



Madalyn Schenk Transcript

Abe Louise Young: This is a recording for Women Who Dared, a project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Today's date is January 11 , 2005. This is an interview with Madalyn Schenk. Madalyn, would you spell your last name for me?

Madalyn Schenk: S-C-H-E-N-K.

AY: Thank you. Conducted by Abe Louise Young at Madalyn Schenk's home in New Orleans, Louisiana. This is disk number one of two. Would you tell me a little bit about your childhood and your background growing up?

MS: I grew up in Chicago, you might say kind of like in a shtetl. Very close- knit extended family, a predominantly Jewish neighborhood.

AY: And do you have siblings?

MS: I have three. I have two sisters and -- actually, you know, if we do talk about extended family, I have two sisters myself, my mother was one of four. We spent a lot of time at my aunt's house, so that her three kids are kind of like, while we were little, were right there with us all the time. I probably saw my mother's parents four times a week, because they stopped by when we were either at my aunt's house or at our house. I ate lunch at my aunt's house when I was in school. And we had Friday night dinner at my father's mother's home, mother and father's home every Friday night. So, yeah, we were together a lot.

AY: Can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents?

MS: Yeah. My grandparents are a huge influence, I think, on me, not because they thought they would be, but just because they were. On my father's side, my grandmother



was very quiet woman, Orthodox Jew, did not put her values on anyone, but always invited, you know, my grandparents had six children, so their children were invited to Friday night dinner. My grandmother invited any stray person from the temple, from the street, from the anything, so you just had a crowd there. They were Shomer Shabbos. My grandfather was a talker, and for the most part -- I don't know because my sisters were older, or whether everyone over time got tired of hearing the same stories over and over and over again, but I remember sitting next to him often at dinner and just listening to him tell his family's history. His mother was a very strong-willed woman, which would be my great-grandmother. She said that if she had to fight to be a Jew, she would just as soon do that in Israel, so they were looking at the very turn of the century, the first pioneer movement, she packed herself up with her five children, they moved to Petah Tikva, and were among the first to -- you know, I can hear his voice talking about mosquitoes, eucalyptus trees, Turks, what the Ottoman Empire situation was. My great-grandfather probably was a little bit different, and the reason why I would say that is that he and his brother came to America twice to make money, and on both occasions raised money to start small synagogues in Chicago. So I guess the fundraising gene is just in there, because I never heard about that until I was like 20, 25 years old. And my grandfather always would say "my Minnie meyer" [?] about his wife, you know, loved, just put my grandmother on a pedestal, and probably felt that way about his mother who was so convinced. My grandparents were married -- my father's parents were married in Petah Tikva. My grandmother ran away from home at 17 years old, she was from Bialystok, Poland, and she ran away from home. We don't know why, because if I asked my father, he was kind of a business person, and he said her father was a water carrier, or an ice person, or some kind of profession that was lowly, and so she needed to get away from that. If you would ask a cousin who's really ugly, I know that probably is a little vain on my part, but really unattractive, she would say she ran away because her father said that she was unattractive -- my grandmother was not, but that was what her father said. If you talked to my cousins who are more religious, they would say that she went because she



felt that she belonged in Israel, that that was part of her Judaism. And if you had asked my sister, she says every 17 year old belongs to a political movement and therefore she was 17 years old, Zionism was in fashion, and she followed that. And so none of us know the answer. We do know, though, she said she had a 55 year honeymoon in the United States, and that exactly 13 months and one day when the shiva was over she was on the plane and she made aliyah again. So there was definitely something that was driving her, but she's a quiet person, kept her values to herself, and she just did what she believed was what she had to do.

AY: Do you feel that she had a strong impact on you?

MS: I would guess so in as much as the example is there, I'm not a religious person though, or an observant person, and yet there's just kind of a sense. Now, on my mother's side of the family, I would feel like those grandparents were there more, I saw more, they were much more Americanized, and I think that in their way they certainly had an impact on me. My grandfather taught me how to use a brewer, not to do it this way, this way, whatever. He used to sit me in his lap when I was little; he read the *Forverts*, he watched the news on TV. My grandmother was an extremely social person. She needed to do two things, as she got older she needed to do three or four things a day. And there were always raffle tickets on the kitchen table. When I think back on it, she was a sloppy housekeeper. She probably had them there all the time because they were overdue or not due, or whatever, didn't move them. But always for HIAS, and they had great pride in having brought their siblings to the United States, so that would be like bringing people from darkness to light.

AY: You said for HIAS?

MS: Mm-hmm.

AY: Can you explain that?



MS: It would be a Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. So that would be an organization, which helps people who immigrate to the United States.

AY: And so your grandparents were involved?

MS: She supported that. She supported that, but I believe because they loved the United States so much, and I believe that they thought that what they did was to take their -- you know, there was great pride that they were able to bring their siblings, that family counted, that being a part of this country counted, that there were economic benefits, and all that kind of stuff. And yet, it wasn't something that was talked about a lot. And then the other things, my father would give anybody the shirt off his back. A very generous person. I know as a kid my mother would often say, "You care more about other people than you do about us," when she'd get mad. And I've heard my husband say that to me. But, on the other hand, you know, I can't knock her out of the equation because if you were to say where is the tension between a mother and a daughter, I would say, "I always thought if you don't expect anything you won't get hurt." And my mother always is of the opinion, "If you don't expect anything, you don't get anything." And so I think that that's always been a tension and probably at this age I guess she's right, and maybe I'm right too, I don't know.

AY: Can you describe your parents to me? Their occupations, their personalities, whether they were Zionists or not, political or not, loving parents or not.

MS: OK, my father would say you don't talk about sex, money, religion, or politics. As soon as he died, I think that's all I've talked about, sex, money, religion, and politics.

AY: You see me laughing silently because I can't laugh during the quotation (laughter). So all of my responses to you will be silently.

MS: I think that that is the case. He was a very special person, nonjudgmental in any way, not demanding in any way. When he passed away, there were hundreds of notes.



My mother couldn't read them, she wouldn't answer them, and every single one was how much they loved my father and about the special place that he ate with them. So it's a candy store, an ice cream shop, a something, and all different places for all different people, and so that I think he had a gift of being able to make you feel loved, even though he was not an overly engaged parent, if that makes any sense. Now, I remember one day -- and the contrast is this -- I remember one day, this is kind of a funny story, must have gotten in some argument with my husband or something like that. And just getting in the car and have these tears come to my eyes, and I'm relating this to my mother saying, "I can't believe it, I just miss daddy so much, because he didn't care if you were fat or thin, or smart or dumb, or right or wrong, or this or that." And she says, [angry voice] "That's right, he didn't care. *I* cared. *I'm* the one, I'm the parent. Because it's important if you are fat, or you are thin, or if you're smart, or you're dumb," or you're this, or you're that. So, again, it's that same kind of story conflict about if you expect something you get it, if you don't, you won't get hurt. And I think that that's the contrast between them as two people, is that she's willing to fight for the last right, she has to be right, and he just got very comfortable, [makes reasonable voice] "Every person is every person."

AY: What did he do for work?

MS: When I was five, we would say he was in the junk business. When I was seven we'd write on the line that he was in scrap metal. And then we would say that he was an environmental engineer, or a salvage engineer, and finally to an environmentalist. But he owned a junk business, (laughter) primarily ferrous metal, steel, and iron.

AY: Did your mother work outside the home?

MS: No.

AY: What was --



MS: But, wait, that's probably an unfair thing to say. My mother did not work outside the home, and I think that she has an insecurity because she has managed her own money and her own affairs, and so in a way, one might say she's a private investor. And I think that she feels that we've never given her credit, or that she has never felt credit for being able to manage, and she has managed very well.

AY: Is this after, since your father's passing?

MS: I think that she was always very involved in the financial situation at home, but there was a big distance between her and my father's business.

AY: And where and when were you born?

MS: I was born in Chicago, at Michael Rays (sp?) Hospital, in 1950.

AY: And how would you describe your family's class status when you were growing up? I know it's not easy.

MS: No, it's a funny thing, because we have friends who owned homes -- we have very good, close friends. They lived in Jeffrey Manor, they owned their homes, and they always left. People in South Shore were rich, they rented. People in Jeffrey Manor were poor, they owned their own home. So I think that I never wanted anything. So I don't know that there's one thing that I ever thought I should have that I didn't have. I can't remember ever asking for anything that I couldn't have. I didn't get an allowance because I didn't understand why you would have an allowance, because if you needed something you just went to mom and dad, and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

AY: So would you call it upper-middle class?

MS: No, we were middle-class people that lived in an apartment. My father owned his own business. I never wanted for anything. They took great pride, my grandfather was



retired at 55 years old in spite of the fact that he was an immigrant. They traveled to Florida all the time. I did, however, have friends who lived in very big homes, and so I would say, well yeah, then they must have had more resources. But if I were compared to the rest of the world, what I know now would probably, you know, middle class is a funny thing, you know. If you polled people now, 17% of the people think they're in the top 1% income here, so it's hard to describe, but I wasn't wanting for anything.

AY: And when you were a girl, how did you envision the life that you had, or desired?

MS: Oh, I'd get married four days after my last final from college, and I'd do what I was told. 20 years old, married, four days after my last final.

AY: Did you?

MS: Yeah. And I think that if I had graduated college at 22, like most people, if I hadn't rushed through, I would have been on the other side of the women's movement, and I would have gone for a graduate degree, and life would have been very different. It hasn't been bad though.

AY: How did the women's movement affect you or impact you? Did you consider yourself a participant or were you doing other things at the time?

MS: When the shooting happened at Kent State, I was in Chicago visiting my boyfriend, so that that whole war movement, that whole women's movement -- I lived on the South Side of Chicago, so the whole civil rights movement was happening all around me, and I think I was oblivious. I can think back on it and say, oh, I remember this, that, and the other thing, but I was not what you would call an active participant.

AY: When did you wake up and decide to become involved? I don't mean to suggest that you were sleeping. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)



MS: No, no, no. The wakeup isn't the issue. I think that... I'm trying to... This particular honor, or this particular recognition is extremely uncomfortable for me, because I don't believe I ever took a risk. I don't think I ever did anything alone, that I ever did anything that is remarkable, that I ever did anything that wasn't within the framework of the committee.

AY: Still?

MS: And so if you were to say, "Madalyn, what about your childhood?" There were eight of us who I thought were the most popular kids in grammar school, because we had all the honors, whatever it was, very cliquish. I was invited to 65 bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah parties, just because I was part of this little group, you know, that kind of demanded a little attention, so whatever that was about. I was always in a high school sorority, in a college sorority, and just, for whatever reason, it always came to me. Not because I sought it out, but the community, you know, like in college I was, like, something for the community chest, we used to joke about that kind of stuff, I'll have my share. But in terms of fundraising for a cause, it just got plunked to me, or planning a party, it was just the piece that generally landed in my lap. Now when I left college, I swore I'd never do that again. I didn't like being a part of that little group who was the third blackballer, either I knew somebody or didn't know somebody, or just somebody said, "I don't want them here, OK, here you go," you know, as a part of that kind of snooty little group. And swore I'd never do that. I was married, I had my children, and we moved. When we moved to New Orleans I knew that I had to write a check to several organizations just to meet people, that that was part of the moving expense.

AY: Can you explain that a little more, that idea?

MS: Well, you have to, I guess, you know, you just have to get recognized one way or another.



AY: And what groups did you want to be recognized in particular?

MS: OK, well, it's more like you just get thrown in the Mississippi River and grab a branch, and you're going down the road. When I was in college, my suitemate was a girl from New Orleans. She doesn't live here, hasn't lived here for as long as I've, even before we moved here 22 years ago. So what had happened is the first piece of mail in my mailbox was an invitation to National Council of Jewish Women's membership meeting. And I went to the membership meeting, they tell you membership is this much a year, or you can get a lifetime membership. So I said, all right, well, I'll just write the lifetime membership check and be done with it, and of course that was recognized by somebody who said, "Oh, why would this" -- you know, it was unusual. It was a little bit different. But I just felt that it wasn't a lot of money, it was just part of the expense of moving. And I think that was recognized, and because that little contribution was, you know, it was the first piece of mail, the contribution was recognized, I was asked to be on a committee with two other women, Sherri Goodman and Ricki Nudick (sp?). It was to, again, not by any thought, not by anything other than I was asked to be on a committee to plan lunches, back to the same old kind of thing. My sister then became president of this political action committee. I had invited some people to my house to meet my sister, to raise up some money to help candidates who were pro-Israel, who were pro-choice, and who were for the separation of church and state. And for whatever reason, about the same time I had been nominated to be Vice President of National Council of Jewish Women. Again, nobody ever wanted to be the public affairs vice president, it's what was offered to me, probably because the woman who was president of the National Council of Jewish Women was at that fundraiser, thought that there was some kind of interest. Or because I was an unknown quantity, and so since it was something that people generally don't take an interest in, that was fine. And then I had to be the good girl that I am and do the job well. So that's why I think wakeup is a bad word. I think it was mostly just doing what I was asked, and doing it as well as I could.



AY: It seems to me like --

MS: Fear of failure.

AY: -- at every moment -- fear of failure?

MS: Fear of failure.

AY: Although at each of these junctures that you've describe, it seems like you have the choice to say yes or no, to give or not to give.

MS: I never think that. I mean, why would they ask if they didn't need it?

AY: It's true. How have you been changed by (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) this work?

MS: As Vice President of Public Affairs I went -- OK, maybe from going to this PAC meeting in Washington, or several PAC meetings, I'm not sure if it happened then or whether there was a GA in New Orleans and happened then, but there was a big push, nationally they were making a push for -- in order to build a strong U.S.-Israel relationship, they were making a push that states should have economic partnerships, this whole idea that trade makes friends. And the example was given that in Texas, Hightower initiated, through the agricultural program in Texas, Israeli technology for irrigation. That was the example. I'm sitting in the meeting, and I'm thinking, "Well, what can I do? I'm just a little volunteer; I don't have a job, or a business, or anything like that. What can I do?" And so, again, timing is of the essence. I said, "Well, let me see about whether or not any of the volunteer programs that National Council of Jewish Women is funding could be imported as a trade, and let's focus on education because education is such a critical need in this state." And it just so happened that three months before -- again, this is a timing issue -- that National Council of Jewish Women's HIPPY program, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, was translated from Hebrew to English.



AY: What was the other language?

MS: From Hebrew to English. NCJW had invested, after the Six Day War, they invested money in Israel through the Hebrew University. And what they did is developed a program that said you have Jews coming in from the West, this is a western mentality, you have Jews who are coming in from Arab countries, they have a more Arab mentality, the women are not in the same place. For security issues, the children have to grow up together, and they have to be able to maintain equal status. And so what was done is that they organized a grassroots network where in these communities where people had very little resources or little education, a woman recruited four, or five, or six women who had small children, ages three or four, and they went out into the community, they were trained to go out in the community and role play for the other mothers, so that the language that the school readiness was there. So this was an American donation to the state of Israel. And so the program had just been translated from Hebrew to English.

AY: Full circle.

MS: Full circle. And it's again timing, we were able to get the Orleans Parish School System to pick it up. Later on, just timing again, Renee Pratt was running for State Representative, African-American woman who had been with the Congressman when he was a state legislator's aide. She's a Catholic woman, African-American, her priest was going everywhere with her and she didn't know how to answer the questions about a woman's right to choose. And because I had been involved in that movement alongside at the same time as all of this --

AY: Which movement?

MS: Oh, I was the first, I orchestrated the first pro-choice rally in Louisiana.

AY: OK. (laughter) Well, we'll get back to that.



MS: OK, but that's all tied into, you know, I came to New Orleans, I was put on a committee, a social committee, then I was asked to be on the executive committee, to serve as a vice president, they gave me what nobody wanted, I took the spot, I kind of jumped on it. One of the things under that was, you know, finding a community service. I went to some meetings and this public affairs piece about jumping into the circle, and knowing something, identifying a need, and finding a service, or finding a service and then advocating for it. So we're just going around in a circle the whole time. And, in any case, Renee was elected. She hit the ground running, and one of the pieces of legislation that she did was to take HIPPO and put it in six places around the state, so we went from Orleans Parish to six places around the state, at the same time as Hillary Clinton did it in 17 locations in the state of Arkansas.

AY: The same program, or just the concept?

MS: The same program.

AY: The HIPPO program, how did she get her hands on it?

MS: She had gone to Florida. A woman named Nan Rich (sp?), I don't know Nan, but a woman named Nan Rich was very involved in National Council of Jewish Women, I believe, on a national basis. I think they met in Miami, or there's some contact about Florida, and yeah. So Nan Rich started in Florida, Hillary Clinton started in Arkansas, and I did it but with a committee here in --

AY: Do you feel that diminishes the value of the work that you've done, because it's not a single-handed venture?

MS: No, I don't think it diminishes the value of the work. I think it means I never took a risk. It's this risk thing that's bugging me. I didn't take a risk, because everybody else was with me! I mean, I didn't step out by myself. I did it, you know, and there's lots of people having different connections to different people, and some of it is timing -- a lot of it is



timing, and whatever. Now, because of the HIPPI project, and the other thing is, as this chair for National Council of Jewish Women, I served on a committee where they select the Hannah Solomon Award. And for whatever reason it was a very... politically divisive time for that organization, different women, it was just jacking around for whatever. And no one could agree upon, we had two meetings, maybe, no one could really agree on who should be the Hannah Solomon Award Winner. And I had gotten three pieces of mail -- actually this was all in two days, right before the meeting. And this woman, Elizabeth Rack's name was on the list. And I just said, "Well, these are three things I care about, let's ask somebody if they know Elizabeth." Well, they thought that was a fabulous idea, Elizabeth was elected as Hannah Solomon Award winner, she's been my mentor ever since.

AY: Can you tell me about her?

MS: OK, Elizabeth Rack –

AY: And how she has mentored you. How do I spell her name?

MS: Elizabeth you know, because it was once your name. Rack is R-A-C-K. OK. Elizabeth Rack is in her 80s. She... well, OK, she's in her 80s. She was a national treasurer of the League of Women Voters, she was elected to the New Orleans Parish School Board, was one of the first women to have been elected in this environment. Elizabeth is, you know, she rarely tells a story, but she went to Rice, because that's what, Rice you could go to college and not have to pay for it, right, and that's what she could afford to do. She graduated second in her class, scored the highest for accounting, was denied a place on the CPA review, because she would be taking the job of a man. There was a war, World War II, she was working as a bookkeeper for a firm. Is it geology or something like that, has to do with oil development. And the men went off to war, she did all of the legwork, all of the work to open up a office in Venezuela, and she doesn't begrudge the end of the war, but she was to go to Venezuela to run this office, and the



war ended, and then she never went. Everything was in place, and a man went. She has been at the forefront in forming an organization called Committee of 21, to help other women get elected. There's a building right over there that is the NOCCA Institute, that's the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

AY: I went there for grad school.

MS: You did? OK! So, I'm chair of the NOCCA Institute board now, but Elizabeth was one of the founders of the school. You know, she was on Planned Parenthood's board.

AY: Tell me about her impact on you personally.

MS: OK, so in 1989, my father died on September 13, 1989. I don't know exactly the month in 1989, but 1989 is when there was a Webster Decision and it appeared that the Supreme Court was going to let the – that states could decide what the rules would be about whether a woman could or could not get an abortion, or under what circumstances, what regulations. So Elizabeth, because of HIPPIY -- and she was on the school board, then we got her involved in HIPPIY, blah, blah, blah, so this whole relationship from this random nomination started. Elizabeth suggested that they invite me as a representative of National Council of Jewish Women to a planning meeting about what was the community response going to be to the Webster Decision. September 13th, 1989 my father passed away. I came back here, I served on so many committees people would all say, "Oh, I'm so sorry about your father," and I thought, "Ah, hell, you don't know him, you don't know me." So I said to Terri Bartlett, who was the Executive Director of Planned Parenthood, "You don't have to pay me much, \$500, something, and I'm going to coordinate the first pro-choice rally here in Louisiana, in conjunction with the Mobilize for Women's Lives, and I'll tell everybody that I'm getting paid, and that's why I can't go to my meetings, that I have a paid job and I have to do my work. And then I could just kind of run away from, you know, my grief from my father." And Elizabeth taught me how. She just taught me how to organize, you know.



AY: How to organize?

MS: People.

AY: Can you say this is as a full sentence so I can get it as a quote? That she taught me how to organize people. (inaudible)

MS: Yeah. I'm sure of it. We had the rally, we had people there who were –

AY: Sorry to interrupt. Could you, so I can get it as a complete quote about a woman who's influenced you, could you say her name and then that she taught you how to organize around this rally? And then explain a little more.

MS: All right, well, Elizabeth Rack taught me everything I know about politics, and how to organize people, and to manage a database, and to engage people in a cause that's bigger than themselves.

AY: Around this –

MS: And it was –

AY: -- march. What was the name of the march?

MS: It was November 12 , 1989, Mobilize for Women's Lives, Planned Parenthood, ACLU, League of Women Voters, I think. I don't know, there must have been about, NARAL, seven or eight women's organizations nationally pooled their lists together to do a rally in Washington. And what we did is we did one in New Orleans as well. And there's a group of us that came together to do this rally, that are soul mates, even if we don't know much about each others personal lives. I think anyone would take a knife for the other one, a bullet for the other one.

AY: That's amazing.



MS: It was a defining moment.

AY: Did you go to the March of Women's Lives on April 24 , 2004, in Washington? MS: Nope.

AY: It was a defining moment for me.

MS: It was? [*excited*]

AY: Mm hmm.

MS: Being a part of something bigger than yourself. It's very important, it's good for menopause.

AY: I agree.

MS: So, in any case, we organized a rally. After the rally, Woody Jenkins, he's another little character from Louisiana. Woody Jenkins was the point person who instituted, well, not instituted, but initiated legislation that would prevent a woman in Louisiana from getting an abortion, either in the case of rape, incest, or the life of the mother.

AY: Wonderful. How charming.

MS: Very extreme. Buddy Roemer vetoed the legislation. The connection again is the Roemer administration was involved in getting money for HIPPY, whatever. My friend Julie Schwam Harris was part of this Win for Roemer movement. She was staff on the campaign. I pulled together a group of maybe eight women who raised over \$60,000 and he still refused to meet with us, but we raised the money as a thank you for him having vetoed a bill, the only veto that has ever been overridden in the state of Louisiana.

AY: How many campaigns have you worked on?



MS: OK, so, Roemer loses, and it's then the Duke/Edwards election. My friend who worked in the Roemer campaign wouldn't work for Edwin Edwards, but I did. And so –

AY: Vote for the crook.

MS: Yeah. Well, the best line, this is my favorite line, Robin Eckings (sp?) came into the, we had our own little headquarters. My job, this was my first paid political job, was to convert Roemer supporters to Edwards voters. And we had our own little, very uptown, little headquarters, away from the rest of the campaign. We kind of worked with other organizations because people couldn't make themselves vote for Edwin Edwards, and we did it like these Roemer supporters. We only looked at precincts that were 60% or above Roemer, I guess I should probably say that, it's the technical part of this stuff. Campaigns get to be like toothpaste. You market. But we looked at precincts that were 60% plus Roemer, and used the telephone to really do a death and dying experiment. You know, we had people call and say, "I'm really sorry that this happened, but no vote is a vote for Duke." And finally, by the end of the campaign, we had -- I think I even may have a copy of the article -- we had so many people out there working for Edwin Edwards directly, it was very intense. I know that Robin Eckings once came, and she was a newscaster at the time, came into the office, said "Madalyn is a feminist" -- because in Louisiana I would be a feminist, but someplace else I would just be nobody -- and she said, "As a feminist, how do you go for a guy who sleeps around and everything like that?" You know, the treatment by Edwin Edwards of women, not quite respectful. And I said, "Always a lover, never a hater." And that really is how I kind of felt about that election.

AY: "Always a lover, never a hater"?

MS: Mm-hmm. I'm ready to go for that.

AY: Yeah, that's hilarious.



MS: You know, that was, how do you balance that? You know, well, yeah, he was a lover. So that was Edwin Edwards' campaign.

AY: Can I interrupt you momentarily to ask you a little bit about, well, do you think of yourself as a feminist?

MS: I just think of myself as me. I would say that most people would say that I'm liberal, I don't think I'm liberal, I think I have good common sense. Most people might say, you know, that I'm out there; I don't think I'm out there. I've always got hundreds of people. I mean, was it risky to be for Edwin Edwards? I don't think so. You know, I didn't realize it was risky at the time to do this rally. I did the rally because my dad died, you know, I mean, and it was something I was engaged in. It was a very safe place for me. I didn't find it to be -- so this is all --

AY: I understand.

MS: This whole process, as I said --

AY: You don't like the label of this particular, Women Who Dared, because you don't feel it's accurate about your --

MS: I don't think it's honest.

AY: -- your motivations.

MS: I think that my friend who lost her husband, who went through his illness, who was out --

AY: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MS: No, no, no, my friend Renee Zack, my closest friend. She just lost her husband from Leukemia. She faced his illness, every time she goes to a party alone she's facing



something, she's taking a risk every single day. That is a risk. I'm not alone. I don't think if you're alone -- unless you're alone, I don't think it's a risk, I just think it's part of the party. You know --

AY: Have you ever been alone?

MS: No, my god. [*low voice*] I'm scared of it. (laughter) I'd be afraid of that. And I went from my home to my sorority in college, four days later I was married, I had my house, I don't think I've ever been alone.

AY: I love your honesty, and your candor, and your sense of humor.

MS: Well, yeah, I've never been alone. Being alone is a scary thing for me, and people who do things alone, that that's very frightening. You know, people say, "Well, you need to be chairing the NOCCA Institute for very powerful people on the board, that's a risk." I don't think it's a risk. Anything that's put out Wynton Marsalis, and Harry Connick, Jr., and Terrence Blanchard, and a hundred other Grammy winners, like, that's a prestigious position, that isn't taking a risk, that's just getting included in something. Along the way, I guess, the other thing is, is that probably after we did this pro-choice rally, then we did the Edwards campaign, these things are kind of just rolling one after another at that time in my life. From the Edwards campaign, then, for very little money again, almost no money at all, I coordinated with my friend Julie Schwam Harris, who is a friend that I made through this whole choice movement, we coordinated seven parishes for Clinton-Gore.

AY: (inaudible)

MS: So the timeline really is my dad died in -- you know, I moved here in '82. I was National Council of Jewish Women, I must have been that Vice President in '85, '86, I'm not sure. '89 my father passes away, we do the pro-choice rally, right after that we're making HIPPY state-wide. Then we're going from HIPPY state-wide to supporting



Roemer, from supporting Roemer to the Edwin Edwards, David Duke thing, and from there to the Clinton-Gore campaign. Now, the Clinton-Gore campaign, there is a defining moment. First of all, it's everybody's favorite campaign in the history of this city, I believe. But the defining moment for me is we stepped over three little -- the headquarters was on Tulane Avenue. There were -- you're familiar with Airline Highway? Prostitutes, drug addicts over there, so we step over some comatose people to let the phones get hooked up. And I plug in the phone, there is not a table in the headquarters. There is not a chair in the headquarters. There are ants crawling on the carpet. Plug in the phone, and it rang. And no one can ever get a campaign headquarters phone number, ever, because it's not listed as a Democratic party. It's not listed as Clinton-Gore for all these boring technical finance rules. Somebody rings the phone and I'm all by myself, and the person asks me a question, and it was whatever. And I didn't have any campaign materials in front of me, and they say, "What is candidate Clinton's position on gays in the military?" I swear this is true. The first question. And I said, "Well, I don't know what it is, but I'm sure that he's much more sensitive to the needs of gays and lesbians, because the community is supporting him and not supporting President Bush, but as soon as I get my position papers I'll give you a call, I'll let you know what the official word is on this." He's not giving me his name, he's not giving me a phone number, nothing's coming out. You know, when I tell this story people say, "Oh, so it was all over the news as a big flash?" I said, "Well, no, actually not." Finally this kid says, "I don't know you and you don't know me, but in the seventh grade I ran away from home. I couldn't relate to anyone at school, my father was beating me, I just didn't know what to do, so I ran away. I prostituted myself on the streets," he had serious drug addiction, blah, blah, blah. OK, I'm thinking, "What am I going to do?" And he said, "But I got myself into a program, and I have since received a GED, and if gays could be in the military, I could go to college, because I have no family and no one to pay for this, and if I went into the service the GI bill would take care of me." And I never knew before how government impacted people's lives. It was still just sorority to me. So, for this little unnamed person that I don't know, that I'll never know, when



President Clinton was elected and instituted a program called AmeriCorps, I was on the Louisiana Serve Commission, and served as the chair of the Louisiana Serve Commission that oversaw AmeriCorps grants in the state, because I think that people need to be able to do some kind of domestic service. It doesn't matter if you're a woman, a man, if you don't want to go abroad, if you are openly gay and part of the way that you can manage your life is to admit that you are gay, and not have to hide that. So, there you are. But I didn't wake up. It happened to me. Does that make any sense?

AY: It makes a lot of sense.

MS: It just happened that when I was Chair of the Louisiana Serve Commission, all the presidents got together and did this, what did they call it? America's Promise, it was a President's Summit for America's Future. So, because I was Chair of the Louisiana Serve Commission, I was the convener of that Louisiana delegation, was very involved with the follow up to it. Again, I didn't step up to the plate, and so I'm very uncomfortable.

AY: It seems to me from the stories that you're telling me that all of these things were able to manifest because of a real culmination of, like you said, timing, luck, but also your willingness and capability to receive the responsibilities that were offered. And I see, I mean, I think it's very humble, it's deeply humble of you to not want to promote yourself as this great leader, you know, or to, like so, but I also think that your –

MS: I was presen –

AY: -- your positions, oh, pardon me, please continue.

MS: OK, I was presented with a risk and I didn't take it.

AY: OK, tell me about that.



MS: So, part of all of this on the side, in another place, and I think I probably should be talking about this, because I think that's why I was picked, was what role I played in electing other women to office. I think that's why they did this. But in any case, I don't want to talk about that right now. The opportunity came up to elect a new Chairman of the Democratic Party. And, because I had done the Clinton campaign, and been involved in a lot of issues, I mean, we haven't even talked about the Million Mom March, but I guess for Mary Landrieu's campaign, she wanted to run for Governor. Right after the Clinton campaign, then Mary started running for Governor against Edwin Edwards.

AY: (inaudible)

MS: All right? And so what my job was for Mary's campaign was to initiate the Leadership Alliance for Landrieu. And that was a program where women, primarily women, could give ten, 15, \$20 a month on a credit card or an automatic draw from their checking account. People who had any interest in government were going against Edwin Edwards. So we went to people who didn't have very high income, who loved getting a little hello from Mary every time they charged her -- I still get it, but they loved this program. We raised \$250,000, ten dollars, \$15 a month out of a checking account.

AY: And what kind of a hello did they get?

MS: They got charged on their credit card, that was their hello. They didn't get anything in the mail, we never got that organized, and they never got anything. They just, every now and then they'd get a phone call from me saying, "Have you found four more people?" Or they got a little charge.

AY: Where did that idea come to you from?

MS: Ann Richards. Ann Richards did a credit card program, and so you could -- Ann Richards was Mary Landrieu's mentor. You know, went from State Treasurer to Governor. Mary's going State Treasurer to Governor's race at the top. So, from the



Clinton, then we did the Leadership Alliance for Landrieu, so I knew women from all around the state. And so we encouraged them to run for the state party, then eight years later here's this opportunity to run for Chair of the Democratic Party. And I had my hat in it. I had my votes lined up, I was pretty confident that it was going to be mine, but I got a call from Senator Breaux and a call from Senator Landrieu, and asked me not to do it, and I backed off.

AY: Why?

MS: They wanted a white male. And for all these years that I pushed other people to do something, I quit. And so quitting is killing me, because it's not my nature. I'm the most perseverant, that is my nature, is I'm very perseverant. And that I quit, that is killing me. And so the risk I could have taken was to go up against them. And it would have been the right thing, considering the fact that the person that they endorsed had no clue and didn't do a very good job.

AY: Is this for the local?

MS: The state.

AY: The state.

MS: Louisiana state.

AY: Is that something you would ever come back to?

MS: No. Too embarrassed about the whole experience. Extremely embarrassed about the whole experience. I worked on Miriam Waltzer's campaign.

AY: Really?



MS: When she ran for Supreme Court Justice. She didn't win. She almost won, but she didn't.

AY: She would have been wonderful.

MS: Mm-hmm. So, I don't know. So I would say it's not humble, it's honest. Women ten years younger than me who were out front in the Civil Rights Movement, especially in the South, *that's* courage. Women who were the first to run for things, Elizabeth Rack, Miriam Waltzer, people who were committed to put themselves out there to be judged, *those* people, *that* is risk. Me? I always did it in a very social atmosphere, in a way that helped. Now, on the list of unpopular causes, I would say I'm not liberal, but that in Louisiana I do champion unpopular causes. In the list of unpopular causes would be the Million Mom March. You can see my dining room table? Every now and then, when we have friends over, it's like the roundtable. And I have these friends that I have made over the years from political campaigns. Martha Palmer is over for dinner, it happened that day that the article in the paper was, 'there's going to be a Million Mom March to talk about common sense gun laws.' OK. She makes it the agenda for the dinner table. And I said, "We're not doing a rally. I've been that route, the newspaper refuses to cover rallies. Times-Picayune is not going to cover a rally. So we do all that work, and it's not going to get covered." The other thing is that we had this bad experience with the other rally where it was infiltrated by a guy who said he was Catholics for Free Choice, but he wasn't. He was an anti-abortion person, he's recently been taken to court because part of his activities were to, he tells people -- OK, so Bill Graham. You heard this story? You know this story? OK.

AY: But please speak it for the --

MS: OK. This guy Bill Graham is an anti-abortion activist, who infiltrated the whole planning of the rally in 1989, and then for several years filmed people coming in and out of Planned Parenthood, and coming in and out of Planned Parenthood's fundraisers. So,



currently, he is being taken to task because the Gambit Magazine had the courage to put the story in the paper, and that some women -- now this is courage -- women willing to go to court to put their story on the line. Now that's the difference about taking a risk and doing what I do. There's a huge difference, and I think that that should be recognized. So in any case, what he has done is he's confused women by telling them that they will get a better doctor, he's going to arrange for a better facility for them to have their abortion, and the time runs out for a legal abortion, and then they are forced to have a child. So, in any case, because of the experience with him, I was unwilling to plan another rally. He had --

AY: What was your experience with him? How did he infiltrate?

MS: He infiltrated, came to all of our meetings, and then we were circled by 1,800 -- there were 1,800 of us at City Park, and he had about 1,000 people circling the rally on the other side of the police barricades, with megaphones, out screaming us. And I said, "I'm not planning another event for the TVs to carry both sides of the story." So Martha and I raised up enough money to take 72 -- so for the wrong reason, this is also important, for the wrong reason we did the right thing. We raised up money for 72 women whose children were the victims of gun violence, women who many of them had never left the city of New Orleans, and we took them to Washington. They weren't alone on Mother's Day, they made friends with people who had a similar life story, and they were empowered politically. It wasn't because I did it right, it was luck. I am very embarrassed about this recognition. All

from a dinner party. Again, very social, not alone, no risk in my mind. AY: Maybe you could focus on the part of doing on behalf of others, and just forget about risk. Because it's really completely relative and subjective, what's a risk in your mind --

MS: So my friends say --



AY: -- isn't a risk somebody else's mind.

MS: So here my friends will say, "So Madalyn, in seeking popularity. you pick everything that's unpopular."

AY: (laughter) That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about your Judaism and what role it plays or doesn't play in your mind?

MS: OK. Abortion is not about a woman's right to choose; for me, it's separation of church and state. Don't be telling me who my God is, what I should do, I'm not about that. So that's where that comes from. For some people I know how deeply they feel it's a health issue, and some people feel deeply that it's a privacy issue, but for me it's about who's calling the shots. So my Judaism in that regard. I think that as a kid what I remember most, with great affection -- well, first of all, we were raised in the Conservative movement of Judaism. So I went to Sunday School on Sunday, I went to Hebrew School Monday through Thursday for five years, for an hour and 15 minutes, it was either hang out after school and then go across the street to Hebrew School, or it was go to Hebrew School right after school, whatever it was. And then on Friday night I ate dinner at my grandmother's, and they say that Saturday is a day of rest, so I had no religion on Saturday. So I'm not a go-to-church kind of Jew [laughter], I'm not a go-to-temple kind of person. That's not where my comfort zone is. If you were to say that Judaism has three legs to a stool, acts of loving kindness, knowledge of the Torah, and prayer, I'd be falling off the stool. Because of this inbred love of Israel, we used to, as kids, have these little cards that you could put a dime in, a quarter in, or whatever, save your money to buy a tree in Israel. And those JNF trees were so exciting to be able to get the money in, to buy the tree, maybe to buy more trees than somebody else, and then when you would say, in honor of, and have a certificate, and I would give it to an aunt or a grandmother, I mean they would well up with tears like it was the most special little thing. And I think that made a big difference about where I am. I don't know... I don't



know how to do it differently. And it's just there. It's just woven in. Passover's an important holiday to me, it's an at-home holiday, you know? And we are, like, reading this story, year in, year out; and I have fond memories of sitting there next to my grandfather, having a little different Siddur than everybody -- I mean, a little different Haggadah than everyone else, and feeling a little special about this holiday. And for me, Judaism is about celebrating freedom, it's about moving people from darkness to light, it's about enabling people to be everything they could possibly be in this time, in this space. And I think it's extremely empowering. I think that for those women who really are pulled to their Judaism from a spiritual way, and in terms of participation in the religion, I think that they don't feel equal, or that the movement has said that they don't feel equal. But I'm raised with women were held in such high esteem for what they did within the home that, not having any brothers, I guess, having this grandfather that held my grandmother in such high esteem, that I've always felt that the woman is at the hub, and that the success of children, the success of her husband really is in large part related to how empowered or how fulfilled the woman is.

[Recording paused.]

AY: This is a recording for Women Who Dared, a project of the Jewish Women's Archive. Today's date is January 12 , 2005. This is an interview with Madalyn Schenk.

MS: S-C-H-E-N-K.

AY: Thank you. Conducted by Abe Louise Young, at Madalyn Schenk's home in New Orleans, Louisiana. This is disk number two of two. So, Madalyn, you were talking to me about the empowerment of the whole family being related to the empowerment of the woman at the hub.

MS: Yeah. And if you look at the kinds of things that I think that I have had the luxury of accomplishing -- because that's part of it too, I've had time, lots of women don't have



time -- HIPPY is about teaching the mom how to be the child's first teacher. Electing women to office is about bringing another point of view, the family's point of view to the table -- or at least that's what we had thought when we started electing women. Allowing women to be, helping other women to be leaders in their communities is about helping women assume leadership roles in causes bigger than themselves, which is about mental health. If we go back to the President's Summit for America's Future, we were looking at five things for children, one is a caring adult, a mentor, a tutor, a coach. I certainly have gained a number of friends, women, mentors, tutors, and coaches through this process, other women who have taken me under their wing. Certainly that's something that has to happen in a family, is that a child needs to have either their own family member, but some caring adult. Ask me why I do NOCCA, that's it, because NOCCA's full of caring adults, people with talent that are giving that talent to others. Same thing with the New Orleans Center for Science and Math Education. If you say that what children need is a safe place to learn and grow, we're back to schools again, we're back to working against violence in communities, common sense gun laws, that kind of thing. Being able to have education programs available, training programs to women. The third thing that they were looking for is a Healthy Start. Certainly you empower the woman, she makes sure that her kids have good nutrition and the right kind of shots. School readiness again, being able to, caring about Healthy Start, safe place to learn and grow. A marketable skill through effective education, we're back to schools again. And then the fifth thing is an opportunity to give back and volunteerism -- and I probably have said it ten times, but you need to be a part of something bigger than yourself in order to have good mental health.

AY: Wonderful. Couldn't agree with you more. Did you have personal experiences of struggling with mental health that help you come to learn this personally?

MS: No. I just think that anybody who is self-absorbed is going to --



AY: Is sadder.

MS: Yeah. I think it's just, it's just a social nature. I'm looking outside the house, I'm looking away. You know, I'll stretch out my eyeballs, I want to be in a bigger space. And so that's probably judgmental of me to think that you need to be in a bigger space to be happy, but OK. (laughter)

AY: Can you tell me some of the nuts and bolts, and some of the rewards of your work with NOCCA, and the AmeriCorps, and Louisiana Serve Commission.

MS: All right, well, we're just going back to education. My son, Jonathan, terrific kid, he played baseball, and it's the kindness of strangers. The people who played on the team from all different places, the people who coached the team, who had no idea who he was, what he was about or whatever, he went to the University of Virginia because he can hit the ball. And he had so many opportunities open up to him because of where he went to school, and all of that comes back to just somebody doing something. I'm just paying back.

AY: What do you do, what is your work with him?

MS: The NOCCA Institute's the fundraising arm of the school, we raise money to support the artists and residence program, to support scholarships for kids that go to programs away, so that people can see them, discover them, have an opportunity to go places outside of New Orleans. Last year two students went to Julliard for dance. We raised the money for special lessons, so the kids can build their portfolios and build their talent. So, that's exciting. The New Orleans Center for Science and Math Education is like NOCCA in that you opt to go for half a day, and we are different than -- NOCCA you audition for, the New Orleans Center for Science and Math Education you choose to go there. You have to be an Orleans Parish student, because of the nature of the Orleans Parish School System, 92, 93% of the school's African- American. Because of the African-



American culture, we have 60% of the students are women, which is unlike any other high school --

AY: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MS: -- math and science school in the country, because it's primarily African-American and more women, as opposed to white males.

AY: Did you get connected with -- the school should get connected with Smith College's Women in Engineering Program.

MS: Oh really?

AY: Are you familiar with it?

MS: Mm-mm.

AY: Smith College is where I went to undergrad, and we had an African- American President, Ruth Simmons, who's now currently the President at Brown, and her grand vision was to build an engineering school, because engineering is one of the last fields that has yet to be truly made equitable in and penetrated by women.

MS: Ruth Simmons' first husband that she divorced, Norbert Simmons, used to live in this building.

AY: Huh!

MS: So, you know, (inaudible) lives in this building.

AY: Yeah, it's true.

MS: See, everything is connected. (laughter)



AY: I couldn't agree more. But there is a summer program for –

MS: OK, good.

AY: -- teen girls to learn engineering.

MS: So, will you go on a different page of your thing and write that down so I won't forget? And I'll make sure I get it together.

AY: I'm looking at our time and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MS: Pressed.

AY: Wishing I had more -- wondering if maybe I should call Shannie –

MS: Shannie.

AY: Shannie and see if she could go a little later (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) –

MS: Well, it's 3:30, and at 4:30 I probably need to go to NOCCA.

AY: OK. I might –

MS: Because I have a 5:00 o'clock meeting. And yours is at what time?

AY: 4:30 with Shannie.

MS: OK, so you want to call her? Do you think, for 15 minutes, or no?

AY: You know, I actually, I can soon, call soon.

MS: But, I'm going to get boring pretty soon.

AY: (laughter) You wouldn't, I could interview you for hours. OK.



MS: Because I'm like a little disjointed, I bet those other women were a little more organized.

AY: Everyone had their own pace. Yours is very self-reflective, and I appreciate that.

MS: Thank you... I'm going to be trying to fit in still. (laughter) OK, so am I doing as well as (inaudible)?

AY: One day you'll feel (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) fully there. Let me just look at my list of questions and see –

MS: What you missed.

AY: -- any last things I should ask you... So I won't ask you any of these questions about risks. (laughter)

MS: Well, you can ask them, let me see how I react to them.

AY: It's OK.

MS: Well, I'm curious!

AY: OK, just for interesting, just to see?

MS: Yeah... Come on. You can read. [*Claps hands*] Let's go.

AY: Yes, I can. They're just rather generic. What was it like for you to take these kinds of risks within your own community, and how did your family respond?

MS: And so the answer is, I always thought I had my community right behind me.

AY: Wonderful. So --

MS: And I knew I had my family behind me.



AY: Tell me a little bit about your husband.

MS: Well, I don't know if I knew I had my family. This is my son Jonathan. So my daughter goes off to college, and we're back into the Clinton- Gore campaign. And Johnny goes to school, he goes to St. Martin's, and his friends are pretty conservative. "So Jonathan, who did you vote for in the school poll?" "George Bush." "How could you vote for George Bush?" He says, "It's easy. Bill Clinton is bringing hunger to America." I said, "Jonathan Schenk, you watch too much TV! I know you're watching more TV, because I'm not here to monitor it, and surely you know it's the economy, stupid, and Bill Clinton is not bringing hunger to America." "Oh, yes he is." I said, "*Jonathan.*" He says, "Mama, I have first hand knowledge that Bill Clinton's bringing hunger to America." And I said, "How can you say that?" He said, "There hasn't been a loaf of bread or a cup of milk in this house in three weeks." [*Laughter*] We love that story.

AY: That is very funny.

MS: So that's how they did. They did, they did, they didn't have much choice.

AY: In supporting you.

MS: Right.[*Laughter*]

AY: And when did you marry and who did you marry?

MS: OK, my husband's name is Robert Schenk. I got married four days after my last final from college. I was 20 years old at the time. We'll be married 35 years in June. He is a very private person, and has given me the resources, the time and the money, to do whatever I wanted, and has never even shook his head once for whatever somebody else might think is just like harebrain. He'd just leave me alone to do what I want, and I don't know how much I really tell him what I'm doing, because I'm not looking for any input either.



AY: And what is his occupation?

MS: He's a contractor.

AY: Building?

MS: Mm-hmm. Subcontractor.

AY: What's your secret to 35 years of marriage?

MS: If I had the answer, I'd write a book and make a lot of money. [*Laughter*] Don't know.

AY: OK. And is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

MS: No, I don't know, I mean, look at the questions. Look at –

AY: Oh, OK. At my schedule of questions?

MS: Yeah.

AY: Sure. You answered a lot of it extemporaneously, so I don't have to go through the exact questions.

MS: OK, so we did the first one, I know we did that. Yeah, did you go to synagogue? A lot. Or I went to Hebrew School enough. Were you -- I was bat mitzvahed, if you wanted to know that. My three sisters, but we were bat mitzvahed on Friday night, because at the time women could not read from the Torah. So the bar mitzvahs were on Saturday morning and bat mitzvahs on Friday night.

AY: You were all bat mitzvahed on the same day?

MS: No.

AY: Because you were different ages.



MS: We're different ages. One sister's ten years older than me, and the other sister is six years older. Was your family Zionist? Interesting kind of question now, because, yeah, but I didn't know that. So maybe they resisted labels too. My husband's grandmother was a labor Zionist, and the day that we were married, she took \$100 out of his pocket to buy an Israel bond, and \$100 out of his pocket to give to the Israel Emergency Fund.

AY: That's great.

MS: Because one was an investment in Israel and the other was a gift to Israel.

AY: Good things to do on your marriage day.

MS: Well, she just took it right out of his pocket there, nobody, well, OK. (laughter) Is your relationship to Judaism changed over time? I said no. What are the particular challenges, gifts of being Jewish in the South? I don't know. I grew up in a neighborhood, I said, that was predominantly Jewish. You could smell the corn beef, you could smell the food from people -- the neighborhood smelled Jewish. Here, you know, it's different. And when I was involved in NCJW, the Museum of Southern Jewish Experience, they did a picture -- a photo exhibit, or something like that, and I think at that time I became aware that Jews in the South really, you know, they were going to drive from Bogalusa to the city of New Orleans to send their kids to Sunday School. It's work. It's different. And by the same token, I wonder whether or not they were looking for a white male, is what they told me, but maybe they weren't looking for a Jewish woman to be Chair of the Louisiana Democratic Party, or a woman from Chicago. You know, I don't know. What do you think your Orthodox grandfather would say about your life's work? This is what my grandfather used to say: "There are Cohens, a few of them; that's one rank of people, OK. There are Cohens, those are one rank of people. There are the Levis; that is another rank of people with certain responsibilities assigned to them in the Torah. And then there is Kol Yisrael, the people." And he would say, "The people are the ones who bestow the leadership, not the responsibilities that the others have." So he would be proud of me being out there



with people. My father, who says, “Don’t talk about religion, don’t talk about race,” all that stuff, kept in his drawer the article from the paper when I chaired -- I was involved in the Jewish Family Services, so was President of the agency at one time, but I chaired the Passover food distribution. And I sent the article home, and after my father died I saw it was in the drawer. And the reason was is that his grandfather, that was his job in the community. Not his paid job, but what he did to be a part of the community was to make sure that people had the food they needed, the ritual items that they needed to celebrate Passover. And so my father just thought that that was really neat, without me knowing it, that I would have done the same thing. My grandfather also, my Orthodox grandfather always used to say, “If you don’t want to do something, you do a bad job, and no one ever asks you again.” So, I guess if people ask me to do things maybe I’m not doing a bad job, so he would like that. Family’s politics? I don’t think my parents were political, but my mother talks about Democratic politics to me all the time now. I remember as a little girl -- I don’t remember the movie well, I should probably see it, but I remember the feeling of watching *The Cardinal* with my mother, who freaked, and the reason is that her mother had an illegal abortion for the fifth child. My mother was four years old, my grandmother was bleeding everywhere she sat down, and my mother remembers that. And it was so striking, so scary to her that this issue is very important to her, and she can get on it and not get off it. Interestingly enough, my oldest sister, if you were to have asked her what is this? She would say, “Grandma, what’s the secret to life?” And my grandmother would say, “A hysterectomy.” And my sister doesn’t know, or won’t believe, that it was because a hysterectomy saved my grandmother’s life after she had an illegal abortion.

AY: Was that a story that you would feel comfortable being publicized?

MS: Yeah, I don’t think my mother is weird about that. Women did it, you know –

AY: They did what they had to do.



MS: They did -- well, or they were dumb, and they thought that was the thing to do. So much of life is fashion. Who knows why she did it? We don't know why she did it, but that's what she did. I'm looking at this... How do you explain your work to your children? I probably don't. It's my space, I'm not sharing it... I think I did it.

AY: I think you did. I think you did a fantastic job. I think it's a wonderful interview. And there's going to be some just delicious quotations in your voice.

MS: So now, I need you to help me a little bit. AY: OK, with artifacts and such?

MS: We'll go do that now, but --

[END OF INTERVIEW]