BUILDING BRIDGES: AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE WAR ON PROSTITUTION AND THE GREATER WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN KANSAS CITY

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at Kansas City’s War on Prostitution in 1977 and the larger women’s movement of second-wave feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The War on Prostitution makes the women’s movement in Kansas City unique because it brought together non-like-minded feminists despite their differences in ideology. A product of both oral history and traditional historical research, this work draws upon a large variety of primary sources including newspaper articles from the Kansas City Public Library, archived materials pertaining to women’s groups from the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at University of Missouri-Kansas City. At the core of the project is an oral history component of phone conversations and interviews with women who were active in varying areas of Kansas City public life, including politics, activism, and law during the early decades of the women’s movement. The interviews were conducted from August to November of 2017. Research also included secondary sources on the topic of second-wave feminism and feminist theory. The work serves as a platform for future research on the women’s movement, the War on Prostitution, and the lives of prominent women in Kansas City’s history. It is a testament to the women’s movement of the 1970s and 1980s and the remarkable women who were involved in it.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Building Bridges: An Anthology of the War on Prostitution and the Greater Women’s Movement in Kansas City,” presented by Kaylee Peile, a candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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**Introduction**

On the evening of May 12, 1977 Theresa Brennan, also known as “Ocelot,” stood at 12th and Baltimore Street with a sign that read, “Here I am. Stone me, those among you who have not sinned.”¹ The night before, Brennan and thirty-eight other prostitutes had been arrested in downtown Kansas City. Arrests took place in two waves. The first was conducted in the afternoon of May 11 in the area of Linwood Boulevard and 37th Street due to female sex workers “flagging down cars.” The second was conducted later that evening after twenty-eight women were involved in “disorderly conduct.”² In an interview with the *Kansas City Star*, Brennan claimed to have been arrested at least sixteen times and convicted four times over a span of three and a half years, all on the charge of soliciting.³ Brennan was a prostitute in her early twenties and became the leader of Kansas City’s chapter of COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), a prostitutes’ rights organization founded in California by Margo St. James in 1973.⁴ Brennan had become the leader of COYOTE-KC, which she noted was made up of “few but determined” women, in 1975 after several incidents between Kansas City police and sex workers.⁵ Her arrest and that of the thirty-eight other prostitutes in May marked the beginning of the Kansas City’s

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so-called War on Prostitution.  

The War on Prostitution, also known as the “Whore War,” is important in Kansas City’s history because it was a part of the local women’s movement in which divided feminist groups who differed in beliefs on several ideological fronts such as sexuality, race, and feminist agendas came together in defense of women’s rights. At a time in women’s history when feminist groups were at odds with each other on numerous political and social issues both locally and nationally, women representing several different facets of Kansas City’s public life including politics, activism, and law coalesced in support of the prostitutes targeted in the War on Prostitution. Prominent female attorneys, city council members, and members of the National Organization for Women-Kansas City, the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union, and the Greater Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus all played parts in the anti-WoP movement and worked with Theresa Brennan and Kansas City’s COYOTE chapter. Prior to and following the WoP, local feminist groups seldom interacted with one another because of ideological differences and conflicting objectives.

The War on Prostitution was a fleeting historical moment in which activists transcended the sharp differences among feminist groups and came together to fight for women’s equality. The intersection of these groups is significant because they both highlight the women’s movement in Kansas City, which has been majorly overlooked by scholars, and mirror what was happening in women’s movements across the country. Similar anti-prostitution operations happened in several major U.S. cities in the 1970s that engaged their local chapters of feminist

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6 Throughout the essay, the author will refer to the War on Prostitution both by its full name and by the abbreviation WoP.
groups including New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles. It is important to recognize that Kansas City had comparable experiences to other cities in order to connect it to the larger narrative of the women’s movement. It is also necessary to acknowledge the uniqueness of the women’s movement and the WoP in Kansas City. Although the movement was on a smaller scale, it included distinct characters that represented variations in class, race, and sexuality. The WoP unintentionally fueled intersectionalism among feminist groups who supported persecuted sex workers and COYOTE members. Before and after the WoP, groups like NOW-KC and the KCWLU did not extensively overlap, making it a vital point of collaboration in the women’s movement in Kansas City.

In Kansas City, there is a lack of historical analysis on the local women’s movement. Although scholars have focused on Kansas City women in the 1950s and 1960s, there has not been a focus on women in the 1970s and 1980s and the larger women’s movement. The scope of this work focuses on the 1970s and 1980s women’s movement in general and the War on Prostitution in particular, based on interviews with six women who were involved in Kansas City public life in the 1970s. The recollections of local feminist groups contained in the interviews begin in the 1970s and end in the 1990s. These oral histories are supplemented by historiography, feminist theory, and other primary sources in order to provide a thorough understanding of the War on Prostitution and the larger women’s movement in Kansas City. This

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8 Women such as Lucile Bluford and Martha Jane Phillips Starr are celebrated in Kansas City’s Starr Women’s Hall of Fame. The majority of women included in the Hall of Fame, however, are focused in the decades preceding the women’s movement. The Starr Women’s Hall of Fame is located in the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri—Kansas City.
anthology not only adds unheard voices to the city’s historical narrative, but also offers a foundation for future research.

This thesis was conducted as an oral history because oral histories create a more personal, intimate microhistory that cannot be accomplished by traditional methods of research. This oral history provides new historical insights into the War on Prostitution and the broader topic of feminist activism in Kansas City, while offering understanding of the social and political climate of the city at that time. By adding interviews to traditional research, this thesis explores the women’s movement in Kansas City in more depth. This research allows agency to individuals who were active in the women’s movement by supplementing women’s history with their own experiences and recollections.

The women interviewed for this oral history were chosen because they were politically and socially active in the women’s movement, and offer insight to life as a woman in Kansas City during the 1970s and 1980s. Through their interviews, they discuss the various struggles women worked through during the movement, especially issues centered on sex, sexuality, and race discrimination. Their voices help narrate the women’s movement on a local level and offer different viewpoints on the War on Prostitution. Their experiences are a significant addition to local women’s history because they were leaders in breaking the glass ceiling and represented white, black, heterosexual, homosexual, working- and middle-class women. These women were driven and determined, and made a space for future female leaders by being some of the first women in their fields.

*Kansas City’s War on Prostitution*

Led by Mayor Charles Wheeler (1970 to 1979), the Wop called to clean up and
decriminalize the downtown area of Kansas City.⁹ Like in many cities, Kansas City engaged in an effort to rehabilitate its urban center as a response to high rates of crime, violence, and poverty, with prostitution being a major aspect of the ‘dangerous downtown’ stigma.¹⁰ The average unemployment rate in Kansas City in the 1970s was 35 percent.¹¹ Although personal income had almost doubled from 1965 to 1977, the number of jobs did not substantially increase.¹² This left an overwhelming number of lower- and working-class men and women in financial distress. The city’s downtown was a central area for crime and violence. From 1965 to 1975, homicide rates rose 60.6 percent and assault rates rose 118.2 percent.¹³ Gang violence in the River Quay led to the destruction of buildings, and made the once up-and-coming area an unsafe environment for businesses.¹⁴

Urban poverty left many women in financial distress, pressing some to join the ranks of sex workers. Although Kansas City had a red light district, it was shut down in the 1960s, leaving sex workers to solicit clients downtown. Business owners claimed to have experienced a decrease in business as a result of the “aggressiveness and density” of sex workers working in


the area around them.\textsuperscript{15} In 1975, the volume of complaints by businesses brought police attention to the area, and arrests of sex workers increased.\textsuperscript{16}

Across the nation, anti-prostitution and anti-soliciting ordinances grew in popularity in several major cities, including New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Prostitution became a reoccurring topic among political groups and women’s organizations.\textsuperscript{17} This national trend trickled down to Kansas City, and a committee comprised of city council members, including J.R. Serviss (2\textsuperscript{nd} District at Large), Joanne Collins (3\textsuperscript{rd} District at Large), and Joel Pelofsky (4\textsuperscript{th} District at Large), was constituted under Mayor Wheeler’s supervision.\textsuperscript{18} They established a planning and zoning committee to conduct an anti-prostitution campaign, with Serviss as the appointed chairman.

Wheeler wanted the city’s law enforcement to become more active in his “war.” The Kansas City Police Department’s vice division was encouraged to become more involved and conduct frequent vice operations to expose and arrest sex workers.\textsuperscript{19} In 1977, KCPD began to conduct sweeps two to three times a day in the areas most affected by prostitution, which was 27\textsuperscript{th} to 39\textsuperscript{th} Street along Troost Avenue during the day, and 9\textsuperscript{th} to 14\textsuperscript{th} Street in the downtown


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{19} Robert L. Carroll, “City Declares Open War on Prostitution,” \textit{Kansas City Star}, 12 May 1977, sec. 1A, p. 1
area at night. During these sweeps, policeman would drive through the city’s “problem” areas while vice officers pretended to be paying customers, or “Johns,” in order to catch sex workers soliciting. The KCPD claimed to have seen a decline in arrests directly after their “crackdown.”

According to Captain Elmer Meyer, vice division commander of the KCPD in 1977, the culmination of KCPD involvement and City Council’s ordinances would undoubtedly influence women to “stay off the streets.”

Citizens of Kansas City were also encouraged to partake in the War on Prostitution. A “court watchers” program invited private citizens to volunteer their time to monitor the judicial process of people charged in prostitution cases. It was important to Mayor Wheeler that the people of the city be involved because he believed that legislation alone against prostitution would fail. In May 1977, he told the Kansas City Star, “I don’t believe you can legislate morality. You have to use social pressure to tell them they’re not wanted.” Society’s involvement was necessary, Wheeler argued, in order to successfully discourage pimps and prostitutes from staying on the streets.

Resistance to the War on Prostitution involved individuals from several different avenues of public life that included not only sex workers and feminists, but also politicians and attorneys.

\[\begin{align*}
20 \quad & \text{Ibid., sec. 1A, p. 1.} \\
21 \quad & \text{Howard S. Goller, “Police Announce Decline in Arrests of Prostitutes,”} \textit{Kansas City Star,} \text{May, 1977, sec. 8A, p. 1.} \\
22 \quad & \text{Ibid., sec. 8A, p. 1.} \\
23 \quad & \text{George Koppe, “Few Rally to Battle Hookers,”} \textit{Kansas City Star,} \text{18 June 1977, sec. 11A, p. 1.} \\
24 \quad & \text{Robert L. Carroll, “City Declares Open War on Prostitution,”} \textit{Kansas City Star,} \text{12 May 1977, sec. 3A, p. 2.} \\
25 \quad & \text{Ibid., sec. 3A, p. 2.}
\end{align*}\]
Joanne Collins, Kansas City Council’s first black, female councilmember, had personal experiences with sex workers in the city apart from her participation in the planning and zoning committee. Near the beginning of the war, Collins was approached by Brennan and COYOTE because they claimed they were being treated unfairly, and were being forced to compete with outsourced sex workers during conventions. Upon their request, Collins went undercover as a sex worker with the women to witness the alleged mistreatments. Collins stated that

Some people came to see me to tell me that the out of town prostitutes were coming in for big conventions, and they were taking over the business. And not only were they taking over the business, we had local downtown businesses that were providing support; shelter, or a place to negotiate. And I thought, ‘Oh, this is just terrible.’ And they told me that the police were abusing them too. So they invited me for a ride. I told my husband and he said, ‘Only you could do it.’ So I dressed as much as I could to look like one of those, but as I stepped up into the wagon with two or three of them, an officer said, ‘Is that you, Ms. Collins?’ I said, ‘Yep, it’s me.’ He said, ‘We aren’t taking you anywhere.’ And I said, ‘Yes, you can. My friends tell me that they have a problem with some of the officers, and not just the prostitutes in the street.’ And of course that got to the chief and the chief took care of it. I didn’t have to deal with it anymore.26

Collins also served on committees whose focus was to promote the city as a destination for potential, often “male dominated,” conventions. In the early 1970s, Kansas City marketed itself as a convention city because of its central location in the country. They argued that it was more practical for businessmen in the interior of the country to drive to Kansas City rather than fly to the coasts for conventions.27 Collins worked with site selection committees that would come and survey Kansas City’s amenities. According to Collins, these committees included

One person checking the rooms and checking transportation. Checking the food, print services—because at the time, they used print shops. But I couldn’t figure out what this fourth and fifth person was. And come to find out, that person was actually checking the

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26 Joanne Collins, interview by author, August 31, 2017.

availability of prostitutes for their convention. The availability of the women, and as one of my doctors would tell me, they were trying to see how ‘healthy’ they were.28

One of the lawyers against the anti-prostitution ordinances, Marcia Walsh, argued that although the ordinances stated “no person” was allowed to solicit or loiter, they targeted women who were “in fact standing” while “men [were] in the cars.”29 Walsh also stated that she questioned the ordinance as to whether or not it allowed “too much power [to be given] to police.”30 Walsh practiced as an attorney at a law collective—originally called Riederer, Eisberg and Walsh—in Kansas City in the 1970s. A coworker at the law collective, Fred Slough, argued that the ordinances were passed out of “panic” and had the “intent of violating constitutional rights.”31 Walsh worked both at the law collective and for Legal Aid, and had come into contact with Brennan at the beginning of the war. According to Walsh, she and others at Legal Aid became involved in the anti-war movement because the War on Prostitution was aimed only at female sex workers and not the men who were purchasing the sexual favors. She recalled

> We thought it was unfair that the vice squad had only male officers. Because they would go out and ‘offer’ to have sex with the prostitute. And the prostitute would suggest a dollar amount, and then the prostitute would be arrested. So, the only people that were going to get arrested were women. After we made some arguments about that, then the vice squad started having female officers too. So ‘John’s’ got arrested as well as the women for prostitution.32


30 Ibid., sec. 1A, p. 2.


On September 22, 1978, Brennan spoke at a public forum that was sponsored by the Eastern Jackson County Women’s Political Caucus and attended by both the National Organization for Women-Kansas City chapter members and Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union members. She represented herself and other prostitutes of Kansas City and spoke out against the oppression she believed the city had imposed on women through the War on Prostitution. Before suing the city for 2.2 million dollars on behalf of herself and other Kansas City sex workers, Brennan filed a press release entitled “Cease Fire” which stated

Just out of concern for municipal dignity, a city should, if indeed it must declare war, declare war against mugging, murder, robbery, rape; not whores. Allocation of special funds to pay policemen to work overtime in an area that is already the most heavily patrolled area in town is patently absurd. To declare war against an enemy of comparable strength would at least make for a fair fight, but for the city to declare war against forty women whom it has beaten down long ago is sad and cowardly. To ask citizen participation in a program of peddling, turn of the century vigilantism, is ignoble unruly and insulting to any person of common sense. To seriously propose two loitering ordinances, both so obviously unlawful, ill written, and unconstitutional as to be just plan laughable, is lower than the adhoc committee in its official capacity should sink.

Kansas City’s “whore war” ended with the overturn of the loitering ordinances that targeted sex workers in April, 1986. Nearly a decade after the ordinances were put into effect, the Jackson County Circuit Court decided that they were too broad and restricted the actions of citizens stating

33 Greater Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus, “Newsletter: July, 1978,” newsletter, box 1, folder 6, National Organization for Women-Kansas City Collection, LaBudde Special Collection Archives, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO.

34 COYOTE, “Our Side of the Whore War,” article, page 1, box 1, folder 15, National Organization for Women-Kansas City Collection, LaBudde Special Collection Archives, University of Missouri- Kansas City, Kansas City, MO.

35 Tim O’Connor, “court overturns city law used against prostitutes,” Kansas City Star, 26 April 1986, sec. 1A, p. 3.
that “A person cannot be punished solely on the basis of his status” as a prostitute or panderer.\textsuperscript{36} The ordinances were rescinded as a result of a case that began in 1984 and involved William Christian, a Kansas City man who had been convicted of soliciting earlier that year. The court decided that an arrest based on “innocuous behavior” such as beckoning to passers-by or hailing vehicles would be a violation of a person’s right to freedom of expression.\textsuperscript{37}

The involvement of public figures like Joanne Collins and Marcia Walsh in the War on Prostitution helped protect sex workers against discrimination and harassment. Collins’ cooperation with the sex workers and members of COYOTE shed light on the abusive relationships between them and Kansas City police officers, as well as the under-the-table relationships between business owners and outsourced sex workers. Due to action by Legal Aid, Riederer, Eisberg and Walsh, and the ACLU of Kansas City, the war’s focus on female sex workers broadened, and vice operations began targeting male customers in 1979.\textsuperscript{38} The added support from public figures with feminist groups in Kansas City aided the anti-war effort in protecting the rights of the sex workers.

\textit{Race and Sex Discrimination in Kansas City}

The War on Prostitution highlighted the discrimination and mistreatment of female sex workers in Kansas City, but it was not the only instance in which women were blatantly harassed and discriminated against. Race and sex discrimination, as well as sexual harassment, against women transcended class and was experienced in a range of environments in the 1970s and 1980s in Kansas City. Women of several different vocations experienced discrimination in the workplace and in public life. Joanne Collins became involved in the Jackson County Republican Committee

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., sec. 1A, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., sec. 1A, p. 3.
in the 1960s, and was soon elected as its secretary. Early on in her political career, she experienced race and sex discrimination. Collins recalled

They elected me secretary for the JCRC at that meeting, and by the time they carried out the vote, Bill Ridpath, a Trump-like person, said, ‘The only reason that you’re putting her in position is because she’s black.’ And then he went on to say, ‘We are not going to have black n-word persons working in office.’ I was twenty-seven, maybe closer to thirty at that time.39

Marcia Walsh was the first woman elected the judiciary at any level for Kansas City—she was elected to be a Municipal Court judge in the 1980s—and paved the way for future women in the Kansas City court system. She experienced sex discrimination early on in her career as a judge and recollected

I don’t think I had been on the bench for a week when—I was in the middle of a trial in the court room, and this young, white man stands up and hollers out in the court room. He hollered out, ‘What right does a woman have to be a judge?’ I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe somebody would stand there and interrupt a trial. I couldn’t believe the words he hollered out.40

Eleanor Harris worked at Blue Cross, Blue Shield, where she and her coworkers experienced blatant discrimination and sexual harassment. In addition to hostility in the workplace toward her female colleagues, Harris recalled instances concerning one particular co-worker. She stated:

For instance, when there would be a group meeting, she would try to avoid standing by the doorway, because almost every man that would come through the doorway would touch her. And when it was time for the meeting to break up, same thing. She was an especially attractive woman by the feminine ideal standard at the time—well, just about any time, really. She was a young, attractive, woman. And she mentioned to me kind of openly, and to some of the other women, how resentful she was toward this kind of attention. At that time, I don’t remember a lot of people talking about sexual harassment in the workplace. But there was some discussion about it. Feminist consciousness raising included some discussion about it—these kinds of problems. So I mentioned it to the executive, that I knew something was happening and I thought that it was a problem for the business organization, and that it was perhaps something that the business organization should take

40 Marcia Walsh, interview by author, September 20, 2017.
action on. And I remember him saying that it was her responsibility to rebuff advances that she didn’t want.41

Paula Mariedaughter worked as a flight attendant in Kansas City for Trans World Airlines from 1969 to 1985. Mariedaughter was a founding member of Stewardesses for Women’s Rights, a group dedicated to improving the working conditions and protecting the rights of stewardesses in the 1970s. According to Mariedaughter, she and her colleagues experienced several instances of sex discrimination both from TWA and the pilots they worked with. She recalled

Stewardesses for Women’s Rights filed sex discrimination charges against all the airlines with a whole list of things. Weight discrimination, height discrimination, age discrimination. The marriage thing had already been struck down. But not only that, when I first started flying—say you had a twelve hour day. The plane would not take off if there weren’t meals for the pilots. Meals for us did not matter. We were permitted to eat a meal if there were some left. Not until our union negotiated meals for us were we getting meals. We were also required—if I had worked three days on and three days off—the flight attendants were supposed to do this out-of-town book. If I went somewhere and wasn’t going to be at my home phone, I was supposed to sign in, and they could call me at any time and try and get me to go to work. Pilots didn’t do that. The flight attendants had to share rooms. You worked a twelve hour day and were expected to share a room with the other flight attendants. Pilots never had to share a room. So until our union negotiated separate rooms. You need a separate room after working all day with people. So there was all sorts of sex discrimination in there, yes.42

Joanne Katz was an attorney in Wyandotte County in the 1980s. Dealing with cases that included domestic violence, she remembered her work experiences:

It was horrible! I was not only a woman in Wyandotte County; I was an outsider. It was far more in my face than it would ever be today. Ok, that’s all I can say. You know, making jokes. Jokes that are sexual, and then if you’re not thinking it’s funny, then you’re just a kill joy. You’re a prude. All of the things. But it was such a different time. You just kind of—I felt like I had to learn to just, you know, manage it. For instance, this is very—at that time, in Wyandotte County, it was very difficult to get police to respond to domestic violence. And I would go and do domestic violence—on the restraining orders, I would get training by the police department as part of my job at Legal Aid. It was a good thing they didn’t

41 Eleanor Harris, interview by author, October 11, 2017.
42 Paula Mariedaughter, interview by author, November 8, 2017.
allow rotten fruit in there, or vegetables, because they would have just thrown them at me. I mean, they were *so hostile*.43

Implicit homophobia in Kansas City was not restricted to feminist circles. As an open lesbian, Mariedaughter experienced discrimination in the public eye. She recalled

I had a speaking engagement at a high school out south—a predominately white high school—talking about lesbian and gay stuff. I came with my visual aids, and I got there and was told that the football coach had objected to having someone come and speak on this issue, and I was turned away.44

Discrimination toward all minorities extended through the seventies and into the eighties in Kansas City. Kay Madden began to practice law in Kansas City in the early 1980s. She was a member of the Human Rights Project, which was an organization in Kansas City that fought to protect the rights of gays, lesbians, and minorities that were being targeted for hate group activity. According to Madden

We were hearing of mostly gay men being beaten up around the gay and lesbian nightclubs and where Liberty Memorial is, because that was a place where men would pick each other up. There was a concerted effort to try and keep track of incidents of physical attacks. Mayor Berkley, who was the mayor in the late eighties, formed a Mayor’s Commission on hate group activity. And it wasn’t just about gays and lesbians, by any means. It was about all the hate that was being spewed about all minorities.45

Whether it be prostitution, health care, politics, or law, women all over Kansas City experienced levels of discrimination and sexual harassment in the 1970s and 1980s. Although they were challenged and pushed down in a male-dominated society, these women were able to persevere and succeed in spaces that no other women had been before in Kansas City. Some of them were the first successful women in their field, whereas others were on the battle lines,

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44 Paula Mariedaughter, interview by author, November 8, 2017.
45 Kay Madden, interview with author, October 4, 2017.
protesting for the rights of all women. Their stories add to the narrative of the women’s movement in Kansas City because they attest to the discriminatory and often difficult circumstances women were expected to live and work in on a daily basis. They are a testament to the larger women’s movement because they, much like the prominent feminist leaders throughout the country at that time, fought against male-dominated opposition and broke into careers women had not been in before. Serving as a common thread among these women, discrimination and sexual harassment influenced their life experiences, ideologies, and involvement in social and political activism in support of women in cases like the War on Prostitution.

**Historiography and Feminist Theory**

Despite shared experiences in discrimination and harassment, women’s organizations in Kansas City did not typically work together prior to and after the War on Prostitution. The relationships, or lack thereof, between various feminist groups in Kansas City were typical of the complex variations of second-wave feminism across the country in the 1970s. Issues of class, race, sexuality, and sexual expression greatly divided feminists. Although identity politics were embraced by social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, invisibility of race and ethnicity amidst a white-washed American society was not a new concept within women’s groups. The neglect of women of color among white women’s groups was felt as early as the women’s suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century, with Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech in which she makes comparisons between the treatment of white women and black women.\(^{46}\) In her speech, Truth “exposes the construction of femininity” and its exclusion of some women through

\(^{46}\) Speech delivered at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851.
differences in race and class.\textsuperscript{47} Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women of color and working-class women fought to be heard by white, middle-class women and were continuously ignored by the majority.\textsuperscript{48}

Second-wave feminism highlighted the separation of white women and women of color. Although it was made up of several groups that varied in class, race, sexuality, and ideologies, the face of the second-wave became the middle-class, affluent, white woman. White second-wave feminists argued that “women should all be women first” before their racial or ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{49} Some feminist scholars such as Becky Thompson and Chela Sandoval argue that second-wave feminism should be considered “hegemonic feminism” because the movement did not focus on world views or women of color, and is remembered as a movement made by white women that, “deemphasizes or ignores a class and race analysis.”\textsuperscript{50} In 1969, Maya Angelou addressed the exclusion of black women in white society in \textit{I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings} stating, “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on

\textsuperscript{47} Susan Mann and Ashly Patterson, \textit{Reading Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 219.

\textsuperscript{48} Ida B. Wells-Barnett, “Lynch Law in America” (1900), Alexandra Kollotai, “Working Woman and Mother” (1914), Tillie Olsen, “I Want You Women Up North to Know” (1934), all express frustrations of working class women and women of color who were not included in the movement for women’s rights that was led by elite, white women.


the razor that threatens the throat." As figures like Betty Friedan practiced a version of feminism that centered solely on white, middle class, heterosexual women, outlying feminists responded to the ostracism by creating feminist groups of their own, such as the National Black Feminist Organization and the Combahee River Collective. Founded in 1973, NBFO combated black women’s issues based around sexism and racism. The Collective included black, socialist, and lesbian feminists who addressed the issues of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation arguing that, “sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women’s lives as are the politics of class and race.”

Black women were not the only minority group to find their voice in radical alternatives to second-wave feminism. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Chrystos, and Mitsuye Yamada published works that shed light on the struggles of Mexican-American and Asian-American women and their invisibility in white society. Las Hijas de Cuauhtemoc, a Chicana women’s group, was one of the earliest feminist organizations to be formed in the “radical” second-wave, and it focused on Mexican American student movements. Asian Sisters, an Asian American group, focused on drug abuse and helping young women of Los Angeles. Women of All Red Nations was

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51 Maya Angelou, excerpt from I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Random House LLC, 1997) in Reading Feminist Theory by Susan Mann and Ashly Patterson (Oxford University Press, 2016), 246.


54 Mitsuye Yamada, “Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman” (1979), Chrystos, “I Walk in the History of My People” (1983), and Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987) all discuss the exclusion of Mexican and Asian women and their culture throughout American history and the blatant segregation of women of color and white women.
a Native American feminist group that advocated for improvements in public and women’s health for both Native Americans in the United States and indigenous people in South America.\(^{55}\) Despite the efforts of black, Latina, Native American, and Asian American women, the legacy of more conventional second-wave feminism “all but ignored the feminist activism of women of color.”\(^{56}\)

Feminists such as Gloria Steinem attempted to bridge the gap between white feminists and women of color. Steinem recognized the disparity of influence within feminism when it was divided, and sought to form a more united front between black and white women by focusing on their shared issues arguing that, “Nothing is not affected by racism and sexism and class.”\(^{57}\) Despite the efforts of feminists like Steinem, gaps remained between several feminist groups.

Another major rift during the second-wave of feminism was between heterosexual and homosexual women. Radical and lesbian feminisms grew alongside women of color groups in the 1970s. While lesbian culture had first found a stage in the 1920s with literature such as Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*, lesbian issues did not gain serious attention until the post-Stonewall era of the 1970s and 1980s.\(^{58}\) Mainstream feminist groups, such as the National Organization for


\(^{58}\) *The Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall, published in 1928, was one of the first successful pieces of literature representing lesbianism in American culture.

The Stonewall riots of Greenwich Village, Manhattan in 1969 officially marked the beginning of the LGBT civil rights movement. Before the riots, the LGBT community did not coalesce with other civil rights movements. After the Stonewall riots, lesbians could not easily be excluded from the larger women’s movement.

Susan B. Marine, *Stonewall’s Legacy: Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Students in Higher Education* ASHE Higher Education Report: Volume 37, Number 4 (San Francisco:
Women, as popular feminist leaders such as Betty Friedan, did not support lesbians nor address lesbian issues. Distrust and disagreement was felt on both sides of the sexuality gap. Anti-lesbian feminists argued that lesbianism would detract from the momentum of the women’s movement and “distract attention from more serious and more widely shared women’s issues.” Conversely, radical feminists argued that heterosexual women were not true feminists because they were tied to male privilege. The notion of the “woman-identified-woman” challenged not only patriarchy, but also the labels created by heterosexuals (both male and female) for lesbians that were designed to “throw at any woman who dares to be equal.” Radical feminists like Charlotte Bunch declared war on male supremacy and women who bought into the patriarchal bargain, arguing that the “Nature of homosexuality is men first,” and that “[Men] will not deal with their sexism until they are forced to.”

Disagreements about prostitution were problematized by a long list of ideological differences among feminist groups. The sexual revolution and the movement for liberation of


60 Mann and Patterson, *Reading Feminist Theory*, 90.


women’s bodies in the 1970s played a large role in the fragmentation of feminism that led to “sex wars” between different sub-groups of feminists, including radical feminists, sex radical feminists, and minority feminists. At the center of disagreements over erotic practices was the topic of prostitution, and whether or not the selling of sex was a woman’s right, or an intrinsic pillar that propped up the patriarchal system. Feminists in the camp of Gayle Rubin said that, “sexual repression was one of the most irrational ways for civilizations to control human behavior,” and argued that telling women how to express their sexuality was against the values of feminism. Contrarily, feminists such as Andrea Dworkin argued that sexual practices such as pornography and prostitution were, “at the center of a cycle of abuse,” and that they “helped to institutionalize and legitimize gender inequality.” The evolutions of feminism that came out of the second wave significantly fragmented the women’s movement. Progress became stagnant by the 1980s. Gaps between white feminists and women of color widened, and the base of radical feminism shrank considerably. Rather than focus on what united them, 1970s feminists largely remained divided and lost the momentum that took decades to gain.

*The Women’s Movement and the War on Prostitution in Kansas City*

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66 Ibid., 93.

Ideological differences across the feminist spectrum were reflected in the Kansas City women’s movement. The National Organization for Women was policy-driven, whereas the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union was socially-driven. The main goal of NOW, both locally and nationally, was to push for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.\(^68\) The KCWLU focused on building a woman-centered community, and were much more radical than NOW-KC. According to Joanne Katz, a former member of a branch of the Women’s Liberation Union under the University of Missouri—Kansas City, coalesced with KCWLU. Their organization …Brought in some highly radical feminists. One of them was Jill Johnston. She had a book that was called *Lesbian Nation*, I think. I mean, it was so radical at the time, that it strongly influenced me. For instance, the women’s union on campus would not allow men. So when I left, I was highly politicized.\(^69\)

Despite intersectionality growing in popularity in the 1970s, both women’s organizations in Kansas City were overwhelmingly white.\(^70\) Integration in the NOW-KC and the KCWLU was

\(^68\) Susan Mann and Ashly Patterson, *Reading Feminist Theory*, 93.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution that was at first introduced to Congress in 1923. It gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s with the progression of the women’s movement. In 1971, it passed both houses of Congress in 1972 and was submitted to the state legislatures for ratification. Congress had originally set a ratification deadline of March 22, 1979. Through 1977, the amendment received thirty-five of the thirty-eight needed state ratifications. Although the ERA was at first supported by members from both the Democrat and Republican parties, anti-ERA women’s groups led by Phyllis Schlafly began a campaign against it, resulting in states rescinding their support. Although the deadline for the ratification of the ERA was extended to 1982, the amendment was never passed.

\(^69\) Joanne Katz, interview by author, October 5, 2017.

\(^70\) Intersectionality was adopted by feminists of color who, at the time of Kimberle Crenshaw’s work on intersectionality, were looking for a bridge between major inequalities among women such as race, gender, and class. Intersectionality makes it possible for such structural and systemic inequalities to be seen on a broader scale. By recognizing that several factors affect the experiences of people and their perspectives, different factions of feminism and those that are associated with them can be better understood. Although intersectional feminism has grown increasingly popular in the last few decades, it is not unscathed of critique. Scholars such as
not very successful. Although members were aware of the need to actively engage with women of color, white members did not feel adequately equipped to do so. According to Eleanor Harris, former president of NOW-KC

We talked about trying to outreach to non-white women, and frankly we just weren’t very good at it. In retrospect, we didn’t know how. The heart was there, but the brain wasn’t [there]. The women’s movement throughout the ERA countdown days the non-white feminists and the white feminists did not intersect well at all.\(^71\)

Paula Mariedaughter, former member of the KCWLU, agreed that, although the Women’s Liberation Union carried out strong statements of principle including anti capitalism, anti-racism, and later, socialist feminism, class and race were still an issue within the community. Mariedaughter stated

We tried in the minimal ways we could think of. There was a woman who was involved in the gay liberation movement, who was very outspoken and active. She was an African American woman whose name I can’t remember. But she didn’t seem that interested in feminism. She was more—she liked gay men. I think we were just ignorant on how to do it; on how to make African American women comfortable. I think we had good intentions, but the intentions didn’t play out in everyday life. Many of us were trying to make a living. I don’t know what all of the excuses are. But we were reading Audrey Lorde, and there was a woman who came to the bookstore in Lawrence. She was a Native American woman and many of us went and heard her talk, so we were interested. But to make those community, day-to-day life connections—that’s what pulled the community together, not just meeting at meetings, but real-life connections. And class was always an issue too. The women who had money and didn’t have money, and trying to—the expectations about what was the normal way to live.\(^72\)

\(^71\) Eleanor Harris, interview by author, October 11, 2017.

\(^72\) Paula Mariedaughter, interview by author, November 8, 2017.
Although NOW-KC and the KCWLU shared problems in terms of class and race, the groups were largely divided over sexuality. Harris was chapter president in 1976, shortly before the NOW-KC chapter dissolved as a result of a sexuality-related schism among NOW members. Harris recounted that

One of the things that was happening was, there were some new members to the organization that were interested in influencing the chapter. A lot of those new members were identified as lesbians. There were a lot of members of Greater Kansas City NOW who were also members of the Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus. My sense of it was, a lot of the women who were Women’s Political Caucus members, and who were interested in careers in politics, had a tendency to not be real welcoming of a more radical persona. There seemed to be a homophobia within the chapter. I think there was an undercurrent of implicit homophobia at work there. And ultimately, it was a bad strategy. The actions of the, for lack of a better term, “heterosexual wing” or group, lacked integrity. And that’s never a good thing, when you’re talking about an idealistic group—a social justice group.73

Contrary to NOW-KC, the KCWLU was largely made up of lesbian members, and differed from them in terms of sexuality, inclusiveness, and mission. Mariedaughter stated that

We were mostly lesbian. Any straight woman that was there was comfortable with lesbians. In my personal opinion, lesbians did most of the hard work in the women’s movement. We were swept under the carpet. It was about changing the world, not just changing the laws.74

Despite push back between women’s organizations in Kansas City in terms of race and sexuality, groups like NOW-KC and the KCWLU found common ground through the War on Prostitution. Unlike the broader scale of second-wave feminism, women’s groups in Kansas City were able to transcend their ideological differences and work together to support sex workers. The national chapter of NOW incorporated the decriminalization of sex workers as a plank in their convention in 1973, but did not definitively get involved in prostitutes’ rights until the

73 Eleanor Harris, interview by author, October 11, 2017.
74 Paula Mariedaughter, interview by author, November 8, 2017.
Local-level NOW chapters, however, carried out their individual involvement in the fight for prostitutes’ rights directly after 1973. In New York, Nevada, and California, they urged their governments to “end all laws that aimed at (male) control of women’s sexual life” and held continuous debates on whether or not prostitution was a “victimless crime.” Although NOW-KC mainly focused on the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, the organization came to the aid of Brennan and COYOTE in 1977 when the ordinances were passed. Up until that point, NOW-KC had not taken a specific stance on prostitutes’ rights, because it was not clear to many members as to whether or not prostitution was liberating or oppressive to women.

On May 19, Eleanor Harris appeared before the Kansas City Planning and Zoning Committee. She asked the Committee to reject the ordinances presented by councilman Serviss, and to accept an alternate section to be added to the new ordinances. In a press release, Harris stated that the sections proposed by Serviss were “unconstitutional in that they are so vague that one section could easily be interpreted to allow a police officer, at his or her discretion, to arrest anyone for appearing in public [or] for talking to anyone else in public.” NOW-KC proposed to replace Serviss’s ordinances with their own version of an ordinance that specified it was

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75 Eleanor Harris, phone conversation with author, July 26, 2016.
77 Eleanor Harris, phone conversation with author, July 26, 2016.
78 Eleanor Harris, phone conversation with author, July 26, 2016.
79 Eleanor Harris, “NOW Presents Alternate Ordinance to K.C.”, press release, box 1, folder 15, National Organization for Women-Kansas City, LaBudde Special Collections Archive, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO.
unlawful for any person to “halt or attempt to halt persons traveling on the streets or sidewalks with the intent to interfere or obstruct the entry or exit of customers to and from a place of business.”80 The specification of NOW-KC’s proposed ordinance differentiated the individuals who had the intent of obstructing business entryways and loitering from those individuals who did not have the intent to do so.

The KCWLU did not show substantial interest in prostitution and sex worker’s rights until 1977, after the ordinances were proposed. The goal of the KCWLU was to stimulate women-centered bonding through events, clubs, and support groups so that women were better able to lead independent lives from under patriarchy.81 They established a women’s center in a house they bought that served as a commonplace for feminists, and also supported New Earth Bookstore, a local bookstore that was an “alternative” community center in the Midtown area of Kansas City.82 In the summer of 1977, KCWLU members attended rallies opposing both the War on Prostitution and Anita Bryant and her “Save Our Children” campaign against homosexuals.83

Kansas City women’s organizations collaborated with COYOTE-KC to organize meetings and rallies in 1977. Newsletters and pamphlets from NOW-KC and the Greater Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus from June to September advertised meetings with members of COYOTE-KC and talks presented by “Ocelot.”84 These collaborations were focused on more

80 Eleanor Harris, “NOW Presents Alternate Ordinance to K.C.”.

81 Paula Mariedaughter, phone conversation with author, October 24, 2016.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Greater Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus, “Newsletter: July, 1978,” newsletter, box 1, folder 6, National Organization for Women-Kansas City Collection, LaBudde Special Collection Archives, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO.
than just prostitutes’ rights; women’s rights in general and the sexuality of the female body were frequent topics as well. With the uproar of the War on Prostitution, women’s organizations in Kansas City gained the opportunity to become more visible.

Differences in goals and tactics in the anti-WoP movement persisted among the women’s organizations. NOW-KC and KCWLU agreed that the ordinances passed during the War on Prostitution were violations of women’s rights. Unlike COYOTE, however, they did not completely agree that prostitution was an appropriate career for women. Kate Kasten, a KCWLU

67 Kate Kasten, “Response written and read by Kate Kasten at a hearing before the Plans and Zoning Committee, 19 May, 1977, Kansas City, MO. Kasten read a proposed, satirical addition to the ordinance that she had written. The proposal requested the city to send out one thousand police women to be trained to “mobilize against [male] violators” that harass and beckon to women in public. In the statement Kasten expressed her excitement that “the city will escalate its war effort beyond the rather unimportant skirmishes it has been engaging in against prostitutes, and points its big guns at a more important enemy, one that has virtually taken over the city.”


69 Joanne Collins, interview by author, August 31, 2017.

70 Eleanor Harris, interview by author, October 11, 2017.

71 Paula Mariedaughter, interview by author, November 8, 2017.

72 Ibid.


75 Kay Madden, interview by author, October 4, 2017.

76 Marcia Walsh, interview by author, September 20, 2017.

77 Kay Madden, interview by author, October 4, 2017.
member, said she believed prostitution was an oppressive system designed to keep women of certain racial, ethnic, and socio-economic background, oppressed. She stated that police should use the ordinance to “direct their attention to men.”¹ Pauline Cassler-Jones, who was a member of NOW-KC, stated, “We are not necessarily supporting prostitution but women at large.” Groups like NOW-KC and KCWLU became involved in the anti-WoP movement because they considered the persecution of sex workers in Kansas City as a direct threat to women, not necessarily because they supported legalizing prostitution.

Although it was not a long-lasting unity, the War on Prostitution served as a bridge for feminists whose ideological differences typically had created barriers between them. The missions of the groups were different, but each needed the other to coalesce and gain momentum in both the War on Prostitution and the women’s movement on a broader scale. It was understood among feminist groups that progress could not be attained without action on both social and political fronts. As said by Mariedaughter, “I was really glad that people [did both]. I wanted that to happen too, because they both have to happen.”²

**Conclusion**

The War on Prostitution was an exciting time for feminist groups in Kansas City. With the media attention that the war drew, feminist groups were able to help strengthen the voice of COYOTE and female sex workers, while giving their own organizations a voice. The War on Prostitution provided women’s groups in Kansas City the unique opportunity to build a bridge of communication and cooperation between them. Rather than focus on the differences that divided them in terms of class, sexuality, and agenda, groups such as NOW-KC and the KCWLU briefly worked together to combat the WoP both in policy and social activism. It is an important addition to women’s history, because it was one of the few times in history that radical feminists,
radical lesbians, women of color feminists, and white, mainstream feminists worked together despite their stark ideological differences.

The women’s movement in Kansas City was certainly on a much smaller scale than other women’s movements happening in larger cities like Los Angeles and New York in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the community that was created among women’s groups out of the War on Prostitution was exceptional. It allowed dialogue and relationships to form; something that did not happen regularly among polarized feminist groups. Despite differences in size, the issues women in Kansas City were experiencing within their organizations and in their personal lives paralleled the issues women were facing across the country. The difference is that Kansas City women, if only briefly, successfully came together on behalf of all women.

Although feminist groups in Kansas City were predominately white and middle class, they put their agendas aside during the War on Prostitution to support women who were unlike themselves. Aside from Theresa Brennan, sex workers in Kansas City were predominately lower class, black women. Despite the flagrant absence of intersectionalism in NOW-KC and the KCWLU in terms of race and class, they supported women of color and lower socio-economic standing during the WoP. Women in public life along with feminists groups made up of policy makers, radical activists, and prostitutes upset the system by challenging a scheme that was designed to vilify the female sex worker in Kansas City. By doing so, sex workers gained a limited amount of agency in the years of the WoP and gained attention through their supporters and the media. The, albeit brief, intersectional collaboration of feminists groups and women in Kansas City’s public life allowed a voice to be given to a class of women who, both before and after the War on Prostitution, were considered nothing but “whores” in society.
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PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Joanne Collins

DATE
August 31, 2017

LOCATION
LaBudde Special Collections Archive, University of Missouri, Kansas City

EDITING
Minutes 50:04 to 52:14 were redacted by request of Ms. Collins and are not included in the transcript.

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Joanne Collins was elected as the first African American, female city council member for Kansas City’s 3rd District at Large in 1974. Throughout her political life, she was active in the Jackson County Republican Party and a member of several political and social organizations. In 1977, she was on City Council’s planning and zoning committee during the War on Prostitution under Mayor Charles Wheeler.

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PEILE: I just wanted to know what made you more involved in public life?

COLLINS: First of all, I started when—my church is first. Running for office and becoming involved in an elected position by any small group of people started at my church. Because I am a member of the African American Episcopal Zion church. It is known as the Freedom Church because it is the church of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglas and Rosa Parks. I grew up with that, not only with the bible and the Lord; but I grew up with the black history part, and how to get involved in voting. That was very important to us. We had voter registration drives all the time—twelve months out of the year. Home and church was the only place I could go as far as my mother was concerned. To school, church, and home. I could not even go to someone else’s house to play with a child, but the child could come to my house.

I would spend a lot of time reading, and I did a lot of, well we did a lot of recitations, what we called “pieces” or speeches—small speeches at church and I also did them at school. I did a lot of drama when I got to high school. We did Shakespeare plays; four or five of those. And we did some comedies and a couple of mysteries and I loved that because that was the only time I got to talk; at home I could not talk. And I had to excuse myself when adults from outside were in there. That’s the basics of it.

When I went to KU, well I learned my political skills, my ones that were most beneficial, appeared to me in the church. I was a delegate to a conference when I was thirteen and in my church the character of the minister and all the lay officers is challenged every year—every twelve months. If they are going to stay in position as a minister or officer at my church, all members in good standing could vote for you or against you and most of the time you had a unanimous vote. Every now and then there would be a controversy. When I served and was elected a delegate to an annual conference of five states—about twenty-seven churches— the bishop was having problems with a couple of ministers and he formed a committee and three ministers and three lay people at my church, women had always held office or were ministers. He always had an equal number of lay and minister and women men.

I had not served as secretary for the church before but I had served as secretary for a scout troop and youth choir, that kind of thing. The minister knew I could take some minutes, so I did. I was appointed and I went into this room, and the minister that was charged because he had fathered a baby out of wedlock, and he didn’t acknowledge the child. And he of course was not paying child support or anything. The member, when they stood to pass his case to remain a minister for the year they charged him and so the bishop sent us into this room, and I had to take minutes. Well, those individuals, there were people for him and against him, and I did a pretty good job of writing it all down, and repeating it. The bishop had me repeat some of it. Some of the things that people said, he wouldn’t let me repeat it because it was bad words, cuss words, etc. That was my first experience. My mother didn’t know that when she let me go to church, I would get that experience. I didn’t even tell her when I got back. I was pretty upset because I cried during the whole thing; tears flowing down and I was just taking notes.

The next time I had an experience was when I served on the Jackson County Republican Party and Dick Berkley invited me, he was the an officer. He was not chair, he became chair the next—Dick Berkley was the former mayor of Kansas City. He invited me to the meeting and I should have known he had something in mind for me. But the secretary had not come for a
couple of meetings and when they asked if anyone would take some notes, he volunteered me
and I did, I took the notes.

The next time we had the monthly meeting, I had the notes but I hadn’t planned on using them,
but they called for the minutes. Nobody said anything and Dick Berkley says, ‘Joanne’s got
some notes from the last meeting, or she at least as some notes on the actions taken’ and so, I got
my notes out and I read them and they were impressed so they elected me secretary for the JCRC
at that meeting and by the time they carried out the vote, Bill Ridpath, a Trump-like person, said,
‘The only reason that you’re putting her in position is because of her notes and you agree that she
did a good job, and she reads well, and the only reason you are electing her, appointing her is
because she’s black.’ And then he went on to say, ‘We are not going to have black [n-word]
persons working in office’ and Dick Berkley,

PEILE: And how old were you? I’m sorry.

COLLINS: Oh I was twenty-seven, maybe closer to thirty at that time. Again I was taking notes,
and I took notes on everything that this guy said about me. But I was elected anyway. The next
meeting I read minutes and I read everything back, including the cuss words and the n word. I
only had ‘N’ on my paper but I said it, because Dick Berkley kind of encouraged me to do it.
And there were three or four people that I knew there and they were very encourag

That’s when I decided that I was going to get involved in politics in Kansas City, Missouri. See a
part of that, I was in Kansas City, Kansas. I had gotten married—married a foreign born
individual. And at the time I did not know it but I was his green card. He was from Jamaica but
he was raised in Great Britain, and I had had my first year or two at KU. Then I married him
through letters and flowers and gifts. I never had a date with him or kissed him, because he went
back to Jamaica and I went to Mackinaw Island for babysitting some children that my parents
worked for. And I was in my freshman year at KU so I got married in Christmas time. I had been
jolted the year before, so I was on, what do you call it, the rebound? Everything for the wedding
was already there and this man did this.

Anyway, I had come back to Kansas City and started working at the post office. I just found out
that was back in 1961 or ‘60. And when I moved to Kansas City Missouri, I divorced him after a
couple years. Then I was working at the post office and met my second husband. And my second
husband was from Illinois. He was an activist and had been involved politically, and was a
member of the Republican Party in Illinois. All my friends were black republicans. Dick
Berkley, who was the white republican, and two other Italian friends who were fine and so we
called ourselves the “integrated mafia” or “republican mafia”, whether we were or not. We
thought that was a kind word then but I learned later I shouldn’t have used that word in certain
places. Anyway, so there was a national council of black republicans. I worked for Dole when I
was in Kansas and when I moved to Missouri I worked for…well Dick Berkley was active a
little bit but I worked for, it was during Bonds’ administration I think where I decided that in
voting.

The first time I moved to Missouri, the first election, the first person/republican I wanted to vote
for was Lt. Phelps. I never will forget it because I went to the voting election polls and asked for
a republican ballot and the black republican election judge and the black democrat election judge started laughing and they said, ‘Oh, honey, we don’t vote for republicans over here. You must be from Kansas.’ I said, ‘Yes I am, but I am an American citizen and we vote for whoever we want to vote for wherever we are in these United States.’ Then she said, ‘Well not here! Hahaha!’ So I left, in tears, because I do a lot of crying. I left in tears. I used to do a lot of crying.

PEILE: I do a lot of crying too so I understand.

COLLINS: I left in tears and I went and called my husband and told him that the black republican person working laughed at me for asking for a republican ballot. He said, “Girl, what’s wrong with you? Call the board of election and tell the commissioners and tell them to get you a ballot. When I get off work, I am getting a ballot.” He was upset. He was almost seven feet, three hundred pounds. They were going to give him a ballot. I waited and they met me there.

The word got out that Joanne Collins lived in the Oak Park neighborhood, and she is voting as a republican. And at that time the only other organization that was active in the black community was Freedom Incorporated and they said they were all democrats. One of their co-founders was a republican but he acted like and talked, and said he was a democrat. He was actually a republican from Kansas City, Kansas and lived on the next block from us and I knew that so I visited with him. He said, ‘You know you guys are right. Go ahead and make your own party but don’t ever ask Freedom Inc. to endorse you because you’re a republican.’ That’s how we got started. So we started two or three organizations and then…we started one in the community and then we started one state-wide and district wide and then we ended up with a national organization. And we had one hundred-fifty people from Kansas and twenty probably from Missouri—African Americans who claimed to be republicans.

Then I also had the experience of the League of Women Voters while I was at KU, I participated in a couple of their voting registration drives and lobbied in Topeka for legislation so I got intrigued by how you got legislation to pass, but I liked the policy part of it. So my husband loved to write. He did all the writing. I just wanted to know what they wanted. And when I could find out what they wanted I would give it to him and tell him, ‘Draft this and see what we can do.’ I always remind people that when you are in politics you have to delay your satisfaction level. Because it takes ten to thirteen years, now this is historically speaking, ten to thirteen years from policy to law.

But the experiences I had, that’s why I give credit and stay active with the league of women voters now is because of that basic experience. And for those of us who talk about voter registration and don’t do anything about it, I actually make sure that people are registered and that they get out and vote and that they are educated on the ballot issues or the on individual candidates. So we spent most of our time on education. And I never considered myself a ‘lobbyist.’ That for me was a negative word. And in some cases and in some situations it isn’t. But education and advocacy. And with the League of Women Voters, and because I worked on some legislation and dealing with environmental issues like water and I think it was called as a water bill at the time and that’s probably sparked my interest in environmental issues; even now. That’s how I got started.
The community the neighborhood I lived in that I have always belonged to lots of not-for-profits. When I was twenty-three I belonged to twenty three. When I was fifty, I belonged to fifty. So you look at one of my resumes you’ll see that there’s a long list. I love organizations and have always been an organizational person. One third of them were political, one third of them were social, and one third of them were religious. When I did the republican committee I lost the first race the first time. I ran then the second time—I ran and I won by a few votes. Because it was a low vote position anyway. But I didn’t win by that many. I didn’t really consider it a ‘win’ but one vote made the difference. And about two years later I had done some neighborhood work and that’s when Kay Waldo Barnes and I teamed up on some neighborhood complaints that we were having but the city council members at the time…and we had done some court watching for some reason. The judges were going to sleep on some videos that had evidence and we were just volunteered court watchers to make sure they stayed awake. And to listen to the evidence, and I liked that part.

Anyway we had a thing at City Hall, the Neighborhood Association was complaining about them sweeping the streets. At the time we had a street sweeper that would sweep the block; every block. Weekly, or monthly, something like that. Whenever they did it was the day before the trash was picked up. Everybody thought that was stupid but the city said that was what they had to do. And the neighborhood association said they couldn’t do anything about so I said, ‘Hmm let me try.’ I went to city hall, talked to the council member; that’s when I found out council members are policy makers. Only, you have to talk to staff people. In our form of government it is the city manager. I talked to the city manager and he said, ‘The contracts were out’ and that’s the way it was—it couldn’t be changed. Kay and I had a conversation at some other meeting and she said, ‘You know, we should see if we could get a pilot program out of them’ because the budget is already done, the contracts for the year was set. So we did. I suggested we do a pilot. In fact, we can interrupt the schedule now and do a pilot and have results before the next hearings on the budget.

In the next hearing, it worked out. I mean of course it worked out. They changed it. Individuals in my neighborhood thought that I had worked a miracle. I hadn’t done that much I just asked if we could try to see if it could work. Then my neighborhood association told the next neighborhood association, and then the next neighborhood association, and so we got the benefit out of it in the 3rd district and that made a difference because at that time the African American community was confined to certain addresses. Then we began to brag about it. Of course most organizations I was a part of were integrated and so I talked about it, and kay talked about her situation in her neighborhood and they thought we were just, it wasn’t that much, but it made a difference. Then we thought, the next time we looked around and there was an election to be held. First of all we, had an African American council member, 3rd district at large, Richard Tolbert. He took over two buildings that belonged to the city, what you call that, not homesteading, you call it something. It’s got a name. Anyway so as a council member he didn’t have a house to live in, is the problem.

PEILE: Was he squatting?
COLLINS: Yes, yes. He was squatting. He started living in it and he had access to a city card. When it was time to turn the card in, he didn’t turn the card in and got in trouble with the city and he was charged and had a court case. He had to resign midterm, three years into a four year term. They had a special election. That’s when I ran. Freedom, Inc. sponsored seven individuals. One was Mamie Hughes. Good friend of mine. She was a good friend then and she’s a good friend now. Still is. Those individuals, they had to be elected by/filled in the expired term by the mayor of the city council. We were all interviewed. Kaiser…good friend of mine and was a sorority sister. She was the last person scheduled to be interviewed by Mayor of the city council. She had the apt right before mine. She had twenty minutes. Well was she was a great talker. She kept talking and talking—went about forty minutes. And everybody teases me now, they said it then and I said the same thing; everybody was so worn out, when they came to interview me, I gave such short answers and finished within fifteen minutes, they said, ‘Just elect her.’ But Mayor Wheeler, he was the mayor at the time. When he went to collect the votes, the joke is, that he said, ‘Well she’s won, seven to six,’ I believe. And so, Leon Brownville said, ‘Let’s see it. Show us the ballot.’ And he (Wheeler) said, ‘The ballots are to be sequestered,’ or something like that. But he told me later, he did not want me to know that he did not vote for me. He said, ‘I never thought you would win either.’ He told me that he would never appoint me to any committee. And I certainly wouldn’t be a chair of a committee, because I was a republican, not because I was black, but because I was a republican. And this was a nonpartisan election. Well supposed to be a nonpartisan. Everybody knows what your politics are if you have any and if you have done anything in the community.

Within a year he had given me three appointments and I remind him of that even today. I remind him. I said, ‘You know, after saying you would never give me any appointments, you gave me three.’ We created one new organization which was a youth group development council and I had about fifty some youth servicing agencies. Four of the boards that I served on had services for youth but they were all adults of course, old people; which of course is like too many cases today. I insisted that if they couldn’t put a youth on the board, which is not easy, have a youth advisory. Ask them the type of services they want. Ask them to evaluate what we were doing. I got such great resistance. I never seen so many people get so mad at having young people participate. I began to feel good about it. They of course were ostracizing me but it didn’t matter. The two or three that did try it had such good results with the next year’s program and the funding and their requests for grants increased and the youth was more satisfied than they had ever been. And so that little piece of experience worked out for me. Between the neighborhood work and belonging. Oh, and I didn’t have money.

They said you had to have then, probably ten thousand dollars for your primary. You didn’t have to money for your first appointment but you did have to have it the second time around and I thought, ‘Well I’m not going to be able to do that. I’ll use all my organizations and call on individuals to do what I knew they could do.’ Half of them would never get involved in politics, and they certainly weren’t going to get involved with working with a republican, black, female. I said, ‘How about just the female part? How about just the black, female part?’ Some folks took that, some took both. And the Republican Party didn’t have a lot of candidates anyway in KC and so I ran. Jackson County had a position and I ran for that, and that had the big ‘R’ on it and they said, ‘No way.’ The unions wouldn’t want me. And my experience with the unions turned
out just like my experiences with Freedom Inc. I knew so many individuals that were members that I knew I couldn’t get the endorsement of the board.

But the biggest coup for me personally, was the second time I ran I didn’t even get invited to be interviewed by the unions. And so I just asked my friends, when they got their invitations, to let me know. I was just going to go and get my twenty to thirty minutes, whatever they allowed for the candidates. I showed up at everything. I love meetings. I showed up at everything. One of the—they had a combined union endorsing committee, which was the presidents of all the larger unions in the area. I never will forget, they told me, ‘You’re not on the list. You weren’t scheduled. You won’t be able to interview.’ I just sat and waited until they finished. They were supposed to be in that room for a two hour period and they still had thirty minutes. When they started to come out I said, ‘You still have 30 minutes, would you consider one of the legitimate candidates for an interview?’ They did. They said, ‘Of course we are not going to endorse you, and you know why.’

As I left, the secretary of this group of consolidated unions said to me, ‘Ms. Collins, I’ll tell you what I am going to do. I have to send out the endorsing list. When I get to 3rd district at large, I’m going to leave it blank. And when I leave it blank, that means that that member is free to choose whoever they want.’ I got a large percentage of votes on the ballot because people recognized my name but didn’t know whether or not I had been endorsed. Because they carried their list in with them to vote. We have organizations; I belong to organizations, where the board may ‘do something’ and I choose to do something else. And I have always believed you are free to vote for who you want to vote for. That’s the strong part that come from the church. So I got the vote. She called me back the next day and she said, ‘I’ve got thirty volunteers that are calling in and want you to make it to the 3rd district at large. They are not saying it yet, but honey, you are going to get this vote.’

That was the power of a secretary. I use that story quite a bit over the years because secretaries know how powerful they are. I tell people, you can introduce me to the president or the chair, the treasurer, and I know who really runs the show. It’s not like that now but back then in the sixties and seventies. Women knew their power but they didn’t talk about it or write about it. If they wanted to change something, they changed it in the document before it was presented. Now, I am not throwing any ideas into your head. In today’s world, where you see, I just saw that, I have a good friend that is a retired from Donnelly College this year. He made a graduation speech this year that some senior made some twenty years ago. And they googled it, and it was word for word. In those days, you couldn’t do it as easily as you can now. And I felt so bad for him. I have served with him on boards too, but he never should have done that. Plagiarized his whole speech.

PEILE: Everyone can find anything now.

COLLINS: Yes! You can use one sentence in a speech. But, that’s how I got started. And I was very supported because my husband was a very active individual. He liked to work behind the scenes. I’m not a good writer, and I had my husband and my son to write. They could write in my language. Of course they would do all the research and they had all the facts and made anecdotals. I could make three speeches and people would think, ‘Oh, she’s really good,’ but I didn’t write them. I could read them and go over them, and sometimes they would get a little too
strong for me and I would say, ‘You guys know better, strike that,’ or I would strike it. I was really blessed to have a husband who was supportive. We didn’t agree on everything. He, in the later years of my political career began to be on the opposite position from me. We had a dining room table, and I would have my information on my candidate and my issue on one side of the table, and on his side would be his evidence against the position, on the cause, or the candidate. We never violated each other, although I knew I had to get two votes for his one if I was going to beat him. I think we enjoyed doing that; that piece of it. As my daughter would say, that’s too much information. But that’s how I got started. I was surprised at the number of organizations that I belonged to, and the people who said they couldn’t get involved in politics or they couldn’t do what I asked them to do, like write letters and make phone calls, or make an announcement, or tell someone that they knew me. They did it and they did it so easily. At campaigns, I never had those big parties at the end of the day when an election was won. Those individuals probably wouldn’t come out at night because they were older women or they wouldn’t want to be around someone who drinks alcoholic beverages or who smokes. They would stay up all night and wait for the vote to come in.

PEILE: So when you were on city council, were you the only woman?

COLLINS: When I got on city council, we had a woman. That one year expired term that I finished, Sarah Snow had been on the council. And that’s another story that I love because I got to make a move. When Sarah was on, she represented north of the river, in the first district. I think history shows that I am the first woman city council member elected at large, and first African American elected period. And Sarah was on, then she ran for mayor and lost. I didn’t serve with her for more than one year. But she was really good for me because we were of course good friends. She was discriminated against as a woman and she was a good democrat too; she had been recognized in her area for so many years. She didn’t get invitations to everything that the male council members did. When she found out about it, she would write the sponsor and organization and tell them to send a check in the equivalent to the cost of the lunch and drinks to her favorite charity. Which I always complimented her and thanked her for doing that. But she would say, ‘Joanne, we can’t go.’ and I said, ‘If one of our colleagues gets invited, we can go.’ I had a black 3rd district council member. He was, let’s put it this way, he preferred to be separated and did not want to go where white folks went. So I told him, ‘The next time you get an invitation, and don’t think I got one, let me have it.’ He did. He shared all of his invitations.

I told Sarah we were going to go. The first one was in the building that I live in. that’s why I chose to live in it. It was the old Kansas City Club. Only gentle men could go. Women could not enter unless they were on the arm of a paid member. Then, if a woman came and the man was already in the building, they had to come through the ‘ladies’ entrance, which is now the entrance that we all use. When the next invitation came from the council members, I didn’t get one, and Sarah didn’t get one, and Charles showed it to me. So I told Sarah, ‘Here we go!’ That annual meeting had been held the year before, it was in the bottoms, somewhere around Kemper arena. Sarah said, ‘Last year I had them donate twelve dollars. I will just have them do that again.’ I said, ‘No, no, no, Sarah, we are going.’ We went, and didn’t have a problem at all. The next time we got an invitation to the building I live in she said she couldn’t go. I am trying to remember the reason, but I think her husband couldn’t be a member, so she didn’t feel comfortable. I told her, ‘You aren’t going as his wife. You are going as an elected city council
member. That’s how I am going to go. And we aren’t going through the ladies entrance; we are going through the front door where the bellman is.’ We didn’t have a problem once we got in and into the third floor. And the receptionist desk had all the names of the council members. I told the receptionist, ‘We RSVPd.’ They had not even recorded our RSVP. We didn’t have a problem after that.

Then I still hear stories, even when I worked for United Missouri Bank. Mr. Kemper-Krosby Sr. could not be a member of the Kansas City Club, and that’s how they formed the River Clubs for themselves, in opposition to the Kansas City Club. There was another story, my son told me not too long ago. Al Brooks tells the story about how his father worked for the Kansas City Club and his mother had sent him down to get his grandfather’s pay envelope. And he went down by bus, and went through the front door. The doorman told him that he could not come through the front door; he had to go around the back and get it. Now there are several versions of that story and I told Al, ‘Al, you’ve got to get this story straight.’ He said he did not go to the back door; he went back home and told his grandmother that he was supposed to go to the back door. So she went down, and they went through the ladies’ entrance. It’s just crazy. Crazy, crazy. We aren’t too far from that world.

PEILE: I know, and at times I feel like we are going backward.

COLLINS: Did you see where little Trump disbanded her equal pay for women group yesterday? And I thought that when she had accepted that that there was hope. She disbanded. I remember when she said, ‘Our business is good to women.’ Which I thought meant equal pay. They had rooms, lactating rooms for women. Someone told me the other day, ‘You know why they have those don’t you? They don’t want the women going too far from the job.’ I said I just didn’t want to hear it. I cannot believe you’re going through this. But anyway, that how I got there. That’s who I am. So ask your next question.

PEILE: So in 1977 during the War on Prostitution, you are the only woman city councilman…

COLLINS: Is that right?

PEILE: Yes, that’s right.

COLLINS: Ok.

PEILE: So how did that affect you? I know that when we first talked, you had told me a story that a lot of people don’t know about, that we talked about. You’re night ride in the paddy wagon.

COLLINS: Yes, and the prostitution—we had a local organization called COYOTE, but I recall that only because, oh boy. I kind of got backed into that one. There had been a black Baptist convention in town. A minister had called me at two o’clock in the morning. One of my friend ministers called me and said that his friend had been rolled by a prostitute; she had taken more than she bargained for. He didn’t have any money. He had raised so much, well he was so drunk, and he raised a big stink about it, and he ended up at the city jail. But he needed, he called Rev.
Williams and asked him if he would bail him out. And Rev. Williams said, ‘Ms. Collins, I can’t go down there, but I am willing to pay his bail. Will you come and pick up the money and get him out?’ I said, ‘Reverend, I won’t do it, but my husband will.’ My husband did. Come to find out, the prostitute that he had engaged for the evening, she had taken, not only all of his money and his ID. That’s, I think that’s how I got introduced to my street prostitutes. Or maybe that’s when they felt comfortable to tell me what had happened. Then, they came and told me that. Well first of all, I had this experience with site selection committees.

I had been involved in promoting the city, and seeking out conventions that we could bring to town. When the site selection committee would come to KC to take a look at the city to see if they liked the city, the mayor, it was Berkley then. Berkley was the mayor and he would always ask me to serve on the committee. I did. I couldn’t figure out, there was four or five people that would come for these male dominated conventions. There was one person, they were checking the rooms, and checking transportation. Checking the food, print services, because at the time they used print shops. I couldn’t figure out what this fourth and fifth person was. Come to find out, that person was actually checking the availability of prostitutes for their convention. The availability of the women, and as one of my doctors would tell me at Truman Medical Center, they were trying to see how “healthy” they were.

But that little experience that got some coverage from people by word of mouth. Then some people came to see me to tell me that the out of town prostitutes were coming in for big conventions, and they were taking over the business. Not only were they taking over the business, we had local downtown businesses that were providing support; shelter, or a place to negotiate. I thought, ‘Oh, this is just terrible.’ They told me that the police were abusing them too. So they invited me for a ride. I told my husband and he said, ‘Only you could do it.’ I dressed as much as I could to look like one of those, but as I stepped up into the wagon with two or three of them, an officer said, ‘Is that you, Ms. Collins?’ I said, ‘Yep, it’s me.’ He said, ‘We aren’t taking you anywhere.’ I said, ‘Yes, you can. My friends tell me that they have a problem with some of the officers, and not just the prostitutes in the street.’ Of course that got to the chief and the chief took care of it. I didn’t have to deal with it anymore. But what I never did get resolved was why some of my business owners took a——

You know, that’s when I found out my biggest pimp in Kansas City was a fifty-seven year old, white, housewife north of the river. She had twenty-two women working for her.

Minutes 50:04-52:14 have been redacted upon Ms. Collins’ request.

PEILE: How did that happen?

COLLINS: That experience, you told me something that I didn’t know. Did you give me a copy of that ordinance?

PEILE: I believe I did.

COLLINS: I think I have it in my file. It’s to be looked at when I find some time because I have not looked at it yet like I really wanted to. Because you said there was a vote? That we lost? That the city council carried out a vote. Who voted against it?
PEILE: I will have to go look. I haven’t looked at it in quite a while, but I will look and send you an email.

COLLINS: Alright.

PEILE: So the last thing I wanted to hit on, is you as a black woman, on city council, in nineteen seventy- in the seventies. What were your experiences? Do you have—

COLLINS: You know, I don’t think I had the experiences of a normal, black woman, actually. Because it uhm—and folks tell me now it is the way I…not carried myself, but positioned myself. Because I had—I became “JC and the twelve.” It was Joanne Collins and the twelve men. I could hear it. And everyone but the mayors called me “mother”. My children would probably tell you, it’s the way I handled them. They called me “mother”. I always considered it to be not a good word. And my husband, he was critical of this too because I told him, ‘I knew what they were really saying. It’s not the loving ‘mother’.’ I said, ‘And you know, when I call them ‘sons’, its unfinished.’ It was mother and the sons. I guess I, first of all, I don’t let anything really get to me. I had a couple council members that had been approached with cash money to do something, and they came to me and said, ‘Collins, (so and so) approached me today. Did they come you? I see that you weren’t on their list.’ I would say, ‘I have told you guys, don’t bring me no junk.’ I didn’t have to worry about it, because they didn’t come to me. A couple of guys had some problems because they had taken cash money when they shouldn’t have done it. They were unhappy with themselves afterwards, but they had already done it. One paid his—he had plenty of money and didn’t need it but took it just to take it because it was offered to him. I had been around basketball too long, because I had early experiences where recruits were actually given...and my husband had experienced it himself. And my son, knew about other guys, because they had all been recruited for basketball. I had two son-in-laws and they were treated the same way, who knew that their colleagues had been offered suitcases of cold cash. They were not offered suitcases of cold cash. Of course they all tell me they wouldn’t have taken it.

PEILE: Yea, of course.

COLLINS: They weren’t offered and that was the hurtful part for them. I was glad not to be offered. I did have a situation with the ministers, the black ministers, when I sponsored the ordinance for...you didn’t have that in your file. Someone else had visited for legal partners to have equal insurance and coverage. We had a situation where we had employees who had gotten married in some other part of the world or some part of the country. We had a couple of legal partners, they couldn’t get the insurance that we had.

PEILE: Was it Austin Williams that you talked to? Was he a student?

COLLINS: I don’t know. I sponsored it, but there had been some other council members who wouldn’t touch it. The word got out to black ministers. Twenty three came down to my office. And they couldn’t get into my office, so they stood around, and some of them were in the hallway. They told me, ‘Joanne Collins, you’re no Christian. You’re going to hell. You’re supporting,’ And they didn’t call them ‘gay’, they called them something else that was not kind.
‘Feminine men’ or something like that. I listened, because I have been known to listen until they kind of calm down, and got everything out that they wanted to say. Since they were standing, it didn’t take that long. So I stood up, and looked out at them. I knew most of those ministers. There were two Methodists. The rest were Baptists. And I said, ‘I’m sorry. I’m so glad that none of you will determine whether I am going to hell or not. I can tell you this: you hire more individuals who are qualified for this ordinance than any other industry or company or organization in our community. You pay your musicians more than you make yourselves. You are going to tell me I am going to hell because I support—you support their lifestyle, and that’s their choice. I am just trying to provide some equality, in case that person dies…they are married.’ Of course they didn’t want to hear that about marriage, because you couldn’t do that in Missouri or Kansas.

I looked out, and Reverend Hartsfield Senior was the Baptist minister, and Precipes was the Methodist minister who was leading the group. Hartsfield looked out and said, ‘We need to go. Ms. Collins is right.’ I said, ‘Well, before you leave,’ and I looked out over the group, and I said, ‘By the way, I’m not just talking about your musicians, because two of you go both ways.’ I was so mad. I was so mad. My husband said, ‘Doggonit, you don’t usually have a retort like that out loud.’ Even now, people ask me, ‘Collins, who were they?’ I didn’t say who they were. Then one lady I was telling this story to the other day said, ‘What do you mean, they go both ways, Joanne?’ I said, ‘They were men by day, and women by night.’

‘They’re what!’? Lord, she’s eighty years old, too. I have so much of that now because on, publically, it was in the news since then, and one is still a minister. All of my, some of my friends…one who used to write speeches for me, he was a player for about three churches, and he was not gay but he was…I called—he was “free standing”. There are some individuals, artists that get all they need to get for their emotions, their sexual responses, and action from their music. Others have to have some physical act with other individuals. My husband taught me all that. My daughter says, ‘There you go mother, too much information.’ There is those little initials that I don’t catch all the time. Any more questions? I’m talking too much.

PEILE: No, you’re talking a perfect amount. I think I was just going to—you’ve given me all the answers to my questions. But I wanted to ask if you had any advice, for the [young] women who are living in the era of trump. With women, and the LGBT community, what is—do you have any advice on how we should proceed?

COLLINS: How we should proceed? I’m probably not the person to—because I’m frustrated with him, and I can tell you the reason why. My husband died in ‘95. In ’91 or ’92, my husband was a historian and a researcher, and he told me—and of course he was active in politics. He said that there were two men that…and he didn’t call them ‘men’. I tell everybody I don’t remember what he called them, but I know he didn’t say ‘men’. He said, ‘There are two individuals you need to be leery of. Ted Kennedy and Donald Trump.’ Ted Kennedy, I knew. Donald Trump, I did not. I just dismissed it. I knew about Ted Kennedy was actually the womanizing part. Then, I had some interaction with Carolyn. Sometimes good things come out of a bad situation. Then Carolyn once told me some stuff about her mother, etc. Then the campaign came, and he (Trump) was a candidate.
Of course Bob’s been gone, and I had no reference. I’m not going back to research and look for it. I just still say, everybody, gosh darn it, I can’t believe it. He called something like a ‘rascal’ or something, I can’t remember what he said. I’ve told everybody, and my son remembers it too, the conversations that we were having at the time, Bob Collins and I. Now I know. I tell you I was leery of him the day, but I didn’t think he would survive the primary. When he was nominated I just said, ‘It’s just too much. I can’t do this.’ I had seven organizations—republican organizations that I turned my resignation in to. I told them—I wrote the same letter for all of them; telling them the party had probably gone too far right in the last ten or twelve years. I had no candidates I could vote for. At the nomination for President Trump, individuals that I worked with were very pro-Trump. I mean they had Trump caps, they had Trump t-shirts. I cannot believe—those individuals, two of those organizations I belonged to sixty-one years. I’ve been paying dues sixty-one years. They can’t take the real republican out of—I’m going to be a real republican, that what I know about the Democrat Party, and what I know about the Republican Party, that is just a part of me. I’ve gone along with many of the republicans in the later years. Danforth was my favorite, until he nominated Thomas. Because I was Thomas’s hearings, and I could not, but they had a personal relationship. I have to forgive him for that. I had not heard from him until a few days ago. He wrote that New York Times editorial, Danforth did. He said all the right things.

He’s been on MSNBC and CNN three times this week and I thought, ‘Oh, there, he’s back! Thank God!’ I have my, what do I call it? My “shame on you” email that I am sending on September 4th. They go back on the 5th, congressmen and senators. I’ve drafted it and I can’t hold out any longer so I’ve gone public with it yet, but I’m sending it to all republican senators. I haven’t put the last word on it, but I have a little draft. I went to congressman Cleaver’s office the other day and I said, “How can I just get all the republicans’ email?” and he said, ‘Do you have google? You just call us up when you get ready to do it. Just send us a draft please.’ They are going to help me set it up so I can send it. But this is so pathetic, so pathetic.
PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Marcia Walsh

DATE
September 20, 2017

LOCATION
Olive Garden, Overland Park, Kansas

EDITING
Minutes 16:50 to 17:14 were redacted by request of Ms. Walsh and are not included in the transcript.

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Marcia Walsh was an attorney at Legal Aid and a Law Collective in Kansas City. She later became the first female judge in Kansas City on any level, and was elected to be a Municipal judge. Walsh and Legal Aid were involved in representing prostitutes that were arrested in the 1970s under Mayor Charles Wheeler’s War on Prostitution.

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Feminism 57, 58—Feminism in the present day political climate, from 48:00-50:15

Fulbright to St. Petersburg, Russia 55—Experiences with Russian students and abortion laws in Russia, from 38:00-41:00
Judge for Municipal Court 54, 55—Getting elected as the first woman for Municipal Court, from 28:34-32:00

Law Collective 49, 50—Early work and experiences with Riederer, Eisberg, and Walsh, from 11:24-15:12

Law School 47, 48—Experiences with professors and colleagues at University of Kansas Law School, from 4:00-5:25

Legal Aid 48, 51—What work was like in Legal Aid and work involvement, from 00:43-5:57, 6:35-7:08, 16:25 25:00

Theresa Rowell-Brennan 50, 51—Meeting Brennan and the impression she made on Walsh, from 17:17-17:45

War on Prostitution 51, 53—Interactions with sex workers and how Legal Aid and the law collective got involved, from 18:00-26:06
WALSH: My name is Marcia Walsh and I live in Kansas City, Missouri. And I’ve lived here since 1973.

PEILE: 1973. And in ’73 how old were you?

WALSH: I was thirty-three.

PEILE: Thirty-three. So you came in, were you already a practicing attorney?

WALSH: Well I moved to Kansas City from Lawrence. I had just received—had graduated from KU Law School. And I moved here to get a job at Legal Aid. That was my first job as a lawyer.

PEILE: And how did you like that?

WALSH: I loved it.

PEILE: You loved it. And what were your experiences there? (loud crash in background)

WALSH: I started in the Municipal Court Defense Unit. I had one day of training, and then I had to handle cases on my own. That’s how it worked then.

PEILE: That’s a lot. Were you overwhelmed?

WALSH: I was scared. I thought people were going to jail because of me; because of my ignorance and because I didn’t know what to do. That happened I think once. But what I finally came to realize was that people went to jail, usually, because of what they had done.

PEILE: So before you came to Kansas City, going into KU Law. My friend is actually going there right now. He’s having a hard time but he likes it. What inspired you to practice law? What made you want to do that?

WALSH: It was the Vietnam War. So, yes, I’m watching the Ken Burns Series on public TV this week. Well, also, when I was in Lawrence, I had been Draft Counselor at the Peace Center for some time. I was struck by how it was pretty much just the poor and the middle class that were going to fight. And I realized I thought the War was wrong. I did go to some demonstrations, including the big one in Washington, D.C. And at the Peace Center, I wasn’t really counseling. I was more urging these young boys, these young men, to go away instead of going into the draft. I thought, ‘That’s not counseling,’ so I quit there.

(Conversation with waitress)

WALSH: So I went to law school because I thought lawyers were the engine of social change. What I came to realize in the past—what, forty-plus years—lawyers aren’t the engine; they’re the caboose. That’s how it should be. It should be the people that support laws, and support changes in laws before lawyers do. I wanted to be a lawyer to help people. The people that needed the most help were poor people. So I went to Legal Aid.
PEILE: So when you were in KU Law, what was the demographic like?

WALSH: Oh (laughs). In my class, on the first day, there was a class of—I believe the number was 232 students—thirteen of whom were women. They had to change the lavatory from ‘Men’ to ‘Women’. I think they did that for the class before us. That’s where us women would have our women meetings, in the lavatory. There was one teacher who taught a course I wanted to study. But I had heard what he said to the women in his class, or his class, was that he would never give an ‘A’ to a woman. I thought, ‘Well, nuts to you, Buster.’ I didn’t take the course. It was interesting.

PEILE: Do you feel like you were discriminated against from your male peers?

WALSH: No, I didn’t feel that way. Maybe I was oblivious, but I did not feel that.

PEILE: That’s good.

WALSH: Sometimes students said things that were, I thought, very sexist. I think that came from ignorance, as opposed to deliberateness.

PEILE: So then, you come to Kansas City, and you’re working at Legal Aid. What was it like there?

WALSH: It was so egalitarian.

PEILE: Really?

WALSH: It was wonderful. It was the perfect job for me. I had, in my unit, there were I think six of us. Legal Aid was in a building that, I think I told you in an earlier interview, that it had been condemned. Every day we would go up the steps to the second floor where our offices were and we would pass this pink notice on the door that said ‘Building Condemned: Those who enter are liable for prosecution.’ Legal Aid was the court. We shared offices. There were two metal desks pushed together. One person sat on one side, at the desk that faced my desk, and I sat on the other side. There were two of us that shared each desk. That’s where we interviewed clients, so we couldn’t sit in on somebody else’s interview. So only one client could be interviewed at one time when there were four lawyers in one office. The office was probably four times bigger than this table. So we worked together.

We—there were three dockets each morning, and two each afternoon. Well, originally, there were three each afternoon, but they stopped the third docket because the court clerks needed time to umh, make notations on each case—the handling of each case. So the first docket in the morning was called the “general ordinance docket”, which meant that it was cases—it was any non-traffic case. That could be shoplifting, prostitution, trespassing, assault, disorderly resisting arrest, those kind of charges. Sometimes those overlapped with state charges. Or they had been filed as state charges, but they weren’t because, sometimes it was because the police wanted a quicker disposition, because a state case could take a year or two and a city case could take as
short as a month. So then there were traffic dockets at 9:30am and 10:30am and traffic all afternoon. There was also a general ordinance docket around eleven in the morning.

We worked hard and fast. And there were eight partners, but there were only, I think it was, six of us. It was Bill, Ed, Tom, Meg, Terry, and me. I think it was six. That was Monday through Thursday. On Friday, we didn’t have dockets in the afternoon. We had free time; out-of-court time, when we could interview clients and do research on the cases of clients who had already come in. That’s another thing that happened. Most of our cases; we just met the day they were in court and had no time to prepare. We had to know the law. I think we were the best lawyers practicing in court. If we had time to research; if somebody came in—well, let me back up. For the afternoon dockets, only two of us were ordered to court. One would handle the court rooms on one floor, and one would handle court rooms on the other floor. In the morning, all six of us went over. Those of us that didn’t go to court in the afternoon would be interviewing clients. Friday afternoons were; we all tried to go to lunch together, which was really nice, and argue our defenses. Search and seizure was always an issue. We knew search and seizure law. I had the person who was the best boss I ever had during my time.

PEILE: What was his name?

WALSH: His name was Bill Dittmeyer. He’s still practicing law. I think he went, ultimately, to the U.S. Department of Education but he’s still in Kansas City.

PEILE: So he’s been working a long time.

WALSH: Yes he has. Let’s see.

PEILE: So you were working in Legal Aid—

WALSH: At the time of the law office.

PEILE: Ok.

WALSH: The first two years that I was in Kansas City, I worked mornings at Legal Aid and afternoons at the law office. The law office was just a marvelous group of people. After forty-four years, they just closed their doors August 31st; three weeks ago.

PEILE: Oh wow.

WALSH: Forty-four years. Fred Slough was one of the original ones and he was one of the original partners at the end. He was there the whole time. I left after two years. Sally left after eight or ten years. Cathy stayed the whole time until she died, a few years ago. Albert left after about two or three years; ultimately became a Court of Appeals judge. Also, before that was the county prosecutor; respected by everybody. He died of cancer. Cathy died of cancer. That left eight. Fred was with the office the whole forty-four years. Denise, who was Albert’s sister, was our manager. Howard, Howard Eisberg, went into practice doing immigration law, and became a
musician. He’s had several CDs put out of his music. Let’s see, Albert, Howard, me. We were the three lawyers.

Then there was six students and Denise, the office manager. Six law students. Eric Tanner became a lawyer and worked at Legal Aid for a while and the law office. Blaire Kauffman became a lawyer, didn’t work for a long time at the law office and became a law librarian, and worked at the judge’s college in Reno, and worked—I think it was at Yale. Just retired in the past year. That’s the three. Sally worked at the law office for eight to ten years, and then retired from law I think. Denise, Kathleen Maginn, I think, worked there a short time and then married and had children, then retired. I think. Who else? (Quietly recites list of names) I forget who the tenth one was but I’ll think of it. Maybe we should eat our salad?

(Resumed after dinner)

WALSH: I’ve remembered all ten of us in the law office. The law office was originally called Riederer, Eisberg, and Walsh. And that was Albert Riederer, who, when he left the law office became the Jackson County Prosecutor and ultimately became a judge on the Missouri Court of Appeals. Howard Eisberg was, after he left the law office, he became an immigration lawyer. Then, when I left the law office, I went to Legal Aid full time. Then there were six law students. Blaire Kauffman, Eric Tanner, Cathy Connealy, Fred Slough, Sally Wells, who went to KU. Everyone else I think went to UMKC. Oh no, Albert went to Columbia. After Sally Wells, Kathleen Maginn. I’ve lost count. And then Denise Riederer was our office manager. She was Albert’s sister. I hope I names all ten.

PEILE: I think you did.

WALSH: Ok. So I think I also told you before, but maybe the recording cut off, that the law office was in existence until August 31st, 2017. Just three weeks ago. Closed its doors.

PEILE: And you said Fred Slough was still there.

WALSH: Yes, Fred was still there.

PEILE: That’s dedication. Do you still keep in contact with him?

WALSH: Oh yes.

PEILE: So you guys, was that—you and Fred, and Sally, those were the people who had been in contact with the War of Prostitution, right? I remember Fred’s name being in newspaper articles with yours and Sally’s. I don’t remember though why he had been mentioned. I’m assuming it was just, what made you guys get involved in the War on Prostitution? Because that was four years later.

WALSH: I came into contact with Theresa Rowell and she was so interesting, and she was so decent. Ultimately she went to law school. She went to UMKC Law School while she was raising her son. On occasion she had no baby sitter and had to bring her son to school and have
him, I don’t know, he slept in the corner of the library when she was there late hours doing her research. She did graduate from law school. I heard that the Missouri Bar would not allow her to be admitted to the Bar because of her municipal court conviction.

PEILE: Correct.

WALSH: And maybe Sally met Theresa through me, I don’t remember. She was a lovely woman.

Minutes 16:50-17:14 have been redacted upon Ms. Walsh’s request.

PEILE: She came in because she was trying to fight the city. This was the beginning of the War on Prostitution, right?

WALSH: The War on Prostitution, when did it start?

PEILE: It started in 1977. May of ’77. I think it was like the beginning, early May, when Mayor Wheeler first announced it and it was in—the newspapers took it up. Then a few weeks later is when the newspapers articles start talking about Theresa Brennan and how she was trying to sue the city for 2.2 million dollars on “actual and punitive damages,” was what the articles said, that were done to her and to the prostitutes that were in Kansas City. But I didn’t know, I was assuming that she went to you for legal aid for that.

WALSH: No, because Legal Aid couldn’t do cases that brought money into them. We represented people who, for example, with cases in municipal court, who needed to get a divorce, or juveniles in juvenile court. We couldn’t file a case that was seeking money damages. That did change, I think it changed, I don’t think that Legal Aid could always take up an EEOC case, and in EEOC cases you could earn attorney fees, and Legal Aid ultimately was able to do EEOC cases. Even then, we couldn’t sue for money damages. She never came to—Theresa never came to Legal Aid for that. I don’t know where she went.

PEILE: I don’t know either. I do know that after—so she got her JD in 1985. Then she was denied the Bar because of the arrests for prostitution. And then in 1987 she got her Master’s in History at UMKC. Which is weird whenever I was doing research, because she was doing all of this when she was my age. She got her Master’s in ’87 but after that—and there’s not even a written thesis in our archive. We looked. There’s nothing. And I don’t know where she went.

(Conversation with waitress)

PEILE: But yea, as far as I know. Her name changes from Rowell to Brennan but I don’t know if that means she changed it indefinitely and she moved? I have no idea. But after ’87 there are no more records.

WALSH: Did you ever find that Kansas City Star Sunday magazine with her on the front cover?

PEILE: Yes.
WALSH: Did you?

PEILE: I have photo of that. That’s why, I don’t know if I emailed you or Eleanor (Harris) about this, I was asking someone to confirm her face, to make sure that it was her. And I was finally able to see her. So it’s frustrating.

WALSH: Well I’m thinking Chicago. And I don’t know why I am thinking that.

PEILE: Chicago is much bigger than Kansas City. I think it would be harder for me to find her. So, ok. You came into contact with her. And you were involved, what stance were you taking?

WALSH: Well we at Legal Aid, or at least I at Legal Aid; I think there were others there—thought it was unfair that the vice squad had only male officers. Because they would go out and, well, sort of ‘offer’ to have sex with the prostitute. The prostitute would suggest a dollar amount, and then the prostitute would be arrested. Well, so, the only people that were going to get arrested were women. After we made some arguments about that, then the vice squad starting having some female officers too. So ‘John’s’ got arrested as well as the women for prostitution. I mean, that was our argument. If you cut off the demand, you eliminate the supply. I think that’s what kind of made the War on Prostitution ultimately peter out. I don’t know that any statistics would say fewer people were getting arrested but there were more men getting arrested.

(Conversation with waitress)

WALSH: It just seemed to fizzle out; this War on Prostitution. Maybe they came to understand—the powers that be came to understand, that you just don’t eliminate prostitution.

PEILE: It doesn’t just ‘go away’. Especially, not just in Kansas City, but in other cities—it’s, what is it called, the “world’s oldest profession”—something that always comes back. That’s not necessarily a good thing, but it always comes back. Whenever you were working in Legal Aid, did you deal with, you said, in the morning you dealt with things other than traffic. Were a lot of prostitutes, did they come in for—what were the issues that they were dealing with?

WALSH: Well they were charged with prostitution.

PEILE: And they would come to you to get advice or?

WALSH: If we interviewed them in our office, then we would have a file on them and we would know when their court date was and we would be able to go and either present a defense if the client chose to plead “not guilty” or negotiate a plea, depending on the client’s record. If we met them in court for the first time, it could either be two ways. The people arrested in court since yesterday who couldn’t post bond would be brought into court the next morning, were in jail clothes. If they wanted to plead “not guilty” and wanted to speak to a lawyer the judge in that court room would say, “legal aid” and so we would take that person out into the hall and interview them, and a few minutes later, maybe go to trial. Or negotiate a plea. So that was one way, and the other way was if they came into our office. Oh, but in court, if they had posted bond and had a court date, and hadn’t come into our office, but they’re in court today, and the judge
explains their right to an attorney and they say, ‘I want an attorney,’ the judge would then say, ‘legal aid.’

PEILE: So the prostitutes that you guys interacted with, do you remember, what were they demographically? Was it a majority of black women? Or was it mostly white women?

WALSH: I think so. I think it was a majority black women.

PEILE: I guess you wouldn’t know, because a lot of things I have read, from what I understand, Kansas City’s prostitutes were largely black women who didn’t have an education after high school.

WALSH: The street walkers, yes.

PEILE: That’s interesting.

WALSH: It’s pretty typical. Because then there were also, though I don’t remember of any case like this, or even saw any case like this, people in stables. Prostitutes in stables who had—could make a phone call somewhere, and they could come to your house, or somebody could come to your hotel room. It would be, I think, next to impossible for the police to catch them.

PEILE: It’s interesting. I’ve been told from a few other people that I have interviewed, the women who were prostitutes, a lot of the prostitutes in Kansas City were upset with the War on Prostitution, because the whole reason for it was to “clean up downtown” for the conventions, but then, as it turns out, the conventions were seeking prostitutes.

WALSH: That wouldn’t surprise me.

PEILE: It’s interesting, it’s kind of an ironic dichotomy. I was wondering, because Theresa Brennan is interesting for several reasons; she was educated, and everyone I have talked to about her says she was a wonderful, lovely person. She had a voice because she was white. And a lot of the women she interacted with and worked with were not. I wanted to, because everyone says they remember it being black women, but I wasn’t sure. Because that also makes a difference with these women. Not only are they uneducated and a minority, but they were women on top of that, so they weren’t being treated fairly. But I guess that might just be my opinion.

WALSH: Yea, you can’t say that.

PEILE: I know. Anyway, so after the War on Prostitution, into the ‘80s, what did you do? You were at Legal Aid for two years and then…no, you were at the law firm for two years.

WALSH: I was at Legal Aid for ten years, until ’83. From ’73 to ’83, and then I became a judge.

PEILE: Ok, and where were you a judge?

WALSH: Municipal Court.
PEILE: And how was that? What was that like?

WALSH: I was the first woman who became a judge at any level for Kansas City. Municipal, Circuit, Court of Appeals, Missouri Supreme; there were not women judges who had jurisdiction over Kansas City. So it was hard. It was, I felt very honored to have been chosen.

PEILE: To be the first female judge is a big deal. You kind of paved the way. Did you feel like that at the time?

WALSH: Mhm.

PEILE: You did?

WALSH: Yes. And you know, the way you get selected was—there’s a procedure which is now called the Missouri Plan. It started in Missouri I think in 1936. It means that the judicial selection commission, which differs for each level of judge, interviews the people that have applied and then nominates three of those people to a panel. And then the executive chooses which of the three will become the judge. Well something like thirty-five states now use that plan although, it is not used throughout all the states. So for Kansas City Municipal, there were—the commission was five people: two lawyers of one party, two lawyers not of that party, and then there was a citizen, maybe I’ve got the numbers wrong, because it seems to me there was more than one citizen. Maybe three lawyers and two citizens, something like that. But it was important on the commission that there not be the same party for everybody, which is good. So I was on a panel of three, and one of the directions we received was that you don’t send letters to the city council, and you don’t have people send letters on your behalf. I followed that, and I think not everybody did follow it.

In Kansas City, the executive was the city council plus the mayor, so that’s thirteen people. Women from various groups lined the city council chambers when they met to vote. And one guy, I think, did end his political career, because he said, he looked up and saw all of these women and somebody said, ‘What is this?’ and he said, ‘Well it ain’t no Miss America contest.’ You might have read that. Some reporter heard him and printed it. That ended his political career. These women from various groups were all standing there, and I didn’t go in the room. I just, I didn’t want to be there. I was out at some breakfast table outside the meeting room. And usually the mayor votes last. The mayor at that time was Dick Berkley. I know I didn’t have his vote. You could go to each councilman and woman and speak to them individually in an effort to let them get to know you, and I did that. I don’t know if I went to everybody. So I knew I wouldn’t get his vote. A friend of mine, who was the head of Legal Aid at the time, Mike Thompson, had been in the room and he came out and said something to me and sat down at my table. I didn’t know what he said, but he had said, ‘Congratulations.’ That’s how I found out that I had been selected. But Mayor Berkley didn’t vote last. Reverend Cleaver had to leave that room early for some business thing, some city council business thing, and so he hurried back in the room and was the last person to vote. They asked him how he was going to vote. I heard there was this pause. Now the vote was six to six, and Cleaver says, ‘Walsh.’ That’s how I got selected.
PEILE: That’s exciting.

WALSH: It was so wonderful. Ultimately, Reverend Cleaver became Mayor, and now is 5th District in D.C. When he was mayor, I had decided I was going to apply for a Fulbright. I was a judge by then, and I was applying for six months. I knew that would mean a six month leave of absence. I had been on the leave committee for the National Association of Women Judges, and so I was current on what leave proposals had been made in the past by that national association. What had been made in the past was six months leave of absence every seven years. My courthouse was just directly across the street from City Hall. I had made an appointment with the Mayor to tell him that I was going to apply for this and it would require a six month leave of absence. I’ve always been the sort of person that was so anxious about being sure I had employment. Sometimes I thought losing a job was the most scary thing that could happen to a woman; losing a job without having another one. I was walking over and I was going to ask him to support an ordinance that would give municipal judges a six month leave of absence every seven years—it was a sabbatical, if they chose it. And as I walking over, it dawned on me that I wanted to do that so much. I wanted to get a Fulbright to teach law in St. Petersburg, Russia so much, that if he said no, I was going to quit my job. That was really huge for me. Well, he didn’t say no. he said, ‘That would be a tremendous honor for the city, if you were to be selected.’ The city council passed this ordinance. Then about eight months later I received notice.

(Disruption from waitress)

WALSH: The city passed the ordinance granting judges, municipal judges, six months leave. Later I found out I was selected for the Fulbright. I went to St. Petersburg, by then it was St. Petersburg. I had been there before when it was Leningrad. I taught law there. I taught a course that I developed myself. It was called “International Law and Women’s Rights in Russia and the United States.”

PEILE: It probably went over well. How many kids did you teach?

WALSH: Not many, but all of these young ones that I did teach were bilingual. Before my books arrived there, they did ask me to teach several sessions on the U.S. Constitution. And I thought, ‘Oh my God, I can’t do that. I don’t have the books, I don’t have the Constitution, blah blah blah blah.’ Then I thought, ‘Oh, get a grip. You have said for years you love the Constitution—prove it.’ So, I did. I taught—and this was a huge room just jammed pack with people; standing in the isles, and standing along the sides of the room. And there I had to have a simultaneous translator. But I did it. I was relieved. My class did not go over well. It was like they were there to get brownie points from somebody, is how it felt to me initially. But then I got to speaking about abortion. I did a paper in criminal law or independent study at UMKC, where I earned a LLM there. I found out that abortion was the most common form of birth control, and that, I think the number was thirteen. The average Russian woman had about thirteen abortions. Nobody was talking about health. Nobody was saying, ‘You can’t do that to a woman’s body.’ I don’t remember if the number was thirteen, but it was very high. It was shocking. When I said that number in class, nobody made any comments. But the next class, a tall, young, soon-to-be Russian lawyer came up to me after class. He said, ‘You know, when you said that, I didn’t
believe you. I went home to talk to me wife, my partner, who’s a nurse. And she said ‘yea’. She said, ‘I’ve had three’.

(Conversation with waitress)

WALSH: She had had three abortions and he didn’t know it. So then it seemed like the class believed what I was saying from then on. That’s not Kansas City, so ask me something else about Kansas City.

PEILE: I was going to ask—because I have wanted to hear about your life, and I love that you talked about Russia, because I love Russia and would love to go sometime.

WALSH: Go.

PEILE: I know, I need to go. I need to travel more.

WALSH: Well I didn’t travel internationally until I was twenty-eight. Are you twenty-eight?

PEILE: I’m twenty-four.

WALSH: So you’ve got time.

PEILE: I wanted to ask what your experiences were as a judge, a female judge, in Kansas City. Did you really feel any backlash with that? You’ve gone through—

WALSH: Yes.

PEILE: You did. Ok, I knew you had—pretty smooth sailing up until that point, but I didn’t know.

WALSH: I don’t think I had been on the bench for week when this—I was in the middle of a trial, in the court room, and this young, white, man stands up and hollers out in the court room. I think I told you this. He hollers out, ‘What right does a woman have to be a judge?’ I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe somebody would stand there and interrupt a trial. I couldn’t believe the words he hollered out. So that was—

PEILE: How did you respond? I know how I would.

WALSH: I let the bailiff take him into custody and hold him for contempt.

PEILE: He deserved a little more, I think.

WALSH: Well contempt is a jail-able offense. Not, oh, I don’t know, maybe it was within the first six months, a friend of mine who was a police officer from—we were friends when I was a legal aid lawyer and he was a police officer. Then I became a judge, and he was still a police
officer. One day, I don’t think I had even been on the bench six months, he knocked on my door. I had him come in. He shut the door, and we sat on the sofa in my chambers. He said, ‘There’s a movement within the policed department to try to get you booted off the bench.’ I don’t know if he used the word ‘booted,’ but I was shocked. I thought I was doing just a fine job. This friend moved to California. He finished all of his years as a police officer and moved to California. And every now and then he and his wife come back to Kansas City, because he has grown children here. They came back for the eclipse. The three of us went out for supper. I said, ‘Do you remember when?’ and he said, ‘Yeah. Some of the police thought you were too liberal.’ Well I think that’s an odd thing to say. What does ‘liberal’ mean in terms of evidence, and making a ruling; a finding of ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’? I wasn’t writing opinions that somebody could say were liberal or conservative. So I decided after supper with my friends, when I went home and thought about it; I decided that what they meant was I believed defendants maybe more than they thought I should. I don’t what else “liberal” could mean in terms of the work we Municipal Court judges did.

PEILE: You don’t think it really—do you think it was stemmed from that? Or do you think it also had to do with the fact that you were a woman?

WALSH: Oh, I think that’s exactly where it came from.

PEILE: It’s interesting, the excuses people make to cover up the real reason.

WALSH: There was an article, maybe it was Monday’s New York Times, where it was the first woman, I guess this last week, to co-announce a football game. The article was written by another woman who is a DJ in Chicago. And she said, ‘People have complained about my voice so many times. It’s too high, it’s too low. It’s too this, it’s too that.’ Boy, that hit me, because have adversely commented on my voice as well as “too high.” I think what it means is, they want to hear a man. You could find that article in the New York Times because it was just this week.

PEILE: I’ll look into it. When did you retire?

WALSH: August 31st of 2006. I’ve been retired eleven years. I went back to school. I went back to KU and I earned a degree in architecture. Except for that, I don’t think I’ve done anything worthwhile. It’s an easy life, being retired. And I am enjoying it. It seems like there’s more I should be doing. Given the current political climate, there’s probably more I can do.

PEILE: I was going to say, I think you’ll have a chalked-full schedule in the next year or two. So that is, I guess, how I will end this interview. We have talked a little bit about the political climate, and your experiences as a woman in the ’70s and ’80s and ’90s, how do you think we as women should move forward as feminists in the age of trump. How do we move forward? We have come so far.

WALSH: I don’t have an answer to that. The groups that formed immediately after the election—formed for the Women’s March in January, I think we need stay tighter than we are. We need to—there has to be a way to rapidly contact one another. I don’t if that means great big lists of email addresses or what it means but we need, it’s not just women. Because I think
identity politics is what does us in. I’m tired of waiting for a woman president. I have waited a long time. With other countries in the world, I think, ‘How in the world can—’ they have had women for so long, and we just can’t do it once. Well, it wouldn’t be just once but—I think we go to our respected capitol and lobby. Did you know there’s a bill this year in Missouri that would have mandated that id a prisoner, a woman prisoner, was in labor, she had to be unshackled? Because that’s not law right now. In Missouri, women prisoners are shackled when they are literally giving birth. There’s another law, I forget what it’s about. It’s about police and guns. When we went to lobby one legislature in Missouri about those two bills, he said, “Oh, so police would have shackles put on them, and women would have them taken off?” and I said something I regretted saying, because I thought surely it would make him against the de-shackling of women bill, but I said, ‘Yea, but women in labor aren’t typically carrying guns.’ It was something about what the police had to report about guns. Boy, did I get a sour look from that senator.

I think we have to, you know, they say in so many ways to ‘think globally, act locally.’ I think we have to act locally. We have to run for school boards. We have to—I mean look at the city council in, is it Tonganoxie? Where Tyson was wanting to come in? I take my dog to sheep herding classes every Monday on a farm outside Linwood, Kansas. So I’m out on these country roads. Every single home, back in October of last year, had signs that said “Trump”. This year, this past Monday, every single farm home had a big sign on white paper with red paint, “No Tyson in Tongie.” That’s organizing. I think they’ve stopped Tyson in Tongie. Well, we have to… I know money talks. There’s this book called Dark Money, which is about the Koch brothers in Kansas. It’s a book that left me more depressed than I’ve ever been after reading a book. It’s like they’ve had a fifty year head start. Well, they’re organized. That’s how we have to be. If we can’t fight them yet nationally, we fight them locally.

PEILE: Absolutely. Well thank you for taking time with me.

WALSH: Oh, you’re very flattering. Thank you.
PREFACE
These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

The manuscript may be read, quoted from, and cited for purposes of research only by scholars approved by the University at such place as is made available for purposes of research by the University.

INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Kay Madden

DATE
October 4, 2017

LOCATION
4047 Central St. Kansas City, Missouri 64111

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Kay Madden is an attorney in Kansas City. She has worked in family law, and has been a member of several organizations including the Pink Triangle Political Coalition, the Human Rights Project, and the National Lawyers Guild. Madden is an open lesbian and advocate for LGBT issues.

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MADDEN: I’m Kay Madden. I’m an attorney in Kansas City, Missouri. I became an attorney in 1983; that’s when I graduated from law school and got my law license. I’m from the Kansas City, Missouri area. Eudora, Kansas is where I consider myself from. I have my law degree from the University of Missouri, Kansas City, and a Master’s Degree in Library Science from the University of Missouri, Columbia, and an undergraduate degree from Mount St. Scholastica College which was in Atchison, Kansas and which has since become Benedictine College.

PEILE: So before you moved to Kansas City, you mentioned you lived in Springfield, Missouri, and you were working on the rape prevention.

MADDEN: Rape crisis prevention. That was in the mid-seventies, and I had gone there after graduating from library science graduate school. I’d gone to Springfield to work in the public libraries there. There was a lot of consciousness raising, and a lot of, you know, women’s activism; a lot going on in Springfield, Missouri. One of the things that someone started was the hotline for women who were victims of rape. We would take phone calls, and go to the hospital and the police station, and follow the case through prosecution, if there was prosecution. That was kind of a monumental thing back then. We worked with an organization of Kansas City called MOSCA.

PEILE: Then you moved to your, you got your law degree in 1983, but when did you move to Kansas City?

MADDEN: 1980, because I started to go to law school in 1980. I moved pretty much from Springfield to Kansas City to do that.

PEILE: So going from—you’ve got your MLS. What provoked you or influenced you to get your law degree? Was that the plan the whole time? Or was that kind of a happenstance sort of thing? What happened with that?

MADDEN: Yea it was a happenstance sort of thing. I’m not one of those people who read—I can’t think of the book at the moment. A lot of people read To Kill a Mockingbird. You know, even though there was all of this social activism in the seventies, I was not inspired to go to law school for those reasons. I went to law school to be a law librarian. Because I wanted to make more money, actually. One of the ways to make money in libraries was to specialize. I just went to law school for that. I didn’t take any of the courses that would prepare one to be a litigator. I just took three years of law and thought I would go and be a law librarian, and that’s not what happened. Instead I got acquainted with the people I ended up practicing law with for thirty-two years.

I met a couple of them right away when I was in law school. They were practicing lawyers at that time, but they came to the law school to present about the National Lawyers Guild, which is a progressive legal organization formed way back when FDR was president; to be the progressive arm of a more liberal movement. So I really liked Fred Slough and Cathy Connealy, and the politics were just really wonderful. I remember going to my first National Lawyers Guild conference when I was probably still a first year law student and thinking, ‘this is where I belong.’ Working then with the two of them on social issues and social causes from a legal
perspective over the next two years just made me more interested in being a lawyer. And then they offered to have me work with them in 1985. I worked with them and then became a partner; Slough, Connealy, Irwin, & Madden in 1989. But really my activism came kind of later in life. As I lived through the Vietnam War and not protesting the war, so I’ve tried to make up for that (laughter).

PEILE: I think you’ve done a great job. The firm you worked for; is that the one that just recently closed?

MADDEN: Yes, we just closed.

PEILE: In August, right? I spoke with Marcia Walsh.

MADDEN: Marcia Walsh had been a member of it, in the early, early days, in the mid-70s, they were a law collective. This was before I ever knew them. They came out of law school with a burning desire to it differently. For the most part, they did. Over the years, the firm morphed into a more traditional firm, at least, in terms of structure. But ideologically, it never did. It was always, always way more progressive. What happened to us is that, Cathy Connealy died ten years ago, in 2007, and Fred Slough, and Dale Irwin, and I continued to practice together. As it happens, if you’re lucky, you get old. We got old. I like say, ‘Well the boys got old, but I didn’t’ but of course, that’s not true, unfortunately. Dale wanted to retire and tour the country in his restore Airstream, and Fred and I both wanted to continue practicing.

So Fred is practicing downtown with an attorney, and I’m practicing in Westport with another attorney. I’m still just doing what I was doing before, just by myself, instead of with my law partners who I miss a lot. I miss them every day. They were such great guys. I don’t get to talk politics as much as I would like. Not that—this, where I am, they are very political. Here, this is a not-for-profit, Heartland Center for Jobs and Freedom, it’s a great…wonderful work that they are doing. I’m just not part of that like I was a part of that firm. It’s just different, that’s all.

PEILE: You were a part of the National Lawyers Guild. And so, what came first? Was it the Pink Triangle—I always get it tongue-tied. Political Coalition or was it, the other one, the Human Rights Ordinance Project?

MADDEN: The Pink Triangle Political Coal—see I can’t even, and I think that name was partly probably something I helped with. Well in fact, I know I did. You know, it was the Pink Triangle Political Coalition and it came out of the March on Washington in 1987. The whole Human Rights Coalition, that didn’t happen until the early nineties, when the focus became to change the discrimination ordinance in Kansas City. Now, PTPC, Pink Triangle Political Coalition, had a lot of different goals. We were so excited after the March on Washington in 1987. A whole lot of people went from Kansas City and the area, and so when we came back we wanted to do something. We wanted to do something. We were so inspired. Pink Triangle came out of that. The reason it was called “pink triangle” is because we didn’t want to have it be something that just had “gay” in it or “lesbians”, and “gay and lesbians” seemed kind of cumbersome, although some would argue Pink Triangle Political Coalition was cumbersome. We were using that symbolism from the Nazi Holocaust, and the pink triangle gays and lesbians were forced to wear
in the Holocaust. It seemed like a good idea at the time. What happened was, Pink Triangle had been around for three or four years, and it just tried to do probably too many things. When the nice, precise, narrow effort to amend the city ordinance to not discriminate against gays and lesbians, that took the energy, and that’s what ended up happening. PTPC folded and the Human Rights coalition went on.

PEILE: It was Human Rights Ordinance Project, then Human Rights Project, right?

MADDEN: Yea, it was HROP, then HRP. And I keep calling it “coalition,” don’t I? And that’s not right.

PEILE: I think I only know the difference, because I have been looking at the papers and have had to know the different acronyms for it. So what kind of violence was happening in Kansas City leading up to this Human Rights Project toward gays and lesbians?

MADDEN: Well, while PTPC was in existence, we were hearing of mostly gay men being beaten up around the gay and lesbian nightclubs and up on—where the Liberty Memorial is because that was a place where men would pick each other up. And so there was some beating and toward the end of PTPC and the beginning of HRP, there was a more concerted effort to try and keep track of incidents of physical attacks.

Berkley, Mayor Berkley, who was the mayor in the late eighties, formed a mayor’s commission on hate group activity. It wasn’t—it wasn’t just about gays and lesbians by any means. It was about all the hate that was being spewed about all minorities. Afro-Americans and Jewish. Those were the two main groups. I bet we didn’t have any Muslims at that time—we may have. I remember on that commission, there was an American Indian woman, but I don’t remember anybody from a Mosque. That doesn’t mean that there wasn’t, but I don’t remember. I don’t think it was the focus at that time. So that commission was around for a year or two. It did a lot of various committee work and things. We recommended that the hate crime, was there a hate crime statute? I think there was a hate crime statute state-wide, and one of the things we recommended was that gay and lesbians be added to that as a protected class under that statute. That eventually happened, I think. It didn’t happen at any time right around then.

PEILE: So it wasn’t totally successful. Do you know, roughly, how long though? Until the—

MADDEN: Until the statute got passed? Oh, I don’t know.

PEILE: Ok. Then the Human Rights Project morphs into…or does it have nothing to do with ACTUP?

MADDEN: Well, they co-existed. There was a cross over in membership. So, let’s see. I think ACTUP started before the Human Rights Project started. Pink Triangle Political Coalition had, because it was a relatively small community, so the same people were doing a lot of the same work. ACTUP was growing on the coasts. PTPC wasn’t necessarily an activist organization. We had done some demonstrations, but nothing like what ACTUP was doing. Local people started to get involved, and wanted to do that sort of work so they started ACTUP, and some of those men
then—because it was a couple men that started it. There were several. I mean there were, I don’t
know, six, seven, or eight guys who were the mainstays of ACTUP. Then a couple of those
started HRP.

PEILE: Ok. I knew it got confusing once it started to overlap. So ACTUP, what were your
memories as a woman involved in that organization in Kansas City? I know that, through
research and documentaries, ACTUP in different parts of the country had pushback with women
getting involved, and some didn’t. What was it like in Kansas City?

MADDEN: I don’t remember any particular push back. I think that I probably attended
demonstrations that they would put on. I don’t think I ever went to any of their meetings
because, like I said, first there was PTPC and then HRP, and activism is—like we are seeing
right now, with the NFL and the players protesting during the anthem. Well, you know, it’s
difficult. It can be divisive. I don’t think—and there was some, some. Not necessarily a
male/female or gay/lesbian division. It was more like a means division; is this the best way to get
the message across? Do you want to be taking fake blood and throwing it at the city council? Is
that the best way to make change happen? Well, there’s always that debate. There’s always that
debate about how change happens. It all happened together. That’s the reality, I think. You take
to the streets, and you take a knee, and you throw fake blood, and you do all of it so that
hopefully something changes eventually. Stays changed, for God’s sake. It doesn’t seem to stay
changed. That’s one of the problems (laughter).

PEILE: So you moved to Kansas City in all of this in the eighties and nineties. What were your
experiences, just as a woman lawyer in Kansas City? Because there wasn’t that many of them;
not a considerable amount. But I guess, women were starting to break into the scene in the
seventies and eighties. What was it like? Did you—

MADDEN: Well, let’s see. I graduated from law school in ’83 and I worked for a labor law firm
for a couple years. Then when I joined my firm, you know, I was so lucky in that I worked with
these great people who were to egalitarian, and ‘share and share alike’, and ‘all for one and one
for all’. I mean I was so lucky. I probably lived in a little bit of a cocoon as far as my firm went.
Now, practicing in the bigger picture, I was probably more sensitized to being a lesbian. Because
there really weren’t any lesbians. By the time I graduated from law school, my class wasn’t fifty-
fifty, but it was a good percentage. Maybe 45 percent female? I saw a lot of—my classmates
were practicing, so I would see them out and about. I don’t think that I felt discriminated against
as a woman, and maybe I just wasn’t sensitive enough to it, because I certainly here of women
who did have more difficulty with it.

I was also practicing in an area where there were a lot of women. Family law, which was what I
was doing, had a lot of women in it. So we all there were lots of meetings, and I would go and I
was certainly not the only woman there. I think that’s another thing that gave me sort of this—
maybe it was a ‘false sense,’ that women had made a lot of progress. I think that’s true, to a large
degree. I mean they are way more female judges on the bench now than there were when I
started. But I’m sure there are still lots of discrimination and sexism going on for sure. But my
personal experience, and I was much more interested if people knew I was, in the beginning,
because it was the eighties and I wasn’t out for a few years. I was much more concerned about
that. Oh, does that person think I’m a lesbian? If I take this case and have to try this case to the
court, will he or she know that I’m a lesbian?

PEILE: Did you get any of that? Did you get any—do you remember any discrimination because
you were a lesbian?

MADDEN: Well again—

PEILE: Or again, were you just—

MADDEN: No, although I think some of my—some of the other lawyers out there may have
been a little discriminatory from time to time. I think, I remember, I always thought somebody
took a case away from me by telling the other side I was a lesbian, and my client fired me soon
after that. I don’t remember any judges mistreating me because of it. It was so gradual, too. It
was a gradual, gradual process.

PEILE: I was going to ask about that, because in the collections you donated, I had read—you
had a folder, and I don’t know if it was at a conference you spoke at, but you talked a little about
your personal life. And you just mentioned the eighties; when did you come out? How old were
you? What was that process like for you?

MADDEN: Well it think, starting with Pink Triangle, because with PTPC there was more
publicity. I remember kind of agonizing at one point in the spring. The Star was going to run an
article about probably about PTPC, or the Human Rights Project, and anyway, for some reason
they wanted to put my picture in the paper. I remember worrying about that. Because it was such
a story that I was going to be identified as a lesbian in the paper for the first time. That was after
’87, and I was still worried about that. I think getting older helped too. Being a lawyer for a
longer amount of time, and hopefully having a reputation as someone who did good work, was
reliable. I didn’t lie to my court, and I didn’t lie to my attorneys—I just tried to be a good lawyer.
I think that, eventually, outweighed any other concerns that I might have had. I can’t tell you
when I started to feel more and more comfortable. Probably sometime in the nineties I bet.
Slowly, in the nineties.

PEILE: The people who were in your personal life; was that a surprise to them?

MADDEN: No, no, no, no. Personally, I was always—my friends always knew. I don’t think—
and people in my law school knew too. It wasn’t that I was trying to hide so much. It was just,
well, I just didn’t ever make it an issue.

PEILE: Well it shouldn’t be an issue, that’s the thing.

MADDEN: Well, back then, you had an opportunity it make it more of an issue.

PEILE: Absolutely. What do you think, bringing it to present day, with the political climate that
we are in now, what advice—I don’t even know if its “advice.” What advice or comments do
you have about moving forward as women? In the age of Trump, how do women move forward? How do feminists move forward? Activists—do you have any comments, or any advice?

MADDEN: (Laughter) Well it’s interesting, just today—it’s such a coincidence, I was driving earlier this morning and heard on KCUR, an interview with a woman who had been elected at the age of twenty-eight. I think she was a representative to our House of Representatives here in Missouri in Jefferson City. So she was on the legislature. I don’t know how long ago this was, but it was not all that long ago. Like I said, she was twenty-eight. The sexism that she encountered, and the horrible treatment, and the whole program was geared about the treatment of women in our House in Jefferson City. And so, somebody kind of asked her that question. Although specifically about being in elected office in Jefferson City, and she said something like, ‘You just have to keep doing it.’ Women just have to keep going out there, they have to keep getting elected, they have to keep going out and getting positions of power. They just have to get positions of power. And I don’t know any other way to do it, except to just do it. I remember speaking at UMKC to one of, it was a class that was taught jointly by Stuart (Hinds) and by that history professor—

PEILE: Cantwell? Dr. Cantwell?

MADDEN: Yea. Who’s gone now, right?

PEILE: Yes. He went to Wisconsin.

MADDEN: Such a shame. He was such a nice man. Seemed to be a really good professor. I remember somebody, this was relatively soon after Trump got elected, and somebody I the back kind of asked me that question. I said, ‘You just have to start. You, as a UMKC student, you have some kind of governing body. You have student council or something. Go. Go run. Go learn.’ There are organizations out there that will help women run for office. It’s just—it’s hard work. It is hard work. And you look at the Hilary Clintons and the Clair McCaskills of the world. Even the Jolie Justus’s and the Kathy Shields’s—to be in the public eye is a tremendous commitment of possibly a personal life. Men get to do this because they have the woman at home taking care of the home, ‘the home fire is burning.’ It’s a cliché but it’s true. It’s hard for women to have that kind of support.

PEILE: I think it was Hillary Clinton who said—I think it was this year, ‘It’s hard for women to break into these fields when they don’t have women to look up to.’ But at the same time, now, we have gotten to the point where we are finally getting women to look up to, and I think that’s really important. It will just be interesting to see how it goes from here on out. It’s been an interesting year, so I can only imagine what the next year will bring.

MADDEN: Yea, and I think it has been galvanizing to a certain extent. Again, it’s just, can the trajectory keep going? It’s probably like anything else. It will go, and go, and go, and then there will be a time of complacency, and then there will be something else. Like I said, we have made lots of progress from the seventies and eighties.

PEILE: Absolutely. Well, I thank you for your time.
PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

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INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Joanne Katz

DATE
October 5, 2017

LOCATION
Phone interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Joanne Katz was an attorney in Kansas City in the 1980s, and was a member of the Women’s Liberation Union at the University of Missouri, Kansas City in the 1970s. Later in her career, she became a professor of law at Missouri Western State University.

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PEILE: Go ahead.


PEILE: Ok. And what brought you to Kansas City in 1973?

KATZ: I had gone to a college called Beloit College for my first year of college, and my mother was sick, and after the first year I ended up coming home and staying in St. Louis for the fall semester. And then my brother had gone to UMKC so I wanted to leave, but I didn’t want to be that far away, so I came to UMKC to finish my Bachelor’s Degree.

PEILE: And you were how old in 1973?

KATZ: I turned twenty in February of ’73.

PEILE: Ok. And then what were you going to school for undergrad for, at UMKC?

KATZ: Well, you know, I think at that point it was, I was thinking pre-med (laughter). I kind of went through, although I’ve always been a social activist and it grew out of my experiences, I went to a high school with racial integration. When my brother, who you know, went to that high school, it was 95 percent Jewish. By the time I graduated, it was probably about a third African American, a third Jewish, and a third of whatever else. And it was during the sixties—the late sixties, and also I was highly influenced by the Vietnam War, and having a brother who was of draft age.

Initially I went away to college during the revolution, however, I got there in 1971 and it was over. It kind of ended with Kent State; when the bullets—when they became real. Then I kind of floundered a bit, and ended up getting a Bachelor’s Degree in American Culture, which was a multi-disciplinary major at UMKC, that was kind of run by a guy named Bill Jones. I think that was his name. He was like an Assistant Dean or something, and this was kind of his baby. I fell in with him and other people who were really political activists, I would say, overall, and designed a program. And that’s how I ended up graduating in 1975.

PEILE: After ’75, what did you after that, for a career? What did you start doing?

KATZ: Well, I—can I just speak to something, though? In terms of UMKC at that point?

PEILE: Sure, absolutely.

KATZ: There was a Woman’s Liberation Union on campus, when I got there. One of my very best friends; and we always tell people, they’ll say, ‘How did you meet?’ Because we went to the same high school in St. Louis. Her name is Esther Marcus. But we didn’t meet in St. Louis; she’s older than me. We met at the Women’s Liberation Union at UMKC. And UMKC brought in some highly radical feminists. And one of them’s name was Jill Johnston. She was up there; she
had a book that was called *Lesbian Nation*, I think. I mean it was *so radical* (laughter) at that time, that it *strongly* influenced me. The women’s union, for instance, the women’s union on campus, we would not allow men in.

PEILE: Oh wow.

KATZ: Yeah (laughter).

PEILE: That’s interesting though. I like to hear things like that!

KATZ: You know, it does at to, if you’re looking at the woman’s movement in Kansas City at all. There was, simultaneously at that point, a Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union. Have you talked to anyone about that?

PEILE: Yeah. So—

KATZ: With the bookstore?

PEILE: I’ve talked to several people about the bookstore. Then, I haven’t gotten ahold of her this year, but last year, Paula MarieDaughter and Kate Kasten; they were both members of the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union. And I think, Kate was really involved in theatre, and she did a lot of plays, and more radical things for UMKC theatre. So they were involved in that.

KATZ: Uh huh.

PEILE: But they’re really the only women I have talked to about that. So it’s good to hear more about it because I don’t know much about that specific—

KATZ: Well, and I don’t—by the time I kind of met these women, there was—it was a house. They had a house in central Hyde Park that had been bought. That, actually, there was this structure that had been, you know this, and I don’t know how it—I have no idea how it kept afloat. At some point it didn’t. I’m sure it was bought for a song, just cause back then and everything. But, at any rate. When I left I was highly politicized. I’d been politicized in high school, I was politicized. In college, I became that. When I graduated from undergraduate school, I wanted to do work that I felt was politically relevant. I was in a socialist-feminist study group at the Women’s Liberation Union, and we were talking, and in the course of the conversation in the group, I said something; that I was looking for a job, and I wanted it to be politically relevant. Well, a woman named Kathy Connealy, who has died, and Sally Wells, were there that night. And they were part of this law coll—at that time it was a law collective. Marcia Walsh was a part of it. Albert Riederer was a part of it. Where Kay Madden works, or, where she did work.

PEILE: Where she did work, yes.

KATZ: They came up to me and said, ‘Can you type?’ (laughs). It was like, well, I wasn’t *entirely* honest. I was like, ‘I can type,’ and they said, ‘We are looking for someone to be our
office manager.’ They paid me three hundred fifty dollars a month, and I went to work for them. It changed my life. It totally changed my life. Meeting them, getting involved, and getting involved with the political things; the National Lawyers Guild. So I worked there for about a year. Really, I couldn’t type (laughs). It was a serious problem. I was a little dyslexic, which I didn’t know at the time. I get numbers mixed up—like taking messages.

In reality, I ended up in law school because I was a terrible secretary. I couldn’t make it as a secretary (laughs). Of course, it was a typewriter without a correcting key. Wills, when you type wills, there could be no corrections. I would just sit there crying, as I typed. Well, it was obvious that wasn’t working. I ended up going from there and I worked for the public defender at juvenile court. They had a brand new unit, and I was their paralegal. Then I went to work for Legal Aid as a paralegal. Then I went and traveled for a couple years. There was a period of time in between where I was actually a CETA worker with Westside Housing, when that was new brand new. I was working—really feminist, side-by-side with Mexican guys (laughs), working on the Westside on building projects. And then I came back and went to law school. I went to law school six years after I did my undergraduate.

PEILE: In what year, you began and ended law school in what years?

KATZ: I started in ’81, and ended in ’84.

PEILE: And what years were you traveling before you went to law school?

KATZ: Between ’78 and ’80.

PEILE: Ok. Do you remember the War on Prostitution in ’77?

KATZ: I remember it, but from earlier. I remember—because it had to be earlier, because it was when, Sally Wells. Have you talked to Sally Wells? Or Sally didn’t want to talk to you, or?

PEILE: Yea, Sally, it’s been hard. I’ve tried to reach out, and I’ve had both Kay and Marcia reach out to her, and I don’t think she’s interested. So.

KATZ: I think she’s not. I think I remember her saying something to me, before you reached out to me, that somebody. You know, Sally is Sally. She’s had a, I don’t know if anyone has told you, her son died. She got divorced. There’s a whole lot of things that have happened to her that he had no control over. So she seems to be taking control.

PEILE: I understand.

KATZ: Anyway, when I was working at the law office, which was from Septem—maybe August—September of ’75 to ’76. There were the very first cases—that one woman who ended up actually going to law school.

KATZ: Never allowed to take—at least, as far as I knew, she was never allowed to take the Bar. I don’t know if she ever was. Sally was involved in that case too. Because Legal Aid, I think, told Marcia to quit it or something. And then they brought in this woman who was with the group COYOTE, Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics. I had a COYOTE tshirt (laughs).

PEILE: Oh wow! Do you still have it? (laughs)

KATZ: No, I think I traded it to someone for a lamp or, you know, I can’t remember unfortunately. I wish I still—of course you wish I had it for your thing, but yeah. That’s about as far as my involvement was.

PEILE: It’s been interesting hearing about—a lot of people don’t remember it. I’ve been looking through, the Mayor, it started in ‘76. The Mayor didn’t actually call it an official “war” until ’77. The woman, Theresa Brennan, she did go to law school after all of that. After she sued the city for 2.2 million dollars and what-not. But she was denied the Bar, and then went on to get her Master’s. She got her JD in ‘85. She got her Master’s at UMKC for History in ’87. Then after that, I’ve completely lost track. But yeah, you’re right. You’re memory is correct on all of that.

KATZ: I ran into her in, it would have been, let’s see. It would have been before, like around, I’m trying to think when it was, when I worked for Legal Aid as a paralegal. I was involved in the first—getting the first women’s shelter organized. And the very first try at that, there was a woman named Jeanie Keenie and Linda May. They were the women who actually got the funding for Rose Brooks. But before that, I was involved, trying to find people. There was some law enforcement grant that we went after. We went down to Jeff City, and she was there doing something; the woman. So that was the first time I saw her, and that was probably ’77 or ’78.

PEILE: That’s interesting. I don’t know—you know, that wasn’t the age of social media, so I have no idea how to track her down now. Especially if she’s moved or changed her name. But I thought I would ask you about that.

KATZ: Did they ever let her take the Bar?

PEILE: No. That was a very sad story. She had a very sad story. So you finished your law degree in ’84, right? Then after that, did you start working for the same collective that you had been a secretary at? Or where did you after that?

KATZ: No, I went to Legal Aid in Wyandotte County. I worked there for a few years as a Legal Aid lawyer. Then I came back to that law office again.

PEILE: What were your experiences like, coming out of law school in 1984? By then, there’s not a whole lot of women. But it’s still, it’s not over saturated but there is still women representation. What were your experiences like in Wyandotte County as a woman; a female attorney.

KATZ: It was horrible! I was not only a woman in Wyandotte County; I was an outsider. I worked for Legal Aid, so I had three huge strikes. My very first Fall working there, I tried to amend a pleading, an answer on a lawsuit where my client had been involuntarily committed to
KU. They’d found her to not be crazy, and then they were trying to foot her for the bill. I don’t know why, I tried to do a general pleading. Then, I found a statute, and so I wanted to amend my pleading, and the judge threatened me with sanctions. Which, I didn’t really know what that meant at the time. I thought I would lose my license. It was rather traumatic. I remember spending a Christmas crying (laughs), thinking I had uh—all of this hard work was for naught. I mean, it was ok. It worked out ok there. It was not easy. It was very hard. Being a woman—when I came in there, I was the only woman attorney in the office. It went from all directions. I mean in terms of where/what was coming at me within the office, outside of the office. In terms of it being tough.

PEILE: Was it blatant sexism and discrimination in the office? Or was it, you know, was it more in your face? Or was it more subtle?

KATZ: It was far more in my face than it would ever be today. Ok, that’s all I can say. You know, making jokes. Jokes that are sexual, and then if you’re not thinking it’s funny, then you’re just a kill joy. You’re a prude. All of the things. But it was such a different time. You just kind of—I felt like I had to learn to just, you know, manage it. For instance, this is very—at that time, in Wyandotte County, it was very difficult to get police to respond to domestic violence.

PEILE: Really?

KATZ: In time someone sued them. Something bad happened. I can’t remember, it had something to do with a police officer and I think he was beating his wife. No one would ever do anything, and in the end, he ended up killing himself—I can’t remember the circumstances, but there was a big lawsuit over the whole thing at some point. I was before that. I would go and do domestic violence—on the restraining orders, I would get training by the police department as part of my job at Legal Aid. It was a good thing they didn’t allow rotten fruit in there because (laughs) or vegetables, because they would have just thrown them at me. I mean, they were so hostile. Well, we would get these orders from the court, and get this order—a temporary order for ten days. We could get them pretty easily, and the Sheriff has to serve them. And they say, ‘Get the guy out of there.’ Well, the Sheriff had a big problem with—‘I’m not going to kick a guy out of his own house.’ So the guy who was in charge was this guy named Captain Patton. I believe. Don’t quote me on that because that—that’s in my memory. Captain Patton. If you had an order and you just sent it over there nothing would happen. So they would send me over with the orders, and as I would say, ‘Ok, I’ve got to go sit on Captain Patton’s lap.’ And I wouldn’t really sit on his lap. He would sit there and tell me dirty jokes, and make innuendos. And finally, he would say to one of his guys, ‘Hey, Tom, here. Serve this on your way home tonight.’

PEILE: Wow.

KATZ: (Laughs) That was just kind of, there you are. Yeah, I feel demeaned. But am I really helping this woman. Otherwise, this woman is going to get beat up tonight. It’s not going to cure it, but maybe I’ve saved her for one night from getting beaten up. It’s such a different world. Being in Vietnam has been interesting, because I think, everything here is about thirty years behind us in these ways.
PEILE: Yea, I feel like, that would probably frustrate me. I get frustrated here. I can only imagine going to another country where they’re so much more behind. I get frustrated in our society sometimes. (Laughs) So I can only imagine.

KATZ: As you should. It’s totally frustrating. Donald Trump is president. I mean (inaudible noise). The epitome of it. (Laughs)

PEILE: It’s one thing after another. I feel like its not, it is relevant, because I’ve been focusing on, the time period I focus on, I feel like right now, politically, there’s not a lot of progress. I don’t feel like—it’s just an interesting thing that we are dealing with. But anyway. So after you came back to the lawyer—was it still a collective then, while you were in Wyandotte County? Or had it changed?

KATZ: No, it hadn’t been for a while. I mean, in that sense. When I went to work there, I made three hundred fifty dollars a month, and I think I was the highest paid person there. Yea, I mean, people made very little money. Howard Eisberg, who, I’m sure you’ve heard of from other people, right? Howard. Or you might have heard of him through his music. Howard’s wife, Jean…his then wife, Jean Rosenthal, who had—I don’t know if you’ve talked to her at all, she’s been very involved in a lot of different causes. At any rate, Jean had a regular job. Jean taught school, I think. I think Jean came from money. Howard took very little. I think he took one hundred dollars a month. It was all, everyone took whatever they felt they needed to survive. By the time I went back to work there, which was in 1986. I left there in ’76, so ten years later, when I came back, I had a salary. Not a very big salary, and they didn’t make much money. It was always very hand-to-mouth, for many, many years. I had a salary. I had no health insurance, but I had a salary. Health insurance wasn’t, I don’t think I even thought about it. Seriously, I don’t think I even had it.

PEILE: What did you do with law? Did you do family law? Or, what did you focus on?

KATZ: No, Kay did the family law. I did, actually, I did a lot of (inaudible) work. I did a lot of personal injury, and actually, that’s what kind of got me interested in mediation. That’s ultimately what I got involved in when I left there in the late eighties, and that’s what I did. I was very much a part of starting that in Kansas City; the mediation.

PEILE: Can you define what mediation is? I don’t know the terms very well.

KATZ: No, no, that’s fine. Mediation, especially within the legal system, that instead of two attorneys in an adversarial way, making decisions and taking cases to trial—the concept of mediation is that the parties themselves can make a decision with the help of someone who helps facilitate that. But the parties make their own decisions. It had not been used at all. I had my first jury trial with Fred Slough, and after it was over I thought, ‘This is so stupid. I had never heard of “mediation” in law school.’ Well, today, that would not be the case. Today, it’s taught. There are clinics, there are all kinds of stuff grounded. It’s a big part of the legal system. But back then, it wasn’t. I had never heard the term in ’84. So I went, and became a volunteer with the city. Kansas City had a mediation program in house, and got a lot of referrals from municipal courts and different places. Then I just hung a shingle (laughs) and went out and said, ‘I’m a mediator.’
So early on, I was doing family mediation and worked for a year with a farm credit mediation program from the state of Kansas. And so I became—I pioneered a lot of that.

PEILE: That’s wonderful. I have law friends, both at KU law and UMKC law, so I will quiz them on mediation and see what they can tell me (laughs).

KATZ: Oh, they will know. Trust me. You go ask them about it. They’ll go, ‘Oh yeah. Mediation, yeah, they use it all the time.’ And you can go, ‘Well I heard there was time not so long ago…’

PEILE: Right. ‘I know a woman who…’ exactly.

KATZ: Then I ended up teaching at Missouri Western, which I did for twenty-six years. And got involved since the early 2000s in criminal justice reform work. And that’s really been the focus of my work since then.

PEILE: How is that different from mediation, for you? What are the differences and the different obstacles that you face?

KATZ: Well, mediation is primarily in civil cases. In the United States, it has 5 percent of the world’s population and 25 percent of the prisoners in the world, in our prisons. So, my approach to wrongdoing is more restorative in terms of victims-focused, looking to repair the harm to the victim. It’s a whole area that’s called “restorative justice.” My way of looking at the criminal justice system is that it fails because all it wants to do it punish. Like, for instance, criminalizing drugs. As opposed to—are drugs a criminal offense, or are drugs a public health issue? It’s the lens you look at things through. So I spent five years—when I lived in Johnson County, the Johnson County Criminal Justice Advisory Committee where we really looked at every aspect of the criminal justice system and wherever we could bring reform in, we did.

PEILE: This is kind of a side note, but have you seen—I don’t know if you’re into documentaries, but have you heard of the documentary called The 13th. It’s on Netflix, I believe, and I’m sure you can find it online. It’s about—it came out in the last year or so, and it’s about how the prison system has become the new Jim Crow. It’s a really good documentary.

KATZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I have heard of this, and I just read Michelle Alexander’s book, The New Jim Crow. Yeah. So, it’s that. That’s what I’ve been involved in. But, thank you. Because I think someone told me about this, but I forgot about it. I get Netflix here. I can watch it on my iPad.

PEILE: It’s good. I recommend it. Obviously, it’s very depressing. It’s informative.

KATZ: Well it’s especially depressing, because Eric Holder and Obama really got it, and really tried to make some, what were considered very big changes. Of course, I consider them as mythical. Now you’ve got this idiot attorney general who, ‘Oh, we’re going to punish.’ It’s like, why? Why are you doing that? Anyway.
PEILE: Kind of taking a step back to the eighties a little bit, you were friends with Kay Madden at that point. Kay was working on the Pink Triangle Political Coalition and the Human Rights Ordinance Project. Did you have any involvement in those?

KATZ: No. Nu-uh.

PEILE: Ok. I didn’t know if you had had—with ACTUP-KC, do you remember any of that?

KATZ: I remember, but I wasn’t that involved with any of that whole piece of what was going on there.

PEILE: Was that an active choice, to stay away from those things? Or was it kind of an afterthought?

KATZ: No, I think I was doing other things. I can’t really remember. When I went to work for Legal Aid which was in ’84. So from ’84 to ’86, I think I was in Legal Aid, I felt like it just totally consumed me and what I was doing. I don’t know that I was politically involved in too much else. Then I’m trying to think, what I was involved in, when I went back to work at the law office. Because Kathy Connealy was a part of that. I certainly was aware of what was going on. But I wasn’t active in it.

PEILE: So when you get to the point where you are a professor, and that’s the late eighties, early nineties, right? Or is that—when did you start teaching?

KATZ: I started teaching in ’91.

PEILE: Ok. So in ’91, what was it like—what were the demographics like at the university? Were there a lot of women? Were you one of the only ones?

KATZ: There was one other woman. It was a cop shop. It was a criminal justice and legal studies department. Mostly police that I was dealing with. I was—there were two women, and the other woman that was there had been there for a long while, and really was like their work horse. It was not easy. I took the space I needed. I walked in, and I’ll tell you this story. I walked in, as my perso—who I am is I try to befriend people, that’s just kind of—I’m not waiting for people. I’m in their offices, and I was talking to this one guy. These two guys were talking together, and one of the guys used the ‘N’ word in front of me. This is in 1991. I’m standing there, and I’m thinking, ‘I really want to fit in here,’ (laughs) right? I’ve only been here less than a month. I thought, ‘It’s too far—I can’t.’ I said to him—I turned to him and I said, ‘You know, I really—that really, personally offends me, and I would just ask that you not use that term around me.’ I turned, and I left. You know, didn’t slam the door. Didn’t—that’s what I said. About half an hour later, he comes in and is kind of like, with his tail between his legs, and he apologizes. I tell him—I’m sure my brother has told you the story about our father and Nazi Germany—so I tell him this story. I tell him that I can’t tolerate it, and I felt personally responsible to stand up for it. Well then he starts telling me that his sister married a Jewish man and blah, blah, blah. In the end, well, I wouldn’t say ‘end’ because we got into kinda a not-good place, but for many, many years, he was—he felt like he had to make up for having done that. It was very interesting.
he said to me was—and this is in St. Joseph, Missouri—what he said to me when I called him out on it was, ‘You know, that’s just how cops talk.’ 1991.

PEILE: That wasn’t that long ago.

KATZ: No, it was not that long ago. St. Joseph, you know, was on the Confederate side in the Civil War, and it has a tradition of being really racist.

PEILE: Now, were you, I’ve been asking you as a woman, have you been discriminated against. But do you have recollection of being discriminated against for being Jewish?

KATZ: I grew up in a Jewish community in St. Louis. Never had anything ever, ever. My first weekend in Kansas City, this guy asks me out on a date. We double date with this other couple, and we’re just driving down Wornall. And this is 1973. We’re driving down Wornall, and I’m not really sure where we were; it’s my first time, I don’t know. We’re driving along, and it’s probably along Southwest High School. The girl on the other date says, ‘Oh, here we are in Jew-Town’ (laughs). I remember just turning—and it was really more of—I was shocked! I just had never heard anything—I’d never heard that expression or that anyone would say that. Of course, I told her I was Jewish, and it was fine. People say stupid things when they’re not thinking. I don’t know if she personally felt that way. Really not, really not. It’s really funny here, that when I tell people I’m Jewish—and actually here it’ve been a little different. One of the students—it’s happened a few times, that I have been asked what my religion was. If I have a religion, and if I’m Christian. I’ll say, ‘No, I’m part of a religion that I don’t think you know about. I’m Jewish.’ ‘Oh, Jewish? Jews are really smart.’ Of course, they’ve never met a Jew. I had students in St. Jo who had never met a Jew. One guy came up to me. He was kind of a little autistic, so he kind of said what was on his mind. He looked at me, and he goes, ‘You Jew?’ I’m like, ‘Yea, I’m Jewish.’ He said, ‘I’ve never met one before.’ But really, discriminated against, nah. People say stupid things, yeah. But not really discriminated against.

PEILE: That’s good to hear. I sometimes forget that there is—well, I don’t know of any Jew-Town here. I’ve only lived here two years, but no one has ever told me about anything like that. So moving forward into your life, as an adult. As a professor in the nineties, going forward, what—I’m kind of just giving you the floor, but in the nineties with the Clinton era, and we’ve all seen after that, and the way everything has unfolded. What are your thoughts? Being in your twenties, my age, in the seventies, and going through all of that, then going through the eighties and the nineties with the Clinton era, and then coming to today, what are your thoughts on everything that has happened politically? With women and this new rise of feminism—what do you think about all that? It’s a loaded question, so I’m sorry.

KATZ: That’s ok. Of course, it’s totally depressing. I went to Washington. I was at the Women’s March on Washington. I was there with two of my girlfriends. People would come up—young women would come up and say, ‘Can we take your picture? You’re so cute.’ Like we’re the cute old ladies (laughs). I had a sign that on one side said, ‘Third Generation Feminist.’ Which, maybe, is a little bit of an exaggeration, but certainly, I come from strong women. On the other side it said, ‘Daughter of a Refugee.’ It’s kind of like, there’s a part of me that—I agreed with Bernie Sanders. But I really wanted a woman president. I just really wanted one. I just felt like,
if we could break that, then the sky was the limit. To have not broken it with such a horrible, horrible, sexist, who stands for everything I don’t stand for. Every bit that we think, it didn’t happen.

But, when you—I really appreciate that you say “new feminism” or the “new era” of feminism, because I wasn’t the first one. The first one was who got us the vote; our foremothers. Then, I was very much a part of the second wave. I feel I’m still part of that. I was speaking to some people where I live in Kansas City, before I left. This woman, Mary Jane Mitchell, and her poor husband, cause Mary Jane really speaks her mind. They are probably ten years older than me. I said, ‘Mitch, I’m not talking about you. I just can’t tolerate white men anymore.’ (Laughs) and then I say, ‘In my twenties, I was radical feminist. Now in my sixties, I am again a radical feminist.’ Not that I haven’t been, but really, I haven’t. Really, I haven’t been. I’ve certainly lived it, I’ve certainly taken advantage of it, certainly not felt being a woman keeps me from doing some things. Some things it does keep me from doing. Not the way I feel it now. I mean, I feel it now.

I felt with younger women, that they haven’t’ been activists because they didn’t have to fight for anything. If what this does is mobilizes this next generation of women, I’m not saying it’s worth it, because it’s not worth it. But, then there’s some gold there. There’s something positive that will come from it. For me personally, all I can do is keep speaking my truth. I have a twenty-four year old daughter and, you know, I would not have—I don’t think of her as a feminist, per say. She’s—I don’t think—actually, I’m changing my views on her, but really, I wouldn’t have thought of her as really an introspective person. The day after the election, she—I was in Las Vegas at the election. The next day, my friend, Esther and I—we went out and walked around in the desert because we were so depressed. Then I came back, and my daughter had been trying to reach me—my phone didn’t have service when I was out there. And when I talked to her, she was just crying, and saying, ‘Mom, how can people vote for someone who assaults women?’ She was there with her girlfriends, and they had all spent the day just—and that reaction, I realized, not so much that she wasn’t a feminist, she just assumed that was the way the world was; someone who assaults women could never get elected. How do you feel? I know, this isn’t about you, but I’m curious about yourself. How old are you?

PEILE: I’m twenty-four. So I’m the same age as your daughter. I, in undergrad, I was not someone who was—I’ve always considered myself a feminist and I grew up and was always someone who was outspoken. I always believed that people should be treated equally. I’ve always been very smug, I guess, when I would grow up around—the boys I grew up around, and they would make comments about me being a girl. I was always that way. But I never really, in undergrad, that was just a few years ago. But being called a “feminist” was more of a negative connotation. I never, ever told people that I was a feminist. I would just argue with them, and explain my morals and my truth. So, I never understood that.

But when I moved to here two years ago, I don’t know. I think it was definitely Donald Trump. It was those sorts of people. When the election was coming up, I was just starting—before that. The year before the election, I was really starting to get more involved politically. I was realizing that that was something that was really interesting to me. I got on board with feminism and I really got active and I really became outspoken. I totally—the third wave of feminism—because
the second wave was so successful, and because they really rocked the boat, after that, it was like
the pendulum swung the other way. People in the eighties and nineties, it became more
conservative. I’m not ok with that, because there wasn’t active feminism for too long. So yes, we
got very comfortable in just assuming things were ok. Now, the majority of voters—white,
middle class women voted for Trump. That baffles me.

KATZ: It baffles me too.

PEILE: Yes, he made it to where—me and my best friends; we are now—we’ve lit a fire. I’m
proud because—especially because, this is what I study, and I’m so focused on feminism in the
seventies. I’m proud to know that my generation is carrying that torch a lot better than the
generation before us did. I am very frustrated, and I am very—I sometimes wake up and cannot
believe some of the things that we are dealing with. As a woman, I’m frustrated with other
women who don’t understand why it’s important. I’ve had people say to me, ‘I don’t understand
feminism, because we all have our rights now.’ First of all, feminism isn’t just for women in the
United States. I think it’s good—I think it’s good that we are uncomfortable. It’s not just women.
I’m glad we are all starting to pick the right side. It took us way too long, but women, and the
LGBT community, and the Black Lives Matter Movement; finally we are all starting to work
together, and we are realizing that we have to become a collective entity against the evil (laughs)
that’s on the other side.

KATZ: You know the group that I see who has done that so well is that fifteen-dollar-an-hour
group. That Kay shares the office with. They—it’s the first time I’ve seen it so verbally, that they
see that as this mass movement; of all of these different interests. They’re gathering around the
living wage. I really like that quite a bit. We’ll see where it goes. As you were speaking, I was
thinking about this before, when I was at UMKC. When I was UMKC they brought in a
professor for the first time to teach the sociology of women. And I think it was maybe in ’74,
maybe? It was a woman, and I think her name was Mary Stewart, for some reason, but that
doesn’t seem right. Since, Mary Queen of Scots—I think her name was Mary Stewart (laughs).
She was an interesting person. I’m not sure—I think people looked to her thinking she was going
to provide this great leadership on campus for the women. I don’t know if that was really what
she was good at. She was, I think, more of a scholar. I think she was—that was what she did. We
went; there was a bunch of us, and we went to Bloomington, Indiana. Again, I think—at the
University of Indiana. I think there was a woman’s conference there. It’s very vague. Oh no, and
then there was another woman professor who went with us there. I think maybe she was in
history? I don’t remember what. It was very unusual. First of all, there weren’t that many woman
professors anyway. This woman—I wonder if my friend, Esther, would remember her name.
Probably not. Because Esther went—I know Esther went with us. And she’s the one I met at the
Women’s Liberation Union, but we grew up in the same area in St. Louis. There was this, kind
of a, wave or push to start to teach—Oh! I took a course, and I know it was by an adjunct. It
might have been out of the American Culture Program that they put together. But this woman
taught a course on twentieth century social movements—women’s twentieth century social
movements. To this day, it is my context at looking at any woman’s movement in the U.S.

PEILE: Do you remember the person who taught? The professor? Or the adjunct?
KATZ: I think her name was—I could be wrong. I think her first name was Lois? I’m thinking maybe it was like, Presser? I don’t know.

PEILE: Well, I’ll look into it.

KATZ: It was like, maybe one night a week. It was such a good class. The temperance, the suffrage movement, I mean all of it. It really put what was happening in the context of the times. For instance, I’m going to Japan in a couple weeks, and one of the things they wanted me to talk about was the history of women’s rights in the United States. That’s one of the lectures they want me to give. I have a whole framework for that, that I wouldn’t necessarily otherwise have. I’m not a historian, right? But still, that class and what we read in that class, you know how there are a few of them, as you go through. You have big, grey matter, right? These classes, you don’t really remember. Here I am, forty years older than you, and I can remember this class, and it was really excellent. It was really good. You started to see—we started demanding women’s classes, or classes more focused on women. You start to see these little smatterings of it happening. This was all in the seventies.

PEILE: That’s a great testament to that professor, though, that is stuck with you. That that knowledge stuck with you. That’s a great compliment to that professor. They probably wish that they knew that.

KATZ: I’m going to see if I just google her, if that’s the right name. If I get any clearer about any of these names.

PEILE: You can always send me an email. I guess, wrapping up with this interview, going back to present day. Do you have any advice, or any words of wisdom for women today, moving forward in the age of Trump? Do you have anything you would like to share with them? Or what we should be doing?

KATZ: This is what I think. You have ahead of you what anyone who is in a social movement has in front of them always, which is—you’re commitment has to be not based on the results that you get. Your commitment as to be your commitment. Because, those of us who hung in there, even though we say some results, but lots of discouragement, but just kept doing it…then this new wave is here. Do you know what I’m saying? Some of the work you’re—some of the walk is not about anything to do with your lifetime. Some of your walk has to do with future generations. You just got to keep walking the walk, and saying your truth, and never worrying about being too radical. You can never be—well, not killing someone or something. Do you know what I’m saying? Speak your truth, because it is really important. It brings me great comfort to know that you are all out there. That’s all.

PEILE: Thank you.
PREFACE

These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

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INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Eleanor Harris

DATE
October 11, 2017

LOCATION
LaBudde Special Collections Archive, University of Missouri, Kansas City

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Eleanor Harris was the former president of the Greater Kansas City National Organization for Women in 1976. She was involved in the War on Prostitution and made speeches and press releases on behalf of NOW-KC and COYOTE in the anti-war response.

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HARRIS: This is Eleanor Adams Harris. What else did you want to know?

PEILE: Just where you’re from and—

HARRIS: I’m originally from Alton, Illinois. My husband, Steve and I moved here the year that we were married because he had an opportunity to work for the railroad in Kansas City, Missouri. I had a job at that time as a data entry operator. They actually called it a ‘keypunch operator’ at the time, because data was literally punched into cards to be read by computers; the way data used to be read into looms in the textile industry, long before that. So anyway, I was called the key punch operator, which was a job that was not yet a career. So I followed him to Kansas City, Missouri, and we spent most of our lives in the Kansas City area ever since. Although, we are currently down south, in South Dakota.

PEILE: And what year did you move to Kansas City?

HARRIS: That was in 1973.

PEILE: Did you immediately get involved in women’s activism here? Or, what prompted you into doing that? And when was that?

HARRIS: I got involved in women’s activism probably within a couple of years of moving to the Kansas City area. I was generally aware of some of the issues that were controversies at the time. For instance, the Supreme Court had decided in 1973 that women had the constitutional right to have access to abortion services. I was raised in a Catholic family, and within my family of origin, even access to contraception was controversial. The idea that women would be free to express their sexuality and, not necessarily, have some burdens that men would not have as a consequence of that was something that was kind of earth shaking for a lot of people. I thought it was cool.

I also was aware—was very aware, because I had been burdened by it in just the few years that I had been working, that women were often expected to work at least as hard, if not harder for a business than their male coworkers, and yet were not entitled to the same amount of pay, or some of the other benefits that men were entitled to. The idea of having equality in the workplace, having access to work opportunities—that was something that was considered ‘new’ and ‘radical’ in the early seventies, and I thought it was an excellent idea. Actually, I felt even as a very young girl, I felt the injustice of sex discrimination very keenly. I was very aware of it. As a kid, I mostly just felt how it affected me. The way kids are egotistical. You know, I can’t have that bike because it’s a boy’s bike, that sort of thing. Or, I can’t be involved in certain activities because those were boy activities. Or, I am expected to serve the household in a lot of ways and boys were not expected to serve the household because that was a girl thing. I thought those were ridiculous restraints that were being put on women, for the most part. These were simply things that restricted women’s lives, not men’s lives. As I became an adult, and I started hearing intelligent people like Betty Freidan and Gloria Steinem articulate what this meant, they were singing my song. I wanted to be a part of the women’s movement—of what they called the “second wave.”
PEILE: How old were you in the mid-seventies, when you first moved here for your job?

HARRIS: Twenty-one.

PEILE: Twenty-one. Did you experience any discrimination or sexual harassment in your workplace?

HARRIS: I did experience sexual harassment, but I don’t think I did when I was twenty-one.

PEILE: Later in life, or?

HARRIS: Oh, yes. Later in life. When I was no longer in a jobette, and started competing with men. That’s when I started—and when I was, you know. Actually in the jobettes, there weren’t a lot of male co-workers. So no, it wasn’t until I had male co-workers that I would experience sexual harassment. I don’t even know how much discrimination there was in terms of, what kind of differential the men for just being men in terms of pay. With promotions, or, I know that when I would get promoted, there was almost always a backlash as far as anger and hostility. Usually coming from men that would be focused.

PEILE: It’s hard—it wasn’t under a microscope as much as it is now—discrimination in the workplace. So it’s interesting to hear stories, because now it’s much more of an issue that’s on the table. Then, it wasn’t so much. When you got involved in the National Organization for Women, did you start and then become president right at the beginning? Or did it take a little bit of time? How did that work?

HARRIS: First, can I back up just a little bit?

PEILE: Sure.

HARRIS: The sexual harassment—actually, one of my memories about that was that there was a woman who I worked with that I noticed was experiencing a lot of unwanted attention at work.

PEILE: What job was this?

HARRIS: This was at—after I started working, I had advanced. I was now a software programmer. Actually, should I name names?

PEILE: That’s totally up to you.

HARRIS: It was at Blue Cross, Blue Shield in Kansas City, and it was around 1975. I was already involved with NOW at that point. I wasn’t with NOW for very long. I probably wasn’t even chapter president at that point. I had been active, and I was proud of my activism. I was known for it. I was known for being a feminist. One of the things that I had—and I had a hostile male superior, and I ended up leaving there. I had an exit interview. In the exit interview, I took the opportunity to mention to an executive that I had, along with a whole lot of other people, had
witnessed that this female employee was regularly experiencing all kinds of unwanted attention very publically.

For instance, when there would be a group meeting, she would try to avoid standing by the doorway, because almost every man that would come through the doorway would touch her. When it was time for the meeting to break up, same thing. She was an especially attractive woman by the feminine ideal standard at the time—well, just about any time, really. She was a young, attractive, woman. She mentioned to me kind of openly, and to some of the other women, how resentful she was toward this kind of attention. At that time, I don’t remember a lot of people talking about sexual harassment in the work place.

There was some discussion about it. Feminist consciousness raising included some discussion about it—these kinds of problems. So I mentioned it to that executive, that I knew something was happening and I thought that it was a problem for the business organization, and that it was perhaps something that the business organization should take action. I remember him saying that it was her responsibility to rebuff advances that she didn’t want. I also knew—I wonder if I addressed this to him or not. I knew that he had advanced some women, and then there were some rumor mongering that the women he had advanced were advanced because of sexual favors by them, kind of thing. Which was unfair to him and unfair to the women. I don’t remember if I addressed that to him directly or not. That was where that ended. Back to NOW. What happened with NOW is, during the ERA countdown days, there was—

PEILE: What year was that?

HARRIS: I want to say—I became chapter president probably in 1976. But I might not be right about the dates. My memory of some of the details is perhaps not real reliable. You’ve got records that I’ve turned over to you, and I didn’t keep those things, so you have a better idea than I do. There had been a schism in the group. One of the things that was happening was there were some new members to the organization that were interested in influencing the chapter. Basically what it came down to was a lot of those new members identified as lesbians. There were a lot of members of Greater Kansas City area NOW who were also members of the Kansas City Women’s Political Caucus. My sense of it was, there was a lot—I certainly don’t want to put words I anybody’s mouth or speak for anybody. My sense of it was, a lot of the women who were Women’s Political Caucus members, and who were interested in careers in politics had a tendency to not be real welcoming of a more radical persona. There seemed to be this homophobia within the chapter. Up to that point, I had not been in a leadership position. I was—coincidentally, there was the Kansas City Whore War, which we have talked about before. Now wait a minute, I think I’m getting my timeline a little mixed up.

PEILE: The Whore War was in ’77.

HARRIS: Ok, that was after I became president. I’ve got my timeline screwed up. I was going to say that the Whore War happened beforehand, but it didn’t. It was after. Anyway, I was promoted by what I would call the ‘political types,’ the heterosexual wing of the chapter, to take a leadership role. My profile was very straight and not radical. I was being befriended—well, I was already friends with this very heterosexual group of women. There was this tension, and I
was elected. In the process of the election, there were these accusations that there was something fraudulent about the election. I think it might actually be true—I don’t know. I’m not going to—actually, it’s documented in the notes in the records that I gave you. I think it’s unfortunate that there was such competition for this. It ultimately ended up dissolving the chapter. We sort of threw the baby out with the bath water with what happened. I think that the bird’s eye view of the actions of the group—the heterosexual wing of the chapter, in the process was homophobic, and it shouldn’t have happened.

PEILE: Do you think that the homophobia was innate homophobia? Or do you think it was strategic? I’ve looked in other, for example, in different movements in the gay, male community. A lot of people didn’t want people to be “outwardly gay” because “looked bad” for what their agenda was. So do you think that NOW was trying to stay within heterosexual norms to get more progress in the women’s movement? Or do you think it was just blatant homophobia?

HARRIS: I think it was mostly strategic. I don’t think it was only strategic, but I certainly think the way it was talked about was strategic. I mean I know the way it was talked about was strategic. Oh yeah, I think that there was—I think that there was an undercurrent of implicit homophobia at work there. More to the point, I think it was strategic. Ultimately, it was a bad strategy. It was bad strategy. It didn’t work. Look where we are.

PEILE: Right, it dissolves.

HARRIS: Well not only it dissolves, but one of the babies in the bath water was the ERA. We don’t have the ERA. I mean, look at who it was we were trying to satisfy. We certainly didn’t satisfy them. I think that the word integrity comes to mind. The actions of the, for lack of a better term, “heterosexual wing” or group, lacked integrity. That’s never a good thing, when you’re talking about an idealistic group—a social justice group.

PEILE: Was NOW, other than the lesbian group of women who were trying to be a part of the organization, was it inclusive in the sense of transcending class and race? Or was this mostly just a group of middle class, white women? I understand that it was a small group. But were they trying to outreach to lower class women, or women of color? Or was that not really a part of their agenda either?

HARRIS: Yes, we talked about trying to outreach to non-white women, and frankly we just weren’t very good at it. In retrospect, we didn’t know how. I think it’s not that the heart wasn’t there. The heart was there, but the brain wasn’t there. We just really didn’t know how to do it. Intersectional identity politics was something that—we didn’t even know what to call it then. No, we were not good at it. We were not good at it when it came to sexual preference, we weren’t good at it when it came to ethnicity. A lot of this was just really new to almost all of us. When I think about it, I was not really—I wasn’t part of the anti-war movement. I was in high school at the time. I was barely aware of it. But I understand, as a course in history, that maybe the reason that things happened when they did, the way they did, was because we had the anti-war movement and we—concurrently, we had civil rights for African Americans continuing to chug along. Those two things were coming together and picking up momentum and intersecting. Women who were involved in both of those things were beginning to recognize that. Some of
them were really, what’s her name? It became the children’s defense fund? She was a really prominent leader, anyway. So you saw some momentum being picked up for women.

Still, the women’s movement throughout the ERA countdown days—the non-white feminists and the white feminists did not intersect well at all. I think Alice Walker wanted to call herself a Womanist—she didn’t even want to call herself a feminist. Because there was so much difficulty in identifying with the kinds of stuff Gloria Steinem was talking about, and the other editors for Ms. Magazine. Not that there weren’t things in Ms. Magazine that were very, very important for all kinds of ethnic backgrounds. There were things that needed to be talked about that were even more important for women with non-white backgrounds that needed to be talked about. One of the times that this really came to—really became real for me, was in 1995. I was back involved with NOW for the second time—Kansas City Urban NOW. I think I was president of the chapter again (laughs). When the O.J. verdict came down in 1995; that was a sensitive time because of the intersection of feminism and race. I had met—there had been a reception with Gloria Steinem prior to the verdict, if I remember correctly. So I met some feminists that previously I had not met before. With the intensity and the passion about the murder of O.J.’s ex-wife, I was meeting people who were coming across to me as being virulently racist. I mean, I just kind of suspected that. The kinds of things they were saying to me, as a stranger, at a feminist reception at a feminist event.

Then there was something going on in LA-NOW. I can’t remember the woman’s name, but she was trying to launch a career as a media personality. She was doing the kind of activism that NOW likes to see, only what she was doing was saying some very—extremely harsh things about O.J.—I mean, the man’s a murderer. The way she was saying things would be interpreted as being an affront to millions of Americans because of their ethnicity, and she didn’t seem to care. National NOW, I understood, was in an un-public way trying to say to this person, ‘Don’t do that. That’s not helpful.’ She was continuing to go down that path, and she eventually spun off on her own, and did kind of a shock jock thing for a while. But when the verdict came down, I had some local people calling me and asking, ‘Aren’t we going to do some public demonstration protesting the acquittal?’ I just felt very confident in my response which was, ‘No, we’re not.’ We were not going to. Because there was—domestic violence was a huge problem. It’s still a huge problem, and it will continue to be a huge problem. There are going to be lots of opportunities that are not complex like this is, where we will be able to address that. We would not be able to address that, because of the complexity of the situation.

PEILE: Obviously, especially since there has recently been an anniversary for that trial. Now, he’s been released. I know there’s been a lot of documentaries and a lot of things. I really have not considered how it affected feminist groups, in the nineties. That’s just something I didn’t—I obviously knew it was domestic violence, and that it was an issue—it was a race issue. I knew it was an issue, but I guess I didn’t consider it being as heightened as it would have been in feminist groups.

HARRIS: I think feminist groups for the most part wisely recognized that, so much passion as there was surrounding the issue. Typically in a consensus-based, volunteer organization, when there’s something very public that gets passions rolling, that’s the time to make hay while the sun shines. In terms of recruiting members, and making money, and getting attention to you
cause, but you gotta be careful that your message is clear. That message was—would not have been clear by any stretch. It would have been horribly insensitive to not recognize the intersection of race and feminism in that situation. And it really took me a while—I mean I was just so shocked by what was happening around that trial. Even before the verdict, I was just so shocked by what was happening around that trial, because I had so much to learn about the black experience in America. I was fortunate at the time, as an upper middle class, white woman, to have a black housekeeper who was kind of helping to school me a little bit on what was going on. Because we could have little conversations about it in my home when she came into work. It helped for me to be able to get some sense of what was going on. Because it was such a shock to me, that anyone could be rooting for this guy. I came to understand that—something that I understood more clearly after I started seeing the video tapes, the police injustice that came after the, oh, what was the name of the fella who was tortured by those LA cops after he was stopped in a traffic violation?

PEILE: I know who you’re talking about, but I don’t recall his name.

HARRIS: You know what I’m talking about. It really woke a lot of people up to how much black men are mistreated sometimes on the street. Gosh, I can’t remember his name. That was just—and I saw the video and was just like, ‘Oh my gosh! This terrible stuff is going on.’ Then realizing the video was not just a one-off.

PEILE: Now, in present day, we see those things all the time.

HARRIS: Because we have our trusted smart phones, and it’s everywhere.

PEILE: I want to talk about your time in NOW in the nineties, but before forget, I want to ask you two questions about the seventies NOW. Did NOW work well with the other organizations in Kansas City—the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union, and the more social feminist groups? Did you collaborate at all? Or was is strictly separate?

HARRIS: I would say it was, not strictly separate, but mostly separate. I remember doing some things, but not very much, with the Women’s Liberation Union. I was really glad for the opportunity, actually, to be able—I think it was their house that was a domestic violence shelter. I went there to—they had asked for volunteers. They were going to have a maintenance day at their house. So I went there, and I really didn’t help that much. I did paint a wall in the bathroom, or something. In the process I got acquainted with the house and some of the other people there and I was so struck by this poster. One of the first things I saw when I walked through the door was this poster of Billie Jean King, the tennis player. I saw that movie, *Battle of the Sexes* and critiqued Emma Stone. Because Billie Jean King, when she was on the court, I remember from this poster, she was so buff. She was really mighty like the Williams sisters; her legs and arms were all pumped. Well, Emma Stone, she’s great, and her portrayal is perfect. She doesn’t have rippling muscles. So yeah, I had some impressions from that experience. But no, I didn’t see anybody else there that I knew. So no, there wasn’t, I remember going to state conferences, and—no, never mind. That’s a different subject. Again, I remember lesbian NOW members and some of the heterosexual NOW members being kind of tense about them.
PEILE: And also, the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union—a lot of those member were lesbians. So, I’m wondering if that’s the reason why there wasn’t—they weren’t working together.

HARRIS: I suspect so. Yeah, I think it might have had a lot to do with it. The idea being, well we’ve got to focus on the ERA countdown. You know the—the Kansas City NOW and the Women’s Political Caucus, I actually see Harriet Woods occasionally in the media, or Claire McCaskill, hear rumors about her pot smoking husband, and how difficult he was for her and things. So I feel like, ‘Oh, I almost rubbed elbows with some of the real stars.’ I guess that makes me feel a little bit special. It’s like, one degree of separation; that other group was different. Not the same people. I didn’t see a lot of overlap.

PEILE: So then, moving to ’77, what were you—was NOW already dissolved by 1977?

HARRIS: Probably.

PEILE: Do you have any memories of the Whore War in Kansas City?

HARRIS: Oh, yes.

PEILE: Were you involved in any of the protests? What do you remember from that?

HARRIS: Just that, I kind of had fun working on—developing my remarks for the City Council because I had help from Phil Caradella and Katherine Shields, who I was friends with at the time. They were both pretty clever. They were both debate champs from school. They were both members of the Bar. She, later, had some political successes. They were somewhat skillful with that sort of thing. They were encouraging of what we all considered a good cause. We certainly had some success with that. I got some attention from media exposure. When I testified at City Hall, there were television camera crews there. It seemed like I was just in the news, and when I went to work, they were commenting about it.

PEILE: Positive or negative comments?

HARRIS: Positive and left-handed positive. Some of them were harassing. Some of the men I worked with made, what they considered, “jokes,” insinuating I was a prostitute, and that I should service them. Other than that, it was positive. Now, my family of origin, I told them about it. I know some of them were more conservative than I am. They were like, ‘Oh, aren’t you concerned about being associated with prostitutes?’ Stuff like that.

PEILE: The last thing I will talk about with the seventies—do you remember Anita Bryant coming here in 1977? It was that summer the whore war was happening, and Anita Bryant had come to Kansas City. I know women from the Women’s Liberation Union were going downtown, because she was going to speak in the convention area, and they were going there to protest. I didn’t know if you were aware of any of that.

HARRIS: No, I missed that for some reason.
PEILE: It was during her crusade.

HARRIS: I remember her crusade. I also remember, I believe it was in ’76, we had a reception for Republican delegates, during the Republican Convention. I kind of had fun with another chapter member. This was just before I became chapter president, I think. I helped sign graphics for our material—our hospitality for our—to promote our hospitality for the delegates. But no, for some reason, I don’t remember Anita Bryant.

PEILE: It’s probably for the best. It was probably not super memorable to see her anyway. Moving to the nineties, what was Kansas City NOW like in the nineties? Was it bigger after? And which branch was it? Was it a new branch? I’m not familiar with the nineties NOW.

HARRIS: I think what happened, was that the branch that—the homosexual branch or wing, which was not all gay, by the way. They were gay allies that were offended by what the straight wing had been doing. They became Kansas City Urban NOW. Sometime in between the seventies and the nineties there was a Greater Kansas City NOW. I think it was a Kansas chapter, not a Missouri chapter. At any rate, it changed again. I was under the impression that there really was not much in the way of requirements as far as national was concerned to grant a chapter—you know, sanction a chapter. If a group of people got together and said, ‘We want a chapter because there is not a chapter here that is active.’ They would say, ‘Ok, you can have a chapter.’ Now in the case of Urban NOW, as you saw in the documentation I gave you, they made a case as to why they felt unwelcome in the Greater Kansas City NOW, and so they made an Urban NOW. So in the 1990s, I sought out the local chapter of NOW. What I found was a small group of older women, not younger women like in the seventies. Women who were actually older than me for the most part. Some were my age, but some were older than me.

PEILE: Why do you think that is? Why do you think there wasn’t a wave of twenty-something women in the nineties becoming a part of feminist groups and activism in the nineties?

HARRIS: I’m not sure. I suspect that NOW was not as edgy in the 1990s that it was in the seventies. I suspect that NOW is not as edgy today as it was in the 1970s, and maybe as it was in the 1990s. That doesn’t mean that it couldn’t be again. I say “suspect” because I really am not making a science of any of this. I haven’t been active in NOW. Every once in a while I see a NOW spokesperson in the national media, and usually they’re doing a great job at articulating whatever position needs to be taken on a controversy, and I’m happy that they are there. Even in the 1970s, NOW was more of a national organization more than it was a local chapter. Of course, the local chapters were helping too to raise money to support all of that. I think that after the Equal Rights Amendment countdown, and after the Equal Rights Amendment failed, that there was a diminishing interest. Another thing I think happens—it’s just a wild supposition on my part. For instance, the recessions—the economic recessions in 2008. A lot of 501c4’s and 501c3’s lost their financial support—the ones that were supported by middle class people loss their support when they felt like they could no longer afford to give as much as they did. I think that also—sometimes people didn’t join as much. Then once they stop giving to some of these organizations, they might not start up again when there’s less economic pressure on them. So that may be one of the reasons. Basically, I think they went south because they just aren’t as edgy. Having said that, the Equal Rights Amendment is still needed today.
PEILE: It failed twice, right?

HARRIS: Well, the deadline was extended.

PEILE: Maybe that’s what I’m thinking of. I thought that it tried to be passed twice, and failed twice. But maybe I’m—

HARRIS: Well, it got started—I don’t have all the dates committed to memory, but Alice Paul sort of kicked things off probably more than one hundred years ago.

PEILE: I know it failed in the seventies. I just for some reason thought there was another a few years later.

HARRIS: It ran out of time. So there was a consensus that there should be an extension. There was an extension, but it was limited to a number of years. Then we called that the “ERA Countdown.” It didn’t get passed then either. What’s interesting about all this to me, is that thing predated all the constitutional originalists. Bork, the original originalist, he came along later—after the ERA countdown expired. Scalia, and I guess Gorsuch is now another originalist that we have to deal with. They make the best case for why we need the ERA. Because they perversely argue that they’re so happy that we don’t have it because it permitted the largest sex discrimination wage case to fail in the originalist court, and that was the case against Walmart. That was based on the reality that women do not have the same constitutional protections to equal pay that other vulnerable groups have under the constitution. If Walmart had discriminated against black people the way they discriminated against women, they would have lost that case. If they had discriminated against Jews the way they discriminated against women, they would have lost that case. But by the originalists own interpretation, they lost that case because in the words of Bork, the 13th amendment does not protect women in the same way that it protects the rest of the population. In Borks opinion, it shouldn’t. That guy was the legal advisor to Mitt Romney, who was running for president not that long ago. Although, I don’t know when Bork died, and if he was advising Romney in Romney’s last campaign, the point being that though that it’s not a dead issue. It’s just an issue people aren’t talking about. It’s also an issue that people don’t understand very well because it’s not talked about.

PEILE: So, I guess that would be the final thing I want to ask you, moving into present day, now in the era of Trump. How do we have those conversations, and how do we start talking about things like the Equal Rights Amendment? When, as we talked about at the beginning of this conversation, in 1973 abortion and contraceptives were an issue and in 2017, abortion and contraceptives are still an issue and is still a thing women do not have. They’re still fighting for their rights in places like Missouri and other states. Now, we are making it a religious issue. We are taking away—insurance is no longer covering birth control in some respects because of religious issues. How, in the era of Trump, do women and feminists move forward and have these conversations, when they have a government and are surrounded by people telling that it’s not relevant and it’s not something we can attain?
HARRIS: I think that if it’s not something we can attain right now, it’s because of the brokenness in our democracy. I don’t think it’s a lack of awareness. Now, I just said, there’s a lack of awareness and understanding about the ERA and the constitutional law because frankly, those are kind of hard. That’s a nuanced, legal, complicated kind of thing. Ask Ruth Bader Ginsberg—don’t even ask me to explain (laughs). Really, there are some really good documentaries out there—fairly current ones that address these issues. I think that within the information age, we collectively as a nation—we are connected now in ways through the smart phone and the internet and everything that allows us to be really very aware of these things. The problem is not that we can’t get together like the sisterhood got together in the 1970s, and the sisterhood got together in the 1990s. That’s not what the problem is, as I see it. As I see it, the problem is that we’re having barriers put in front of us by the moneyed interests that are crippling our democracy.

You have the citizen’s united-type decisions that are allowing this overly conservative government to load up the Supreme Court with originalists who don’t represent the attitude of the population, so that we have situations like the recent massacre in Las Vegas. When did you ever hear anyone say anything about D.C. v Heller? I’ve heard one person say anything about D.C. v Heller since Las Vegas, and yet, it is very germane to what happened in Las Vegas. That is the result of the originalists majority decision on the Supreme Court—that second amendment case in I think 2006 or 2007, that established the individual right to everybody being armed to the teeth, regardless of militia. That again, came from the originalists. How did those jokers get on the court to begin with? Well they got there, a lot of them, in my opinion—well, it’s not just my opinion, its history. We’ve have presidents going into the oval office who were not elected by popular vote. At the same as that’s going on, we have a very unpopular Congress that is made up from gerrymandered districts. These are things that, I think, mean that our democracy is broken. Those are the things that I think are the barriers that prevent all kinds of social injustice from being corrected.

PEILE: That’s a good answer.

HARRIS: Thank you.

PEILE: Thank you for your time.
PREFACE
These manuscripts are based on audio-recorded interviews conducted for the Department of History and the LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the University of Missouri, Kansas City, the recording and the manuscript being the property of the University. I have read the transcripts and have made only minor corrections, emendations, and redactions. The reader is asked to bear in mind, therefore, that they are reading a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

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INTERVIEWER
Kaylee Peile

INTERVIEWEE
Paula Mariedaughter

DATE
November 8, 2017

LOCATION
Phone Interview

INTERVIEW HISTORY
Paula Mariedaughter was a flight attendant in Kansas City for TWA from 1969 to 1985. She was active in several organizations including, the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union, the Stewardesses for Women’s Rights, and her union, while living in Kansas City. Mariedaughter was involved in activism both in the War on Prostitution and the rally against in Anita Bryant in 1977 in Kansas City.

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MARIEDAUGHTER: My first name is Paula. My last name is Mariedaughter. My birth name had been Paula Elizabeth Nealson, and in 1975 I changed my name to Paula Elizabeth Mariedaughter in honor of my mother, Marie Donavon Nealson. I was born in 1945 in Miami, Florida. In Kansas City, I moved there, in 1969 for training as a TWA flight attendant. I have a college degree in political science from a small college in Tennessee called Maryville College in Maryville, Tennessee. My high school had four thousand students in it and my graduating class has one thousand, so I wanted to go to a small college. The college had a total of 850 students. I liked it a lot. I did well and thrived in that environment. I took a civil service job with the federal government but then the hiring freeze happened, and I decided to try being a flight attendant. I was 5’10” and a half which was over the height limit, living in Miami, doing substitute teaching after graduating college, living at home with my parents and siblings. A white woman interviewed me in Miami. Her name was Sandy Donaldson, and she talked to me a little bit and said, it was an interview with TWA to be a hostess—that’s what they called it at that time. She said, ‘Well, our limit is 5’9. I think you’d be good. I can send you to Kansas City for a special interview. I can send white women over the height limit, Spanish speaking, and African Americans,’ I think she probably said ‘black’ at the time, ‘to Kansas City for a special interview. Would you like to do that?’ I was flown to Kansas City by them by February. It was through headquarters that I had my special interview. Later, I got a letter saying that I had been accepted and my start date was ‘blah, blah.’ That night at the dinner table, my father, and my mother, and my two sisters, and my brother were sitting there eating and he [father] said, ‘So are you going to take this job or not?’ I said yes, that I thought that I wanted to do this. He said it was like being a flying prostitute.

PEILE: Oh wow.

MARIEDAUGHTER: I know. I was pretty much shocked. I didn’t know he had that strong of feelings about it all. I found myself tearing up and saying, ‘I can be a lady anywhere.’ It wasn’t the perfect response, but at least I stood up for myself. It’s just one of those examples of my mother being supportive of me testing my wings in various ways, and my dad being trapped in his own sexism, I think. Later, that was in the fall of ’68. I was supposed to start in early winter, and got a telegram saying they were postponing my class until March, so I wasn’t going to start until March. Then that summer, my brother, Carl, was killed. He was a senior in college, and was trying to get an acquaintance from college home. The young man had been—was drunk, and Carl was (inaudible) trying to get him home. He was an acquaintance. Apparently the young man wouldn’t let Carl drive. He was going 120 (mph) and the police were chasing them. The car went off the road, and Carl was killed. They hit a telephone pole, and the guy was so drunk he tried to say that Carl was driving. I went home for my brother’s funeral and I remember being outside, hanging up clothes, and my dad coming out and talking to me about whether to have an open casket or not. I was saying that I think we would all rather remember him the way he was, and not the way someone is going to try and put him back together. In that conversation, or one that day or so, he said, ‘Why did it have to be my only son?’ I thought, ‘Oh. Well, which one of us would you like to pick, Dad, out of the girls? Pick one of them.’ I didn’t say anything. He was grief-talking. All these instances of sexism came from somebody who had been a good dad in most ways.

PEILE: What was your relationship like later in life with him?
MARIEDAUGHTER: Poor. He divorced my mother. He had gotten involved with some woman at work. First, they separated for a while, and then he came back. Later, when he left permanently, he told my mother the only reason why he came back was because he couldn’t afford two residences. He left her after twenty-five years of marriage, or so. I think he had his own problems with sexism and class. His parents had divorced when he was very young. His father left five kids and started a new family when he was supposed to be supporting the other family. My grandmother worked in a men’s clothing factory and they lived—when they first separated, my grandmother moved into an unheated attic space, with five kids, of her brother’s house. This is in up-state New York, so it was cold. So in high school, he [father] was this hot-shot athlete. He came from a very poor family, had a rich girlfriend and her parent’s separated them. So, athletics was the way he made a place in the world for himself. And in hindsight, I think he had dyslexia. My brother had dyslexia. Neither read very well. So he had his own issues, trying to live up to the masculinity in the culture. So I have compassion, but it was hard. When he left my mother, I definitely took my mom’s side, so to speak. I had airline passes that my parents could use and did use those a couple times to go visit my sisters when I offered it to him. There was some connection, but it wasn’t—I never saw him again. He died of cancer, I don’t know, later. But I didn’t see him.

PEILE: I’m sorry that you had a relationship like that.

MARIEDAUGHTER: He was a good father in my young years, which I think was really important.

PEILE: Absolutely.

MARIEDAUGHTER: I think patriarchy destroyed him too.

PEILE: In my personal life, I can definitely empathize that. I understand.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Thank you. Actually, my younger sister, Lee, asked him, as he was dying of cancer, if he had any regrets in his life. He said that divorcing Marie, so that was interesting. He was dead by then, so she never knew that. She might have known it on some other level, but she never heard it from him. My mom was definitely the strongest influence on my life. She was born with a club foot and went on to be an athlete; ran track, was a volleyball player, and basketball player. She was an amazing woman. They were a good pair for many, many years. So, back to Kansas City.

PEILE: No, no, you’re fine. I wanted to ask about—you ended up in ’69 already in Kansas City, right? How old were you then?

MARIEDAUGHTER: Twenty-four.

PEILE: Ok. What were your experiences in the TWA? You’re coming into it with your father saying—it’s a prostitution job.
MARIEDAUGHTER: When I started flying, it was highly desirable. Very, we were told how many women—young women, were rejected for us to be accepted in those classes. We were proud to be flight attendants. It was a big deal. I don’t know what other people in the country thought. There were awful books called (inaudible) but they were stupid. We were proud to be flight attendants. It took a lot of independent willingness to live on your own, and fly to some strange city, and get yourself downtown to the hotel that you were supposed to be at. There was a large comradery between the flight attendants; the ones that had been around would help us figure out how do to what we needed to do to get downtown, and took us under their wing. We had lots of adventures. Actually, on my very first flight I went from Kansas City to Los Angeles, and Los Angeles to Denver the same day. Denver had a layover. Well, from Los Angeles to Denver, we had John Wayne on board. He invited us out to dinner; all four flight attendants. He was traveling with two other men, and the four of us went out to dinner. Actually, three of us went out because one of the other women had plans. We had dinner and they were all very nice. It was interesting because strangers would come up to him, and he would have spaghetti in his mouth, and they would come up and ask for his autograph. He would put down his knife and fork, and sign the autograph and was very nice. I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this would be a terrible way to live.’

Anyway, it was, I kind of lived up to what I saying, that you can be a lady anywhere. If you’re a teacher—whatever you’re doing. I think because I’m tall, I didn’t get hit on a lot of the ways some other, cute and petite, women did. I was intimidating in some ways. I didn’t have anybody ever pinch me or do any kind of weird stuff like that. I do remember one time, I had a layover somewhere. Usually you’re with your—you have three or four flight attendants you’re flying a three or four day trip with. Well sometimes, you’re a floater and you move around by yourself. So I had got to this hotel and I was in the elevator going up and this other man gets in and says something like, ‘How are you today?’ and I answer back. He said, ‘After you go up and change, would you like to get a drink?’ I said, ‘I’ve had a really long day. I would rather not. I appreciate it, but no thank you.’ So when he gets to his floor, he turns around and says, ‘Well I didn’t want to go out with you anyway.’ (Laughs) So I had a good experience as a flight attendant in part because I was very active in my union. In 1973 we did a six week strike against TWA.

PEILE: Why did you do that?

MARIEDAUGHER: They wanted to take away our dental plan, they wanted to not give us a raise, just all—the working conditions and salaries. They thought they could do it—could push us around. When I first started flying, it was pretty much a company shop. Do you know what that means?

PEILE: No, I do not. Please explain.

MARIEDAUGHTER: It means the union is very weak and the company gets what they want. Whatever they want, they get, pretty much. It wasn’t a strong union. Because it was a male-dominated union that recruited the flight attendants. The person who was negotiating for us was not a flight attendant, they had never worked for an airline. I think it was a (inaudible) worker’s union, which we eventually left as part of the women’s movement. A number of the unions
pulled out from these male-dominated unions to start their own. That’s another huge—you could write twenty different dissertations on that. It was an amazing time to be alive.

When *Ms. Magazine* came out the airlines were actually having *Ms.* as one of the things that was available for passengers. But I subscribed even before. There was an article about a group starting called Stewardesses for Women’s Rights. That came out in—the preview issue was early in ’72 and they were having an organizing meeting in February of ’73. So I made sure I was there. So I was one of the founding members of Stewardesses for Women’s Rights. Our first meeting was in New York and we had elected officers. Gloria Steinem was one of our speakers. We had a big office in New York and smaller offices and several conferences. It was pretty active for four or five years. We did fundraising. One of the issues that came up was, Playboy wanted to give us a grant. Some of the women in the group thought the money would be reparations for their mistreatment of women. Others of us in the group said no, that it was blood money. We didn’t want to touch it. They would just use it as publicity, that they had given this nonprofit organization money. The groups that felt like I did refused the money. We did get some grants, but eventually money ran out and we lost our headquarters. It was across the airlines. It was (inaudible) and Eastern, and American, and United. It was a really interesting experience. From that I got excited about meeting other women. I was excited about feminism and women’s liberation, and thought, ‘Well, if there are these women out there, there must be some in Kansas City.’

There was a woman’s fair on UMKC campus. So that had to be, probably ’74. One of the things they had was a play called—I think it was called “If Men Could Have Abortions.” The play was a male figure on a hospital bed, saying all the reasons he needed an abortion. Because he had his whole life to live, he wasn’t ready to be a parent, all these reasons. There was a committee that was going to decide whether his reasons were good enough or not. It was pretty powerful. There were information tables, so then I met women from the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union. That was my entry to really radical, fun, exciting, wonderful women.

PEILE: Whenever you became a part of the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union, how many people were involved? How many were members?

MARIEDAUGHTER: That’s a good question. They had a women’s center on Tracy to begin with. Right there by UMKC. They had all these different collectives; they had newsletter collectives and abortion collectives and child care collectives. They had lesbian alliances and when UMKC realized—sorry, Rockhurst College was the landlord. They had a property management company. Once they realized, I am going to answer your question. Rockhurst kicked us out, saying they needed the house for “office space,” and it was obviously not true. We found a house on Charlotte—3620 Charlotte, I want to say, that had been a half-way house for a Church group. And we were in the process of rent-to-buy process. At that point, I would say that was the high membership time. We refinished floors, and we had one woman living there as a resident. We had women’s dances and meetings there at the house. It was a pretty rundown neighborhood at that time, and now it’s pretty upscale. I’ve been by there, and you wouldn’t even recognize the house. I would guess one hundred. Mostly white women. We had mother-daughter team. They were interesting, to have the daughter—she was around my age, and the mother was twenty years older. It was just a, so woman-positive space to be in. I had the
chance—in ’70, I took my mother to Rome and Florence. Then the next year, in ’71, I took her to Athens and Delphi. Her emphysema was so bad after that, we couldn’t fly. She couldn’t fly. After that, I never really traveled because what was the most exciting to me was being around these women. I could have been anywhere in the world, and where I wanted to be was at the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union. Because we had Actor’s Sorority, which was a women’s theatre group, that was there for maybe five years. New Earth Bookstore was kind of like a community center in many, many ways.

PEILE: The New Earth Bookstore, I know, has made an impact on a lot of women, because everyone always references it when I’m talking to them. I know it was a great place to be.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Until what happened. I think I told you what happened to it.

PEILE: I believe so, but you may need to refresh my memory.

MARIEDAUGHTER: It started out—this was before my time. My understanding was that it started out as a mixed, men and women alternative bookstore. And the men kind of faded away. This had to be, late sixties. There was one man left, and the women in the group asked—they wanted to make it a woman’s bookstore, and they asked him to leave, and he did. Again, this was before my time. So when I came into the Women’s Liberation Union in ’73-’74, it was a collective of the Kansas City Women’s Liberation Union. Kind of like a childcare collective, or whatever. It was all volunteers running the bookstore. Somewhere, I would say’75-’76, two women who were lesbian partners, Joline Whirley and Joni Shoemaker, somehow or another ended up owning the bookstore. I don’t if they loaned money to the store and decided, I don’t know how it happened. I really don’t know. How we heard about it was, there was flier talking about some New Earth event and it no longer said ‘Collective of the Women’s Liberation Union.’

PEILE: They kind of pulled the rug out from under you, a little bit.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Yes. It was ongoing because, at that point, the bookstore was in the Foolkiller building. Have you heard about the Foolkiller building?

PEILE: No.

MARIEDAUGHTER: On 39th and Main there was an ex-chocolate factory which became the Foolkiller building, which was an alternative theatre and mixed men and women theatre group. We rented space in there for the bookstore, literally on the corner. Actor’s Sorority did many of their plays and rehearsals there. There were other meeting groups for, there was one man who was doing anti-Semitism; keeping track of right-wing groups. Lenny, I can’t remember his name. It was very much a community center building. So eventually those two women moved away. The bookstore had to move because the Foolkiller building was going to fold. When they went away, they were still demanding monthly payments from the bookstore. The bookstore was trying to run and make itself viable plus the strain of monthly payments to these two women. It was a long range effect on the whole community. Not just the lesbian/feminist community. The bookstore was a resource for all sorts of alternatives; the gay, male culture, the new age—there
was new age books there. So it was very important and was immensely weakened by that. Now, they’re back in Kansas City, I understand.

One of the other things that happened when I first came to the Women’s Liberation Union, they had a real strong statement of principal. They were anti-capitalist, and anti-racist. Then, seven or eight of us went to a socialist feminist conference in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and came back and the Union voted to become a socialist feminist union. A number of women were really upset about that. That was one of the things that led to us losing the women’s center and the shutting down of the union.

PEILE: You had mentioned earlier that there weren’t a lot of women of color in the Women’s Liberation Union. Why do you think that was? Was there an active effort to outreach to women of color? Was it just kind of—I know in the seventies, intersectional feminism is finally coming to the front. But I don’t know, was that just kind of an afterthought, with women of color? Or was it just hard to do?

MARIEDAUGHTER: We tried in the minimal ways we could think of. There was a woman who was involved in the gay liberation movement, who was very outspoken and active. She was an African American woman whose name I can’t remember. She didn’t seem that interested in feminism. She was more—she liked gay men. I think we were just ignorant on how to do it; on how to make African American women comfortable. I think we had good intentions, but the intentions didn’t play out in everyday life. Many of us were trying to make a living, I don’t know what all of the excuses are. We were reading Audrey Lorde, and there was woman who came to the bookstore in Lawrence. She was a Native American woman and many of us went and heard her talk, so we were interested, but to make those community, day-to-day life connections—that’s what pulled the community together, not just meeting at meetings, but real-life connections.

Class was always an issue too. The women who had money and didn’t have money, and trying to, the expectations about what was the normal way to live, I don’t know how to explain that.

PEILE: That makes sense. I think I’ve seen that with the National Organization for Women, too. There’s a bit of a class gap. It would be different for the Women’s Liberation Union, because you were not so much focused on the Equal Rights Amendment, or politics, right? It was more of a social—you’ve mentioned community. It was more of an every-day thing.

MARIEDAUGHTER: It was changing hearts and minds, is what I would say. We weren’t looking to change laws. Kate (Kasten) and I were both doing stand-up and other women were doing speaking engagements at local colleges. I remember one time I had broken my foot, and I had a speaking engagement at a high school out south—predominately white high school, talking about lesbian and gay stuff. I came with my visual aids and my foot in a caste, and I got there and was told that the football coach has objected to having someone come and speak on this issue, and I was turned away.

PEILE: After they had already told you that you could come?
MARIEDAUGHTER: Yes. So it wasn’t just about our community; we were trying to change hearts and minds with gay pride celebrations, and marching against Anita Bryant when she was there. Marching for Leonard Peltier in Leavenworth when he was incarcerated. We were marching against Nestle and their (inaudible) to third world countries. It was pretty broad-based.

PEILE: You guys were very busy, it sounds like.

MARIEDAUGHTER: (Laughs) Well, that’s what I was saying; when I had days off, that’s where I wanted to be. It was about changing the world, not just changing the laws. I was really glad that people—I wanted that to happen too, because they both have to happen.

PEILE: It’s definitely something—it takes a village. Changing not only policy, but mindset. It’s good...both the National Organization for Women and the Women’s Liberation Union in Kansas City, they might have been different, but if one had existed without the other, there wouldn’t have been as much progress.

MARIEDAUGHTER: There was some overlap in membership.

PEILE: Was the Women’s Liberation Union—was it predominately women who were lesbian? I’m asking because the National Organization for Women, they dissolved because half of the group wanted lesbian membership, and the other half did not. They were anti-lesbian, so they dissolved by the mid-seventies. So I didn’t know if you had felt, while you were a member, that pushback.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Oh, wow. I’d say we were mostly lesbian. Any straight women that was there was comfortable with lesbians. My personal opinion is—this is my personal opinion, and it’s upheld by my partner who was in Lawrence and was a part of the Spinster’s Book and Webbery, which was a community center there, that lesbians did most of the hard work in the women’s movement.

PEILE: They didn’t get a lot of credit, I don’t think, either.

MARIEDAUGHTER: No. We were swept under the carpet. But that’s my experience. That we did.

PEILE: So when did you come out? You were already in the Liberation Union by ’74 at least.

MARIEDAUGHTER: ’74 is when I came out. Just being around lesbians—when I first went to the Women’s Liberation Center in Kansas City, I was around a lot of lesbians and was thinking about a lot of lesbian stuff, because I was reading about it in Ms. and books. I dived into all of these feminist books at the time and was thinking about—well, first of all, my experience was that it was much more fun to be around these women who were talking about what I was excited about, than to go on a date with someone who was just going to argue with me and fight about it all. So my experience was that I just liked being with these women. At first I thought, ‘Gosh, they sure talk about being a lesbian all the time.’ Then I realized, this may be because, where else are they going to talk about it, except where they feel safe? I had all of these feelings, then I
had—started thinking intellectually about, ‘Well, as long as I’m reserving my special, sexual involvement and feelings for men, isn’t that some kind of sex discrimination? When, who I find really fun and interesting are women?’ It just sort of evolved from there. My theory is, you fall in love with who you hang out with. Who’s fun, who makes you laugh, and who you enjoy. It was a very positive experience for me, being involved with women.

PEILE: I’m assuming since most of your friends were probably a part of the Women’s Liberation Union that they were supportive, but was your family supportive of you?

MARIEDAUGHTER: No. My dad and my mom had separated. I would still see my mom because I would fly from Kansas City and have overnight layovers in Miami and visit with her. But she, early on, had said to me, ‘Where you live, how you talk, how you think, has all gone downhill in the last two years.’ I think it was about her worrying about me surviving in the culture. I never literally said, “I’m a lesbian” to her, because she had made it clear, what I just said to you. I never came out to her. We struggled trying to stay connected without ever talking about that issue directly.

PEILE: I find that very sad. I’m sorry. Because I know you had a—you mentioned earlier that your connection was better with your mother.

MARIEDAUGHTER: When I first told her about changing my name, she got really, really—I told the MarieDaughter name, and she was really upset. I think she died within two years of that. I think by the time she died she had come to see it in a more positive—because what she said to me was, ‘How am I going to introduce you to my friends?’ I would go, ‘Well, mom, how about this is my daughter, Paula?’ I think it was just the shock of it all and, she really loved me. I feel that she got it, on some other level. She was so good. She never ever said to any of us, ‘When I’m going to have grandchildren, and when are you going to get married?’ She was really incredible about that. She avoided enculturation in a lot of ways, but was stuck in other ways.

PEILE: I’ve found, personally, in situations like that, that you just have to more-so focus on the positive parts of that. The things that they do embrace, that’s the most important.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Right. It’s kind of like, they are the doing the best they can from where they are coming from.

PEILE: As a lesbian in the workforce, how long were you in TWA?

MARIEDAUGHTER: I worked for TWA from 1969 to 1985. I didn’t know this, until I started reading about TWA stuff, but I actually entered the workforce at the beginning of the jet age. Right after I joined TWA they retired an airplane that was called the Constellation, and it was the last of the propellers. It was sort of an iconic airplane. Actually, there’s one at the airport now. Did you know they have a museum at the downtown airport? They have a Connie, which is the section name for the Constellation. If you ever get a chance to go through it, it’s really fun. It’s like stepping back into the forties.
When I started, there were no male flight attendants. In 1973, Pan Am went to court and argued that they didn’t want one of their pursers on international to get bumped back to being a flight attendant domestically when they had a layoff, and he was saying that his seniority should give him that right. Pan Am went to the court and argued that women were better at serving than men, and the public preferred women serving them. This is in ’73, and its *Diaz v Pan Am*, that was the court case. It was struck down, and that’s how male flight attendants got their foot in the door.

The pilots hated it. They called them “ball-bearing hostesses” and were totally mean and hateful to them. In part, because the men were—well, first of all, most of the men were military trained. But the men were much closer to our age, and they were doing the same job as us, and we would hang out with them more. The pilots lost their preferred status in relationship to us.

PEILE: Did you feel any discrimination as a lesbian or a woman from the seventies into the eighties, especially with working with men, finally, in the eighties?

MARIEDAUGHTER: (Laughs) Stewardesses for Women’s Rights filed sex discrimination charges against all the airlines with a whole list of things. Weight discrimination, height discrimination, age discrimination, the marriage thing had already been struck down. But there was an incredible book, I need to get the name of this book. Let me come right back, alright? Hold on.

(Pause)

It’s called, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*, by Gail Collins. She’s a New York Times op-ed columnist. She has a lot in there about flight attendants, because when EEOC was first up and running, they expected to have all of these complaints from African Americans, and one of the first complaints were from “stewardesses” talking about being forced to leave the job when they got married and being forced to leave at a certain age.

PEILE: You were also, it wasn’t just dress. You had to dress a certain way, and you had to be a specific weight. But you had to wear lipstick and you had specific make-up requirements too, right?

MARIEDAUGHTER: Yes. But not only that, when I first started flying—I was telling you that the union was really weak. The airplane could not take off unless there were meals—say you had a twelve hour day. The plane would not take off if there weren’t meals for the pilots. Meals for us did not matter. We were permitted to eat a meal if there were some left. Not until our union negotiated meals for us were we getting meals. We were also required—if I had, you know, if I worked three days on and three days off—the flight attendants were supposed to do this out-of-town book. If I went somewhere and wasn’t going to be at my home phone, I was supposed to sign in, and they could call me at any time and try and get me to go to work. Pilots didn’t do that. This was sex discrimination.

The flight attendants had to share rooms. You worked a twelve hour day and were expected to share a room with the other flight attendants. Pilots never had to share a room. Until our union negotiated separate rooms, you *need* a separate room after working all day with people. So there
was all sorts of sex discrimination in there, yes. And when the male—at TWA the pilots had a set of wings. They had one wing on one side, the logo in the center, and one wing on the other side—kind of a straight line, set of wings. The flight attendants had a logo in the center, and then one wing coming up the side. When they hired the male flight attendants, what kind of wing do you think the male flight attendants had?

PEILE: You’ll have to tell me.

MARIEDAUGHTER: It looked like the pilots with the double wings. But we had—when Stewardesses for Women’s rights, when we had filed the sex discrimination charges, we talked about these wings, and that the male flight attendants got different ones from us that looked like the pilots’. The EEOC, we languished and languished and languished with the EEOC until Clarence Thomas, the head of EEOC, he was there because he didn’t believe in the EEOC and wanted to wipe out whatever possible. He dismissed all the charges against the airlines. He wiped out the class action case. Many things had been changed because of union contracts and because, I think, the airlines saw the writing on the wall.

PEILE: It’s interesting that, even though the pilots are calling the male flight attendants “ball-bearing hostesses,” but they still are getting—they’re still dressing more like a pilot than the women are. That’s ridiculous.

MARIEDAUGHTER: The other thing that stood between us and the pilots—I told you about the 1973 strike. The flight attendants strike against the TWA was the first one to have a strike against the carrier. Because they never believed the girls would actually vote to go on strike. This was in November-December, we were out there for sex weeks, in Kansas City, picketing in December. So you can imagine how cold that was. The pilots did not honor our picket line. It was the mechanics and the very strong mechanics union who honored our picket line. If they had not honored that picket line, they could have kept us out on strike and re-hired—hired new people fast to replace us.

PEILE: Why do you think that they honored your picket line?

MARIEDAUGHTER: Because they had the union mentality. They understood union politics. The pilots are—they just think they’re better than everybody else because they make so much money. They don’t think the union—it’s just a convenient way to, whatever. That’s my understanding. But this has been an ongoing issue for pilots and flight attendants for years; that they will not honor our picket lines.

PEILE: That’s interesting. I wouldn’t say it’s surprising, but it’s interesting to hear. So after ’83—right, you were done in ’83?

MARIDAUGHTER: ’85.

PEILE: ’85, I’m sorry. After that, what did you do? Did you stay in Kansas City, or did you go somewhere else?
MARIEDAUGHTER: No. When I started with TWA in 1969, again, we had a weak union. We could have—there was no retirement plan for us, but if we wanted the company to take out ‘x’ amount of money for our retirement, they would do that. I have never been great at managing money, and I thought, ‘Well if I’m going to have any retirement money, I need to do this.’ I wasn’t making a ton of money anyway, but I thought that this was something I did for myself. I did that, and then in the seventies, when we got the Independent Federation of Flight Attendants, our own union run by flight attendants, that union negotiated a retirement plan which was putting money away for us every month. It was part of your salary; your perp. For those of us that had signed up for the retirement plan, TWA gave us all that money back. All the money that I had—I think I had four or five thousand dollars, and I had taken that money and put it on a down payment for the forty acres of land we now live on. Because at that point I realized that I wanted to leave the city. My union friend who also got her four or five thousand dollars, loaned me her money for my down payment. I needed to have ten thousand—whatever, nine or ten thousand dollars down, and she loaned me her money for me to buy this land. I paid her back, and I paid the bank—the people that finance—it was owner financed for the other seven thousand.

PEILE: That’s a very good friend.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Yeah, she was. We had done union work together. That as part of it. She trusted me and she believed in me. I believed in her. Amazing relationships come when you’re working on something you both care about a lot. Jeanie and I moved to northwest Arkansas and rented a small house. The forty acres is thirty miles southeast of Fayetteville, which is a nice little college town. It was little then, it’s not so little now. We rented this small house and started building a house. We had a woman (inaudible) who would tell us what to do. 800 square foot house, owner built, very simple plan, and we built this house.

PEILE: And you’ve been there ever since.

MARIEDAUGHTER: Yes. I did get—before I left Kansas City, I found a lump in my right breast and I went to a very young, woman doctor, and she said, ‘It’s only fibrocystic, don’t worry about it.’ Well, a year later, that lump is now advanced breast cancer. So in the middle of building our house, I get this diagnosis, and we are dealing with that. That’s another whole story, but it turned out pretty well. I went to this doctor named Bernie Siegal who wrote this book, *Love Medicine, and Miracles* who talked about how a doctor needs to be your consultant, and not play “god” with you. That went well for twenty years, although I now have breast cancer again. Anyway, given that I had advanced breast cancer and didn’t do chemotherapy or radiation because of the long term affects, he said, ‘Well, because your tumor is estrogen-dependent, you have the option of having your ovaries out, which will reduce the amount of estrogen in your body which will protect you a certain amount.’ That was my choice. I went into menopause at forty-three. We built the house and scrambled to make a living down here. Jeanie worked at the university for a while. Then later we did—she has a lot of computer skills. We did websites for quilt shops, once I got involved with quilting. She programmed a whole shopping cart for—it was called “Quilt Shops,” and sold websites and did the upkeep for quilt shops all over the country, including one in Hawaii. She was so excited, that she sent us flowers from Hawaii.
PEILE: So, to end the interview, I wanted to bring it to more present day. I’ve asked all of the women I’ve talked to the last few months this question—well, it’s more like a series of questions. In the last year, obviously with the political climate that we are in, what are your suggestions, or advice that you have for feminists—a new generation of feminists that have come up out of the election of Donald Trump? We had the Women’s March in January, and there’s this new resurgence, which I personally think is great. I am very excited about it. What do you suggest? What do you think we should do moving forward?

MARIEDAUGHTER: The most important thing is to fight for women-only space. Gerda Lerner, who wrote *The Growth of Feminist Consciousness*, talks about that there’s no chance for a woman to create a revolution without women-only space. These are my words, but that’s her concept; that women have got to be with each other, and learn to trust and like each other. Which doesn’t mean we would never work with allies, but that women-only space is central to women coming up with actions they need and want to inspire.
VITA

Kaylee Marie Peile was born on April 29, 1993 in Jacksonville, Illinois. She was educated in local public schools, and graduated from Western High School in 2011. She attended

She received the Fr. J. Gray History Scholarship from Quincy University, from which she graduated, Costigan History Major of the Year, in 2015. Her degree was a Bachelor of Arts in History.

Ms. Peile began the master’s program in history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2015. She began work as a graduate assistant for the Department of History in the Spring of 2016, and additionally worked at LaBudde Special Collections Archive at the Miller Nichols Library at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Ms. Peile received the Carla Klausner Best History Paper Prize in the Fall of 2016.

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