to women, and we certainly were no group of little faint-hearted girls—well, needless to say, I mean, we'd all been on the Freedom Rides. We very quickly organized our daily activities so there was everything—several people in the cell had—were fairly proficient at ballet, so we had ballet lessons. And of course, there were bars to hang on to, although the barres were in the—they were vertical instead of horizontal, but we had ballet. The two things I can remember are ballet and Greek lessons. One of the Freedom Riders was actually a retired classics professor from Vassar, I think. It was one of the Seven Sister colleges. And anyway, I still have my little notebook where I have—with the Greek alphabet written down, and I think we had started maybe learning some very, very simple words. But that, at least, took up time. There also may have been French lessons, because there were certainly enough Freedom Riders who were proficient in French. And then we had periods where we sang, and that is about all I remember, because after about a day or two—do you want the story of how Parchman [State Penitentiary] got into the picture?

02-00:29:40

Tewes: Yes, yes. I want to know how you were transferred to prison.

02-00:29:45

Real: The State of Mississippi, meanwhile, of course, is trying to figure out every conceivable way, short of lynching us or short of physically attacking us, to make life very difficult for us so that we would communicate with future Freedom Riders, "Don't come. It's too awful here." Of course, that would—

things would have to be pretty awful for us to have to say that. So on the one hand, the conditions in the Hinds County Jail were getting more and more crowded, particularly the white—well, for all four categories: white women, Black women, white men, Black men. The cells were getting totally overcrowded, and Freedom Riders kept pouring in. I mean, virtually every day, there would be a new busload and new people pouring in, and it was clear that Hinds County could not accommodate all these people.

02-00:30:51

So somebody, some clever soul in Mississippi came up with the bright idea of transferring us to Parchman State Penitentiary. Now, this was a, from their point of view, very, very clever [idea], because Parchman, of course, even then and even to this day, has a reputation as being an absolutely brutal, brutal state prison, and that we were going to be going—it would be transferring us to a state prison. And again, that very thought was supposed to put the fear of God in our hearts, and we would all get the heck out of there. Of course, that isn't the way it worked.

02-00:31:42

So that is what they did. They transferred us up in groups, because they were using—my recollection is that it was sort of like a paddy wagon, maybe a larger paddy wagon. It didn't have a capacity for that many women, so maybe ten women were transferred up a day or two before us. I think the anticipation was the worst part of it, because we saw them leave, and all we knew—Parchman was like talking about Alcatraz, you know? I mean, it was just, like, awful. We had no idea what they would do to us up there and how we would be treated. And then I was in the second group that got sent up there. I just remember we were put in this—it must have been like a paddy wagon. I don't remember there being windows where we could see out. And that was, I have to say, very, very unnerving, because we had no idea where we were going. All we knew was that Parchman was way up in the northern part of Mississippi, that there are vast swathes of Mississippi that have swamps and heaven knows what, and bodies get dragged out of the swamps. We had no idea.

02-00:33:20

On the way up, the bus stopped, actually, in one of these absolutely remote areas. Absolutely nothing around. Somehow either we could see out through the front window or something, but the bus stopped. That was probably, again, one of the more nerve-racking moments, because I thought, Okay, this is it. We're about to be dragged off into the swamps, and nobody's ever going to find our bodies. But I don't know whether the driver had simply stopped to relieve himself or what, or whether that was done to scare us. But anyway, the bus then took off, and eventually we get to Parchman.

02-00:34:03

I don't remember if we knew this ahead of time or if we learned it when we got there that we were going to be housed in what was called the maximum-

security unit. This is where they locked up—well, first of all, death row was in the maximum-security unit, but also all the most recalcitrant prisoners were also locked up there. But they were going to lock us up there. I suppose this was supposed to put the fear of God in us, that we were being treated like we were ax murderers or something, and heaven knows what they would do to us.

02-00:34:43

Our own theory, which we developed fairly quickly, was that the purpose was exactly the opposite. The purpose was—oh, the other thing they worried about, the other thing they worried about was that if we were allowed to mingle with the regular prison population, that all of us white women would be raped by the Black male prisoners. That was a common assumption. I would meet it again in Louisiana. That was automatically assumed. You stick a white woman, a young white woman into a situation where there are a lot of Black men, and she is going to be raped. Period, end of story. I mean, that's the way it is. So we were being protected from being raped. Our theory was quite the opposite: that they were concerned that we would infect the Black prisoners with our ideas, and they would have all kinds of internal problems on their hands, so they wanted to keep us as far away from their regular prison body as they could, so we were locked up in the maximum-security unit.

02-00:36:04

Now, the maximum-security unit—did I send you pictures?

02-00:36:13

Tewes: No, I don't think I've seen those.

02-00:36:14

Real: Oh, hang on here just a moment. A little show and tell. [holds up paper] This is a diagram of one half of the maximum security unit, so there was another wing coming off this other side.

02-00:36:30

Tewes: Okay, so there's a long hall with cells, and then a larger vestibule entryway, it looks like.

02-00:36:37

Real: Yeah, right, right. And this catwalk was literally that. Prison personnel could walk up and down it, and a lot of the electrical and plumbing work was there. The Freedom Rider women were in this row of cells. Our understanding—and I've heard people contradict this—but our understanding at the time was that the prisoners who were in this row of cells, who we couldn't see were—that that was death row. All we knew was that we backed up into cells that had Black men in [them]—and I can tell you about that in just a second. But anyway, all these cells were occupied by Freedom Rider women.

02-00:37:44

We were segregated by cell, but there was no attempt to label a particular cell—like the odd numbers were white and the even numbers Black or

something. But within a cell, you had only Black women or only white women. The cell was built for two, designed for two people, and most of the cells had two people. By the time I got there, however—this is a little diagram of the cell—by the time I got there, they were running out of room, so we were actually three to a cell. This is like again, something straight out of Hollywood, what a cell looks like. There were bunk beds on the wall, so it's two beds, and then in the back of the cell there was a toilet and a sink and, oh, a light, I guess. The door to the cell was up here in front. So we were issued mattresses—a mattress, a sheet, a pillow, a Bible, and a cup. And so I'm trying to remember now—I honestly don't remember how—what arrangement we had in our cell as to who slept on the floor. But at any given point, somebody was sleeping on a mattress on the floor, and then the other two of us were sleeping on the bunk beds.

02-00:39:37

Again well, from the prison's point of view, they were trying to make life as miserable as they could for us. I was very, very fortunate, in being one of the earliest groups to come up there, because starting in about the next group to come up, they devised this new form of torture, which I don't know if anybody has told you about, for the incoming women of doing vaginal searches, on the theory that we were trying to smuggle things into the prison in our various orifices. I do have to say that was unbelievably horrific. Mercifully, I didn't have to go through it, but we heard the women screaming. The search was done by a woman trustee, a woman prisoner who had been given certain responsibilities. My understanding was she had a bucket of disinfectant and a single glove, and she'd glove her hand and literally stick her hand up a girl's vagina, and then she would then stick her hand in the bucket of disinfectant, and then move on to the next girl. And needless to say, this was excruciatingly painful, and they were just shrieking. We could hear that.

02-00:41:09

Oh, we were also issued uniforms. [laughs] I'd call them cute in any other context, but the—and apparently, the men did not get uniforms like this; I only learned this at, I think, our fiftieth anniversary. I assumed that the men also had black and white striped pants, but we women were issued black and white striped skirts. [laughs] They came in an assortment of sizes, and you would somehow be given a skirt that somehow fit you. We were allowed to keep the blouse that we had on when we arrived, but we had this black and white striped skirt.

02-00:41:58

Anyway, then we were basically locked in our cells for the entire duration. We were let out, I think—I'm trying to remember if it was once a week or twice a week—each cell, one at a time, would be taken down to the end of the cell block where there was a shower. We were allowed to shower and we were issued a fresh skirt, and then we would go back to our cell.

02-00:42:29

They brought our meals to us—and I do have to say the food was a slight cut above the Hinds County Jail food, in part because Parchman is a prison farm, and so a lot of the, particularly the vegetables—which, by the time they reached us, were way overcooked and swimming in grease, but okay. But they were at least—presumably had been grown on the grounds of the prison farm. I mean, I learned all about Southern prison cuisine. What was the stuff called—it was syrup, and I don't think it was molasses. It was something that was even of lower grade than molasses, and it was dark and thick, and you got that with biscuits in the morning. There may have also been eggs, but that was a main part of breakfast, was biscuits and syrup. But the syrup was, to my Northern palate, fairly ghastly tasting. It wasn't what I'd call sweet. I mean, there was sort of an undertone of sweetness, but it was very bitter. A lot of cornbread, a lot of, as I say, fried greens that have been fried, deep-fried in oil.

02-00:44:07

As I mentioned, a lot of the Freedom Riders smoked, and so one of the favorite tricks of the jailer was to walk up and down the aisle in front of the cells smoking. He'd drop his cigarette, and it would be just far enough away so that you couldn't reach it from the cell.

02-00:44:30

There was a famous incident with the mattresses. Did you know about that? Okay, well we—again, we organized our days very, very carefully so that we had either activities or quiet periods all through the day and well into the evening. Some of those periods involved singing. [holds up paper] And the maximum-security unit—we're over here, and the wing over on this side had the men, the men Freedom Riders. And we did a lot of singing, and we could hear the men singing, and they could hear us, so there would be a lot of singing back and forth. Well, as I say, the jailers were trying to figure out any which way to make us miserable, and so they finally decided that they were going to forbid singing, it was creating too much of a racket. So they came through and they kept giving threats that, "If you don't stop singing, we're going to take away your mattresses." We, of course, kept singing, and they ultimately took away our mattresses.

02-00:45:52

Now, I might—okay, remind me—there's one other thing about women that I want to mention in here. They took away our mattresses, so we were without mattresses for, I'd say, two or three days. It was very uncomfortable. So one of us was sleeping on the cold concrete, on the floor. The other two were not any more comfortable sleeping on just the steel bed frame of the bunk bed that had little ventilation holes in it, so you'd wake up in the morning and you'd have all these little round marks all over your body. And then they would turn the—there wasn't air conditioning, but there was some sort of an air cooling system, and they would turn that up to its maximum so that it got very cold. And of course, the metal and the concrete floor got very cold, so it was very

uncomfortable. It didn't stop us from singing, however. We kept right on singing, and we kept right on doing whatever we were doing.

02-00:46:59

The only reason that we got our mattresses back was that there were a bunch of Freedom Riders from Minnesota, and somehow word got back to the Governor of Minnesota that citizens of his fair state were being mistreated in this following way, that they were being imprisoned and had their mattresses taken away. And the Governor of Minnesota got on his high horse, so to speak, and organized a commission to go down to Mississippi and investigate the conditions under which the citizens of his fair state were being held. So, needless to say, the prison officials, knowing that this commission was going to be coming to investigate our conditions, returned the mattresses, gave us all fresh black and white striped skirts, gave us fresh sheets, and they just had to kind of step down and swallow their pride. So we got our mattresses back.

02-00:48:10

I mentioned about women. One of the things that, again, struck me, because it was so foreign to me, was the way that women were treated or were looked at in the South. And maybe I was dimly aware of that from reading I had done in college, but to see it in action, to see this notion that women were fragile creatures that needed to be up on a pedestal and we needed to be protected and our virginity needed to be protected—so we were in this peculiar no-man's land. Because on the one hand, we're pariahs. We're these commie, hippie, pinko, radical people who have come down to overthrow their way of life; and on the other hand, we're women. So there was a limit to what they were willing to do to us, and one of them was physical. Aside from the vaginal searches, I don't think any of us had a hand laid on us. You know, like, we weren't beaten, we didn't have hoses turned on us, we didn't have buckets of water thrown on us. Those sorts of things, I learned later, were done on the men's side. When they refused to give up their mattresses, particularly the Black men were beaten pretty badly, and they did, I think, have hoses turned on them. So they were treated fairly brutally, where as I say, because we were women, and Southern chivalry—what shreds of it were left—were turned on. And again, that struck me as so ridiculous. It went part and parcel with what was wrong with the entire system. I mean, the entire way of life, as far as I was concerned, was skewed. And when I'm saying that, I'm talking primarily about white Southerners.

02-00:50:44

What I did gain was an enormous appreciation of Black culture in the South at the time. Yeah, a respect that I still hold. There was a morality, there was a tight-knit sense of family, there was a sense of duty and of hard work. There were all kinds of things that were in direct contrast to what was going on in the white community. But anyway—

02-00:51:26
Tewes: When you could see—the women, you said, were treated fairly well. What about Black women? Was this just for white women?

02-00:51:34
Real: See, I have never heard a Black woman tell me that she was beaten. They may have been afraid to touch the Black women, simply because there were all of us white women on that cell block, and we might have raised a stink. I honestly don't know. I'm sure that to the extent that they could get in little verbal jibes and call the Black women all kinds of names, they did. And I'm sure that to the extent that they were in any way—polite is hardly the word I would use—but at least not rude to us, I'm sure they were rude to the Black women. But I don't think any of them were beaten—

02-00:52:36
Tewes: Okay.

02-00:52:36
Real: —in prison anyway.

02-00:52:37
Tewes: Okay. You know, I'm curious about these toilet paper letters that come up later in—

02-00:52:45
Real: Oh, the toilet paper letters from Louisiana.

02-00:52:48
Tewes: Oh, I'm sorry. Okay, we'll get to those later. [laughs]

02-00:52:49
Real: That's okay, it's okay. We'll get there, we'll get there. Oh, I mean, there were letters. We were allowed to receive and write letters in Parchman. Of course, they went through a censor, so the letters that we received, we didn't get very many. I had worked out a very primitive code with my family so that if I wanted to talk about CORE, I would talk about apples. There were other code words that I would use. So I think we were allowed to write a weekly letter, and my mother, of course, being a librarian, saved all those letters. So somewhere I still have them, all these letters that I wrote from Parchman. Everything had to be couched in very positive terms, like, "We're having a wonderful time here and the food is so delicious and we're being treated very well." [laughs] I couldn't say very much more than that. A few letters did get through from friends of mine, but if they said anything at all supportive of what I was doing, it would get x'ed out.

02-00:54:12
Now, the most famous letter that I got in Parchman—I don't know if I mentioned this earlier—was a letter from a journalist in Montgomery.

02-00:54:26
Tewes: Yes, you did explain. Bob Dole, was it?

02-00:54:29
Real: Bob Dole—Bob Duke, I'm sorry. Bob Duke. I'm looking at the letter right now. He claims that he interviewed—he says, [reads letter] "Your audacious group, after it debarked from an interstate carrier in a pelting rain at the Greyhound Bus Station here last month—" so we must have—in Montgomery, we must have pulled in—okay, that may have been the only bus terminal in Montgomery. And then he says, "I meant to remonstrate with you before your motley crew left our peaceful city, but alas, it was too late. Why did I bother to consider your case? Well, you seemed more normal than most of the riders I've met. Unfortunately, the majority of the so-called 'Freedom Riders—' " he has it in quotes—"with whom I have come in contact impress me as being first-class lunatics." And he goes on and on and on. He defends the Southern way of life, he defends the Governor of Alabama. He talks about how—that the Blacks are very happy in Alabama, and they have a wonderful way of life. We can't come in from outside and tell them how to run—I mean, this letter goes on for three-and-a-half pages, ending with—oh, he does talk about us as being a bunch of nuts, and then he says at the end, "As for me, I am a loyal Southerner who regards his Southern heritage as the greatest honor of his life. I offer no apologies for my stand." And then he says, "Miriam, visit Montgomery after you are freed from jail. Do not come as a Freedom Rider, but as a tourist, interested in receiving a true picture of the South. Write to me when you get a chance." Needless to say, I neither wrote to him not returned to Alabama as a tourist. But that letter got through with—I mean, there are just one or two little cross-outs, which for all I know—well, I think that the—he may have made. But that got through in its entirety.

02-00:57:22
Tewes: Wow, so surreal. [laughs]

02-00:57:27
Real: To this day, I crack up on that line that he considered me more normal than most of the riders he met. [laughs] I've never known whether to take that as a compliment or an insult.

02-00:57:43
Tewes: Yeah, hard to tell.

02-00:57:46
Real: Because—

02-00:57:46
Tewes: Go ahead.

02-00:57:47
Real: To be absolutely honest, in my—just in my little motley group, what he called motley group, there were three of us white women. And I didn't think that I looked more—as a matter of fact, one of the women in our group was

Southern. She was from Atlanta, and she was blond-haired and blue-eyed, and I would have thought he would have thought that *she* was the normal-looking one. But okay, he thought I was normal.

02-00:58:19

Tewes: Why not? I want to zoom out for a second. I believe you mentioned to me before that it was your intention to stay in jail for a month, and that was part of the tactics here?

02-00:58:32

Real: That's right, that's right.

02-00:58:34

Tewes: And so did you stay the whole month?

02-00:58:36

Real: Yes, yes. That was part of the commitment we made with CORE when we signed up for the Freedom Rides. Part of CORE's tactic was to basically do like a jail-in. It was to fill the jails and keep them filled, and just make as much of a nuisance for the State of Mississippi; drain their coffers, so to speak, feeding and clothing and housing all these Freedom Riders. The reason for forty days was Mississippi had this kind of arcane rule that once you were arrested and jailed, you had forty days to post bail. If you had not posted bail by the fortieth day, you forfeited the opportunity. So on the one hand, we committed to CORE that we would stay in jail for forty days, and CORE committed that on the fortieth day, they would bail us out.

02-00:59:35

So to be absolutely honest, I think I got bailed out several days early. That's because Judy Frieze, who was a cellmate of mine and, as I say, I had come down from Boston with her and her parents had been in touch with my parents, her parents worried about her, because she had asthma, and she actually had an asthma attack the first night that we were in Parchman. They wouldn't give her her asthma inhaler until the next day, so I sat up with her all night. I don't know whether Judy had written to her parents and let her parents know that she'd had an asthma attack or what, but they got very worried about her, so they insisted on coming down and getting her out of jail before the forty days was up. But it was like on the thirty-seventh day. And they called my parents and said, "Well, we're driving down to pick up Judy, and as long as we're getting her, do you want us to pick up your daughter?" And my parents said, "Yeah, why not?" So Judy and I were released together.

02-01:00:53

Tewes: Wow. While on the subject of parents, you come from this very Left background. How did they feel about you participating in something like the Freedom Rides?

02-01:01:04

Real: Okay. Well, on a general level they were, of course, enormously, enormously proud. I mean, all I was doing was following out everything they had taught me from the time I was an infant. [laughs] And they did everything they could to support me and to support the Freedom Rides—I think even while I was in jail. And after I got out of jail, they organized a number of coffees, little get-togethers where I would tell my story, and then they would give a little fundraising pitch and raise money for CORE.

02-01:01:46

Having said all that, my mother, years later, confessed to me that the entire time that I was on the rides, she was physically sick. She was so sick to her stomach with anxiety that she actually took to her bed, because I was on—it was the first bus through Alabama, and so she didn't know whether the next phone call was going to be from CORE saying, "We're terribly sorry to inform you—" and she said when CORE called her to let her know that I had been safely arrested in Jackson and was in jail, it was an enormous relief for my mother. [laughs]

02-01:02:34

Tewes: Well yes, then she knew exactly where you were.

02-01:02:36

Real: Exactly, exactly, exactly. [laughs]

02-01:02:39

Tewes: Goodness! Oh okay, before leading you into that question, we were talking about the end of your time at Parchman. What happened when you left? Where did you go to next?

02-01:02:59

Real: Well actually, by that time my parents were—we had a place where we vacationed every summer, a cottage in Upstate New York that they rented. It was a little cottage, a little colony of cottages, and they were all rented by friends and colleagues of theirs, so it was all these Lefty New York City schoolteacher types and their children, and so I ended up there. I don't remember now the details of how I got there. The Friezes would have brought me—I honestly don't know. But I ended up there, and I must have spent pretty much the rest of the summer with them up there, and they organized, of course, some coffees up there.

02-01:03:55

My mother tells a very funny story. This was in way, way, way Upstate New York near Ticonderoga, Fort Ticonderoga/Lake Champlain. It's way out in the country, and there was this little, rural grocery store that they would go to to buy their little grocery needs. And so my mother was in there one day and chit chatting with the woman behind the counter, and my mother said very proudly, "Oh, my daughter is arriving this weekend, so I'm buying some extra special things for her, because she just got out of jail." [laughs] My mother is

saying this very proudly! And the woman behind the counter says, "Oh, I'm so *sorry*." I mean, because it meant a completely different thing to her. Oh, my poor mother, to have had a daughter who ended up in jail. How awful!

02-01:04:57

And then that fall I went back to school, I went back to Swarthmore.

02-01:05:03

Tewes: What was that transition like into—for lack of a better word—civilian life again?

02-01:05:10

Real: Weird. Of course, when I got back to Swarthmore, I was active with SPAC [Swarthmore Political Action Committee], and apparently I spoke. I have no recollection of it *whatsoever*. But Penny Patch, in—I can't remember the name of the book now, *[Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement?]*, where she has a chapter, but she talks about how the inspiration for her getting involved in civil rights was hearing my talk in Clothier [Hall] at Swarthmore. And she was so impressed, she said, "Here was this tiny, little woman—" you know, because at the time I was all of five feet tall—and that she, Penny, was only a year or two younger than I was, and here I had done this incredible thing. She was just so turned on that she then got involved, and then she became very involved in the Civil Rights movement.

02-01:06:17

But I'm trying to remember. I don't remember exactly what we did that year, but with—I mean, SPAC did whatever—if we were continuing to picket Woolworth's, or if that was the year we did the roller skating rink test? There was this roller skating rink, [Great Leopard Skating Rink], that was midway between Swarthmore and the town of Chester, [Pennsylvania], which was heavily Black. It came to our attention that the rink was basically segregated, although, of course, this is Pennsylvania; it can't be overtly segregated, but they had some sort of situation set up so that various nights had certain names. On certain nights, they would only admit white people, and on other nights they would, I don't know, only admit Black people. I don't remember exactly how it worked. All I remember is that we organized a test case, and we had various groups of people going singly and in groups—whites, Blacks, mixed groups—going to the skating rink on a whites-only night. The Blacks would be turned away, and the mixed-race groups, I think, would be turned away, as I recall. And we filed a complaint, we sued or we did—you did whatever you did, and it actually went to court. We all testified in court, and they were found guilty and discontinued that practice, so we basically desegregated that roller skating rink.

02-01:08:28

So over the course of the next two years, I was involved and certainly at the forefront of any sort of civil rights activities that we did. I know that various—this may have been my senior year—when we would go down on

weekends to Maryland, they were having picket lines and sit-ins in Maryland, and we would—near the Eastern Shore; actually, even maybe outside of Baltimore—and we would join in the demonstrations. I remember being arrested in Maryland and spending the weekend in jail in Maryland. I, of course, had brought my backpack with me with my textbooks, and sat in my jail cell attempting to do my work. And did I mention this, that I was called to task by the dean of women?

02-01:09:31
Tewes: You did, and so there was that underlying tension of your activism at Swarthmore and your academics—

02-01:09:36
Real: Right, right. I mean, it wasn't affecting my academic performance. I was doing very well academically. But her concern was that I was a role model, and that I would be tempting girls who were not doing quite so well academically and were maybe struggling to participate in these activities, and they would get behind in their schoolwork and maybe flunk out of school. So I probably made polite noises that I would certainly make sure that any girls who got involved—that anybody who got involved understood the risks that they were taking, that they might get arrested and they might miss class and they might end up in jail for a weekend, and thereby not be able to do their work.

02-01:10:34
Tewes: That's so interesting. So I think you graduated around 1963 from Swarthmore?

02-01:10:40
Real: That is exactly when I graduated.

02-01:10:41
Tewes: Perfect. And what were your plans at that point? Were you intending to look for a career or were you really invested in this civil rights work you were doing?

02-01:10:55
Real: Well okay, both. Both. So as a proper student at Swarthmore—by that time I was a history major, American history. And so the course, of course, was for me to go to graduate school. Part of this, I don't want to say—I attribute to the culture at Swarthmore at the time, that academics and the academic way of thinking was the highest form of thinking, and that if you were career oriented or you were on the teacher training track, you were at a slightly reduced level. You know, that you really wanted to be an academic for academics' sake, that you were a scholar for scholarly sake. And the fact that this would be put to use was somehow besmirching the pristine beauty of this scholarship, so heaven forbid we really thought about career. So obviously, if you're on this scholarly track, the thing is you continue on this scholarly track by going to graduate school.

02-01:12:24

So I did whatever it was one needed to do. I must have taken the GRE [Graduate Record Examinations] and I applied to graduate school. I think I was accepted pretty much everywhere I—well, I don't even remember now. I know that it came down to a couple of schools that I was considering. One of them was the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and one of them was Northwestern, both of which, at the time, had outstanding American history faculty. At that point, UW Madison was one of the leading—had one of the leading American history departments in the country, and a lot of the leading scholars were or had just been in the Department.

02-01:13:26

The reason for Northwestern—okay, so I'll have to backtrack here a bit. But I was also, by this time, also interested in African history, because I thought, Okay, if I'm interested in the Civil Rights movement, I should really back up as a historian and understand the roots from which Black America arose, and so I should know something about African history. And Northwestern, I think, had a very strong African history program. As luck would have it, UW Madison also did, and UW Madison had one of the leading academicians in the field of African history teaching there at the time, so I ultimately chose Wisconsin. And so I was all set to enter Wisconsin the fall of '63 with a major in American history and a minor in African history, and then Louisiana intervened.

02-01:14:39

Tewes: Yes, how did you get to Louisiana after graduation, and what were your intentions there?

02-01:14:45

Real: Okay. So I, of course, ever since the Freedom Rides, had kept in close contact with CORE. I may have even spent school vacations volunteering at their national headquarters office, which was, at that time, in New York: 38 Park Row. But in any event, I was aware that CORE was organizing a voter registration project in Louisiana.

02-01:15:23

Excuse me, this is the historian in me backing up to give just a little bit of an overview. The voter registration work—and that started in the summer of '63—started from initiatives coming from both the civil rights organizations themselves and from the federal government. So from the civil rights organizations' point of view—and this included—this was CORE, SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee], SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], NAACP—I think I've covered pretty much all of them. We began to see—I mean, the Freedom Rides were an enormous success, but it became obvious that that approach to ending a whole system of segregation, a little piecemeal approach where, okay, first you knock down segregation in public schools, then you knock down segregation in interstate

travel facilities—so if you go at this piecemeal, centuries from now we'll still be knocking down pillars of segregation. So what is another way?

02-01:16:47

And there's also this feeling also that there has to be a way of mobilizing the people themselves, in the South primarily, that the initiative needs to come from them, and that there needs to be a life-altering thing where they become part of the system, rather than having each individual way that they interact with the system cleaned up. And what better way than the right to vote? It became very, very clear—I mean, everybody knew in the civil rights organizations that throughout much of the Deep South, Blacks were almost totally disenfranchised, and in the upper part of the South it wasn't much better. Okay, that's from the civil rights organizations' point of view.

02-01:17:52

Meanwhile, the federal government is thinking—and again, I'm putting words in their mouth—What can we do to get these troublemakers off the street and off the TV screens, which is driving us nuts, because it's playing terribly in the Cold War TV game? Khrushchev and the Soviets were making hay out of this stuff. Kennedy was beside himself, How do we shut these troublemakers up without appearing that we are suppressing their energies? Aha! Voter registration. Great. It gets them off the street. They're going to be out in the backwoods talking to people trying to get them to register. We're not going to hear anything—I mean, that in other words, We're not going to have large groups of people getting attacked and getting beaten and buses burned and all that kind of stuff. This will be under the radar. So actually, there was actually a foundation set up, I think, to provide funding for that initial round, that initial voter registration project, and some of the funding came with the help of the federal government. It wasn't federal funds, but it—and I may be mangling history a little bit, but that is my best recollection at the moment.

02-01:19:24

In any event, all the civil rights organizations came together in a coordinated effort to launch this massive voter registration project throughout the South. And basically, what they did—and this was a very, very smart move—was to carve up the South, so that you didn't have workers from different organizations falling all over each other attempting to reach people. And CORE, as it were, got Louisiana. SNCC got Mississippi and maybe parts of Georgia? I'm less clear who got what, but it was mostly CORE, SNCC, and SCLC.

02-01:20:15

But CORE got Louisiana, and CORE then decided—again, I just have to give CORE so, so much credit. They were very, very smart. What they did was rather than tackle the state as a whole, they focused in on: what area in Louisiana has the largest concentration of Blacks who are not registered to vote? And voila, that turned out to be the Sixth Congressional District, which is basically the row of counties along the horizontal bar of the L—I wonder if

I have a map. But anyway, these counties, they all bordered on Mississippi at the northern end, and they might as well have been straight out of Mississippi. And in Louisiana, to make matters even more confusing, counties are called parishes, because that's a holdover from the French; it has nothing to do with the Catholic Church. The parishes that were closest to the Mississippi River were like something out of the antebellum period. There were still plantations—many of them were tourist attractions, but there were still plantations. The Blacks were living in virtual servitude. They weren't quite indentured servants, but they—or what is the other term. I'm blanking on it.

02-01:22:09

Tewes: Sharecropper?

02-01:22:10

Real: Sharecroppers, yeah. They weren't sharecroppers—although no, some of them were. But most of them, at least in the parishes that I worked in, most of them were sweet potato farmers, and they were absolutely beholden to the one local cannery that bought their sweet potatoes and turned them into those hideous things—I don't know if you're old enough to remember them. But back in the day, sweet potatoes would get canned in this treacly, awful, sweet, sugary syrup. A particular treat at Thanksgiving is you'd empty a can of this stuff into a baking dish, and then you'd put marshmallows all along the top and you stick that in the oven for a while. [laughs] It nauseates me today even to think about that, but that was a big treat. So anyway, it was this cannery, Princeville [Canning Company], and they bought everybody's sweet potatoes. And of course, that was a big club that they held over everybody's head, because if you did anything out of line, you wouldn't have a market for your sweet potatoes, and then you wouldn't have any money.

02-01:23:23

Well anyway, CORE chose the Sixth Congressional District, which was unbelievably classic. As I say, there were plantations. The two counties that were closest to the Mississippi were West Feliciana and East Feliciana Parishes, side by side. In these two counties the population was over 50 percent Black. I think in West Feliciana Parish it was probably close to 60 or 70 percent Black. In West Feliciana Parish, not one single Black person was registered. In East Feliciana Parish there may have been one or two Black people registered. There were other parishes where things were not quite so bad. There was a parish called Iberville, the parish seat of which was Plaquemine, [Louisiana], not to be confused with Plaquemines Parish. But anyway, CORE targeted that area.

02-01:24:33

And so somewhere in probably the spring or summer—oh no, of course it must have been the spring of '63—I applied to be part of this voter registration drive, and of course I was immediately accepted and they all knew me. And so I literally—I think I drove—went south directly from Swarthmore—maybe I went home for a brief period, but I remember driving south with a couple of

other volunteers who were also going to be part of that project. Oh, just a second here. I'm sorry, that may have been the following summer.

02-01:25:36

In '63—okay, when I graduated from Swarthmore, the project had not yet started up in Louisiana, so there was a period of a week or two that needed to be filled. So at that time, there was a very active voter registration campaign, a very big movement/activity on the Eastern Shore of Maryland run by Gloria Richardson [Dandridge], a very, very strong-willed, powerful woman. And a number of my friends from Swarthmore were, I think, already involved with Gloria and with that project. So I went down and I joined them for however many days. I was killing time until I could go to Louisiana.

02-01:26:27

And so then I went to Louisiana. The CORE task force was gathered in the City of Plaquemine in Iberville Parish, which was the most progressive of the parishes, meaning that in Iberville, there were already a number of Blacks registered. But the place was still something out of some previous century—totally segregated town, segregated schools, I mean, you name it. The training went on for several days, so we were trained both in nonviolent techniques, but also trained in how to do voter registration training. Because Louisiana at this time had a citizenship—well, they had a voter registration form which was byzantine. It was so carefully designed to prevent anyone from voting, I mean, you'd have to be very literate to get through this. Now, if you were white and totally illiterate, you, of course, were waved through and you put your x on the appropriate lines and you could vote. But if you were Black and you made the slightest error on any *part* of this byzantine—when I say form, it actually was several different pieces, and if you made a single error on any part of it, you would be rejected. CORE had obtained copies of all these forms, and we were trained, first of all, on how to fill them out correctly, and then how to teach other people how to organize, how to organize community meetings, bring people in to train them how to run a voter registration drive. And then I guess we may have had some practice in Iberville going door to door, and then we were divided up into groups that were sent to the various parishes.

02-01:29:01

I was sent—East and West Feliciana Parish were treated together. At that time, it was considered too dangerous, actually, to send CORE workers, to have them go in and live in West Feliciana, so we were all housed in Clinton, which was the parish seat of East Feliciana Parish. And then from there, CORE workers would make daily forays to West Feliciana. I was the only white woman. My recollection was that there was at least one other Black woman; there may have been two Black women. I was the only white woman. We were, of course, an integrated group. The guys, there were, I think, at least two white guys, as I recall.

02-01:30:06

The CORE field secretary, whose name was Ronnie Moore—and he's another extraordinary, extraordinary person. And as I say, CORE just—everything they did was very carefully thought out. So Ronnie had made a preliminary visit to East Feliciana Parish to meet with the various law enforcement officials to let them know that an integrated group was going to be coming into the parish and was going to be conducting voter registration work in the Black communities, and that he—Ronnie and CORE—expected that we would be protected from any harassment by any people in the community who might object to our being there. There actually a very famous photograph that appeared in *Ebony* magazine of the district attorney sitting—leaning back in his chair with his feet up on the desk. He asked who was going to be in the group, and Ronnie told him, and he said to Ronnie, "Well, I just want to let you know that I cannot vouch for the safety of the white woman. Because she's—I can't vouch for what those Black—" and he didn't use the word Black—"field hands are going to do to her." So again, that's that notion that that's what happens when you put a white woman into a Black environment. So he could not vouch for my safety, and I don't know what Ronnie said to him. Maybe he'd expect that he would or—I mean, that I was coming whether he vouched for it or not. So I did.

02-01:32:13

I was there all summer, and worked only in East Feliciana Parish. It was considered—at that point it was too dangerous to send a white woman into West Feliciana. And we spent our days canvassing. We had the county divided up. We knew where all the Black areas were, and this was a very, very, very rural county. Clinton was the only town, and it was tiny. So most of the people we're dealing with live way out in the country, and we're walking along these country roads and stopping at these unbelievable shacks that people lived in. And so we would canvass—typically in a single week, we would target a particular area that might consist of two or three roads. And we would spend the day canvassing, going door to door. We would be in a team; I was usually with a Black woman. We would have literature with us, and we would talk to the residents. We would go up to a house, and if the people were already in their rocking chairs on the porch—or we would knock on the door, and we would introduce ourselves and talk to them about the importance of voting.

02-01:33:59

The whole notion was absolutely terrifying to most of these people. Some of them didn't want to have anything to do with it. But a lot of them, it was amazing. It was amazing how many people absolutely rose to the occasion and said they just really, really wished they could vote. I mean, they were willing. When I think about the sacrifices they made and the risks they took—so we would go door to door, and we would tell them, "Okay, every night this week we're going to be having voter registration clinics at—" and there would have been a Black church in that area that would have given us use of their church. We would say, "Okay, we're going to be meeting every night this

week from"—whatever it was—"seven to nine. Please come, and we'll show you how to fill out the voter registration forms, and we'll do everything. We'll get you all ready, so all you'll have to do is go to downtown Clinton and fill out the forms, and maybe you'll get registered. But we'll also have a—" so in the evening, we would have these clinics, and we would have multiple, multiple copies of all the forms. We would sit down individually, one-on-one with people and we would take them through the various forms, and then they could take them home and study them. And then we would have a rally where we would sing freedom songs and somebody would give rousing remarks. Ronnie or one of the—usually one of the men, Mike Lesser or Ed Vickery or Danny Mitchell or Rudy Lombard—one of them would give a rousing talk. We would always end with a rousing rendition of "We Shall Overcome," and we would all stand with our arms crossed.

02-01:36:22

So it varied locality by locality. But in Clinton, we would then make—when they were at the voter registration clinic, we would say, "Okay, we"—meaning one of the white—one of the male voter registration workers, one of the male CORE people—"we'll meet you at the voter registration office in downtown Clinton, and we will be with you and we'll help you." So again, it was too dangerous to send me to downtown Clinton, but the men would go. And so the next day, maybe ten, twelve people who had been at the clinic the night before would show up, and they would get the royal treatment, which at the very minimum, was that they would be forced to stand in line, often outside—and this is Louisiana in the summer. And believe me, I had never been in a semitropical to tropical climate before, and I would never, ever in a bazillion years choose to live in one again. For somebody who was raised in New York City, just the heat and the humidity alone were killers. Well okay, people are standing outside in the grueling sun. Or if they managed to get in the building, they would be standing on the stairs going up to the voter registration office or standing in the hall, and the registrar would take his sweet little time. He would maybe process one person, and then he would decide it was time for his break. And so he'd go off for a break, and he'd come back and he'd maybe process one more person, and then it was time for lunch. So over the course of a day, he'd maybe process two or three or four people. And of those two or three or four, *maybe* somebody got registered. But invariably, he would find a mistake.

02-01:38:33

And as I say, just to give you an example, years, years later, in my recent past, when I was a classroom teacher and I was teaching US history, and I'd be teaching the Civil Rights movement—and so one lesson would be I would have them—I'd say to the class, "Okay, every one of you is now a Black resident of Clinton, and you are going to try to register." And so I would pass out the forms one by one, and they—none of them would have had any training. And I'd say, "Okay," and I'd go through it line by line and have them fill out the form. And then I'd say, "Okay, now I want you to exchange papers

with the person sitting next to you." And then I would go through it again, line by line, and I'd say, "Okay, you're now in the role of the registrar of voters, and your job is to find even the slightest error, like a T that isn't crossed, an I that's not dotted. Instead of crossing out 'do not,' you crossed out 'do.' " You had to calculate your age in years, months, and days. And there was a particular formula that the registrar used to determine—so we would calculate it for the people who were going to go down there. And if they were not going to go down—even if they were going to go down the next day, we'd calculate it as if it was the next day, so they'd have the right numbers in their heads. So let's say, even so, you were one number off—you'd fail. Invariably, not one of my students would pass. Now, these are educated kids. They're juniors in high school. [laughs] They're raised in California. I mean, so if they can't pass a test, I mean, you can imagine.

02-01:40:29

And so we would be canvassing all over the county, and we went to all kinds of areas. I was canvassing and I ended up in the proverbial rocking chair on somebody's porch talking to this little old lady, this sweet little old lady. I broached the subject of how important it is to vote and all the things you can do if you can vote, and she said, "Oh yes, I know all about that." And she proceeds to tell me the story of her great-grandfather—anyway, it was grandfather or great-grandfather, who had been alive during Reconstruction and had been elected to the state legislature, and who was lynched on his way home one time when he was coming home on a break from the legislature. So she said, "I know what it means to vote. And if I can vote before I die, that would be the most wonderful thing." Well, I was totally blown away by this story.

02-01:42:06

Now remember, at that point I was all set to go to Madison in the fall to do graduate work in American history. And I thought, Good grief, this is American history in front of my nose. Now, I don't know at this point if this story is true or apocryphal, it's some family story that's been passed down and has perhaps been exaggerated over the years, but here is this lady who's talking to me who had a relative who was alive during Reconstruction—I certainly knew what Reconstruction was—and who had been elected to public office. And I thought to myself—I mean, that just, as I say, it blew me away, to the point where—

02-01:43:09

Okay, so fast forwarding a bit. As we get to the end of the summer, I am so into what we're doing. This is what I mean about how, to me, this was more important than the Freedom Rides. This wasn't any sort of top-down endeavor, this is giving people the power to act on their own. It's not trying to put pressure on the federal government to come in, and from the top-down force the white people in the South to do something that will allow Black people to do something else. I mean, in a way that was one of the ideas. But the basic idea was power to the people, giving people the initiative to make their own

decisions and to have control of their lives. And that's what I was doing on a person-to-person basis.

02-01:44:21

Now, the frustrating part of that was that by the end of the summer, there wasn't much progress. We could not report that, Oh, wowie. Here we had a county where practically no people, no Black people, were registered. And now, look at all the Black people we have registered! No. We could maybe count on the fingers of a few hands how many people were registered. It just looked like it was an enormous mountain. We could continue climbing it, and I was, I wanted to continue climbing it. But I was just so into what I was doing, the thought, at that point, of simply leaving and going to Madison, just was less and less appealing. I mean, it wasn't appealing at all. I did not want to do it. I wanted to stay there.

02-01:45:37

I'm trying to remember if by the end of the summer some other things had begun to happen or if that didn't happen until the fall. But other things began to happen, so that we got more involved in more general community organizing than just voter registration. But in any event, with great trepidation I wrote to Wisconsin and asked if my admission could be deferred for a year. And they wrote back and said, "Fine, no problem," which I give them undying credit for. So that took one huge load off my shoulders. And somewhere in the course of that next year—oh also, Wisconsin, being this—having a very, very heavy-duty American history program, you didn't just go in majoring in American history—heaven forbid—you specialized in a period. So for reasons that I can now not understand in the slightest, because I was—anyway, I was somewhat misled. I mean, having now taught the period, I have a completely different view of Andrew Jackson. But at the time, I was very taken with Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian democracy, so that was going to be my period, was Jacksonian democracy. And I was all signed up with a major professor, and blah, blah, blah.

02-01:47:13

Somewhere in the course of that year, I said, "No, I want to follow—I've got to follow up on this old lady and her relative, and I want to do Reconstruction. I mean, that was the last time that Blacks could vote, and that's what I want to do." When I finally did enter Madison a year later, that was my—my concentration was Civil War and Reconstruction, and I was now studying with a completely different professor. Anyway, then when it came time to choose my topic for my master's thesis, I was a little bit adrift. My professor—I just, again, I have to give him an enormous amount of credit. He knew about my experiences. I mean by that time, I had probably talked at Wisconsin, but anyway, he knew about my past. He said, "Why don't you do something about Blacks and voting in Reconstruction Louisiana?" or something, I don't know. But in any event, he gave me the idea, and my master's thesis was, "[Negro] Political Activity in Reconstruction Louisiana, [1863-1876." In 1966, the

accepted terminology was "negro," and "Black" and "African American" had not yet come into being.]

02-01:48:47

So to finish off that story, although I'm now a year ahead chronologically, I was bound and determined to either confirm or not confirm this lady's story. And this was so far before the Internet that nobody even imagined the Internet. So there I am, scrolling through microfilm and heaven knows what else, but there were a number of newspapers—including, I think, some Black newspapers—in Louisiana at the time. And lo and behold, I found the story. So he did exist. I mean, she [Elizabeth Gair Weatherspoon] had given me his name, [John Gair]. He did exist. He was a state legislator. He was lynched, and that became a footnote in my master's thesis.

02-01:49:49

Tewes: What a wonderful confluence of your activism and your academics.

02-01:49:56

Real: Yeah, yeah, yeah. This was a topic from heaven for me. I mean, I found there was considerable activity. The parallels to what I had just been through were so enormous. I mean, granted, there was some help from Black Northerners. There were, what did they call them, freedmen's schools and there were so-called carpetbaggers from the North that did some help. But primarily, it was Black people organizing themselves, and, of course, during Reconstruction they had an untrammeled right to vote. They didn't have to go through all this nonsense with citizenship tests and stuff. And they registered to vote by the thousands, and they participated and they voted. They went to meetings. They risked—they were beaten. There were crosses burned. It was worse then, but similar to what we experienced. I mean, I saw the parallels.

02-01:51:31

To me even to this day, Reconstruction is such an important period of this history, because it was proof positive that given the opportunity, everybody could vote and everybody could participate in government, and the system didn't fall apart. You didn't have a bunch of savages running wild, the way the cartoons pictured it in the state capitol buildings, and stuff like—I mean, the governments functioned perfectly well. And in fact, for a very brief period of time, there even was a Black governor, [Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback], in Louisiana.

02-01:52:11

So I had a blast, because it turned out that there were, toward the end of Reconstruction, there were extensive congressional hearings about harassments and attempts to prevent Blacks from voting, and these hearings were, of course—ended up in bound volumes, and I read through them. These were the ordinary people. These are people just like the people I had dealt with, who were coming up and giving their testimony about how they had voted or what had happened to them or how they were beaten, the meetings

they went to. And I was totally enthralled. I had a blast writing my master's thesis.

02-01:53:01

So anyway, so backing up—

02-01:53:09

Tewes: I think this might be a good place for us to end for today, actually.

02-01:53:12

Real: Oh okay.

02-01:53:13

Tewes: But if you want to add a final note, please go ahead.

02-01:53:18

Real: Well no, I was just going to say, I was going to back up to the end of the summer of '63. I probably went home for a week or two of R&R, but CORE—by that time, the voter registration drive, the voter registration projects throughout the South had proved their mettle. I mean, there was proof all over the place that this is what was needed. CORE continued the project, so I just simply signed on, I just continued. I then returned to the Sixth Congressional District, to Clinton, where I then spent most of the rest of the next year until, at the end of the summer of '64, I went home and then went to Madison.

02-01:54:16

Tewes: Right.

02-01:54:18

Real: And that, I must say, was—that was the culture shock of culture shocks.

02-01:54:27

Tewes: Yes, could you briefly explain why that was, though?

02-01:54:31

Real: Oh well, I mean, here I was one week walking up and down these dusty back roads talking to farmers who, if they were lucky, had had a third- or fourth-grade education, teaching them how to fill out these forms, helping them to organize. And then I remember, vividly, ending up—one of my classes was American intellectual history, which was apparently a very popular course, so it was taught in one of these huge lecture halls. And I can vividly remember sitting in that lecture hall and not even remembering how to take notes. I mean, the professor was up there delivering all these brilliant insights, and I'm sitting there, How do I write all this stuff down? I mean, I can't write fast enough. To say nothing of: here I am surrounded by all these intellectual types in Madison, Wisconsin, which is a very kind of lily white town—or was then—very Midwestern. I mean, it was about as far from Louisiana as you could get in every way possible, including the climate. So anyway—

02-01:56:09
Tewes: That, too.

02-01:56:10
Real: Okay.

02-01:56:11
Tewes: All right. I think that is a perfect place then to actually end for today.

02-01:56:14
Real: Okay.

02-01:56:15
Tewes: Thank you so much, Mimi, for your time. That was a great overview of those really important moments in your life.

02-01:56:22
Real: You're welcome.

Interview 3: March 23, 2021

03-00:00:00

Tewes: This is a third interview with Mimi Feingold Real for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on March 23, 2021. Ms. Real joins me in this remote interview from Mill Valley, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you again for joining me, Mimi.

03-00:00:23

In our very extensive conversations, we covered your time doing voter registration with CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] in Louisiana, as well as how that led to your decision to continue on and what to study in grad school at the University of Wisconsin, Madison from 1964 to 1966. But as sort of an offshoot of that conversation we were having, I think it would be wonderful to hear from you about this CORE collection at the Wisconsin Historical Society, and how that all connects with the work you were doing.

03-00:00:58

Real: Okay well, when I arrived in Madison, I very quickly discovered several other people who were entering graduate students in the History Department in American history, who were also coming in out of the field, so to speak. And we used to joke that we still had mud on our shoes from being active in the South. So we became friends. One of the other people, his name is Bob Gabriner, came up with the idea, which he suggested to the rest of us and of course we all thought it was a fabulous idea, to approach the head of the Wisconsin Historical Society with the following proposition: here we were, American history graduate students, so we were very, very aware of the importance of primary source material.

03-00:02:12

This was a period, particularly in the mid-sixties, when we begin to see the emergence, as a consciousness in the field of history, of people's history. That history is not just the story of political leaders and elites and business leaders, but it is also the story of ordinary people going about their daily lives or protesting what is happening to them. And that that was, A, an important area of study; but, B, we had just come out of history in the making, and this was very, very, very much among the people, and this was a classic case of people not leaving any formal historical record. I mean, in the past, even in—for other questions in the twentieth century, you could turn to people's letters or diaries or journals or written stuff, but that was not the case in the South. These were communities where people had, maybe if they were lucky, a fifth- or sixth-grade education. Diary-keeping or journal-keeping was not part of the culture, and people didn't write letters.

03-00:03:45

So I guess we became aware of the fact that what we had done—in other words, what was going on in the communities was going to be lost unless

there was some way of collecting the memorabilia, the ephemera of what we had done. That would include posters and handouts and leaflets, stuff that we used in our voter registration clinics to teach people how to register to vote, how to fill out the forms, all that stuff. And including any more or less formal written stuff, like reports. Even our CORE field offices in Louisiana, we ourselves, as CORE workers in the field, were constantly having to send in reports of what had happened and how many people we'd registered, or incidents of harassment or cross burnings, or people being beaten, or what happened when we took people to the voter registration office, and these we would all submit to the CORE office in Baton Rouge. Like, Bob Gabriner had worked in Tennessee; Danny Beagle, I can't remember where he had worked, but it was in some other state; but this was true of all of us. I mean, there was all this stuff that was—and nobody was particularly saving it or preserving it, and that if something wasn't done to preserve it, it would just be lost, and that whole documentation for future historians would be totally lost.

03-00:05:47

So at Bob Gabriner's suggestion, we approached the then-head of the Wisconsin Historical Society. I don't know if Bob had known this already at the time—why the Wisconsin Historical Society and not the regular library? Because the Wisconsin Historical Society basically was the—in addition to being a historical society, it had a very, very, very extensive library, and it was basically the library for the Department of History. I mean, that was the history library, so as a graduate student, that's where you spent most of your time, that's where you did all your research. And then when you progressed to being a second-year graduate student, you actually could earn a carrel in the stacks. [laughs] So it was bad enough that you were spending all your time in a library. I spent virtually most of my—I may have even gotten a carrel the first year. But anyway, my major memory of Wisconsin is of basically spending a good part of every day in my carrel, which was buried deep in the stacks, which was buried deep in this library. Anyway, you know, it was like an animal burrowing into its little cave.

03-00:07:05

Anyway, so that's why the Wisconsin Historical Society. Unbeknownst to us, I think, was the fact that the then-head of the Wisconsin Historical Society, whose name unfortunately escapes me at the moment, was himself a scholar of African American history, [Leslie H. "Les" Fishel]. And so of all the lucky breaks. I mean, he understood what we were talking about, and he said, absolutely, they would love to house this collection. The Historical Society already had a very extensive social justice collection. I don't remember at that point what they had, but they had been collecting labor union records and assorted protests for years and years. So he thought it was a wonderful idea, and what emerged from that was a plan whereby the Historical Society would fund us to go back to the communities where we worked in the South and collect whatever we could, and that is exactly what happened.

03-00:08:30

This whole process has been fairly well documented by the Wisconsin Historical Society. There was a book that Michael Edmonds wrote based on the collection that ultimately developed, and I'm, of course, blanking on the name of the book, *[Risking Everything: A Freedom Summer Reader]*, but there's a fairly long introduction in which he tells the whole story of how this project came to be. But I remember—I think that it's in his introduction—that there was some concern, on a legal level, about liability of the University if they sent us south and something happened to us or whatever. There was some issue, but they overcame it.

03-00:09:30

So the summer after my first year in graduate school, I went back to basically the area that I had worked in in Louisiana. I did visit Mississippi briefly, visited one or two people. But I rented a little Volkswagen Beetle and drove all around the countryside and collected all kinds of stuff. But when I got to the Baton Rouge CORE office, they had a lot of old files which they no longer needed. Let me see, what happened? I also went to New Orleans, and New Orleans was—the New Orleans CORE office was sort of the, I think, the main, main office for Louisiana. But in any event, they had a considerable—they had file cabinets worth of stuff. But was even better was I think they had just moved into a new office or they were about to move, and a lot of old files had been packed up in boxes. They were going to throw them out, because they were old files, they didn't need them anymore. And I said, "No, no, no! Don't throw them out. I have a solution for them." And so basically, again, with the funding from the Historical Society, we packed up those boxes and shipped them back to Madison. Danny Beagle and Bob Gabriner were doing the same things in their locales, and there were a couple of other people who also worked on the project. Those boxes of stuff then went into this social action—whatever they called it—collection, and that has become one of *the* major centers now for civil rights papers in the country.

03-00:11:38

What happened with CORE was that—I don't mean to toot my own horn, but I kind of started a ball rolling. And I think one of the things we were asking of things like the New Orleans CORE office and the Baton Rouge office was that, when you do have boxes, when files become obsolete and you want to get rid of them, don't throw them away, send them to Madison. I think Madison, the Historical Society, used that as a jumping off place on their own. They took major, major initiative, so they got most of the CORE papers. They reached out to the New York office, which was the national headquarters of CORE, and they've ended up with the vast majority of CORE papers. And of course, they collected other stuff, as well.

03-00:12:43

But I remember that summer—oh, and you'll appreciate this story. One of the things that we wanted to do, knowing that most of the people we'd be talking to were not exactly intellectual glitterati, that we would interview them. So I

do believe Madison must have furnished us with tape recorders—whatever was, I think—they couldn't have been reel to reel, they must have been cassette tapes. So that was one of the things I did. In all the little communities I visited, I sat down and interviewed the people who had been instrumental in the voter registration movement. I was doing oral history. I had never heard that term before, and nobody ever used that term, but that's what I was doing. So included in the collection in Madison are all these tapes that we all made, talking to these rural farmers, sharecroppers, people in these little towns where we worked, who otherwise, their voices never, ever would have been preserved for history. And now, there they are in Madison for anybody to access.

03-00:14:19
Tewes: This is amazing!

03-00:14:22
Real: So I did that. As I say, I can remember sitting in people's kitchens or—talking with them, getting them to reminisce about what they did and what kind of reactions there were. [laughs] One of the main adventures I remember is that I went to see one of the leaders in pressing for voting rights in Southern Mississippi: a, by that time, very elderly tenant farmer, I guess, or sharecropper, whatever he was. Of course, all these people lived at the—way out in the boonies on dirt roads. Apparently, it had been raining, because my little Volkswagen Beetle got stuck in the mud. I'm trying to remember now exactly what happened, but I think we finally got a local Black farmer, who had a tractor or something, to pull me out.

03-00:15:29
And then as I say, I ended up in New Orleans. And then in New Orleans, they already had file cabinets full of stuff that they wanted to get rid of. But even after we had identified those, I, on my own, found boxes of stuff that had been shoved under tables and under desks of more files, so we had all those sent off, as well. So that was that story.

03-00:16:07
Tewes: [laughs] Yeah, that's a really exceptional moment to be involved in, and to have helped develop this archive is really wonderful, as well.

03-00:16:15
Real: Yeah, but it was just this beautiful confluence of the fact that there we were, coming out of the field, and we were all American history graduate students, and so we knew the importance of preserving that stuff, and then we were in a position then to do something about it, which we did.

03-00:16:35
Tewes: And your first oral history work, which we'll continue to talk about a little bit later today.

03-00:16:39

Real: That's right, that's right. As I say, I had no idea that that's what we were doing. Interestingly enough, the Wisconsin Historical Society arranged for a reunion of all of us who had worked on that project, and that was a real, real highlight. I'm trying to remember if it was the fiftieth anniversary. But in any event, they brought us all back, so Bob [Gabriner]— I don't remember if Danny Beagle was there. But anyway, quite a number of us were, and Michael Edmonds arranged the whole thing. It was an extraordinary week, and I loved it, I just was in seventh heaven. They used us as much as they could, like we made guest appearances in classes, an assortment of classes, from the Political Science Department to the Law School to various organizations. And then the last night there was a huge—there was a big meeting. It was a lecture, and all of us were arrayed up on the stage, and we each spoke, and the auditorium was filled. And afterwards, there was the opportunity for people to buy Michael Edmonds's book, and we sat up at a table and signed the book. So that's the one and only time I've ever been at the author's end of a book signing. [laughs]

03-00:18:12

Tewes: Well, I want to transition to more activism work that you did after finishing your master's program, and that is your involvement with SDS or Students for a Democratic Society. How did you get involved with them?

03-00:18:28

Real: Well, that wasn't very hard. Okay, so first I have—I do have to inject that much as I enjoyed graduate work and writing my master's thesis and sitting there in my carrel in the stacks of the Wisconsin Historical Society, I was absolutely aware of how remote the ivory tower was from the real world. I mean, here I had come out of—you couldn't get more real, of the real world, than the Sixth Congressional District in Louisiana doing voter registration work. On that level, I just couldn't connect with academia, and just the kind of the petty infighting that would go on.

03-00:19:27

[Have] I already told the story about the professor who invited me to be his graduate student for a PhD? Okay. Well first of all, when I first go there, the only person I knew was the—was someone who I had been friends with when I was a child, [Joan Wallach Scott], because her parents and my parents were both old lefties, and we were part of the same little teenage group. She was enormously, enormously helpful to me, just in getting me settled and helping me find an apartment. She loaned me her car so I could drive around and look at apartments. But she was in European history, I think specifically French history, and she would regale me with these stories of the most hideous male chauvinism. There were a couple of professors in the European History Department who were absolutely noted male chauvinists, I mean, from the old school who seriously believed that women did not belong in graduate school, and gave their women graduate students—and even if they weren't their own students, gave any woman graduate student a hard time. And, Joan, my friend,

was in the middle of that, because I'm trying to remember if the guy, the professor was—George [L.] Mosse was the prime offender in this group, M-O-S-S-E. And I'm trying to remember if Joan was a student of Mosse's. But in any event, she got it from Mosse. She was a very, very strong-willed woman, and that wasn't about to turn her around. But anyway, that did give me a clue of what the culture was possibly like. Now, I never encountered that. My advisor for my master's didn't treat me any differently from anybody else. I never felt like I was being condescended to or something, because I was a woman. I did my graduate work—I mean, I didn't feel it.

03-00:21:54

I must have taken prelims first. So even though I had decided that I was going to leave graduate school—I could not take the ivory tower one more minute—I also was not going to burn all my bridges. So I committed myself to taking preliminary exams, which was the next step. Once you finished your master's thesis, you took prelims, and then if you passed those you entered the doctoral program. So I took prelims and passed.

03-00:22:33

Somewhere in there, before I left the place entirely, one of my professors invited me into his office and invited me to become his graduate student. I had taken American intellectual history with him, and he was a very, very likable professor, very approachable. I'm trying to remember why he would have even known about me, but in any event, he invited me to become his graduate student. But he said, "I have to warn you that if you decide to stay here for your doctorate, you are going to have to be twice as good and work twice as hard as any man in the Department." And it was weird, because I wasn't offended. I mean, I thought like, You're telling me about the strange habits of the natives. It didn't mean anything to me. I mean, at that point I'm quite sure I had already decided that I wasn't staying. So maybe that's why I could be so sort of cavalier. I guess my reaction to that was, Okay, so, like no problem. I mean, if I'm going to stay—if I were to stay, I would do that. I'd work just as hard as anybody else or I'd work harder, whatever it took. But there was something in that that told me that there was going to be some ugliness, and that just reaffirmed my decision to get the heck out of there.

03-00:24:30

Okay, so how did I know about SDS? Interesting you should ask. When I went south, I was an outlier. All the other people who had been active in SPAC [Swarthmore Political Action Club]—and there was this kind of central little group of us—they all went into SDS, and they thought that I was wrong, that I was barking up the wrong tree. I was following an avenue that was—nothing was ever going to come of this. Why? Because Blacks were not a majority in the country. Blacks were still a minority, and that if there was going to be a revolution in America, it was going to come from the white working class, you know, with maybe the lower middle class tagging along or something. But pursuing Black rights was wasting your time, you're wasting your talents. You know, that's very nice. You want to go down south and be

nice to people, whatever, you want to help them register to vote, but that's not going to change the course of this country. And when I think back about that and look at what had actually happened in this country in the last fifty years, I don't want to say that I have to laugh, but that is—it is truly ironic, because, A, what we were doing in the South had *incredible* impact on the country, unbelievable historic impact, A; and, B, the attempt to organize the white working class absolutely fizzled and died. I mean, SDS never got anywhere in the North.

03-00:26:33

Okay. So as I say, by the time I got out of Louisiana, I think I had—there were a couple of SPAC people who were in Cleveland, I think. They were working in Black communities, but they were the only ones. So then one of the other Swarthmore people, his name was Carl Wittman, and he had been very close with Tom Hayden. The two of them were really architects of—and I don't remember now what the plan was called, but it was basically this—that the concentration had to be with the white working class. Various SDS people were dispatched to a variety of different communities that—cities around the mostly the Midwest, mostly in the Northeast, with sizable working-class communities, and that's what they were going to do.

03-00:27:44

One group, that had a couple of my friends from Swarthmore, decided to go to Hoboken, New Jersey, and this was very [makes air quotes] scientifically determined. So they decided that they wanted to be in the New York area, but not in New York City itself. For some reason they focused on—what they were trying to do was to identify communities that had large white working-class populations with relatively small Black populations, so it would kind of keep it clean, as it were—boy, that's not going to sound good in a transcript. But to make it almost like a scientific experiment, that we're involved with the white community, and the white working-class community is a sizable portion of the population. And therefore, if we can influence them to somehow foment community change and the revolution or whatever it was they were supposed to foment, that's what we were supposed to—that would be progress.

03-00:29:08

They identified two cities in New Jersey: Hoboken and Elizabeth. And I don't remember now why Hoboken was chosen over Elizabeth, but it was. So our little group—and I think they may already have been in Hoboken, which is why I went there when I arrived, but I arrived to become part of that community. So what everybody did, in other words, to, so to speak, infiltrate the white working-class community, we were all supposed to get working-class jobs. This whole thing felt strange to me, and I also couldn't figure out what kind of white working-class job I could get, so I got a job as—in the school system as a substitute teacher, and I very quickly became a permanent sub for a third-grade class in some little Hoboken public school. I learned many things from this experience, but one was that I was not cut out to be an

elementary school teacher. [laughs] It called for a completely different set of talents than the ones I had.

03-00:30:44

But anyway, there we were in Hoboken, and as I say, everybody—so Carl got a job in a print shop. Somebody else worked in a Venetian blinds factory. I don't remember now where the other people worked. See, in the South, it was so obvious what you were organizing people for and what you would call meetings about. And I could never figure out in Hoboken what we were supposed to be doing. I don't ever remember there being a meeting, a community meeting. I have memories of teaching and I have memories of getting together with the other people in the Hoboken project and sitting around in our various apartments and eating Oreos and whatever, but I don't—whether each person was supposed to be organizing within their own little job and just disseminating ideas, it never—I never understood. And as I say, I have no memory at all of what we were doing. If I wanted to, I could read any histories of SDS and see what it was that they actually did, if that's been documented, written about.

03-00:32:12

But at some point, we determined that nothing was going to happen in Hoboken. Okay. So first of all, it turns out the problem with Hoboken—it may have been a white working-class city—it was, at that time—now this is way, way, way before it became yuppified—it was, at that time, very, very, very heavily Italian, and it also was very, very much like a small town, it was very much like a small town in Italy. I mean, for example, you bought your vegetables at the green grocer, and that's all the green grocer sold, were fresh fruits and vegetables. And then if you wanted a chicken, you went to the poultry store, where there were cages and cages and cages of live chickens. You would point to the chicken you wanted, and the butcher would go in the back, and would butcher the chicken and defeather it, and do whatever you wanted with it, package it up, and you'd go home with this very fresh chicken. I assume there was a supermarket there somewhere, but people didn't shop in supermarkets. There were these little—you bought your milk and bread in a little grocery store.

03-00:33:38

But more than that, culturally it was a very, very tight-knit Italian community, and everybody was very happy with their lot. I mean, they didn't particularly want to be organized, thank you very much. It was like, you know, We're fine, get out of our face kind of thing. I mean, they all had good jobs. They had jobs that paid well enough to be able to—now, living in Hoboken at the time was not living in the lap of luxury. I shared an apartment with several other people. I think it was like a third- or fourth-floor walkup. The housing, it was old, these old brownstones. They were very charming, but very old. But people were very happy, and people were very content with their lives.

03-00:34:33

At the same time, various SDS friends of my SDS Swarthmore [College] people had migrated out to California. They were sending back reports that were the equivalent of, "The streets are paved with gold out here. This is where it's at," they said. "This is where it's happening, this is where the movement is. You've got to get out here." So that's exactly what we did.

03-00:35:05

In the dead of winter, we all—in those days, there was a phenomenon called driveaway cars. This was a service—and there were several services like this nationwide—where if somebody had driven their car from point A to point B—usually a long distance, like from California to New Jersey or New York—and then for some reason, they had to return to California very, very quickly, so they had to fly back, they had to have some way of getting their car back. The way you did it is you hired these—a driveaway service, and the driveaway service hired people like us. We're sort of responsible, semi-respectable, college graduate types, and we would drive this car across the country. So that's what I did. That was the situation.

03-00:36:05

The car I drove was a Volvo sedan, and the family had—they were from San Francisco. They were in New York visiting relatives, and they had a family emergency. Somebody died or something back in California, so they had to fly back very quickly, and somebody had to drive their Volvo back. So I drove the Volvo with one of the other people who we had sort of adopted in this project, and her two young daughters, and we drove—and so all the other people had similar circumstances: drove out to California and met up with the SDS people here, and immediately became involved with what they were involved with. So—

03-00:37:00

Tewes: You said this was in the dead of winter. Was this '67 or '68?

03-00:37:10

Real: It must have been—because if I left Madison in '66—and it certainly wasn't the winter of '66, so it must have been the winter of '67. And that was an adventure, because at that time, there were freeways part of the way across the country. But crossing the Rockies, the freeways had not been built yet. Whatever, the I-80 or I-5? Anyway, the two main freeways, the northern route and the southern route, they didn't exist then all the way across. So I can remember the most hair-raising part of that whole trip was driving across the Rockies, because this was, as I say, it was in the dead of winter. It was snowing. I had never, ever seen the Rockies before. As far as I was concerned, I was on the surface of the moon. I mean, this was not natural landscape at all. The Rockies are rocky. They're very, very rocky, and these narrow roads—and as I say, it's snowing.

03-00:38:23

When we descended down the other side of the Sierras and into the Sacramento Valley, I thought I had entered heaven. I mean, we come out of this surface of the moon into this glorious valley where it's sunny and green and there's no snow. I mean, my mouth fell open. So we drive across—oh, and I'm thinking the whole time, by the way, we're going over the Rockies, of course, I have to think of the Donner Party. And I'm thinking, Oy vey, I'm going to be [the] modern Donner Party; they'll find my body in the spring when it thaws. But in any event, we were driving across the valley there from Sacramento towards San Francisco. In the distance I can see another mountain range, and I have to tell you that my heart sank to my toenails. I thought to myself, I cannot take another mountain range. From the distance, you couldn't tell whether it was snow covered or what it was, but I thought, I just, I mean, I can't. I can't. We're now on a relatively nice flat road, it's relatively straight—I can collect myself. And of course, that was when I discovered that was the Coastal Range, and the freeway makes a sharp left turn when [laughs]—actually before the [San Francisco] Bay. But I wasn't familiar enough with the geography then to realize that, A, there's a bay; and, B, what's beyond that is not a mountain range that I have to cross; and, C, it's a very low mountain range, as mountain ranges go.

03-00:40:29

So anyway, we arrived in San Francisco, and we—at first we were living in separate apartments. And then the whole group of us decided—again, we were sort of pioneering things—we decided that we should all live together. And so basically, what we—I don't want to say that we invented this, but we were a commune before that word was in use, because we shared everything. We had this house on, ironically, Liberty St. And even more ironic, if you know San Francisco at all, Liberty St. intersects Castro. This was a period when, of course, we idolized what was happening in Cuba, and [Fidel] Castro was a great hero of ours, so here we were at the intersection of Liberty and Castro in this big house, which we rented.

03-00:41:31

What people were involved in, at that time, the gold on the streets of California, of San Francisco, was the draft resistance movement, and so that's what we were all going to get involved in. So of course, the men in the group immediately got involved in that. I don't think any of them did any draft [card] burning, but they participated in demonstrations and whatever else it was that they did. We women, were sort of a support network. And that was when the first conscious inklings began to develop in my brain, talking about identity and becoming a woman in my own right. There was something that was—something awry in that picture. I realized that in some ways, but not really, that what I was doing in the South was so very, very direct, that it didn't concern me there. But here, I was involved with an issue, which didn't—in no way affected me personally. I was not about to be drafted. Granted, people I knew might be drafted, although the fact of the matter is that most of the people I knew would not have gotten drafted. They would have probably gone

to Canada before they would fight in the Vietnam War. But that began to niggle in the back of my brain, that I'm fighting somebody else's battle, and I'm fighting it in a way I can't identify with it at all. Well, I mean, on a very intellectual level I could. So I really felt adrift. I mean, I didn't really know what I was doing there, what I was supposed to be doing.

03-00:44:24

And somewhere in there—and this is where my memory becomes totally, totally hazy, and Chude [Pamela Allen] filled in some of the details as she remembered them. I still don't have any memory of this, but she says that at some point she had been—she was back East, and I think she came out to California to organize women's groups, and she had been given Carl Wittman's and my names. As she recalls it, she came out here and we all went to Stinson Beach or to some beach, and that basically that planted the seed of the women's movement. That immediately, immediately resonated with me, because—okay, this is going to get to one of the questions you asked before—not so much in Louisiana, but very, very much with SNCC [Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee], I was very aware of very ugly male chauvinism within SNCC, coming from the very top.

03-00:45:57

Tewes: Do you mean SDS?

03-00:45:58

Real: I'm sorry, SDS. I mean, sorry, SDS. Tom Hayden, for example, treated women abominably—at least from my perspective. Now, other people may have different perspectives, but I knew women who he had really just treated like dirt. And other women were beginning to speak up in SDS, that they were being marginalized, that they were being expected to do office work, to bring coffee to—that in other words, the people who did the [makes air quotes] real work were the men. They were the ones who thought the deep thoughts. They were the ones who implemented these deep thoughts, and it was our role as women to bring them coffee, to make them lunch, to keep the office straightened up, to run the mimeograph machine, all these supplementary roles. But worse than that were these stories about the way SDS—and I'm not making this sweeping generalization of all SDS men, but specific SDS men treated their girlfriends—we're not talking like on some philosophical level. This is on a very, very basic personal/psychological level. These are men who, they may spout the most wonderful theories in the world about the equality of people and helping the oppressed and all that stuff, but they were, as I say, treating their girlfriends like dirt. And to a certain extent I experienced that myself.

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I think what must have happened was that enough of us must have started talking with each other, just kind of personal grousing, and then realized that maybe there was more to this grousing than—in other words, it wasn't our fault, it wasn't a personal problem of each of us. That was the most eye-

opening thing, I think, of the whole thing, is that we had all totally, totally internalized what was happening in our relationships with men and thinking that if anything was wrong, it was our fault, we weren't doing something right. Each one of us thinking we are the only ones who feel this way. I mean, I would look at other couples and I would think, Oh look, they seem to be getting along so well, or, That the guy is so nice, and then discovering that this was not the case at all. And it would come down—and so we started meeting. Somehow, we attracted more women, not just SDS women, but we started attracting other women who were involved in movement sort of stuff in San Francisco. It was never very—a large group. It really was more like—almost like a group therapy group, you know, with maybe eight or ten of us at the most. We would talk about our experiences and just the way men treated us, I mean, down to the way we made love and what men expected of us, as I say, but on very, very, very small individual actions level.

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This was incredibly liberating, I think, to all of us, because, I think, here we had all been spending all of our time—and I'm not belittling anything that we had done—but we had been spending our time liberating everybody else, as if we were the most liberated people in the world. And you know, like physician, heal thyself. This realization that, Wow, it's true of our own lives in ways we never even realized. Just the way men might speak to us or a boyfriend might speak to us, or the way we might be afraid to express an opinion in an SDS meeting where there are a lot of guys and you're afraid to speak up, because your idea is going to be belittled. I mean, as I tell this story, I can feel the feeling I had then of just this enormous relief, of just feeling liberated.

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And it wasn't that we all of a sudden then turned around and our behaviors changed 100 percent, but it was suddenly this realization that—and again, it was the sort of realization that one might come to in therapy—that your feelings are not—you're not alone in feeling them. They're not weird. You're not some monster or some weirdo or you're a maladjusted person, because you're experiencing this or because you feel this. This is all perfectly normal, or at least it's something that everybody else is feeling at the same time. I mean, I can just remember these meetings, where, as I say, it was like group therapy, where we would talk about our own personal experiences and the latest argument we had with a boyfriend or what he had said or what he did or what he expected of us; and how maybe we didn't really like to cook and how on some level we felt unfulfilled, that we couldn't do anything in draft resistance—I mean, what were we supposed to be doing? That question wasn't answered. The mere fact that we were beginning to ask it was this radical thing. So—

03-00:52:56

Tewes: You've pointed to, I think, one of the more important legacies of the many important ones of the women's movement, is this idea of the personal is

political, and learning that these experiences that women were having weren't just personal problems, but part of the larger systemic issues, so—

03-00:53:15
Real: Right, right.

03-00:53:15
Tewes: —I appreciate you sharing how that felt so liberating to even think about it that way.

03-00:53:20
Real: Yeah. Now, I think Chude must have shared with us a newsletter that came out of—there had been a women's group organized in Boston, and they may have been the first. They published some sort of newsletter, and we began to get hold of it. Now, I remember that newsletter was also enormously liberating, because women would talk about how they were raising their children. And again, it would be very, very specific. You know, an issue they had with their toddler or something or how they were behaving, what kind of discipline, or lack thereof, they were doing. And these were also ideas that really resonated with me. Again, I thought, Wow, how liberating! And then somewhere in there—was it that same Boston group, [Boston Women's Health Book Collective], that came out with the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*?

03-00:54:19
Tewes: I think that was that group, yes.

03-00:54:22
Real: Now, I don't remember if that book had come out by then or not, but that was another enormously liberating publication. Because again, here it was in black and white spelling out all these things that we had wondered about, questioned, doubted, I mean, everything about how—from the functioning of our various body parts. Now that I'm thinking about it, talking about body parts, to the extent that any of us saw doctors, you know, needed medical attention of any kind, the doctors were all men in that day and age. And gynecologists were not exactly the most sensitive creatures to women's issues. I mean, who talked about women's issues at that time? I mean seriously, they sort of looked down—and I can remember even decades after that having an OB-GYN who was the most self-righteous prig, condescending male chauvinist. And I'd feel uncomfortable, I didn't like him. Mercifully, he retired. But it was like, what can you do about it? I mean, I can't argue with him. I wouldn't even know what to say to him, let alone in those days you didn't argue with your doctor. But yeah, it was one more little bit of awareness. So *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was, again, this enormously eye-opening thing. It opened up this whole universe, that we could understand the functioning of our own bodies, and again, see what was normal, what wasn't normal.

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And interestingly enough, the makeup of our little group was still—we were still these SDS/other radical organization type people; we didn't talk very much about that. For some reason or another, I remember that there were two women who wanted to join the group. I don't think any of us knew them, but they knew some of the other SDS people or something. They came in with an agenda. And again, I'm not being critical of them, but they were impatient with the tack that we were taking, and they thought that we should be out organizing working-class women in The Mission. And at that point, it was like this newly liberated butterfly or something, but still wet on the wings, this very kind of fragile new identity that we all had. Or at least—mostly I'm talking from my own point of view—of trying to figure out what it meant to be a woman, and a strong woman. The idea of suddenly going back to where I was, of fighting somebody else's battle, of helping some other group do its thing, was, for me, going to be a step backwards. Not that there was anything wrong with trying to organize working-class women in The Mission, but I was not a working-class woman in The Mission—although we may have been living in The Mission at the time. And at that point, most of the white women in The Mission would have been Hispanic, and I didn't even speak Spanish. Again, it was foreign. As I say, that was something that I had been evolving, sort of shedding the layers of, evolving away from, and that was not the direction I wanted to go in.

03-00:59:19

At the same time, I was having—let's just put it this way: I was having problems with my boyfriend, serious enough so that I needed to leave that relationship and establish myself on my own to kind of—I don't mean to say like I was broken, so I needed to put the pieces back together again. But there were all these new parts and pieces of me that I needed to come to terms with and decide what I wanted to do with myself and kind of define myself. And so I left the commune and broke up with him. Oh, there are a couple of other projects I forgot about that I could mention now. So then I found an apartment on my own.

03-01:00:25

But just to mention: so there we were in this commune in The Mission, and there were all kinds of stupid ideas that we were pursuing. So one of them was that we were going to open a restaurant. And we got to the point of actually looking at vacant restaurants, restaurants that were available for lease. And what we would do with them, I don't know. And again, I have no idea what purpose that was going to serve. What were we supposed to do with a restaurant? I mean, I don't know. Were you supposed to serve up Marxist tracts with hamburgers? [laughs] I'm exaggerating, but what in the world function was this supposed to serve? But I have these vivid recollections of sitting in a vacant restaurant. Everybody else is talking about how they would paint it and what they would do and what kind of food they would serve. Again, I'm sitting over there in my proverbial corner, as it were, thinking, I don't understand what we're doing. [laughs] So that all kind of came together,

and then the women's stuff, and so then I left and established myself on my own.

03-01:01:55
Tewes: I like the way you put that, "establish" yourself.

03-01:01:57
Real: Yeah, and that's exactly what I did, and it wasn't easy. Again, it wasn't like I left, and I immediately discovered my calling, and I instantly established myself and became a well-known fill-in-the-blank and lived happily ever after. I mean, it was a lot of fits and starts, a lot of mistakes, a lot of dead ends, a lot of trying this and that. And once again, the powers that be were with me. Okay, so I did a whole bunch of very, very, very odd jobs.

03-01:02:43
Tewes: This might be a good time, actually, to back up for a minute.

03-01:02:46
Real: Okay.

03-01:02:47
Tewes: And then definitely talk about those jobs, because those are important, too, and, I think, relevant, as you say. I just want to establish some things here. First being that you come to San Francisco in winter of '67. When this group forms, according to Chude, this was around 1968.

03-01:03:07
Real: That would sound about right.

03-01:03:08
Tewes: Okay, and this consciousness-raising group that you're involved in later becomes Sudsofloppen.

03-01:03:15
Real: That's right, consciousness-raising is the term I was trying to think of and I couldn't think of it.

03-01:03:19
Tewes: Ah! I think you described it well. In Chude's memory, you were really the linchpin here. You're the person who had these connections to the New Left in San Francisco, who could invite women from these groups. Do you remember trying to gather those women at all, and what you were saying to get them to join?

03-01:03:39
Real: No, except that we had obviously—I mean, what makes sense to me is that we would have been talking about these things personally among ourselves, and that I, with my background—you see, I came at all these things with my background from the South, where organizing was organizing. So my immediate thought was, We need to organize a group, we need to have a voter

registration clinic. But instead of having a voter registration clinic, it's going to be a figure-out-what-we're-doing-as-women-in-this-situation clinic. Seriously, I have no recollection beyond that. I mean, I have no recollection of calling women or trying to get women to these meetings. But I'm not going to deny that I knew all these women from my SDS connections.

03-01:04:49
Tewes: Mm-hm. Do you think it's possible there were women from your commune who went to this group?

03-01:04:54
Real: You know, I am wondering about that myself. You see, I don't even remember who the other women were. This is how much my memory of that period has been erased. Fascinating. I almost feel like somebody from *Men in Black*—and you know, they pointed the magic pen at my head, and I forgot that whole episode. There may have been one or two other women. I'm trying to think, who else was there? Nora somebody—vague bits of first names are floating through my head, but again, I don't even remember if they were at these meetings or not.

03-01:05:55
Tewes: That's okay. We can fill anything in later.

03-01:05:56
Real: Yeah, yeah.

03-01:05:58
Tewes: Or if anything comes back to us. And I do realize this is many years ago I'm asking you to reflect on. [laughs] But you did mention that these were probably all women from the New Left. Do you have a sense of the demographics of the kind of women who would be involved?

03-01:06:19
Real: Well yeah. I mean, we were all white, well educated. Beyond that, wow, I don't—yeah, we were all at least college graduates and white. I was going to say we were probably mostly from big cities, but I couldn't say. You see, if I could remember who was in that particular group, I'd have a clearer sense of who these people were. But yeah, that's about the best I can do. Religion was never an issue, but we were, I'm sure, a very eclectic group. I'm Jewish, there may have been other Jewish women. The others may have been some form of Christian, but that was never an issue. That was never anything that we discussed. None of us were practicing churchgoing or synagogue-going women at the time.

03-01:07:43
Tewes: Yeah, I was going to ask that, because that was not something that was necessarily important for you in the Civil Rights movement either.

03-01:07:49

Real: Well, religion played a much more important part in the Civil Rights movement—very actively. Because we worked primarily—well, we worked a lot through local churches. We used to go to church services, Black church services every Sunday, and the pastor would allow us to speak at the end of the service. And then there would be the occasional gospel music concert that we would go to. Those of us who were Jewish played very, very much on the Jewish story of the Exodus, which everybody knew. That was a very, very, very well-known story among Blacks in the South. And there was much more emphasis, I think, among the Blacks in the South on Old Testament stories. But they certainly knew the Exodus, and that we were once slaves and now we are free. That resonated enormously, so that was a theme that we would sound again and again when we talked in these churches. But as far as us personally practicing—

03-01:09:05

Oh, and I do remember once in Louisiana, we decided that we would have a little kind of cultural exchange. [laughs] So one of the people who was volunteering that summer, his family owned a coffee roasting company in New York—I don't remember the name of it now—and he was Jewish. And we decided that we needed a little cultural exchange. We outsiders, Northerners, had been busily eating Southern cooking and not complaining, but we thought that we should introduce them to some good Jewish food. So this guy with the coffee company, he had gone back to his job—I mean, I think he was president of the company or something—and he arranged to have bagels vacuum packed in large coffee cans, and he may have also had lox similarly packed, and we went into Baton Rouge and bought cream cheese. And so we had this wonderful Sunday morning lox and bagel breakfast spread, which—and we invited all the local kids who worked with us and everything. I mean, we weren't trying to shove anything down anybody's throat, but we just thought that they might enjoy sampling a different kind of food. Well, it went over like a lead balloon. Let's just say that lox is an acquired taste, and it has a consistency, because it's basically raw, and they were not used to that at all, so they found that very objectionable. They liked the bagels.

03-01:11:06

Tewes: This is hilarious, Mimi. [laughs]

03-01:11:09

Real: Anyway, that was our attempt. And I think, did we also try to cook—I think we also, I think, tried to cook a Chinese dinner, now that I recall. I think that may have gone over better. But I remember the lox and bagels did not—were not a hit.

03-01:11:27

Tewes: That's great.

03-01:11:27

Real: And then, we also encountered—I don't want to call it anti-Semitism—in the South, and I don't want to call it ignorance, either, but the—we encountered this a number of times, particularly among the local high school kids who helped us, and they would just be very open. On any number of occasions, when those of us who said that we were Jewish, they would ask us, "Where are your horns?" And we would have to explain that Jews don't have horns, that it was a mistranslation of a Hebrew word in the Bible; and the word doesn't mean horns, it means rays of light. And so Moses did not have horns growing out of his head; he had rays of light, because he had communicated with God, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So religion was much more a part of our lives, in that sense, in Louisiana than it was in SDS. In SDS, it wasn't. And in San Francisco, it didn't play a role at all.

03-01:12:51

Tewes: Thank you, that was really an interesting connection there. I'm thinking about other issues that became a big part of the [women's] movement and discussions, and I'm wondering if any of these will ring a bell for you or have resonance. Certainly, you mentioned sexuality being something that women were discussing in these groups. But also, particularly in San Francisco, there was a large contingent of lesbian women involved in the movement. Can you recall discussions about—

03-01:13:25

Real: We had no consciousness of that whatsoever. I don't even know—see, this is in the mid-sixties, late sixties. I don't think The Castro District had become a locus of gay activity that early. It may have, but we were pretty much oblivious to it, is my recollection. Because at that time, I think even in San Francisco, that was something you didn't talk about. It hadn't reached that level of open consciousness yet. But again, I wouldn't trust my memory. I just remember that was not an issue at all that we dealt with or that I remember anything about.

03-01:14:26

Tewes: Okay. I'm also curious about networks of these women's groups, and how these ideas are getting disseminated. You mentioned reading something like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, but were you aware of any other groups or any other discussions happening in the Bay Area?

03-01:14:49

Real: Oh, the simple answer to that is no. The one I remember is the Boston group. But see, I left so early on that there may have been other groups that formed after I had moved away from all that.

03-01:15:18

Tewes: That's fine. I guess we should discuss the fact that you did leave after several meetings, I believe.

03-01:15:27
Real: Yes.

03-01:15:28
Tewes: And this was in part recognition that you had more personal work to do—or how would you describe that break with the women's movement and with the New Left at that moment?

03-01:15:39
Real: Okay, a lot of it had to do with the breakup with my boyfriend. That was personally very, very painful, and I wasn't yet ready to talk about that. I mean, this was not group therapy, after all, this was, as you so correctly called it, consciousness-raising. And I was really pretty much consumed with pain from that experience and just needed to sort myself out. So I don't think after I left, I don't remember going to meetings. I mean, I kind of cut myself off from that, from that group.

03-01:16:21
Tewes: Looking back, do you think that was on purpose, that that was dredging up too much personal pain for you?

03-01:16:29
Real: No, no, no. I mean, it was in some ways—I don't want to say coincidental, but they're happening at the same time. And it may be that all that consciousness-raising allowed me to recognize my own personal pain and to acknowledge it. And once you acknowledge it, there's no shoving it back into its dark recesses. And so having recognized it, I needed to—this is on a very visceral level, I'm not thinking this out on an intellectual level—on a very visceral level, I just had to get away from there and get away from him and let him go do his thing, and I would go do—I would find a new path.

03-01:17:32
Tewes: Yes, and I want to talk about that new path, but I do want to just ask: as you've moved away from these movements starting in the late sixties, did you keep up with any information about, I don't know, like the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] or anything that was happening in the women's movement?

03-01:17:53
Real: No more than I would have. I mean, I was aware of the news, but I wasn't involved. At that point, for the next quite a few years, I wasn't involved politically at all. I knew what was happening in the world, but I wasn't—I didn't go to group meetings. Or I may have signed petitions or something, but I don't remember, I don't remember anything about the ERA at that point.

03-01:18:31
Tewes: Okay.

03-01:18:32
Real: Unfortunately.

03-01:18:35
Tewes: Is there anything you'd like to add about this particular moment in your life, about what this meant for you or any other stories I've forgotten to ask you?

03-01:18:46
Real: No. The women's [movement] period? No. I wish I could, but I don't remember anything more.

03-01:19:07
Tewes: That's okay. Thank you.

03-01:19:11
And so we've been talking about this pivot point in your life, where you're moving on and building yourself up in different ways. You were starting to say you were taking on a series of odd jobs, and perhaps you should detail some of those a little bit for us.

03-01:19:31
Real: Okay, let's see, I don't remember. Well, there weren't too many of them, but one of them was distributing soap samples. I mean, this is like the Dark Ages or something. But this was a marketing ploy that companies used. And so they hired people like me, just out of college, or young people who were looking for a little source of income. You would basically go door to door distributing these little sample sized boxes of laundry soap. One of the interesting things that came out of that, and probably one of the reasons I remember that, is—and I think they may have assigned us a particular area, and I ended up in Pacific Heights, which is a pretty ritzy-schnitzy area in San Francisco. I knocked on this door, and it turned out to be the home of one of the Zellerbachs, the Zellerbach family having founded this big paper company that became a big paper conglomerate. This particular Zellerbach was not involved in the company. I don't remember now what he did, and I am trying to remember now why we had a connection. But anyway, he somehow invited me in—I don't know if he felt sorry for me or whatever—and we started a conversation. I think he had gone to Swarthmore. We had some connection like that. So anyway, we immediately get talking about stuff that is far more intellectual than delivering soap samples. I think that kind of planted in my head that I had more potential than just delivering soap samples. I mean, I didn't see that as a career. That I needed somewhere in there to discover how to use my brain—I mean, how to put my brain to use to earn some money.

03-01:21:50
But before I eventually got to a resolution of that issue, my next major odd job was working for the US Postal Service as a mail carrier. That was very much a women's movement move on my part, because it turned out—I think somebody might have mentioned to me, so I must have had maybe some connection still to SDS people, because I think it was from them I heard about this, that the Postal Service, up to that time, had had a physical test, in addition to everything else, to become a mail carrier. It included hoisting a fifty-pound sandbag or some such thing, and carrying it across the length of a

room. And I don't know exactly why they dropped that requirement, but it did have something to do with the beginnings of pressure to open up mail-carrierdom to women. So then the idea was I should try to get a job with the Postal Service, you know, to test the system to see: are they still using the old sandbag test? And if they're not, can I get a job? Or are they still discriminating against women? Well, they weren't discriminating against women, and I was hired.

03-01:23:39

So I became a mail carrier, working out of the North Beach Station, and I was at the bottom of the totem pole, so I got absolutely the worst route. And of course, this—North Beach is a hilly area anyway. I was assigned a route that was so hilly, and that actually involved at least one long outdoor staircase, that—it didn't even accommodate the mail carts, so I carried the mail in a mail sack on my shoulder and hand delivered it to all the people on my route. So I walked up those darn stairs at least once a day.

03-01:24:33

At any given time, when you do that, you're not given all that much mail. You maybe have just a few blocks worth of mail, and then you would encounter another one of these—and I don't even know if they exist anymore, I don't think they exist anymore—but you would see a regular red, white, and blue mailbox, and then right next to it would be a green box that looked—it was exactly the same shape, but it was painted kind of military green and could only be opened with a key. That's where, earlier in the morning, somebody from your station would have come around and would have dropped the load of mail for those few blocks in that green box. And so you would collect the mail from this green box, and you would deliver it to the appropriate blocks, which would end you up at the next green box. Then you would pick up your next load. So at any given time, you weren't carrying fifty pounds of mail—although I do have to say it was a fair amount. It's the one time in my life where I could eat whatever I wanted and I lost weight. [laughs] I mean seriously, it was like a gym workout every morning.

03-01:26:03

But the beautiful result of this—oh, and I do have to confess that intellectual or—with all the schooling behind me and being a historian, I couldn't help but notice where people got mail from, and what kind of mail I was delivering. And believe me, your—well, nowadays it's very different, because if somebody comes driving in a truck, he barely even sees the mail that's going to go to your house. But back in the day, when the mail was delivered by a mail carrier who walked on two feet carrying the mail on his or her shoulder, mail carriers knew a great deal about you. So in any event, I noticed fairly early on, A, that I was delivering mail to two women who had two addresses, and they were both on my route. But it was the same two women at each of these two addresses, and that just struck me as interesting. I mean, I wasn't nosy enough to know—but I wondered what they were doing, I mean, what was going on with these two separate homes? And then one day I noticed that

they were getting mail from something called the Regional Oral History Office [ROHO] at UC Berkeley. And boy, did that pique my curiosity! Now again, I had never heard the term oral history. I don't even think it brought to mind what I had been doing in the South.

03-01:27:56

But most of the time, I did not meet these—really most of the time when I delivered mail, I went up to the mailbox or the mail slot and put the mail in, and I never even saw the people who lived in the house. But periodically, one or other of these two women would emerge from one of their houses—in particular—because these are very regular routes, so you would know that your mailman comes around ten o'clock in the morning. Every once in a while, they would come out to get their mail—one of them in particular. And I remember one day—seriously again, this is in some ways my movement training; I wasn't afraid to say anything. And so I wasn't afraid, after we had exchanged pleasantries, to say, "By the way, I notice that you have some mail here from the Regional Oral History Office. What *is* that?" And so she was a little taken aback that a mail carrier would even wonder what regional oral history was or something. And so I immediately had to explain that I was an American historian, I had a master's degree and had passed prelims for my PhD, and so this really intrigued me. And so we got into a whole conversation, and the more she talked, the more intrigued I got.

03-01:29:29

Finally she said—and this conversation may have gone on over more than one visit—she finally said, "What the heck are you doing as a mail carrier?" She said, "Let me introduce you to Willa Baum, who is the head of the Regional Oral History Office." This must have gone on over several days or weeks, because I remember at first saying, "Oh no, no, no." And then thinking to myself, What am I saying no, no, no [for]? This sounds fascinating. To be absolutely honest, okay, I've made my point. I'm a woman mail carrier. This is one of the duller jobs in the world, and it is very, very physically taxing. How long do I want to go on lugging this stuff on my shoulder? So I said to her, "You know, I'd love to meet Willa Baum." So she arranged for me to meet Willa, and the rest, as they say, is history.

03-01:30:26

I had a lovely meeting with Willa, and at—so she explained that at that moment they weren't hiring, but that there was a project on the horizon that they had applied for funding for to document the California career of Earl Warren, and so that's where we left it. And then several weeks later, maybe a month later, maybe less time than that, Willa called me and said, "Would you like—" basically, "Would you like a job?" I think at some point she may have even taken me to the Faculty Club for lunch. I mean, I was just totally, totally, totally blown away. And so she hired me, and I was originally hired as a researcher. I worked with Chita Fry, Amelia Fry, who was also one of the principal people on the Earl Warren Project.

03-01:31:37

Chita and I, I remember, we spent a day in some—I don't remember if it was a newspaper archive or somewhere where we spent the entire day looking at whatever it was, newspaper clippings or whatever. First of all, I was in seventh heaven; but second of all, this was a piece of cake for me. I mean, this was history research. I knew exactly what I was supposed to be doing, and I just fell right back into it. Chita was very impressed with my expertise. It's not that I did anything extraordinary, but I did have a background. And so she spoke to Willa and I was—my position there was then increased, so I then became an editor and an interviewer. Very shortly thereafter, somehow there was some kind of training. I don't know if Willa gave it to me directly or whether there was literature that she had written that I read, but I was outfitted. In those days we were using reel-to-reel tape-recorders, these—[indicates the size of the machine] the tape recorder itself was like a small Victrola, with a handle and reel-to-reel tape. And I started interviewing, and so I worked on the Earl Warren Project for the next decade.

03-01:33:25

Tewes: Yeah, it really was a decade. I think 1969 to '79?

03-01:33:28

Real: Right. And then very quickly it—and here, again, is me sticking up for the underdog, so to speak. So Earl Warren's California career could be divided into three sections, starting with his years as District Attorney of Alameda County, and then he became Attorney General of the State of California, and then he became [California] Governor. So those were three separate periods. Everybody wanted to work on the glamour of the governor's period. A few people kind of said—when I [say] everybody, there weren't that many of us. There were one, two, maybe four or five of us who were interviewers and editors. But the governor's years had much more glamour, and maybe even the attorney general's years. Nobody really was interested in his years as [district attorney]. So I, like sticking up for the underdog, I said, "I want it. I'll do it." So I did. It wasn't an issue of glamour to me. Whatever it was, it was history. It was interesting.

03-01:34:47

Okay, so I'm researching this whole period, of course, getting this stuff under my belt, and fairly quickly come upon a case that Earl Warren had prosecuted when he was DA that involved one of the waterfront labor unions. Now, I already knew all about Harry Bridges, and the [International] Longshore [and Warehouse] Union. My friend Danny Beagle from graduate school was now working for the ILWU. He was, I think, the head of their library or something, or their research department. And I worshipped Harry Bridges. He was one of my great heroes in history. This case tangentially involved Harry Bridges, but it did involve one of the waterfront unions, and it was a case where several officials of this union were arrested and ultimately convicted of murdering a ship's captain. But the question was, was there an ulterior motive? Was this all a plot by the ship owners backed by the power—the authorities and the DA's

office, to protect—well, to destroy radical unionism on the waterfront? And the union that these three men that this case dealt with were all a member of the Machine—oh God, how can I forget the name of this—

03-01:36:32
Tewes: Machinists Union?

03-01:36:34
Real: No, it was the Watertenders, Wipers—it's the people who work in the engine room in ships, [the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association]. And if you dig up my doctoral dissertation, ["The King-Ramsey-Conner Case: Labor, Radicalism, and the Law in California, 1936-1941,"] you'll find the name of the union. But in any case, these were two officials of the union, and then one ordinary member. And there was indeed a ship's captain who was beaten and died of his injuries. Whether the union officials or this one particular member of the union—whether they were involved, whether they had instigated it, was the question. And anyway, Earl Warren prosecuted this case with enormous vigor, using methods that he would, many decades later as Supreme Court Justice, declare unconstitutional. But of course, they were perfectly acceptable methods when he was a DA, and he was just doing his job as a DA, vigorously going after evildoers or whatever.

03-01:37:55
Okay. So this case absolutely—my little antennae went up, and I thought, Wow, this is fascinating. This is the story of a radical union trying to unionize the waterfront. This is a story of the ship owners trying to destroy unionism on the waterfront, being backed up by law enforcement, which we're past the stage where the ship owners are going to instigate murderous riots; we now have a better way. It's a much more peaceful way to take care of these things, and that's through law enforcement. So I thought this case, there was an absolutely fascinating story here, and so that awakened the idea in me that this would make a great doctoral dissertation. [noises in the background]

03-01:38:59
Tewes: Let's pause for a second, actually. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break, Mimi, and you were just talking about how all of this work you were doing at then-the Regional Oral History [Office]—now the Oral History Center, for those not in the know—brought you to this Earl Warren Project, which then brought you to your dissertation topic. Which, by the way, you'd been determined not to be involved in academia.

03-01:39:25
Real: Right, right.

03-01:39:26
Tewes: This is totally a shift for you.

03-01:39:28

Real: Right, right. When I was in Madison, a PhD—if you went on for a PhD in history, what that meant was that you then taught at a university somewhere, and so you just stayed in the ivory tower. The exact geographic location of your particular ivory tower might change, but that's where you were. Well, I was no longer in the ivory tower, and I was also no longer actively involved in the movement. There was a part of me that saw the—like, I had started down this path, I needed to finish that commitment. I had done everything to get a PhD, short of writing a dissertation. Why, here was a dissertation topic; let's finish it, let's do it. And once again, I just thought that idea. Nobody was there to talk me out of it. Certainly, Willa was all in favor of it. And they were all in favor of it because to have a PhD on their staff was going to be a great feather in their bonnet. So she was all in favor of it, and I was going to continue to work at ROHO. But what it would mean is that I would do a bunch of additional interviews related to my particular topic that might otherwise not have been done, and those all became part of ROHO's collection. In fact, there's an entire volume in the Earl Warren collection called the King-Ramsey-Connor Case, *[Shipboard Murder Case: Labor, Radicalism, and Earl Warren, 1936-1941.]*

03-01:41:18

My first thought was, Well, here I am at UC Berkeley. I'll just finish up here. I don't care where I get my doctorate from. So I got in touch with the History Department at Berkeley, and let's just say that they had their own rules, and they would not recognize the prelims from Wisconsin. I mean, in other words, I was going to have to practically start from scratch. I would have to fulfill an assortment of course requirements, and then I'd have to take prelims over again, and then I could maybe write a dissertation. And I thought that was just too daunting. I didn't want to go there.

03-01:42:18

Somehow, I thought maybe I could finish up at Wisconsin, since that's where I had done everything else. So I wrote to the chairman of the History Department. I do have to say I was something of—well, I was well known in the Department, a lot because of my civil rights—I mean, they didn't have that many graduate students who had been Freedom Riders and civil rights workers in the South, and so I was pretty much known. By that time, one of my professors from when I was there had become chairman of the Department, so he knew me anyway, because I had been a student of his. And I wrote to him and said, "Look, I would love to finish up my doctorate. I've passed prelims. I've discovered this wonderful topic that I would like to pursue for my thesis. Do I have your permission? And there is a teensy-weensy problem, that, A, I have moved into an entirely different area of American history from my master's work; and, B, in any case, the professor who supervised my master's work had moved on to the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, so I would need somebody to supervise."

03-01:43:56

So he got me right in touch with Stanley Kutler, who was a professor—what field was he in? Labor/constitutional law? Law. Anyway, he hooked me up with Professor Kutler, and that was a—we remained good friends until he passed away. I would visit him and his family, and he would visit if he was out on the West Coast. He would visit me long after I had finished. And again, he remembered me—did he remember me? But he took me on. And basically, he didn't have too much to do. I mean, I would send him chapters and he would make comments, and I would do revising and do whatever he told me to do.

03-01:45:19

The other thing was I did need to have a certain number of credits of coursework. I think I had to develop a minor or I had to develop something that was related to my thesis topic that wasn't Civil War and Reconstruction. So I did a minor, so to speak, in—I don't remember what it's called now, gosh; memory is a terrible thing—criminal justice. As luck would have it, there the leading professor in the Criminal Justice Department was a radical, well known for his writings in the field. And so I had a wonderful, wonderful conversation with him, in which, basically, I told him who I was and what I wanted to do. I think I may have had to take one classroom course with him, but all the rest of the credits I filled by doing independent study. And those course credits could be transferred from Berkeley to Wisconsin, so that's how I fulfilled that requirement. And then ultimately, I eventually managed to finish my dissertation. I was writing the dissertation while I was still working at ROHO and doing all these interviews.

03-01:47:03

And then I had to go back to Madison to defend my dissertation, as you well remember that process, and that was fairly nerve-racking, as those things are. But you know, then again—I just have to add this—I never, ever felt, during that entire experience that I was being treated any differently, because I was a woman. Now, granted, when I was being questioned, there's a panel of professors, and Professor Kutler, of course, was the head. But there were—I can't remember how many—maybe there were three other professors or two other professors. Anyway, one of them—I don't even remember if I knew him or not. But then, poor Stanley Kutler couldn't find a third. I don't remember what the problem was, but he couldn't find a third, so he dragged in somebody, this radical professor from the European History Department, which was fine with me. Again, if you could get hold of my dissertation, all those names, aren't they right in the beginning somewhere? There's a page where they all sign off? What was his name? Howard something? That's not right. In a way, I felt relieved about him, because I knew that he wasn't going to be able to drag me over the coals over some minor detail in the dissertation. I don't even know if he had read it. He may have asked some kind of general questions, and I don't even remember now.

03-01:49:07

I just remember sitting at this table with all these august men, but not feeling scared because I was a woman, but scared because my dissertation was on the line. [laughs] And whether I was going to get a degree or not was on the line, and I was being tested—and I've never been terribly good in those situations. And then, of course, they finally finish up their questioning, and they say, "Will you please step outside the room?" That I can remember. I can remember standing out in that hall and just the proverbial sweat pouring off me. I don't think I actually sweated; the building was well air-conditioned. But anyway, and then they invited me back in and said, "Congratulations, whatever, and fine job." And then I did all the little bureaucratic things that you need to do to actually graduate, and then I actually flew back to Madison for the graduation.

03-01:50:21

Tewes: That's a long journey. You finished in 1976, I think?

03-01:50:25

Real: Right, right.

03-01:50:27

Tewes: And something you'd been pursuing for over a decade at that point.

03-01:50:31

Real: Right, right. So yeah, that was neat. I still somewhere, I think, have—or do I? No, I may not have the hood. And the other thing I remember is that in those days, graduation in Madison was held in the football stadium. Everybody was there, from undergraduates to all the different graduate schools and, you know, doctors and lawyers and all the other graduate schools. And the only people who actually got to walk across the stage, which was down in the middle of the football field, were the people getting advanced degrees, so the doctors and the lawyers and the PhDs. So I got to walk across the stage and get my diploma cover.

03-01:51:29

Tewes: That's very cool.

03-01:51:31

Real: And have the hood put on me.

03-01:51:36

Tewes: I think that's a good place for us to end today, Mimi. But is there anything you'd like to add out of everything we've discussed?

03-01:51:45

Real: I can't think of anything, no.

03-01:51:49

Tewes: Okay well, thank you so much for your time today.

Interview 4: April 6, 2021

04-00:00:00
Tewes: This is a fourth interview with Mimi Feingold Real for the Bay Area Women in Politics Oral History Project. The interview is being conducted by Amanda Tewes on April 6, 2021. Ms. Real joins me in this remote interview from Mill Valley, California, and I am in Walnut Creek, California. So thank you, again, for joining me in this conversation, Mimi.

04-00:00:25
Real: Delighted.

04-00:00:27
Tewes: I wanted to follow up with some things we discussed in our last interview. One of which being that you actually worked in my current office, which was then called the Regional Oral History Office [ROHO].

04-00:00:40
Real: Right.

04-00:00:40
Tewes: I wanted to ask you just a few questions about your experiences there. So you mentioned working on the Earl Warren Project, which was a very big part of your life, because that led to your dissertation.

04-00:00:51
Real: Right, right.

04-00:00:52
Tewes: But you also mentioned to me, in a previous conversation, that you met Alice Paul during this time.

04-00:00:58
Real: No, I didn't meet Alice Paul. I met Earl Warren. But one of the other interviewers in the office, one of the other biggies, so to speak—in fact, I was working directly for her when I first started working there—was Amelia Fry, or she went by a nickname, Chita. She was the one who did the Alice Paul interviews, because I think Ms. Paul was then back East in Washington, D.C., if I'm not mistaken. But anyway, Chita would interview her there and would travel. In those days, we didn't have any computers or Zoom or any way of doing it remotely. You went to the interviewee's house or office and interviewed them there.

04-00:01:57
Tewes: Sorry, I misunderstood that one. What do you remember about meeting Earl Warren in person?

04-00:02:03
Real: Well, he had come out to the Bay Area for some reason or another. A luncheon was arranged for him to meet the entire staff of the—certainly of the

Earl Warren Project. There may have been a couple of other ROHO people there, so we had a very formal kind of lunch, probably at the Faculty Club, Women's Faculty Club on the Berkeley campus. I just remember I had been sick right before then, and somehow he had learned about that. He took the trouble to ask me how I was feeling, if I was feeling better. I was just enormously impressed, I mean, I was overwhelmed. I was sort of intimidated by—here I was, sitting at the same table as the former Chief Justice of the [Supreme Court of the] United States. But he was very humble. He wasn't condescending or arrogant or any of those things. He was just very down to earth. I think one of the members of his office when he was a DA and also attorney general—Richard Olney? I remember the last name was Olney, and I'm not positive if his first name was Richard. [It was Warren Olney.] He may have also been there. That's about all I remember of that luncheon.

04-00:03:41
Tewes: Do you know what he thought about the project itself, these interviews being conducted around his life and work?

04-00:03:48
Real: Well, I think that he was very honored and very impressed. I mean, I think he was very happy that this stuff was being documented, particularly the earlier years. Because of course, practically every word out of his mouth when he was chief justice was recorded time and time again. But I think that it was very meaningful to him that the earlier parts of his career when he was a DA and attorney general, and even Governor of California, that that was being documented in a responsible way.

04-00:04:25
Tewes: No, I understand that distinction there. That's so interesting, Mimi. So we also talked about how you came to ROHO and how you met Willa Baum.

04-00:04:37
Real: Yeah.

04-00:04:38
Tewes: I was curious: in 1969 when you joined the office, do you remember what the state of the field was in oral history?

04-00:04:50
Real: I'm tempted to say primitive. I mean, it was very early. Not that many people even knew what oral history was. When I would tell people where I was working, the first question everybody asked was, "What's oral history?" The only other major oral history office in the country, that I can remember at the time, was at Columbia [University]. I think it was sort of a little bit of a competition as to which one, ROHO or Columbia, had been founded first. But they had been founded in the same period and had achieved eminence, both of them, each on its respective coast. But it was a very primitive field.

04-00:05:45

There was almost nothing written about it. I remember having a couple of different kinds of opportunities to teach people how to do oral history, and I'd be scrambling for written material to give my students. Willa Baum had written a booklet, which I don't know if it's still in circulation at the Oral History Center, on how to do oral history, but there was very little, there was very little. And the other thing was that there was a sort of distinction then between the kind of oral history that we were doing and the kind of oral history that people like Studs Terkel were doing, that kind of almost anthropological fieldwork or sociological fieldwork. Not that we were looking down on them or anything, but we were just very aware of the difference, both in technique and in purpose. But yeah, the field was very, very new.

04-00:07:07

Tewes: That's why it's so exciting to hear about it from your eyes what was happening. [laughs]

04-00:07:14

Real: Yeah.

04-00:07:15

Tewes: Is there anything else you want to follow up for—about your time there at ROHO that we have missed?

04-00:07:22

Real: Well, except that it was a very exciting time for me. I mean, I remember thinking when I first started working there, You're going to have to drag me out of here feet first if you ever expect me to leave this office. I absolutely adore the kind of work—I mean, you know, like, I am being *paid* to do this? I love it! I love it, I love it, I love it! I mean, there was everything, from researching before you went to interview, and then interviewing somebody. I *loved* interviewing, because I didn't have to say much, you know? I mostly just had to ask questions and bring the other person out. What I thought about anything was immaterial, as you well know, and I love that. I just loved meeting all these different kinds of people and bringing out their stories, and helping them to remember things from the past.

04-00:08:28

And then, of course, there was also the editorial side, where the tapes would be transcribed—and I'm sure this is what you still do—and then we, each interviewer, would edit their own transcripts and we would do light editing. And then we would be responsible for sending it back to the interviewee and getting it back from them. That was always a challenge. I'd say that was a very important part of my life. You know what? First of all, it brought together a number of elements in my life, which is—this is the first time since I left graduate school that I was using my graduate education. I was also independent. I was living alone, and it just seemed to me that this was a fantastic career. And then I began to see that there were further possibilities.

04-00:09:46

There were a few interviews I did that were not [Earl] Warren Project related, and one of them had to do with the history of a tugboat company in—it was the Crowley Maritime [Corporation], something, something, something. Anyway, they basically operated tugs and barges, and they started out as just a tugboat operator in San Francisco Bay. And by the time I got into the picture, they were a worldwide operation and running tugs and barges all over the place. It was quite remarkable. So I interviewed, I think—I'm trying to remember if I interviewed the original Crowley—was he still alive? But I spent a great deal of time with the younger generation Crowley, who was running the operation then.

04-00:10:37

Somehow, the idea got planted in my mind that there was an opportunity there that I could, so to speak, seize. So I kind of invented a company—I mean, I invented my own little company, which I called Oral History Associates. I marketed myself as doing corporate histories, of which oral history would be a large part, since most corporations didn't keep large archives of their histories. I actually got a number of jobs over the next number of years. I wrote the history of Consolidated Freightways, the trucking company; Kaiser Aluminum; Clairol, the hair coloring people; East Bay Regional Park District—those are the ones that come readily to mind. Oh, just a minute, FMC [Food Machinery and Chemical Corporation]. And each of these would be a fairly major, major production. Oh, and then I had a big job with a bunch of companies, operating under the corporate company Mannix Co., Ltd, based in Calgary. I mostly did work for their division, Manalta Coal, Ltd. And so I spent the better part of a couple of years going back and forth to Calgary, somehow most all of the time in the dead of winter, interviewing the people up there. They did these huge, huge heavy open-pit mining. They had quite an operation. They were into a number of different things, but open-pit mining and—I'm trying to remember.

04-00:12:34

Anyway, I would do a lot of interviewing. This created an archive for the company, because I would be interviewing, very often, the founders or the older generation, and the people who had stories that were going to be lost if somebody didn't come in and record them—and that was me. And then I got what information I could from the companies' own archives, and I would then write a book. And they would then, usually, provide the book designer and take care of the publication of the book, and it became a public relations tool. These were substantial books. They would run to 100 pages or 150 pages, and fully illustrated. The companies would use them, both as public relations pieces and as things in human resources. Like, they'd give one to every employee as a way of communicating the corporate culture, that you should understand the history of the company that you work for, and why we do things the way we do and why we value things—why we value what we value. And this is what the early days of the company were like. Needless to say, the early days were just extraordinary stories in each of these companies,

and that would get, as I say, eventually published as a book. So that was Oral History Associates.

04-00:14:15

Then somewhere in there—oh, so that was what I was doing when I first met Rabbi [Pinchas] Lipner. Then eventually, I got married, and we wanted to start a family. My husband, at that time, had his own—he was in another very, very, very highly specialized field of store planning and design, and he was one of the leading people in the industry. He traveled extensively. So between his travel and my travel, we wanted to start a family, but you don't start a family if the two people involved are traveling all the time. So I sold the business and got out of doing oral/company histories.

04-00:15:20

Tewes: So this would have been around—from the time you left ROHO, from around 1979 to the late eighties?

04-00:15:27

Real: Right, to—yeah, right. Right.

04-00:15:30

Tewes: A good long time. I didn't realize that was your own business, though, at that time. That's great.

04-00:15:35

Real: Yeah, yeah. I'm digging out my résumé to see if I can put some years on it.

04-00:15:44

Tewes: Oh good.

04-00:15:50

Real: [looks at résumé] That's teaching—yeah, Oral History Associates, 1977 to whenever I did this résumé. But anyway, I started it in 1977.

04-00:16:13

Tewes: Okay.

04-00:16:14

Real: Oh yeah. So I'm looking at the list here. See, this is why we have résumés, so we can remember these things. Now, did I mention Intel? I also did Intel. I did some interviewing for Bank of America. I never wrote something for them. And also some interviewing for Standard Oil. Oh, Bristol Myers. Oh, and I also did something for the Bristol Myers Company, which owned Clairol, so I did Bristol Myers, and then I also did Clairol. Bristol Myers never published their book, for a variety of internal reasons, which had nothing to do with me, but Clairol did. As I say, I would have left there sometime in the mid—well, I guess I did oral history for almost a decade. And then, as I say, I realized that if we were going to start a family, A, I wasn't getting any younger, and, B, we both had to be more or less in the same place at the same time to get a family started. So anyway, that's—so as I say, I sold the business.

04-00:17:42
Tewes: Right. Well, I think that's so interesting that you started off your oral history career doing government and legal interviews, and then you're moving on to the corporate business side of things.

04-00:17:52
Real: Yeah.

04-00:17:54
Tewes: That's just an interesting observation [laughs] about different specialties.

04-00:17:59
Real: Yeah. Well as you know, the interviews for the company histories were very focused, so I wasn't doing any wide-ranging thing. And there usually was enough material that the company itself had on its history, so I had a general background. And then I did the thing that you're trained to do, is I would ask colleagues of theirs, "Look, I'm going to be interviewing so-and-so. What should I be sure to ask him about?" that sort of thing. And then one interview would lead to another, because somebody in an interview would talk about something, and then I'd be able to ask the next person about that, so they'd build on each other. Also these were—how best to put it—human interest-oriented histories, so we didn't go into great technicalities. With Standard Oil, we didn't—I wasn't talking with them about the intricacies of engineering oil wells in Saudi Arabia. It was more about how they built the business and what kind of challenges they had to go through.

04-00:19:20
Don't get me started, because I could talk for hours, but there was a wonderful story that, for Standard Oil, I interviewed somebody who was, pardon the expression, as old as the hills. He was quite elderly when I interviewed him, and he had been with Standard Oil his entire career. He had been sent out by Standard Oil to start up their operations in Saudi Arabia—and this is way back, I can't even date it. But this is going way, way, way back. They're building these huge oil rigs and whatever else they do. But he told this very funny story about how when he would go to observe the construction sites, he noticed that all the Saudi workers were hammering with their left hands and using all their tools with their left hands. He thought that was rather peculiar, and he looked into it a little bit further. He discovered that the Standard Oil American foreman, who had been sent over there to train the Saudis, was left-handed. And so the Saudi workers, having no prior experience with Western tools, just imitated what they saw. [laughs] The guy picked the hammer up with his left hand, and they all learned to pick their hammers up with their left hand. So anyway, but—

04-00:20:57
Tewes: [laughs] Great story.

04-00:20:59
Real: That was the kind of thing that we were after, which was the kind of story that would grab everybody, from investors to employees.

04-00:21:17
Tewes: And effectively! I'm drawn in. [laughs] Well, this is great. And so this is a major transition in your life, leaving ROHO, starting your own business.

04-00:21:26
Real: Oh yeah, yeah.

04-00:21:27
Tewes: Another major transition that we've already [mentioned] here was meeting an important person in your life, Rabbi Pinchas Lipner. Can you tell me about how that relationship came about?

04-00:21:40
Real: Okay. Let's see, I have to back it up a few years. It's hard to place exactly when it was. Let's see, it was probably maybe the late seventies. So I was on my own, and I would have still been working, I think, for ROHO. I don't know exactly what sparked my interest in Judaism. But I had been raised Jewish, but in a religiously, for lack of a better word, assimilated home. My parents were radicals, and so they had no truck with organized religion. On the other hand, my father's father, who was very observant, lived with us. So I have no idea where it came from, but niggling in the depths of my soul was this desire to learn more about what it meant to be Jewish. I mean, I knew I was Jewish, but I had no idea what—much beyond that.

04-00:23:15
So I ended up signing up for a course. I don't even know how I found out about the course, but it was being taught by a conservative rabbi from the conservative movement in Judaism, and it was just an eye opener. I loved it. But the course ended. And at that point, I had befriended a couple also in the course for pretty much the same reason I was. They told me about wonderful, wonderful classes that they had heard about from friends of theirs, being taught by this rabbi named Rabbi Pinchas Lipner. It was primarily Torah study, and they just absolutely swore by this class, they just absolutely loved it, they loved the rabbi, and I really ought to check it out. So I have no recollection of how I even found out about the class, how I discovered where they met or how—but in any event, I started going.

04-00:24:30
I absolutely fell in love with Rabbi Lipner. I mean, I'm not talking love-love, but I just was blown away, I was just mesmerized. This man was so warm and so accepting, on the one hand, and so unbelievably knowledgeable. Everything he said made so much sense to me. It all hung together, and it was factual and moral stuff, and how you lived your life, all coming out of a lesson from whatever Torah portion we were studying at the moment. But he was so unbelievably accepting. I mean, nobody else in that room, other than he, were

Orthodox. Most of the other people were like me; we didn't know very much about Judaism. He showed no signs of condescension or arrogance toward us at all. People could ask the silliest sounding questions. I mean, sometimes people would ask questions and *I* would cringe. He would make them feel like they were the smartest person in the room, and he would—every time he spoke it was like he was speaking directly to you. He had the most incredible eyes, like he was looking into your soul, and you were looking into his soul. He was just so full of wisdom. But not necessarily just religious wisdom, but on a very, very, very basic day to day, what you do with your life kind of wisdom. And so I was hooked. I went to these classes—pardon the pun—religiously. They were, I think, once a week, and they were in someone's house in San Francisco. I just loved it, and then that relationship developed.

04-00:26:38

Then after I met my husband—I don't know if you want that story? Okay so, during the course of all of this, I think I even went to see Rabbi in his office, because I was really looking to get married and I wanted to marry somebody observantly Jewish. I thought, Well, who better who would know? And I, in my innocence, think that there's this vast pool of Orthodox Jewish men in the Bay Area, and Rabbi Lipner never said anything to dispel that. He didn't do anything to burst my balloon. So he said he'd see what he could do, see who he could think of. I think he did fix me up with somebody, and that didn't—we didn't click with each other.

04-00:27:34

So by this point, I was doing my own business. I was working on this contract with this company in Canada. It was in late May, but I had just—they were just opening up a new strip mine way up in the Rockies, in the mountains outside of Calgary. And so I had been at this opening celebration, both to be there—well, I had gone up there to do—I had done a number of other interviews, but there was somebody who was going to be at the celebration, and that was the only time I'd be able to interview him. So I had gone to do that interview. This is May, but it started to—there was snow on the ground, and I think it started to snow while I was there. To make a long story short, I flew back, that was the end of that particular trip. So they flew me back to Calgary in the company plane, along with a bunch of other company people, and we landed at the Calgary Airport. And so I got off their private jet and just scurried over to the Air Canada desk and got on my flight, which didn't get into San Francisco until midnight or so.

04-00:29:21

At that time, my usual practice was I'd park my car in the Park 'N Fly lot and took the little Park 'N Fly shuttle over to the airport. So I, after my flight landed and I collected my luggage, I went out and eventually a little Park 'N Fly shuttle came by, and I hopped on. I was the only person in the entire little shuttle. Just as the doors were about to shut on the shuttle, some guy comes flying out of the same terminal and leaps on the bus just as the doors are about to close. He is wearing flip-flops, and he has this big roll of architectural

drawings under his arm. It's clear he has not just come from Calgary. Seriously, there I was, I literally had a fur coat on—or I think it was a fur coat. I still had my heavy coat on and boots, and here he is in his flip-flops. Well it turned out, of course, he had just returned from a business trip to Hawaii, which he had extended for a couple of days so that he could enjoy Hawaii. And then as soon as he jumped on the bus, the doors closed and the little shuttle bus took off for the parking lot.

04-00:30:41

Well, so we chit-chatted, and by the time we got to the parking lot he had taken my phone number. And I thought, at the time, What have I done? It's pitch black outside. I barely can see this guy. I did manage to try to get a look at his car, because he was the first one—his car was the first one we got to in the parking lot. I thought at least I could see something about his car. But I said, "For all I know, he's the Boston Strangler! [laughs] I mean, I don't know who this guy is, and he's taking my number." Okay well, I didn't think anything of it, because I was—I had more traveling, and it turned out he had more traveling. Sometime within the next week or two, he called me and we made a date. At that time, I was living in an apartment building in The Marina District in San Francisco. And I thought, Okay, okay, I still—I don't know anything about this guy. I am certainly not having him up to my apartment. So I said, "Look, it'll be easier, because parking is very, very difficult, so why don't you just pull into a driveway, and I'll be right in the lobby of the apartment building [waiting] for you." [laughs] And so he picked me up, and we went out to have dinner.

04-00:32:01

Well, at that point in my life, it was very, very important to me that I marry somebody Jewish. And of course, again, I know nothing about this guy. So I have to give myself enormous amounts of credit for somehow being subtly able to direct the conversation in such a way that he was able to reveal that his grandparents had come from Russia. And I thought, Okay well, either he's a White Russian or he's Jewish. Anyway, it soon became apparent that he was Jewish, so I sort of internally let out a great sigh of relief. And as they say, the rest is history. We dated, and our dating was really crazy, because we were both traveling a lot. Eventually he asked me to marry him, and I said yes.

04-00:33:04

So then the question came—oh, by that time, to just back up a bit—I was still going to Rabbi Lipner's classes. And I kept telling Bob [Real] how wonderful these classes were, and how much I thought Bob would really like them. And of course, typical person, he—I'm trying not to make sexist remarks here, but he did not immediately show much interest. He said, "That's your thing, and I want you to enjoy your thing. I don't want to impinge." And I said, "No, no, no! You'll really love it. You'll really love the rabbi." And finally, I think just to appease me, he agreed reluctantly to come schlepping along for one meeting. Well of course, he immediately fell in love with Rabbi Lipner, and one thing led to another.

04-00:34:04

At that point, Rabbi Lipner, whose main job was not teaching adult education classes—he had founded a school back in 1969, I think, in San Francisco, then called the Hebrew Academy of San Francisco [later Lisa Kampner Hebrew Academy]. And this was the first Orthodox day school in not only the Bay Area, but all of Northern California. And that was one of the reasons—there's a long history attached there, but that was one of the reasons he had agreed to come out—he's not from San Francisco—and found this school. Because San Francisco, at that time, had the largest Jewish population in the United States without an Orthodox day school. So he came out and he founded it. And as I say, that was in 1969. By the late seventies, it had grown so that it was now, by that time, all the way from nursery through high school. It had literally grown, and it had outgrown its quarters, which had originally been a set of flats in The Outer Richmond. And so with the help of the Jewish—what is now the Jewish Community Federation, he was able to secure funds to build a new building, basically.

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Bob became very interested in that, and so Bob ended up becoming sort of the coordinator, from the school's side, of that building project. So he was the one who coordinated with the general contractor and all the subcontractors, and he reviewed all the architectural drawings. When decisions had to be made, he would be part of the making of those decisions. And so he became very close to Rabbi and, of course, I was also close to Rabbi from all these classes.

04-00:36:40

So then when Bob and I decided to get married, the question was—we definitely wanted a Jewish wedding—who could marry us? And really, the only rabbi we knew was Rabbi Lipner. And so to make a very long story short, we had a full-blown Orthodox Jewish wedding, which—it was just—and that is also one of the highlights of my life. It was just a truly extraordinary event. Two other rabbis, who were very, very key in building the Hebrew Academy, in creating the school that it became—it was sort of a triumvirate of Rabbi Lipner, Rabbi Daniel Goodman, and Rabbi [Mordechai] Rindenow. The three rabbis all officiated at the wedding. They were all very much a part of the celebration afterwards, and, I mean, it was everything! I was raised up in a chair and Bob was also holding the handkerchief between us. One of the rabbis dancing with a wine bottle balanced on his head. I mean, it was whole nine yards and, of course, all the things that went with an Orthodox wedding. I was led to the chuppah by the wives of Rabbi Goodman and Rabbi Lipner, I think. And they led me under the chuppah, around Bob seven times, which is, again, part of the ceremony. I mean, it was just wonderful. [laughs]

04-00:38:22

And so then when Bob and I decided that we wanted to start a family, that was when I sold the business. At some point in there, I started working for Rabbi. At first I was working just like—as a general kind of assistant to him in the

office. And then the woman who had been handling admissions left, and so I was asked to take her place. So I did admissions for a number of years at the school. This is when the school was really growing very, very fast. And by this time—oh, I'm sorry. I've skipped over a number of years.

04-00:39:12

I didn't actually start working at the school until after my son, [Joshua], was born, because—I skipped over, I left off where Bob and I want to start a family. Well, we started one [laughs] and we had a son. And then I was a stay-at-home mom. This is part of my self-definition as a woman. It was not at all demeaning to me to be a full-time mom. I mean, I took everything that I did very seriously, and the job of mothering I also took seriously. Because I had come at it from such a different angle from a typical situation—I mean, I had already had a career, I had created my own business, I had been in the Civil Rights movement, I mean, I had done all this stuff. I had proved to the world and to myself that I was fully functional, that I could do anything I wanted to do on my own. It was no great burden to take on motherhood. This is just one more project, and that I was going to do it my way—and that's exactly what I did. It was not necessarily the traditional thing that most people did at that point. But I, as I say, I read a lot and absorbed bunches of ideas. Some of them resonated and some of them I thought were ridiculous. The ones that resonated, I adopted. I do have to say my son was none the worse for wear for any of that. I mean, he's grown up to be a lovely human being. [laughs]

04-00:41:12

Tewes: I'm curious if any of the things you were reading about motherhood related back to the women's movement and any of the conversations happening in that movement.

04-00:41:21

Real: Some of it did, some of it did. I mean, there was even stuff that I remembered reading from the very early women's movement, the stuff that had come out of Boston, you know, when I was doing the women's group in San Francisco. This is long, long, long before I met Bob or ever thought of having a child. And I don't even remember now what it was, but several of the women, in writing this little newsletter, would talk about their experiences and what they were doing with their own infants. And I would think to myself, Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And whether Dr. [Benjamin] Spock says that's what you're supposed to do or any of the other child-rearing experts—there were child-rearing experts that I put a lot of faith in; I don't remember most of the names now. You know, for example, I elected to breastfeed, and that was very important to me. And so there was the whole La Leche League literature, and an assortment of other people who were great advocates of breastfeeding, and also advocates of—I can't remember what the term is, but basically that the baby sleeps in the bed with you.

04-00:42:44

Tewes: Co-sleeping?

04-00:42:46
Real: Yeah. And believe me, that was not a popular idea at the time. But again, it wasn't that I didn't care, but it just made so much sense to me that I did it. And it has its drawbacks. My husband and I used to laugh, because Josh was a fairly hefty baby. He wasn't some little, petite, frail, little thing, and we didn't have a king-size bed. We just had a queen-size bed, and he would, as an infant and as a little baby, he would love to sleep across the bed. So his feet would be against one of us and his head would be against the other of us, and the two of us would be practically falling off the sides of the bed, [laughs] with Josh across the middle. But anyway, so those were just some brief examples of that.

04-00:43:55
It was when Josh was old enough to be going to school full-time that I started working at the Hebrew Academy. And I was in no rush—he was never in daycare, and I didn't even leave him with babysitters all that often. But he did go to preschool for a year at a little local preschool. I think that was maybe two or three days a week, and he was fine. The funny story there is that, again, me being the quintessential mother, I had absorbed everything that I had read, and so I wasn't just going to drop him off there, I was going to make sure that he was settled, that he felt comfortable. Here was this strange environment, and all these kids he had never seen, and the teacher who he never seen. So that very first day, they had a playroom with these little low round tables and little chairs, and the kids were all sitting down in the chairs. I don't know whether they had crayons or what it was. And I, of course, sat down in the chair next to Josh to just make sure that he was okay and everything. He finally turned to me and he said, "Mom, when are you going to leave?" or words to that effect. [laughs] I mean, however a three-year-old or a four-year-old would phrase that. But so I figured he was fine, and he was.

04-00:45:42
Tewes: [laughs] He was ready to be independent.

04-00:45:45
Real: He was quite ready. He did not need me hovering over him. And anyway, the following year I put him in the Hebrew Academy, in pre-K, which was—and the only reason I hadn't done nursery was that the Hebrew Academy nursery was five days a week. I thought that was too big a transition to suddenly—from being at home with me all the time or just being with me all the time, that he would suddenly now be in school five days a week. So I wanted to start gradually, so that's why I did a local nursery, and then pre-K was five days a week. He was absolutely fine with that. He loved the Hebrew Academy. I think, even then, it was maybe a half-day program. I think they dismissed at like one o'clock in the afternoon or something, so it wasn't a full day. But anyway, and then he continued on at the Hebrew Academy. By the time, I guess, he was in maybe kindergarten or first grade, that was when I—Rabbi Lipner said, Was I interested in doing some work at the school? And of

course, I was. So anyway, that's how I got there. And then, as I say, I worked for him for a number of years.

04-00:47:15

And then there were financial pressures on our family brought on by 9/11, which destroyed my husband's business. And so when my son was in high school—this was about the time he was in high school—I began to be open to maybe another opportunity, but I didn't even know where to look. And then a job fell in my lap teaching American history at a Catholic girls' school in Marin County, [San Domenico School]. And so I leaped at the opportunity, because the salary was going to be like at least twice, if not more, than I was earning at the Hebrew Academy. The salary was very nice, but that turned out to be an experience where I was a square peg in a round hole. It was not the right place for me, and that was not the right—I was not right for them/they were not right for me. And so at the end of that year, I told them that I would not be returning for the following year.

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And then out of the blue came a phone call about a month later from the secular principal at the Hebrew Academy, saying that the high school history teacher was retiring, and would I be interested in teaching tenth grade European history and eleventh grade US history? And that would be both regular history and Advanced Placement. Of course, I said yes, *would I be interested*? And I can still remember, I put down that phone and I just went, whoop-de-doo, around the kitchen. I was just so happy and so excited. And so that's what I did until the school closed in 2016. So I started out teaching tenth and eleventh grade, as I say, regular and AP. And then a year or two later, the person who was teaching twelfth grade social studies, which is one semester of economics and one semester of US government, he left. And so I was asked if I would take that on, as well, and I said of course. I remained teaching tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades at the Hebrew Academy.

04-00:49:57

That was, again, one of the highlight periods of my life. It was the same feeling, maybe even more so, that I'd had at ROHO, that, I can't believe I'm being paid to do this. I just adored the work. But more than the work—it wasn't really the—it was the entire atmosphere. It was Rabbi Lipner. I could walk into his office any time I needed to, he would call me in. We got to be very close working—I don't want to say partners, but I played a fairly important part in the Hebrew Academy. I just absolutely so looked up to him. He was such a role model to me on every single level.

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And then I *adored* the kids. By that time, about maybe 90, 95 percent of the kids were Russian Jewish émigrés. And so in many ways, they were typical immigrant kids, in that their parents had undergone unbelievable hardships to bring—to get their family out of the former Soviet Union and bring them to the United States. They wanted success, and of course, that had been a big

thing in the Soviet Union, academic success. And so they wanted their kids to go to Berkeley or—Berkeley was the big goal. And so it was the most wonderful group of parents and the most wonderful group of kids. I mean, they were bright and they were eager to learn. Granted, there were kids who were problems, but even them, I loved dealing with them.

04-00:51:59

I was able to teach the way I wanted to teach. That was the other thing. This was a private school. We were following the California curriculum, in part because if we didn't, the kids wouldn't be able to get into secular universities. So we were following all the UC requirements, that: x number of years of English, x number of years of social studies, et cetera, et cetera. But I was able to teach on a fairly rigorous level, and to teach in a very traditional way, because that's *also* what the parents wanted. They were used to education in the Soviet Union, which was completely different from the United States, and very, very traditional. There it was very regimented, so—I didn't teach that regimented. But this was: the kids sat at desks, and I stood in the front and taught. It wasn't like I lectured for forty minutes, but it was mostly I was teaching. Anyway, I adored that.

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And then actually, along about, I'm going to say maybe 2014—2013, 2014—the AP people decided, in their infinite wisdom, to completely redo the AP history courses. And again, to make a long story short, I felt that they were pretty much, if not destroying the AP European and AP US history courses, but they were certainly dumbing them down and turning them into something that was not academically rigorous. And by that time, I was teaching this full load of three grades, and I was also doing private tutoring to supplement our income, and I was getting pretty burned out. I mean, I literally never had a day off, and I was working myself into a tizzy. And so I made a very difficult decision, but I just could not face teaching the new AP courses in the classroom. It went totally against my grain. So I stopped teaching tenth and eleventh grade, and I just continued to teach twelfth grade for a couple of years. At the end of 2015/2016 academic year, for a variety of horrible reasons, the school made a decision to close. So that ended my classroom teaching career.

04-00:55:12

Tewes: Yes, but as you've mentioned, you've continued to mentor students another way: through tutoring.

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Real: Right, so I continue the private tutoring. But all during those years, as I say, I was very close as a colleague to Rabbi Lipner. Even when I was only teaching one grade, I was still conferring with him a lot.

04-00:55:39

And well, now, should I tell this? I guess I should tell this story. I don't even remember now what led me to—ah! Somewhere in there, having become such a close colleague to Rabbi Lipner and hearing all his stories of all the challenges that he had faced in founding and developing this school—and they were immense. There were many, many efforts, primarily from the Reform Jewish community to shut him down, to shut down the school—and that's another complete story in and of itself. It was not a huge leap for me, from my oral history days and as a historian, to say, "Somebody should write the history of this school. This *is* a story. This is an *important* story, it's a David-and-Goliath story. It shines very interesting light on the Jewish community in San Francisco and its history, and somebody should write this history. And who might that somebody be?" [laughs] So I started very small, and I just started gathering information.

04-00:57:18

At about this time—again, coincidences don't happen; there's no such thing as coincidences—ROHO had been given a contract by the Jewish Community Federation to document their presidents, and so they were working their way from, of course, the oldest ones to the younger ones, and doing a series of interviews with each of them. And so I thought to myself, That might be a very interesting source of information about the—there might be stuff in there about the Hebrew Academy. I was having a terrible time, because obviously, again, there is not this trail of documents and written records and files that I could access about the history of the Hebrew Academy. And I also realized that I probably was not going to get an enormous amount of cooperation from Federation.

04-00:58:24

Many of these Federation transcripts had reached the stage that they were bound volumes, and they were in The Bancroft [Library]. So I spent a couple of weeks in The Bancroft, wading through these transcripts and finding some very interesting things. A little bit here, a little bit there. And then I hit Richard Goldman's transcript. He was a big, huge muckety-muck in the Federation. He had been Federation president for many, many years; major, major donor. Extremely, extremely wealthy man. I can't remember how he made his money; real estate development or something, or handling office buildings downtown? In any event, he was extremely wealthy, and just a big, big macher in the Jewish community, a big muckety-muck. I am reading his transcript, and he talks about visiting the Hebrew Academy, and comments—I don't remember now the exact quote, but he compared Rabbi Lipner to Hitler. I mean, and he made several other comments in that interview that were extremely—unflattering is hardly the word. I mean, we're talking slanderous comments about Rabbi Lipner, and I was, quite frankly, appalled.

04-01:00:10

I remember it was a Friday, and I had ordered xeroxes. The poor Bancroft Library—again, this is before cell phones, this is before computers or

anything. The poor people at Bancroft Library, they're—I kept putting in all these orders to have pages xeroxed out of transcripts. So I get the xerox of this transcript, and I think, What am I—it was Friday and it was—that's the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, Friday night. And I thought, Should I show these to Rabbi now? Is that going to ruin his Shabbos for him? What should I do? And I finally, I don't know what made me, but I gave him the transcript, and I said, "You might not want to read this over Shabbos. You should wait until Monday." He went ahead and read it anyway, and his response—he did not go ballistic. I would have gone ballistic. He did not go ballistic.

04-01:01:20

But somewhere, the idea eventually formulated in the back of his head—now, I don't remember exactly how this idea developed. I don't know if it came from him or from somebody else that he showed the transcript to. I mean, to him, all it did was prove where the Federation's opinions were in those days. And I have to say things have changed a lot at the Federation since then. The idea came that Rabbi Lipner could sue Goldman for whatever it is, libel or slander—libel. I'm trying to remember. I taught this stuff. Anyway, I can't remember which one is print and which one is speech. But anyway, that case, he did [sue]. He did, and the case actually went to court. Goldman was—what's the word in legal cases, where you're interviewed under oath but not in a courtroom? There's a word for it, [deposed]. Anyway, he did that.

04-01:02:39

In any event, the interesting thing is that the—needless to say, as in many legal cases, the case eventually hung on a technicality of: had the statute of limitations run [out], and it had to do with the date that the transcript was published, so to speak, versus the date that Rabbi Lipner first became aware of it. The first round in court came down on Rabbi Lipner's side. I don't exactly remember now what the whole legal path of the case. But between that first hearing in Superior Court and the second hearing, we, being fairly cynical about what was going on, speculated that somebody got to the judge. It was the same judge, I think, or maybe it was a different—in any event, in the second round, Rabbi Lipner eventually—the case was thrown out, and again, it was on the grounds of statute of limitations. The statute of limitations had passed, and so it was too late to sue, so there was never any substantive decision made that Goldman had actually slandered Rabbi, but it was very obvious from the transcript that he had.

04-01:04:27

What appalled me, as an oral historian, was that he—okay, maybe he said those things in the original interview and it was transcribed verbatim, of course. He had ample opportunity, in reviewing the transcript, to cut that out, and he didn't. And that, to me, spoke volumes. The fact that he let comments like that get into print, knowing—now, this was not going to be a best-selling book on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but even so it's available to the public. Any member of the public can come waltzing into The Bancroft and ask to see that transcript.

04-01:05:11

Oh, oh! Then later on, when by this time—we're now in the modern age and there are computers, and the transcripts start getting digitized. There is the question of whether Goldman's interview should be digitized, because now—okay, up to then, it's not easy to get—you have to come to Berkeley, you have to go to The Bancroft Library, you have to go through this whole rigmarole to even get into The Bancroft Library. And then you have to, you know, you have to request the volume. And by that time, this is a major production. But if the thing is available online and anybody in the entire world can just click a few buttons, and voila, there's Richard Goldman telling the entire world that Rabbi Lipner is like Hitler. And also, what needs to be said there is that Rabbi Lipner had lost virtually his entire family in the Holocaust, so this was even more of an insult. So the one thing that came out of that—and I don't know if this is still true—but at one point, Rabbi Lipner did get ROHO to agree that they would not digitize Goldman's interview. Now again, I don't know if that lasted or not. I've never checked. But that's one of the things that came out of that.

04-01:06:42

Tewes: Wow! That is quite a journey there. But it's interesting to see how these various elements in your life connect here, with the oral history and teaching, and Rabbi Lipner being such an important—

04-01:06:56

Real: And you know, granted, I had been raised with—as a red diaper baby, with this orientation toward social justice and fighting injustice wherever you see it, and blah, blah, blah. But that remains a constant theme. That's this little theme that's going on underneath everything else this whole time. That was the whole thing, in trying to write the history of the Hebrew Academy, was that: this is a story that has injustice and justice embedded in it, and it needs to be told. And then when I discover somebody like Richard Goldman, who is this pillar of the community, insulting another Jewish leader like that, I mean, I wasn't just going to let it sit. So—

04-01:07:55

Tewes: I appreciate that analysis you just made there, too. And I think the through line you're pointing to, of pointing out injustice throughout, it does make me think back to the teaching element of what you're doing though.

04-01:08:11

Real: Oh yes, exactly.

04-01:08:11

Tewes: Because by the time you're teaching history, again, you had been involved in social movements. You had a perspective—

04-01:08:17

Real: Yeah, yeah.

04-01:08:18
Tewes: —to bring to this. And I'm curious about that.

04-01:08:20
Real: Absolutely! Oh, absolutely. Thank you for mentioning that. That absolutely infused my thinking. Because again, I'm not then going to flip to a total Howard Zinn approach to US history, but I am going to—I would tell the kids in both courses at the beginning of the semester, I would define history, and I would tell them what my job was. And I said, "And part of my job is to teach you the underside of history, is to teach you that America is not this beautiful success story. And European history is not this wonderful story of kings and Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution and the French Revolution and all these wonderful things. That there are other sides to the story, and there are people who are being downtrodden."

04-01:09:11
At a time when it wasn't necessarily the standard view of things, I was teaching a very different view, for example, of Andrew Jackson as president, who, I mean, by the time I finished wiping the floor with him—[laughs] so anyway, I know when friends of mine would get terribly, terribly upset when Trump was elected and all during Trump's term, and they'd say, "Oh my God, this is the worst president the United States has ever had. The United States is going down the tubes! He's destroying the country." I'd say, "Excuse me, let's have a little historical perspective on things. Needless to say, there are a lot of things that we can disapprove of, but he is not the worst president we have ever had." And they'd say, "Okay, well tell me one who was worse." "Andrew Jackson, for one. [James] Buchanan for another." [laughs] So anyway, yes, I would bring that perspective into my classroom.

04-01:10:22
And with the Civil Rights movement, I spent—after the AP exams were over, there would be a period of several weeks where we still had school. And that would be a time—so in my US history class, I would devote at least a week or so of that period to the Civil Rights movement, and I would end up showing them—well, when we got to the Freedom Rides, I had a little PowerPoint that I—I did a lot with PowerPoints, and I had a little PowerPoint. I showed pictures and various things of the Freedom Rides, and diagrams of the cells in Parchman [Prison] and stuff like that. And the very last slide in that PowerPoint presentation was my mugshot. None of them knew anything about me, or at least not that. And I'd say, "And that is me." Oh my gosh, our teacher is a jailbird. Our teacher is an ex-con. [laughs]

04-01:11:33
Tewes: That is so wonderful. I can't imagine how that impacted students, to have that personal connection to the past. Wonderful.

04-01:11:40
Real: Yeah, yeah.

04-01:11:41
Tewes: Similarly, I was thinking as you were speaking, that I don't remember having substantive instruction in high school about the women's movement. Having lived through that, I'm just curious how you approached this, teaching teenagers about this time.

04-01:12:00
Real: You know, it's very, very interesting that you say that, because I well remember in high school—and I learned zilch about the suffrage movement. As far as I was concerned—let's see, what else did I learn zilch about? I guess when I was in college, majoring in American history, I must have encountered the women's—the suffrage movement. That would have been too early for—I don't even know if we would have gotten Betty Friedan or any of those people. I think that was even later. But for example, one of things that comes to my mind is the Japanese American relocation/internment. I never, ever learned about that. There was not one word of it, either in high school or in college or in graduate school. I had no idea that it had even happened, that anything like that had ever happened in US history. I did not learn of that until I was working on the [Earl] Warren Project, because Warren was [the California] Attorney General, I think, by the time that happened. And of course, he was very much in favor of interning the Japanese. He saw them as a fifth column, as enemies within, blah, blah, blah.

04-01:13:28
So wow, yeah. I used to really emphasize that one, and also the history of Native Americans. When I first started teaching the course, there was very little material available on the history of Native Americans; not like today. But again, I would try to bring that in as much as I could, and make it a two-sided story, and not just how the Americans grabbed all this land from the Indians, and gave them smallpox and stuff.

04-01:14:10
Tewes: Yeah. Is there anything you'd like to say, in rounding out your teaching career and connection to the Hebrew Academy?

04-01:14:18
Real: You know, the only thing I think is that the Hebrew Academy—teaching at the Hebrew Academy was an experience. I have never felt totally comfortable characterizing myself as a teacher or an educator, because the idea that—I mean, I'm too old now, but even when the Hebrew Academy closed, the idea of applying to teach anywhere else just did not appeal to me *at all*. Teaching at the Hebrew Academy, it was the two parts and [how] they fit together that really turned me on. [laces fingers together] That was the great experience there.

04-01:15:11
Tewes: That makes sense. Two parts of your identity coming together.

04-01:15:13
Real: Yeah, yeah.

04-01:15:16
Tewes: Well, then shifting—

04-01:15:17
Real: Oh, the only other thing I was going to mention is that there is an interesting element of this. That I have now come full circle, because my parents were both in high school—my father was a teacher; my mother was actually a school librarian. But my father was a teacher, and I had vowed, as a kid and all through high school and all through college, that I would never, ever be a teacher. [laughs]

04-01:15:48
Tewes: I'm glad that stuck. [laughs]

04-01:15:51
Real: So I think that there's an irony there, that I came full circle and ended my formal career, as it were, as a teacher.

04-01:16:03
Tewes: That is perfect. Shifting once more into thinking about the legacy of these movements that you touched and were touched by over the years, I wanted to mention that you have been involved with the Bay Area Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement.

04-01:16:21
Real: Right.

04-01:16:23
Tewes: And when did you become involved with this group?

04-01:16:29
Real: Oh wow, I was still teaching at the Hebrew Academy at the time. It couldn't have been all that long after it was started. I don't do very much with them. I'm in their speakers bureau, so mostly what I've done has not been directly with the civil rights vets, but I've done classroom gigs. And actually, it's Chude [Allen] who is chairman of that committee, and we've done a couple of gigs together. And then there are other little things that they've sent me out to. She also recommended me to an instructor at San Francisco State [University], and for quite a number of years, I would make an appearance at her class at State every semester. It was a semester-long course.

04-01:17:31
Tewes: Is this Kathy Emery?

04-01:17:32
Real: Yeah, yeah. And I loved that. That was great.

04-01:17:48
Tewes: As we're closing out here, I'm also curious about the ways you've been connected to various political and activist movements, and how that has shaped how you feel today about politics and activism. Can you say anything to that?

04-01:18:07
Real: Wow, that's a good question. You know, I have been most comfortable, and have really felt the entire time that I was active—from the Civil Rights movement on—as a soldier in an army. You know, a soldier in an army, in the army of justice, whatever you want to call it. But I've never felt like it revolved around me or that I was the leader. Even though I might have ended up in positions that held some responsibility, I never wanted to be in charge. I was happy being a foot soldier, and that pretty much continues to this day. So at the moment, for a variety of reasons, not to mention the pandemic, I don't take an active role in anything. It's mostly my checkbook, at this point, and giving support to various organizations or causes.

04-01:19:32
Tewes: Are there any causes that stand out to you today, as being most important to you?

04-01:19:40
Real: That gets into very difficult territory, and I really can't say that there are any. A number of things that are very important to me, that I make sure that I contribute to and support as much as I can, are Jewish. And I tend toward causes that are not mainstream. Like, I may give to major organizations, but I'm mostly interested in donating to smaller organizations that are reaching out to poor Jews in Russia; or that are fostering pro-Israel groups on campus, like StandWithUs; or that are helping bring young adults to Israel to introduce them to Israel, like Birthright [Israel]. [phone chimes] Sorry. I guess I am drawn, still, to the underdog. I do contribute to a number of Native American causes—and yeah.

04-01:21:20
And then there are things that aren't political, like a friend of mine's child had a very serious bout with cancer. He's okay now, but the parents have started a foundation, really aimed at making sure that pediatricians are more educated about pediatric cancer. This kid came very close to dying, and one of the main reasons was that his pediatrician didn't take his symptoms seriously. He kept dismissing them as strep throat or a cold or something. And so by the time it got really bad, the kid was just hanging on by a thread. That has to do with medical education, so that's—so I give to that foundation, and stuff like that.

04-01:22:24
Tewes: Wow. Well, thank you for sharing all that. It's interesting to see this through line in your interests.

04-01:22:32
Real: Yeah, yeah. And I guess another through line, which I've alluded to, is that I support things that are important to me and that make sense to me, regardless of whether that is politically correct or popular. In other words, I'm following my own head, yeah.

04-01:23:02
Tewes: Sorry, that was me pantomiming [following your own] drummer. [laughs]

04-01:23:05
Real: Oh, right, right. Thank you, thank you, thank you, right. I was trying to remember the quote, but yes, yes. That is very much me.

04-01:23:21
Tewes: We've also been discussing your connection to the women's movement extensively through these interviews, and I'm curious what impact you think the movement had on the Bay Area as a whole.

04-01:23:35
Real: Wow. Well, I'm tempted to say, on the one hand, San Francisco has always been in the forefront of things, and so they were probably more accepting of women doing an assortment of things. Like, there have been women in politics—Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer—at one point, the two senators from California were both from the Bay Area, and I think at one point, California was the only state in the union that had two women senators. A friend of mine worked for Dianne Feinstein when she was on the [San Francisco] Board of Supervisors, you know, way, way, way back at the beginning of her career. So I have followed her. She has actually been a great help to me, at one point when she was a senator. I will vote for her until she is no longer in the Senate, because of the help that she gave me. She responded to a request that nobody else really responded to. I wrote to everybody, my congresspeople and both senators, and she was really the only one who picked up the ball.

04-01:24:58
The women's movement, I think, has just propelled San Francisco, anyway—and Marin, also—into being at the cutting edge of whatever it is that women do. I mean, women are now all over the place in politics. Several of the cities have women mayors, and women are—and of course, Nancy Pelosi [as Speaker of the House] in Congress.

04-01:25:32
You know what? I think what impresses me more than anything else is the extent to which a new consciousness has seeped down to the ordinary person. One of my students at the moment—ordinarily I don't teach middle schoolers, but I have this one eighth grader. I'm basically teaching her US history, because her middle school basically botched the entire course. But when I talk about women, the role of women in the early—in the colonial period and in early American history during the Revolution, she's just totally blown [away].

I mean, she can't believe it. It's just beyond her comprehension that women could be treated like that. In other words, there she is—how old are you in eighth grade? Thirteen, fourteen, twelve, thirteen? Her image of herself is that she can be anything she wants. I mean, the idea that women couldn't vote, it's like, I'm, I don't know, I'm describing the Dark Ages, the Medieval period or something. I mean, it's almost beyond her comprehension. And I've encountered that attitude with other people, as well.

04-01:27:39

Even when I was teaching, and I'd get to the women's movement, I would be amazed at how alive the women in the class would just really resonate with the sentiments of both the suffrage movement and then the present day—or whatever was the present day at that time—women's movement—so yeah.

04-01:28:08

Tewes: That's amazing. Well, given that, that you were seeing students feel such connection to this history, I wondered: what impact do you think the women's movement had on your life?

04-01:28:21

Real: It was one step of—see, for me, the Civil Rights movement had much more of an impact. And the fact that I was a woman in the Civil Rights movement never—I was not fighting a separate battle as a woman in the Civil Rights movement. I was a foot soldier for CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]. The women's movement was an extension of that. And it was an extension in the sense that, as I've talked before about, about stripping away layers of identity. That the importance of the women's movement, for me, was to realize that all these ideas that I had been living with all my life impacted me on a very personal level, a very visceral level, and that my own experiences as a woman were important. So I think that's where it was important to me, where it impacted me. And it gave me the additional zing to go on and do what I did.

04-01:29:47

Even when I was doing Oral History Associates, I was operating pretty much in a man's world. Certainly, most of the people I interviewed were men, but I very seldom encountered any overt—whatever you want to call it. I think the fact that I was a woman, actually—you've probably had the same experience—that as an interviewer, to be a woman, you're sort of less threatening to some of these particularly older gentlemen. They feel much more comfortable with you than they do with some great, big guy or something. And of course, I'm very small to begin with, so I was not much of a threat at all. [laughs] But I wasn't aware—like, I wasn't doing my business to prove a point, that women could do this. But it did have the impact on me, that I *could* do this. I don't know if that answers the question.

04-01:31:13

Tewes: It definitely does. I think it shows how this seeps into various aspects of your life over the years, and your identity, as you pointed out.

04-01:31:22
Real: Yeah.

04-01:31:23
Tewes: Well, as a final thought here, is there anything you want to make sure that we cover, that we acknowledge here about your life and your work?

04-01:31:43
Real: That also is a very good question. It's a sort of a weird position for me to be in that I'm kind of in the spotlight here, that I'm the center of attention. And so I don't want to make myself appear any more important than I was, because I think—maybe I wasn't a cog in a wheel, but I was, as I've said before, I was a soldier, a foot soldier, and I was doing whatever I could. And if I made a difference, I'm happy. But again, I don't know that I, personally, made the difference.

04-01:32:37
Tewes: I appreciate hearing that.

04-01:32:41
Real: I do have to say, though, the one thing where you do really feel that you make a difference, like, I made a difference, is with my son. I mean, my husband and I raised him, nobody else raised him, and I'm enormously proud of him. He's turned into just a lovely, lovely human being. And much as I don't want to toot my own horn, I must have had something to do with that. [laughs]

04-01:33:12
Tewes: Yes, I can say we can give you a lot of credit for helping raise him. [laughs] That's beautiful. Thank you, Mimi. Well, that's all the questions I have—one final release here: is there anything else you'd like to add to our story of our many hours together?

04-01:33:31
Real: I can't think of anything.

04-01:33:34
Tewes: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

04-01:33:37
Real: Well, I was delighted to help in any way I could.

[End of Interview]