PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Cora Weiss conducted by Ronald J. Grele on May 21, 29, June 5, 10, July 10, 16, and November 20, 2014. This interview is part of the Cora Weiss Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.
Q: [laughs] Suppose we begin with your birth. You were born in Sydenham Hospital?

Weiss: Sydenham Hospital in Harlem was a small, private hospital, which I think my mother found because she must have investigated pre-Google that they had the lowest infant mortality rate in the city, so there we were. And I always had a good feeling for 126th Street. Later, not too much later, when my own children were small, I became a volunteer teacher at PS129, which was not far from Sydenham. And that was a wonderful experience.

Q: Did you then live in Harlem, or—

Weiss: No.

Q: —or, where were you living?

Weiss: We were married and moved into Greenwich Village, first apartment.

Q: Your father and mother moved to the village?

Weiss: Where were we living after I was born?
Q: Yes, when you were born, where—

Weiss: Oh, when I was born.

Q: —were you living?

Weiss: I think they were living in Eastchester, which was the South Bronx.

Q: Right.

Weiss: And moved—upward mobility from there.

Q: What do you remember about your father and mother? Let's explore them in a little more detail. Your father was an entrepreneur?

Weiss: He was. But he was also a tennis player, and he also had an eye for women. And my mother was a housewife, but soon became an academic. She was an orphan when she came to this country with her father, her mother died in childbirth. She was raised by various relatives, and they lived in the tenement section of the lower East Side, where the bathtub was in the kitchen with a counter on top of it. And it's now a museum for the Tenement Museum.

Q: Yes, the Tenement Museum. Right. Yes.
Weiss: Right. My mother was very active in Westchester County politics. She ran the Roosevelt for President office in White Plains. She drove a car. She was a very advanced feminist in 1936, '38, '40. And when I went to University of Wisconsin, she went back to college to Columbia University and got her doctorate in anthropology. She had actually graduated from NYU [New York University] as the valedictorian of her class.

Q: In French Literature, I read.

Weiss: In French Literature. And we had a wonderful bookcase full of the old French paperback books. They were all, for some reason, in a pale, pale yellow, or light tan, all the same color. They spoke Yiddish at the table.

Q: I was going to ask whether they spoke Russian or Yiddish.

Weiss: Not Russian, but they spoke Yiddish when they didn't want us to know. And so, I picked up Yiddish as a child, or as a young adult, most of which I have forgotten. No practice. My father was home for dinner, and probably not home for dinner more than he was home for dinner. But we had weekends, a lot of weekends, together. I have very fond memories, and I became very close to my mother because they got divorced, and it was not terrific. Then he got married, and then he got married again.

Q: When you said, "He had an eye for women," I was going to ask you—
Weiss: That's where it leads—

Q: —how that played itself out.


Q: [laughs] Oh, God!

Weiss: My mother was stunning, I thought, but—

Q: Did you continue to have contact with your father?

Weiss: Oh, yes. Sure. But we were not as close, I think, it's fair to say, as I was with my mother. My mother stayed alone, and he had company, so—

Q: [laughs] I sent you a copy of this terrible right-wing college thing that says that your father was a member of the Communist Party when he was a young man?

Weiss: We have no evidence of that.

Q: No evidence of that? None whatsoever? He never mentioned it to—?
Weiss: Not once.

Q: That's the only reference I ever found to anything like that. I don't know where they dug it up.

Weiss: Well, then, you don't have a very good eye, because Wikipedia is full of it.

Q: Is it?

Weiss: I must say that I can't bear reading those things, because they are wall to wall lies. It's not the only lie in what you gave me. There are paragraphs full. They get transplanted without change from website to another, and you can find them in too many places. And they're very upsetting to me, because I tend to be a stickler for the truth and for accuracy. Truth is harder.

Q: Accuracy—

Weiss: Accuracy is better.

Q: Nice distinction.

Weiss: Well, there is.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: I mean, what's true for me may not be true for others.

Q: In a couple of bio sheets that you sent me, you talked about being the victim of anti-Semitism when you were young. Was that in the Bronx, or was that in Westchester?

Weiss: It was in Croton-on-Hudson.

Q: Croton-on-Hudson.

Weiss: Where my mother wrote her PhD thesis and coined the phrase, rurban. R-U-R-B-A-N, rural and urban. And her thesis was on the three tiers of Croton, and especially the lower tier, who were the Italian immigrants that came from Southern Italy, Catanzaro, Cosenza, and came over as brick layers. And many of them helped to build the famous Croton Dam. There, the lower village was Catholic, the middle village was Protestant, and the upper village, where we lived, was largely, but not exclusively, Jewish. So it made for a very interesting thesis. One of the problems that we faced was trying to erase differences between us as children in the school, and the other children in the school. One of the differences was that they all walked to school. So, we were told to walk to school. It was two miles downhill. Going back was another question. But when we passed the Catholic church in the mornings to go to this public school—it was a WPA [Worker's Project Administration] school, a famous program of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Q: They built the school?
Weiss: It was a WPA school.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We're talking about 1939, 1940. So, when we passed the Catholic church in the morning, little boys—I mean, they were kids—would stand on the steps of the church and throw stones. It's something that has remained with me.

Q: Do you recall what you did as a result? Did you talk to your mother, did you—

Weiss: We kept walking to school.

Q: Any complaints to the school officials or anything like that?

Weiss: I don't know. I mean, I just don't remember, if there were.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I'm not sure they would have gone very far.

Q: What was the religious life of your family like?
Weiss: Zero.

Q: Zero? They weren't particularly Jewish, or religiously Jewish?

Weiss: No. Jewish we were; religious we weren't. Big difference. We celebrated the holidays, we spoke Yiddish, we did Pesach and Purim, and our friends were both Jewish and non-Jewish. We had a lot of friends from both villages—the Protestant village and the Catholic village—but we didn't think of them that way. The family who had the cleaning store that did our cleaning were the Ginos and Guarneris, as I recall. I'm always surprised when I recall. They became very good friends, partly because my mother took me and my brother to Italy with her on a research trip, to help her with her thesis. I wonder if that was her thesis, or a paper that she did? It was probably both, a paper that she did for college, for university, that grew into her thesis. So we went to—do you know the book, Christ Stopped at Eboli?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Carlo Levi?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Well, that was one of my earliest books that I remember as a young person in school.

Q: Did you go to the south of Italy?
Weiss: Yes, of course. We went south of Eboli.

Q: South Eboli, yes. Oh, yes.

Weiss: In the olive district, olive growing. That was important. I mean, we were exposed to the world as kids, when I was in ninth grade, I think. I took my first trip on the Experiment in International Living to England, and we walked the Cotswolds—

Q: Cotswolds.

Weiss: Cotswolds. The Cotswolds through England, and played darts in the bars and the pubs. That was an important first early international experience. The next year, I remember going to France. We were counselors in a summer camp for the children of Algerian trade union workers, the Syndicate. The camp was in a village on the north called Oaplage, and it was run by a woman whom we called the main de fer, the Iron Handed Woman. But it had helped my French, and—

Q: Now, who arranged that? That would be the Experiment your mother—

Weiss: My mother. The Experiment, yes.

Q: They put you—
Weiss: They put us out on the boat early in life.

Q: And they put you in the training for the Algerian kids?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Oh!

Weiss: It was a summer camp. It was like being a counselor—

Q: It must have had a progressive tinge to it.

Weiss: If it did, that did not get to me. What got to me was the terrible discipline that this woman administered to the children. I felt that was terrible.

Q: When you say your family life was not particularly religious, what, then, stood in for religious in terms of just ethical ways of living—

Weiss: Well, ethics.

Q: —the kinds of things that we would normally associate with religion? How did—
Weiss: When we left Croton, I was in the ninth grade, I guess. And my mother looked for a school for us to go to. And she found Fieldston, which is an Ethical Culture School, but she liked it because they had a potter's wheel, and she thought that was very creative, and it would be wonderful if her children could learn pottery. Instead, I didn't learn pottery, but I learned about ethics. That was very, very important. Algernon D. Black, who was one of the main theoreticians of ethical culture, was my ethics teacher. Once a week, we sat in his room and had extraordinary conversations. That, I think, was a very important influence in my life. I've never been able to understand how two or three, maybe four at the most, alums who graduated with me have become very far right-wing. What was it about their ethical culture education that didn't stick? Why didn't it stick with them, if the rest of us are normal, good people? [laughing]

Q: What was the curriculum? Was it a fairly standard curriculum? History, English, algebra, et cetera?

Weiss: Well, standard is one way of putting it, but we didn't have teaching for testing. We had lots of participation, and we had terrific teachers who could have been, and maybe eventually were, professors in universities. My history teacher was a man named John Anthony Scott, Tony Scott, who only taught using original texts, original documents. He also was very interested in folk music, and used folk music and culture as a way of teaching early American history, for instance. He also played tennis with my husband, later. I think he was a teacher for our oldest daughter. So he stayed there for a long time.

Q: Wow.
Weiss: Fieldston was important. It probably planted the first seed for feminism for me, because I remember I ran for president of the school, and so did possibly two other young men in my class. And all the young women voted for the handsome man. So that was a lesson, lesson number two.

Q: You didn't expect them to?

Weiss: It didn't occur to me—

Q: Yes.

Weiss: —I think. It would be a fair way of putting it. But it happened.

Q: You were active in the student body, student clubs?

Weiss: Probably, yes.

Q: No foreign members?

Weiss: I remember that basically the only African American faces in the building were the porters, the cleaners. I do have a photograph where I'm talking to one of them. I don't know what we were talking about, but I imagine it had something to do with, “How come you're not in a union?” [laughing] There were two African American students in my class out of ninety; one
became a brilliant—I think she's a mathematician, and the other, sadly, committed suicide, I think probably because he was gay. But when I mentioned this to a young woman who interviewed me for her senior paper at Fieldston a few years ago, she commented that the situation has not changed, that they've noticed the same thing, which is sad. But then there was a—

Q: The homophobia, or the women—

Weiss: Oh, homophobia we didn't talk about, I don't think. But it was about the lack of diversity. Racial diversity.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Which is not just a racial issue, it's also a class issue.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But there are scholarships, and there could be more, probably. But the front page of the New York Times Sunday Magazine section, the cover, ran a story a few weeks or months ago about two kids, one from Fieldston and one from a school in the South Bronx. The South Bronx teacher came to Fieldston with a proposal to link the two classes and find where the kids had commonalities and differences, and engaged the kids in common experiences, which I thought
was the most brilliant thing that could ever happen. I was thrilled that it was picked up by *The Times* magazine cover.

Q: I got all the stuff about your father's philanthropy. Were you at all aware of that when you were young?

Weiss: I can't say how old I was when I became aware of it. I can't remember. But generosity was part of living. I don't remember his giving specifically. But he did start a foundation, I think it was started in 1949, although if you look it up, it says '50-something. I'm pretty sure it started in '49. And it was just he and my mother as officers.


Weiss: Well, I have the incorporation papers. [laughing]

Q: Well, again, I got those off the Internet.

Weiss: The Internet is not the most reliable source.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: They were very generous, but it was only after he sold his company that he had—for me, it was a huge amount of money. But for American corporations, it was quite small.
Q: Now, when you were at Fieldston, your mother was at home? She had not yet gone back to school?

Weiss: She was talking with many of our professional friends about what she would do. At one point, she was interested in going to medical school. A psychiatrist friend of ours suggested that she study anthropology as a pathway. It clicked, and she stayed there. She became a rather well-known and wonderful anthropologist.

Q: Right.

Weiss: She became a Caribbeaist anthropologist. She wrote a number of books. She wrote a book called *Ganja in Jamaica*, which I've just given to my oldest grandson, who is interested in Caribbean history. Probably he's interested in ganja, too! [laughter]

Q: How old is he?

Weiss: He's twenty.

Q: He probably is. Yes.

Weiss: But she claims that she never touched the stuff. On the one hand I believe it, because in many ways, she was sort of Victorian. On the other hand, how could she be in Jamaica all those
years, with interviewing women at breakfast who were stirring ganja in their tea, so they could make it in the fields for a whole day under the sun? This was a very important support mechanism, to mix their tea with ganja.

Q: Well, that's one of the major themes of that book, is that it is used as a stimulant for work.

Weiss: Exactly.

Q: For people going out to work.

Weiss: Exactly. Not to get high.

Q: Unlike hippies, who doze off.

Weiss: But she became the darling, for a little bit, of *High Times*, I think is the name of the magazine?

Q: Right.

Weiss: I never saw it. Although I guess I must have seen the cover for the magazine, because I think we framed it at some point. But it was sort of the joke of the house that grandma's the darling of the *High Times* crowd. But they did it, because she would be in seventh heaven now to know how marijuana is being used properly—
Q: Right.

Weiss: —for medical purposes.

Q: I looked at the compilation of essays that they put together—it was much later after the big conference. Your mother was the general editor of some, I don't know if it was forty or fifty essays. I mean, incredible run-down—

Weiss: Wow!

Q: —of every aspect of marijuana use and production. It's an incredible volume.

Weiss: She was a big expert.

Q: Yes. The other thing that struck me, she worked with a coeditor of a book on youth in Trinidad.

Weiss: She did a lot of work in Trinidad. She loved TT [Trinidad and Tobago]. She worked there—I think she may have been, if not the first, the earliest to bring graduate students from the U.S. to the Caribbean for field studies. They would take their summer vacations doing field study work, and she worked with them, because she believed in young people. Maybe that's where I
got it from. So, she did a book on youth. She did a book on plantation slavery, and on ganja.

She's done a lot of papers.

Q: Yes. Well, it just struck me—

Weiss: She ran a fantastic conference at Hunter not long before she died.

Q: On Caribbean studies?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Well, it just struck me that in the early '60s, '70s, she's writing about marijuana and youth culture, at exactly the right moment for all that kind of stuff.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Weiss: But it was also when she was in the heyday, in the highlight of her professional career, she got her doctorate when I got my BA. So, that would be '56, más o menos. She taught at Columbia sometimes, she got an honorary degree at Brooklyn College and delivered an extraordinary paper as the price of getting the honorary degree. She had an academic career, but she had a very activist career in terms of her travels to the Caribbean, her work with—she loved
Michael Manley, he loved her. Eric Williams, another good memory, from Trinidad was a very close buddy. She produced for them. I think, in a way, it was a form of empowerment for the post-colonial islands.

She loved a woman named Lucille Mair, she was from Jamaica, who eventually became a U.N. [United Nations] diplomat, and a woman named Nita Barrow, Dame Nita Barrow, who was the—what's the title when you represent the Queen? In any event, she was Dame Nita Barrow, from Barbados. She became the head of the 1985 Women's Forum, Third World Women's Forum in Nairobi, where I was a delegate. She established a lot of very good friendships. One day, she developed appendicitis, and she was in Jamaica, and she went to the hospital, and they said, "Do you want to be flown to New York, or do you want to have your appendectomy here?" She said, "Here." That put the crown on her head, I guess, with the West Indians, because when she died, she was called by a West Indian academic man, who came to speak, a "Caribbean woman," and that was the highest accolade she could hope for.

Q: Yes. You talk of her very fondly. Do you think in any way she was a role model for you?

Weiss: Oh, absolutely! How many other mothers drove a car? I think she even drove a convertible car! [laughing]

Q: You went to Wisconsin knowing you were going to work in anthropology?
Weiss: I didn't know what I was going to do. I went to Wisconsin because of a very funny incident. I decided I didn't want to take SAT [Scholastic Assessment Test] exams, and there were only a few schools to pick from that didn't require them. I found Reed College in Oregon. And one day, we were with my father's mother, my grandmother, who didn't speak much English. My grandmother asked my mother, "And where is the first born—first born in this country—going to college?" My mother said, "Reed College." My grandmother said, "Where is that?" My mother thought and thought and thought and thought, and she said, "It's near Japan." So, that was the end of Reed College, and I had to find a compromise. Wisconsin not only sort of fell in the middle, but it had the legacy of La Follette. It had at least one, and maybe two, professors at the law school who had participated in writing the U.N. Charter. It was a very exciting place, and it didn't require an SAT exam.

Q: What was it like to be a Jew from New York in Madison at that point in time?

Weiss: There were probably a lot of other Jews from New York.

Q: Oh, yes?

Weiss: That wasn't the issue.

Q: In the state legislature, they were complaining about it.

Weiss: Really?
Q: Yes!

Weiss: Oh, I didn't know that. Well, maybe I did. But I worked with a man named Leroy Gore, who was the editor of the Sauk City newspaper, because he decided that there was a constitutional way to recall Joe McCarthy from the Senate, who was plaguing America with McCarthyism. That intrigued me. So, I was partly responsible for setting up a Madison headquarters. It was a petition-gathering campaign, and we had to get X-percent of the electorate to sign the petition, and then that would constitute a legitimate reason for a recall. So I got in my car, which was made in Milwaukee, I think it was a Studebaker. But it had New York plates. I started driving through the state collecting petitions, collecting signatures for the petition. All of a sudden, I was pelted—this you can't forget—with tomatoes and potatoes and corn husks. I didn't understand quite why, until I realized it was my New York plates. So, that was a very important early lesson in political organizing. It's where I cut my teeth, I think, in political organizing.

Q: Were there places where you were warmly received and people signed?

Weiss: Well, we got thousands of signatures. I wasn't the only one collecting them, by any means.

Q: Right.
Weiss: We certainly had the requisite amount to constitute a legitimate recall. But the judges of the State of Wisconsin were undoubtedly either picked by, appointed by or influenced by Mr. McCarthy, and all of a sudden, most of the signatures turned out to be not legible. So, it didn't work. But it was a wonderful campaign, it was called "Joe Must Go."

Q: Right.

Weiss: Leroy Gore wrote a little book called *Joe Must Go*, which I'm sorry I've lost, but—

Q: He was a rock-ribbed Republican.

Weiss: I wasn't rock-ribbed anything! [laughter] But he was very courageous and very reassuring, that there are good pockets of terrific people, who were not going to let this country down. So, it was part of my education. I didn't get a credit for it.

Q: [laughs] How many people were in the Madison office of the "Joe Must Go?"

Weiss: Oh, I don't know.

Q: Because in that interview, Nina Serrano talks about—

Weiss: I read it. She was one. But I have no memory for that.
Q: Was it usual to have a car as a coed in Wisconsin at that time?

Weiss: A lot of things weren't usual. I lived in a dormitory in the first year that I was there, because it was required. The dormitories were really sort of old, private houses that had rooms for ten or fifteen students. We had to write a little essay, so that the dormitory mother could know who she was getting. As a result of my essay, and I have no idea what I said, she assigned me to a room. My roommate was Carolyn Parker [phonetic], who was the only African American in the building. We got along very well. I think she was from Indiana, and I've tried to find her since then, and the university doesn't have a record of her in their alumni files, because I'd like to know what she did in life. Anyway, I decided that dorm life was not for me, and I rented an apartment for the rest of the time.

Q: You could do that?

Weiss: Well, let's say I did it. [laughter]

Q: As I remember about college at that time—

Weiss: I'm sure it was illegal.

Q: —the girls had to be in at 10:00 at night, and that was it. You know?

Weiss: Right.
Q: Terrible!

Weiss: Well, they were unusual years.

Q: The feeling that you gave me was an incredible array of activities. Various kinds of committees for the U.N., various kinds of student government committees, different kinds of committees, et cetera. When did you study?

Weiss: I got through, I got a degree. I took exams. But those were years of experimenting and discovering. They were important. There were a group of African students on campus, and they had no money. And they were poor.

Q: Now, how did you meet them?

Weiss: Probably in the Student Union, I have no idea. But we created an African Student Union. It may have been the first African Student Union in the country, I don't know. I'm not going to be sure about a lot of things, because I really don't know.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: I decided that maybe they could earn money if they went out into the town and gave talks about their countries, and they would pick up $10, or $5, whatever. It would become their pin money. That worked. That was wonderful.

Q: Well, how did you organize that?

Weiss: Oh, I have no idea.

Q: Various Rotary clubs? Kiwanis clubs?

Weiss: Probably.

Q: How did you do that?

Weiss: Or, stories in the local newspapers.

Q: Yes?

Weiss: I think we did it together. So that was one thing that happened. Another thing that happened was that I had already been abroad four or five times in my life, and I was interested in international affairs, or life. I became the Chair of the International Speaker's Bureau, I think, for the International Club, if that was what it was called.
Q: Right.

Weiss: In my third year, I think it was my third year, I invited a man named Peter Weiss who was escorting a woman named Ashadevi Arayanakam, who turned out to be one of Gandhi's cousins. She ran a fundamental education school in India, not fundamentalist, the difference between Islamic and Islamist. I invited them to come and speak. Well, I met them and took them to the cafeteria for lunch. On the lunch line, we talked, and this man named Peter Weiss explained to me that he ran the International Development Placement Association [IDPA], which would place skilled Americans in developing countries at local wages and under local conditions.

Q: He was a lawyer?

Weiss: He was, but he had graduated from law school and started this IDPA organization because he, too, was interested in international development and relations. Before we finished lunch, I asked him if he gave internships for students in the summer. To make a rather longer story shorter, I went to work for him—

Q: No, we want the long version.

Weiss: You want the long version?

Q: Absolutely.
Wei: Really?

Q: This is what it's about. The long version, not the short version.

Wei: OK. So, that summer, of my third year, if it wasn't the third it was the second. But anyway, I came to work for him in a building facing the U.N., which was a Carnegie building, but I can't remember, a Carnegie Endowment, some kind—one of the Carnegies—where he had two rooms, and one room had a bookcase and I was supposed to be the librarian, and there were probably thirty or forty books. [laughs] Anyway, I worked for him that summer, and then I went back to school. I came home for Christmas vacation, and I got a phone call and asked if I would like to go out on New Year's Day. I think I said, "What's wrong with New Year's Eve?" But anyway, it was New Year's Day. I went out, that was January 1st. By February something, we were engaged, and the rest is fifty-eight years of marriage. We lived happily ever after! It's been a good ride!

Q: Yes. It's remarkable that you were so simpatico, so fast. Interested in the same kinds of things—what was his political background?

Wei: Peter was born in Vienna, came to this country when he was twelve or thirteen. He went to Straub Muller Textile High School, which was a trade school, textile trade school, because his mother was concerned that he should have a skill to get a job. He was admitted to Harvard, but they didn't offer him a scholarship, so he went to St. John's in Annapolis, the Great Books school, because he got a scholarship. Then he went into the Army, like everybody else. When in
the Army, his mother would send him a newspaper that he could fit into the back pocket of his Army fatigues. It was *P.M.*, which was a liberal, left-liberal newspaper in New York. That's basically, I think, where he started to get his politics.

Q: Back, for a moment, to the "Joe Must Go," did anyone there ever speculate on what would have happened if you had been successful?

Weiss: If they did, I don't remember. And I kind of doubt that we ever did.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: You know, it's been interesting, that when you're busy doing, you think about what you're doing next. But I'm not sure that you speculate about what would happen.

Q: Right.

Weiss: I'm not aware of ever having had that leisure. I did another thing at Wisconsin that was fun. We had a hard time getting good speakers to college, because the college was under the authority of the legislature, which was all very McCarthy. So, one day, I said, "Why don't we form a club and get it sponsored by a faculty member, and then we can have the authority, because we would be an official club of the college, the university, to invite people?" Because I had trouble getting Pete Seeger to come. So we formed something called the Folk Arts Club, I think that was the name of it. We invited a professor from biochemistry named Karl Paul Link,
who was simply fantastic, and it turned out that he invented Coumadin, Warfarin, for the University. So, we could get Pete Seeger and others to come and speak. But, retrospectively, I see it as a rather creative way of doing something totally non-violently, totally legitimately, legislatively-approvable way of having our voice heard on campus.

Q: Did they let him come?

Weiss: Oh, yes.

Q: Oh, yes.

Weiss: Eventually.

Q: Yes. Where I went to school, we had trouble bringing Eleanor Roosevelt.

Weiss: That's a good one! Which school was that?

Q: University of Connecticut.

Weiss: Oh, my goodness!

Q: In 1956.
Weiss: Now, speaking of role models, I think she probably had a bit of influence on me, also.

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: Yes. She was a—

Q: [crosstalk].

Weiss: —remarkable, remarkable woman.

Q: Yes. Your family politics were Democratic Party?

Weiss: Democratic Party. My mother worked for Roosevelt to be re-elected, Eleanor [Roosevelt] used to come to the house to do fundraising, and would fall asleep in her traditional cat nap, and wake up and know exactly where the conversation was. She didn't come often, but came sometime. Yes. We were Democrats.

Q: And in Wisconsin, obviously.

Weiss: Yes. But then, you had to wait until you were twenty-one to vote.

Q: Right.
Weiss: So, I don't think I voted while I was there. I wasn't twenty-one until—

Q: You wouldn't have voted in '56?

Weiss: —fifty-six. When was the election? In November.

Q: Yes. Right, in October, you would have been twenty-one.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: [laughs] I'm trying to figure that out, because I know that I first voted in '56.

Weiss: I would have been twenty-two.

Q: Or, did I vote in '52?

Weiss: No, in '52, you would have been eighteen.


Weiss: So, in 1955 I would have been twenty-one.

Q: Yes. Yes.
Weiss: There we are. So that would have been Eisenhower.

Q: Yes. Eisenhower/Stevenson, the second time around. But you hooked up with Ivan Nestingen?

Weiss: Ivan was remarkable. I loved his whole family.

Q: He must have been very young at the time.

Weiss: Yes. He died very young. It was very tragic, unfortunate. I think it was a heart attack. But, in any event—I loved them, and they loved me. I used to babysit for their kid, one or two daughters. He ran for State Assembly, and for mayor. I believe I worked on his—I can't remember—one of the two campaigns. Bill Proxmire was the Senator. He gave Peter and me our engagement party. So, we had good friends. When [John F.] Kennedy was elected president, and most of the people in Wisconsin, I think, voted for [Hubert H.] Humphrey.

Q: Right. In the primary.

Weiss: In the primary.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: Ivan, because of his work for Kennedy in the state, got a plum. And he became the deputy secretary—you know, all of these titles are—

Q: Yes. In HEW [Health, Education and Welfare].

Weiss: Oh, HEW, was it HEW then? Health, Education and Welfare?

Q: Yes. In your classes, you majored in anthropology. What particular courses—I gather it was the four fields at that time?

Weiss: Cultural—

Q: Archaeology, cultural—

Weiss: Yes, I didn't do archaeology.

Q: And [crosstalk]?

Weiss: Right. So, I did cultural. But I think you had to do one class in archaeology to get your degree, because I remember the professor, whose name also began with a B. But my friend, the professor, was Milton Barnett, who was incredible, brilliant guy, who ended up at Cornell. I didn't follow him much longer than that. Yes, I did cultural anthropology. I made a lot of good friends.
Q: I've got a list here, but I don't see it.

Weiss: Some of whom I still remember, but not too many. I haven't kept up with the university. I went back to speak at Wisconsin during the Vietnam War, as I was speaking around the country. But I haven't paid much attention beyond that. Wisconsin is also where I cut my teeth in civil rights, because there was a group of young African American families who literally lived on the other side of the tracks, with young children. There are all these gorgeous lakes. So, I decided to start a little integrated summer camp, which I did, I think, once.

Q: Where did that idea come from?

Weiss: I have no idea. But I have a photograph from the Cap Times of me and little black children and little white children, and we're all sitting around in bathing suits. It's a nice picture, I'm amazed that you can still see it. It's where my back started to go out. Actually, I was in law school, then. So, it was '56. I was swimming with some kids on my back, and stupidly, instead of dumping them off my back to get up out of the water, I got up with them on my back. I've had lower back trouble ever since! I took my law school finals in my first year, I only went one year, standing up because it hurt too much to sit down.

Q: Nina Serrano in that interview said something like, in the "Joe Must Go" office, that two or three communist students were not welcome?
Weiss: Probably. That was prescient! [laughing]

Q: Was that part and parcel of the politics of the time?

Weiss: I think inevitably. You know, that's what McCarthyism was all about.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It was terrible that people had to be marginalized, but otherwise, you would all be tainted.

Q: Yes, I remember—

Weiss: Is that the right word to use?

Q: Yes. I remember—

Weiss: Guilt by association.

Q: Yes. When the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] National dropped their anti-Communist clause, it just caused a great furor among the people I knew.

Weiss: I never had much truck with the SDS. I didn't follow—[laughter]
Q: We'll get to that.

Weiss: Really?

Q: I can understand why! [laughter]

Weiss: It's too bad.

Q: What did you think you were going to do with an anthropology degree? Were you going to do field work?

Weiss: I was going to go to law school and become a lawyer.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I think my father had it all arranged that I was going to work with Porter, the Porter Law Firm. There was another partner who became—

Q: Abe Fortas, yes.


Q: [laughs] Why did you drop out of law school?
Weiss: Because in 1956, a lawyer woman and a lawyer man didn't get married.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I don't think there was—I mean, there obviously were some, but there were barely any married lawyer couples.

Q: Now, did your husband move to Madison?

Weiss: No.

Q: No.

Weiss: I moved to New York.

Q: You moved to New York. After law school?

Weiss: I went to Hunter College School of Social Work.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Well, I didn't finish. [interruption]
Q: You were living in Madison, Peter was in New York?

Weiss: I came back to New York.

Q: Did you commute back and forth while you were in law school? Or, you were just on your own?

Weiss: We weren't married yet.

Q: Oh, you weren't married yet. So you got married after law school.

Weiss: I didn't get married until June of '56.

Q: Aha. Aha. So, you left law school and came east to get married?

Weiss: Right. I packed it all in.

Q: [laughter] What was the plan then? What kind of conversations did you have about—

Weiss: BA. MRS. I went to Hunter College School of Social Work, because I wasn't going to be a lawyer. I had to be something. That lasted for two years. I got pregnant close to the end of the
second year, before graduation. I was working on the lower East Side under the three bridges, with groups of boy gangs. It was just the beginning of drugs.

Q: Now, those would have been Puerto Rican at the time?

Weiss: Or Irish.

Q: Irish. Oh, yes. It was still an Irish neighborhood down there? Yes. Yes, that's right. That's right.

Weiss: That's not a memory that sticks, but—

Q: Yes, that's right.

Weiss: One of my experiences was on the Upper East Side in Yorkville. I did a clinical experience there, with single mother households. They were having baby after baby after baby. I said to them, "Do you know about birth control?" "Oh, no!" So I introduced them to birth control. I was soundly reprimanded by my supervisors, who were good Italian Catholic. I think the Department of Welfare, what's the name of the guy who was the commissioner? African American and gay? Oh, I can't remember, don't—

Weiss: It would have been '57.

Q: Wagner.

Weiss: Dumps...


Weiss: With a D-P, D-U-M...

Q: Dumpson.

Weiss: Dumpson?

Q: From Harlem, yes. Yes. Right.

Weiss: Yes. He didn't like it.

Q: Well.

Weiss: Anyway, I worked as a social worker for two—I mean, I tried to get a social work degree, but I quit, eight-five or ninety percent of the way in to the end, partly because, a) I was pregnant, b) I had writer's cramp and couldn't possibly write a dissertation. And c) my supervisor at
Beekman Downtown Hospital where we had an out-patient mental health clinic that I was attached to, when I announced to her that I was pregnant and I would be leaving, she said, "Oh! I hope I had something to do with it!" I was shocked! [laughter] And ran faster away than I would have run! [laughs]

Q: Were there incidents where she was doing things that were undermining you in any way?

Weiss: I think she was probably—they had this whole gathering, group of sort of fraudulent marriage counselors, fake psycho, psychologist something-or-other. She was just nuts! Anyway, I left. But I also had an experience there that affected me for quite a while. I used to work at night, and I'd come home at 10:00 or so. Peter also worked at night, so that was not a problem.

Q: He was establishing his law practice.

Weiss: Yes. Young lawyers worked around the clock.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Terribly exploited. As I was putting the key into the door to get into our apartment, I was mugged from behind. Apparently, I bit the mugger very, very hard on the hand. So, he let go. I went in. I was two or three months' pregnant, and very anxious about the pregnancy. I called Peter, and I called the police, and whatever. The police found him, because he went to sit on the subway steps at the end of the block, smarting from this [laughs] not-self-inflicted wound. It
turned out to be—I hope I'm getting this right—S. J. [Sidney Joseph] Perelman's son, I'm pretty sure that's right, but I'm going to check it just to make sure.

Q: The son.

Weiss: Yes. He had been in a state home for youth offenders. But he apparently had gone up and down 10th Street and 9th Street in the village attacking blonde women. I was blonde at the time. Either he wanted to go back into the reform school because he couldn't handle freedom, or he just enjoyed attacking women. Who will ever know? But it became a kind of little notoriety, because his daddy was a writer.

Q: Right.

Weiss: I went to court to press charges. We had a newspaper then called the _World Telegram_, and it got into the _Telegram_. I couldn't work with my team, my gangs anymore, because they lost trust in me, for good reason.

Q: Right.

Weiss: They didn't want to have charges pressed against them for anything. So the whole thing ended on a bad note. But I decided I couldn't solve the world's problems [laughs] on a one-to-one relationship, which would have been psychiatric social work.
Q: In the world of social work? Right.

Weiss: So, I quit.

Q: In the 1950s, the social work profession in New York, there was a great deal of red baiting, because from the 1930s, there were many, many very progressive social workers. Was there any evidence of that?

Weiss: I wasn't yet a social worker. I was a student.

Q: Yes. Yes, yes.

Weiss: The group of people who most impressed me was the young men who had done the Korean War, because this was '56. There was a bill called 56 something-something, where you could get a free tertiary education.

Q: Right.

Weiss: If you had been a veteran.

Q: Right. The extended the Second World War thing to the Vietnam vets [veterans].
Weiss: Exactly. So the boys, the young men in my class were Korean vets. It was '56, '57. That stays with me. But I had not yet gotten into the world of organized social workers. It's true, they were a progressive group of people.

Q: Right. What were you going to do then, when you left social work? Was there a career?

Weiss: Well, then I had a baby. I took care of my baby. But then we moved to Riverdale, and I met a woman from Women Strike for Peace, that was 1961. I joined Women Strike, and that was a huge activity for me. I mean, that's where I learned to do everything I know.

Q: Before I move onto that, as a continuation, your work with the African students at Wisconsin, I wonder if we can move into the—

Weiss: AASF [African American Students Foundation]?

Q: African American Students Foundation.

Weiss: That's a good idea.

Q: Am I right in assuming that there's a certain—

Weiss: That came first.
Q: —kind of continuity—

Weiss: There has to be. Yes.

Q: Yes. How does that all happen?

Weiss: Peter was one of the organizers of, and eventually president of, the American Committee on Africa [ACOA]. And then the first year or two—

Q: Which had been founded in support of the liberation movements in Africa, especially the anti-apartheid, am I correct?

Weiss: Apartheid came later.

Q: Apartheid came—

Weiss: It was in support of the anti-colonial movements.

Q: Right.

Weiss: The liberation struggles. So it's Algeria, Ghana, Gold Coast, Mozambique, Kenya, Tanganyika, now Tanzania. So, I was a volunteer at ACOA. It was a wonderful group. The director was a Methodist minister named George Houser. We never had enough money to really
become a big, important organization. So, we were always a small, struggling organization, which probably was better. There was no corruption. We depended on volunteers. So, I was a volunteer. I did a lot of things that were interesting.

Q: Like what?

Weiss: Well, we had Africa Freedom Day every April 15th at Town Hall, Carnegie Hall. We would bring African leaders, liberation struggle leaders, to speak. I helped to organize those. One day, we invited a man named Tom Mboya, M-B-O-Y-A, who was both a liberation leader and an economist. I mean, he was brilliant. He was a labor leader.

Q: Connected to unions. Yes. Yes.

Weiss: I would say, yes. He was a labor leader.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, he was a labor leader and a liberation leader. He came to New York because the Brits were going to leave. Arrangements for independence were on the table. They would be free, an independent country, in 1963. The Brits were going to take everything. The expression was that when the French left the French colonies, they took the light bulbs.

Q: Right.
Weiss: The Brits took all of the civil servants so that there would be nobody to run the Customs, the docks, and everything that's run by a civil servant class, the entire administration of a country. There were no schools of higher learning. Makerere College was the technical school in those days. There was no other university. So, either you were rich and you could get out, or you were picked and you could go to London.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Or, you were picked up by the Russians to help build their interests, and they would give scholarships for students to go to Moscow. I don't know if anybody went to China yet, to Beijing. I think it was mostly Moscow and London. That didn't satisfy Tom, who had already gone to Ruskin, in England. He came to America to speak at one of our events, and he said, "This is where our students should come and get an education and come back and become the civil servants, and the nation builders." So, we put him on a speaking tour of colleges.

Q: He had come under the auspices of—

Weiss: Of the ACOA. Instead of picking up money as a speaking fee, he asked for scholarships. He must have gotten scholarships from 150 colleges in this country. He went home, and he said, “Let's start an airlift, because the kid who could get into the college has no way of getting there.” He came back a second time and we sat around the table, and he went, bing bing bing, you be the director of the airlift, and you be something else, and you be something else. That's how I got the
job. I was the executive director, unpaid, and a member of the board of directors, an officer of the African American Students, plural, Foundation, which ran the airlift, Africa airlift.

Q: Now, this is a foundation that was actually incorporated, or just—

Weiss: Incorporated.

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: We had a wonderful lawyer, who died just a few years ago, [Arthur] Borden, B-O-R-D-E-N. We were incorporated, we were legal, and we had no money. So, we had to raise money. The first thing that happened was that the man who owned Lassie, the dog, the famous Hollywood dog, he owned the name. There were many dogs all called Lassie, and the more the Lassie dogs, the greater his income. His name was Milton Gordon. He had an office in one of the first glass skyscrapers in New York, which was Seagram House on Park Avenue. He generously gave us a room. So we took the room, high up. We couldn’t wear skirts, but we had no alternative. So we couldn’t walk up to the window because it was glass ceiling to floor, and the guys below used to love looking up!

Q: Right. [laughs]

Weiss: I had a Japanese woman assistant, Mary Hamanaka, who was raised in the internment camps in California, and had a husband who was a Japanese actor, also from the internment
camps. They had an enormous empathy for the students coming from Africa under colonialism. They could relate to them. Then I worked with another gentleman who also lived in Riverdale, and we were all Riverdaliians around this. Ted [Theodore W.] Kheel was on the board. He lived in Riverdale. He was the labor lawyer for New York, or for the trade unions.

Q: Right.

Weiss: And Frank Montero. So, Frank and I used to drive in every day to the Seagram Building.

Q: He was a lawyer?

Weiss: No, he was a PR [public relations] guy.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: There was the U.N., and Frank said to me, "You know, nobody in this country has a stamp from the United Nations. Let's send out a fundraising letter with a U.N. stamp on it." That was brilliant! Now, who are we going to get to sign the fundraising letter? We got Harry Belafonte, Jackie Robinson and Sidney Poitier.

Q: I saw that! How did you get them?

Weiss: Who knows? Somehow. When you want to do something, you do it.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: You get it done! They signed a gorgeous letter, which Frank wrote. He was a great writer. Frank and I addressed and stamped—licking stamps, there were no stick-on stamps then—hundreds of envelopes and carried them to the United Nations, which had a post office in the basement. We mailed them with return addressed envelopes. One of them ended up in the post office of our district in the Bronx, our post office, I guess, for our zip code. Well, there were no zip codes. This was before zip codes.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We have a thin carbon paper letter with about twenty names of postal workers on it; their name, their address and their contribution—$1, $2—I think five was the highest of any of them. That's one of the most moving contributions we received. It was wonderful! Anyway, we did that, we brought the students over on the airlift, the first plane had eighty-one students, of which 13 were women; ‘girls’ we called them then, which I now realize, in retrospect, how remarkable that was. It didn't occur to me that it was remarkable, then. We were pilloried—pilloried—not by corn husks and tomatoes and potatoes, but by the establishment. We were lowering the standard of education by bringing so many kids from the “bush.” How did we know that they would go home, ever? They don't have enough money to survive in this country—just every possible attack.
Q: Who were these people, were they—

Weiss: Well, the African American Institute, the Institute for International Education. The established organizations.

Q: Right, yes.

Weiss: At that time, only children of the elite came from other countries.

Q: That's right.

Weiss: Most of them, well, I don't know most, but many of them from India and Africa didn't go back because there were no jobs. We had the possibility of saying, you're going to be the first educated generation, and there, there's nobody to run the country. You're going to become the nation builders. So, ninety-seven, ninety-eight percent of them went home. The ones who stayed married and had families.

Q: Well, what kind of schools would they go to?

Weiss: Everything. The ones who started in the south, Philander, white Christian colleges that wouldn't take American Blacks, called Negroes then, but would take Africans because they were foreigners. So, I think, in many ways—
Q: Like old missionary schools, almost.

Weiss: Exactly. Which is what they had in Africa.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But these were their colleges. The college level. I maintain, and I haven't been disproven on this, that the African students were the wedge that opened the door to African Americans in southern white colleges. I think that can be pretty well established. The kids who went to schools in the south worked their way north, almost to a student, they graduated from northern schools. Some of them came for high school, which took a lot of courage to leave your family, and you were fourteen, fifteen, sixteen.

Q: Right.

Weiss: So, in the end, after three years and a huge story involving [phone ringing] the Kennedy Foundation and John F. Kennedy running for president, which I'll tell you in a minute. But in the end, we had 778 students, mostly from Kenya, but also from what was then Rhodesia, southern Rhodesia, Tanganyika, other eastern countries.

Q: Right. East African countries.
Weiss: Yes, East African countries. But, go back up for just two seconds. In 1961, Tom Mboya came again for another tour to raise college scholarships. Somebody had the idea, why don't we introduce him to Jack Kennedy? –who was running for president, who was then in the Senate, and who was the chair of the Africa sub-committee. It was because of that chairmanship that we felt they should meet. So, Tom flew to Hyannisport, Kennedy was there. The conversation got to Tom saying to the senator, "We need to bring three planes over this year. We need $100,000." The senator picked up the phone and he called his brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, who ran the Kennedy family foundation in Chicago, and said, "I have a brilliant, wonderful, ambitious young man here," and they were very close in age. They both shared ambition for political leadership.

He said to Sargent Shriver, "We need $100,000." Sarge said, "I can give you five." He said to Tom, "He can give you five." Kennedy said to Sarge, "We need a hundred." Sarge said, "I can give you five." And a third time, Kennedy said, "We need a hundred." A third time Shriver said, "Five." Tom Mboya jumped with joy and said, "We've got $15,000!" [laughter] Anyway, in the end, obviously, Kennedy got us $100,000 from his family foundation. That paid for the charter of three planes that came in '61. On that, one of those planes, was a woman named Wangari Maathai. Fast forward, in 2004, she gets the Nobel Peace prize. On the first plane in 1959, there was a woman named Pamela Odede. Fast forward, she becomes Tom Mboya's wife. They were wonderful people. To a person, they really were the nation builders of post-colonial East Africa. There were two or three Indian women, which I thought was quite courageous for these—the thing was run by African men over there. Here, we were a mixed lot.

Q: Right.
Weiss: Black and white, and men and women. There it was African men. They put thirteen women on the first plane, of whom at least two were Indian women. That was a remarkable—

Q: These were Indians from Africa?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Yes. Yes, yes. Yes.

Weiss: There were large Indian communities there.

Q: Right.

Weiss: That was a great adventure in my life. In 2007, I was a delegate to the World Social Forum, which was held in Nairobi, and went to speak. Peter was also a speaker there, I think. I called a couple who were very good friends, who lived with us for a while. A lot of the students lived with us for a while. You could walk around Nairobi and people would come up and say, "I slept on your living room floor," and said, "We should have a reunion." Pamela Odede Mboya and I cohosted a reunion in a hotel that was managed by, or among the management was, the daughter of one of our airlift student couples, a man and a woman who got married here. It turned out to be the first time they had gotten together since 1963 or ’64, when they left this
country. They all had stories, each one had a story to tell. Wangari Maathai was there. She was sort of the queen of the group, because in '07, she had already gotten her Nobel.

Q: Right.

Weiss: She had the Green Belt Movement and she was planting trees everywhere, and she was remarkable! We had a wonderful reunion.

Q: Was any of that ever picked up by any of the mainline foundations? I'm trying to—

Weiss: No.

Q: No?

Weiss: What the mainline foundations did, I think three or four of them, four at Carnegie, I can't remember. It may be Hewlett, I'm not sure, so I can't say—decided to adopt libraries in Africa—

Q: Oh, this is was a much later—

Weiss: Of course.

Weiss: Under Vartan, exactly.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Some of them sent money for graduate or post-graduate work. Ford established an office in Nairobi.

Q: Right. Yes, that's why I was thinking that she would—quite natural for them to—

Weiss: But they didn't—the idea of a large number of students coming to fulfill a real need just never happened again, anywhere.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But now, of course, China has sent thousands of students to this country to study, and they're full-paying, the colleges love it. Obama has asked for 100,000 American students to go to China to study; it hasn't happened. We did a unique thing. To his credit, Tom should be forever thanked for having the vision and the group of people around him.

Q: Yes. His assassination was a real loss.

Weiss: Oh, it was terrible!
Q: Yes.

Weiss: But I have pictures of lots of liberation leaders in Africa, each of whom was assassinated.

Q: Yes.


Q: Right. So, before we went on this detour, we left you leaving the social work school, going to Riverdale, raising children?

Weiss: Bing bing bing, one, two, three!

Q: One, two, three. In what ways did your life resonate, in what ways did it not resonate, with the Feminist Mystique and Betty Friedan? Were you a suburban housewife chafing at the bit? Or, what? How did that fit?

Weiss: You know, that's an interesting question that I've thought about a lot. I didn't read Betty's book. I was not a member of the CR [consciousness-raising] clubs that came up, with mostly women. But I was an independent feminist woman. I'm not sure I know why. So, my life sort of ran parallel with the feminist movement. I have photographs that remind me that not only I, but Peter and Seymour Melman, even, were marching in the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] demonstration. I don't remember what year that was. I had my own radio show at WRVR.
Q: At that time?

Weiss: In '72. That was later.

Q: Yes?

Weiss: But I think you could not find maybe more than one or two other women on the radio then.

Q: Right.

Weiss: I didn't care what you talked about when you came on the air with me, as long as you were a woman! So it was the only station that had a voice for women only. It was called Cora Weiss Comments. I did it, I think, for about three years.

Q: What were you doing in Riverdale? Were you active in the community? PTA [Parent Teacher Association]? What did one do at that point in time? You've had this very active life, yes?

Weiss: Well, I was active—

Q: You're now raising children. Do you continue that activism in different kinds of ways, or, is it—
Weiss: I was very active with the Riverdale Neighborhood House. But I was also very active with the local chapter of Women Strike for Peace.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I was active helping the African representatives to the U.N. to find housing, because there was terrible racism.

Q: Well, how did that come about?

Weiss: Well, the people from Guinea, for instance, needed a house for their mission. So, I went to our real estate agent, who had sold us our house—

Q: Now, how did you find out that they needed a house?

Weiss: Well, because through the American Committee on Africa, and through our work, we knew the Africans.

Q: OK.

Weiss: So, I went to her, and I said, "We need a house for the Guinean mission." She found a house, but—and they moved in, and they bought it with my standing there, making sure it
happened. Then at one point, she said to me, "You know, Cora, they don't want them to all live in the same community." That got my goat! All this is in the *Riverdale Press*, their stories about all of these incidents, and me. So then we had an incident with the Nigerian couple who tried to rent an apartment, not a house, and that became an issue, and I had to intervene there. I think two other African missions, delegations got homes in Riverdale. The other people left to go to live in New Rochelle, where there was an African American community.

Q: Right.

Weiss: It wasn't pretty. We had a housing issue. There was a spit of land where—I can't remember the man's name, Farmer? I don't know. Somebody was building multi-racial and multi-class housing projects, and wanted to put up one of his housing projects. He has a famous one in Maryland, somewhere I'll find his name. But in any event, so, there was a big hue and cry, "We don't want blacks in our communities," said the whites. Not all of them. So, I remember a picket line, I think it was on Fieldston Road, at the top of Fieldston Road, because the Russians came in with a counteroffer. And the right-wingers had signs that said, "Better red than black." That blew us away! I mean, these are people who were all doing red baiting just a few years before! [laughing] Now, we knew which color came to the top. It's a good thing you can laugh at history, yes?

Q: Yes.
Weiss: Anyway, I was busy. I used to speak a lot at the Riverdale Neighborhood House, and panel discussions on international relations. I traveled for Women Strike for Peace to England and Belgium, and Lord knows where else. I would come back and report, and always give reports. Idle has never been a working word, an operative phrase.

Q: Yes. That's what I was trying to get at, because it's—

Weiss: Never been idle.

Q: Right. I think that's true for a lot of people, that the *Feminist Mystique* has to be amended a bit. That people don't just retire in life.

Weiss: No. I don't have time to retire.

Q: I wanted to save Women Strike for Peace for next time, so that we can do a whole thing on women.

Weiss: That was huge.

Q: So I was wondering if we can just move for a while onto the Gandhi Society.

Weiss: Sure. It wasn't very long-lived.
Q: Right.

Weiss: The Gandhi Society for Human Rights was started so that Dr. [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] could have a tax-deductible fund-raising arm to support SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Committee, or Conference.

Q: Conference.

Weiss: Conference. And his other activities. It was started by his lawyer in New York, name to be supplied. Harry Wachtel, right? That makes sense. And Ted Kheel. Ted lived in Riverdale, Frank Montero lived in Riverdale. We were all in Riverdale. Clarence Jones lived in Riverdale. He's just written two books about King. He was a lawyer, too. So, we all sat around again. And bing bing bing bing bing, "You be president," he said to Ted Kheel, and, "You be secretary, and you be executive director."

Q: Were you?

Weiss: No, "You be treasurer." I was the Treasurer. I can't give you the exact years, but I can look them up. I can find them. In any event, I was the Treasurer. We raised money and gave tax deductible acknowledgements to donors that helped to keep SCLC alive, and Dr. King. But I never signed a check. I never looked at a book of accounts. I'm sure it was all kosher, because these were very reputable people. But I didn't stay more than two or three years, and then I withdrew. I resigned. But in the meantime, I got very friendly with Coretta Scott King, and I
remember a wonderful conversation. We had children of the same age, we used to stay home at night and do the homework with the kids. We had a lot in common.

Q: Had you met Martin Luther King, Jr. by that time?

Weiss: Her husband?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Yes. One day, I was on the phone with Coretta, and apparently the door of their house opened and Dr. King walked in, and she said, "Martin, Cora's on the phone! Come say, 'Hello.'" That was the kind of relationship that we had. I admired them both a lot. Coretta and I did a lot of things together. She went to Geneva to a conference with women. She was at the Pacem in Terris conference with us, with Peter and me, in Geneva. She spoke in New York, she spoke in Washington. She was an outspoken civil rights and peace activist. There weren't that many. But she spoke on peace platforms a lot. I'll do this later when you want to do the Women Strike for Peace thing, but when we made a split in Women Strike to create the Jeannette Rankin brigade, it was to create a group of women who would merge poverty and racism at home with the war in Vietnam. That was a very important statement that we were making. We brought in a lot of African American women.
Q: Can we move back to the point in time when you think—looking back on it now, where you were at that point in time—what did you think of the forces' arrayed against you? What were the forces you were moving against, throughout that period from Wisconsin all the way through?

Weiss: Well, they're the same as they are today! [laughs]

Q: Oh, no! [laughs] There have been no victories?

Weiss: Sure! We're still here! And the U.N. is still alive. They were people who opposed the United Nations. It was the Ku Klux Klan who opposed blacks, equality, racial equality. It was the men in power who opposed having women come into power too, because they felt threatened. That still exists. Three women were fired on the same day—just last week? Two weeks ago? The editor of the New York Times, the editor of Le Monde, and the director of the Picasso Museum. They were all replaced by conservative men. Of course we've come a long way, but we sometimes tend to go back a bit.

Q: No. Did you, at that point in time, see the Democratic Party as a vehicle for change? Or the labor movement as a vehicle for change, or, who?

Weiss: I think we've always seen civil society as the vehicle for change. That if there wasn't organized public opinion, there could never be social change. Lyndon [B.] Johnson did his civil rights activity because of the civil rights movement. We fought against the Vietnam War, and it took too long, but we eventually got the Congress to stop funding it. That was the vehicle that
had to be turned off. I am a great believer in organized civil society. I think it's the best kind of society there is.

Q: Spin that out for me, a little.

Weiss: Well, it's very powerful. You know? When mere mortal citizens get together and say they think something is wrong, and if they stick with it—we've won lots! We got the Test Ban Treaty against atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. I think we contributed to ending the war in Vietnam, it could have gone on and on. We prevented an invasion of Angola after the Vietnam War. The list is long. We ended landmines, we got a ban on landmines, on cluster bombs. We got an Arms Trade Treaty, it's not very good, but it's better than having no Arms Trade Treaty. There are lots of things we've accomplished through strategic planning and organizing, whether it's women or women and others.

Q: I've come to the end of my questions. It's a little early to break, but I think it's because we're feeling each other out, and I didn't know how expansive you were going to be, or what. But anyway, what the question for next time is, is the special role of women in all the things you've talked about in terms of civil society.

Weiss: OK. I can give you a good answer right now while I'm—

Q: What would be our theme for running through your life, the special role of women, in civil society, as you envision it, as a movement for change?
Weiss: Well, it takes women and others. Other living things.

Q: But that's a next-time. That's our agenda for next time.

Weiss: OK.

[END OF SESSION]
Q: I want to ask you, first of all, to go back to your teenage years in Croton-on-Hudson, and then at Fieldston. What did you do for entertainment?

Weiss: I remember listening to the radio, to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Q: You were a Brooklyn fan?

Weiss: I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan, and Jackie Robinson was a player.

Q: Forty-six—

Weiss: I said that hesitantly. When did he start?

Q: Forty-six, forty-seven.

Weiss: Oh, so that was later.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: That was Fieldston. But nonetheless, we listened to him, too. But radio was the one social technology in the house.

Q: Did you—

Weiss: We learned to play tennis.

Q: Did you listen to the serials?

Weiss: I doubt it. I read a lot. But if you asked me what did I read, that's not easy.

Q: I'm going to ask you, what did you read? What—let's go by genre.

Weiss: I read a lot of biographies for children. I can't remember whose. Madame Curie, I read about her. Or, I read her biography. Who else? Honestly, I can't remember who else. But I do remember that I was reading children's biographies. As I got a little bit older, I read *When Christ Stopped at Eboli*, by Carlo Levi. That was important, because when I was a child, my mother took us to Southern Italy, and we went south of Italy—of Eboli.

Q: Right. What other genres can you remember? Mysteries, or current events?

Weiss: I never got involved with novels, to this very day.
Q: Oh!

Weiss: I am not the novel reader in the house. I read non-fiction. I read a lot of newsletters. And the computer—well, you don't want me to skip ahead, so I won't.

Q: No, right. Did you read a newspaper?

Weiss: Undoubtedly. I can't remember if it was P.M., or The Compass, one of those that came to the house.

Q: Do you remember, when you were younger, following the war?

Weiss: The Second World War, of course, because my mother worked with the Red Cross in Croton, and we used to roll bandages. She took me down to the train to give the guys going off to war, and at that time it was only guys, coffee and donuts. I think that probably was an influence on the rest of my life in terms of war, and trying to abolish it. Even though I thought the Second World War was a just war.

Q: Did you go to the movies? Wait, see what's happening now? You could not have asked that question, then, about a just war and an unjust war.

Weiss: Right.
Q: Unless you came from a certain family, that had a certain politics, and a certain ideology.

Weiss: Oh!

Q: That was not a question that one would ask then. It's a question – it became a question later.

Weiss: Right.

Q: So, what was the question then about the Second World War? Were you patriotic?

Weiss: We were very patriotic. We supported the war. We hated Nazi Germany, we hated Hitler. And I used to knit. We knitted head coverings, not helmets, but knitted helmets.

Q: Caps, yes.

Weiss: And gloves and socks and scarves for British war relief, Russian war relief, whatever organization was asking for knitted garments, so that I remember knitting.

Q: And these would be local organizations?

Weiss: No, they were international organizations.

Q: But how did you—
Weiss: Because they would have a representative, or a chapter, or somehow—

Q: And where would you meet them? You didn't—

Weiss: I don't think we met.

Q: You didn't go to chapel.

Weiss: I think we just knitted and mailed.

Q: Oh, OK. Did you go to the movies?

Weiss: I don't remember. I don't even think there was a movie house, necessarily. We had a movie camera, and my father used to take movie pictures of us. Oh, we went ice skating in the winter, for a social activity. We learned to play tennis. But I don't remember movies.

Q: Now, when you say we, who is this we?

Weiss: Well, I have a younger brother, so there were four of us. Mother, father, brother and—

Q: So, it would be family outings.
Weiss: Right.

Q: How would you describe your friends?

Weiss: We had friends who were neighbors.

Q: I mean your friends.

Weiss: My friends, right. Well—

Q: The girls you hung around with, the boys you hung around with. The people you went to school with?

Weiss: They were mostly boys in the neighborhood, who also went to public school. We were in the same grade, or the same school. So we walked to school together. I had some girlfriends in school. I remember one in particular, because we had a reunion many years later at our house, and she came with two or three of the other boys. When I was a very young child, I was a friend of the daughter of the superintendent of the school, who was African American. After that, I was the friend of a girl named Judy, I can't remember what her last name was, who was from the middle section of this three-tiered community. But I think they were mostly boys, and I think we played baseball.

Q: You played baseball? Were you any good?
Weiss: You have to ask—

Q: In those terms! [laughs] [unclear]

Weiss: You'd have to ask the other players! I have no idea.

Q: They let you play a second and third time?

Weiss: Right.

Q: Yes. And what did you think you would do with your life? Did you ever sit back and speculate when you were fifteen, sixteen, or something about where your life was going to go, what you were going to do?

Weiss: I doubt it. Everything was very much the here and now. I probably was told, or it was suggested to me, that I could become a lawyer if I wanted to, and that was pretty unusual for a young woman.

Q: Did you think it unusual then?

Weiss: Probably not, because the women around me were all doing terrific things. So—
Q: You mentioned that many people visited your house, and the conversations were wonderful. What did they talk about? Can you remember any of the—

Weiss: Politics, politics, politics.

Q: This would have been politics, Roosevelt—

Weiss: In the ’40s. Right.

Q: —Truman, and the war?

Weiss: Right. A couple who were very close friends of the family were both psychiatrists; one was a psychiatric social worker and her husband was a psychiatrist. So, we talked psychiatry, somehow. We talked community politics, what was happening in Croton, in the community. And later, in the community of Riverdale.

Q: What was happening in your community?

Weiss: There was a lot of racism in Riverdale. There was a lot of racism in housing, in particular. What else? At Fieldston, I was involved with the men who were the porters in the school, who were all African American.

Q: When you say involvement, what was the involvement?
Weiss: Well, they liked me, I liked them, and we talked to each other a lot.

Q: About what?

Weiss: Well, eventually, it was about, how come you're not in a labor union? And I don't know how I got to that, but I did.

Q: [laughs] I won't tease you anymore, but you get to think about, you know, the personal side of things.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Any anecdotes that you might recall? Conversations? Funny things that happened? Sad things that happened?

Weiss: I can do that later.

Q: What moved you?

Weiss: Later in life, it's hard.

Q: It is hard, yes.
Weiss: In those early days.

Q: Yes. There's a natural inclination to apply today's terminology to yesterday.

Weiss: To yesterday's? Right. I understand that.

Q: You know, what did yesterday think its problems were? What was the question, what were the questions asked then?

Weiss: Anti-Semitism was rife, racism was rife, the war was rife. Ice skating was good. We had a lot of—the family had a lot of friends in the community, and a lot of interaction with them. There were always people for either dinner or Sunday breakfast, or—

Q: And you would sit in on the conversations?

Weiss: Or sit on, if it was at night, sit on the stairs and listen. I remember that. We were supposed to be in bed.

Q: Yes. You had rigid hours about going to bed?

Weiss: Well, most school children have to go to bed at a certain time so that they can get up in the morning. Rigid was not an option. An operative word, I shouldn't say option.
Q: Oh, were you?

Weiss: No, we weren't rigid. We were flexible flyers. I'll tell you one quick story. I have no idea how old I was. We were living in Croton, so it had to be somewhere between—somewhere up to eighth grade, or through eighth grade, because we moved at that point. We used to go sleigh riding. We lived on top of a hill with a big forest of trees below us. There was a young man who was probably two or three years older than I, who would come on skis, and he would ski slalom through the trees. One day, I decided to follow him on my sled. I couldn't slalom with the sled—

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: —so I went [crashing noise] crashing into a tree and broke my front teeth, and I don't know what else happened. But in any event, the consequence of breaking my front teeth—oh, I never had any consequence with the young man. That was the extent of my fondness for him. But the consequence of my front teeth breaking was that I went to a dentist in the city who had a grant from the Department of the Navy to do research on using acrylic for repairing broken teeth. I was one of his experiments. I'm not the experiment, he did the experiment, I was his victim.

Q: Yes, right.

Weiss: He painted this stuff on my two front teeth, which was terrific. I kept them for many years. Then, they absorbed color, so if I drank tea or coffee, or pomegranate juice, whatever, they
would stain, and so I'd have to have them redone, repaired. It wasn't until I was seventy-eight or nine years old [phone ringing] that I got a new kind of front teeth that don't stain. Now I'm not ashamed of opening my mouth, or smiling!

Q: All those years, were you?

Weiss: All those years. All of my photographs have my upper lip covering my upper teeth. Or my lower lip. One of my lips.

Q: Right. And those were the years when you were doing an enormous amount of public speaking!

Weiss: Huge. But I was very tooth-conscious. And it all started because I was following a guy down a hill! [laughs]

Q: Now, when you were public speaking, were you aware of your teeth when you were—

Weiss: It just became totally unconsciously habit.

Q: OK. Now, I'd like to move you ahead a little. Now, let's go—

Weiss: Now, are you happy that you got a story?
Q: Yes. That's what I want. Stories!

Weiss: Life is just one big story, isn't it?

Q: Absolutely! Absolutely!

Weiss: Right.

Q: I can give you a lot of theoretical stuff which argues that, that that is life. But let's move ahead now to the Joe Must Go. Exactly where were you, what were you doing, when you became aware that there was this movement to recall Senator McCarthy? Who told you? Did you read about it?

Weiss: That's a tough one. I was very good friends with a member of the Wisconsin State Assembly, Ivan Nestingen and his family.

Q: Now, you had met him earlier. How did you meet him?

Weiss: I have no idea. You know, I was an adventurous young woman, and I read the local Cap Times newspaper while I was going to school in Madison. I had interests beyond the classroom, and they just came with my DNA and with me.

Q: Well, you must have walked to his office, or you must have gone to the valley—
Weiss: I have no idea. I just have no idea. Let's go fast forward. I knew him. I liked him very much, and I supported his democratic politics, and he was running for office, and I was helping him. I think he probably told me about Leroy Gore, who was the editor of the Sauk City paper. I don't even remember meeting Gore, I just remember picking up the petitions and starting to work around Madison with them. I did a lot of that.

Q: That was in the Madison office?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Now, was he in the Madison office?

Weiss: No, Gore was in Sauk City.

Q: At Sauk City. Now, did you go to Sauk City to meet him?

Weiss: I don't think so. I mean, if I did, I certainly don't remember.

Q: Sure.

Weiss: But I kind of don't think so.
Q: How many people worked in that Madison office?

Weiss: I have no clue. Everybody was a volunteer, and they came and went.

Q: What were the jobs?

Weiss: Collecting petitions, handing out petitions, getting the petitions sent to their proper resting place, wherever that was. Maybe it was Sauk City, whoever was doing the collecting of the signatures.

Q: So, you would be in the office, and people would come in and pick up the petitions, and they would go out and door knock the neighborhood?

Weiss: I was mostly door knocking.

Q: You were door knocking.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Tell me some stories about door knocking.
Weiss: Well, there were three options. Either someone said, "Sure, I'll sign!" Or, someone said—usually a woman, "I'll have to ask my husband." Or somebody closed the door in your face. It was a very important lesson for me, in the many lessons I learned in college.

Q: Did you have a spiel? "Hello, I am your—"

Weiss: That's interesting. I have no idea what I said. I probably did. You'd have to, in order to do it, but I can't remember that. At least I'm honest about what I can't remember.

Q: Right, yes. Now, one of the issues, which was not a political issue, in that campaign, was McCarthy's failure to fully agitate for dairy subsidies. Do you remember anything about that? Or making an appeal to people, not on the basis of his politics, but on this basis that—

Weiss: You know, you've read that probably recently.

Q: Yes, right. I—

Weiss: So you know about it.

Q: I looked at a history of the—

Weiss: [laughs] of Joe Must Go and the time?
Q: Yes!

Weiss: Well, I haven't read up on the history of Wisconsin in 1950!

Q: You were there!

Weiss: I know. That—

Q: I know only from reading. You know from experience.

Weiss: But memory interferes. So, I remember the petitions, I remember the failure, I remember the extraordinary courage that this guy in Sauk City had. Somewhere I should have a book called *Joe Must Go*.

Q: Right.

Weiss: I hope I have it. Unfortunately, a whole box of books disappeared.

Q: You can get it on—Amazon has it for sale.

Weiss: Oh, really?

Q: Yes. [laughs]
Weiss: Oh, bravo! Thank you! OK.

Q: OK. You know, I have had a lot of experience interviewing activists. Most of them are really concerned with what is happening now, what they're doing tomorrow, what next month's agenda is, what organizations they're working with. It's difficult for them to go back to that time when they weren't engaged in those particular kinds of issues, because they're so caught up in today's activities.

Weiss: I've been plowing through my files, not knowing why, what I'm going to do with them, but knowing that they have to be organized. After several years of asking around, I decided to organize them chronologically. I have boxes full of papers. It seems to me that from the very beginning, I've been organizing. I started speaking very early in life.

Q: Do you recall the first time—

Weiss: No.

Q: —you went to a public meeting?

Weiss: No. But I probably have my first speech written out. I decided early on to write everything out, because if I were challenged, I wanted to have the evidence of what I said. That became a habit, and I have written every speech I've given since then. But many of them were in
pencil on legal paper, yellow lined paper. They had no date, and they had no place and no time, because who thought any of that was important? We had no sense of history, ever. We just did it. [laughs] So, when I was chair of the Speaker's Bureau of the International Club at Wisconsin, I might have talked at some point, somewhere. But I don't have those, even in legal pad size. [laughter] But I do after that, when I started speaking with Women Strike for Peace [WSP], 1961.

Q: Now, you said that you had no sense of history, but—you had some sense of history. What is the history that you then had? When you invited a speaker, what did you know about his or her past? What did you imagine about the country they came from, the economy—the place that they lived?

Weiss: I had a set of values. I had an internationally, or globalized, head, largely because my mother took us on trips when we were younger, or I went abroad in high school during the summers. So, we invited people to speak who shared those values, values of justice and equality, and not anti-Semitic people, and not racist people.

Q: How did you round up the audience?

Weiss: Well, there was no email. I guess there were posters, flyers that we mimeographed. My mother used to say you can't do anything if you don't know how to use a mimeograph machine. [laughs]
Q: And you knew how to use it?

Weiss: I certainly did learn fast!

Q: Did you stand out and hand out the flyers? Or did you post them in dormitories?

Weiss: Probably, whatever you have to do. I don't know. I mean, really, I don't, can't—I don't want to lie. [laughter]

Q: Did you ever think, generally, when you went door knocking and somebody answered, did you have some impression of that person with whom it was going to be easier to talk to? Difficult to talk to? Someone similar to yourself? Someone different from yourself?

Weiss: No, we just went up and down the blocks. We had no way of knowing who we were going to meet. There were no lists, there were no voter registration lists with addresses to look at. The important thing that I remember is, that we collectively, all around the state, everybody doing the Joe Must Go campaign, had gotten the requisite number of signatures, which was based on the percentage of the electorate. Whoever was responsible for making a decision about whether they were legitimate or not, or whether McCarthy would be recalled or not, decided that they were not legible. That is what stuck with me through the years.

Q: Do you recall your initial feelings when you heard that?
Weiss: Oh, we were furious!

Q: When it was broadcast, or—?

Weiss: It was a great and very important lesson in corruption, or cronyism.

Q: It was just absorbed as a lesson?

Weiss: It had to be, because there was no appeal.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I don't think there was an appeal.

Q: You didn't have a march, or you didn't—

Weiss: No.

Q: …what people would do today.

Weiss: No, we just went onto the next thing. [laughter]
Q: Fine. You know, some of this is awkward, but it really does give a much better sense of where you are in the world, who you are in the world, in the sense of, you know, obviously much more concerned with acting instead of remembering.

Weiss: Clearly. Sure.

Q: Yes. Kind of remarkable.

Weiss: But I remember the lessons learned, right? That's important, because we don't repeat our mistakes twice, we hope.

Q: Well, let's, then, move on to Women Strike for Peace. Got you thinking about the past, et cetera, Can you recall exactly when you heard about the initial strike, how you heard about it, who told you about it, where you were, et cetera? Give me the picture.

Weiss: Women Strike for Peace was not a strike in the sense of the Greek Goddess, what's her name, with an "L," who did strike against men.

Q: Oh, Lysistrata?

Weiss: Lysistrata, thank you very much! My age of blocking is showing.

Q: [laughs]
Weiss: So, we lived in Riverdale, it was 1961. I had two babies, I was still working on the airlift, which started in 1959 and went to '63. A woman, I think her name was Leona Grant. She lived in Riverdale, and she was also an early member of Women Strike for Peace, which was not technically a membership organization, because we didn't have dues, or—

Q: But let's get back to that day.

Weiss: But she came, and we sat in the living room together, and she talked to me about it. It sounded great.

Q: What did she say it was?

Weiss: Who knows what she said? Oh, I know what she said. She said that Dagmar Wilson, who was an artist married to a British Consular General in Washington, actually in Leesburg, Virginia, became enraged when she learned about the atmospheric testing of atomic bombs, because the bombs would come down and hit the grass and explode, and the cows ate the grass, and we all fed our babies cow milk.

Q: This was the Strontium-90 debate?

Weiss: Exactly.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, I said, "Sign me up," or whatever to that effect. It moved very quickly. That was the very early, early days of Women Strike. So I talk about myself as among the founders, the early members.

Q: What did you do that day?

Weiss: We started a chapter in Riverdale.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Then there was a chapter in the North Bronx, and people would come to meetings. I remember Ruth Messinger, who was a young mommy then also, coming, and we would change our babies' diapers on the living room floor together. That was long before she ever thought about being mayor of New York, or borough president. We had a New York City central office, or eventually we had a New York City central office. And I—

Q: Let's get back to the Riverdale club.

Weiss: Right.

Q: How many of you were there?
Weiss: Whoever could make it on a given day, ten, twenty, twenty-five people.

Q: And what would you do when you met?

Weiss: We all studied Strontium-90. That was important. We had to be smarter than the people we were going to see, to ask them to campaign against atmospheric nuclear testing, and for a treaty to ban it. That was the goal. That was the agenda. So, we did. At a certain point, I can't remember exactly when, we all agreed to send our baby teeth—here's another name you're going to have to help me with—to a scientist at Miami University Medical School, was it called Miami University Medical School? In Cleveland, Ohio. I don't think it was called Miami University. I have to look that up.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But the guy who was the scientist, whose name I ought to remember, eventually ran for president on the progressive ticket. He was very well-known.

Q: Not Dr. [Benjamin] Spock?

Weiss: No.

Q: No.
Weiss: He died a few years ago.

Q: Oh, God, I should know that name.

Weiss: He was very important. He eventually lived in Long Island, and worked against the nuclear power plants on Long Island. Barry Commoner! Anyway, he was terrific, and he collected baby teeth from all of us Women Strikers from all over the United States, and tested them for the presence of Strontium-90.

Q: Wow!

Weiss: We didn't know if it was our babies whose teeth showed up with Strontium-90, but he found Strontium-90 in baby teeth. That was the killer chemical in atomic bombs. There were many killer chemicals, but we focused on one.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That gave us our cred, our credibility, to go out and say this is what's happening, and we have to stop the testing.

Q: Now, who would you say that to? In Riverdale?
Weiss: Probably first to the *Riverdale Press*.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Which was published and edited by a wonderful couple, David and Ceil Stein, who were liberal, and who agreed to—I mean, here's a story from the *Riverdale Press*, it's coincidental. But that's not from that time. This is from later, because they ran my op-ed—

Q: These are the copies of materials from the *Riverdale Press*.

Weiss: Yes, but that was in 1995 when the Beijing conference on women happened.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But the point is that it was a liberal—

Q: Notice how you move it—

Weiss: I do, but—

Q: Immediately from those things, to '95!
Weiss: Because I was talking about the *Riverdale Press*. So, we probably started with *The Press*, with a press conference. Then we probably had talks in the town. There was a ‘Neighborhood House’ where we could talk, and we mostly mobilized other women and went on a demonstration, either in the city or in Washington. We grew and grew, and had meetings. I became the representative to the city, and then the representative to the national. That was my launching pad.

Q: When you became—

Weiss: My living room was my launching pad.

Q: When you became the representative from Riverdale to a city committee—

Weiss: The citywide organization, which had representatives from all of the communities in the greater New York area.

Q: OK. Do you remember some of the personalities that you met at that first meeting, the second meeting, the third meeting?

Weiss: Bella Abzug, for example.

Q: Yes! Tell me about your first meeting with Bella Abzug. Bella Abzug is a person that everyone remembers their first meeting with! [laughs]
Weiss: Bella was a powerhouse, and I like to think, and it may be because I can't remember, but I like to think that I was one of the few people she never yelled at.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: I'm quoted as saying that somewhere. She did a lot of yelling, but she did a lot of doing. She was interested in the legislative side. We were interested in the policy side, that the U.S. should not invest in atomic bombs. She was interested in domestic politics, I was interested in international politics.

Q: That would have meant just—a disarmament conference.

Weiss: And the U.N.

Q: And you negotiated through the U.N.

Weiss: Exactly.

Q: Negotiated treaty, the test ban treaty, well, what eventually became the test ban treaty.

Weiss: It's not that I was not interested in U.S. politics.
Q: Right.

Weiss: It's that after we had everything in common, those were our separating goals.

Q: Well, I would imagine, from her point of view, if you're interested in politics, then the question is, where do you go?

Weiss: She went to—

Q: The Democratic Party.

Weiss: Becoming the party.

Q: Yes. Whereas—

Weiss: And the elected. I was not going to—

Q: Your question, where do you go? It was to the U.N.

Weiss: —get elected anywhere. Right.

Q: Did you ever have that conversation with her?
Weiss: No.

Q: No.

Weiss: But many of my friends in my adulthood I made from those meetings, Amy Swerdlow, who, unfortunately, is no longer with us, Judy Lerner, who is with us. She's ninety-two or three, and still going strong. So I had a lot of women friends from Women Strike for Peace, because that became my social life and my political life. Then I became a public speaker, as a result of Women Strike for Peace.

Q: And how did that happen?

Weiss: I went out speaking. You know how things happen?

Q: Who said to you, "Cora, you should give the speech?"

Weiss: Well, you sit around a table, and somebody says, "You do it." That's happened many times in my life, the most important one, of course, and I'm going forward, was The Hague Appeal for Peace. Six of us sat around the table, and somebody said to me, "You be president." That's how things sometimes happen.

Q: [laughs] When you first met the women from New York, can you generalize about who they were, or where they came from, or what they seem to be?
Weiss: They were mostly white. I don't know if it was—

Q: When you say mostly, that means there were one or two—?

Weiss: Because it means that I can't remember if there were one or two who weren't.

Q: Yes. Do you ever remember seeing—

Weiss: It's why we created the Jeannette Rankin brigade later.

Q: Did you ever remember seeing a black face at any of these meetings?

Weiss: Probably not in the beginning, which is why we split off. [laugh]

Q: Back there—

Weiss: OK. But every action has a reaction, didn't some famous physicist say that? We were probably mostly middle-class. We were mostly Jewish, I don't know, maybe. But not exclusively. And mostly liberal, left liberal.

Q: Were there people who had had an organized party life?
Weiss: Undoubtedly.

Q: Either from the Communist Party or the Trotskyist Party?

Weiss: Undoubtedly. *Pas moi*, not me, but others.

Q: At that age—

Weiss: We had very strong meetings. We had very good political conversations. Where are we going? What are we doing? How are we doing it? What slogans are we going to use? We learned a lot together. We invented things, because nobody had ever done what we did before.

Q: Can you give me an example? What did you invent? Give me an example of what you felt you invented.

Weiss: We had a demonstration at the Pentagon, and because they didn't like us—this was about ending the war in Vietnam—they closed their doors for the first time in the history of the Pentagon. We took off our shoes and banged on the doors of the Pentagon! We had slogans that said, "Not our sons, not your sons." Which meant the Vietnamese mothers and the American mothers. We laid down in the streets of New York with signs on our chests with the names of Vietnamese dead!

Q: Was that the die-in?
Weiss: It was a die-in.

Q: Die-in. And you did that?

Weiss: We did it, of course, with high heels and gloves and proper suits.

Q: How many of you were there?

Weiss: Oh, that was dozens and hundreds. I mean, we didn't count, I don't think. But the newspapers recorded a long line of women lying on the street.

Q: Now, how did that tactic emerge? You were sitting around, and someone said, "We should do a—"

Weiss: Yes. We were sitting around, and people make different suggestions, until one pops out as one that we all accepted.

Q: OK. Now, you had been involved in organized political activities, or organized social political activities, such as the airlift, and working at WSP. Those were in regular organized organizations that said “We're a hierarchy,” and, et cetera.

Weiss: Yes, Women Strike did not have a hierarchy. We had representatives.
Q: What did that mean to you at that point in time? I would imagine, was that a new kind of phenomenon to you?

Weiss: It was an informal organization, as opposed to a movement. It was an organization within a movement. First, within the disarmament movement, and second, within the anti-war movement. But we were an organization that designated representatives. I became a representative to the coalition of the movement. I also became a representative to the national organization of Women Strike for Peace. I think our staff person was a hire, and we had to pay her salary. So we must have had contributions. But we certainly didn't have dues. It was a very unique way of—

Q: Do you recall how you raised money?

Weiss: —achieving some social change—pardon me?

Q: How did you raise money?

Weiss: Like everybody! With a tin can.

Q: Among who? At a subway, or a—

Weiss: Well, at demonstrations. No, not on the subway. At demonstrations and at meetings.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, we would pass the hat at meetings, or people would send in a check. There was not a lot of money involved.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Because everybody was a volunteer, pretty much.

Q: Did you like that disorganization? You talked about—

Weiss: I loved Women Strike for Peace. Loved it.

Q: Now, other people who have been involved in Women Strike for Peace do not talk about the organization. They say, "Oh, yes, we have representatives, but that wasn't the important part of it. The important part of it was our day to day action."

Weiss: That's true, but the only reason I talk about “representative” is because that became the ladder, which led me to more national activity. I became a co-chair, the only woman co-chair, of the National Mobilization against the war in Vietnam. I became the co-director of the Committee of Liaison on the prisoner of war issue during the war. What else did I become? I can't remember. But in any event, it was because of my representation from the Women Strike for
Peace to the coalitions or to the national organizations that I became a leader, I guess you could say, in the larger movement.

Q: I'm actually curious how that occurs, going from this kind of amorphous, participatory group to an increasingly complicated organizational structure that actually has representatives too, and then local bodies, representatives, et cetera.

Weiss: Well, nobody got elected. But people were told, or it was suggested, "You go to that meeting."

Q: Key women? Is that the term that was used?

Weiss: Probably. I mean, Amy Swerdlow became the Editor of the Memo after Barbara Bick, I think. She was in Washington. Judy became the Westchester representative. I became the representative to the coalitions. We were never elected, it just happened, somehow. That was the nature of the loose "organization."

Q: But they must—when you were all sitting around a table, people must have had a sense, at a very deeply personal level, that this was the person to do that, this was the person—

Weiss: I guess so, if the way you speak and what you suggest, what you say, would give you the job. [laughs] I've always said, "If you don't want to do it, don't make a suggestion!" [laughter] But Women Strike for Peace was a remarkable, remarkable part of American social history.
Amy's done a great job on her book, which I think is the only book about Women Strike for Peace. It's where we all learned what we know. Most of the women, when it was all over, which would be after the war in Vietnam was over, went either back to school to learn a profession, or to a job. I was one of the few who stayed with the social movement, or the movement for social change. I'm still there.

Q: In these initial meetings, what did you bring to those meetings? Did you have any sense of the traditional women's peace movements at all? Or the women's movements at all?

Weiss: I don't think I knew it, then. And I didn't study gender in university. I'm not sure that gender studies was in universities in the '50s. Not until what year?

Q: Well, it was, but it was all men gender!

Weiss: That's a good point. [laughter] So no, I did not know women's history at that time.

Q: Had you ever heard—

Weiss: I only learned about Bertha von Suttner recently.

Q: Yes.

Q: Had you ever even heard of [Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom] WILPF?

The Women's International—

Weiss: Oh, yes.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That we knew, because that's why we created WSP. For some reason, Dagmar, who started, she was absolutely the point person who started Women Strike for Peace, WSP, decided not to join WILPF. WILPF brought baggage, political baggage. We were interested in doing one thing, just getting rid of atomic bombs.

Q: What kind of baggage did they bring?

Weiss: I think they brought political baggage. They were party members, and I don't remember everything. But I know we wanted to start fresh. The two organizations existed parallel, side by side. But we distinguished between them, and Women Strike attracted—we never counted, but there were thousands of women across the country who participated at the local level in Women Strike chapters. Twice, we splintered. The first time was when the Vietnam War started to break out in the mid-'60s, when the strategic hamlets were happening.
When Cardinal [Francis J.] Spellman was given a check for $10,000 to go and hire the South Korean army to go in our place, to South Vietnam. Women Strike women split because some of them wanted to stay with the disarmament issue. The majority of us wanted to get involved in the anti-war issue. That splinter lasted for a few years, and everybody eventually came into the anti-war movement. That was very important for me, as a national figure in Women Strike, and a lot of interesting things happened as a result.

Q: You were on the side—

Weiss: Of the anti-war.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Right.

Q: The Vietnam War, that we consider, that we have to move toward concentration on the war.

Weiss: Right. And on July 4th, 1969, we met with the Vietnamese women in Canada on our most patriotic holiday. We had a huge number of women from the United States going up to Canada. We were barred first by the Canadian customs officials, and somehow negotiated our way in, I can't remember how that happened. But Mrs. Benjamin—Mrs. Dr. Spock was with us, and an African American mother of a young man who was killed in Vietnam. Helen Boston. We met
with the Vietnamese women there. And that's when they said to me, "Will you come to Vietnam, and bring two women?" So that—

Q: Let's see how far we've moved. When you said—

Weiss: Well, we can't stay in 1961 forever!

Q: No, but you said there were two splits.

Weiss: Right.

Q: The first split was over the Vietnam War versus a much more generalized disarmament.

Weiss: Right. And then I'll tell you about the second split?

Q: Second split.

Weiss: OK. The second split was a few years later when a number of us in Women Strike realized that we couldn't grow, unless we adopted a domestic issue as well, agenda; and unless we reached out to women from the religious community, and women from the African American community. So we adopted the name Jeannette Rankin. She was the first American woman member of Congress. Unfortunately, she voted both against the First World War and the Second
World War, and none of us were ideological pacifists. Nuclear pacifists, yes; but not other kinds of formal pacifism.

Q: That contrasts, say, the Quakers, or people—

Weiss: Right. We were not Quakers.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We were not anti-Quakers, certainly.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But we supported the Second World War. And we talked about just wars. The Jeannette Rankin brigade started with four or—[interruption]

I'm sorry. So, the Jeannette Rankin brigade was named for Jeannette Rankin. The object was to bring together women from the religious community, which we did; women from the African American community, which we did; and talk about: “End the war in Vietnam, and racism and poverty at home.” So, that became the dominant issue in one sentence. We had a demonstration in Washington where we were all together, black and white, Catholic and Protestant and Jewish. I don't know if we were Muslim-conscious then. Probably not. The Jeannette Rankin brigade was terrific. We met with Jeannette in Congress, she was still there. We got press. It wasn't
sustainable. Why, I don't know. But neither was Women Strike for Peace sustainable. I mean, after the war was over, everything went either back, or to new places.

Q: Yes, I was trying to look for the definite end to the Jeannette Rankin brigade, but I couldn't find a moment where that happened.

Weiss: I don't know if there was a moment. I think it petered out.

Q: Get back—

Weiss: But we made new friends.

Q: But, getting back now to the Washington march, it was a march to the capital, rather than just a march in the city.

Weiss: That's right.

Q: Which, of course, was against the law.

Weiss: But we didn't have a license, permit?

Q: No. There was a court case.
Weiss: Oh, there was a court—you're very smart! If I had read my own history, I would know about that, but I haven't! [laughs]

Q: The capital police posed a limit.

Weiss: That's right.

Q: Which was appealed, and lost in court. So, there was a limit beyond which you could not go.

Weiss: Right.

Q: So the rally was held, and then afterwards, there was a conference. Do you recall the—

Weiss: I have a photograph of Coretta [Scott] King and Jeanette Rankin. It's a terrible photograph taken with a very old, small camera, and me and Amy sitting at a dais, in a hotel, I think. Probably in a hotel, and we were talking.

Q: Do you remember that meeting?

Weiss: Not very well.

Q: It's a vivid moment in the history of the women's movement.
Weiss: Really? Tell me why.

Q: Because it was the first confrontation that many women in Women Strike for Peace had—

Weiss: Ever had.

Q: —with the second wave of feminists.

Weiss: Oh, really? The stockings, whatever they were called?

Q: Well, there were women there who were arguing that the issue was patriarchy.

Weiss: Right. Well, now we're smart, and we know that patriarchy plays a role.

Q: And in that conference, they, a number of women, organized a group that split off.

Weiss: Oh, of course. That I remember.

Q: And carried out of burial of traditional woman in Arlington Cemetery, or moved to. Do you recall that at all?

Weiss: No, because I wasn't with them. But I recall there was a split. A splinter.
Q: You don't recall your reaction to that?

Weiss: No. Well, I didn't go with them.

Q: That's one of the most vivid parts of Amy's book.

Weiss: Oh, really?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I read that book a long time ago.

Q: Because it was the first time, she was quite shocked by these women, and she said it was a very—a turning point in the history—

Weiss: Well, we all, actually, resented is the right word? Didn't like their interference. I know a group of—I can't say feminists, because we were all feminists. We didn't call ourselves feminists yet, but we did, later.

Q: No, but—

Weiss: But they were very radical.
Q: These people did—the radical feminists, right.

Weiss: Right. Exactly.

Q: This was the first time you met the radical feminists.

Weiss: Right. They tried to interfere in Canada at one point, at some of the meetings with the Vietnamese women and the Vietnamese men, and were very shocked, because they didn't have radical feminists in Vietnam. So, they didn't have that experience at all.

Q: Was that the meeting in which someone raised the issue of what happens with lesbians in Vietnam?

Weiss: In Vietnam? Probably. We really objected to that. I mean, we were protecting the Vietnamese women from them, I guess. But you know, I don't think that became a huge thing in life for me. They were there, but we kept doing our thing. So, those were the two splits. The first one to drop disarmament in favor of anti-war, the second one to—we didn't drop Women Strike. We just brought Women Strike as much as we could into the Jeannette Rankin brigade. The women that we met with then became lifelong friends. I remember Anne [McGrew] Bennett, who was the wife of the president of Union Theological Seminary. I can't remember too many other names. But in any event, that's when I first met, I think, Maxine Waters, whom I spent time with afterwards. All of that cascaded into Women for Meaningful Summits [WMS], Women in International Security [WIIS], all of these other women's groups that I played a role in.
Q: Let's stick to the movement, the anti-war movement. Starting with the Jeannette Rankin brigade, that you said it was organized, and you wanted to bring in new constituencies. There were religious women. What role did you think—how did you relate to the religious—I don't want to say element, because it was such a strong part of the peace movement. But the religious impulse within the peace movement?

Weiss: We had enormous respect for them, because we recognized how much of an enormous impact they could have on public opinion, and because they were nice women. So, we had a woman from the Jewish Women's Congress, there's another word missing from there between Jewish and Women. National Congress of Jewish Women.

Q: Jewish women, yes.

Weiss: I think something like that. We had a woman who was very active in the United Methodist Church. We had a woman who was the wife of the Union Theological Seminary president, and others. We really worked together. We were very respectful of each other. We organized in consensus fashion. They were important, and as a consequence of all of that, I became a delegate of the World Council of Churches [WCC] to the Nairobi—to the 1985 Women's Forum. I went to the Beijing Women's Forum also, in 1995, but it wasn't—it was as a delegate of the International Peace Bureau [IPB]. The Nairobi meeting was very important in my development as—
Q: That's who the religious group is.

Weiss: Right. But that was religious, because I was representing the WCC.

Q: Back to the religious grouping. The religious grouping was made up of some very different kinds of characters. Were you aware of those differences, say, between the Quaker Peace Groups and the Catholic anti-war movement?

Weiss: Well, the Catholic anti-war movement was the pacifist movement.

Q: Yes, it was the pacifist movement. But it was—

Weiss: Yes, and it was radical pacifist.

Q: —much more activist, much more, you know—the Medea, Pennsylvania, when they broke in.

Weiss: Right. That's an important point that you raise. We opposed civil disobedience, but we didn't oppose them, the civil disobedient people. My role very frequently was to make demonstrations safe for women and families. I wanted to see families come to demonstrations, and they would be put off if there was going to be CD, civil disobedience. Or, at least if the civil disobedience wasn't going to be separated, somehow—and I had a hard time persuading the mostly-men organizers of those national demonstrations. I remember once going to a meeting in the city with another woman from Great Neck, who was representing Women Strike for Peace,
and the two of us wouldn't let them go forward in the conversation, until they could assure us that it would be safe for families. That was an important contribution, I think, and I think it helped make the demonstrations grow.

We certainly didn't have any—you're not going to like this—on June 12th, 1982, in Central Park, when we came back to disarmament. That was the major anti-nuclear demonstration, where we had a million people. We never would have had a million people if there was going to be civil disobedience.

Q: Yes. And increasing as the '60s wore on, especially within the student movement. And actually, some of the more radical men's movements, there was a conscious attempt to provoke the police. A conscious attempt to provoke police action.

Weiss: Some of us thought those were police people moving in on us.

Q: Next time they'd—

Weiss: We were aware of FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] interference. Very much so. When we had the Ring Around the Congress, where Joan Baez and I were kind of central characters, we definitely had interference. Do you remember that at all? Ring Around the Congress?

Q: Oh, yes. Well—
Weiss: Am I allowed to go there now? [laughs]

Q: Yes! You can go to the Ring Around the Congress, because that's still within the purview of—

Weiss: Totally. It was pouring rain, and all of a sudden—

Q: First, what was the goal of it?

Weiss: The goal was to get enough women together who, holding hands, could ring the congress the building, which is quite large in Washington.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I yelled out, when the last woman came to me, and I was at the microphone, "We've rung the congress!" Joan was with me. It was an amazing feat. The whole thing was to stop the war in Vietnam. But the night before, we were threatened that anybody who came into Washington would have to pay a tax, "a poll tax," and we were told that it came from the African American community, saying this. This threw us into a tizzy!

Q: Yes.
Weiss: We had a meeting in the basement, or in the ground floor of a motel the day or the night before. It was pouring rain, they were predicting rain forever, and roads would be closed. And we had this threat.

Q: How did it come to you?

Weiss: A message. I can't remember how. But somehow, we all were told that this was the demand. It didn't occur to anyone yet that this was a hoax, and that it was something that the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] or the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], or one of the DIAs [Defense Intelligence Agency] was putting out to try to stop our demonstration. It showed how strong we were. [laughing] So that was a very huge almost-interruption, because we decided to go ahead, and there was no tax. But that took a lot of work, to make that decision.

Q: But it also speaks—

Weiss: Because we were legitimately scared.

Q: Yes. But it also speaks to a certain time in the movement, when more and more, the agitation for black participation had turned into black power, and you know, the Chicago meeting where they wanted half of all the delegation would be black. There was, at that moment in time within the African American community, the kind of—

Weiss: The split with black power movement, yes.
Q: —that would make it logical that there would be that kind of a demand.

Weiss: That's true.

Q: So, it also speaks to a moment in the history of the movement.

Weiss: That's absolutely true. It wasn't smooth sailing for twenty years, or more. It still isn't.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But to their credit, the women went forward. It was a great demonstration.

Q: Yes. Again, moving back to the religious aspect of the movement, from your conversation—the impression I have is that you're much more attuned to the peace movement within the established denominations. There's a denomination—

Weiss: When did Clergy and Laymen, originally called Clergy and Laymen Concerned About the War in Vietnam, that was early. That was Dick Fernandez [Rev. Richard R. Fernandez]. He and I became very good colleagues. We're friends to this very day. Then they changed their name to Clergy and Laity. They were a very important organization. Originally mostly male, yes. They had full-page ads in the New York Times against the war. We worked closely with them. Then we

She went on a delegation to Saigon during the war, and got maced, or sprayed. Pepper-sprayed, by the local police in Saigon? I said that with a question mark, because who else might have been there? But they were an anti-war delegation. She was a heroine. She was just a remarkable person. Even today, in the elevator of my office building, the Loretto women greet me very warmly, and I them. These are lasting friendships.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: When you—

Q: Now, another aspect, which was one aspect of Women Strike in the early days, but then appears later in a lot of the Vietnam things, is the particular role of the political sectarians. You know, the representatives of the—

Weiss: They played a role.

Q: The duBois clubs, or the various Trotskyist groups, later the Maoist groups, etc. What—

Weiss: There was always one guy, Arnold [Johnson], who proudly represented himself as a member of the Communist Party. And because of that one guy, the attackers, who were many,
accused us of being communist-run, communist-led, communist-infiltrated. You know, there was one man. And he was kind of a sad-sack, as I recall. None of the organizations that we've mentioned so far were communist-run, communist-led or communist-infiltrated. There was room for anyone to come in, as long as they agreed with the purpose of the organization. And the culture, I'm not going to use the word "rules," because we didn't have rules.

But if the culture said no CD [civil disobedience], then you all agree. You carry it out. If the cultures agreed on the purpose of the demonstration. We created the Committee of Liaison. I'm going to go back. As a result of the July 4th, 1969 meeting in Canada with the Vietnamese women inviting me and two others, Ethel Taylor from Philadelphia and Madeline Duckles from California, to come to Vietnam, after the famous demonstration that I ran together with Peter Yarrow, and an organizing committee. I never did anything alone. That was on November 15, 1969, in Washington. That was important because it was led by Democratic and Republican senators. [Senator Charles] Goodell, from New York, was the Republican. And [Senator George] McGovern from—

Q: South Dakota.

Weiss: South Dakota, a Democrat. The two of them literally held hands! I think it was the last time in the history of America [laughter] that a Democrat and Republican senator held hands.

Q: Well, not really—[laughs]
Weiss: Almost!

Q: Well, Tip O'Neill and Ronald Reagan were an odd couple.

Weiss: Yes. Anyway, it was an important demonstration in terms of—we were told that it was a turning point in public opinion.

Q: Right.

Weiss: It grew the public opinion against the war. Unfortunately, it ended with tear gas, not because we did anything to provoke it. Who knows what provoked it? In any event, I left for Vietnam after that, with a memorandum to the Vietnamese women, saying that the president was using prisoners of war as the reason for perpetuating the war, and claiming that our prisoners were being tortured, and therefore, we had to keep bombing the north. Well, if we keep bombing the north, we'll get more prisoners of war, because the bombers were shot down by the SAMs, the Surface to Air Missiles. As a result of that memo that I brought, and our conversations with the women in Hanoi, in North Vietnam, I came back and we formed the Committee of Liaison with soldiers detained in North Vietnam.

Q: Now, question. Do you want to pursue that whole issue, or do you want to go back to—you see how fast we've moved from the past?

Weiss: Well, we have to! It's a long life, and it's got a lot in it!
Q: But we've got a lot of time!

Weiss: OK.

Q: We've got a lot of time. And that's such a special event, the prisoner's exchange. There's so many complicated aspects to it, that I would really like to say this—

Weiss: And a major success of civil society.

Q: Yes. And I'd really like to save it so—

Weiss: OK.

Q: Rather than—

Weiss: I'll do whatever you say.

Q: —as something that is on the tailgate of another conversation. So if either one of them ever gets—

Weiss: Right. But everything has its consequence.
Q: But what? We’ve got a lot of time.

Weiss: OK—I mean, the outcome of that demonstration and our meeting in Canada was the establishment of this committee.

Q: Yes—

Weiss: And my testifying in Chicago.

Q: Yes, but the topic really was, religious people and sectarians, within the peace movement.
And you're—

Weiss: So I worked together with Dick Fernandez on that.

Q: I have a vision of you as a person coming out of a certain kind of organizational politics, and a certain kind of personal politics, deeply informed by Women Strike for Peace. At the intersection where you meet, a set of traditional bodies, whose powers are quite different.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: And there has to be a set of negotiations whereby you begin to understand them, and they maybe, maybe not, understand where you're coming from.
Weiss: Well, I may not remember the how, but in 1972, I took an office in the Church Center for the U.N. to put Friendshipment in there, which was the organization that we founded after the war, as the war was ending. The phrase, which I think I coined, of mixing—of connecting friendship and shipment of goods to help repair the damage in Vietnam. I'm still in that building, Church Center for the U.N., which is owned by Methodist women. I speak at many of their Methodist events in the chapel. So these have been lasting relationships.

Q: But the question we were getting around was that your own religious involvement had been with the major denominations.

Weiss: Oh, yes.

Q: Yes. The Methodists, the Presbyterians—

Weiss: The Jews.

Q: The Episcopals, the Jews. It's traditional denominations.

Weiss: Right.

Q: Not Evangelical.

Weiss: No. And not Southern Baptist.
Q: Yes. Yes. But when you reach out to the African American community, you are going to meet a set of preachers, a set of people whose religious motivation is not similar to the one that you have traditionally—

Weiss: So, I met them, who were all men preachers, when I went to Riverside Church in 1978. And [William Sloane] Bill Coffin would have a Tuesday morning breakfast.

Q: But you met them earlier through [Dr.] Martin Luther King and James Bevel.

Weiss: That's true.

Q: James Bevel represents a very strong wing of the evangelical Baptists.

Weiss: I know, but I'm trying to remember if he brought that to the table. James Bevel was an organizer. I mean, that's what I remember of Jim. Also, the man who ran the Welfare organization, whose body was found in the Potomac. Wiley? Was that his name? With a "W."

Q: Wyatt Walker?

Weiss: No, not Wyatt Walker. Not Wyatt.

Q: No?
Weiss: Wyatt was a New York preacher. I'll remember. A man who ran the Welfare something organization. You were thinking of Wyatt T. Walker.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: No, he was a New York preacher. Anyway, so I met the men preachers. You have to understand that I didn't bring religion to the table. Everybody wants to say, "You're probably an agnostic." I think I'm an atheist. But I don't make a big issue of it.

Q: But you were much more comfortable with the main line denominations than the—

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Would that be the fairest thing to say?

Weiss: Yes, of course.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Sure. Anyway, what do you want to talk about? [laughing]
Q: Also meeting a set of traditional people who have been involved in the peace movement, and new people. What was your relationship to the student movement? Your personal relationship and Women Strike for Peace relationship?

Weiss: I have letters from the head of one student movement. Was there one? I don't remember.

Q: No.

Weiss: There were several. Inviting me to speak at their conference. His last name began with an "I." Why do I remember that much? Anyway, I did that. I spoke on campuses during the Vietnam War, lots. Student movement—we always had students in the demonstrations. They were very important. And I loved talking on campuses. I spoke in Teach-Ins. Teach-Ins started at Michigan University, I think, was one of the first?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Weiss: And they were very important. I mean, we literally depended on education to build a movement, because a well-educated person is our best citizen, was one of my phrases. But formal relations, a representative? No. I think it was not formal.

Q: Get into some of these questions when we get into the Pentagon march, because that's when, obviously, it splits into two, really two different actions. One at the Lincoln Memorial and one at the Pentagon, and they represent—
Weiss: That was the Mobilization.

Q: Yes. Yes. In October of '67?

Weiss: It's the only demonstration that I can remember that I missed, because I had whiplash.

Q: Ah!

Weiss: From a car accident, I guess, of course. I was not able to do it. I was in a ring around my neck.

Q: I was on the West Coast. We're both victims of Norman Mailer now. We have to rely on him.

Weiss: He wrote the story?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It's the only demonstration I ever missed, and I used to say to people that, "You get a demerit for missing a demonstration." So that was my demerit. I didn't have a role, except for these meetings in New York beforehand, where we kept insisting that it had to be safe for families. The split created the safe area.
Q: Now, I had been told there was this remarkable day when Bella Abzug and Jerry Rubin went at it over the tactics of that—do you recall any of that?

Weiss: You have to ask Bella, Bella's spirit about that.

Q: Yes, no.

Weiss: Oh—

Q: When I read that, I just imagined that that would have been a remarkable confrontation.

Weiss: But I do remember in one demonstration in Central Park when Abbie Hoffman tried to get onto the speaker's platform, and I only had to shake my head to whoever was the security person not to let him up. But we became kind of friends afterward.

Q: Why didn't you want him to go up?

Weiss: Because that was not going to be helpful.

Q: Did you know what he was going to do or say?

Weiss: Well, he represented a kind of whacky offshoot, the Yippies. That was not what we were interested in.
Q: Yes. You became friends afterwards?

Weiss: Well, he hung out in Long Island with his mother, probably. He came to our house once, where I had planted a kitchen garden. He taught me how to eat zucchini flowers, and how to fry them. I don't know, why do I remember that? Then he once tried to attract my attention when he came to, I think, the Chile event in Madison Square Garden, and he was in some kind of a not very effective mask. I refused to have anything to do with him. That's all I remember about him, except when I testified in Chicago. But then I'm going to 1971, and you won't like that!

[laughter] It was 1970—

Q: I don't necessarily want to keep a chronological order, but there has to be some other kind of logic to it. We stay with a topic for a while, and explore a certain amount into it.

Weiss: Oh, we were talking about Abbie, so—

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Abbie was at Chicago at trial.

Q: But that was part of the discussion of the relationship with the student movement.
Weiss: My relationship, I think, was, I was a friend and a speaker, and we didn't have organizational—that I can remember.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But they were a member of the coalition of the larger movement.

Q: Right. Now, when you represented, or you came from Women Strike for Peace, is it fair to say you represented Women Strike for Peace at those meetings?

Weiss: Always.

Q: Always. When I read about some of those meetings and look at the minutes, there's this enormous discussion about the wording of—the placards, or the signs, which were to be carried. It's kind of difficult for me to understand what those issues were. How did you understand those issues? Because it seems to be major, major part of the discussions of most of these conferences. Why was it important that the signs say this, or the other thing?

Weiss: I think there were, I'm pretty sure, there were those of us who wanted to be as American as we could be in our language, in our image, and not some marginal political or, whatever group. Some of us spoke more clearly than others. We weren't going to mix up lots of issues. We wanted to end the war, so we had to say, "Stop the war now," or, "The war is not good for children and other living things," which was a very powerful phrase that was born in California
that we adopted. I guess that's why we had those discussions. Also, we'd never done it before. You know, for everybody, there was a first. We used to marvel at demonstrations, three or four down the line, for which there were still people who had never gone to a demonstration before.

Q: Actually, that's a later question I wanted to ask, but it is quite true that each demonstration was larger and larger and larger.

Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: Yet, at the same time, some people must have been weary of demonstrations. "Oh, another demonstration, and another demonstration."

Weiss: Not yet. I think we held the tension and the dynamic, and the importance of demonstrating until the war ended. Because then, we had a party. "The war is over" party in Central Park with Phil Ochs [whispers] and me.

Q: Pardon?

Weiss: And me.

Q: Yes!
Weiss: We had a group, a big group, of organizers. And that was on Mother's Day. May 11th, I remember, 1975.

Q: Let me make a note of that, and we'll get back to it.

Weiss: It's called "The War is Over Rally," it was wonderful!

Q: One of the—

Weiss: We also insisted on having music. You know, we brought a kind of creative atmosphere to everything we did. We would sing, we would have singers in our group, musicians. We cared about our dress. I remember one demonstration on 5th Avenue where I arrived in a cherry red suit, and one of my fellow members of Women Strike for Peace said, "Your lipstick clashes!" [laughter] I mean, that was the worst put-down I'd had in years! [laughter] But that was what happened! Those were some of the crazy things that happened.

Q: Well, Amy Swerdlow says that you were feminine, but not feminists.

Weiss: Well, I wonder what feminist would mean, then? We were emerging feminists, for sure.

Q: Well, she was talking about the later ideology of feminism.

Weiss: She wouldn't have—exactly. She wouldn't have done that ten years later. Right.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: She didn't have an opportunity, ten years later. [laughs]

Q: After studying feminist history, et cetera, becoming—in a sense, it becomes an I-ism.

Weiss: Right. Of course.

Q: There are two things that I have to cover today. And one would be the 5th Avenue Parade Committee, and the other would be your beginning—your trips abroad.

Weiss: There were many.

Q: Which way do you want to go?

Weiss: Abroad.

Q: OK. What was the first trip abroad you took for Women Strike for Peace?

Weiss: Sixty-nine.

Q: Sixty-nine, was it? You didn't go to the—Geneva?
Weiss: No. But I helped to organize Geneva, and I brought—oh, what was her name? Who wrote for a *Red Book*, wonderful writer. Vivian Cadden. I made sure that she went, and I got Coretta to go, Scott King. That was a very important delegation. I still had three little kids at home, and a husband who worked hard. So—

Q: Did you go to the Hague conference at all?

Weiss: I went to Belgium, Brussels, but when was that? It was a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]—that was a NATO activity.

Q: Yes, that was for the multi-national—

Weiss: Multilateral Force [MLF].

Q: Multilateral Force, right.

Weiss: We did that in New York. I remember wearing a sailor hat. All of us wore little white sailor hats, and demonstrated in front of a ship in the Hudson pier, in the Hudson River, at a pier. That was about the Multilateral Force, MLF. But I don't remember the year.

Q: [laughs] But you do—
Weiss: But I remember the politics.

Q: Yes. But you went to Brussels, you said?

Weiss: I went to Brussels, and to The Hague.

Q: Yes, right, because the measure of focus was a Hague conference where there were representatives from many, many other nations.

Weiss: Right.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: You know, I have three or four passports that are full! [laughs]

Q: Well, it would be interesting just to go through, look at—

Weiss: I think I probably have most of them.

Q: There's a story behind every one of those images.

Weiss: It's amazing, the travel that we did. I was in London, I spoke in the House of Commons. I was in an anti-nuclear demonstration with Peggy—she was very famous, she was fantastic.
Peggy Duff. D-U-F-F. She became a very good colleague in the prisoner of war issue. We can come back to that later. There was a wonderful woman Member of Parliament, Ann Kerr. She was a Member of Parliament, and there was a photograph of us—oh, maybe we can look at the Memo—walking together, leading a demonstration. That would have been about Vietnam or the MLF, or—probably Vietnam. Then when she came to America, she stayed with us, and she went on a speaking tour here. I brought a lot of women members of parliament to Riverside when I was there. That would be sometime between '78 and '88. I travelled for WSP before 1969 to London and Brussels.

Q: 1969. We'll say that when we talked about the pri—because that's a prelude to the prisoners.

Weiss: Yes, it's a very important trip.

Q: But then it was—

Weiss: It was under bombs, don't forget. Something I don't think I would let my children do today, or my grandchildren. But my husband didn't keep me from going because of the safety issue, and I am forever grateful for that.

Q: Actually, this is kind of personal, but let's talk about that for a moment. You know, what was your husband’s reaction to all of this?

Weiss: Peter never said, "No." It's—
Q: Now, he was very much a movement person, himself.

Weiss: Well, not then.

Q: Not then? When was the lawyer's—

Weiss: Well, he did start—he worked with [Joseph Harold] (Joe) Crown and Bob Boehm on the Lawyer's Committee on Vietnam, whatever that was called.

Q: Right. That was '65, wasn't it?

Weiss: No, not yet.

Q: Not yet?

Weiss: Or, Peter wasn't, yet.

Q: No.

Weiss: But anyway, he moved in to the movement, obviously. But in the beginning, it was me, solo. He let me go. It was wonderful, and I'm grateful to this very day, and that's why it's 58 years.
Q: Who took care of the kids?

Weiss: Sometimes we had young people, a couple, college couple, who was the daughter of a former teacher of mine at Fieldston. Sometimes we had a sleep-in housekeeper. That was more frequent in those days than it is today. I think those two options.

Q: Have you ever sat down—

Weiss: My mother took them sometimes, but she didn't live with them.

Q: Have you ever sat down and speculated about what their lives would have been like if they had had a kind of stay-at-home mother? Or, what was the effect on them? How did they grow up in that?

Weiss: At my fiftieth birthday, my son, who was then thirty years younger, so he was in his twenties, got up at a big fiftieth birthday party and said, "We used to have to wait for mom to come home from Vietnam to get picked up at school." [laughter] I like that story very much! But he also said, "If we had known why she was there, or what she was doing, we might not have protested." [laughs] They were part of everything I did. They licked stamps, they stuffed envelopes. They came with me as infants on my hip, two at a time. Two hips, I had. Maybe that's why mine hurt now. To meetings. They were forever eating Rusks, is that what it was called? Those hard biscuits that you give kids when they're teething? Holland Rusks.
Q: Right, yes.

Weiss: How did I remember that?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: And bagels. Bagels were very common. So, they were involved with me. They were never kept out. They may have learned how to use a mimeograph machine, also. I'd have to ask them. They marched with us. I have a photograph of a march, I have no idea which one it was. Tamara [Weiss] looks like she's a teenager, my middle daughter, and my husband and me with umbrellas, carrying signs. I think the picture was published, somewhere. My problem. All the things to try to find! But they were engaged. That was very important.

I used to leave casseroles. We used to make casseroles then, and it was before the age of microwaves. Everything was before! [laughs] I would make casserole dishes. I left ten, I think, for one trip, with directions on top. Preheat the oven, 350 degrees, and we froze them. Then they would take them out and cook them for dinner. But I think the one trip that I made only ten for, I got stuck in Vietnam because of the floods. My trip lasted two weeks, instead of one plus. So, I don't know what they did for food, after that. I guess they became self-sufficient.

Q: You were living in Riverdale then?
Weiss: Yes.

Q: Did they grow up politically?

Weiss: Well, our son is chief of staff for one of the best members of Congress, and has been for the last twenty-two years.

Q: Who is that?

Weiss: George Miller, from California.

Q: Oh, right. Yes, yes, yes, yes. Who is retiring.

Weiss: Well, so is Danny [Daniel Weiss].

Q: A real loss.

Weiss: Danny's leaving. It's a huge loss. Danny started with him on the committee for the interior, or labor, or education, maybe.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: And now, Danny's daughter, who is entering her second year at Scripps College in California, is going to be an intern for George Miller this summer!

Q: [laughs] And the other two?

Weiss: Judy [Weiss] got her DSc which is a doctor of science—

Q: That's OK.

Weiss: —from Johns Hopkins in public health policy, but she also worked for George Miller, in her college years—

Q: Oh!

Weiss: —on one of his sub-committees. She may not be political in a kind of traditional sense, but her DNA shows. I mean, she's got wonderful values! They all three have wonderful values. They’ve translated it into their own thing, into doing their own work. So, she worked for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health for a number of years. She taught at Boston University for some time, in public health policy. Now she takes care of her adopted son from Guatemala, who's wonderful.

Q: Given all of that, how did you respond to this, the current ideology that children need the mother at home, or they don't develop properly, you know—
Weiss: Well, they had me at home when I was at home.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I was very much at home. They were engaged with whatever I did. We traveled together, and we took them with us in the car on a car trip through Europe when they were studying castles of Europe, of the Netherlands or France. We rented a car and drove through Netherlands and Belgium and France. Then when I got my FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] papers—you don't like me doing this, but I think it's wonderful—and read about our being followed on that trip by one of the IAs, meaning Intelligence Agencies, and they said, and, "She," and, "Subject," which was me, "Is in a car crossing the Netherlands-Belgium border with two children.” Danny was furious, because he was in the car, too! But he was so small that he couldn't be seen through the rearview mirror, or however they saw us. [laughter]

Q: Well, hmm. I'd like to get to the 5th Avenue Parade Committee, if we could.

Weiss: OK. [laughs]

Q: We have plenty of time.
Weiss: But I will say, for your record, that I went to many meetings in Europe during those years with Edward [P.] Thompson and meetings in Spain, meetings in Italy. I walked from Perugia to Assisi. I spoke in London. I mean, I have a big passport full of stamps—

Q: This is outside of Women Strike for Peace?

Weiss: No, I was always a Women Strike representative.

Q: Oh, but this was after '69? You said the first time you were abroad—

Weiss: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Q: —was '69.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: So, this is all after '69?

Weiss: Yes. Then it was International Peace Bureau, IPB. But the two sort of smushed into each other.

Q: Yes. I don't want to push you too much, but we can end now.
Weiss: I can go for another half hour.

Q: OK, terrific. Tell me about the demonstration in New York that led to the 5th Avenue Parade Committee, [laughs] and you were involved in that?

Weiss: I guess so. But it wasn't a friendly situation, as I recall.

Q: That's why I want to talk about it.

Weiss: [laughs] Oh, you do?

Q: Yes. Because you talked about friendly—

Weiss: There was a lot of tension among the leaders.

Q: —this is not a friendly one. Right.

Weiss: I don't know why. I don't know what it was, but there was a lot of tension. I remember that the mayor was [Edward] Koch. And he used to have a—

Q: What—

Weiss: Wasn't it Edward Koch? He wasn't mayor then?
Q: No, it would have been [John] Lindsay.

Weiss: Lindsay?

Q: Oh, it's way back.

Weiss: OK.

Q: You know, the first—

Weiss: Well, then Koch wrote a piece about the 5th Avenue Parade Committee later. He accused the whole committee and the whole parade and the whole demonstration of being communist-inspired. He was very nasty, Mr. Koch.

Q: I'll have to look that up.

Weiss: It was in a glossy magazine [Playboy], as I recall.

Q: I'll find it. But there are a couple of interesting aspects to that. First of all, the attempt to reach out and form a coalition among all the New York groups. Do you recall what the tensions were about? Who didn't you like? Who did you like, who didn't you like? Let's make it intensely personal.
Weiss: Ooh! Well, let's put it this way, if I didn't like them then, it didn't last.

Q: Oh, that's a life of activism.

Weiss: But that's important, because what people didn't like—I mean, "like" may not be the right word to use. It might be that we really had deep disagreements about method, about speakers. There was no sense of gender balance then, and we insisted on women speaking. And they would—I guess Bella was always acceptable as a speaker, she was quite rowdy. I am literally, honestly blocking—I'm not necessarily blocking—I'm just really not remembering those details. I don't think that parade committee was hugely important in the whole evolution of demonstrations. The important committees were the spring mobilization, the national mobilization that brought people together nationally in Washington, mostly.

Q: I was on the West Coast, what I'm trying to—I have an idea that, again, removing from a situation of more or less informal contacts, and increasing formalization. And all over the country, there are these regional groupings that are beginning to work out coalitions in Los Angeles and San Francisco and in New York, and in Cleveland, and in Chicago. And in New York, where you were, the focus was the 5th Avenue Parade Committee.

Weiss: Right.

Q: Which then, later, became one of the elements of the larger mobilization.
Weiss: But not as—

Q: Not as the Parade Committee.

Weiss: Not as the Parade Committee.

Q: No, but—

Weiss: It was the leaders from the Parade Committee who became the leaders of the national movement.

Q: Right. It's like you're getting your spurs on a local level for the national stage.

Weiss: Yes, that's a good way of putting it.

Q: That's why I'm interested in the Parade Committee and you.

Weiss: That's possible. What year was the Parade Committee?

Q: Sixty-five?

Weiss: That early?
Q: Spring, oh, no no no no no no no no no no. Sixty-seven.

Weiss: Yes. Must have been.

Q: Yes. Yes, yes. No, the Parade Committee was earlier. Sixty-seven. The April '67 is the big one in New York and in San Francisco.

Weiss: The U.N., yes.

Q: Yes. But the Parade Committee—

Weiss: Was before that.

Q: —was '66 sometime. And it was a surprise to most people how many people turned out.

Weiss: Sure. But maybe that was because Women Strike for Peace made sure that it would be safe for families! [laughter] I mean, that was really a very important contribution. I like to think that I had a pretty good role to play in that. I really felt strongly about that.

Q: Who were your allies in the coalition? Who would your allies have been to make it safer for families?
Weiss: The trade unions, the retail workers and the—

Q: 1199?

Weiss: Eleven ninety-nine. Hospital workers.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, what was the retail workers', David Livingston's union? Sixty-something?

Q: 65.

Weiss: 65. Very much my allies. We did a lot of organizing in David's office, in his building. And Clergy and Laity Concerned. I mean, that sticks out in my obviously not-terrific memory. They were my allies, our allies, of Women Strike.

Q: One last question. One last topic. A.J. Muste [Reverend Abraham Johannes Muste].

Weiss: He was a sweet old man. He went to get—

Q: Seems to be a very key character.

Weiss: I think he was already getting older.
Q: Older, of course. Yes.

Weiss: At that time. So, Dave Dellinger replaced him and his role. Muste and Dellinger co-chaired some meeting, I vaguely recall. I recall Muste going to Vietnam early. But I didn't know him personally.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: Dave and I knew each other very well, because we worked together. But I think Muste was, Muste and his role were replaced by Dave Dellinger.

Q: How did you get along with Dellinger?

Weiss: I spoke at his last birthday party in Vermont fondly of him. It was tense, because he was not used to having women play a leadership role, and I wasn't used to being bossed! [laughs] So, I guess that's a recipe for tension. But, you know, we were called by the Vietnamese one summer, 1972, come to Paris. He and I got on a plane together, flew immediately, and we were told we could come to Vietnam and bring home three prisoners of war. We did it. We had our moments, but we worked together. We had to. We did a lot of work. We were co-chairs of the Committee of Liaison together.
Q: Yes. But within the coalition, he would have been much more sympathetic to civil disobedience.

Weiss: Totally.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: And to his sort of—his friends.

Q: Right.

Weiss: So, we weren't married! You know? We were partners in a campaign to end a war that nobody wanted. We had our different ways. But we managed.

Q: Next time, we'll talk about the coalitions and moratoriums. And—

Weiss: It was the moratorium I can't talk about, because that was the different organization. The mobilization.

Q: Yes, yes, no no, I don't mean moratoriums. Mobilization. I meant the Mobe. Yes.

[END OF SESSION]
Q: Would you tell me your name, please?

Weiss: I'm still Cora Weiss.

Q: Still Cora Weiss, still West End Avenue in New York City?

Weiss: West End Avenue.

Q: Terrific. OK.

Weiss: I once said I would never move—I would never live on West End Avenue, it's interesting, the stereotypes.

Q: Now, last time, I said, why don't we start with what you're doing now, and go backward. So what is it that you're Skyping?

Weiss: First I had to be trained in Skyping, because I'd never Skyped before. So a young man came over and spent an hour with me, and I learned—
Q: Now, where did you find him?

Weiss: We have, Peter and I share a computer guru whose name is Matt-something. He has a team of himself and two other fellows. This man was kind of interesting; he's new to the team. He's an Iranian Jew and has recently moved to this country. Anyway, he came, and we opened the computer. And I learned how to Skype. It wasn't so difficult after all, and now I realize that I haven't Skyped before out of fear.

So, this gentleman came and taught me how to Skype, and I realized it was fear of learning a new technology, which is keeping me from learning—from advancing. So, Monday afternoon, I was a Skyper, and Tuesday morning at 8:00, I got a Skype call, is that what you call it? I don't even know the lingo—from The Hague. A group of women were sitting around the table from a dozen countries, organized by Cordaid, which is a Catholic funding agency for developing countries. But you don't have to be Catholic to work with them or to be helped by them. They have a group of remarkable young women who are smart and very, very helpful. They do leadership training for women.

So, there was a woman from Colombia, an African woman who said she was from The Hague, but when she said her name, I said, "Aren't you Kenyan?" She was amazed. "How do you know I'm Kenyan?" "Well, Auma Obama, who is the president's step-sister, but we say sister, has a daughter named Akinyi [phonetic]. Auma's a friend of mine, and she tells me about her daughter." "Oh," she said, "Akinyi?" My name is—" I said, "I know your name is Akinyi." Then we spoke a little Swahili.
So that got things off to a great start. The woman from Colombia is working with women's organizations on the peace process, which I care a great deal about, because it was a peace process begun two years ago in Cuba with Norway, Colombia, Cuba, I think there might be one more country, as the mentors, the facilitators for the process. There were no women. We were absolutely aghast, and we said to our Colombian friends, "You've got to have women at the table."

So she and I engaged in an interesting discussion about whether the women in Colombia who represent anti-racism, pro-peace, pro-reconciliation, want to be at that table, because they don't support either the government or the FARC [Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia], the rebels. The ELN [Ejército de Liberación Nacional] is not at the table yet, the third party. So I said, "Well, what are you doing about that?" "Well," she said, "We're meeting and creating mechanisms so that our demands for the peace process get communicated to the two women in the government who represent the government, and the one woman from the FARC who represents the FARC, so that they receive our message." I said, "That's absolutely brilliant, and it's a new, unique initiative which is very welcome. And we should make sure that we communicate that idea when the next peace process comes." I've been following peace processes since Ireland.

Q: These are the negotiations that are going around issues of peace in Colombia, internally?

Weiss: Around ending the violence.
Q: Violence.

Weiss: The violent conflict. But it has to do with more things. It has to do with agrarian reform. It has to do with, what do you do with the victims? What do you do with the prisoners? What do you do with reconciliation? How do you reconcile? So, she and I got talking, there are 20 women at the table, about introducing peace education, because who is going to implement the peace agreement? It'll be the teachers and the mothers, the people who do the educating of the next generation. So, that was wonderful. Then, all of a sudden, the Internet went down and I got—not panicked, but concerned, because it was my first Skype. The Skype sends you a message, and it says, "We're terribly sorry, the internet has gone down, and just hold still until we get it solved," which is wonderful! So, I figured the whole world is listening!

Q: [laughter] A couple of follow-ups now.

Weiss: Yes?

Q: I think it's the U.N. Resolution 1325?

Weiss: That's my—

Q: Does that have any application to this particular situation?
Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: In what way? Pull that out for me.

Weiss: Well, 1325, which I had a great deal to do with drafting, is a civil society vetted, drafted and lobbied-for resolution, and it got a unanimous agreement by the Security Council. It's celebrated every year on its anniversary, October 31. No other U.N. resolution is celebrated every year like that. We are working very hard to implement it around the world. There are forty-five countries that now have national action plans. When I was introduced at this telephone Skype meeting, she said to me, Lisa [phonetic], the facilitator, said, "Well, Cora, we just introduced you as the godmother of women, peace and security." So I told them they were giving me a little too much responsibility, but I do care about it very, very much. What it says, in a word, is, "Women must participate." Participation, participation, especially at peace-making tables. So, it also calls for prevention of violent conflict and protection of women and girls during violent conflict, the three P's.

Q: This would happen for every U.N. agency or program?

Weiss: It's addressed to the world.

Q: Ah!
Weiss: And the first paragraph says that women must be at every—not must—women should be at every level of decision-making, and at every level of governance, which means it applies to the mayor of New York bringing women into his government. It's very misused and confused, deliberately, by member states, who insist—

Q: In what ways?

Weiss: —that it should only apply to violent conflict, to situations of war. But the first paragraph doesn't even mention violent conflict. So, we go around trying to help the interpretation and the definition of it, and the application of it. It's an extraordinary resolution. It has now four or five daughters of—which don't include the participation angle as much, and which I think are not necessary, because it's just words, words, words, and what we need is action, action, action. And the resolution itself is very comprehensive. It's very historic, because until then, 2000, the Security Council virtually never uttered the word, "woman." In the famous Brahimi report [Report of the Panel on United Nation Peacekeeping Operations], which is like the Bible of the U.N. for development, and so forth, in the—

Q: How do you spell that?

Weiss: B-R-A-H-I—

Q: Ah.
Weiss: -M-I. He's the guy who just retired from being the U.N. Representative on Syria.

Q: Yes, that's right.

Weiss: Which we all welcomed.

Q: I knew I recognized the name.

Weiss: We welcomed.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I have nothing against aging, but if you can't keep up after a certain age, you should let the next generation take over. I'm very willing to do that. Anyway, 1325 is terrific. It's historic, and it's international law, because in the Charter of the U.N., Article 25 says that Security Council resolutions should be carried out by member states. Hans Corell, who was the lawyer for the U.N., I brought in to a breakfast meeting of civil society women, and the question on the table was, "Mr. Lawyer for the U.N., Hans, is this international law?" He pulled out the Charter from his pocket and he read Article 25. Because a lot of the women doubted that it had any oomph.

Q: When you say that you had something to do with 1325, what is that something?
Weiss: In 1999, at The Hague Appeal for Peace, a couple of hundred women got together, on their own, it wasn't a scheduled meeting, and talked about the fact that the Security Council had never mentioned women, and that the idea of women, peace and security had to become institutionalized. We considered a draft that a woman named Sanam Anderlini brought from International Alert in London. Fast forward, that—

Q: No, no, no, no, no.

Weiss: Don't go fast forward?

Q: No, no fast forward.

Weiss: Well, because [laughs], well, we had the—

Q: A leisurely pace.

Weiss: A leisurely pace. We had the meeting, a number of us got very excited about this idea. None of us had ever brought something to the U.N. We'd always take from the U.N., didn't bring to the U.N. None of us was representing a government. We were not member states. We were member constituents.

Q: Right.
Weiss: So, that was May of ‘99. In June of 2000, we gathered around the table at UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women], which was then the women's agency of the U.N. Now it's called "U.N. Women," and it represents a coalition of women's agencies. But UNIFEM, the United Nations "femme," in French, women's organization, so they had a big, almost-round, an oval table. It's very important, the shape of the table. We learned that from the Vietnam peace talks in 1969, I guess, 1970. No, later than that. Seventy-three. So we sat around the table. UNIFEM was the only U.N. agency at the table. There were probably twelve or fifteen of us from civil society, and I was one of them. We first had to iron out and make compromises about our own positions and demands, or what we call, "Our asks," which we did. We formulated an agreement not formally, but we created an agreement through compromise.

Q: Do you recall what kinds of compromises?

Weiss: That's a serious problem, because I had a big fight with the representative from Amnesty [International], I'll never forget it. But I can't remember what it was about. [laughter] She, I think, was only an intern at the time at AI [Amnesty International]. But because she represented such a powerful institution, she brought authority to the table. I mean, her views were taken seriously. But I can't remember what. So, we argued, we compromised, we discussed, we agreed. And UNIFEM brought a woman from the Namibian Mission to the U.N. who could help us learn Security Council language. The reason we picked Namibia is because Namibia was going to be the president of the Security Council in October, and we needed a friend. Namibia had just completed something called the Windhoek Declaration, which was a declaration about women and empowerment and rights. It was an important declaration in the history of women's rights.
This tall, wonderful woman came, I can't remember her name, and she helped us with Security Council language. And we began drafting. We drafted a draft for October, because Namibia would be president, Jamaica had a woman ambassador, and was on the Council, and Anwarul Chowdhury from Bangladesh was on the Council. So, we had three good friends, three feminists. We geared our effort to October. We had a draft ready. We went around the table, and assigned people to the different countries, the fifteen countries of the U.N., to, "Lobby them" on the draft. We sent the draft to Angela King. She was the Secretary General's gender advisor. She was from Jamaica. She took the draft and she gave it to her deputy, who was a young Russian man. The combination of “Russia,” culturally, politically, historically and “man” didn't bode well for us. He stayed up all night long, and he turned our draft into nineteen paragraphs. The only thing wrong with it—I was going to show it to you, but I didn't bring it to the table is that it never utters the word, "Shall." And that omission of demand is what created the doubts. He brought it to her in the morning, and she took it to the Security Council on the last day of Namibia's presidency.

And they had never seen anything like it before, and Anwarul Chowdhury made a terrific speech. He also made a terrific speech in March, on International Women's Day. So, we knew we had a solid friend. And basically, how could all these men and one or two women say no to women? We created kind of an embarrassing situation. Embarrassment is a very important form of diplomacy. I discovered that during the Vietnam War. They adopted it unanimously. So here's another doubt: They didn't vote, they adopted. That created yet another doubt in—

Q: What is that distinction?
Weiss: Well, it turns out not to be.

Q: Oh.

Weiss: But the women, who had no experience with U.N. resolutions or the Security Council, doubted that it was real, that it was as valuable as a resolution that would be voted. But again, Hans Corell came to our rescue and said, "Look at Article 25. The Security Council dealt with it, and now member states are required to carry it out." And so, we have. Even the United States came through in December of 2010, with a National Action Plan.

Q: Do you recall what nation you lobbied?

Weiss: Oh, that's a good question. Probably Jamaica, because I knew the ambassador, and she was a friend. Lucille Mair.

Q: Did you have any conversation with the Americans?

Weiss: No. I deliberately stayed away, because I didn't want them to turn me down. So, somebody who wasn't known to them went to see them.

Q: Yes. Who—I just can't—
Weiss: Who was the U.S. ambassador?

Q: I can't remember.

Weiss: I have to look it up. I have no idea. It could have been Madeleine Albright.

Q: Albright?

Weiss: In 2000? I don't know.

Q: Could have been. Yes, could have been.

Weiss: So, one day, I asked Madeleine Albright at a meeting at the Council on Foreign Relations, how come you don't implement 1325, which was adopted on October 31st? "Oh," she said, "Because it was adopted on Halloween."

Q: [laughs] What did she mean by that? Or, what did you think she meant by that?

Weiss: She didn't take it seriously.

Q: Ah.
Weiss: Anyway, it's been adopted. We have a National Action Plan in the United States. It has its wrinkles, because the first agency in the U.S. that it was given to for drafting, national action, was the military. The Department of Defense. That was the last place that we had in mind when we were working around the table, because this was a peace agreement, as far as we were concerned. It was to promote peace, and it was to include women at the peacemaking table. We discovered in the Irish Peace Agreement that it made a huge difference. That's a whole story about the Irish Peace Agreement and me.

Q: Well, now you can fast forward to that. It's a logical subparagraph.

Weiss: Except I think the Irish Peace Agreement was April 10, 1998. But in any event, it's linked because I took a group of Americans, I think we were a dozen, on a peace process tour to Ireland, September 16th to 25th, 1994. I have two huge files about it in the office. We went to the North. But before we got to the North, we got off the airplane, and we went immediately to Mary Robinson, who was then president. Even though it was drizzling, she walked us around the president's place. It's like a little mansion, in Dublin. She talked to each one of us. It was a remarkable choreography and conversation. We told her we were going to the North, and she invited us to come back when we were finished, to report to her, which was fabulous opening.

We then went to Belfast, we went to the North. We were met by Caitriona Ruane, who worked for the Center for Research and Documentation. It was a research outfit, and she hosted us and took us around. We met with the Irish women, Catholic and Protestant. The one thing they asked for and the takeaway was, they wanted a safe space to meet. There was no place they could meet.
They would be attacked. When we finished the tour, after we had been in a prison, we had been in the police department, we had met with Irish Catholics and Protestants and slept in the homes—all of us were assigned to a home of Northern Irish people. When we went back to Dublin to take the plane back to New York, we met with not only Mary Robinson, but with Jean Smith, who was President Kennedy's sister and the U.S. Ambassador to Ireland. The one thing we told both of the women was, the one message we're bringing back is the Irish women need a safe place to meet. And they arranged it. At that place, the Irish women agreed that they would go to George Mitchell, who was the U.S. facilitator for the Irish peace talks, to resolve The Troubles, to end The Troubles.

George Mitchell said to them, "No, you can't have a place at the table, because it's only set for political parties." They went back and they formed the Irish Women's political party. They came to George, and they said, "We're sent by the political party, the Irish Women's—" He said, "Fine." They got not one, but two seats at the table. What they did at that table has not been replicated since. They refused to let the men, who represented the political parties, go forward until they got their human rights demands institutionalized. It was a remarkable and successful effort.

Q: These were human rights for women?

Weiss: Human rights for everybody.

Q: For everybody.
Weiss: Those human rights demands are in the famous agreement, it's called the "Good Friday Agreement." That agreement is referenced by many of the subsequent peace processes. The South Africans went to Ireland to talk to the people who sat at the table. How did you do it? What did you do? They learned lessons from the Troubles Agreement, from the Good Friday Agreement, to use for South Africa's agreement to end Apartheid. It was used by other countries. It's a very important agreement, and the fact that it has these institutions for human rights is, "Spot on," as they say in South Africa. So, where were we? We have 1325. We use it. We have training sessions about it.

There's an organization that's devoted almost entirely—the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders—it's devoted almost entirely to implementing 1325 in developing countries, and helping the women understand how they can use it at the local level, as well as at the national level, because your village shouldn't be an exclusively male hierarchy, ignoring the women, ignoring their right to participation. It gives women the right to participate.

Q: Now, going through your speeches, I noticed that it was post 1325 that you make a very obvious effort to publicize 1325, and going back to it in many kinds of contexts, not just peace process, but women, the particular roles of women, and actually, in some cases, discriminatory policies towards women, et cetera, et cetera. Do other people do that, or have you taken this as your special mission to do that?
Weiss: Oh, sure. No, it's among my missions, but it's integrated with everything I do. I do peace education, and then women. I'm working now on an op-ed piece that's being written by Sanam Anderlini, and I'm helping her edit it, for [William J.] Hague, the foreign minister of England, who's called a meeting for next week of ministers, a ministerial meeting on rape. Initially, it was going to be rape, I think, of women in general, rape and abuse. But now, it's limited to rape and violent conflict. The problem with his proposal, and the direction that he's going to take the discussion, is that he wants to pluck rape out of war and let the war go on. That's one of my best-used phrases these days.

So, I had an opportunity yesterday to meet Peggy Kerry, who is a friend, and who works at the U.S. Mission in charge of non-governmental organizations, civil society. She told me that he was going to go, that John Kerry, her brother, was going to go to Hague's conference for one day. I said, "Peggy, would you like John to take a message to Hague? We can't let rape be plucked out of war and let the war go on. They have to be dealt with simultaneously." She said, "Of course. Of course that's right." "Well," I said, "It's not the way it's going to happen." She's going to convey my message. I spoke to Sanam this morning, and I said, "Send me an executive summary of the op-ed," which she's putting on OpenDemocracy.org in London. So, that's how things happen. You have lunch with somebody, you meet them, they tell you something that you might know something about.

Q. Yes. You've used the term a number of times, “civil society.” What is civil society?
Weiss: It's you and me. It's not corporations and it's not government. It's people who have the right to vote, and it's people whose public opinion, whose opinions, help to move policy, we hope. It's worked in a number of cases.

Q: But when you talk about it, you also talk about it in terms of—you said—

Weiss: Organized.

Q: —non-government agencies, in terms of organizations.

Weiss: Right. NGO [Non-Governmental Organization] is a phrase that—it means Non-Governmental Organization.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But I think it frequently means No-Good Organization. So I prefer to talk about Organized Civil Society, or CSOs, Civil Society Organizations.

Q: Well, give me an example of an organization in which you and I would be participants in something called, "civil society." [interruption]
Weiss: Women Strike for Peace was a Civil Society Organization. The Hague Appeal for Peace is a Civil Society Organization. The Lawyer's Committee on Nuclear Policy is a Civil Society Organization.

Q: Aha.

Weiss: They are organizations that bring together mere mortals and promote social change, or whatever they promote. They're not limited to social change, but I work with the social change Civil Society Organizations. I am passionate about organized civil society. I think I would never be in a corporation, that I'm aware of, because I'm not out for profit. I've long ago decided never to be in government.

Q: So, these are—in some of the pieces I have, the list of organizations with which you've been identified, committees, conferences, et cetera, runs page after page after page that are any number of organizations. So, this is, to my mind, then, this is the connection between the listing of all of those organizations and the philosophy behind it.

Weiss: The philosophy behind it is that—

Q: You have to be organized.

Weiss: You have to be organized and be—you have to be people of similar mindsets, I mean, to choose which organization you want to join, or invite you to join them.
Q: Now, I've interviewed a number of people who are deeply embedded in conservative movements. They start with the argument that anything the government does is wrong, and the alternative to the government is the individual, or people who organize outside of government agencies which is, in many cases, exactly what you're talking about.

Weiss: Except that that's an anarchic argument, isn't it?

Q: Yes. Tell me why.

Weiss: We support government, because government makes change, makes policy. So we're there to influence government. I hope that's one major distinguishing characteristic. I mean, that sounds like libertarians and anarchists.

Q: Yes. Yes.

Weiss: Yes, well, that's not my cup of tea.

Q: That's what I was trying to get at.

Weiss: You know, I'll tell you another thing, since we were talking about women. I've looked through some of the things I've said a long, long, long time ago, my early, early speeches. I'm amazed that I talked about women then, but I did. Whether it was because I wasn't elected—
because a man was elected and not me, and the women voted for the man when I was in high school—I don't know what it was because of. Or, because of the influence I had from my mother and books that I read when I was very young, but I started out talking about “Women, women everywhere, and not enough in power.” Or, “Women count if you count the women.” Or, “Where are the women?” I just wanted women, period. Then I evolved and the movements evolved, and we all got more sophisticated. At one point, Bella Abzug started to talk about—she wanted a large group of women, concentration of women. A "critical mass" was the word she used. So, I adopted that idea, and then I realized that if you had a critical mass of women in this country, they could be Tea Party women, because the Tea Party had a majority of women members.

Q: Oh, yes?

Weiss: But if you had a critical mass in a developing country, all of which had experienced oppression, violence and so forth, you might have an agreement about a progressive agenda of peace and human rights and gender equality. So, I call it an evolution of my thinking. Now, I say, and this is my phrase, you can't use it, "It takes more than ovaries." That you have to have women who are peace and justice-loving women, women who support gender equality and sustainable development, and not just women women. Everybody looks and says, "Of course." But that's not what they say and do. I write it into my talks now. I distinguish between women women and peace and justice, good women.
Q: Let's keep that thought for a moment, but going back again to the distinction between women in a more affluent society, women in a developing society. Part of that is the differing nature of the oppression. The oppression is so overt in many parts of the world, yet, the oppression here is somewhat different.

Weiss: Well, a) in the developing world—and it's changing there too, as countries evolve—but in the developing world, they have more in common than in conflict. There's more suffering, among a larger group of women. But Ellen Johnson Sirleaf hasn't suffered, and she represents a new elite. That's happening in increasing numbers of developing countries; there is a new elite. Small, but it's going to get bigger. The gap between rich and poor will get bigger. In this country, we have an educated mass, we have political party, evolution, and development, we have more choices to make. And we have a larger middle class. So, not all women want to reduce the military budget. Not all women want to abolish nuclear weapons. Not all women want to have alternatives to prison and get rid of solitary confinement. That's what I am concerned with. I like the women who want to abolish war.

Q: My argument would be that that difference is historically contingent, that there are certain women from certain communities with certain ideas, laws, attitudes, ideologies; and there are other women—but it's historically contingent. So—

Weiss: One might have said that the preponderance of Tea Party—or that the Tea Party comes out of the South.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: But you go to Easthampton, New York, and there are Tea Party flags. Right on Route 27 where every human being has to travel to get to Montauk, the end of the United States, there's a Tea Party flag in front a famous pizzeria. So, it's interesting.

Q: What is the special thing that women bring to the table?

Weiss: Women, or good women?

Q: Well, Tea Party women, organized women, civil society women.

Weiss: I don't think we'll—

Q: What is it that they bring to the table that makes it so special that they are women?

Weiss: Well, I don't think that there's a homogeneity among women.

Q: Oh, yes.

Weiss: I don't think you can say, "They." I mean, not all men are alike, why should all women be alike? So, the good women, the peace women, the two women who sat at the Irish peace talks, the Good Friday talks, brought the idea that we have to have a human rights-based decision
making. We have to have a peace-based decision making. I mean, it depends on who the women are. But, I think to put us all in one lump is a huge mistake, because it doesn't recognize that there's no unanimity among the testosterone crowd. Why should there be among the estrogen crowd?

Q: Do you have many contests with women, say, in the Tea Party organizations? Or, women in the various apparatuses of the right at all?

Weiss: No. They don't live in the neighborhood.

Q: All right. Well, if you were in the political arena, you would have to—

Weiss: Which I'm not. I'm in the social change arena, not the political party arena.

Q: Along a different kind of track, your discussion of civil society and non-government agencies resonates to my mind with a lot of what [Alexis] de Tocqueville talked about, about the nature of American society, that it is just the spontaneous organizations that arise all the time, non-government agencies.

Weiss: That's true. But, when you keep saying, "Non-government," it means that the government is the important.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: Right?

Q: Right.

Weiss: Who wants to be a non-something? You like to be a pro-something. So, I think civil society is more important. It's a power, if it's well-organized and determined. We were a power to get a—we didn't get the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty because it hasn't been ratified yet, but it exists if the Congress would only ratify it, the Senate. That came from civil society, from the pro civil people, not the non-people.

Q: Right. Do you see yourself as some kind of a middle personality between the agencies of Civil Society and the political process itself, in which you're the lobbyist, the contact? You know, especially with political women?

Weiss: I'm not a lobbyist. That's not a good word in my book. I have friends. I support candidates. I have friends among the elected officials, I support candidates. I don't think it's a secret, but I've just been asked to help Chirlane [McCray], who is the mayor's first lady, get mentored in speech making. I'm not going to do it myself, but I'm going to help her get somebody who will, because that's not been part of her poetry past. It's important, because she now has opportunities to speak publicly. I guess there are tricks that you learn when you speak publicly. So—
Q: We'll talk about those.

Weiss: We will?

Q: Yes. Yes. How could I—after reading your speeches—

Weiss: I apparently—

Q: —not talk about how you speechify? We'll talk about that eventually. We'll get to that.

Weiss: I've made a few, I think.

Q: I'm particularly interested in the role that you've carved out for yourself, because you say you're not a lobbyist.

Weiss: I'm an enabler, maybe.

Q: OK.

Weiss: I'll try to think of other words.

Q: How would you describe either—yes, give me your words for what it is you do.
Weiss: Well, yesterday, I attended a planning meeting of the Methodist women, United Methodist women, who have started to work on a program for September in New York, which would be the first meeting of a series of meetings that's taking place as the U.N. opens its new General Assembly session. They've invited me to be in on the planning. It'll be sponsored or co-sponsored by about a dozen civil society organizations, including the International Peace Bureau, which I represent at the U.N. as a representative, and which I was president of for six years. So, I proposed speakers.

I said we have to discuss climate change, we have to discuss development and maybe create a people's agenda for the post-2015 development agenda, because the agenda that the U.N. is going to propose is going to have deficits. And we're not going to like it. It won't be strong on women, it won't be strong on peace as a requirement for development. It's a wonderful opportunity for me to help influence, and they love everything I say, or almost. I see it appear on paper, later, as agreed upon. For instance, they wanted to talk about peace and security as an agenda item. I came back and said, "Why don't we talk about human security, because the word 'security' emerged after the Second World War as 'national security.' And it means militarism. It means military." That's not what we want. We want human security, which means the things that enable people to live, starting with literacy and employment and food and water, and safety. And it was right there, in print, right after I said it. So—

Q: Go back to John Wesley roots.

Weiss: Yes. That's a possibility. I'm not an expert on Mr. Wesley, but he is around me.
Q: Right.

Weiss: The building that I work in is owned by women. It was built by women, and it's owned by women. The United Methodist women. That's always been a comfort zone for me, because it’s a place where only non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, have offices. So The Hague Appeal for Peace has an office.

Q: Now, when the Methodist women, who are organized, come up with their statement and present it to the U.N., will you feel any responsibility to join them in that to—

Weiss: Oh, we all will.

Q: You all. So you—

Weiss: Join? You mean go with them?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Oh, yes. I've gone—we once had—I can't remember what year it was—a petition, which we presented to the president of the General Assembly who was from some newly independent state, an Eastern country, East—I can't remember what it was. Anyway, I have done that. And I have made proposals from the floor in the U.N. I've spoken a lot in the U.N.
Q: Right.

Weiss: I was the only civil society speaker in 2010, in the General Assembly at the podium where normally, only member state representatives speak. That was kind of heady.

Q: How did you get to have that?

Weiss: Well, because Anwarul Chowdhury organized a Culture of Peace event. The ambassador from Bangladesh was involved, and the Secretary General came, and officials came. Helen Clark from UNDP [United Nations Development Program] was a speaker. I think she and I were the only two women in the morning session of officialdom. Then we were followed by dozens of guys representing member states. But the initial talks, the initial speeches, were made by U.N. agencies, a government and civil society. I was the only one. I was grateful to Chowdhury for picking me. It was very heady to have the SG [Secretary General] looking down on you, wondering “Who is this person?” Civil society organizations came to listen, but they were relegated to the balcony way in the back. But I got a lot of applause, and I think the only laughs of anybody speaking. Laughter is very important.

Q: Tell me about the laugh. What did you—

Weiss: I don't remember the jokes.
Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But I said, obviously must have said a few things that were funny.

Q: How many speeches do you usually give?

Weiss: Don't ask.

Q: Ever count them?

Weiss: I do have a list. Did I give you the list?

Q: Oh, I've got—yes. I've got lists [laughs]—

Weiss: But I don't have the early speeches, which I wrote on yellow legal pad, in hand.

Q: Some of them are in—

Weiss: At Swarthmore?

Q: Yes. That's why I said, in your handwriting—

Weiss: I have to go and copy them.
Q: —on the yellow pads.

Weiss: Oh, and they don't have dates?

Q: No, no, unfortunately, they don't.

Weiss: That's the problem. But they were all early, early '60s.

Q: Yes. Yes. When did you first begin to speechify? Do you recall the first couple of speeches you gave? Or, under which aegis it might have been?

Weiss: Well, you know, in high school, I was the co-chair of the assembly committee, and I was only in ninth grade. My co-chair was another wonderful woman, whom I liked very much, who died of ovarian cancer, very prematurely. She was in tenth grade. So, we probably at least introduced the speakers that we invited. They were all school assemblies. But I don't have those on yellow legal pad. [laughs] Then, at the University of Wisconsin, I was the person responsible for speakers from the International Club, I think. Whether I spoke, I don't remember, but it wasn't yesterday, you know.

Q: Right.
Weiss: So I might have spoken there. But, I think my first talks were probably associated with the African American Students Foundation, what we call the Airlift, because we had events, and I have photographs of me standing behind a microphone.

Q: This would be welcoming remarks, and things like this?

Weiss: Whatever. Whatever they were.

Q: Yes. Did you give speeches for Women Strike?

Weiss: Oh, that's where I did the most.

Q: Do you remember a few of the first ones? Who you spoke to? What your topic was?

Weiss: I think the topic was Strontium-90, because that's the first thing we did in Women Strike. We used to get together in living rooms and try to learn as much as we could about the deadly ingredients of an atomic bomb, and why that was affecting our babies, because they drank the milk that came from cows that ate the radiated grass.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But I did huge numbers of talks under the banner of Women Strike as the Women Strike rep.
Q: Well, what would have been the venue?

Weiss: Living rooms, community rooms, centers, neighborhood houses, universities. I think I'm going in order of evolution.

Q: Right. Church groups?

Weiss: Universities, church groups? Yes. That's how it went for years. It evolved from subject matter, the Partial Test Ban treaty, which we got signed. Not just exclusively, "We," but we were very key, I think, to helping promote public opinion about that. That was 1963, October, as I recall, when the president, President Kennedy, signed the Partial Test Ban treaty. Then, the Vietnam War. And the demonstrations against the war. I not only helped to organize them, and to co-chair them, to speak at them.

Q: Did you ever take a course in public speaking?

Weiss: No.

Q: How did you learn to do that?

Weiss: I’d love to give a course in public speaking. I've often thought that if I ever retire, I might do that.
Q: And what would you say? What are the four or five principles—

Weiss: The first thing that a woman says when she gets up to speak, invariably, is, "Can you hear me?" Have you ever heard a man get up to the mic, and before he opens his mouth on his speech, say, "Can you hear me?" It is a gendered experience. That's number one. Number two, don't hold a pencil in your hand when you talk. And number three—

Q: Why? Because you bounce it around, or—?

Weiss: Because you're not aiming at people. You don't need a pencil anymore. You've written your talk, or you know what you're going to say. It's an extra piece of distraction.

Q: Feature and fact from Cora's almanac! [laughter]

Weiss: Bravo! Then limit your talk to making three points, if you can. People cannot digest tons of factoids, numbers, unless they're related to a very specific point that you want to make. And speak from the heart. Show your passion. If you don't feel passionate about something, don't talk about it. That's enough. And don't talk too long! [laughter]

Q: Were you at first at all intimidated about speaking?
Weiss: Oh, my goodness, of course! Not so much in neighborhood houses, community centers or living rooms. I don't think I felt terribly intimidated there. But I'll never forget the first time I was called on at the Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], even though I had had my hand up for about three or four years. And never called on. Women were not welcome there. But I wrote out my question and read from it, and I was very intimidated. But it's an intimidating atmosphere. It's all dark suits and ties. Women were then ten percent, and not much more now—still, it's a very gendered place.

Q: A little off the topic, I want to come back to speeching, but tell me about the Council on Foreign Relations. Why would you want to be there?

Weiss: I have to remember this guy's name—it wasn't my idea. I didn't ask for it. Adele Simmons was the president of Hampshire College, where I was a trustee for her twelve years of presidency. We became very good friends. I've been going through my files, and I have found dozens of letters from her. Now there are dozens of emails, which nobody keeps. I don't know how history is going to be written in the future!

Q: I worry about that all the time!

Weiss: You see? She then became president of the MacArthur Foundation. She, because of those two presidencies, was a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, where, at that time, I'm not sure that it was even ten percent, but let's say ten percent were women. But I doubt it.
Q: Women? Ten percent women?

Weiss: Anyway, she nominated me. Yes. She nominated me. I had never heard of the Council on Foreign—I mean, I didn't know what I was getting into, but it sounded interesting. If it was going to deal with international relations and foreign policy, I'd be interested. So, she sent my nomination in, and she had people second it. I don't remember who they were. But [Brent] Scowcroft was the Chairman of the Nominating Committee at the Council at that time.

Q: Scowcroft?

Weiss: Scowcroft.

Q: Oh, Brent Scow—

Weiss: Brent Scowcroft, was his name Brent?

Q: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Weiss: My nomination sat for four years, until he left for a government position. The next person, whoever it was, let me in. That was my introduction to the Council. I go to interesting meetings that interest me, that are relevant to the work I'm doing, or to my interests. I don't go often. The food is always good. It's free lunch. I have friends there, and I have made friends there. So, yesterday, I went because Darren Walker, who is the new president of the Ford
Foundation, was speaking. The Ford Foundation is the largest foundation, except for Gates, in the world. It has a huge impact. It used to have a Peace and Security department, which it has dropped. Darren is a fabulous human being! His history is fantastic. He comes from Texas, where he had a single mom. I don't remember how many siblings. They were poor. He went to a head start pre-kindergarten program, a government-funded program. He went to the University [of Texas] in Austin. He went to law school. He's an amazing success story! Now he's the president of the billion—

Q: What did he talk about?

Weiss: He talked about what Ford is interested in doing, the changes that are happening because it has just come out of a terrible president, who was just awful.

Q: Luis [Ubinas]—

Weiss: Well, he was an interesting person, because he was—was he Puerto Rican? From the Bronx.

Q: Yes. Yes, Dominican, or some—

Weiss: Latino. He comes out of the corporate structure. Out of Wall Street. He was not very popular. In any event, Darren is there. He's funny, he's fun, he's lively, he loves his job, and it comes through. It was very interesting. It was a big—not horseshoe, but big square table. All the
black suits sat on one side. The women gathered together. Wherever they sat, there were two or
three women, never one single one.

Q: Interesting! Off tape the other day, you told me a story about your run-in with John McCain.

Weiss: Yes. At the Council. That was a while—a long time ago.

Q: Tell me that story. Well, tell me that story. We're here for a long time ago!

Weiss: [laughter] Everything was a long time ago!

Q: Well, today’s a springboard for then—

Weiss: That's for then and now. So, McCain was invited to speak, and I went up to shake hands
with him before the speech began. He refused to shake my hand. Now, John McCain was a
prisoner of war, and, from '69 to '73, I ran the Committee of Liaison on Prisoners of War. It had
a longer title, but that's what it was. I brought mail from his wife and family, as well as many
other wives and families, to him in Hanoi, by hand. The purpose of the committee was to prevent
the interruption of mail, and to increase the amount of mail that POWs [Prisoners of War] could
get.

Q: So you had—
Weiss: It was an arrangement that I made.

Q: Then you had met him in Hanoi?

Weiss: No.

Q: No.

Weiss: He would not meet with American visitors.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But I brought his mail. And I carried his mail to his wife back, so she got it within seventy-two hours of my arriving, or less, because that was one thing we insisted on, immediate mailing.

Q: Yes, we're going to get into that next time.

Weiss: OK, good.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: So, he knew who I was. He knew that I came out of the antiwar movement, I guess. He thought I was a traitor. He wouldn't shake my hand. When he got up to speak, formally, he referenced people who opposed America's policy. He said it in a very not nice way. He didn't mention names, but my friends knew who he was talking about. I found that very unfortunate, because one of the things that we do in life is try to support reconciliation. That's part of the peace process. But he wasn't ready, I guess. If it weren't for not just me, but the Committee, he would not have been able to write a letter every single month, because until then, they could write a letter once every whatever to his family. He would not have been able to send his artwork, which he did in the prison camp to his family. He wouldn't have gotten a letter every month from his family. So, Sy Hersh, who is a friend, says that we cared more about the prisoners of war than the government. I mean, we tried to improve their lives while they were there, knowing that they would get out.

Q: Back to the Council, I know that you're friendly with Steve (Stephen) Cohen and Katrina vanden Heuvel?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: When he, for some reason—

Weiss: Wanted to run for the board.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: It would be a write-in candidate.

Q: Right.

Weiss: So he asked me to nominate him.

Q: OK. I knew that there was a reason that I had read that. You know?

Weiss: But the point is, I would do it. Why not? You know? It would create one space for a non-corporate person! [laughs] I think I nominated Katrina for a term membership when she was young. Younger. She's still young. I've nominated a lot of people for the Council, and I think, I'm not a hundred percent sure, but I'm eighty-five percent sure, they've all gotten in. I'm not the only nominee. Nominator, I mean. Not nominee.

Q: Yes. No, people were—

Weiss: There's a nominator, and then there are two or more support letters. I've been either the nominator or a supporter. But they've all gotten in.

Q: You mentioned Hampshire College. Tell me that story.
Weiss: It starts in Princeton where Adele Simmons was the Dean of Students? I said that with a question in my voice, I think she was. In any event, she was in the hierarchy at Princeton. And Richard [A.] Falk was on the faculty.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Dick was a friend of ours. I took him with me to Vietnam in 1972, for what Peter Arnett called the "prisoner snatch" for the return of three pilots to this country. Adele had just been named, or elected, president of Hampshire, which was a small experimental college in the Five College area, in the valley, of Western Mass [Massachusetts]. I think maybe together with Evergreen [College] on the West Coast and maybe Reed [College], it was really one of the very, very few experimental colleges in the country. Adele was going to be the next president, and she was looking for trustees to bring to the board. Richard proposed me. So she invited Peter and me for dinner.

Q: Had you met her before?

Weiss: Never! Never heard of her!

Q: Yes?

Weiss: We had dinner in the playroom. She had two or three little kids. They had a playroom, and they pushed aside the toys, and they put out a dinner table, and that's how we met and talked.
The next thing I got was a letter inviting me to join the Board of Trustees, to which I had to be elected. But whoever was president at the time carried out her wishes. So, she brought me, she brought Amy Cohen, who was a member of the Scheuer family. Steve Scheuer just died a few days ago.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Her brother was a member of Congress. Her daughter was going to be a student at Hampshire, as our daughter was going to be a student at Hampshire, which is an interesting story also, because our daughter went to an experimental school in New York called City As—

Q: Without Walls?

Weiss: It was called City as the School, known as City As. It was a school set up by an Egyptian American, which was an alternative school to public school, or private school, where she had gone. She had been in Fieldston until tenth grade. So, her last two years were at City As.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: The reason it was called, "City As," is because they used the city as their schoolroom. So you went to the New York budget committee, city council budget, to learn math. You went to the blood mobile to learn chemistry. I can't remember the other places, but they used the city agencies and organizations as hands-on experience to learn good things. Then you graduated.
She applied to Hampshire. I have no idea how she heard about it, I guess at the City As. She got in, and she came home one night, and she said, "Mom and Dad, I'm going to Hampshire College." We were shocked! Mostly because she didn't need us to help her get into college, which we expected. We'd never heard of Hampshire. Fast forward, I became a trustee. Fast forward, I was invited by her graduating class of 1982 to be the class speaker for commencement. The commencement speaker. There was no protest movement at that time, so I didn't have to refuse. [laughs] Which seems to be the new trend this year!

Q: Who are the other trustees? Aside from the Scheuers?

Weiss: Interesting people. A guy named Henry Morgan [phonetic], but he wasn't Henry Morgan the comedian. He set up the bank in the south side of Chicago, which was a kind of community-owned bank. He was from Massachusetts. A guy named [John] Watts, who was part of an investment group in New York, Amy Cohen, who was professionally, I think, a psychiatric social worker.

Q: Now, was that unique in your experiences, to be on a board like that?

Weiss: Absolutely. It was wonderful!

Q: Oh.
Weiss: I learned a lot, I made good friends, and an incredibly interesting thing happened. One day, the student—we used to meet in what was called the Red Barn, which had been renovated from a real barn, and it was red, to a very modern front, which was glass from ceiling to floor, so we could look out on the gorgeous campus. Beautiful campus.

Q: Yes, it's lovely.

Weiss: We would sit at a big square table, and there were maybe fifteen of us, *más o menos*, and one day, a group of students came parading down the hill carrying placards, saying "Divest from South Africa." I looked at the students, and I looked at my fellow trustees, and I said, "Colleagues, what's our answer to them?" Fast forward, they appointed me, John Watts, and Henry Morgan, three trustees to spend the weekend in the president's house, Adele Simmons' house. It was a big, gorgeous house on a huge field, with a wonderful view of mountains and fields. Our assignment was to write an investment responsibility plan. We wrote it, three totally different people, one corporate, one—I think Henry probably was an academic as well as an activist, and me. We brought it to the board meeting, and it was called the Committee on Investment Responsibility, which was called CHOIR [Committee at Hampshire on Investment Responsibility]. I don't think any other college in America had such a committee, or such a proposal. Investment was done by investment brokers hired by the universities.

Q: Right.
Weiss: We said we had to—now, we had to divest from any corporation doing business in South Africa. Now, mind you, Hampshire had pennies, so to speak, in the bank. We were poor. We were new. We were young. But, we may have had enough thousands of dollars so that they had to be invested. So we had to have an investment policy.

Q: You know, I was going to ask you what the Hampshire portfolio would have looked like.

Weiss: I can't remember.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But it would have been social domestic programs, probably.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But not—I was going to say [John] Deere tractors, or Caterpillar, but that's in Israel.

Q: Yes. Probably would have never been a consideration of the company, or the banker, or whoever was—

Weiss: No, American companies were making money in South Africa.

Q: Right. Yes, yes.
Weiss: It turned out to be the first university or college to have a divestment program for South Africa. The snowball effect was incredible. It went like a prairie fire through universities, and then through cities and villages. The American Committee on Africa hired Dumisani Kumalo to work on divestment of city investments, and he got New York City to divest, and it all harkens back to Hampshire.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It's a fascinating history. Today, how many years later, they still have an Investment Responsibility Committee of board members.

Q: How long did you serve there?

Weiss: Twelve years.

Q: Twelve years?

Weiss: I think it was twelve. It was Adele's tenure. Then she was called to MacArthur [Foundation]. So, it was either ten or twelve years.

Q: But what was the normal run of your business?
Weiss: As board members? As trustees?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Oh, we had very lively board meetings. We were very concerned about buildings and renovation, and faculty, promotions or not. The agenda was always packed. We had terrific board meetings. It was very participatory.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We cared about the campus and about the students and about the faculty. We had a student representative on the board, and a faculty representative on the board. That was very inclusive.

Q: Good. Going back now to speeches, and you said you overcame—

Weiss: My intimidation?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Yes, almost entirely. Not entirely. If you're not scared before you make a speech, you're not going to make a serious speech. You have to have some anxiety.
Q: Does it become pro forma after a while?

Weiss: Never.

Q: Never.

Weiss: I am preparing now for a talk I have to give in a week for the memorial program for Jonathan Schell, who wrote *Fate of The Earth*, and *Ben Suc*, and for *The New Yorker*—he was going to be groomed to take over *The New Yorker*, and that got scuttled. He was a very good friend. He was a very thoughtful, prescient writer. He was for the abolition of nuclear weapons before it was a phrase. He was against the war in Vietnam. He was revealing information that people didn't have other places to go to get, and *Fate of The Earth* became the textbook of the anti-nuclear movement, just as *Ben Suc* became the textbook for the antiwar movement.

So, Peace Action is going to have a memorial service for him on June 12th, which happens also to be the anniversary of the June 12th, 1982, one million people in Central Park, which never had a name. So, people call it the Freeze Demonstration. Well, it wasn't the Freeze Demonstration. They call it a Mobe demonstration, it wasn't a Mobe. It was an anti-nuclear demonstration without a formal name, and it was the biggest we ever had in this country; a million people in Central Park saying, "Goodbye nuclear weapons," which [William S.] Bill Coffin bellowed from the microphone, as dozens of helium balloons went up into the sky. I'll never forget his voice saying that. Well, unfortunately, they didn't goodbye, they didn't go, and we're still working—
Q: Off tape I'll tell you a story about my participation in—

Weiss: Really?

Q: Yes. Funny story.

Weiss: There's a great little story, which is both funny and remarkable. I was on the stage, because I was helping to manage it. All of a sudden, in the middle of the afternoon, or whenever the time was, somebody leaned up from the ground below to the stage, and handed somebody on the stage a note, and it had, "Cora Weiss" written on it. They gave it to me. I read it, and it said, "We made it. We're in 110th Street," or wherever, way the hell in the back of the crowd. That note had been handed from hand to hand, person to person, and it got to the stage, it got to me, and it was from two young women who were the daughters of a very good friend of mine in Wisconsin.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: They came from Madison to the demonstration, and they sent the note, and I'll never forget it! I think I've kept it! It was such a statement of the whole world that was in my hands, almost, I mean, you know—people came from everywhere, all over the world.

Q: Yes—
Weiss: But it ended badly.

Q: In what way?

Weiss: Well, the stage was taken over, and we had to leave.

Q: By whom? I don't remember—

Weiss: Well, it was very, very unfortunate, and it saddens me forever. It was taken over by a group of people organized by, I think his name was [Rev. Herbert D.] Daughtry.

Q: Who?

Weiss: Daughtry. He was an African American minister.

Q: Oh, yes!

Weiss: They were very upset that whatever they wanted didn't happen. They just came and took over the mics, at about 4:00 in the afternoon. So, we had done most of the program. But what didn't happen that was a very serious problem was that a Latin band didn't get to play, and had been promised, because we wanted them. Whoever it was who got the band, I can't remember who it was, was furious. I have a photograph of Coretta Scott King and me walking away from the platform, arm in arm. It'll last with me for a long time.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: I was very, very sad by it.

Q: I had left by that time.

Weiss: You had left by then?

Q: I forget—yes. But I—

Weiss: Well, a lot of people did.

Q: But I remember the issues about black participation, you know—

Weiss: We had lots of black participation.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But not enough to suit this fellow.

Q: As I say, I've been reading a number of your speeches, and actually there are one or two, you might want to look at video tapes. There's—
Weiss: [laughs]

Q: Yes! There's a video of a speech you gave for the Nobel Prize. The theme of it was that so few women had gotten Nobel Prizes.

Weiss: And the tape is there?

Q: Yes, it's eleven minutes long, it's your speech before a group of people who were gathered in Oslo, for—

Weiss: You know, my children might want to use that. They're giving me an eightieth birthday party.

Q: I'm having one, too.

Weiss: Why don't we—we could merge them. October 4th.

Q: Mine is June 30th.

Weiss: Oh! Tell me how it goes! I'm not looking forward to it, but it's a video at Swarth—?

Q: Just, I go to Bing, and I put in Cora Weiss speeches.
Weiss: Oh, you can get it on Bing? You don't have to go to Swarthmore?

Q: No, no no!

Weiss: Oh, my God!

Q: It's on the Internet!

Weiss: [laughs] And what is it saying?

Q: You will be surprised, there are at least twenty different things that you can click on!

Weiss: How the hell do they get it?

Q: One is from The Hague—what is the group in The Hague? The Hague—

Weiss: Hague Appeal for Peace?

Q: Yes. They list twenty or thirty of your speeches. And about four or five of them, you can call up. Others are just referenced.

Weiss: Oh, my God!
Q: There are a number of particular speeches that you have given that, either you can get the text, or in one or two cases, they're videotaped. But this is a video, and it shows you in front of a group of people, mostly men, at some kind of a conference, about the Nobel Prize. I have other notes that I was going to bring next week, they're in my notes for next week.

Weiss: I spoke about the poverty of women getting a Nobel before Jody [Williams] started the Nobel Women's Initiative, which now, the women who are alive who got a Nobel, belong to.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: And they're all going to be at The Hague meeting in London this week. Everything relates!

Q: But obviously we can't go through each speech, but there are things that come up again and again and again and again.

Weiss: Well, not everything. Not enough has changed.

Q: But one of the major themes is peace education.

Weiss: Yes.
Q: And I wonder if we can talk about that.

Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: A little, about peace education. You've been involved in this for any number of years.

Weiss: Since '99.

Q: Where do you begin the approach? Where would one begin that approach? Do you work with, say, the unions? Or state agencies? Or, how do you work about peace—where is the locus of your activities of peace education?

Weiss: I've always said you work with whoever will listen!

Q: Ah.

Weiss: That's for openers. The Global Campaign for Peace Education was born at The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference in May of '99, in The Hague. It came to New York to The Hague Appeal for Peace office, and it was the one program out of the whole conference, 10,000 people, twelve programs, that we decided to adopt and continue with. The other programs that were adopted were spun off to other organizations to continue with, Small Arms, for instance. First, we worked with the United Nations, the Department for Disarmament Affairs, and asked them to co-sponsor with us a training of people in four countries.
Q: Now, they did have a peace education office.

Weiss: No.

Q: Oh, they closed it up by that time?

Weiss: There was a peace education office in the U.N. run by one woman, which was closed in a budget crunch. I once asked Kofi Annan if—I wouldn't cost a penny, the U.N. wouldn't have to pay me a cent—but could I have a peace education office, could I reopen one, at the U.N., just to have the imprimatur of the U.N.? And he, without blinking, without wasting a second, he said, "Cora, you wouldn't want to work with this bureaucracy." He was very smart, and right. I wouldn't have had the freedom that we have now. So, we had the peace education office at the women's-owned United Methodist Church Building, called the Church Center. We worked with the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs [ODA]. We got a grant from the U.N. Foundation, and we got grants from the governments of Sweden and Japan, and one more country, I think.

Q: To do what?

Weiss: To bring a training session to schools of education, which had public schools associated with them. So, we went to Cambodia, and there was a compound of a teacher education college, a primary school and a secondary school. I would pronounce the name of the province, but it just...
slipped my tongue! I'll get it. Kampong Chong. We took a team of people, Betty Burkes, from Cambridge, who was a Montessori school expert and a peace educator, somebody from the U.N. Department of Disarmament Affairs and myself. We did role playing, we did introduction to peace education, and left lots of ideas.

First, Cambodia was one of the four countries. The other countries were Peru, Niger and Albania. So, the U.N. liked to do one thing in each continent. Something came from each one of these, but it was not sustained. You can't hit and run. I mean, we sustained it for a year or two because we were in touch. We exchanged information, we sent resources, we wrote a book about it, a booklet, it's a soft book. To his credit, Jayantha Dhanapala from Sri Lanka, who was the head of the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the ODA in those days, welcomed it, embraced it, promoted it. As a consequence, they now have a disarmament education program in the ODA.

We went to Peru, we did a program there. We found Latin American peace educators, and we maintained and grew a list of peace educators globally. We had a conference in New York, we had a conference at Teacher's College. We gave awards for three years, a beautiful, beautiful dove that somebody made and contributed to us. During the active life of The Hague Appeal for Peace—which is no longer active, it's now online—we had activities. We made fabulous friends all over the world, and we still keep in touch with them. But now, we're online as a monthly newsletter, called the Global Campaign for Peace Education.

Q: Now, what would it actually consist of? Negotiations? Disarmament proposals? Discussing it? Is it political science or international relations or history? Or all?
Weiss: OK, I love that question, because then I can say what it is. Peace education is content and methodology, pedagogy and methodology. The methodology is very, very important, because it should be adopted for use across the board. It's participation, critical inquiry and reflection. If you adopt those three ways of teaching, you won't give lectures anymore to second graders or to tenth graders. You'll engage the students in participation. You won't insist on the truth, your truth, you'll invite questions and doubts. You'll question facts, and then you'll be told to go look it up and find out whether your doubts are justified or not. Then, on reflection, you'll think about what you learned and maybe apply it. Then the content, Peace Education, is for democracy. That's our primary interest.

It's teaching for and about, so it's advocacy. Teaching for and about disarmament, gender equality, human rights, sustainable development, non-violence, traditional peace practices. How did your grandmother, or great grandmother, solve her problems with your great grandfather? Did she shoot him? My grandmother said, "Eat first, and talk later." I don't think that is probably taught in conflict resolution classes, but it's not a bad idea. Whenever I have a meeting, I always have food and drink available. So, that definition guides us. I maintain that you don't have to have a separate course called, "Peace Education," although in graduate school, it's essential.

Q: Right. Yes.

Weiss: But in primary school, you can integrate these ideas into whatever else you're talking about. If you have a social studies class, you should talk about human rights. You should talk
about gender equality. There was a program in New York City called Resolving Conflict Creatively Program [RCCP], run by a wonderful woman, Linda Lantieri. She went into the schools, and she worked with schoolteachers. She started in pre-kindergarten. The children were given a yellow t-shirt with the word, "Mediator" on it. It was the longest word in their vocabulary. Every day, a different child was a mediator when they went out to the playground. If a little boy came and tried to take my truck from me, the mediator would run out onto the field and separate the children and say, "Why did you do that?" And they would sit down and talk, both the victim and the victimizer, the mediator and the teacher. Now, go fast forward in school, this evolves and gets more sophisticated, and now you're in eighth grade and the teacher is including RCCP in her teaching method. You go home from school, and you find your father has a knife at your mother's throat, and it's a bad scene. You have been exposed to this conflict resolution program in school. You say to them, "Talk, don't fight!" Instead of attacking each other, they're now attacking the son.

Q: Does it really work?

Weiss: Well, we'll see in a minute, because they don't want to break up their fight, and, "Where did you learn that, young man?" "Oh," he said, "In school." So, the parents go to school and complain to the teacher, and a parent's group has been started, Resolving Conflict Creatively. So these things happen, either because of an individual or a group of individuals, or a group of teachers. Now we're trying to get the Global Campaign for Peace Education adopted by Toledo University in Ohio, and we're close, I think. We will have a professor, Tony Jenkins [phonetic], who will teach there. We're working with Adelphi University in New York, to bring their
students on board Peace Boat, where Peace Boat U.S. has a peace education program going from port to port to port.

So, in small ways, one by one, hopefully with a multiplier effect. In January of this year, the Committee on Teaching About the U.N., CTAUN, where I'm an honorary patron—that impressed me—with Anwarul Chowdhury from Bangladesh, and a third person from UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization], who changes as the UNESCO person changes. We had a conference, an all-day conference for educators from the greater area on peace education, or Education For Peace, where I spoke. It happens. You know, you talk about it, you have a discussion with the educators, they bring it home to their schools, the students bring it home and talk to their teachers about it. It's a growing field.

Q: You say an online newsletter?

Weiss: It's an online newsletter, monthly.

Q: And that keeps up with what people are doing—

Weiss: What's going on in the field.

Q: Best practices, bibliography—

Weiss: Jobs.
Q: —jobs?

Weiss: Jobs in the field. And references. It's global. It's the Global Campaign for Peace Education. We have a young man who came to The Hague Appeal for Peace conference in The Hague in '99, and went back and started The Hague Appeal for Peace University in New Delhi. Now, it's not a university, it's courses. But he has not stopped. He continues. He's working in a corner, I think, that is bordered with Pakistan. Anyway, he continues to carry on the peace education program, and he's constantly sending emails to Betty Reardon, who ran the program in Teacher's College, and me, to ask for our advice. It's a lovely, lovely relationship! But it's catching on. It's not peace studies. Peace studies pretty much study wars.

Q: Yes, right.

Weiss: The history of war.

Q: Yes, yes. Yes.

Weiss: It's peace education that is, we hope, a new way of looking at education, and including things that are important. Non-violence is essential—it's part of the definition.

Q: Right.
Weiss: I like to think that it would be included in peace agreements. The word ‘education’ never happened, never appeared in the Geneva Accord, which was a people's peace agreement to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, called the Geneva Accord because Switzerland offered free housing and space to Palestinians and Israelis to work out an accord. I took one look at it, I read it, the word ‘education’ never appeared, and I immediately got in touch with Yossi Beilin, who was one of the writers. But we also did something else more interesting. Two people, an Israeli Orthodox Jewish woman and her counterpart colleague, a Palestinian writer, ran a program called Middle East Children’s Association [MECA]. They ran it for three or four years, until they ran out of money. We gave them a Hague Appeal for Peace award, the two of them together. I put the question to them, "Would you be willing to write an annex to the peace agreement for the Geneva Accord on Peace Education?" –because they are Israeli and Palestinian.

Q: Right.

Weiss: "But," I said, "Would you write it in such a way that it would be adaptable to any peace agreement?" To their everlasting credit, they wrote the most beautiful, two-page simple student exchange, teacher exchange, examination of textbooks for hatred, teaching for reconciliation. It was remarkable. And it's available—

Q: Sounds like a curriculum guide, almost.

Weiss: Oh, it is.
Q: Oh.

Weiss: It is. It's what teachers should do to help implement the peace agreement. And it's online. It's available for anybody who wants to use it. If they can't find it, they can write to me. But, it's a concrete example of a contribution that we made in peace education that I'm very proud of. It's really terrific.

Q: Now, do you recall, way back when, when you first began to think in this way about what you were doing? I mean, in Women Strike for Peace, you're agitating, you're lobbying, you're marching, etc.

Weiss: We're educating on what the content of the nuclear—

Q: Did it formally come to your mind that this is really educating?

Weiss: We had to learn about atomic bombs, or we wouldn't have been able to talk about why they had to be abolished.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Or, not tested in the atmosphere.

Q: Now, this learning side, what is the education of that?
Weiss: Well, we went teaching what we learned.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: That was the mechanism to create public opinion to support us.

Q: Was there ever a discussion in Women Strike for Peace that maybe we should work up a curriculum to this?

Weiss: No.

Q: That comes later?

Weiss: Yes. Yes. You know, education is an interesting thing. It takes two. We're always learners, I think. When I go to a meeting and say, "Who here is an educator?" Everybody raises their hands. "And who here is a learner?" Nobody learns—and I'm the only learner in the room? You know, people have to realize that they're learning every day, I hope.

Q: Sure.

Weiss: If they have an open mind.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: But you know, I was a volunteer in the public school system from 1960 to ‘62. I brought students from Harlem to the U.N. and brought U.N. ambassadors from Africa to Harlem. It was a totally ghettoized school, all black, basically. Maybe there were some Hispanic kids. And that was my way of teaching and opening their heads to the fact that there's another world out there, and they're a part of it.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But I didn't say to myself, "I'm an educator," but it's very interesting to me that I've come full circle.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: Back to education. Because I've decided that it's the only sustainable thing. You can march, you can protest, you can make phone calls, you can write letters. But education is the closest thing, I think, to a sustainable form of social change.

Q: Where do you get the money?

Weiss: You apply for it. You look for grants. But Women Strike for Peace, we used to pass the hat at every meeting.
Q: Right. Yes. But sometimes—

Weiss: And Bella had the hat.

Q: Yes? [laughs] So, like peace education, what strikes me is something the Gates Foundation should put a lot of money into.

Weiss: I wouldn't take it from them, I don't think, not without being very, very—I mean, I'd love it, obviously, right? But I'd be very conditional, because huge amounts of money, which is how they give their money—

Q: Right.

Weiss: —they have to give away five percent of what they've got. Five percent of billions is a lot. Huge amounts of money given to people who have never spent huge amounts of money is not always the effective—I don't want to use the word efficient, but effective—way of spending money. So, we would have—if we took it from Gates, if they offered it, we'd have to have a lot of talk about how it was going to be spent.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Because the people getting it would have to play a big role in how it would be spent.
Q: Sometime when we resume, I want to talk about the Rubin Foundation, and—but we've kind of come to a point now, today's session is over only because I've got a doctor's appointment, because I'd love to keep going.

Weiss: Keep talking. [laughs]

Q: But I finally got you talking about yourself. But in a really nice way!

Weiss: OK.

Q: I like this conversation!

Weiss: [laughs] At last!

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I must say, I was a little upset last time.

Q: Yes, we weren't going anywhere. I was too empirical in the sense of getting that detail, the detail, the detail, the detail, this is much more—

Weiss: Flowing.
Weiss: Well, what I am today comes from where I've come from.

Q: But it's a way of getting back into that.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: In a much more——

Weiss: Everything I've done, I'm sure, has influenced my behavior and my priorities.

Q: Terrific.

Weiss: Betty Reardon was at lunch here two days ago. Do you know her?

Q: Who?

Weiss: Betty Reardon.
Q: No.

Weiss: She ran the PEC, Peace Education Center. It was a peace education program at Teacher's College, which was never embraced by the college as a part of its curriculum, even though she taught courses which students could get credit for, and they couldn't graduate in peace education, but that could be part of their curriculum.

Q: Right.

Weiss: She was not paid by Teacher's College. Right? She's been living on social security for twenty-five years. She lives in the Morningside Gardens, where Peter and I first bought our first apartment when it was on paper, before it was built. Because it was going to be an interracial, inter-everything.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Yes, housing project, which we appreciated. We ended up in Greenwich Village. Anyway, she's terrific. She and Gillian Sorensen and Peter and I were in The Hague a year ago, September, at a peace philanthropy conference, because it was some centennial. Oh, it was Carnegie's centennial. Andrew Carnegie. We all spoke at the conference, and Gillian and I spoke at a very fancy black-tie event. I will tell you, that is where I learned to make a two-minute speech. I always used to say, "Two minutes? I'm only getting started in two minutes!" But now, it's a very valuable skill.
Q: Once, in an offhand kind of self-deprecating comment you said to me when you were putting your microphone on, that, "You never met a microphone that you didn't like."

Weiss: You like that one-liner? It's one of my one-liners. Well, I do like speaking, because I don't think of it as speaking, but as educating, as influencing, as sharing ideas. I don't get up to a microphone, unless I have something to say.

Q: But you're quite comfortable doing it.

Weiss: Yes. I'm a little anxious about this talk I have to give about Jonathan Schell. Also, I have written almost every speech I've given.

Q: Ah!

Weiss: But that's because if I'm challenged, I want to have the evidence of what I've said, so I can't be accused of saying something that I didn't say. I have Wikipedia, unfortunately, to thank for that, because of the attacks that I've been victim of.

Q: Well, I know in classes, the students have sometimes asked me if they can record my lectures. And I said, "No," because I don't want to be responsible for everything I say without notes. You know, sometimes, I just say things off the top of my head.
Weiss: Yes?

Q: And I don't—in-tel-lect-u-al-ly, I don't want to be responsible for that.

Weiss: That's why I've written it down! [laughter]

Q: Maybe that's where we—

Weiss: Barnard [College]. You want that?

Q: OK.

Weiss: There's a wonderful man, wonderful, who does a human rights course at Barnard.

Q: Peter Juviler?

Weiss: Oh no, but I know him. It's another name. Anyway, lovely guy. He called me, and "Would I come and speak to the class?" about whatever I've done that was relating to whatever they were talking about. In the last few years since Peter has retired, I've tried to engage him with me, involve him with me in everything I'm invited—so, if I'm invited to speak in The Hague, I say, "Can Peter speak, too?" Because he's got plenty to talk about. It has always worked. He rewarded me once. He was invited to Barcelona to speak about human rights and
corporate abuse, and he asked if I could speak too, about women and corporate abuse and human rights.

Now it's in writing, I showed you the book. So, this guy calls and asks me to come to Barnard to speak. I invite Peter, and Peter and I come to speak, and there's no text. There's nothing written, because we want to talk about what they want to hear. So we asked them, "What do you want to talk about?" It was a lot of fun. Each of us did a presentation. I can't remember what mine was. I probably could if I were put to the test. But it engaged the students. They wanted to keep in touch, you know. It was a wonderful experience, I think probably because he was such a good teacher, that he had already created a wonderful atmosphere among his students.

Q: But it's something a little different for you.

Weiss: Yes. No text.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I spoke at Bard [College]. That's another example where our grandson, Noah, was taking a class in peace history, but I think it was really war history, or more war, with a professor and his associate. Somehow, Noah talked to his professor about Grandma, because it was relevant to whatever they were studying. The professor invited me to come and speak, and I said, "OK, but can Peter come too?" "Yes." So, we each gave a talk. I think I may have it written down. We
loved it. We love interacting with students. Anyone younger is more fun. And more interesting, because they don't learn a lot of this stuff.

Q: They are interesting.

Weiss: Whoever heard of Women Strike for Peace?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I'm very sad that I can't find a very thick scrapbook that somebody whom I had never heard of before, somebody who heard me talk, made of my talks when I came back from Vietnam with the agreement and the letters, the first 300 letters. She clipped, or got a clipping service, for all of the newspapers that I was in in the country, and sent this to me. It was fantastic!

Q: They have a file down at Swarthmore.

Weiss: Really?

Q: With a lot of clippings about—yes.

Weiss: Really?
Q: Big, thick file, of clippings.

Weiss: But this was a scrapbook.

Q: Yes?

Weiss: Unfortunately, when we moved here, I had one box of books, among many, that were all either about me, or that I cared very much about, including one that was written by one of our children's kindergarten teachers, who wrote a book about women at work, and that was a long time ago, fifty years ago.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: In which I have—she was a photographer. Then she wrote the text. All of those books were in there. My mother's PhD thesis, a lot of things. We gave 3000 books away, because where do you put 3000 books in a New York apartment, to the local library. I didn't know until several years later that that box was gone.

[END OF SESSION]
Q: Tell me a story.

Weiss: Well, we just got an invitation, I think yesterday, to go to a conference in Siracusa, Sicily, on human rights and international criminal justice. I looked at the list of participants, and they're all guys! y yo, and me! [laughter]

Q: To start, today, I've got a big agenda. I want to just go back and have some final thoughts about Women Strike [Women Strike for Peace], et cetera, et cetera. Aside from the test ban treaty, what do you think were the greatest accomplishments of Women Strike?

Weiss: Oh, our work against the war in Vietnam was huge, because we made demonstrations and anti-Vietnam War activity safe for families. That was very, very valuable. We also took initiatives that had not been taken before, when we were invited to Vietnam by the Women's Union in 1969. We made a proposal that had never been made before in wartime, by anyone. That was to try to break the pretext that the administration was using to perpetuate the war because of prisoners of war, because of the treatment against prisoners of war, instead of stopping the bombing so that planes wouldn't be shot down, so we wouldn't have more prisoners of war.
But that initiative, and I should say unique initiative, was extraordinary. It had two impacts. One was national—politically—and the other was me—personally. I went around the country speaking, sometimes three or four times a week. Even though I became the butt, and Women Strike for Peace became the butt, of Ross Perot's venom, and the venom of some of the families of not necessarily prisoners of war, but of missing in action, and it was pretty vile, pretty ugly, but we became the friends of so many families who, for the first time, were hearing from their loved ones! I was invited to the wedding of one, and to two weddings, actually, of former prisoners. So, it was unique, it was rewarding, and it was, I guess, rather controversial.

Q: I was going to ask, did you feel that Women Strike for Peace gave you a voice? But, as I listen to you, my question is slightly different. Did it give you a presence?

Weiss: A presence?

Q: You were now—

Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: A reconceptualization of "self." A different way of being in the world.

Weiss: Well, I'll tell you something interesting. It never occurred to any of us that we were doing something for history. That's evident in everything we wrote and did, which never had a date.
We would say, "Come to a meeting on Monday," or, "Come to Central Park on June 12th." I don't think you find 1982 on any of the flyers!

Q: No! It's quite maddening to go through the stuff!

Weiss: It's horrific! It's maddening for me to try to file my papers today. But that says something about us. It says that we were doing this because we had to do it, because it was the right thing to do. We had no concept of making history. So, that's one point. The other point is that, I think in Women Strike, and you'd have to ask other WSPers [Women Strike for Peace] to confirm this, because it's not for me to grade myself—but I think I was making more publicity for Women Strike than most of the other members because I was out there speaking so often, and getting so much press. The amount of newspaper clippings is extraordinary. That's when we had newspapers.

Q: What do you think your greatest failure was?

Weiss: That's a good question. I really have to think about that.

Q: We can come back to it.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: I'll put the idea in your head.
Weiss: But it's an interesting question.

Q: What was your largest frustration?

Weiss: Oh, the government! There was a guy in the State Department named Frank Sieverts, S-I-E-V-E-R-T-S. He died. He would call. I would say, "Get your guys out of my telephone! Get them away from our mail!" "Oh," he said, "Those aren't ours. Those are the CIA's." Turf! Government turf! But we were doing what the government couldn't do, and that was enormously embarrassing for them. That's when I discovered that embarrassment is a good form of diplomacy. It's kind of interesting.

Q: What was your biggest laugh?

Weiss: I'm not sure there was a lot of laughter. Can I put that on the "To Think About" list?

Q: Sure. Yes.

Weiss: Because I hadn't thought about that, ever.

Q: I can't imagine that in all those meetings they didn't break out in some kind of laughter—

Weiss: Of course!
Q: —over some kind of absurd situation.

Weiss: Exactly.

Q: Some kind of twist or turn.

Weiss: You're absolutely right. And, in fact, even under these conditions of sadness and tragedy and difficulty and investigation and so forth, if you don't have fun doing what you're doing, you shouldn't be doing it. It's a little twist on Emma [Goldman], if there's no dancing. But I wasn't making a revolution, I was just working hard and long.

Q: Is it fair to say that in the broader movement, that Women Strike for Peace was a moderating force, if not moderate, was a moderating force?

Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: Can you play that out a little for me? Any examples that you might have?

Weiss: Well, I think the most important one is when we wouldn't allow the discussion about a demonstration to go forward until there was a commitment to non-violence, and no civil disobedience. That happened on several occasions. So, that was a very clear demonstration of the moderating force. I don't think it was a moderate organization, at least the public didn't think of it
as a moderate organization, because we were talking to the so-called enemy; the women who represented the North Vietnamese government. You know, I had [Nguyen Thi] Madame Binh in my house for dinner. She was the representative from the south at the talks, Nguyen Thi Binh. So, a lot of other organizations didn't do that.

Q: When you look back on it, what do you think your heritage is, or will be?

Wei: I think we have to, as civil society, take risks. I think we have to do everything we can possibly do to prevent war, because war, as an institution, is a failure. We know so much now in diplomacy, and in the field of conflict prevention, violent conflict prevention. Conflict is good, violent conflict is bad. And about peace education. If we don't become exhausted from exhausting everything we know, we are a failure. War is wasteful, it's expensive in life, in lives lost, in environment destroyed and in money misused. There are other ways to solve conflicts.

Q: Beyond the particular moment of Women Strike for Peace, what about the long-term? In the broad spectrum of the peace movement? You can go back to the 1890s all the way through.

Wei: Well, the 1890s are a good time. I mean, there's Bertha von Suttner, who was a role model in many ways. She was an extraordinary woman, the first woman to get the Nobel Peace Prize. But she was responsible for getting Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, to turn the profits from that invention into the Nobel Peace Prize. That's an incredible success story!
Q: When I was at Swathmore, there was a researcher there from Scotland, a woman who teaches peace studies in Scotland. She was there looking—she was commissioned to write a 6000-word essay on Bertha—

Weiss: Von Suttner?

Q: —von Suttner. She was there looking at the papers down there. She thought if she found enough, she would write a biography.

Weiss: Well, there are a number of good biographies, and I have to write a paper that's due on June 15th, for a woman who is a professor at a Michigan University that I'm not familiar with, and who's holding a class at The Hague on Bertha von Suttner, because it's an anniversary of something, I can't remember what, in—

Q: Oh, maybe that's why this woman is writing that essay.

Weiss: Yes. Exactly. I went around speaking in Austria in 2005, because that was the centennial of her Nobel. I went to Austria, I went to Eggenburg, which is where she lived, her home. I went to Vienna to speak in Parliament there, which was quite a nice experience. Now, there's a museum that's just opened in Vienna, the Bertha von Suttner Museum. In Prague, I helped to hang a plaque to Bertha in—I don't remember what the name of the building was, but it's in an open building that's open to the public, in the main square. Bertha is remarkable. She came from a very poor family, even though she was a princess, but a poor princess. She married a guy seven
years her junior, I think it was seven, who was the son of a noble family; not in Nobel Peace Prize, but ‘noble.’

Q: Noble. Yes.

Weiss: She spoke five or six or more languages, she was a writer, she wrote *Die Waffen Nieder!*, which is called, "Lay Down Your Arms," which is probably the only book on disarmament that became a best-seller.

Q: Did she make an effort to mobilize women? Or women's groups?

Weiss: Totally! She had a women's congress in The Hague in 19— I can't remember if it's '02, something like that.

Q: Now, is this something you knew before or after the Women Strike for Peace experience?

Weiss: Oh, after.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: Long after. It was when I became vice president of the International Peace Bureau [IPB], because she was one of the founders. Then I became president of the International Peace Bureau.
We had a lot of, actually, I think almost thirteen officers of the IPB were Nobel laureates. I was a Nobel nominee.

Q: You know, Amy Swerdlow, in her book, makes a point about the lack of knowledge of history, of the Women Strike for Peace.

Weiss: She was absolutely right. That's probably the reason she studied history post-Women Strike, and got her doctorate in history. Women's history.

Q: I was at a conference in Madison, Wisconsin.

Weiss: Oh, good town!

Q: It was about the student movement, and everyone was bemoaning the fact that we knew no history, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. My argument is somewhat different. It's important to know a certain amount of history, but not too much, because you think you could do—like Columbus, everyone knew the world was round, they just didn't know how round it was. If he had known how round it was, he never would have started out. If in the 1960s and '70s, one really knew how powerful the government reaction was going to be, would you have gone forward? So, sometimes it's important not to know too much. I was roundly condemned for being an anti-intellectual.
Weiss: I don't know if it's a question of quantity or quality. Our grandson has studied the American Civil War for the last five years, high school and university. But does he know enough about how to apply that history to contemporary history? I don't think so. I think it's quality, rather than quantity. But when I met Bertha in history books, I fell in love with her. I've written a little preface to a book about her, actually, that was published by IFOR, International Fellowship of Reconciliation.

Q: You know, earlier, I said presence. Do you consider her model as some kind of presence for yourself?

Weiss: Well, I admire her so much. I do love her, I just think she's fantastic. Who knows how, who's responsible for how you behave? You know, there are a lot of women in my life, my mother, Eleanor Roosevelt, Bertha von Suttner, and my women friends. Not just name drops. You probably pick up behavior and ideas from them. I like to think that sometimes, I go out ahead, alone, and then either reap the rewards or the consequences! [laughter]

Q: Moving now away from Women Strike for Peace, we'll move—

Weiss: But as a final word—

Q: OK. OK, yes.
Weiss: —Women Strike was the most extraordinary university for all of us. I mean, we basically moved from using a mimeograph machine to learning every skill that we've used since then. And—

Q: Like?

Weiss: Well, like mobilizing, organizing, taking risks, who do you call, what do you have to learn first? I am proposing that people sit down now and read Paul Krugman and read Tom Friedman, and read all about the economic consequences of climate change policies, the social, environmental—study it the way we studied Strontium-90. So, I'm bringing the experience from Women Strike into the present, because I think that peace people have to embrace environmental issues, especially global warming and climate change, because it's a threat to peace.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We have to know more about it. We have to be able to answer when people say, “It's going to be terrible for jobs, and terrible for the economy.” Krugman demonstrates that it's not terrible, at all. So, we have a new job to do. It's never-ending, isn’t it?

Q: Moving on, now, to The Mobilizations. How did your involvement in all of that come about?

Weiss: Probably—
Q: Maybe, I think it's important that we should preface this. Everyone who reads the transcript will know this, but it's important for us to keep that in mind, that we're talking about a time now when the peace movement, or the peace effort, was a decidedly minority position.

Weiss: Of course!

Q: That in the broad sweep of the land, the agencies of involvement in Vietnam and war, et cetera, were overwhelmingly predominant.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: So, we're talking about moving from a very, very fringe minority position to one in which the dominant discourse was altered enormously. But it's important to keep in mind how narrow it was at that point in time.

Weiss: So, your question?

Q: The question is, how did you become involved, at that point in time?

Weiss: Well, I was in Women Strike because of radiation caused by atmospheric testing of atomic bombs. The radiation was found in the teeth of our babies, and that got us into the non-organization called Women Strike for Peace. Then, at a certain point, we said we have to put
disarmament aside for a while, and deal with this war, which we knew, nobody attacked us. It was not Iwo Jima. So, what were we doing in Vietnam? I was the delegate from Women Strike to the larger coalition, which was known as The Mobilization, or, "The Mobe." When time came to have a demonstration, it was very easy for them to pick three or four men to co-chair the demonstration; Dave Dellinger, Sid Peck, Ron Young.

But it was clear that if they wanted to have women come to the demonstration, they had to have a woman co-chair, as well. I guess from my participation at those meetings, I was selected to be a co-chair of the November 15, 1969 demonstration. So, you said that the war effort represented a dominant part of civil society. That demonstration, November 15, '69, that was led by a Republican and a Democratic senator, [Charles] Goodell and [George] McGovern, was called the turning point in public opinion. I think it was. Fast forward, this past weekend, we went to the funeral of my great aunt, who was ninety-six. Her four children spoke. The youngest told the story of being in high school, and going with his brother to the demonstration in Washington from Westchester. I was taken aback. He looked at me, and he said, "Cora, didn't you have something to do with that?"

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: "Yes." He talked about how it was his first demonstration. He was a teenager; his brother was even younger. No, older. He was the youngest. They went on November 15, 1969, to Washington. They got on the bus, and they went. It was kind of amusing, because he was talking about his mother, who was lying in the casket next to him, and he said, "And after the bus took
off and we were on our way to Washington, my mother jumped in her car to drive down to make sure we were OK."

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: So, that was an important demonstration. And soon, I'll be talking about—well, this is an anti-nuclear demonstration on June 12th, 1982, which was later.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But I'm going to ask how many people were in Central Park? You were. So, these are memorable dates and events. I can't remember the question anymore [laughs].

Q: Well, I'm moving on.

Weiss: But it was a public opinion-changing moment.

Q: Right.

Weiss: That was important. I think we felt that. I took my first trip to Vietnam from that stage. I mean, it was after that was over.
Q: Why don't we go back now to that point in '66 or so, when you began—well, what was that coalition like? Was that the meeting in Cleveland? Was that where you were meeting?

Weiss: We met in Cleveland because that was where Ben Spock lived, and Sid Peck was teaching. I think that's why we met in Cleveland. But we also used to meet in someplace downtown, way downtown. And we met in labor union offices. I can't remember all of the addresses.

Q: Coming from Women Strike for Peace, what was your take on that group, mostly men, now, that group representing ten, twelve, fourteen, twenty different organizations? Were there sides? How did they break down?

Weiss: It was complicated. It was very complicated.

Q: Tell me the complications as you saw them.

Weiss: Well, you had sort of yuppies on one end, the Abbie Hoffmans, and Jerry Rubins. You had clergy and laity on the other end. You had kind of almost anarchists, I mean, sort of just—not violent anarchists. [pause]

Q: You were talking about the complexities of the—

Weiss: Yes, it was complicated.
Q: —of the coalition.

Weiss: So, there were pacifists, ideological pacifists, which I am not. I'm a nuclear pacifist, and I'm totally opposed to war. But I'm not a Gandhian, although we were both born on the same date, which I didn't discover until late in life. And there was always one member of the Communist Party.

Q: Is it Johnson, is his name?

Weiss: Somebody Johnson, with an A. Arnold. Was it Arnold? I don't remember. He was a kind of a sweet, gentle old man, older. Nobody is old anymore to me. But he was the thorn, or the magnet, that attracted most of the animosity towards the movement, which was unfortunate, because the rest of us had nothing to do with the Communist Party, absolutely nothing. By then, it was a pathetic, small nothing in this country. It was almost all over. So, there were those complications of the breadth, the spread of the various organizations. Then there was the male dominance, and I wouldn't have called it that then, but I felt it, obviously. I wasn't as sensitive to it then as I am now. The conference that we're going to in September in Sicily, the first thing I did was count the number of men on the participant's list. I wouldn't have done that then. All of these things come into play.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: But you'd have to ask Sid or—David is dead, Jerry is dead, Abbie is dead. I mean, all of those guys are dead. You'd have to ask someone else if I was picked for "gender balance," and what's balance? One out of four. Or, I was picked because I was articulate and demonstrating leadership, or both. ¿Quién sabe? All I know is that I was in an elevator once going up to the office of The Mobe in a building in Washington—I'm going to get stuck now—what was the name of the wonderful journalist from the New York Post whose last name began with a K?

Q: Murray Kempton.

Weiss: Murray Kempton, thank you very much! You must be a very young man to have such a good memory! Murray was in the elevator standing behind me with another person, and as I got off the elevator, he said, "That's Cora Weiss, who is a leader in this effort." So, this was before I got involved in the prisoner of war issue, which didn't happen until December, '69, a month later. But there must have been some reason for him to point me out. I don't know. I don't want to take any credit for something I didn't do, or something that was done by somebody else.

Q: No.

Weiss: I feel very strongly about that. It was very much a team effort, I worked very hard.

Q: What did you do?
Weiss: I made sure that Coretta Scott King was a speaker, an opening speaker. I made sure that there were women on the program, and that there would be no violence. The demonstration, this is November of '69—

Q: Right. Yes.

Weiss: —ended with the police coming with teargas. It was a disaster! A total disaster. And there was no need for it. So, why that happened, I'm sure somebody else knows.

Q: Yes. Well, there was a break-off to go and storm the Justice Department, or something like that.

Weiss: Yes, but who led it?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I mean, was it one of us? Or was it one of them?

Q: Oh, I think it was the Weather Underground [phonetic]—

Weiss: Yeah, but who knows where that comes from?

Q: —whatever the hell—yes.
Weiss: I mean, the Weather people were terrible then. So, I think it was an important—I don't remember the question.

Q: Oh. [laughs]

Weiss: That's called short-term memory loss.

Q: The question was to get complexities of—

Weiss: Complexity, right.

Q: But looking at the record, there was an enormous amount of struggle over banners, sayings.

Weiss: Oh, of course!


Weiss: Absolutely, yes.

Q: And because there were all of these, all the factions, it took on a certain kind of sectarian tone and people threatening to leave the meeting, and this, that and the other.
Weiss: Oh, I'm sure.

Q: Who didn't get their way.

Weiss: When you have that wide a spread of values and views, you're bound to have disagreements.

Q: Now, I'm trying to get to how you personally, coming from Women Strike, where there is more or less this kind of in-built sense of community, walk me into this kind of milieu, in which there is an intense struggle over every point.

Weiss: Listen, and June 12, '82 was even worse!

Q: Pardon?

Weiss: June 12, '82 was even worse! There was terrible struggle. Some of us tried to minimize it, some of us tried to accommodate it by letting a little bit in. But most of us tried to see our focus prevail. The focus was, “Out now!” –the war is illegal, immoral and wrong.

Q: Now, you were also involved in '67, when there was a demonstration, part of which was the march on the Pentagon, part of which stayed at the Lincoln Memorial, and part of which split off. Do you recall?
Weiss: I never got to the Pentagon.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But if that was the Pentagon march, which I don't recall the date of—

Q: Yes. Sixty-seven, was it?

Weiss: I think it was the only demonstration that I missed, because I had been in a car accident and had whiplash, and I was wearing one of those huge collars. So, I wasn't there.

Q: So, both of us have to depend on Norman Mailer.

Weiss: Oh, did he write about it?


Weiss: David Cortright has been on the phone with me recently to say we have to do something in 2015, because the Pentagon is planning a huge rewrite of history of the Vietnam War, and they're going to be promoting activities. I don't know the list of what they're going to do that remembers the war with great approval. David feels that we should do something at our tender ages to try to counter that. I don't know what you do in 2015, when everybody is wired to their iPhones and other equipment. And they're not going out marching anymore. So, how do you do
something that the public will take note of? I don't know. Maybe teach-ins all over the country. But something, to indicate that it was the wrong war, the wrong time, the wrong place, the wrong people. And the anti-war movement was right.

Q: Now, I guess this is a question of tactics, what do you do? And one of the major tactics of that period of time was to call a demonstration.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Was there a point in which people began to say, "Gee, another demonstration?"

Weiss: Oh, absolutely. Not only that, but there were two groups, basically. There were the Socialist Workers Party, who were otherwise known as the Trots, and then the rest of us. The problem was that, sometimes, the Socialist Worker's Party would come out and name a date, and it became known. The rest of us would have to join in, because it couldn't be a failure. I can't remember precisely which ones, or what time or what day, but we very often felt that it was not appropriate to have a demonstration on the date that they called it. So, those were internal conflicts.

Q: There was also one about whether or not to work within the Democratic Party, or the Republican, or within the party system, or to somehow build community outside.

Weiss: Well, in 1968, was it '68? The Chicago party convention?
Q: Yes.

Weiss: That was pretty important. My husband, Peter, was an elected delegate from the Bronx to the Democratic Convention, and I was a delegate from Women Strike for Peace, not to the convention, but to the demonstration. The women were asked by the rest of the peace movement to march first, to demonstrate first, in front of the Hilton Hotel where the delegates were all staying, to test the cops, basically. So, we started a walk on the sidewalk in front of the Hilton Hotel, in a kind of oval or circular way, to test the police. The police kept moving us closer to the hotel, and further away from the street, but without any violent expression.

Then the time came for the demonstration to end, and we were calling on the delegates to end the war in Vietnam. Then, the next day, all hell broke loose. So, we weren't a very good test. We were, in a way, used. But then, the yippies and the hippies and the whatever went into Grant Park, and the cops were brutal. They started to use jeeps in Chicago with barbed wire in front that had just come out of Vietnam. That was exactly the kind of vehicle that was being used in Vietnam. Just as lots of military equipment today is being distributed—

Q: I saw that article.

Weiss: —to the American police departments, thousands, including the use of masks, and Blackhawk helicopters, and just frightening things! The militarization of society through the
police department. So, the 1968 convention was an important moment for discussing the Vietnam War.

Q: Did you speak before the platform committee?

Weiss: No.

Q: No. But Women Strike for Peace did have a presence there?

Weiss: I don't remember. Ask Amy [Swerdlow].

Q: Yes, in the Swarthmore archives—

Weiss: There is something.

Q: —there is the testimony, WSP [Women Strike for Peace] people before the Democratic—yes.

Weiss: Oh, that's good to remember. I don't know who it would be, maybe Ethel Taylor—

Q: There were eight or ten points making—yes.

Weiss: Or Edith Velastrigo.
Q: It didn't say.

Weiss: It didn't say who? It just said Women Strike?

Q: It was some kind of an internal report, or something or other. The points made by Women Strike.

Weiss: I'm delighted that they appear.

Q: Who were you backing in '68?

Weiss: That's an interesting question.

Q: Peter was a delegate.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: So you were involved in the Democratic Party in some kind of way.

Weiss: Totally.

Q: The new Democratic coalition at that point in time.
Weiss: —it was Gene McCarthy.

Q: Not Robert Kennedy? Gene McCarthy?

Weiss: No.

Q: No.

Weiss: Stay clean with Gene. Gene McCarthy was a remarkable person. He got very few votes, didn't he? [laughter]

Q: Well, he did very—

Weiss: At least he represented—

Q: —no, he did very well in some of the primaries, and enough to scare [Lyndon B.] Johnson, yes.

Weiss: Well, that's good. Now, Gene McCarthy was remarkable. We have a beautiful poster somewhere, done by Ben Shahn for the McCarthy campaign. Beautiful.

Q: You campaigned for him here in New York?
Weiss: Sure. I mean, he represented the anti-war movement.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: The anti-war values.

Q: Did you meet him?

Weiss: Yes. Yes.

Q: Can you tell me a little about that meeting?

Weiss: No, I can't remember.

Q: You can't remember? [laughs] You were in Chicago the night of the big blow-up?

Weiss: No. What happened in Chicago was, it was August. Our three babies were being taken care of by my mother on Martha's Vineyard, and to have both mommy and daddy in Chicago was not cool. So, as soon as our demonstration was over, I came back to take care of the kids. Peter didn't come back, because—I mean, he came back eventually—he was arrested with Dick Gregory and another group of people, because they crossed the imaginary line. They crossed a street that Mayor [Richard J.] Daley decided you couldn't cross anymore, and they were all
arrested. What Peter's lawyer thought was going to be a five or six hour trial, became a two-week trial.

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: Yes. And—

Q: And the result was?

Weiss: They were exonerated, because they didn't go to jail. But no, I think he had to pay a $500 fine.

Q: Even though he was a delegate?

Weiss: They paid a fine.

Q: He was—

Weiss: Oh, yes. [laughs]

Q: Well, you know, actually, this might be a point at which we can take a little detour. Now, and talk about you and Peter together as movement people, because it's such an important part of your life.
Weiss: Well, first, we're loving people. Lovers, before we're movement. It is an important part. I was a law student, and Peter was a lawyer when we got married, when we got engaged to be married. Peter went to work as a lawyer in international trademark work, "international" being the key word. So, he would travel a lot, because he had clients all over the world. I went to social work school and didn't become a social worker, and decided to go to public health school and didn't become a public health worker. But I was looking for what to do. Then I was in Women Strike. I started traveling because of Women Strike. So, I went to Vietnam for the first time, left three babies at home with Peter.

Q: In '69?

Weiss: Right.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Peter never said, "No," which was just remarkable at that time, and I'm forever grateful for that. But I would always make sure there was somebody else there to help take care of the kids, like a college couple. I always prepared casseroles with instructions on how to heat them for dinner, it was before microwaves. So I tried to make it as easy as possible for him, and my mother played a very strong role. She would take the kids to movies, or come and play with them, or whatever. But he supported me in my work. Then, he eventually joined with other
lawyers to create, or to become part of the Lawyer’s Committee on American Policy towards Vietnam. Then we marched together for the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA].

Q: He also traveled to Vietnam.

Weiss: But not until a little later.

Q: A little later, yes.

Weiss: He went—I sent him with Mort Stavis.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: At the time of the Son Tay raid, S-O-N-T-A-Y—

Q: Right.

Weiss: —which was pretty important, because he was there when the U.S. was bombing what they thought was a prisoner of war camp, or bombing a village where there had been a prisoner of war camp. So, it was a little nervous-making. It was very nervous-making. He came back and reported his findings, I think, to Justice [Arthur] Goldberg and to an editor of the New York Times, and they got an op-ed out of it. What was the year? November 1970. I had already had an op-ed in the New York Times, the first week that op-eds were invented. But I was below the fold,
and a woman from the POW MIA [prisoners of war missing in action] committee was above the fold.

Anyway, Peter had to do his law work to keep us in breakfast, lunch and dinner. He worked very hard and very long hours. He became a partner in the law firm. It was a very significant international trademark law firm. I have a wonderful photograph of him in a demonstration in the rain with umbrellas, with our kids. I can't remember the year. But, he was against the war, and he worked as a lawyer against the war with other lawyers. He supported me and my work. I was out there more than I was in there, I guess!

Q: Somehow I link his name to Bill Kunstler.

Weiss: Because of the Center for Constitutional Rights, but not because of Vietnam, I don't think.

Q: No, no.

Weiss: Bill Kunstler and Arthur Kinoy and a third man from the south, Benjamin Smith, were the founders of the Center for Constitutional Rights. I don't know how many years into the Center…Arthur invited Peter to come in and join them. And to this day, he's a vice president of the Center, but he's just been told that his time limit has come, or will come, in the middle of next year. The Center has been a very important place for him. He brought the idea of international human rights law to the Center.
Q: Ah!

Weiss: Which had been mostly a domestic legal place. Very important domestic law. But he helped to internationalize their outlook. They became members of the Federation Internationale des Droits de l'Homme, they became members of the FIDH, which is the International Federation of Human Rights.

Q: Right. He was also very active in the Institute for Policy Studies [IPS].

Weiss: He was. Contrary to Wikipedia, he was not a founder of it, neither was my father a founder of it, neither was I. But he was Chair of the Board for a certain number of years, after it had been founded by Mark Raskin and Dick Barnet. And a guy who's just joined the Institute, David—not David Hawk, David Hart, who was a kid when I was active, and who is now at the IPS working on something called, "The New Economy," wants me to come down to brief the new staff members of IPS, because he claims that I had a great impact on the direction that he took in life. I have no memory of that. But he said, "And every time I turn around at IPS, I see your influence here," which is very nice, actually.

When Orlando Letelier was murdered, assassinated on Embassy Row in Washington, his car was blown up. The trigger apparently came from the Chilean Embassy, Peter and I flew down immediately. Somebody said, as we were planning the funeral, somebody said, "And we will march on the street during the funeral." I said, "No, we won't. We will be in the funeral, inside
the church—Catholic church in Washington—saying 'goodbye' to Orlando." I prevailed, and people remember that. It's amazing to me, because they reminded me. The Institute for Policy Studies is a very important think tank. It's an activist, scholarly think tank. It's now run by a remarkable human being named John Cavanagh.

Q: Odd combination.

Weiss: Perfect! In and out! [laughs]

Q: Now, when you and Peter were sitting down over dinner, you swapped tales, information?

Weiss: Yes, we still do.

Q: How does that internal dynamic work?

Weiss: “How was your day today, dear? What did you have for lunch?” It's wonderful. We had different things to say to each other. But over the years, when the kids were—when we were still a family of five, we talked about the kids first, and about school first.

Q: Right.

Weiss: And about, "Did you hear that Tamara got into college without our help?" How dare she! [laughs]
Q: Yes! [laughs]

Weiss: And Judy's leaving the University of Michigan Ann Arbor, for University of Massachusetts. Stuff like that.

Q: Sometimes we forget when we're talking about political couples that—

Weiss: Family first!

Q: —or, the ordinary, everyday living.

Weiss: Very! There's nothing ordinary about every day. It's extraordinary, sometimes.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But we also talked about, we need a new furnace, and all of the domestic issues, which were huge, because they were time-consuming. We had to take care of our own home, and get the raccoons out of the garbage can. That was an important part of my life, because I would drive Peter to the subway, during the airlift, '59 to '63, we drove in together. During Friendshipment, 1973 to '75, I worked in the office in the city. I drove him to work, and I would drop him off at his office. I would park and pay for the parking. [laughs]
Q: Is he still a practicing attorney?

Weiss: No.

Q: No?

Weiss: Peter retired five or, no, more than five. A few years, a number of years ago. He's going to be eighty-nine, so he's entitled to his own time, now.

Q: Wow.

Weiss: But he is actively engaged as an international human rights lawyer, and, in fact, is going—we're going together to speak at this conference in Siracusa, Sicily on human rights and international criminal justice. So, you never leave your—

Q: You travel together?

Weiss: Oh, now we always travel together.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Yes. Somebody has to read the small text of what the train track is, or the airline gate.
Q: The slip of the tongue there where you mentioned David Hawk brings to mind The Mobilization.

Weiss: The Moratorium.

Q: The Moratorium. What was the relationship between The Mobe and The Moratorium? I remember last time you wanted to make that distinction.

Weiss: Yes, there is a distinction, and maybe if I had to do it over, which we never do, so maybe we shouldn't even consider it, I would have made a bigger effort at coalescing, and not having it so separated. But people considered the moratorium a more centrist, more political party, meaning Democratic Party, organization, and The Mobilization a more, "Radical," but I never thought of it as a terribly radical, non-party affiliated, non-democratic organization. So, The Moratorium had their demonstration on October 15 – wow! [laughs]

Q: Wow!

Weiss: The Mobilization had ours on November 15, 1969. Francine du Plessix Gray wrote in the New Yorker, January 3, 1970, that Reverend Richard Fernandez and Cora Weiss played an active role in trying to bring the Moratorium and Mobilization together. They were actively negotiating.

The ultimate impact of the two of them was very important, because it had an impact on public opinion. But one of them would have been twice as big, if we had done it together.
Q: Well—

Weiss: It's not a regret.

Q: —some of the same people went to both.

Weiss: To both. A lot of same people.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Definitely came to November, because they had seen how important it was.

Q: But there were a couple of liberal senators who backed out of the November march.

Weiss: Really?

Q: Who had been active in The Mobe.

Weiss: In The Moratorium?

Q: In The Moratorium. I think Robert Kennedy was—
Weiss: One of them?

Q: —one of them.

Weiss: You know, memory is either selective, or just non-existent. But thank heavens for George McGovern and Charlie Goodell.

Q: Right.

Weiss: I think at one point, they actually held hands, marching in the front line!

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But if they didn't, I perceived it that way. They were terrific.

Q: And I remember—

Weiss: Goodell was responsible for Senate Resolution Number 1, which was an anti-war resolution. He introduced the first bill to cut off funds for the Vietnam War. I signed a letter with many others to keep him in the Senate.
Q: Right. I remember something vaguely from a project we had on Al Lowenstein, the distinction between the two pieces. So he's very active in The Moratorium, and then one of the few people who was also—

Weiss: Active in The Mobe?

Q: —active in The Mobe, yes.

Weiss: He was a controversial figure admired and loved by most people on Long Island, and we were always too critical, you know? It has so changed my views today when you just have to welcome anyone who's willing to stand with you and not be critical. I can't stand the internal criticizing. It's true.

Q: Is it kind of a luxury of success, being so critical?

Weiss: We weren't successful, yet, when we were being critical.

Q: [laughs] Yes.

Weiss: We were still struggling to get the war ended. But we ended it, and we forced—I think public opinion forced it to be ended, to come to an end. We succeeded in getting Congress to stop allocating money, and that was the key. The allocation of funding.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: That helped to end it. So, we celebrated in Central Park, thanks to Phil Ochs. We had something called, "The War is Over." It was a huge sign on the stage. The skirt of the stage. Two guys came up to us afterwards, and asked what was going to happen to the sign. I looked around and I said, "I guess it's going in my garage." They said, "Well, can we have it?" We said, "Sure!" Because it was taking this enormously heavy, big banner off our hands. But it became the backdrop for—and now, I'm blocking on the name of the play. What was the name of the famous play written by two men, Ragnei and Rado.

Q: Hair? Not Hair.

Weiss: Hair.

Q: Oh, Hair.

Weiss: There you go. Absolutely right. Good for you! So, it was the backdrop in the stage in the play. "The War is Over." I don't know long that lasted.

Q: This jumps ahead a little bit, but I want to get back to '69 in Vietnam. But this jumps ahead, too, May of 1970. As I understand it, there was a meeting in your room, in your home, when the announcement came that [Richard M.] Nixon—
Weiss: Came about the bombing.

Q: —had bombed Cambodia.

Weiss: Cambodia.

Q: Do you recall that?

Weiss: Absolutely. Everyone was in the room.

Q: Who is everyone?

Weiss: Shirley MacLaine, Donald Sutherland, David Dellinger. It was an extraordinary gathering. I can't remember why we were gathered. But the phone rang.

Q: To build a coalition, I was told.

Weiss: Was it? OK. You know more about me than I know about me. And I'm going to keep reminding you!

Q: You knew it. We know it differently.

Weiss: OK.
Q: I’ve just researched it.

Weiss: You're fresh.

Q: I didn't know it until two days ago.

Weiss: OK.

Q: You know, I'll forget it in two days.

Weiss: So, the room was packed, so it was to build a coalition, OK. So, the phone rang. I have no memory of who called, but Nixon had just bombed Cambodia. Either there was a moment of shock, silence, or a moment of, "We've got to do something." But the, "We've got to do something" came very quickly, and that's what created the demonstration. That was the basis for the next demonstration. I don't even remember where it was. It was in Washington, I assume.

Q: You were—yes.

Weiss: Memory—

Q: And this was before Kent State, of course.
Weiss: Yes, oh—

Q: Kent State came three or four days after that.

Weiss: Really? So soon?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That was such a tragedy. I spoke at Kent State sometime during the war, I can't remember when. That’s going to be a common phrase, "I can't remember when!"

Q: I think there's a song like that.

Weiss: Anyway, it was a terrific gathering. We had lots of gatherings in our house. Do you remember when Olof Palme came? Have you read about that?

Q: When he came to Riverside?

Weiss: To Riverdale.

Q: To River—no. No.
Weiss: That's a wonderful story. If I could go to my study, I might even get you the date. Olof Palme was the Prime Minister of Sweden, and the Vietnamese asked him to work on the prisoner of war issue parallel with me. And I never quite understood what he did, except when I realized he gave it credibility. So, I would not be out there all alone with my little tiny Committee of Liaison, working to break the back of the policy that would keep the war going.

So, we invited this person named Olof Palme, who no one had ever met, but who was the Prime Minister, to come to a meeting at my house, our house, to speak. Peter and I were upstairs getting ready, and the door rang, and—oh, prior to his arrival, the Secret Service came to the house, the day before, or the morning, and asked if they could sit in the kitchen during the meeting. I said, "Absolutely not. You can't come in the house." We didn't know what was going to happen.

So, Peter and I were upstairs, the time for the meeting was coming, and the doorbell rang, and three guys walked in. They were each wearing a navy blue raincoat. They were different sizes and shapes, but I had no idea which one was Palme! [laughs] I don't know how we found out, because they didn't introduce themselves. So, it turns out one was Mats Helstrom, one was Hans [Eric Albert] Dahlgren, whom I had political relations with, subsequently. And the third was Palme.

Fast forward, people come, the room is full, I don't remember what month it was, but all the windows and doors were open because it got very warm in the room with so many people. It might have been October, but I can't guarantee that. Palme is standing—we had two steps going down into the living room, and Palme is standing at the top of the steps, which is with his back to
a hallway, entry hall. And he's talking, talking, talking, and he stops to take a breath, or to think about his next sentence, and all of a sudden, we hear his voice coming from the bushes outside! [laughs] Whether it was the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] or the Secret Service, or who knows which agency, they were planted in the bushes with a tape recorder, and some guy who was doing it was probably testing his tape recorder! [laughter] Everybody broke out into hysterical laughter. It's a story that holds in this age of surveillance. When they made a movie about Palme and they interviewed me for it, because I then had a lot to do with him after that—I became one of the delegates to the six-continent peace initiative that was held in Stockholm—and he came to speak in Riverside [Church]—

Q: I know you spoke—

Weiss: Yes, but well, that was later.

Q: You spoke at his funeral.

Weiss: I did. The public funeral in the square.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That was very moving. The world lost a great human being.
Q: Strange case. A strange case.

Weiss: His murder?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Well, he and his wife hated the Secret Service. They were always crowding them. So, they wanted to go to the movies alone one night, and that was the end.

Q: But you knew you were under surveillance quite frequently during—

Weiss: Oh, yes. Actually, our mailman, whose wife was a member of Women Strike for Peace, told me that our mail was being watched. Tapped. It was a mail tap. And sometimes—

Q: So they could just keep a record of who sent—they couldn't open your mail?

Weiss: They kept—I don't know. But it was watched. Who knows how much they kept and didn't deliver?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We knew our telephone was tapped, because the woman who lived across the street, who was a very good friend, and her husband, who was a local doctor, and sometimes in an
emergency we used him as a doctor, she claims she got a call saying, "Did you know that your telephone was being used to call the enemy?" Because once, I stupidly thought if I used her phone to call Paris, it would not be recorded. But was I mistaken! So, our mailman told us that our mail was tapped. Often, our phone would go, "Clickety click," or whatever. We were aware. I would say into the phone, "Hang up, you guys!" Yes, we knew it. But I don't know what impact it had. I think we felt we were doing nothing illegal, nothing wrong, and we should just keep doing. But there are pages worth of stuff, I gather—

Q: Well, have you ever asked for it?

Weiss: We did an FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] in 1970-something. They charged us five cents a page to photocopy.

Q: Oh, yes.

Weiss: But when it came, I think I measured it four feet up off the ground. Most pages were redacted, so it would say, "Secretary of State," blank.

Q: Yes?

Weiss: Or, "Subject," presumably that was me, "Appears to be in good health. But agent is not a doctor." I used to read from them because I got so exhausted giving talks, sometimes a couple a day, and I did it for amusement, because they were quite funny! But think of all the money that
was spent and all of the boring meetings that these guys had to attend to keep track of us.

Anyhow, I haven't gotten any since then, but we both assume. I mean, what the hell, I'm not going to stop what I'm doing.

Q: When I was at UCLA, we had interviewed Dorothy [Ray] Healey, who was the head of the Communist Party in Los Angeles, Southern California. She had gotten her FBI record. Of course, it was redacted similarly, but it was wonderful for the interviewing, because she could put a date and a place to every meeting she had ever attended!

Weiss: [laughs] So we have to thank them?

Q: No, but that was the upside. Many years later, she had a record of where she had been, at what date, and who else was there.

Weiss: That's interesting. I have never looked at mine, and I wonder if I even know where they are, because it's such a deep pile.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But maybe I should think about using it as a record, a historic record.

Q: One of the things that came out of Dorothy's looking at it was reportage that obviously came from inside, you know?
Weiss: Inside the party, or inside the FBI?

Q: Inside her personal life. Inside the party, inside the organizations she was connected with, et cetera. You know? It is not beyond the realm of comprehension that some of the information in your file was garnered from somebody you knew who was working—

Weiss: In the agency, yes.

Q: It's not beyond comprehension.

Weiss: It doesn't keep me up at night.

Q: Yes. No, now it's so long ago. But, especially in Vietnam, were you very conscious of exactly how far you could go in terms of the Logan—you mentioned the Logan Act. The Logan Act and other kinds of—

Weiss: Well, we never negotiated with the government.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We never negotiated. We presented a proposal to the Women's Union. Now, obviously, there were no civil society organizations in Vietnam at the time. Now there are. But to the extent
that there was a group of women, large group, who were organized as a Women's Union, to promote their needs and their skills and their abilities and their wants, we connected with them. So, they were obviously approved. But it wasn't as if you were negotiating with the secretary of state or a Member of Parliament. We weren't. We were very clear about that. We brought a proposal to deliver mail by hand and bring mail back, and improve the packages for prisoners, which they, then, could take to the military or whoever it had to be taken to for approval, and they came back and met with us, and said it's approved. When we went to pick up the three prisoners of war in '72, September, it was the women who turned them over to us, not the military. So there was that degree of clarity and caution. I don't think the government—who knows what the government would do? [laughs] But they would have a hard time—

Q: Well, apparently, from the report that I got about the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] state department files from other people, the FBI certainly wanted to find—

Weiss: But that's not the Logan Act.

Q: No, that's not the Logan Act, but it said the—for possible prosecution for soliciting under the Foreign Agents Registration Act [FARA].

Weiss: Right, that’s registration. We never registered because we weren't a foreign agent, but that's not the Logan Act.
Q: Right.

Weiss: Two different things.

Q: Right. Well, let's get on to, how did you get to Vietnam? Or how did that story begin?

Weiss: Well, it was November 15, '69, the demonstration in Washington. First it started in July 4, '69.

Q: What happened?

Weiss: In Canada, when the Women Strike for Peace and the Voice of Women Canada [VOW Peace] met with the women who came from Vietnam.

Q: You were not there?

Weiss: Of course I was there!

Q: You were there.

Weiss: I was very—

Q: You met with the women?
Weiss: I met with the women, definitely. We were sitting on July 4th, our most patriotic holiday, licking ice cream cones together at a farm on the Canadian side of the border. We were all sitting on the grass getting to know each other. You know, “How many children do you have, where, what are they studying, what did you do before the war?” We bonded in many ways. At least one of those women became a friend of mine for very, very many long years. I met with her and her husband in Saigon long after the war.

Q: Who was this?

Weiss: Her name was Nguyen Ngoc Dung, N-G-U-Y-E-N, N-G-O-C, D-U-N-G. She became an ambassador to the U.N., but not the perm rep [permanent representative], not the *numero uno*. She was a deputy and the only woman in the mission, and suffered from gender discrimination. So, I would take her to a doctor and do things for her in New York. She was at the airport in Saigon at the time that the U.S. was pulling out, responsible for the journalists. She was an incredible human being. She learned everything she knew by doing it.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Anyway, the women we met in Canada on July 4 were the women who invited me to put together a delegation of three people to come to Vietnam. Until then, some Americans had been. I think Bill Kunstler preceded us in a trip and brought back mail from some of the pilots.
Q: There had been some women from Women Strike for Peace who had gone.

Weiss: Three women—

Q: Yes.

Weiss: —who went to a conference in Indonesia and were invited to Vietnam; Mary Clarke, maybe Dagmar Wilson, Lorraine Gordon. In any event, the July 4 meeting produced the invitation to come, and we proposed that it be after the November demonstration because we were working twenty-four/seven on that. So, the demonstration was over. Ethel Taylor, who was then—was she already president of Women Strike? Possibly—from Philadelphia, and Madeline [Taylor] Duckles, who was from Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF, and she lived in San Francisco. The three of us got on a plane and flew to Copenhagen, and then flew to Bangkok, or Phnom Penh. I think it might have been Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Then we had to get on an ICC plane, International Control Commission, Poland, Hungary, Canada, and Indonesia, to fly into Hanoi. But first we flew to Vientiane.

Q: In Laos, yes.

Weiss: Yes. In Vientiane, we met at the dinner table of the hotel, with a reporter from CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System], a reporter from here, from there. We had good conversations. “What do you know about what's going on in the war?” We met with the Vietnamese
representative, or ambassador, to Laos. I think I'm confusing two trips. But in any event, we flew from there to Hanoi. When we arrived in Hanoi, Ethel was quite sick.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: She had some kind of a sinus infection. So, instead of having the Customs agent or the military come onto the plane first, two people in white jackets, white coats, medical people, came with a huge syringe of Vitamin B, B12, B-whatever, B6, I don't know which B, for Ethel. Then we got off the plane and the bombing began. This is '69. So, we immediately were in a bomb shelter underground.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: But we also looked at each other, I think, and felt secure. That's a very interesting point about being in a country under your country's bombs, and not being worried that you were going to get bombed, somehow. I don't understand how that works. But, in any event, we then went into Hanoi over a pontoon bridge, because the bridge had been blown out. The three of us met immediately with the Women's Union. We presented this proposal. Then they took us to visit—

Q: This was the proposal on the exchange of mail?

Weiss: —on mail and packages.
Q: And packages.

Weiss: The package part was almost as important, because it demonstrated more about us, that we cared about what the guys were getting. And that this was a Women Strike for Peace event. So, then the women took us on the tour of Hanoi, which included the three of us going to the so-called Hanoi Hilton Hotel, which is the name the guys gave to the prison camp. We met with—I remember one, Paul Brown, and we met with half a dozen people who would not become the three guys that we would take home in 1972. We shook hands, and we talked and we brought messages for their families. It was a good meeting. I don't remember how long each of them had been in a prison camp, but the photographs that came out show that they seem to be OK, they were not emaciated, they were not in pain, they weren't limping. But we're not doctors, we're not psychiatrists. So we just could take what we saw back with us.

Before we left, the Women's Union came to see us and brought us 300 letters and said that our proposal was approved. So, we came back, we had a little committee in place called the Committee of Liaison. Stewart Meacham from the Quakers, Dave Dellinger became my co-director, or I became his co-director. Dick Barnett, a woman who was a social worker from Westchester—I don't remember everybody's name. But there were, maybe, six of us. Maybe one or two more, but not too many. It was a small committee. We brought the mail back, and we immediately re-mailed every letter to the addresses on the air letters, they were called, with a letter from us saying that we went to Vietnam, and what we were prepared to do.
Ethel Taylor had to go home in the middle of our trip because of her sinus condition, but I think she brought a letter to a family from Philadelphia named Reynolds—it's amazing how you remember names like this—from him, he was a pilot. That brought her together with that family, and they became good friends. So Madeline and I came back alone, and we flew back via Hawaii and San Francisco. When the plane stopped in Hawaii and we had to get out, I was the most nervous human being in the world, because I did not want these letters to be taken away from me. I don't remember—I couldn't put three hundred letters in my bosom, but I had them tightly attached somehow to me!

All of a sudden, we were stopped on the tarmac, the door's not open yet, and the pilot gets on the mic and says, "Cora Weiss, there's a gentleman waiting to see you!" I absolutely thought I would have a nervous breakdown! Was the gentleman the CIA, the FBI, the DIA [Defense Intelligence Agency]? I wasn't expecting to meet anyone. We get off the plane, I'm clutching the letters in a bag, Stewart Meacham, of the Quakers, is at the bottom of the gang plank! Stewart lived in Hawaii, totally forgot about that! He was a Quaker, and he was the one who wrote the proposal. And he welcomed me cheerfully! [laughter] He welcomed us, Madeline was with me. It took me a while to get over my worries. But those were the little stories that make life interesting.

Anyway, then we flew to San Francisco, and we had a press conference, and Madeline and I told what was happening. There were three guys who were sitting with basketball jackets in the front row. You know, what do you call those, sports jackets?

Q: Yes?
Weiss: I knew damned well they were not basketball players. So, the agency sent people, our office in New York had sent out a press release saying that we were going to have a press conference, and my husband and children came out to meet me. That was very wonderful! And Madeline and I did the press conference, and we were on Walter Cronkite that night. But it's very interesting to me that Cronkite was willing to speak the news of “prisoners of war had sent 300 letters to their families in the country,” but not use our photograph, our picture. So, it couldn't be clear to the watcher of the newscast that it was two housewives.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That was an editorial decision, because the cameras were there.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, you learn, every day you learn something new.

Q: When you mailed the letters out to the families, what were some of the reactions?

Weiss: Huge gratitude from the majority, "Thank you." A lot of silence because they didn't want to let the DIA, or whoever in the Pentagon was watching over them, know that they were happy. And an occasional letter that would say, "I refuse to use your channel, I'm not going to recognize you." Or, one person, I think, said—I'm pretty sure of this—that they were told by the Defense Department not to use our channel. There was one woman, I think she was from Hawaii also, I
think her name was Dudley, whose son was MIA [Missing in Action], but she didn't know if he was MIA or POW [Prisoner of War], because the flags always had POW/MIA on them together. She was an anti-war woman, and she told us that she shouldn't use our channel, and she said, "But I'm going to, because I know that otherwise I won't know whether he's dead or alive." She was a remarkable woman.

Q: These were your channels for getting letters from the families now to send back to—

Weiss: Now, the families would send their mail to us in our office. We had an office on 9th Avenue, which was then called, "Hell's Kitchen," I think, was it?

Q: It's right down here, yes.

Weiss: Yes. We were in a room upstairs from a paint store, and in the front of the office, on the 9th Avenue side, was the Center for Constitutional Rights. This had to be the lowest rent in New York.

Q: Oh, I know the building, yes. [laughs]

Weiss: And on the 42nd Street side, opposite us, was a disgusting bar and grill, low down, with a fleabag hotel above it. Next door on 42nd Street was a drug store. Apparently, I don't know how I know this, maybe from my papers, apparently the agency interviewed the drug store owner, who reported that I bought Elizabeth Arden products. You know, it's not even the top of the line, but
on 9th Avenue and 42nd Street, it was considered very posh! [laughs] What they did with that important information, I cannot tell you!

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But one day, for some reason, two or three of us had to go—we went across the street to the bar to have a drink. I stupidly left my briefcase under the bar, and didn't know it until the next day, when I called, and yes, they had it, and I went to pick it up. Now, we had a theory at the time, and I have no idea how to prove it, that one of the hotel rooms above the bar, which faced our office, was rented by somebody watching us. So, whatever was in my briefcase, I have no idea what it was, was probably heaven for them to rifle through. But, in any event, we survived those years, we made sure that every single month for three years, until '73, April 30, '73?

Q: Right.

Weiss: Three people went to Vietnam, and when they went, they would carry letters from the families. We were in touch with families, we let them know when the next trip was taking place, so if they wanted to send a letter, they could. We took advantage of using the mail to tell them that everyone comes back reporting that their prisoners will be released as soon as the war is over, and the most important thing for us to do was to see that it ended. We did say that in our mail, except for one month, when the Vietnamese reported that it was dangerous weather, there were flooding conditions, and we shouldn't send anybody. I always doubted that and felt that it was political floods, until one day when I went at the same season, and we were stalled for two
weeks because of the flooding. So it took me a few years to learn that that was accurate, that they were not lying.

Q: Now, Jane Fonda was one of your couriers?

Weiss: Yes, Jane and Tom went. That was an unfortunate situation.

Q: Why?

Weiss: Well, because it would be dumb to appear on the Hanoi Hannah radio program. That was an unfortunate move.

Q: Yes, no, I read—

Weiss: And she has painfully paid for it for so long.

Q: Yes?

Weiss: But now, she's a heroine again in this country, and she's very actively working for teenage girls, and—

Q: Yes, I read something that she wrote, it was almost forty years afterwards, about how she was only one of 300 people who delivered letters.
Weiss: Yes, well, she was more than one. I mean, she was an important one.

Q: Yes. Well—

Weiss: But she also sat in the turret of a tank. That's not smart.

Q: Yes. You mentioned earlier, Ross Perot. How did he get involved?

Weiss: Ross Perot, you know, if you want to help somebody, you don't do things to screw it up. He just screwed it up constantly, so that his efforts on behalf of the women—who turned out to be mostly MIA, not POW…but nonetheless, on behalf of the women—were all to satisfy his ego! He once wanted to fly a plane full of turkeys so that the guys could have turkey for Christmas, you know, when the plane would have been shot out of the sky. Those SAMs, Surface to Air Missiles, were very accurate. He sent a bunch of the women to Paris—

Q: That's right.

Weiss: —to meet with the Vietnamese. It was always Ross Perot in headlines, not the names of the women in headlines.

Q: Didn't he have Bing Crosby hooked up with it at one time?
Weiss: I don't know. But he was not helpful.

Q: No.

Weiss: At all. A wealthy Texan. He put a tiger cage, what he thought of as the tiger cage, in the lobby of one of the congressional office buildings, or in the capitol, and said, "That's where our POWs are staying in Hanoi," when in fact it was the tiger cages in South Vietnam that the South Vietnamese government, with the help of the American government, put the dissidents who couldn't stand up, and who were peed on, and lime was thrown over them by the guards. That tiger cage, which was a real tiger cage, I don't know how people survived it, was discovered by a young staff member in congress named Tom Harkin, and Don Luce, who was a colleague of mine. Don spoke fluent Vietnamese and had been a volunteer in Vietnam, an agricultural volunteer, I think. Tom and he discovered the tiger cages. I can't remember the name of the member of Congress he worked for, and then Tom, of course, became one of the great members of the Senate, responsible for the Disability Act.

Q: Yes. Did you have any contact with the people in the opposition camps, the National League of Families?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: You had some contact with them?
Weiss: I came to Washington bringing a box of mail from Hanoi, when there was a hearing on the prisoners of war, which I think was led by Congressman Ben Rosenthal of Queens. In a meeting room, one of the women from the League of Families, it was called, got up and attacked me. Then, I testified at the hearing, and I opened the box of letters and put them out on the table to say that I'm here with mail, and then of course mailed them immediately afterwards to the families. It was a kind of dramatic moment, but it was a moment that demonstrated that we had evidence that we were doing something for the pilots, and the League of Families was making propaganda.

Q: Right.

Weiss: But do you know that Mr. [John A.] Boehner, the Speaker of the House in Congress, has a POW/MIA flag in his office, and it's 2014, and the war has been over for how many years?

Q: Nearly fifty, yes.

Weiss: And there was one in the City Council of New York City until I don't know when, it might still be there for all I know, but I was shocked when I saw it there. There are POW/MIA highways in America.

Q: Yes. Oh, it was a big issue, yes.

Weiss: It was a powerful issue, and it was very well-funded by Mr. Perot.
Q: Well, when I look at some of that, you know, it's almost impossible to get the numbers. If you say Missing in Action, where are you going to find those numbers? So it's bound to be endlessly debated.

Weiss: Well, it could be. But when the plane came, and the door opened, every single pilot walked off the plane. There was not a single gurney. That speaks louder than anything. It was an extraordinary day, and being a prisoner of war is horrifying. I don't know how they all survived. The Vietnamese gave them a lot of pumpkin, which apparently is high in vitamin C. I didn't know that.

Q: Well, John McCain has all these stories about being tortured.

Weiss: They probably were. Have you met a war that didn't have torture? Look at the torture we're doing between Guantanamo and Iraq, and it's horrible. There's a law against it. So, John McCain became a tortured senator. He's in great shape.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We brought his mail back for his wife, at the time his wife, and children. He refuses to talk to me, well, that's his privilege, I guess. But he divorced her and married someone else, and he became a Senator. And he's an authority. He's very good on some issues, like torture. But he was not so good on [Bowe Robert] Bergdahl, was he?
Q: I want to ask you about the '72, and the prisoners' releases. How did that trip originate?

Weiss: Originate? We were having our family vacation in August, which we've had—it will be our fifty-eighth summer there this summer, for just the month of August.

Q: On the Vineyard?

Weiss: On the Vineyard. Our children were small, obviously. Our youngest was ten, I guess. I got a call from Paris, would I please come with David Dellinger, to Paris? So, we were good friends with Frankie [Frances] Fitzgerald and her then boyfriend, who was a journalist, who never came back from Vietnam. He was killed in Vietnam. I called her up, and I said, "Would you like to come and spend a few days on the Vineyard with Peter and the kids?" So, they became our house sitters, babysitters. It got to be news on the Vineyard, and there is a picture somewhere of me taken, getting on the plane, the little—what was then called—I don't know if it was called "Cape Air" then, but it was a little thing that flew with a couple of props to Boston. I met Dave, and we flew to Paris. It was supposed to be a secret, what we were doing there. Was that the secret? Yeah, I think that was.

Anyway, we got to Paris, we were met by the Vietnamese, and we were immediately taken to their place, and we were told that they were ready to release three pilots, and would we put together a delegation and take them? We were thrilled. It wasn't until we got to the airport to come back that they said to us, "And oh, by the way, you can bring a member of the family for
each one." Well, that put this whole thing over the top. It was very, very impressive and exciting, and creative of them. It was going to be a peace gesture, obviously. So, we came back, and we put everything into gear.

Q: They gave you the names?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Did they tell you on what basis they had selected them?

Weiss: No, but afterwards, Mary McGrory, writing in the Washington Star, said, "Vietnamese sent the balanced ticket, because we had a white man from New England, Mark Gartley, a black man from California, west coast, [Norris Alphonzo] Charles, and a Jew from the south, [Edward] Elias. So, we called Mark's mother, Minnie Lee, who taught typing and—

Q: Stenography.

Weiss: —stenography in the winter living in an RV, recreational vehicle, in Clearwater, Florida, and who had three television sets in her vehicle, so she could watch ABC, NBC and CBS news. She was against the war. Her son, Mark, was a recent shoot-down, so he had not been there for more than a year or two, maybe two years. So, we called her, and she said, of course. She became a good friend of my mother's, and there's a picture of both of them smoking together.
Charles, from California, was a recent husband. Norris Charles was his name. We invited his wife to join us from California, and she agreed to come.

But the wife of Elias was told by the government not to come. And she didn't. Because he was Jewish, and without a mother or a wife, I was asked to go and receive him. Each person, the mother and the wife, could go first to meet their relative before the formal press conference and the formal release, and I was the one to go for the Jewish guy from the south. He was responsible for doing the count of the dead from the air. "We just killed forty-two Viet Cong," VC. Well, he could pick a number, any number, and those numbers were used to increase the Congress' allocation.

Q: Body count.

Weiss: The body count became an important vehicle for increasing the allocation of funding for the war, to fight the war. Well, in fact, we killed according to the Vietnamese, two million people; according to somebody else, a million people. It was a huge number of people, not just dead but sprayed with Agent Orange. In any event, so, Paris, we went to Paris in August, within a week or ten days, we were on a plane for Hanoi. That plane went to Copenhagen—oh, and I asked if we could bring a reporter with us, and I wanted Sy Hersh, who had written the My Lai Massacre book. Sy said no, I will never remember why.

But Gloria Emerson, who was writing incredible stuff from the field in South Vietnam, and was a very good friend of mine, knew Wes Gallagher from AP, Associated Press. They had a new
young reporter named Peter Arnett. Peter jumped. He had a Vietnamese wife, he was reporting from the south, and even spoke, I think, a little Vietnamese. So, we had David Dellinger, Cora Weiss. Then we could bring Richard Falk, our international lawyer, Bill [Sloane] Coffin, a minister, who was a leader of the Anti-War Clergy and Laity Organization, and Peter Arnett. Then, there were the family; the wife and the mother of two of the pilots. I'm missing one person.

So, we flew to Copenhagen on SAS [Scandinavian Air Service], the choice of airplane was critical, because the Scandinavian Air Service and the Swedes were incredibly important to us. When we arrived in Copenhagen, the SAS people took us immediately down to the tarmac, not into the airport where the press were waiting, and took us to a fabulous restaurant in the countryside to wait for the ongoing plane. There were several hours, or a number of hours, in between. Then, we could get to know each other. We didn't know Peter Arnett, he was a newcomer. That was important, number one.

Then we got back on the plane without going through the airport, thanks to SAS and the Swedes, and flew to Bangkok, and that's when we got on the ICC plane. But in Bangkok, we're getting onto the plane, and all of a sudden, we see a guy with a microphone and a camera, and he's getting into the plane, pushing down seats so he could shoot us, meaning, with a camera, in the airplane. It was Ted Koppel, who was a stringer at that point! I mean, we're talking 1972. Everybody was younger. Ted Koppel was just starting, and he had the arrogance that he carried with him throughout his career, that he could not only occupy the seat that he had bought, but he could push down the backs of other seats so he could get a view. [laughs] We landed, and when we landed, the military came on the plane, it's wartime, and let us off the plane—
Q: This is the—

Weiss: —the families and the Committee of Liaison.

Q: Oh, the Vietnamese—the military is the Vietnamese military?

Weiss: The Vietnamese military. We were in Hanoi. Oh, the important thing is that, what happens when the ICC flies, you know there are laws of war, there are no laws against killing people, but there's a law against shooting down an ICC plane, which is an international arrangement—the International Control Commission—an international arrangement, to allow transit. It's an amazing thing. And so, it's agreed that the SAMs, the Surface to Air Missiles, will not shoot up, and the American military planes will not bomb, so you don't get danger from the sky or the land.

But the second the plane lands, the American plane is right on its tail, resuming the bombing of North Vietnam, and we are raced into an underground shelter, where we meet Pham Van Bach, who's the chief judge of North Vietnam, on his way out, and Richard [Beebe] Dudman, who has been in Vietnam for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, writing fantastic copy, and he's on his way out, also. Right away, Peter Arnett knocks off on his typewriter—no computers—knocks off his first dispatch, gives it to Dudman to take it out with him. So, it starts right away, at the airport, from a bomb shelter.
Q: Yes.

Weiss: Meanwhile, we come out of the bomb shelter when the alert goes off, and we look on the tarmac, and there's Ted Koppel with a microphone, reporting from Hanoi! They wouldn't let him in. Why the ICC let him on the plane without a visa, you have to go and ask the ICC. All right, that's experience number one, day number one. Without losing a minute, the Vietnamese put us in the Hoa Binh Hotel, which means Peace Hotel in Vietnamese, and tells us that the release will happen that very night. So, they didn't keep the wife and the mother waiting, or the three guys, who were probably being prepared to go. That was impressive number two item, or number one, whatever. We went off in a van to—I don't know where we went. It was probably a military installation.

John Hart was there. He had come in from Vientiane. He was CBS, I think, CBS television. Lovely guy. He was there with a camera. We had Peter Arnett, who was a fantastic reporter. He had bags of film and a couple of cameras, and constantly typing. We come into this very packed, packed with press, Vietnamese press, Chinese press, Russian press, I don't know who else was there, reporters. Agence France-Presse [AFP] was there, I have no idea who they were—packed with press with our Women's Union, I mean our Women's Union friends, and the military. We go to the back room and bring out the three guys; the wife and the mother and me, and we have the three men in suits that had been tailor-made for them by the Vietnamese. Bui Thi Cam was a—beautiful, incredibly well-dressed in her ao dai long Vietnamese dress—lawyer, member of the Women's Committee. She presented the men to us.
Q: How do you spell that name?

Weiss: B-U-I, T-H-I, C-A-M.

Q: Good.

Weiss: We used to call her "Madame Magnifique," because she was always so beautifully attired. So, she was the intermediary. I'm not talking to the military or to the government, I'm talking to the Women's Union. She handed them over to us, and I apparently said a few words, but I don't have a record of it. Maybe [laughs] your friends in the FBI have it.

Q: Well, yes, I'll see if I can dig them up.

Weiss: Anyway, it was a fantastic evening, because it was very quick. They did not want to keep the freed men out of their freedom, or away from their families. So, we got them very quickly, it was over very quickly, and we got into the van and went back to the hotel, the Peace Hotel. There was a spread on the table. I mean, this was wartime. There was a feast that was just beautiful! They had beer, or some kind of alcohol, I can't remember the name of the drink, and food. It was a remarkable time. And Elias is alone. He goes into a silent mode, which he basically never came out of until we landed at JFK, which was ten days later. Más o menos. It was about a week later.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: Because the Vietnamese wanted us to see the bomb damage, and they put us on an incredible trip in jeeps. We had a caravan of jeeps that traveled with one headlight, or none, at night. We left at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, to start our trip south to the southern part of North Vietnam, where a cathedral, Phat Diem Cathedral, it was a famous, old, old, cathedral. It was bombed. But on our way, at more or less 3:00 in the morning, maybe 4:00, Bill Coffin, who had been in the CIA and had a certain amount of military training, looked up, and he saw a dog fight in the sky, and said to the driver, "Look in the sky," pointing. Within two seconds, or less, I don't ever remember the speed of light being also the speed of people. The jeep stopped, and we were raced into a bomb shelter. This was above ground.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We all looked up at the dog fight. It was a MiG, and whatever the American plane was.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Everybody thanked Bill Coffin for being the first to see it. Then there was an all-clear, and we got back. The pilots were afraid, because they knew what the damage could be, if they were in that plane. They had never been a target of their own planes before. I mean, they were, while they were in a prison camp.

Q: Right.
Weiss: But they weren't, I think, quite as visually aware of it.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Then we went to the cathedral, and Elias refused to come out of the van, or if he did, he wouldn't go and look at the damage. Norris' wife was scared to death, because we had another bomb alert. We met people who had been wounded, including a woman whose feet had been blown off by a mine, and was being carried on the back of the man she was about to marry. We met children who had—white bands are the sign of mourning for Vietnamese, black is for us. We have black bands that we wear on our arms. They wear white bands around their heads, around their arms, maybe, but I remember the headbands. We met with far too many mothers and children and fathers who had lost immediate relatives. They came to meet us to tell us about what happened, and how it happened. So, there was a lot of that. And then we got back to Hanoi, and we got back to New York. But going back, the trip to New York was also a story.

Q: Wasn't there a hold-up in Vientiane over whether or not you'd be on American planes, or something?

Weiss: Oh, that was very important. Thank you for reminding me. We never got to Vientiane, because we learned that the MATs, the Military Air Transport planes, were waiting to take the men away. The agreement that we made with the Vietnamese, and the pilots knew it, was that we would bring them back safely to New York. They were being released, in our care, to get them
back to their country. So, we couldn't go to Vientiane. What were we going to do? In comes the Swedish ambassador, Christian Oberg, I think was his name. [Jean-] Christophe Oberg. O-B-E-R-G. He was an incredible ambassador in Vietnam. He arranged, for example, for the Vietnamese to be able to develop or produce smallpox inoculation serum to prevent a smallpox outbreak, and one or two other things like that, which was an extraordinary thing to do at time of war. None of us knew anything about what was going on between China, Vietnam and the United States. He arranged with the Chinese to take us from Hanoi to Beijing, but under house arrest. Not legally, formally, but we couldn't get out of their—of their what?

Q: Jurisdiction?

Weiss: There you go. That's a good enough word. That saved everybody's lives, because what we didn't know was that [Henry] Kissinger was in Beijing, arranging for a trip for Nixon. So, what we didn't know was that the Chinese were negotiating with Washington. It became very dicey in terms of Beijing-Hanoi relations, because right after the war, as you know, the Chinese attacked the northern, northern part of Vietnam. Fast forward today, 2014, they're attacking what the Vietnamese claim to be their islands, the Paracels and the Spratlys, in the Pacific Ocean.

Q: Right.

Weiss: It's all about oil, which I guess is the story of war and peace, isn't it?

Q: Yes.
Weiss: All about oil. So, we got into a Chinese plane in Hanoi, we're now ten, I thought we were eleven people, but I'd have to look at a picture and see who's missing. So, Dick Falk, Bill Coffin, Peter Arnett, Cora, David, the three pilots and their two family members, ten people. We fly across the border, and take our first stop at night, in an airport, in some small Chinese town or city, and we're brought to an outdoor, but covered, hut, with a ping pong table and a Chinese minder. Dick Falk is a professional ping pong player. He beat the Chinese guards, and I learned to play ping pong from these Chinese guys. We played ping pong a lot during the night. Then, we get on the plane in the morning. I'm going to need another word. Dick plays a game with an "S" that's not tennis and not ping pong, but—

Q: Badminton?

Weiss: No, S.

Q: With an S?

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Squash?

Weiss: Squash. Thank you! He's a big squash player. We get on the plane again. But this time it's a Russian plane, and we fly to Moscow. And we couldn't believe it. The Russian stewardesses
were serving us meals while we were landing and arriving, something that would never happen in an American plane. We get off the plane in Moscow, and it's empty! The airport is empty! Why? Because the American ambassador, or charge d'affaires, demanded it. Why were the Russians doing what the Americans want? We need to go back and ask an expert. Maybe it was to counter what the Americans were doing in China, who knows? We get into the airport, and a guy named Dobbs? Or Dubbs? Was the chargé, and demands that we turn over the three men.

To their credit, including Elias, the three men said we made a deal to come back with them, with the escorts. We were the official escorts. He and Bill Coffin actually got into a fist fight in the airport. Bill writes about it in his memoir. Dubbs or Dobbs, I think it's Dobbs, I can't remember his name. I think it's either Dubbs or—Dobbs, probably, died a few years ago with a big obituary in The Times, never mentioning this incident. Welcome Sweden once more, the Swedish head of SAS Moscow comes to pick us up in a Swedish SAS van, and takes us to their private apartment in Moscow, where there's a telephone, and says to the three guys, "Call home." I mean, amazing little details—

Q: Yes.

Weiss: —that are so important. They have a Swedish smorgasbord spread out for us!

Q: [laughs]
Weiss: It was incredible, and it was so important! I don't remember if we slept there that night, or went back to the airport. I have no memory of that. But the next day, or whenever it was, we get onto an SAS plane for Cope [Copenhagen]. And guess who's on the plane—

Q: Copenhagen?

Weiss: Copenhagen. Guess who's on the plane with us? American personnel. Two-story plane, which I've never, had never—

Q: Oh, yes. Yes. They used to have them. Yes.

Weiss: There was an upstairs.

Q: Right.

Weiss: And—no, I'm wrong. The American military personnel get on in Copenhagen. So, we fly to Copenhagen, and we land, and we go to a restaurant again thanks to SAS. I'm trying to reconstruct the details. We get back on, and who's getting on with us, but two or three guys. And one by one, they invite each of the three pilots to come upstairs with them, and this has been all brilliantly orchestrated in Washington. They come back down in uniform.

So we land at JFK, and a guy named Vinny [Vincent] McGee has been running the office for me with our staff. Vinnie McGee burned his draft card, and was a well-known draft-resister, and
went to Allenwood, Pennsylvania, for his jail sentence. When he got out, I invited him to help me at the Committee of Liaison. He did the press work for us, for our return. When we got off the plane, Mark Gartley and Norris Charles both thanked us profusely for bringing them home, and Elias. In Moscow, at night, the SAS van took us to Red Square, I think probably at my suggestion, that we should at least see something while we were there, and it was pitch dark, late at night, but the onions, the cathedrals—

Q: The doors, yes.

Weiss: —were all lit up. Elias refused to get out of the car. He stayed in the van. He was not going to be a tourist. He was not going to do anything with us. We all walked around Red Square, which we had to ourselves! It was amazing! Anyway, so, we get off at JFK, the airport is teeming with journalists. The military take the three guys away. Minnie Lee Gartley, the mother of Mark, is furious that she couldn't have her son alone, even for one day, or one night, at a hotel at the airport. They refused to let them take the guys. So, maybe they had them for a few hours, and then they took them to a medical facility, military base, whatever.

Q: Right. Yes. Like they're doing with Bergdahl now.

Weiss: Right.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: Same scene. Bergdahl, I think, probably suffered more severely than these three guys.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: So, we had our press conference. We came back, we got press. Dave Dellinger was on the front cover of Time Magazine, I think I was a little envious, because they took a picture of him coming down the gangplank, and I was with somebody else coming down the gangplank.

Anyway, it was big news. The point was, it was meant to be a peace gesture, and the thank you for the peace gesture was Kissinger's Christmas bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong Harbor, which was horrific.

Q: Do you think there would have been more releases had the bombing not happened?

Weiss: Of course! There would have been peace talks.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: There would have been—well, there were peace talks.

Q: All this is played out against the background of the talks going on in Paris, yes.

Weiss: In Paris, yes. They would have succeeded in getting a settlement. There was a little story—is it OK to do that? To go back?
Q: Sure!

Weiss: When I was in Paris—

Q: Sure!

Weiss: —waiting to go to Vietnam, Wilfred Burchett—

Q: Yes?

Weiss: —Ira Morris, Claude Bourdet, these are all names of—mostly men—in Paris who were all active in the anti-war movement. They gave a reception for us the night that we arrived, as I recall. Maybe it was another trip to Paris, because I don't remember dates. But in any event, in Paris, I'm in my hotel room, and we're supposed to be a secret, and the young guy who's just starting out with CBS Reports named Ed [Rudolph] Bradley, calls Peter Weiss at home, and says, "Can I talk to Cora," and Peter said, "She's in Paris." He says, "Where is she?" He says, "The hotel X, Y, Z." So, thanks to my husband, he broke the secret [laughs], and Ed Bradley comes knocking on my hotel door very late at night, in Paris.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: I did not give him an interview.
Q: What happened to the guys after they had been taken away? What was their future? What happened to them?

Weiss: Mark Gartley became Secretary of State of the state of Maine, and when his mother died, he sent me the program of her funeral. He was a lovely man, lovely guy. Very young to be a pilot, very young to be a prisoner of war. They all were. They were young prisoners.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Charles, Norris? I don't know, or at least I can't remember what became of him. We were in touch with the two of them for a while afterwards.

Q: Yes?


Q: Right. Yes.
Cora Weiss – Session 4 – 82

Weiss: But, after the war, another guy, whose last name started with an M, I can't remember, who lived in South Carolina invited me to his wedding, which I went to. He was one of the men we met when we went there in '69.

Q: Aha!

Weiss: I think somewhere, there's mail from the families, thanking us. We went back to The War Was Over, we started Friendshipment, a play on words that I think I'm probably responsible for, Friendship and Shipment, to send humanitarian aid to help rebuild the Bach Mai Hospital.

Q: That's where we'll start next time.

Weiss: OK.

[END OF SESSION]
Weiss: I can’t believe it’s number five already. Like people can’t believe I’m going to be eighty.

[laughter]

Q: Okay. We were talking—what were we talking about a few moments ago that I wanted to get you—?

Weiss: Networking.

Q: Networking, yes. Yes. Talking about the ways in which I see your career as a career of networking, in a positive way. And the way in which that is kind of built, brick by brick by brick by brick, over the years, until you seem to become a kind of key player within networks—many, many, many networks. How important was that in your career?

Weiss: Is. Was and is. I love putting people together. I meet somebody, and they have interests that I know are of interest to other friends of mine, and I write an email to both of them, and I say, “Meet each other, because I think you’ll enjoy each other’s company.” Or: someone is
trying to get into graduate school, is perfectly qualified and ought to get in, and I’ll write a very enthusiastic letter of recommendation. I love doing it. People appreciate it a lot.

Q: Will you often as not know someone at the particular institution that this person is applying to?

Weiss: Yes and no. It’s not necessary. I don’t know anybody at the Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], where I’ve been a member for a long time, but I write nominating letters or seconding letters. I think, to a person, they’ve all been accepted. Not because of my letters, of course, but it probably helps. The point is that I get pleasure from it. So it’s a double whammy.

Q: When did you begin to do that?

Weiss: I can’t remember. But sometimes I have opportunities to meet people in different fields, and the people that I work with or know come to me for advice. A lot of people come for advice. I don’t know if I have advice to give them, but they come. They don’t have access to those fields, so I feel like an access person. [laughs]

Q: Can you give me an example of when that happened recently?

Weiss: A young woman from the Cameroons came to be an intern at an organization that is housed in the office of The Hague Appeal for Peace, which I ran. She interned for Peace Boat US, which is an organization that I’ve been very fond of, and helped to grow. At some point
during the course of the summer internship, she came to me and said that she wanted to go to graduate school. She was at John Jay College for her undergraduate work. We talked about what she wanted to do, and so forth. Her father had been a member of the diplomatic corps in the Cameroons, and she was in this country, and married to a Nigerian. She seemed like a very pleasant, very highly motivated person. I saw a potentially wonderful woman leader in her, so I started writing letters of recommendation to, I think, every university and college in the greater New York area. Happily, she got into Lehman [College], and one other school, and she chose Lehman, probably because she got a scholarship or it was less expensive than the others, which is always a problem. That was great. So she started school, she’s finished her first year, she wants to come and celebrate. She’s thrilled—and so am I—that it worked.

Q: This is skipping ahead, but it was one of the questions I wanted to ask you when we talk about Riverside [Church] today: at the Summer Institute, there was a woman there—whose name I’ve forgotten—who has done rather extensive work in Bosnia, and is now extending that work into Rwanda. It’s a mixture of scholarship and activism. She told me that you had had her on a program at Riverside and introduced her to three or four people who were also working in the field. We were talking about where she could get money. I said, “Well, you know, the Rubin Foundation might be interested in it.” She said, “Oh, I know Cora Weiss.” Then the story came out: she had never gotten any money, but the contacts she made were vital in terms of her own work.

Weiss: Isn’t that nice? Now, neither of us knows her name.
Q: I don’t know her name at all. I don’t know. She walked with a cane, that’s all I know. But, interesting.

Weiss: That’s nice. See? I mean, that makes you feel good.

Q: Good. Let’s start where my notes start. This is bringing up our last conversation, which turns out to be exactly a month ago. We last met on June 10th, and today is July 10th. You were talking about your trip to Hanoi with the Committee of Liaison [with Families of Prisoners Detained in Vietnam] in 1972. I wanted to ask you: when you made that trip, did you have a larger political purpose? And that question comes to my mind because I just finished reading Bill [William Sloane] Coffin [Jr.’s] memoir for this interview. He ends talking about that trip, and talks about the larger political agenda that he had. Did you also have a larger political agenda in that?

Weiss: That was the trip that Peter Arnett from AP [Associated Press] called the prisoner snatch. We didn’t snatch the prisoners, they were handed over. My agenda was always doing whatever was conceivably possible to do to end the war in Vietnam—against Vietnam. So to the extent that that was the larger agenda, yes. But Sy [Seymour M.] Hersh says all the time—whenever I see him, he likes to tell people that I cared more about the prisoners of war than the government did. When I look back on the files, and the papers, and the stories, I can see where he comes to that conclusion, because we took huge risks to go and try to get a letter a month written by every prisoner of war. We took huge risks travelling to Vietnam during the bombing, to get a better package of personal items that the prisoners could use while they were there. Those efforts
succeeded. Families in this country could hear from their loved ones, and eventually the list of who was alive and who was not came out of that work. That was important, because it took the pretext away from [Richard M.] Nixon, and—what was the defense secretary’s name, from Wisconsin?

Q: Laird, or Kissing—

Weiss: Melvin Laird. It took the pretext away from them to use the, quote, “torture and keeping of prisoners of war” as the reason for perpetuating the war. That was the reason for our setting up the committee, and that was the reason for our continuing to try to get names out. We did that via this idea of mail exchange.

Q: After the personal exchange, did you continue visiting Vietnam, and continue working—

Weiss: Oh, sure. The Committee of Liaison functioned right up to the end of the war, which was ’73—the end of the entire war was ’75. By then, we had the basic list of everybody who was alive in North Vietnam, and we had some names from those who were prisoners in South Vietnam, but most of those had been moved to the north. We also had the list of people who were either found dead from their planes having been shot down, or who died in prison camp from wounds or disease. It was not a very long list. I’m not sure that it was more than six or eight people. But the point is that you couldn’t debate about it anymore. It was final. That had never happened before in the history of warfare, but I think every war brings out a new initiative on the
part of civil society, and this was quite unique. I feel very proud about the role that we played—it took a team.

Q: In the popular press, the rhetoric of John McCain and the Hanoi Hilton, et cetera, seems to dominate as the interpretive framework of the prisoner experience. That does not seem to be your experience.

Weiss: John McCain became the go-to voice of the Senate for the press. I’m just a Jewish housewife from the Bronx, as some of the press called me. And a woman. But the mail from the families demonstrates how important this experience was, and how grateful they were for the mail.

Q: You have that correspondence?

Weiss: Or Swarthmore [College] does.

Q: Swarthmore does.

Weiss: Yes. They have most of the Committee of Liaison files.

Q: So they would be able to assess the treatment, if it was—according to the prisoners.
Weiss: Never forget that every single pilot—they were all pilots—walked off the plane. There was not one litter, not one gurney. That was shocking for everyone. They were expecting wounded, and—that’s not say that they were all in good shape. I have no way of knowing; I’m not a doctor. But the fact that they walked off, I think, was pretty impressive. We were all very impressed.

Q: There doesn’t seem to be much of a literature, say, as there is in Iraq and Afghanistan, about post-traumatic stress disorders [PTSD], et cetera, among the pilots—

Weiss: PTSD was not—was that word invented at the time of Vietnam?

Q: Probably not, yes. Yes, probably not.

Weiss: It’s a more recent language. I’m sure that they—you know, there were many divorces. But then, there are many divorces, aren’t there?

Q: Well, there is a literature on returning Vietnam vets, and the problems that they faced, et cetera, but I don’t recall anything specific to the pilots.

Weiss: All of these guys saw the war from the air, from the sky. They were never on the ground. They were all educated, because pilots were taken from the elite, in the Air Force. They were all pilots. I mean, these were not grunts. These were not privates. These were not guys who had to make it through the jungle and the swamps. They had a different experience. Now, being a
prisoner of war is absolutely horrific in any war, no matter who your wardens are. So that experience, of course, is terrible. But they came to it from a different place, and that may have helped.

Q: As the war wound down, I’d like to talk to you about some of the activities that you then picked up on, or moved toward, et cetera, et cetera. Before we get to the shipment of wheat to Vietnam, let’s talk about your radio program.

Weiss: Oh, I loved it! More people could hear you on the radio than you can have for dinner.

Q: How did that come about?

Weiss: You know, that’s a good question. It was a kind of interim activity. I had a program on WRVR, which was in the basement of the Riverside Church, never dreaming I would ever be up in an office on the nineteenth floor. My producer was Robert Siegel, whom you can now hear every afternoon at four o’clock on NPR [National Public Radio].

Q: Now, how did that come about, that you hooked up with Riverside for a radio program?

Weiss: I don’t know how I got there, but I know that I was interested in hearing from women. The program was called *Cora Weiss Comments*. At that time in my thinking, in the evolution of my thinking, as long as you had ovaries, you could be on the other side of the mic with me. I didn’t care what you did. But I gave a mic, I gave a voice, to women. I think it may have been
one of, maybe, only two programs on the air where women were the anchors. It was early. So my producer was Robert Siegel. He was just starting out in his radio career. My engin—

Q: And you were in a room in the basement of Riverside?

Weiss: In the basement of the church, was where RVR [WRVR] had its studios.

Q: Well, somebody must have okayed that.

Weiss: Okayed—

Q: Having you—

Weiss: —me?

Q: Giving you a program.

Weiss: You know, it was a noncommercial, public program. I don’t—no. I mean, come on. [laughter] How can I remember? It was 1970-something.

Q: They must have had a lot of empty airtime that they were trying to fill or something.
Weiss: Oh, they had a wonderful program called *The Apartment Gardeners*, a couple who taught you how to keep your plants indoors. They had that kind of stuff. It was great. And they had progressive music, jazz music. I loved it. The music was great. Anyway, I don’t know any of those other details [laughter] about how it happened. It happened, and I had the program for about three years. It was once a week, but because it was not commer—

Q: On what day?

Weiss: Well, that’s the interesting question. Because it was not financially supported by a food or sponsor, they could move me around. So sometimes it was Sunday morning at nine o’clock, when you were probably listening, having coffee and a bagel and the Sunday [*New York*] *Times*. Or it was Sunday night at six o’clock, when there were fewer of you because you were having pizza dinner with your kids. It was usually on weekends, as I recall. But my name and the program were in every single issue of the *New York Times*, which ran radio programs.

Q: Oh, right!

Weiss: I found all of those clippings. I don’t know where they are now, but I found them. It’s a stack of *New York Times* radio schedules. And there was *Cora Weiss Comments!* So that was interesting to me, because I don’t think you can get the radio schedule in the *Times* anymore.

Q: Right. Yes, no, I don’t think so.
Weiss: But I love radio, and I still do. I listen every morning, getting up in the morning, NPR is automatically on. It’s a wonderful, wonderful vehicle. Fast-forward: during our program with the Department for Disarmament Affairs at the U.N. [United Nations] in 2002, 2003, we provided radios to women who went into the fields and discovered that it was an extraordinarily valuable way of involving them in a peace education program. But it was also an empowering idea, and it filled a huge void, because women in the fields are the last to hear the news that a storm is coming, that a flood is coming, that a war is coming. So they’re the first to be victims. This idea of a simple radio—very, very, very basic—caught on, especially, I think, in Niger, it was very popular. It was used by the lovely guy Idi Cheffou, who ran the peace education program in Niger, with former combatants. So radio has always been an interesting thing for me. I love it.

Q: How large was your audience? Do you have that?

Weiss: Well, you could never tell, because they weren’t members, and because also, many of the programs that I did in the early ’70s were taped, because they never knew where they were going to put them. So there was no audience feedback. I didn’t get questions. Some I did, you could call in. But many I couldn’t.

Q: Who were some of the people you had on? Who was the most—as they ask me all the time—who was the most interesting person that you ever talked to?

Weiss: I had Shirley MacLaine on. Now you have to remember the time. This is 1972 or ’3, and there was a photographer in the room. She, obviously, didn’t want to have her picture taken. So
while she’s on mic, she’s slumping over on the table with her head down, or she’s covering up her face, or— She’s doing all kinds of strange antics with her body so that I could never use her photograph. I have those pictures somewhere. [laughs] They’re very amusing. We became good friends after that. Oh, now you’re asking for names. There was a couple who wrote for the *New York Times*, Washington bureau. I had Carol Hill [phonetic] on, who was a novelist, and who taught English to prisoners at Rikers Island. She was terrific. Lots of interesting, terrific people.

Q: How would you find them?

Weiss: Frequently, they found me, or they were people I had for dinner, or who came to our parties.

Q: Any disasters?

Weiss: Well, a disaster meaning, “Was it a boring show?” Probably. But we tried to make it interesting. Once I went to Cuba, and brought a tape recorder with me, and came back with a lot of tape on the sounds of Cuba, and it started with big band music. That was pretty popular. I had a lot of fun doing it, and it allowed me to do other things during the day, because if it was taped, then I didn’t have to worry about showing up at the studio, although I was at the studio often. They were wonderful people. The engineer was a young man who I think had just gotten out of jail on some minor drug charge. They were all interesting people, and I loved doing it.

Q: Now, the subtitle that I found was *A Microphone for Women*. 
Weiss: Right.

Q: That’s very consciously “Women.”

Weiss: Totally. I mean, that was what I cared about most. Because women didn’t have a microphone in those days, and we had to hear from women, to see if there was something worth listening to. I think I demonstrated that there was.

Q: Did you have local community activists, as well as—?

Weiss: Probably. You know, it was three years every week. So that’s 160 or more programs.

Q: Wow. I wonder if there’s an archive of that.

Weiss: I saved the tapes, but they’re on very old fashioned reels, and I have no idea where they are, because when we moved, we lost a lot of stuff in the move. But it’s one of the things I was determined to look for.

Q: Yes. Now, I know in the old days for AM radio—maybe for FM as well—the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] required that everything broadcast—

Weiss: Be kept?
Q: —be kept. Because of the Orson Welles thing. They instituted all kinds of regulations after Orson Welles, that everything be kept. I don’t know if that applied to smaller FM stations or not, or—

Weiss: You know, I don’t think anything applied to WRVR. [laughs] It was eventually bought by some horrible music program station, and it went out.

Q: Oh really?

Weiss: Yes. It didn’t survive. If I have the reel to reel tapes, then it’s not archived.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Had, I should say. Because until I find them, I had them.

Q: Yes. It’d be interesting to find out if they’re still around, and what it was. But you did that until the station was purchased by whoever purchased it?

Weiss: No, it was purchased subsequently.

Q: Oh. Why did you stop?
Weiss: Why.

Q: When?

Weiss: Well it ran, I think, from ’72—I have to look at the clips from the *Times*, because that will tell me. ’71, ’72, ’73, it was—

Q: ’74 to ’78.

Weiss: ’74—that’s when it was?

Q: Yes. That’s what I have.

Weiss: Okay.

Q: 1974 to 1978. Four years. That might have been three years depending upon the months.

Weiss: Yes, exactly. Well, thank you for that information. I stopped because [William S.] Bill Coffin called me and said, “Will you join me at the Riverside Church?” There was an interim of one year when I worked with Paul McCleary for Church World Service in what we called the God Box, on the south side of 120th Street. That was Church World Service, and we had a one-year program to do a ship of wheat to Vietnam. Did you see the booklet that was made about it?
Q: How did that come about?

Weiss: There was a serious problem of—I don’t know if it was the weather. I think it was probably the weather. There was a lack of wheat. The war was over, and there was a possibility of starvation in South Vietnam. It was probably Paul McCleary’s idea. He was a remarkable—I shouldn’t say “was,” because I don’t know—I hope he’s still alive. He was the head of Church World Service.

Q: Which had been around since the ’40s.

Weiss: A long time. They had members from the Christian communities among farmers in America. They did humanitarian aid, basically. That was their job. But it was probably also proselytizing, because it was a Christian organization, and their boxes went with Church World Service labels on them. But I don’t think you had to convert to be eligible for a box of wheat. You certainly didn’t have to for the Vietnam program. Anyway, Paul asked me to join them because I knew something about Vietnam that they didn’t. In one year, we raised ten thousand tons of wheat from American farmers. Then we had the idea of going with the wheat to Vietnam. Or at least we would fly, and the wheat would go by ship.

But until 1978, not a single ship with an American flag had gone to Vietnam, during the whole war years and post-war years. So this was going to be the first ship to travel, not with an American flag, but from an American port. We went from Houston to Saigon with ten thousand tons of wheat. We saw the ship off with a terrific program, because one of the things I’m proud
of, I guess, I’ve enjoyed doing, is mixing politics and culture. So we had the giant puppets—I can’t remember the guy’s name.

Q: The Bread and Puppet Theater?

Weiss: No, it wasn’t, but it was similar. These were huge, huge puppets that a guy named—somebody, something—made and came to Houston with. And we had music. We had Senator [Fred R.] Harris. Harris? Where’s the book? Can I take a—

Q: LaDonna—

Weiss: La Donna’s husband.

Q: Oh, okay. Oh, yes. Right, yes. Wasn’t he Native American?

Weiss: No, she was.

Q: She was Native American, Harris.

Weiss: Yes. He was an American senator. We should get that. I mean, I have the book so I can remember everybody’s name. Bill Coffin came. John Henry Faulk, who was a Texan humorist—brilliant, brilliant, and funny as all get out guy. He had his own radio program in Texas. Who else? So we had an American senator, an American humorist, an American minister. A young
woman who worked for the YWCA [Young Women’s Christian Association] in Texas, or in Colorado—Colorado, I think. The farmer whose wheat was on the ship. We did a huge program at [John and Dominique] de Menil’s Rothko Chapel. There was Mrs. de Menil, and there was the Rothko Chapel, and they had a big empty field outside of the chapel, and that’s where we set up a stage and had a program. And people came.

The idea was to send off the first ship from the United States to Vietnam: a ship of wheat. Then Bill Coffin, and John Henry Faulk, and Paul McCleary, and Robert [Span] Browne, and the farmer, and the young woman who was from the YWCA at the university, and me: we got on a plane and flew to Saigon, and met the ship of wheat. They immediately made bread from it. I felt very guilty eating a piece of bread that was supposed to go to the hungry, starving Vietnamese. We had a remarkable trip. Oh, you know who was with us? An important person from the Lutherans, Reverend Bartholomew. It’s all in the book. He had never had an experience quite like this before. So at one point, when we were with the foreign minister of North Vietnam, Nguyen Co Thach—T-H-A-C-H—he got up and walked out of the meeting. [laughs] So that wasn’t very comfortable or convenient.

Q: Walked out because he—?

Weiss: He was protesting North Vietnam. Right. There we were, trying to be a reconciliation delegation. Or at least, the war was over delegation. We took a trip together. Oh, on that trip, Bill Coffin did not come. He came in 1972, but a Bob [Robert Span] Browne came. He was an African American economist working for the State Department in Vietnam, married a
Vietnamese woman, and resigned over the war in Vietnam, because of the war. He was a remarkable human being. Bob Browne. He was wonderful. Browne with an e. He later became the head of the Africa Development Bank, and set up a foundation called the 21st Century Fund, which gave grants to African Americans who were doing startups. Lovely, lovely guy. His wife—he died a while ago, and his wife Huoi died just recently, this past year. His daughter lives in one of these buildings, the Lincoln Towers: Mai, M-A-I.

He was written up—this is an interesting story—by a woman named Judy [Tzu-Chun] Wu, W-U, who’s an assistant professor of political science or history at the Ohio University, I can’t remember which branch. She wrote a book about Americans during the war in Vietnam, and one chapter was about Bob Browne, and then she came here to interview both my husband and myself, because we were both very close friends with Bob. We just had a reunion with Judy Wu; her husband; her children; and Mai Browne, Bob’s daughter. It was very nice.

Q: What was the reaction among the Vietnamese?

Weiss: To the ship of wheat?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: They brought out everybody: to greet the ship, to greet us. They were incredibly impressed. This was the first act after the war, of significant generosity, and an effort at saying
Vietnam’s not a war; it’s a country. The humanitarian response to starvation was very, very warmly greeted.

Q: It was, however, the only ship that—

Weiss: It was the only ship. I don’t know how soon after that other ships came, but it was the first.

Q: Well, there an embargo.

Weiss: There was. But now there’s a favored nation status. Change happens.

Q: Yes. Now, at that time, I’m also aware that you had become active with groups that were attempting to get Vietnam recognized as a legitimate government through the United Nations.

Weiss: We were supporting Vietnam to become a member of the U.N. They survived two or three vetoes by the Americans, and finally in 1970— I have the poster, they’re gorgeous. They were elected. We did a program at the Beacon Theatre in New York called *Shake Hands with Vietnam*, welcome Vietnam to the United Nations. Pete Seeger sang, and Buffy Sainte-Marie sang, and it was a terrific evening, but we suffered—the South Vietnamese, who came here during and after the war in protest against the North Vietnamese, pulled out the electric line, so we went dark. I don’t know how long it took for us to get light, but we had a theater full of people, packed, and everybody who came shook hands with the Vietnam delegation to the U.N.
Then we had the Vietnamese on the stage, and the Americans on the stage. I recall it was quite a remarkable event. It was culture and politics. Music.

Q: I’ve done a little work in that area of the world, but one of the things was involved, of course, was the Chinese and the American—I don’t know what you want to call it. Flirtation, whatever you want—with the Khmer Rouge as the legitimate government of Cambodia, and punishing Vietnam for the invasion of Cambodia. Was any of that part of the political discussion at the time? The [Henry] Kissinger and [Richard M.] Nixon policy toward Cambodia, and punishing Vietnam?

Weiss: The Khmer Rouge were horrid. Horrible. I am not in favor of invasions, aggression, or war, but I think the Vietnamese invasion saved a lot of Cambodian people from the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, and of the Americans. Don’t forget: we bombed Cambodia. Elizabeth—member of Congress?

Q: Holtzman.

Weiss: —Holtzman. Sued—Peter Weiss was her lawyer—sued the U.S. over the bombing of Cambodia. Lot of history.

Q: Let’s move on to Riverside.
Weiss: Well, Riverside followed the Church World Service. I was working on 120th Street at Church World Service with Paul McCleary.

Q: At the God Box.

Weiss: At the God Box. That was over. A guy named William Sloane Coffin, who was a very dear friend, and remained so for the rest of his life, was called to be the senior minister of the Riverside Church. The Riverside Church. On his way from New Haven, where he had been living, where he was the—what do you call it? The chaplain—

Q: Chaplain at Yale. Yes.

Weiss: —the chaplain at Yale. On his way to Riverside Church, he stopped in Riverdale, where we lived, and I gave him dinner. I cooked up a storm, and one of the things I made, I recall, was baked eggplant. I had never cooked for him before then, I think, and I said, as he walked in the door, “Do you have any food issues?” He said, “I don’t like eggplant.” My heart went through the floor. It turns out he ate it all. Then he drove to the church, and he installed himself in the apartment that he was given by the church. Fast-forward a few days, weeks, I don’t remember, later: he calls me up across the street, and he says, “Cora, guess who’s in my office!” “Who’s in your office?” “Richard Barnet, from the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. Will you come over?” So I said, “Sure.” So I walk across the street, go to the office—had never been there before, had never been in Riverside Church before, except in the basement for WRVR. I knew Dick Barnet very well.
Bill said, “Cora, we’re talking about a program for disarmament at the Riverside Church, as part of my ministry,” *his* ministry, “and will you run it?” [laughs] And I laughed. I said, “Well, Bill, I’ll find someone to run it.” Then I designed a program right there. I said, “Let’s do this.” I created a little program idea, and they loved it. Obviously I was the person I found. [laughs] For ten years—they were ten remarkable years—I ran The Riverside Church Disarmament Program. One of the slogans was “Reverse the Arms Race,” and I did organize conferences, and concerts.

Q: When had you first met Bill Coffin?

Weiss: Bill and I probably met during the Clergy and Laity—originally called Clergy and Laymen—Concerned About the War in Vietnam [CALCAV]. We worked together in the antiwar movement. So it would be mid-'60s.

Q: He would have been involved in some of those meetings for The Mobilization?


Q: So you had seen him in action?

Weiss: Oh, yes. We were in action together. And don’t forget: that’s ’78. In ’72, we were in Vietnam together for the so-called prisoner snatch.
Q: So he was a known object, a known person to you.

Weiss: Oh, we were dear, dear friends.

Q: What was he like? I never met him, I never heard him preach, I never—

Weiss: He was a big, warm bear. He was funny, he played an incredible piano. He used to play the piano at our house whenever he came. He sang. He spoke Russian fluently, because he had worked for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] during the Second World War, and, well, that’s—his story is in his books. He was warm and funny, and very loving, and very caring, and just a fantastic human being. And very smart. He was very courageous, and risk-taking, to hire this Jewish woman to run a program in a Protestant church. And to have a peace program in a church as part of the official church ministry. It was the only one in America.

Q: Was your being Jewish ever an issue?

Weiss: No. It was never, ever suggested that I should pray, or be part of a religious ceremony, or anything. I went to a number of sermons on Sunday because he was one of the most extraordinary preachers of sermons that always had a moral or a political little hook to them. I also did programs about disarmament following the sermons. We had a program on the ninth floor in a lovely big room—Riverside Church is a gorgeous building.
Q: We had a conference there.

Weiss: Did you? And we could take any room we wanted, and there was a beautiful room on the ninth floor of the tower with a fireplace. We filled it at least one Sunday a month, and sometimes more often, with interesting people who were coming through town, to talk about issues that were timely. Church members came, and non-church members came. We had a great volunteer crew from among the members. Wonderful, wonderful devoted women. I think to a woman—

Q: All women?

Weiss: Mostly women. I think, to a woman—to a person—I spoke at all of their funerals in the church. They were great people. There was one other Jew, who was an artist who did a lot of our artwork that we turned into greeting cards that we sold for income for the program. We probably raised at least thirty or forty percent of our expenses by selling things that we prepared, that we wrote, or that—This woman, her last name was [Ellen R.] Simon [phonetic], she was Canadian, and she did a beautiful stained glass at Princeton, in their chapel. It’s just very interesting. She was a stained glass expert.

Q: Where did the other percentage of the—

Weiss: Oh, I raised money.
Q: How?

Weiss: Applying for grants. [laughter]

Q: Who would you go to?

Weiss: There was a wonderful guy who lived very nearby, on 106th Street, or 110th Street, named Corliss Lamont. You know who that is?

Q: An old friend.

Weiss: He was a contributor to Columbia University. He gave us grants every year. We didn’t cost a lot, because we didn’t have to pay rent. I drew a salary, I think, for a year or two, and then that became too much to raise, so I stopped. We paid maybe one or two staff people, but everybody else who worked there were volunteers. It was wonderful. A wonderful ten years.

Q: Thinking back to that first meeting with Bill Coffin and Dick Barnet, you said that you sketched out a program. Do you have—

Weiss: Can I remember it?

Q: —any recollection of what that program would have been?
Weiss: I thought of bringing interest groups together at the church. So there would be representatives of mayors, representatives of trade unions, representatives of the community. I have the proposal somewhere.

Q: Oh, I’ve seen it.

Weiss: You’ve seen it?

Q: Oh yes, I’ve seen.

Weiss: Well then you know it better than I, from memory.

Q: No, I don’t have the initial proposal. But I do have the booklet that was put out on the program, year by year.

Weiss: Right. That was put out by a wonderful woman named June Lordwood [phonetic]—June—no, I brought a copy of it here—Marjorie [Keeler] Horton. I spoke at her funeral. This is terrific. If she hadn’t done this, we would not have any memory.

Q: I was trying to weave my way through that booklet. How would you categorize that program? You had so many things going on.
Weiss: Education for action. We cared about action, but we cared about an educated congregation, an educated citizenry. You didn’t have to be a member of the church to be part of the program. We created platforms for smart people around the country to speak. We gave the first platform of her life to Helen Caldicott. I’ll never forget the day she got off the plane, came to the church, Bill had his office with a bathroom that had a shower and a hand towel. She took a shower immediately, to wash off the plane, and came downstairs and spoke. We created an international platform, Chancel. We had a fireside chat between Bill Coffin and the Soviet—was he foreign minister? Or whatever.

We did things that nobody else was doing to bring people together. But the conferences were replicated, and the program was replicated in California, by a combination of a synagogue and a Protestant church. George Regas—oh, how did I remember that name?—was the minister of the church, and Rabbi [Leonard] Beerman was the rabbi of the synagogue, and they replicated our program. There was another one at Trinity Church in New Jersey, in Princeton, which also replicated the program. Then we used to do things—we created a program called Peace Sabbath, Peace Sunday, where we wrote sermons and mailed them out with flyers—that had beautiful artwork—to clergy around the country so that they would have at least one weekend—the Jews and Muslims on the Sabbath, and the Protestants on Sunday—at least one weekend devoted to peace, disarmament, action. They were educational sermons. We published them all.

Q: Now, were they Bill Coffin’s sermons, or—

Weiss: Some, but also—
Q: —written widely?

Weiss: —other people. We published everything we produced in something called blue books. That was an idea that my father gave to me, because he remembered that a guy named Julius Haldeman? [Emanuel Haldeman-Julius]—I’m saying that with a question in mind, but I think that was his name—who produced the classics in a shape and size that would fit into a worker’s jacket pocket, so that workers going to work could read Shakespeare, or—classics. Sam said to me one day, “Why don’t you print the speeches that are delivered, so that more than the audience can see them?” It was called the blue books, because they all had a blue cover. I’ve been trying to get into the Riverside Church archives to retrieve them so that I could have a record of them, but it’s not been easy.

You know, the turn— It’s how many years since 1988? It was a ten-year program, from ’78 to ’88. We had a twentieth anniversary ceremony, actually, where Dick Barnet came, and Bill Coffin, and everybody who had worked there. Eric Kolbell, who’s now a practicing psychologist; David Schilling, who is now working on stockholder resolutions for the corporate responsibility program at the God Box; Michael Clark, whom I hired away from the social responsibility, corporate responsibility program at the God Box, ICCR Interfaith Committee on Corporate Responsibility, to work for us, who was brilliant, and we did draft counseling together. We had a great draft counseling center at the church. He’s now a minister of a small Methodist church in the Boston area. We had a wonderful staff.
Q: How did you divvy up the work? Did you have specialties?

Weiss: Everybody did something they never had done before. [laughter]

Q: Like what?

Weiss: Well, we had a staff meeting every Tuesday morning for breakfast, and everybody brought food. Bill would come many of the mornings, and people on the staff of the church would come, and volunteers would come, and we talked about what we should do next. So we all had ownership in the whole program. We had at least one major conference a year, sometimes more. We had incredible speakers from everywhere, who loved to come. People never turned us down, because it became an international platform. It became the organizing center for the June 12, 1982 demonstration in Central Park with one million people: the largest demonstration against nuclear weapons ever. We just had an anniversary this year of the June 12th, '82 demonstration, because we combined it with the memorial service for Jonathan [E.] Schell. I did one of the speeches, linking the two.

Q: In reading this, it struck me that the conferences very often were organized by the U.N.’s schedule. A U.N. session on disarmament would be matched by a conference on disarmament. There seemed to be a certain kind of synergy between the two.

Weiss: Well, the synergy was the cause for initiating the program, because it was initiated for the second special session on disarmament held by the U.N. So we were very U.N.-focused, but I
think all of the programs during the ten years stood on their own. One was on small arms, because there was a small arms conference at the U.N., no question about that. There was relevance, and we always invited U.N. speakers, especially from the Department for Disarmament Affairs. We were a disarmament program. We were a peace program, with a disarmament emphasis, and an antinuclear program. We were a fun program. If it wasn’t fun, we couldn’t do it. We always had food, and drink, and music. We had to, because we were pilloried by the guy who played the organ in the—not the organ, the bell tower. The bells. Carillonneur, that’s what he was. He ran the carillon.

Q: Who?

Weiss: Who was he? I don’t know his name. He was called the bat in the belfry, and he put out the most scurrilous, disgusting, red-baiting stuff.

Q: One guy was named Peck, and the other one was Sterling. Byron Sterling, and Jim Peck, was it? Those are the names I came up with. I tried to search them, I couldn’t find any reference to them at all.

Weiss: Well, because they hid behind these—it was called the men’s class, and it was—

Q: They had existed for a long, long time.
Weiss: Yes, but they had pleasure in vilifying and attacking Bill Coffin, who was the most popular minister after [Harry Emerson] Fosdick. And vilifying me. We survived it by singing, I guess is one way of putting it. We had more people come to our conferences and our events than they had. [laughs]

Q: But in their literature—

Weiss: But it was painful, I will admit that.

Q: In their literature, they always said Cora Rubin Weiss.

Weiss: Of course. God forbid they should leave out anything Jewish, because they were very anti-Semitic. Very. They were despicable, but in the interest of democracy, they were allowed to come. I don’t know how many of them actually came to Sunday sermons, services. We had a terrific program; we had a terrific cast of characters; we had terrific staff. We loved the workers in the church. They always came for coffee and bagels—

Q: Did you have special programs for the congregation itself?

Weiss: Oh, sure. But nobody was eliminated. In other words, the public could always come.

Q: But programs that were kind of geared to educating—
Weiss: The congregation? Oh, sure.

Q: —the congregation, and getting the congregation involved in action.

Weiss: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. When my mother died, and after we had distributed her—the things that she wanted to give away to people, and after my brother took what he wanted, and so forth, there was a lot left: clothing, pots and pans, books, rugs, furniture. And we had a tag sale at The Riverside Church to raise money for the disarmament program, the peace program, because she was very, very fond of the program, and came to lots of the events. She loved it. I think she would have liked that. It was nice.

Q: The book also recounts many, many, many times when there would be a busload going to a demonstration.

Weiss: Oh, Riversiders went to every demonstration in Washington, against—

Q: I remember them, always with a sign. [laughs] There was always a contingency, yes.

Weiss: That’s right. That’s the action, following the education. So it became part of the daily lives of so many of these extraordinary women who worked with us. Shuttleworth, Horton. I mean, they were just fantastic people.
Q: The context of the beginning of the program, the political context was kind of intriguing because it’s under the Jimmy [James E.] Carter Administration, when one expected a peace president, who immediately opened a missile program. [laughs] There’s a funny political context.

Weiss: We haven’t had a peace president yet, have we? [laugh]

Q: No. Yes, they don’t—

Weiss: Well, it’s interesting that—

Q: They don’t seem to last beyond the campaign.

Weiss: —when Carter was doing Bible study classes in a church in Washington, Bill and I went down because he was going to do a teach-in in a church, or we were going to do—he was speaking, or I was speaking at a demonstration, and we went to Carter’s Bible study class, and Bill and Carter met. It was a hot day, and I can’t remember very much else.

But the program began, and Bill used Harry Emerson Fosdick, who was a pacifist, and who was the famous preacher at Riverside before Bill. He used Fosdick as a legitimizing jumping-off place to justify having this program, and he used the special session on disarmament at the U.N. Between the two, he appealed to the trustees to let him have this program, and then to have me administer it. My grandmother might have turned in her grave. [laughter] She might have
wondered what was her Jewish granddaughter doing. But, you know, religion never played a role. It certainly doesn’t have any place among my chromosomes. It was all because of decency, and justice, and peace.

Q: Let’s talk about the June 12th demo. Where did that idea come from?

Weiss: Pam Solo and Mike Jendrzejczyk—Mike is no longer with us—they were two important people in the antiwar movement, and I took a walk, I think in Santa Fe or in Boulder. My friends from the Southwest will accuse me of arrogance, that I can’t tell the difference between one state and another. But it was some meeting that we were all at, and we took a long walk during the meeting, or after the meeting. I apparently said, “It’s time for a demonstration in Central Park. It’s time for America to say no to nuclear weapons.” John Tirman, who was the editor of a magazine called Nuclear Times, short lived, also attributes the idea to me. But you know what? America was ready for it, and the peace movement was ready for it. So I could have suggested it, but I didn’t have to persuade anyone. Everybody wanted it.

Q: This would have been in the winter of ’81 or the spring of ’82?

Weiss: Yes, probably. Riverside became the hub for the organizing. There was another place that was another logistical hub, I think. The important thing: Riverside provided space, not just for organizing the demonstration, but also for housing the international contingent. We had many, many, many people from Europe, but many more from Japan who came. We had meetings at the
church of the organizing committee. And we worked. This is before email. The fax was a big item, I recall. And mimeograph machines. [laughs]

Q: Well, one aspect that’s always intrigued me is it was very heavily religious. The religious affiliations were thirty or forty-something—

Weiss: Yes, but you didn’t have to be religious to—

Q: No, you didn’t, but it seems as if the peace program had infiltrated the mainline denominations, and they were, as you say, ready for it.

Weiss: Yes. That’s true.

Q: Where did you get the funding?

Weiss: Where’d we get the funding? From foundations and individuals. Lots. And from churches, I guess. I don’t think it was expensive, but I don’t recall what the budget was. Because everybody paid for their own expenses to get there. The park was free. The streets were free. The trade unions printed a lot of the placards. We weren’t serving dinner. People were volunteers in those days. We didn’t have a lot of paid staff.

Q: Did you have to go through a very elaborate process to get—
Weiss: Permits.

Q: —permits?

Weiss: Yes, but we had a famous, a woman who has become famous—and that may have been her first training ground—Leslie Cagan. She is now helping to organize the climate change conference, and I am calling for a marriage between the peace movement and the climate change movement. Because climate change is a threat to peace. So it’s very interesting. What are we in now, 2014? And that was 1982?

Q: The program was very, in a sense, unpolitical: no senators, no congressmen, not even the mayor.

Weiss: No, the mayor wasn’t—[laughs] That’s interesting. But I’ll tell you—

Q: Well, I know that he wanted very much to be on the program. [laughs]

Weiss: You know one who wanted to be? Who?


Weiss: To denounce us.
Q: Well, but he wanted to be on the program.

Weiss: Really?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Well, he denounced us in his columns in the *Staten Island Advance*.

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: Yes. Oh, that’s a separate story. A few years earlier he had very nasty things to say about us in an article in Playboy. That’s when I did a program at the church called Peace Child, based on a book that was written by a man whose name I’ve forgotten. But anyway, that’s separate.

Q: So it wasn’t the demo?

Weiss: But let’s talk about that for a minute, because everybody and *his* brother—because it was very male-dominant—wanted to be on the platform, including all the local politicos. I can’t believe there were *no* political representatives, but I don’t have—

Q: Well, Bella Abzug spoke, but she was not—

Weiss: She was not yet a member of Congress.
Q: Yes. Right. Or, she had been.

Weiss: Maj Britt Theorin spoke, from Stockholm, who was a Member of Parliament. We had an extraordinary lineup of musicians, and speakers.

Q: Bruce Springsteen.

Weiss: Yes. Everybody was sort of in the beginning of their careers. It was a long time ago! Coretta Scott King came. She and I were very good friends, and she was terrific. But we had an unfortunate ending to the event. We lost the mic at about four o’clock in the afternoon, to a group of people led by an African American minister, whose name—

Q: [Herbert] Daughtry.

Weiss: Daughtry. They took over the program, and we were eliminated from the stage.

Q: Pushed off, or—

Weiss: Well, yes.

Q: You hadn’t moved, it’s that you were pushed off?
Weiss: Well, because that was what happened. I don’t think we were physically pushed off, but we were not welcome anymore. That was a very, very sad, unfortunate ending to a fantastic day. I think ninety percent of the one million people don’t know what happened. But did I ever tell you the story about the note that was passed?

Q: No.

Weiss: There we were on the stage. My middle daughter, Tamara—how old would she have been? 1982. She would have been in her mid-twenties. She was with me, sort of as my aide-de-camp. But what I didn’t know then is that it was the beginning of her being trained—that’s a strong word. [interruption]

So, Tamara was with me, helping and learning, and she has become an incredible producer, and a terrific organizer. Anyway. We were working, we were organizing. I mean, I’m organizing, managing one speaker after another, and the music, and—the people were pouring into the park. All of a sudden, somebody comes up to the floor, the front of the stage, and hands me a small piece of paper. All it said was, “We made it.” It was signed by the daughter of a very dear friend of mine from the University of Wisconsin, who was a physician and taught at the medical school. She was in the back of the crowd, a million people back. All it said on the front was, “Please pass this to the stage for Cora.” People literally passed this piece of paper. It was amazing. I was so happy, a) that she was there—and people came from all of the country, but they came from all over the world—and b) that the audience actually respected her wish. That was terrific.
Q: Back to Daughtry. The Times write up indicated that, in the months of the planning of the demonstration, that he had raised the issue of black participation—

Weiss: Yes.

Q: — and that the organizers did try to make an accommodation to—

Weiss: Definitely.

Q: — speak more to the black community, and not have a quote, unquote “white program.”

Weiss: It was not a white program. I mean, it was a diverse program. Hispanic, black, white. International, national, labor, students. I think—it happened a long time ago, and we’ve moved on—but I think he wanted much more visibility for himself, and resented that he didn’t get it.

Q: I wonder if we could talk for a minute about some of the speakers you had. Michael Manley.


Q: Not at the program, no. For the Riverside.

Weiss: Oh. Oh, yes. Michael was a dear friend. Michael Manley, the prime minister of Jamaica—
Q: A not-uncontroversial person.

Weiss: Of course not! But, you know, if he were not controversial, would we have invited him? He would have been boring. Michael was an amazing human being, and I was very fond of him. My mother worked with him as an anthropo—my mother was a Caribbean anthropologist, Caribbeanist anthropologist. And he spoke. People came to hear him. I can’t remember what he said. [laughter] I should have done this interview about twenty-five years ago, when I never would have thought of doing it.


Weiss: Edward was very important, because Edward was the person who put forward the concept of protest and propose, basically. He was very important in the British antinuclear movement. He was brilliant. Wonderful guy.

Q: And Studs.

Weiss: Studs Terkel?

Q: Yes. Was on a number of your programs.
Weiss: I’ll tell you a nice story. I loved Studs so much. During the Vietnam War, I did a lot of public speaking, and I was all over the country. When he heard that I came to Chicago, he invited me onto his radio program. Studs had one of the most famous radio programs in America, interviewing. It was because of Studs’ interview that I started the program at WRVR. Studs interviewed me the way nobody else had ever done an interview. He cared more about what I had to say than what he had to say. Like you do. He gave an interview a cachet that was remarkable, and it became the subjects of so many of his books, which are wonderful. I remember now that’s why I decided to have a radio program: to do for women what he did for people.

Q: Yes. He was terrific. We did a book together. Well, I interviewed him and I published the—

Weiss: You *did* interview Studs?

Q: Oh, yes.

Weiss: And you published it?

Q: Well, it’s a story I’ll tell you off the—long story—

Weiss: Don’t dismiss these things. They’re important.

Q: The world doesn’t have to know the story. But Olof Palme, who became a friend.
Weiss: Yes. Very good friend. I met Palme because when I went to Vietnam in 1969 with a proposal to establish this Committee of Liaison, the Vietnamese—to their credit—were very smart, and decided to have somebody else engaged in the prisoner of war issue, so that I wouldn’t be hanging out by myself. It was a kind of protection that they were creating for us. A head of state, prime minister of Sweden, and we physically never met. I don’t even think we spoke on the telephone. But I knew that if anything should ever happen, Olof Palme was there to support us. So one day—I don’t remember what the year was. In the ’60s. Palme was in New York, and I invited him to the house in Riverdale—I haven’t told you this story?

Q: When he was talking and they were—

Weiss: And they were recording.

Q: They were recording outside—

Weiss: So it’s already on there?

Q: Yes, you told me that story. Yes.

Weiss: Three guys showed up in blue raincoats, and I had no idea which one was Palme. That was the beginning of a long, wonderful friendship, not only with Palme, but with Lisbet, his wife, whom I adore, and who became an important member of the executive committee of UNICEF [United Nation’s Children’s Fund]. So whenever she came to meetings in New York,
she would come. After Palme was assassinated, she came for dinner, and we had a big round table that I had bought in Stockholm at the time of the funeral. Somebody once told me that when you’re sad from a funeral, you go out and spend money. So I bought—we were renovating our dining room, and I bought a huge, round, thick pine table for $500. It sat twelve people. And it cost $500 to ship. [laughter] So when she came for dinner, the secret service came ahead of her, and made sure that she would not sit with her back to the windows. So she lived a life, after his assassination, as a potential target.

So Palme. We went to Stockholm. I spoke at his funeral, but you know that story already. We went to Stockholm, Peter and I. Wait, back up. We were not only friends with Palme but with Lisbet, and with what were called Palme’s Boys. Palme’s Boys were a group of young men who wrote his speeches, who accompanied him on meetings, who were terrific. They included Jan Eliasson, who’s now the deputy secretary general of the United Nations, and was an ambassador from Sweden to the U.N.; Pierre Schori, who was an ambassador to the U.N.; Hans Dahlgren, whom I invited to be a speaker at an International Peace Bureau meeting that I was running in Italy; Mats Hellström. I mean—It’s interesting that I remember their names. They were remarkable people, who all became somebody in subsequent governments after Palme’s assassination. And friends. I have tons of friends in Sweden, and it’s wonderful.

Palme once had Peter and me up to his office in the—Riksdag? Wherever his office was. It was after hours, so there was nobody in the building, and we were on our own. He loved being on his own. He couldn’t bear having the secret service always with him, which is why he was assassinated, because he was walking alone with his wife to a movie, or from a movie. So he
took us into what was called the Safe Room. In case the building was attacked, in case there was some reason why he had to be protected, there was this incredible lead-lined space that he was taken to. I’m sure that every head of government has some kind of space like that. But of course, we’ve never been to one, and Peter and I were in his safe space with him. Palme once taught me how to eat raw herring, and I have a wonderful picture somewhere of him with a herring hanging over his mouth, and just said, “Just take it all in. Eat the whole herring.”

Olof Palme was a remarkable human being, and he came to speak at Riverside Church. His opening line—and I don’t think I remember anybody else’s opening line, of all of the dozens of people who spoke. “I’ve seen war. War is ugly.” He had just come from Iran. Iran, Iraq, and the Iran-Iraq War. “The face of war is ugly,” I think he said. He was incredible. After he was assassinated, I created the Olof Palme Memorial Lecture on Disarmament and Development, and the first speaker was Oliver Tambo, from South Africa. So these are the link—

Q: I’m really going to get to Oliver Tambo and Allan Boesak.

Weiss: Well, that was a pretty unusual combination. It was the first time that they had been in public together. Allan was the UDF [United Democratic Front]—?

Q: Yes.

Weiss: —of South Africa, and he was later—what happens when you—was he defrocked?
Q: Yes, I’ve forgotten what—

Weiss: It was an ugly, ugly scene. Had to do with extramarital. Sex is always the downer.

Q: But you know, as I listen to you talk, we started out talking about networks, but talking about each one of these people, what you have outlined is—I talked about brick by brick by brick, so it’s exactly what you’ve done in this conversation, is to move brick, by brick, by brick to an ever-expanding group of people.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: And you could do that, probably, with almost everyone that you brought to Riverside.

Weiss: I got Michael Manley a lectureship at Columbia University, where he delivered—three?—lectures, I think. But all of that was because he came to Riverside first. Who else have you got on your list? How about—

Q: Robert Lifton, and Dom Hélder Câmara.

Weiss: Now, Dom Hélder. Let’s stay with him for a second. Dom Hélder Câmara was the archbishop of Recife, Brazil. He was very short, and always had a smile on his face. He’s the first Catholic priest who slept in our house. [laughs] He was an amazing human being. I picked him up at the airport, and I gave him one of my socioeconomic tours of Manhattan on our way
back. I drove him through East Harlem, and Harlem, and Manhattan, and pointed out the abandoned buildings, and therefore the abandoned people. That made a huge impression on him. He had a speaking gig at Manhattan College in Riverdale—which was a Catholic school run by Brothers—and a speaking gig at Riverside. He came with Studs Terkel to the conference. I have a wonderful picture of him, and Studs Terkel, and Vinie Burrows on the night that they spoke.

So I’m driving him to the church. Bill Coffin did not have a car, and he was the senior minister, and there was a parking space for the senior minister, and it had a number one on it. I drove right into it, because it was given to me, because I had a car. I had to drive to work every day. He never forgot that. “Cora Weiss, *numera una.*” I brought him home for dinner, because he was staying with us. We were sitting at the dinner table, and he said to me, “Please give the grace.” Well, my goodness! Cora Weiss, grace! I’d never heard a grace, much less given one. We argued back and forth, until I could persuade him that as the honorary guest, he should do the grace. I think he finally succumbed. I put him in our son’s bedroom. Our kids were gone by then. And then the breakfast. I went into the room, and the bed had not been touched. He created an altar out of Danny’s work table, and he stayed up all night praying.

He was a deeply, profoundly religious human being, who cared deeply about people; who was dedicated to eliminating poverty, violence, and war; and when he came to speak at Manhattan College, where I took him—so, I accompanied him—there was a statue of Jesus on the chancel, and instead of speaking to the audience, he spoke to Jesus. And he had a conversation with Jesus: “What are you doing about the poor people? What are you doing about the abandoned people in Harlem?” He knocked my socks off. I mean, he was a remarkable human being. He spoke at
Riverside, and he brought everybody to tears, and to their feet. It was a tragedy when he lost his post as archbishop. I can’t remember who the pope was, but he was no good. A no-good pope! Because Dom Hélder was too progressive. He supported the workers’ movement in Brazil.

Q: Yes. The liberationists.

Weiss: The peasant movement. And the liberation struggle in Central America. But if there was one guy in the Church—

Q: It’s an interesting combination.

Weiss: I adored him.

Q: During that period of time, you also took a number of trips abroad, and the brochure talks about how you reported on those trips.

Weiss: Oh, yes.

Q: You went to Nicaragua?

Weiss: I did. I went to Nicaragua in ’82. I can’t remember—I don’t remember the date. But in any event, doesn’t matter. I went with a group, and I remember we took an old plane from Managua to the coast. Blue Fields, I think it was called.
Q: The Mosquito Coast?

Weiss: Yes. Because there was a remarkable woman named Helen—with a C. Cummings? Can’t remember—who was a doctor, and she invited us. On the way over, the plane flew very close to the ground. We were sitting in the plane with seatbelts on, but only around our waists. And a door fell out of the plane. That wasn’t the most important thing that happened. [laughs] But it was pretty interesting. Out of that trip came the idea that we should have a Nicaragua-Honduras education project, to try to bring Americans who were strategic opinion makers to see the difference between Honduras and Nicaragua. This is post-Sandinista Revolution. And we did.

We established a committee, and one of the women who worked on the committee was named—Jody Williams. She was a committee staff member working with Lisa Vene Klasen on the Nicaragua-Honduras Education Project, and now, of course, she’s a Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work on landmines. She was influenced about the need to eliminate landmines because of her experience in El Salvador, where she just met too many children without limbs, without eyes, without arms and legs. She ran an extraordinary landmine ban campaign.

Q: You also went to Australia and New Zealand.

Weiss: I did. I was invited to Australia to speak. Peter came with me. The program went on and on, and finally I was the speaker, and I think it was about nine o’clock at night, and when I looked out, almost to a person everybody was sleeping. [laughter] Now that, I remember. I also
remember wanting to go to New Zealand, because [David Russell] Lange was prime minister. And Lange was the guy who had the *cojones* to say to [George P.] Shultz, “No nuclear ships in our ports.” It was the first time in history that an American secretary of state went to New Zealand. A. B. Shultz threatened to never import another bar of butter or another leg of lamb. Those were the two major exports of New Zealand. There are more sheep than people in New Zealand. And Lange held on. A woman named [Marilyn] Waring crossed the aisle and persuaded the opposition members of Parliament to support the “No nuclear ship.” And a woman named Helen Clark led the campaign against nuclear ships. Helen Clark, today, is the head of the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], the largest agency of the U.N., with billions of dollars of budget that she has to raise every year. I think six bil—I’m not sure of the number. When I went in 1985—I think, January—I called her to invite her to come speak in America, and I had no authority to issue that invitation. But I had the gall. I think gall is one of the major things in my life, I guess. [laughs]

Her husband Peter—Peter Davis—answered the phone, and said, “Oh, Helen is too busy to talk.” And I said, “Oh! I came all the way from America. But would you please tell her that this is Cora Weiss from New York, and I’d like her to come and speak at a Freeze [Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign] conference.” Now, I was not an officer of The Freeze. I wanted to abolish nuclear weapons, not freeze them. But the Freeze conference was the biggest thing happening at that time, and I thought I was safe in inviting her to speak and then coming to persuade them to let her speak. So when I came back to America, I went to a Freeze meeting, and I remember being kept waiting outside before I could come in to try to persuade them to let her speak. Anyway, all of that’s over the dam. She came, she spoke—
Q: Why did they keep you waiting?

Weiss: Because I wasn’t one of them. I was an outsider.

Q: Would that be Seymour Melman?

Weiss: No, Seymour was SANE [Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy]. I was SANE. Freeze was—The Freeze became SANE/FREEZE when I led a campaign in SANE with a very nice woman who was one of the administrators of it to merge the two. And then we had a merge ceremony, I think in the Detroit conference of SANE, and we read the merge document simultaneously, the two of us together. It was very nice. Those were—You know, it’s like the Mobe and the Moratorium. They were competing efforts. I would never look at that and repeat those experiences again. It’s so important to bring people together from the get-go.

Q: Yes. Looking back, some of the—

Weiss: Waste of energy, waste of time, waste of money. We have to learn to live together.

Q: The issues that seemed so important—

Weiss: We can’t afford to have enemies.
Q: They fade away. They fade away. You also went to Nairobi.

Weiss: I’ve been to Nairobi a number of times. The first time was in 1959, when I ran the airlift, African American Students Foundation, and I had established a lot of friends, and then Tom [Thomas Joseph Odhiambo] Mboya was still alive. He was subsequently assassinated. All my friends from Africa were assassinated. It’s terrible. I went to Nairobi in 1985 for the Third World Women’s Conference.

Q: It was the U.N. Decade of the Women.

Weiss: Yes. 1985. So it was the Women’s Forum. That was terrific. It was the Cold War, still, and we created a peace tent. We found, and were given, a wonderful knoll to put the peace tent on. It was a little burp in the ground, and it was at the university. Barrow—what was her first name? Dame [Ruth] Nita Barrow, who was from Barbados, was the head of the Forum. She was a short, almost square, very, very heavy, wonderful, wonderful human being. Dame Nita Barrow. One day, we got to our peace tent land before the tent was erected, and we found Pepsi-Cola setting up its stand, and we said to them, “This is our peace tent’s land! You can’t have it.” And they sort of said, “Screw you,” and proceeded to set up their Pepsi, and we called Nita. She came and sat herself down on that piece of turf, and said to Pepsi-Cola, “This is their peace tent.” Dame Nita Barrow got rid of Pepsi-Cola. She has been a heroine of mine ever since.

Inside the peace tent, we had meetings all the time, and there was going to be a meeting with the Soviet women—they were Soviet then; they were not independent yet. The Soviet women, and
Bella Abzug, and Cora Weiss. That morning, I got a message that Bella had succumbed to Montezuma’s revenge, and was not able to get out of bed. And I panicked. It’s something I remember. That is one memory that comes back. How could I be the only American on the same platform with a bunch of Soviet women? How would they ever let me back in my country? I was panicked about coming back through customs. I don’t remember what happened next. I spoke. Whether I found somebody else to join me—is possible, but I can’t remember who it was. But I was so angry with Bella! [laughter]

Q: What was she like to travel with?

Weiss: Difficult.

Q: Well, I think she was a difficult person in general.

Weiss: But she never yelled at me, and all of my friends got yelled at. I don’t know why. We managed to survive together. She was brilliant, and she was important, and she did things that other people never dared to do. She was a brilliant lawyer, and she looked at resolutions in the Congress for their loopholes, where she could come in and propose new legislation despite whatever was already on the table. We went to Geneva together when I was with Women for a Meaningful Summit and SANE—well, by then it was SANE/FREEZE, I guess—and David Cortright, and I, and Jesse Jackson were on a plane, and she was on the same plane, or a different plane, with a group of women. Geneva had been cleared by the government, because [Mikhail]
Gorbachev and [Ronald] Reagan were going to meet at one of their summits, which is why we created Women for a Meaningful Summit.

So we had an empty airport. Everything was empty, and we could move around very easily. Bella was *furious* that Jesse Jackson was there, because he was going to get the press, and not Bella. One could say that a man would get the press and not women, and that’s part of it too, of course. I was sort of in the fulcrum. [laughter] Trying to make the seesaw balance. Anyway, Jesse did get the front page of the *New York Times*, because—remind me the name of the foreign editor of the *New York Times* in 1980—whatever that was.

Q: [Leslie] Gelb?

Weiss: Who? No, not Gelb. His father was a rabbi from Cleveland, and he became the editor.

Q: Oh, [Joseph] Lelyveld?

Weiss: Lelyveld!

Q: Yes.

Weiss: Hooray! He was wonderful. But he was quite young then. I don’t know what his title was yet. He noticed that I knew [Sergei M.] Plekhanov, who was the Soviet—I guess he was very, very close to Gorbachev. He was from the U.S. Canada Institute [Institute for U.S. and Canadian
Studies], and I had known him from previous trips to Russia, to Moscow. So I sort of had an in with our ability to meet with Gorbachev. Joe Lelyveld. He decided that I was the one to attach to, to get attached to. Joe never left my shoulder. [laughter] We were shoulder to shoulder for the whole time, and we met with Gorbachev. He had a personal interaction with Jesse Jackson, which Lelyveld put on the front page of the Times the next day.

Q: So she was right. Bella was right.

Weiss: Yes. But it wasn’t my fault. [laughter] You had to love Bella. It was impossible to be a woman leader from the left liberal side, and she did it. She ran for mayor; she ran for Senate.

Q: By all reports, she was a wonderful congressperson.

Weiss: Fantastic. And she knew every—

Q: Tip [Thomas P.] O’Neill said she was wonderful.

Weiss: Of course. She knew everybody in the building, all the workers. I once was in a car with her years after she had been a member of Congress, and the police recognized—we were at some demonstration in Washington, and the cops called her “Your Honorable Member,” or whatever you call a member of—“Representative.” And the guards in the buildings. I mean, she was known. She was terrific.
Q: When you look back on that whole disarmament program, what would you say was your major success?

Weiss: Of the ten years at Riverside?

Q: Yes. If you were called upon to evaluate it.

Weiss: I think we put disarmament on the agenda after the Vietnam War. We couldn’t continue doing post-war work. We had to go back to disarmament. Back, because I had started there with Women Strike for Peace, in the early ’60s, and the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons. We not only put disarmament back on the agenda, but we gave it legitimacy and cred, as they say today. Credibility. We did it from one of the most important churches in America. We internationalized the platform. We internationalized the chancel of the church, the platform. We created programs that could be replicated around the country. I think it was an amazing ten years. It was one of the best ten years of my life. I met people I never would have met before, and because I could say, “Cora Weiss, Riverside Church,” people would come. They didn’t come for me. They came for The Riverside Church. Bill Coffin and I became, probably, best friends. Forever.

Q: Did you decide to leave when you—

Weiss: We had no choice.
Q: —found out he was going to leave?

Weiss: Yes, we had to leave together. We came together; we left together.

Q: That was the understanding?

Weiss: No. It was the reality. We never made an understanding. And I spoke at his funeral.

Q: You obviously stayed in touch with him afterwards.

Weiss: Oh, yes. He came to New York, and participated in a fast during the small arms conference, and they slept at our house. Oh, they slept at our house a lot. But he had congestive heart failure. So he used to sleep in that brown lounger chair, because it—

Q: Looked like [unclear] chair.

Weiss: I don’t know what that is. But anyway, the back would go back, and he would sleep in the living room. Randy [Virginia Randolph Wilson] and sometimes her daughter would sleep upstairs in the guest room. Oh, Bill was—Bill and Randy were part of our lives. You don’t go to a war zone together and get whisked into a bomb shelter together with your country’s planes dropping bombs overhead and not get bonded for life.

Q: I was going to try to move on to the [Samuel] Rubin Foundation, but it’s getting now to—
Weiss: Three hours. [laughs]

Q: —that point. But I want to start there next time.

Weiss: Okay.

Q: And then to talk about Women and Peace, and then the international peace organizations, and kind of bring you up to date.

Weiss: That’s nice. IPB [International Peace Bureau], and then Hague Appeal for Peace.

Q: The Hague, and bring you up to date.

Weiss: And how about the Security Council Resolution 1325?

Q: Right.

Weiss: I’m very proud of that, I must say. I was trying to think of the ten things I’m most proud of, but there are too many. I’m very happy. I have no regrets.

Q: Good!
Weiss: I’m not very happy that things have gone backwards so quickly. That is terribly distress—I mean, it’s just—

Q: Play that out for me.

Weiss: Well, you wake up in the morning, and see Hamas rocketing Israel and Israel bombing the Palestinians, and you’ve been working on Israel-Palestine peace for years, and played a role in the Geneva Initiative. It’s the most horrible, horrible feeling. I can’t bear it. I can’t bear the fact that today children are targets in war. It’s unbearable. That war is still a method of international relations when it’s a failed institution. And I’m not a pacifist.

Q: Did you feel at a certain point—I’m trying to grasp with this, there was a certain point when it seemed like civil society was going to have a real renewal. You know, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the creation of states abroad, the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in Latin America, [Nelson] Mandela, the new South Africa, et cetera. There was a moment, prior—I guess prior to Bosnia, almost—there was a period when it seemed like civil society would renew itself in very vital ways.

Weiss: That’s a very interesting listing of good history from you. I appreciated that. There was a cascade of movements, starting with the Civil Rights Movement, the antiwar movement, the women’s movement, the gay movement. There were huge successes for all of them. We’re celebrating Freedom Summer right now, even though we lost three remarkable young men, among others. Those were all civil society initiatives, and civil society successes.
And then came the Internet age, and everybody with their face in an iPhone, an iPad, a telephone, a cellphone, a tablet. I don’t even know the names of all these things. And yet they were the instruments that brought people together for the Arab Spring. They were mobilized by the Internet. But it didn’t last. Now there is still civil society. We have community-based organizations now. We just had a terrific success in Florida. I can’t remember how to pronounce the name of the Indians—Immokalee. I-M-O-O-something. The tomato workers won a huge success, and that was a civil society success. The fact that gay people can marry in most of the states of the United States is a huge success. Now you can get insurance and benefits if you’re a gay employee of the federal government. Huge success. The price? Hugely high. Ridiculously high.

I don’t give up on civil society. I love civil society. It’s a great power. But we haven’t had the fierce power of money before, like the [Charles G. and David H.] Koch brothers. We haven’t had the Supreme Court with decisions like the Hobby Lobby, or the Lobby Hobby [Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.], or Citizens United [Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission]. And the five to four decisions, the four being three women. So the times have changed. I hope that we are going to see a reversal, because when the Supreme Court votes against women’s right to birth control, women are going to mobilize. And when a Tea Party candidate gets rejected by the public in favor of a less conservative Republican, maybe that’s an indication. We’re not giving up. People still enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in peacetime, not in wartime.
Q: I had a conversation with my older grandchildren, who kind of are just spirited, et cetera. But looking back, it’s quite remarkable where one came from in the ’50s and the rapidity of the change. That will always stay in my imagination, that things change remarkably fast once social forces are in motion. You know, my grandchildren don’t see that, because they don’t see—

Weiss: That’s not happening now.

Q: —the forces in motion in their lives. But it will happen. That’s what I tell them.

Weiss: I think so. I met a young man yesterday whom I knew during the Occupy movement in New York. He has a Hebrew name. He’s an American, born in the Bronx. I said to him, “So, what did you do when the Occupy fell apart?” He said, “We met and talked about the lessons learned. And one of the lessons learned was that we had no infrastructure,” which was of course the criticism of it while it was happening. “So now what are you doing?” “Now, we are organizing locally, and we’re organizing along justice social issues.” It’s remarkable what they’re doing. They have funding from the Ford Foundation, and the Park Foundation, and all of the totally wonderful foundations. There’s light in his eyes. There’s sparkle. And he’s going to marry a woman who also is organizing in the food and justice field.

[END OF SESSION]
Q: Now, you were just telling me about a peace trip to Ireland. While that's on your mind, let's get that story down, and then we'll begin the regular interview.

Weiss: Okie dokie. So, it's the '70s, early '70s, can't remember what year, exactly, because all of those documents are in my office. We decided that it was time for a peace process tour of Northern Ireland, where we might be able to assess what the situation was with respect to The Troubles.

Q: When you say "we," you mean—

Weiss: Well, it was an ad hoc group of people who were interested in peace. There were ten or eleven of us, and we flew into Dublin, we got off the plane, met with Mary Robinson, who was president at the time. Now, she's the Secretary-General's special envoy for climate change. She walked us around her presidential house, enough times so that she could talk to each member of the delegation. That set us up for going to the north. We landed in Derry, with a marvelous young woman whose name was Caitriona Ruane.

She had arranged a spectacular tour, to meet with Catholics and Protestants, sleep in their homes, drink beer in their pubs, and visit them in their jails. Not their jails, in Britain's jails, which were
Weiss – Session 6 – 2

horrible. The one thing we came away with was that the women desperately wanted to meet with each other, Catholic and Protestant, but had no safe place to do it in the north. So, when we came out, after going to the horrifying cemetery in Derry of the teenage boys who were slaughtered on—what was the day for it—Bloody Sunday, we went to see the U.S. ambassador to Ireland, who is Jean—

Q: [Jean Kennedy] Smith.

Weiss: —Smith, thank you.

Q: Jean Kennedy Smith, yes.

Weiss: She was President Kennedy's sister, Jean Kennedy Smith, and the other most important woman, Mary Robinson, who was president. We said to both of them, we've been to the north, we've talked to both Catholics and Protestants, we've spent a lot of time with women, and they have one request. We ask you to help implement it. They want a safe space to meet. And Jean and Mary arranged for a place for them to go. Then, from there—

Q: In Derry? Or Belfast? Or—?

Weiss: I don't remember where it was. But from there, they formed the women's political party, because they wanted seats at the table, and George Mitchell, who was the facilitator of the peace process, said you can't have a seat, because only political parties are at the table, and they're all
men. They formed the political party, and they got two seats at the table. The Irish peace agreement, which is also called the Good Friday peace agreement, which resolved The Troubles as well as you could resolve a conflict, has been an iconic example for subsequent peace agreements and peace processes.

People from South Africa went to Ireland to study their agreement, to talk to them about how they got people together. And it was those two women who sat at the table with all the guys, who wouldn't let the conversation move on until the human rights issue was finalized. They institutionalized human rights institutions, so that the issues that brought The Troubles to bear in Northern Ireland wouldn't happen again. Those institutions are still in existence, and the Irish peace agreement, I think, is a role model; it's a role model and a good example of why women have to be at the table.

Q: That's a good story. Yes, that's a good story. Now, I wonder if we can go back to my agenda. [laughs]

Weiss: You can go wherever you like.

Q: And talk for a few minutes about the Sam Rubin Foundation.

Weiss: Samuel.

Q: Samuel. It's Samuel. No middle initial?
Weiss: No middle initial, and no The. Just Samuel Rubin Foundation.

Q: Samuel Rubin Foundation. It was established by your father long before you—

Weiss: Nineteen forty-nine.

Q: Yes, long before you came of—

Weiss: Age.

Q: Of voting age.

Weiss: I was there, but I wasn't of age. [laughs]

Q: Right. When did you begin to be involved?

Weiss: I don't remember. It's, well, about thirty-six years ago.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: As president. But I was a director before then.
Q: I've looked at the programs that your father supported. The arts with [Leopold] Stokowski, and the—

Weiss: Stokey?

Q: Symphony.

Weiss: American Symphony Orchestra.

Q: And Israel, the cultural side, these things in Israel.

Weiss: For Arabs and Jews.

Q: And education. Did you inherit that kind of a program? Or how do you—when you became involved, under his tutelage, more or less?

Weiss: Well, we have the same mission statement that he had. We have done a lot of work in the arts. We support a lot of interesting documentary films. One of the most interesting things I think we did was to support the renovation of a Ben Shahn mosaic mural that sits on top of the entrance to a trade high school. That was a moving event, to see that mosaic get put back in its place, in good shape. We support a lot of different kinds of cultural things. But we are very low-key, for a number of reasons, because I'm not only the president of the foundation, but I'm the president of The Hague Appeal for Peace, and I was the president of the International Peace
Bureau [IPB], and I lead a very active life. So, some people say I'm a doer and a donor. But I'm not the donor. It's not my money, which is one of the reasons for low-key; it is administered by a board of directors, and they have to agree to every single grant that is made. We're also very, very small, and we can't have thousands of applications coming in, because the worst part of the job is saying "no."

Q: The board of directors is mostly family, though, isn't it?

Weiss: It's mostly family, and one non-family member.

Q: Who is the non-family member?

Weiss: The current non-family member is Alison Bernstein, who is the—

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: —former vice president of the Ford Foundation.

Q: Oh, really? An old friend of mine! Yes! Interesting. Interesting. Yes. What are the special advantages of being a small foundation, and the disadvantages?

Weiss: Everybody gets a small amount of money, because it's a small foundation. You can engage in responsible risk-taking, more than a large foundation would. Frequently, we take the
first plunge, so we are the sort of Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval, and then Ford will say, well, if we did it, they can do it. They've done that a few times. So, that's the advantage of risk-taking and seed funding. We like to see what happens when you can get something started, now called, "startups." They weren't called "startups," then. The disadvantage is that everybody thinks you have more money than you do, and that they can have some of it. It's very sad, because—

Q: About how much a year do you give?

Weiss: Well, these past few years, it's only $600,000.

Q: Yes, the last figure I have is $589,000—

Weiss: In years past, it used to be over a million, but—

Q: Well, did you take a hit in 2008 with—

Weiss: Considerable.

Q: Who handles your finances?

Weiss: A brokerage house.

Q: So you just hire them to do it?
Weiss: Yes. Of course. Doesn't everyone? [laughter]

Q: Most of the grants I looked at, most of the grants are between $5,000 and $15,000. Small, they're small kinds of grants. How do you evaluate them, when you say it's a seed to something else, which means that you must keep track of the grant's use.

Weiss: We don't make them write ten-page letters about how their money was spent. We also don't make them write ten-page applications, because we think that's not the best use of their time.

Q: Right.

Weiss: They're supposed to be doing what they're asking for money. The evaluation is, if they send us a report, or if we go to visit them, or if we talk to them or hear about their work and they want to apply again, then they can get another grant. We have groups of applicants that we've been funding for many, many years, because without funds, even small amounts of money, it would be harder for them to continue doing the great work that they're doing. We have a core group of grantees that we feel responsible for.

Q: What's the core group?

Weiss: [laughs]
Q: I think I know, because I've looked at the reports.

Weiss: Well, there's a fantastic group that was just visited by Michelle Obama last week. That's Global Kids. Young people from the New York City public schools come together and get their heads wrapped around the world and get involved in incredible issues; they go to the Council on Foreign Relations [CFR] to hold seminars and training programs. They were invited to the White House, because they invented a game about Jackie Robinson, and Michelle happened to see it.

We have the Downtown Community Television Center, DCTV, which makes the extraordinary documentary films about issues that we all care about, or should all care about. But at the same time, it welcomes young people from inner city schools, from schools in the city, public schools, to learn everything that you can possibly learn about the field of videography, and prepares them for jobs in television or film making, so they become employable. But we also insist that they go to college. So, we mentor them, and tutor them so that they can get into college, and the success rate is incredible. It's for crying when their graduation time comes.

Then, there's the Center for Constitutional Rights [CCR], which just won a fantastic case in—well, they win fantastic cases all the time—but they got a ruling that the United States is partly responsible for the Chilean murder of [Charles] Horman. Here it is. "Chilean court confirms the U.S. role in the 1973 killings of Americans in the Chilean Coup."

Q: Right.
Weiss: This was the case that inspired the film, "Missing," and Charles Horman was the young man who was killed in the stadium, and his widow, Joyce, has been unrelenting in keeping a vigil on this situation, and got a ruling from Judge [Jorge] Zepeda in Chile “'that both implicates'”—I'm reading now from the press release—"'implicates and incriminates U.S. Intelligence personnel as playing a dark role in the arrest of my husband,' she said." So, the Center for Constitutional Rights is on the cutting edge of making law and defending people who may not be very popular with the U.S. government. We're very proud of that. We've been supporting them for a very long time.

We support the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy [LCNP], which went to the international court, in The Hague, on the question of the legality of possession and use of nuclear weapons, and got a great decision, and so on.

Q: IPS [Institute for Policy Studies], you sponsored IPS for years.

Weiss: We did sponsor IPS for many years, and then we funded its sister organization in Amsterdam called the Transnational Institute [TNI], which is a more international gathering place of activist intellectuals from around the world.

Q: Peter's involved in the Lawyers Committee, and CCR and IPS.

Weiss: Yes.
Q: But—

Weiss: We don't vote when it comes to the organizations that we're involved with.

Q: I would imagine that in your weekly routine, you make contact with any number of the grantees or the outfits, you hear about them. That there's, obviously, it's a listing of the—

Weiss: That's the doer part of the donor.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We know a lot—

Q: Human Rights, and—

Weiss: We know a lot about the people we give money to.

Q: Right. Right.

Weiss: Or, we try to know a lot.

Q: I read somewhere that you were among the people looking for some kind of a group of foundations to get together on issues of security and peace and disarmament.
Weiss: Well, we did.

Q: Tell me that story.

Weiss: Many years ago, I worked with a small group of funders, David Hunter from the Stern Fund, Carol Geyer from J. P. Penney, no, something-Penney Foundation? What's the name of the store?

Q: J. C. Penney.

Weiss: J. C. Penney, Carol Geyer, and David Ramage [phonetic], and there were very few of us. Phil Stern, David Hunter, all men and me, and Carol. Anyway, there were a half a dozen of us, and we used to meet for rye bread and ham sandwiches at David Hunter's place. Oh, Stewart [R.] Mott was very important in that group. So, we were all medium-sized, small and medium—I was the smallest—small and medium-sized foundations, and we took interesting risks. The first thing we did, as I recall, was to hold a seminar, a gathering, in the Northwest, with Soviets and Americans. That was pretty high-risk. It was Cold War, and it was with the Institute for Policy Studies, [Marcus] Marc Raskin and [Richard] Dick Barnet were very influential in that. It was supported by Pillsbury, the Pillsbury family that made Pillsbury flour.

Q: Right.
Weiss: We had the meeting in their town.

Q: Minneapolis.

Weiss: Minneapolis, Minnesota. Thank you very much, it takes two! So, that was one grouping. Then there was a larger meeting of foundations in the north side of Nassau County, on the North Shore of Long Island, and lots of different people got up and spoke, and I remember saying, "No matter what you do, keep doing it. But do one thing for peace." That, apparently, was the seed for what is now known as the Peace and Security Funder's Group [PSFG]. It's not huge, it's a fairly large grouping of people, which meets on the telephone once a month for conference calls, and once a year for an annual gathering. It's nice to see all the new young people in the field.

Q: Do you kind of coordinate, talk about grantees and the issues, and—

Weiss: Some people do. The biggest coordination happening now, I think, was started by the Wallace Global Fund, [Dr.] Ellen Dorsey in Washington. Wallace is Henry Agard Wallace, who was—

Q: Oh, right. Right, yes.

Weiss: —once vice president of the United States, and the Secretary of Commerce, and ran for president. She started a campaign called Divest-Invest, which means that foundations, and of course anyone else who wants to join, should divest their stocks that are in non-renewable fossil
fuel companies, coal, oil; and invest in socially responsible—solar, and so forth. It's growing. It's a very interesting, contemporary, new campaign.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It reminds me of the campaign that I was involved with, not from the Foundation, but when I was a trustee of Hampshire College in the early '80s, late '70s. The students, we were at a trustee meeting in what was called, "The Barn," it used to be a barn, and it had big glass windows for a wall. The students came walking down the hill with placards saying, "Divest from South Africa." Hampshire, at the time, was a tiny—we practically had five dollars in the bank.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: I mean, it really had no endowment, or—and it was running on a tight budget. I looked at my co-trustees, and I said, "Friends, what's our answer to these kids?" Adele Simmons was the president, and she had done her PhD thesis on South Africa. Immediately, three of us were asked to go and spend the weekend in the president's house, Henry Morgan and John Watts. John Watts is still alive, Henry, unfortunately, isn't. But they were both more business people. Watts runs an investment fund, or a hedge fund, and Morgan was part of a bank and taught finance. And me. The three of us sat for a weekend and wrote CHOIR, Committee of Hampshire On Investing Responsibly, and it called for divestment from apartheid. Divestment from companies, U.S. companies doing business with the apartheid regime in South Africa. They still have that Committee at Hampshire.
Q: One last question about the Foundation. Does Alison bring a kind of perspective from the other foundation world into the Foundation?

Weiss: She's getting used to working with a board that runs a very tiny foundation. Our grant, our total grant, is what she might have made in one grant. [laughter]

Q: Right. But she does have a perspective about the field itself.

Weiss: Oh, yes. She's a very valuable player, and a very good friend.

Q: Yes. What's the future of the foundation?

Weiss: The next generation is going to run it.

Q: And you're—

Weiss: Transition time—

Q: —happy with that? Settled with that?

Weiss: I'm getting used to it. [laughter]
Q: I was just going to ask if there was a generational shift going on there.

Weiss: Happily. Oh, we're very—everybody's very happy.

Q: I know that among people my kids' age, there's a whole world I know nothing about.

Weiss: Me too!

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But they're very dedicated to the work we do, because they do the work. I mean, they read and bring to the table their own proposals and they're involved in every single decision, so, it'll go on. Peter and I will still be on the board of directors.

Q: Let's move onto the agenda that you sketched out in your email to me.

Weiss: Thank you!

Q: Which was wonderful, I want to thank you—

Weiss: Really?
Q: —for the email. We'll start it off, let me ask you a question. You say in there that your views on women have evolved, or changed, and that you're concerned with the Palinization of America. Can you—play that out for me. How have they changed? How have they evolved?

Weiss: I used to say, "Women, women everywhere, and not enough in power." Or, "Look at this picture, where are the women?" Or, "Women count, if you count the women." I don't say that anymore, because there are lots of women in power. I did a paper for a conference in Barcelona in January of this year on corporate abuse of human rights, and the question that I raised in my own paper was, would having women on the board of directors of the corporation make a difference to the factory floor? And the answer, unfortunately, is no; that on balance—you can't say everyone—but on balance, women who are brought into corporate power, corporate boards, onto corporate boards, are as interested, or if not more so, to prove that they can do it. They have _cojones_ like the guys at the table, are interested in profit, and efficiency. Have they ever been to Bangladesh and into a factory? Or to China? Or to Indonesia, or wherever these horrific events are taking place? When I wrote the paper, I started, fortunately, in the United States with the fire in the '20s. The Shirtwaist fire.

Q: Oh, oh, the Triangle Fire.

Weiss: Triangle.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: That was, you know, locked doors, and a fire, and teenage girls, and it was horrific. We have the same locked doors and teenage workers in Bangladesh and in China, and it's horrific. Now, there are more conferences taking place on corporate abuse of human rights. I think the one that we spoke at may have been among the first, and it's published.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: So that's one idea about women. We have to have decent women, peace-loving women, justice-loving women, human rights women, women for sustainable development, ethical women. We are now evolved enough. We're sophisticated enough, so that we have as much dichotomy among women as there is among men. We want to pick the good part. So, we have to define the women. You know, there's not just Sarah Palin, there are tons of others, whose names I'm blocking on [laugh], and I can't stand it!

Q: No.

Weiss: It's terrible. I have evolved, and I now define ‘women’ when I talk about women. Everybody says to me, "Of course, we agree," but I don't hear everybody saying it when they speak. That bothers me, and that's, I hope, going to be one of my legacies. I just found this women's peace platform for the twenty-first century. I was a delegate sent by the World Council of Churches [WCC], what they were doing with a nice Jewish housewife from the Bronx, I don't know. But they chose two Jews, Blu Greenberg, who was very religious. Her husband's a rabbi, and in Nairobi, you can't exactly find kosher food, so she bought tons of raw vegetables, put
them on the windowsill of our room—they put the two Jews together in the same room—and ate green peppers and cucumbers and tomatoes for a week. But the 1985 Nairobi meeting was terrific, and at one point—we brought a peace tent with us from Women Strike for Peace [WSP], and we were assigned a lovely piece of land on the grass.

Q: Yes, you told me that story.

Weiss: Did I tell you that story?

Q: Yes, but what you didn't mention was that the peace tent was an alternative venue to the conference itself.

Weiss: Absolutely.

Q: And was organized by women who feared that their issues would not get onto the—

Weiss: And that subject—

Q: Tell me that story.

Weiss: That's happened just today at a planning meeting that I'm working on, that took place with the United Methodist women who are sponsoring a conference in New York on September 19th on the things that make for peace, because it's the opening week of many
meetings on climate change, the Climate Summit, Indigenous Women's Summit, leading to the post-2015 Development Agenda for the U.N., which is the huge issue at the U.N. Peace is not a part of that development agenda, and we are holding the same kind of alternative meeting. But this time, we have U.N. people coming to speak at it on September 19th, across the street from the U.N., to put peace and gender—women—and human security into the post-2015 Development Agenda. It's called the Sustainable Development Agenda this time. Sustainable development goals. So, has anything changed?

Q: In Nairobi, what were the issues that you were fearful would not get discussed by the regular meeting?

Weiss: Well, it was the height of the Cold War, and we were all scared to death about meeting with Soviet women. But that was our purpose, was to break through and follow our own edict, that all women are sisters. I don't think we would say that today, anymore. But it was OK then. Actually, I should make one comment about that. I think that women in developing countries who have all experienced similar horrors of oppression, discrimination, marginalization and so forth, probably have more in common than in conflict, and probably there, you could say we want more women in power, without going through a litany of good women, peace women, sustainable women.

Q: Right.
Weiss: In developed countries, where there is a lot of achievement—when I went to law school, there were three women in the law school. Today, sixty percent of law schools are women, or more. I didn't finish law school. So, I do distinguish between developed countries and developing countries, in that respect. Nairobi was terrific, but you know, the documents and the agreements that come out of these meetings get a little dusty after a few years on the shelf. The Beijing conference—

Q: What happened?

Weiss: Well, people move on and write new documents. There are more words on paper in this world than there are actions, and what we need is the action. We've got the music, we need the action. All member states want to do is write more words, so that they can say they called for whatever.

Q: Does that discourage you sometimes? Because you, more or less, devoted your life to getting resolutions passed and getting this statement out, and getting this organization to agree to this policy, so—

Weiss: You can't get up in the morning if you're discouraged. You can get angry, and your anger motivates you to keep going. Or, your disappointment. I'm not usually physically angry, but frequently disappointed. We had a very huge success when a small group of us met with UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women] around their table—UNIFEM was the women's unit of the United Nations, now it's called U.N. Women—and there were a dozen of
Weiss – Session 6 – 22

us with civil society and the women from UNIFEM, and we wrote a draft which became Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and it was unanimously adopted by the Security Council on October 31, 2000. It is the only resolution that I'm aware of at the U.N. that we have a commemoration every year on October 30th, we celebrate it, we have an organization that monitors its implementation, and now, to their credit, the member states have agreed to have National Action Plans in every state—it's only about forty or fifty at this point out of a hundred and ninety plus—but there are National Action Plans that speak to the implementation of 1325.

Q: What does that do?

Weiss: Well, it means that women have to participate at every level of governance. It means women have to be at peace-making tables. It means they have to try to prevent violence, and it means that during violence, violent conflict, they have to protect women and girls. It's only nineteen paragraphs. It's very clear. And it's very comprehensive. But, countries like to try to one-up, and so they have introduced resolutions that we call Daughters of 1325, and they all have different numbers, depending on what year they were introduced, and many of them now only talk about violence against women and girls, and especially sexual violence, abuse. My line is, "You can't pluck rape out of war, and let the war go on."

I'm very disturbed when the member states only talk about sexual abuse and violence against women and girls, because it's also against boys, when they leave out the need to prevent violent conflict. We're seeing that again and again, and right now, especially as the member states are drafting for the post-2015 development goals, and they seem to think that you can have
development without worrying about peace. I claim you can't! [laughter] So we're doing what we can to try to get the voice of civil society heard at the government table. Not easy.

Q: Two things to talk about. The Hague Appeal, and the IPB. Which one do you want to talk about first—

Weiss: Well, they're linked.

Q: —or, do you want to talk about them together?

Weiss: In 1996, representatives from four organizations sat around an oval glass-topped table. I maintain that every single negotiation should happen at a glass round table, because you can't pound on a glass table.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: That was an important—it was a totally coincidental experience. It was the table that was available in the room that was available at the Church Center where I work. The meeting was called by the World Federalist Movement, [William] Bill Pace, and they called the three organizations, two of which had a Nobel Peace Prize, International Peace Bureau and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War [IPPNW]. And the third organization, the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy. Why? Because those three organizations were successful in collecting millions of signatures from around the world to bring to the World Court,
also known as the International Court of Justice, when the case on the question of the illegality of the possession and use of nuclear weapons came before the court in July of 1995, and the decision was in '96, I'm pretty sure that's right.

So, they said in 1899, there was a first world conference on peace. As a consequence, mustard gas was outlawed, for example, or dropping bombs from helium balloons. The second one was—there was supposed to be three—the second one was in 1907, and at that one, The International Court of Arbitration was created. The precursor to the World Court. The third was to be in 1915, and it didn't happen because there was a war. So, the proposal on the table was, we should have a centennial of the first conference. We agreed May '99 in The Hague, and the doctor who represented the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War went around the table, and he said, "Cora, you be president, and you be treasurer, and you be secretary," and now we have an organization. That's how it worked. I had not a clue—I mean, I had done many conferences; at The Riverside Church, we had always almost a thousand people at most of our conferences. But an international conference? Ten thousand people?

So, we completely got into it, and set up an office in the basement of the Church Center, where it frequently leaked from the sewage water out in the street. We went out and raised a couple of million dollars with great difficulty, but we did it. But the most important thing was the democratic process. We got a thousand organizations to sign on, and an organizing committee of a hundred organizations, and everybody worked. A couple of most interesting things. First, we ran under the banner, Peace is a Human Right and Time to Abolish War. In 1999, the question of abolishing war was considered ludicrous. People made fun of us. Today, I've not heard anybody
make fun of the idea of abolishing war. If you could abolish colonialism, slavery, apartheid, the prohibition of women voting, why not the institution of war? It had the same supporters.

So, those were our two banners. Thirdly, we held prep-com meetings around the world. One of the most interesting was in Nepal, when the revolutionary guys, what were they called? They weren't the Maoists, but they were equivalent to that. Oh, well, they sort of were Maoists.

Q: Yes, the Maoists, right.

Weiss: But there were eleven Mao parties.

Q: Right. Yes.

Weiss: We used to hear the guns going off—

Q: It's a very strange configuration.

Weiss: It is.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: We heard them shooting in the woods at night. It was pretty close, but we met. The idea of citizen diplomacy was born, and we ran with that idea. We were citizen diplomats. The idea
that we should create a level playing field, Secretary-General of the U.N., heads of state, ministers, heads of organizations, members of organizations, civil society. Nobody would be given a higher rank in order. We gathered all of the moral authorities of the world. I think [Nelson] Mandela, and his wife Graca Machel, whom I love very much, were the only two people who didn't come. The Dalai Lama? I can't remember. He was on our advisory committee. We developed a gorgeous advisory committee.

It was the first peace conference that had mediators at it; it would never occur to me that a peace conference might have problems, when I worked in the past. Kevin Clements from New Zealand, who does peace education, peace studies and peace education, both, we called him, he put together eight or ten people, we bought them walkie talkies, they worked twenty-four/seven. They put out fires before they started, they were terrific. But it was the first peace conference that had mediators. That was interesting. We expected—we planned for three thousand people.

Q: I'm a little confused. The Hague Appeal for Peace came into existence at that point—

Weiss: At the meeting at the glass table.

Q: Oh, in '96.

Weiss: Yes.

Q: Ah, very good! Ah, yes, OK, yes. Now that's clear.
Weiss: And the four organizations were the executive committee.

Q: Aha.

Weiss: We were the *responsables*. And then we had larger committees.

Q: Right.

Weiss: Then we created the four pillars, and it's all in a little pamphlet called, "Time to Abolish War, the Story of The Hague Appeal for Peace," which you can get online. Oh! It became a U.N. document! Oh, look at that. You've got it all here. The one thing that survived—well, the IANSA [International Action Network on Small Arms] was just incredible. The conference on small arms, it keeps going, and is a very effective and important international organization. But the Global Campaign for Peace Education we took back with us to the headquarters in New York, and made that our baby to run with. We no longer had to organize a conference for ten thousand people. We created a partnership with the United Nations. We went to four countries, one on each continent, to work with teacher education schools and primary and secondary schools: Cambodia, Albania, Peru and Niger.

We had a team of educators, and it was terrific. We published a book as a result. We worked with the Department for Disarmament Affairs. We held conferences in New York and other places with peace educators, and out of that global campaign came an international organization
of peace educators, which now functions online. Then, every summer there's the International Institute for Peace Education [IIPE], which goes from country to country, depending on who wants to host it, and peace education is becoming a recognized discipline, as it should be, because of all the things I've ever done in the world in my lifetime; signing petitions, marching, phone calling, mobilizing, the most sustainable thing I think we can do is educate. We have to educate for peace, teach people about non-violence, about gender equality and about disarmament and sustainable development and human rights.

Q: Now, that conference was played out against the Kosovo war.

Weiss: That's why we got ten thousand people and not three. We planned for three thousand. Anyway, I called up Anita Roddick, the woman who used to run the Body Shop, one day—I mean, you do things that you never would normally do in life, but you've got a big organization, you've got to do something. So I called her up one day and asked her if she would contribute three thousand book bags, so that we could have something to give to everybody. The three thousand book bags were gone in seconds, because there were ten thousand people, and it was the Kosovo war.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It was the bombing. One of the consequences of that was that the conference split in half. I came as close as I think somebody can come to a nervous breakdown, frightened that the conference would be destroyed. We immediately created two huge rooms in the basement of the
conference center in The Hague with microphones. The sign on the door said, "Come and talk." We didn't provide facilitators, and people were able to talk for and against the bombing of Serbia and Kosovo. That saved the conference. It was a close call. I guess it saved me, because I'm still here to tell the story! [laughter]

Q: I have two different summations of the conference. One says, "In other words, the peace movement seemed to be suffering from a lack of consensus as to what constituted the most important issue." And this one says, "The conference launched an action plan, The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the Twenty-First Century, containing fifty programs." It also points out the significance of an organization by civil society. Two very distinct—

Weiss: You find totally—where you do your research, you could teach me a lot. I have no idea where you found these things. But in any event, The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the Twenty-First Century was voted unanimously by the one hundred organizing committee members who sat in a room at The Hague—I'll never forget that day—and raised their hands. It's a fifty-point program for getting from a culture of violence to a culture of peace. It was so impressive in 1999 to the ambassador from Bangladesh to the U.N., who was a very good adviser to us and friend, Anwarul K. [Karim] Chowdhury, that he found a way to make it become a U.N. official document, A/54/98. It is as good and valid today as it was in 1999. It talks about gender. It talks about peace education. It talks about disarmament. It talks about human rights. It's a terrific statement, and we still need today what we needed fifteen years ago.
The representative to the U.N. of the World Council of Churches asked me today if he could 
meet with me to help him in their planning, the World Council's planning, of a meeting at the 
end of 2015 in Sweden on peace. He said, "I need your advice, your experience." A woman came 
and sat in the chair you're sitting in who is working on the climate change walk, to take place 
September 22 in New York, and said to me, "How do we get a million people to the climate 
change walk," because she knew that I worked on the committee that got a million people to say 
no to nuclear weapons on June 12th, 1982. So, if you live long enough and get old enough, you 
become a kind of adviser, armchair adviser! [laughter]

Q: What is the relationship between The Hague Appeal for Peace and the Peace Boat?


Q: Oh.

Weiss: During The Hague Appeal—

Q: The office is here in New York?

Weiss: Yes. During The Hague Appeal, I found, or they found me, Peace Boat, which is an 
organization run out of Tokyo by a young couple. They weren't a couple yet, because I had to go 
and speak at their wedding some years later. A young Japanese guy started an organization 
because, he said, every student going to school in Japanese schools learns nothing about what
Japan did to the Philippines, to China, to other countries, that doesn't look good on a score card. So, he was determined to bring young people together, or just Japanese people together on a boat, and travel from port to port of countries in conflict, and invite both sides of the conflicts onto the ship to speak, and to talk about war and peace. That was thirty plus years ago, and I became a member of the board of the Global University of Peace Boat, and we brought Peace Boat to New York, and I organized—they have a thousand people on board—I organized a small—

Q: It's a big ship!

Weiss: It's fantastic! It's so gorgeous.

Q: I saw a picture of it, it's enormous!

Weiss: Yes. Peter and I went to Alaska on Peace Boat. It's not a country in conflict, but it showed the calving of the glaciers falling into the sea, and you could cry when you see it happening. If all of those climate deniers were able to just make a one-day outing to see that happening, they would never deny climate change again. Anyway, so Peace Boat came to New York. We broke up the Peace Boat passengers into groups of ten, and I got New Yorkers to come and show them New York through the eyes of civil society organizations, community-based organizations. So, they went—well, you can imagine what they went—they went to see everything that people do to organize in New York, and it was terrific! A terrific experience. Many of the Japanese met African Americans, they'd never seen a black person in their life,
because there are none in Japan. So, they went to Harlem. They were interested in seeing that there's a Japanese section in New York, and a Chinese section and an Italian section.

So, they had quite an experience. Yoshioka Tatsuya and Rachel [Armstrong Yoshioka] and I became very good friends. I was invited to speak at their wedding, and to speak in Japan. We sat, we bought sandwiches on 120th Street, 121st Street at a little deli on Broadway, and sat on one of those benches in the middle of Broadway. I said, "Let's open an office in New York." That was a long time ago, that was eight years ago, ten years ago. Now, we have not just an office, but we have a fabulous woman running it, and The Hague Appeal for Peace turned its office over to Peace Boat.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: U.S. It's called Peace Boat U.S. It is a registered not-for-profit organization. They have raised enough money to bring a student from Global Kids, a student from Downtown—DCTV [Downtown Community Television Center]—and another student from some media school, onto a ship this summer to make a film about indigenous people in Central America, which they will then show at the Indigenous Summit in September at the U.N. It's fabulous! They're working with universities around the country to have programs for credit on board with students coming. It's going to happen very soon. We'll have students from a number of schools who can come on the ship either by the week or the month, and get credit for whatever program they take.

Q: Terrific!
Weiss: It's marvelous!

Q: Yes. The Hague Appeal for Peace has more or less gone out of business?

Weiss: It has—somebody called it, "Moth-balled."

Q: Ah.

Weiss: But it's still online as GCPE, the Global Campaign for Peace Education, and it's a monthly eNewsletter on peace education. If we need it, it's still got its 501 (c) (3), and it still has its officers, I'm still president.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But it ran its course, and it became impossible to raise money. It's no way to spend your life, raising money.

Q: Yes, but you must have done an awful lot of it.

Weiss: I did it for Riverside Church, of course. It was nice to get onto the other side of the table.
Q: Yes. Let's talk about the International Peace Bureau. When was your initial involvement?

Now, that's an organization that's been around for a long time.

Weiss: It got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910.

Q: Wow.

Weiss: Thirteen of its officers, in the early part of the twentieth century, are all Nobel Peace laureates, including my—if I had one person to really, really admire a lot, it's Bertha von Suttner. She was a vice president of IPB, as I was. I don't remember when I got involved, but I represented SANE, or SANE/FREEZE, I can't remember which iteration of SANE. So, it's been a long time. I started as a representative, IPB is organized in about close to a hundred countries, seventy or eighty countries, around the world. It maintains—it has an office across the street from the U.N. with other NGO’s—and I then became a vice president, and nominated Maj Britt Theorin from Sweden, who was—

Q: Let's back up now. Your initial involvement, what did you actually do when you were a representative of FREEZE/SANE?

Weiss: SANE/FREEZE. It was a disarmament agenda. IPB was a disarmament organization. We were into—I can't remember what the weapons at the time were, the—

Q: Well, the MX missile was one of them.
Weiss: The Pershing—yes. There were a lot.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But in any event, we worked collaboratively with peace organizations around the world to try to eliminate, or at least reduce considerably, weapons systems—

Q: That would lobbying in the United States whilst another group was, say, lobbying in France, and another group—

Weiss: Well, not just lobbying, but talking. I did a huge amount of public speaking.

Q: Ah.

Weiss: And demonstrations. We had big demonstrations against the war, and against weapons. Then my role in IPB increased; I became a vice president, and then I was elected president in 2000. I was president for the six-year time limit, 2000 to 2006. Then I created an international office at the U.N. for SANE/FREEZE, which morphed into Peace Action. Why do organizations change their names when you get so well-known by your original name? Anyway—beside the point.

Q: The change—
Weiss: So, my role basically, as always, is to internationalize people's thinking and doing, and to work with the U.N. For all of its warts, there's no place else in the world where everybody can gather without a gun in their pocket.

Q: Now, IPB is—

Weiss: It's the only room.

Q: —is official observer at the U.N.?

Weiss: Not observer, it's an official—“observers” is a word that's used for Palestinians and the Vatican.

Q: Right. Yes.

Weiss: Their member states have observers. IPB has an official status as—we're associated with the U.N. under the U.N.'s civil society arrangement. We're called NGO—I hate that word!

Q: Yes.

Weiss: I think it means No Good Organization.
Q: [laughs]

Weiss: But, it's Non-Governmental Organization.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: There are two divisions; there's a Department of Public Information [DPI] group, and then there's a ECOSOC group, Economic and Social Council. Allegedly, they have more rights than the DPI group. So, it's the democratic group and the less democratic group [laughs], and IPB is an ECOSOC affiliate. You get a blue badge, and you can go in. But every year, they cut back on access for civil society. It's becoming very unfortunate.

Q: Why would they do that?

Weiss: Because we get in the way. The member states don't want us around.

Q: Oh.

Weiss: We have issues to bring up.

Q: Like what?
Weiss: Well, they're discussing the post-development agenda for post-2015, a development agenda now. The BRICS, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa are opposing putting peace as a necessary ingredient for development. And we want that in.

Q: Aha.

Weiss: So, they don't want us around.

Q: Yes. That gives a little more—

Weiss: That's an example.

Q: Yes, that gives a little more specificity to the earlier discussion. Yes. Its outline subsides, and you know—

Weiss: We have a right under the Charter, and we have [laughs] very little access. The big people—guys, the huge NGO organizations, manage to take advantage of as many loopholes or space as possible. But for the smaller organizations, it's very difficult. We can't pay a staff to be there. So, Amnesty International has not one, but two offices in our building across the street from the U.N., and a permanent full-time staff, as do many organizations. Big organizations.

Q: Yes.
Weiss: That can afford rent and salaries.

Q: But you have you.

Weiss: Yes, but I can't go to the U.N. every day.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: In order to be effective, you have to get to know who the ambassadors are, or at least their top staff. The turnover is enormous, you know it's usually a four-year job. If it takes you a year to find out who the guy normally is, and then two or three years later he's gone, you've got to start over again.

Q: Now, aside from the U.N., what is it that you do with the IPB?

Weiss: Well, I'm the international representative of the IPB at the U.N. now. So, today, as an example, I learned all about what the process is, and what some of the reasons are as to why peace is not going to be in the final document for this post-2015 development goal. I will communicate that to IPB tonight. They have been trying to get governments to adopt their agenda, which is on disarmament and peace, and unfortunately, it's not going to be adopted. So I did that. That was today's job.
Q: Yes. When you look back on your presidency, what was that like to be the president of an international organization? To me, as an outsider, it's pretty heavy stuff.

Weiss: It is. We had meetings in Geneva, mostly, and I would open every meeting and go around the table and ask everybody to say something before we started the meeting, about what was on their mind, what was going on in their world. That had never happened before, in a meeting. It brought us closer together. I asked Jayantha Dhanapala from Sri Lanka, who had been the head of the Disarmament Office of the U.N., and then went on to become the head of Pugwash, to be our honorary president, and he accepted. That had never happened before. When we had a meeting in Florence, Italy—when I say we have a meeting, it means the representatives to IPB from their organizations come together, I think, two or three times a year. I probably—

Q: It could be a fairly large meeting.

Weiss: Yes, but a lot of people can't afford the travel, and we couldn't afford to pay their travel. I must have done sometimes two international trips a month for six years.

Q: Wow!

Weiss: Speaking and meeting. But, I was in Florence before I interrupted myself. I invited Hans Dahlgren, who was one of Olof—we talked about Olof Palme—who was one of Olof Palme's "boys," the team of young men who worked with Palme. I invited them to come
and speak. So, I kept trying to bring not just personalities, but informed—experts in related fields to our meetings. I guess I've always tried to keep the education going.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: You never stop learning. The more we can learn from each other, maybe the better off we'll be.

Q: You talked about how you're currently involved in an effort to put the peace movement and the ecology movement together. How are you going to do that? Tell me what your strategy is.

Weiss: The first thing is, that everyone says to me, "Good luck."

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: Many years ago, there was a James Taylor concert on the Hudson River, on some landfill, to raise money for the NRDC, Natural Resources Defense Council. It was on nuclear energy, largely. They invited me to speak, and it was going to be broadcast wall to wall, from the beginning of the conference to the end on, who knows, probably WBAI at the time. When I got up to speak, they cut the radio connection, because I was talking about bringing nuclear energy movement together with the anti-nuclear weapons movement.

Q: Ah.
Weiss: They were afraid that if they started to talk about weapons and the issue of security, they would lose their donors. So, instead of asking me not to speak, they simply turned off the possibility for other people to hear, as well as everybody who came to hear James Taylor. It's a little bit like that today, with climate change and the peace movement. I think that climate change is a threat to peace, because the problems that it causes, droughts, floods and so forth, all will have an impact on people's behavior; they will try to get to higher ground, try and cross borders, they're going to be rejected from crossing borders, and they'll get violent. That's just one example.

There's going to be a huge food security issue, because the land won't be arable for planting. So there will be starvation. All things that lead to violence. So, I think we have a natural connection. We have more in common than in conflict, and both climate change and nuclear weapons are the two things that are going to do us all in. One will do it quickly, one nuclear weapon, and it'll be goodbye all over, this thing called life on earth, and the other will take time. But eventually, in time, it'll be goodbye. So, why don't we get together? Well, a similar situation exists. They don't want to be seen as a peace organization for whatever baggage that would bring.

Q: You mean the climate——

Weiss: The climate people. But a lot of them say, "Of course." The peace people will say, "Of course," louder than the climate people. We'll see what happens. They want a million people in Times Square on September 23, 22? They're not going to get it unless all of the different siloed
organizations and movements join them and relate their issue to climate; human rights and climate change, peace and climate change. Then we can build a big movement.

Q: Well, that's the lesson from the 1960s, in many ways.

Weiss: You got it. It's the lesson from my life. If we're not together, we're not going to win.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: It's going to take more than just the peace movement to make peace, and more than just the climate change movement to stop the drift to—

Q: How have you gone about making contacts with the climate-concerned people?

Weiss: This wonderful meeting on September 19 is going to be the beginning of a week-long of, I think, dynamic gatherings, for a change. It's a very welcome week. We have Bill McKibben coming to speak, with me, with Helen Clark, who is the head of the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], and others. That's the beginning of togetherness!

Q: Yes.
Weiss: It's nice! They came here to ask me for advice on how we did it for the peace movement. So, I think we have more in common than in conflict, and we have more to talk about, and we will.

Q: Tell me about the Nobel Peace nomination.

Weiss: Oh, that was very—I don't use the word "humbling" often, but it was very humbling. Because of the press and the significance of The Hague Appeal for Peace conference in 1999, a former Nobel Peace laureate, Jose Ramos-Horta from East Timor, nominated me in 2000 for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Q: Ah! Now, how do you find out that?

Weiss: Well, he told me.

Q: Oh! [laughs] Because I was trying to find out if the nominees are published—

Weiss: It's supposed to be a secret.

Q: Yes, and I couldn't—

Weiss: Not for fifty years.
Q: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. So he told you.

Weiss: Then it came out, it was on the front page of the *Vineyard Gazette*. Then I was nominated again in 2001. In 2000, Kim Dae-jung from South Korea won, and I sent him my congratulations. He had spent many years in jail, and he was a fine person. And 2001, it was the centennial of the Nobel Prize, because it started then. You know, it was Bertha von Suttner who persuaded Alfred Nobel to put the profits from his dynamite into a Nobel Peace Prize. She then got one in 1905. In 2001 I was nominated again, that was very nice.

In 2005, I think, I was one of the one thousand women for the Nobel Peace Prize because a group of women in Switzerland, who included members of Parliament, realized that from the beginning, out of whatever the total number of men was, there were only twelve women who got the Nobel Peace Prize. I think up to today, it's not much more than fifteen, at the most. I stopped keeping track. But it's a terrible, terrible percentage. So, they put together a book of one thousand women for the Nobel Peace Prize, which was brilliant, because—not because I'm in it—but because they identified women who were farmers, women who were factory workers. Women who were local teachers. Women of all kinds of vocations and professions, who are peacemakers, and who you need to carry out peace, to implement a peace agreement, to implement peace strategies in the community, to prevent violent conflict.

They found a thousand women from all over the world, and we had a wonderful time! We cut out all their pictures and made postcards of them and strung them together and hung them from
Weiss – Session 6 – 46

fishing tackle, from the ceilings. You had to literally walk through these cards that were hanging from the roof—ceiling, so you were literally rubbing elbows—

Q: Where was this?

Weiss: Well, this was in our office in the Church Center.

Q: Oh.

Weiss: Nice to have a building that you can use!

Q: Right.

Weiss: Then Nane Annan came, the Secretary-General's wife, and lots of other people came, and we had a big ceremony. Just wonderful, ordinary human beings. Mere mortal women, I call us, were nominated. That didn't go very far. Then, in 2011 or '12, I can't remember which, a nice Swedish guy from the International Peace Bureau, which has the ability to make nominations because it was—is—a Nobel peace laureate, nominated both Peter and me together as a couple, and that would have been interesting, because that hasn't happened before.

Q: Oh!
Weiss: We've also been nominated for the Right Livelihood award. I mean, I've gotten enough awards in my life, there's no room for them. But the Nobel Peace Prize is important. People think that it lost its luster when it named Henry Kissinger, and of course, Le Duc Tho, who was named with him, refused to accept the prize with him, from Vietnam. A lot of other people now have all of a sudden become Nobel Peace nominees. It's sort of become better-known in the last ten or fifteen years than it was in the last century.

Q: Well, they gave it to [Barack] Obama. They gave one to Theodore Roosevelt, too.

Weiss: I think they wanted to encourage him.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: But you know that the committee that doles out the awards is made up of members of Parliament, of the Norwegian Parliament.

Q: Right.

Weiss: When the Norwegian Parliament goes right, who are they going to name? Or, when it goes left? I mean, it doesn't go far right or far left, but it reflects the politics of the members of Parliament.

Q: Right.
Weiss: I think it's an important award. It's a lot of money, a million dollars. Wangari Maathai, who came on the airlift in 1960, sponsored by the African American Students Foundation, was the first African woman to get a Nobel Peace Prize. It's controversial, but I think it's terrific. She believed in planting trees to make peace, to prevent erosion. To protect land, which, if not protected and if not cared for, would promote violence because there would be no arable land to grow food. So, she was a very visionary, wonderful woman, and I'm so, so sad that she died of cancer a few years ago. There's a tree planted to her in the U.N. garden. But she was an airlift student!

Q: What are you going to do tomorrow? I mean that in a broad sense, "tomorrow."

Weiss: I'm plowing through boxes of papers that, for some reason, I don't know why, I've kept all my life, starting with my report cards in primary school.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: They are all in an attic, and every day, a few of them get cataloged. Not professionally cataloged, and not digitized; they're not scanned. But I'm keeping track. I was going to give you a list of every year, and what's in the boxes. It's been quite an adventure to do that. It's taken me a year so far, and I'm not finished. It's an amazing way to review your life. So, that's a very big item. Then I have photographs, which we've kept in huge containers, and most of them have to
get tossed. But some of them are quite interesting experiences; I have one of me speaking in the General Assembly of the United Nations, where civil society never speaks to governments.

Q: Yes.

Weiss: That was a few years ago. Two years ago. That's a little heady. A significant little day in my life. I have one with Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo in South Africa, before he became president of South Africa. Anyway, I have a lot of photographs, so they need to be organized. I don't know how to do that, so I'll ask someone to help, or learn how to do it, to preserve them. I have to prepare a speech for the September meeting of the U.N. We're going to Sicily in September to a meeting on corporate abuse of human rights, another different gathering where we'll speak and listen, and look at Sicily for two days.

Q: You're approaching your eightieth birthday.

Weiss: With a little trepidation! But you're my role model.

Q: [laughs]

Weiss: It hasn't affected you in the least!

Q: As you look back on, you know, a career now, sixty years of a career—
Weiss: It's not over.

Q: No! Of course not. I mean, it's not over, but you must have those moments where you look
back and say, "By God, that was an interesting journey!"

Weiss: It has been. It's not over. It's been an incredible run of fantastic adventure. Life is an
adventure. It's been mostly terrific!

Q: Good!

Weiss: With its difficulties and its pleasures, and if it weren't for the family, I wouldn't get up in
the morning. I mean, that's why we keep going, is the whole reason for trying to leave this world
a little bit better, in human rights, peace, justice. It's so that our children and grandchildren, I
have five delicious grandchildren, and I want everybody's grandchildren to have a better chance!

Q: Good! Thank you very much!

Weiss: Well, thank you!

[END OF SESSION]
Q: Just tell me your name.

Weiss: This is Cora Weiss. Session seven.

Q: And this is Ron Grele and I’m the interviewer. Your thoughts on the process, now, of having gone through the interview. Your thoughts about it and looking at the transcript, et cetera.

Weiss: An oral history is an adventure. I had no preparation, no idea that every word counts because it’s going to be in print as well as on tape. Rereading this for the second and sometimes third time, I get the impression that the reader (I don’t know about the listener) will think I have dementia, which nobody else has cited me for, until now, because every page says “I can’t remember his name,” “I’ll remember in the middle of the night,” “It’ll come to me,” and so forth.

And I repeat “and so forth” too often. I’ve never realized that I said that in my speech, in my everyday talking speech. I never thought I said “and” as often as it appears in the transcript. It’s
embarrassing to see “and” come up so often. It’s embarrassing to see “well” come up so often. It’s embarrassing to hear “and so forth” so often because if you think that you’re an articulate person who speaks well, that should not be part of speech.

Q: It’s a way of talking. The perspective you’re talking from now, I think, is that of a speech maker. That you’re accustomed to giving speeches and you work on them beforehand and you eliminate all of those little clauses, all those little helping words that move a conversation along, like “and” and “well,” et cetera. It’s my job to cut you short and say, “Now what do you mean when you say ‘et cetera,’?” And to the extent that I did not do that, that’s a failure on my part, not necessarily on your part. But I think you’re concerned about that because you’re concerned as a speech maker, listening to yourself as a talker.

Weiss: I would hope that in my talker life, I don’t use those phrases so often. I’ve never been aware of it. So I apologize to the reader and the listener.

Q: Well, one of the things that comes out in an oral history is self-presentation. And very often, people don’t know about their own self-presentation.

Weiss: I think if my self-presentation were that encumbered by extraneous, unnecessary language, I wouldn’t get the reception that I think I get.

Q: When you talk to people.
Weiss: When I talk to people.

Q: As opposed to when you give a speech.

Weiss: Yes. When I give a speech, I don’t have to clean up “and’’s and “so forth’’s because they’re not there.

Q: Do you think that’s a result of the informality of this process compared to, say, a conversation you might have with someone about business?

Weiss: It may also be a consequence of some insecurity. My husband tells me that I’ve always had low self-esteem. He criticizes me for it. And it’s true. I have always had low self-esteem, contrary to what people might think. But this is embarrassing to see “and,” “well,” “and so forth,” repeated so often, so I hope they get excised.

Q: Well, we can edit that out of the transcript.

Weiss: It should be excised as opposed to censored. [laughter] I don’t believe in censorship. I believe in deleting.

Q: Let’s talk for a few moments about some of the things you talked about that you wanted to get on the record from the last time we met. One of them is that you wanted to make it quite clear what your position vis-à-vis the Communist Party was.
Weiss: My mother’s father, who brought her to this country when she was an infant and remained here through her marriage and giving birth to me until I was three, probably—it’s hard for me to tell the age from a photograph, but there’s a picture of me in his arms when I was quite young—my mother’s father went back to the Soviet Union in 1938 and was immediately arrested on deplaning and taken to the famous Lubyanka Prison in Moscow. He faced the military tribunal, was tried and executed in fifteen minutes. He was accused of being a German spy. He was Jewish. He thought he was a patriotic member of the party, and the party killed him. Stalin killed him.

I didn’t know that until maybe fifteen years ago. It’s an interesting little story about how that happened. The local head of the neighborhood KGB—I have no idea about how the KGB was organized—called my Aunt Lucy one night when she had the flu. She was in bed with a fever, and he said, “You have to come immediately because I don’t know how long I will have these records.” She went with a pencil and a fever. She copied the files. There was no copying machine.

Q: This would be at the Russian consul here—

Weiss: No, this is in Moscow.

Q: Oh, in Moscow. So she was in—
Weiss: She lived in Moscow and died in Moscow. She’s the aunt who came to this country earlier and went to James Monroe High School in the Bronx. Spoke American English.

Q: And then went back.

Weiss: Then she went back and she became a trusted translator in science, in the Science Institute, and translated English language scientific journals, which were then sent “upstairs,” so to speak, censored, and published so that Soviet scientists received censored, translated copies of American and British scientific journals. Unbelievable. Unbearable.

Q: But she went and copied these records?

Weiss: She went to copy the records with her fever and her pencil. She sent me the records, which is the basis of the story that I just told you. I think if my mother had known that, she would have changed her mind about the Soviet Union. She was never a member of the party. Neither was my father. And certainly not me. But she was dying at the time of [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev’s entrance into history. She said, in her dying months, “Maybe things will be better,” which I appreciated hearing from her.

I will say that until I had heard those stories, I was never an anti-communist because look at the damage that the anti-communists were doing in this country. Senator [Joseph R.] McCarthy was a pretty damaging person, holding up his empty pieces of paper with alleged lists of people who were communists. People were jumping out of windows and they were being fired from their
jobs. But I was never a pro-communist. So I was neither anti- nor pro-. But I tolerated the presence of one single member of the Communist Party in the coalitions of the anti-war movement. He was never going to do any harm to anybody and he didn’t hold any weight.

Q: This was [Arnold] Johnson, or—

Weiss: Arnold Johnson, yes. He didn’t have any cred, he didn’t hold weight, he wasn’t important. But he became the target of attacks. That’s all I have to say about the Communist Party. To be clear, I had nothing to do with them.

Q: The second issue that I wanted to raise comes around Nairobi. You know, you told me this—

Weiss: Could I just say that that’s the first time I’ve told that story about my grandfather?

Q: Oh, really?

Weiss: I felt it was appropriate.

Q: Good. Terrific. Just proper. Always, the anecdote is just the proper one. You told me the story about Nairobi, but not about the American delegation at Nairobi, but rather the countermovement when you had the little knoll and peace camp at Nairobi.

Weiss: That was the 1985 Women’s Forum, World Women’s Forum I think is the proper title.
Q: Right. And the American delegation was headed by Maureen Reagan.

Weiss: That was the government. I was in the Forum, which was not the government. The Forum was the civil society piece and it was separated by X number of miles from the government, so we had our own place. I think it was at the university, pretty sure. That’s where we had the peace tent. It wasn’t counter. It was parallel, and I think that’s an important distinction. So what do you want to know about it? I told the story in here.

Q: Yes. One of the issues that came up—it was an official American delegation, a governmental delegation—is that they prevented a resolution on Palestine that had been passed earlier out of Mexico, a meeting in Mexico City, and I was wondering if you could tell me, what was your position as a peace movement activist on Palestine?

Weiss: I’ve never been anti-Palestine. I’ve always been for a two-state solution, and even though it seems to be harder and harder to achieve now, I’m still for a two-state solution. I think the breakthrough that the government of Sweden has made and the London MPs have made is going to be important in the recognition of Palestine and Palestinians, the rights of Palestinians. I was never aware while we were in Nairobi in 1985 of what the government was doing, because they were so far away and there was no daily paper that we had, and we were having a very vital and busy time.

Q: Well, I didn’t conceive of them as parallel. I saw them as a breakthrough from—
Weiss: At every World Conference of Women: Mexico, Copenhagen, Nairobi, Beijing, there has been a parallel forum where civil society dealt with the issues that we thought were important. I went to the Nairobi meeting in 1985 and the Beijing meeting in 1995. At both of those, I helped to set up and support a peace tent where people were welcome. There was an open mic. It was a wonderful addition to the Forum.

Q: Was there ever any contact with the official American delegation?

Weiss: Many people tried and did. Many people had connections with Hillary [Rodham] Clinton who was in Beijing and she actually came and spoke on a rainy day to the Forum which was in Huairou, H-U-A-I-R-O-U, I think is how it was spelled. The Beijing distance between government and forum was a solid hour ride in a not-very-comfortable vehicle, so many of us never even tried to go, but people did go, mostly to the government, not from the government. We had our own terrific meeting in Huairou.

It was very strange because the Chinese government actually emptied the village so that we could occupy it, which I thought was simply terrible. We had no idea where the villagers went. But we had sessions in the classrooms of the schools. We had sessions in all the public buildings.

Q: Now, these sessions would be devoted to various kinds of resolutions about—
Weiss: Not necessarily resolutions. Some of them were just educational meetings. We tried to talk about nuclear testing, which was going on in the Pacific. We held a demonstration against the French nuclear testing and I remember Chinese policemen putting their hands up to try to prevent us from marching and to prevent photographers from shooting our pictures.

The Westchester Gannett Chain—was that the name of the—I think it was—the name of the newspaper chain—ran a wonderful photograph, which I coincidentally happen to be in, of the women lined up protesting the French testing of nuclear weapons in the Pacific. It was great that that news got to Westchester County. We used that photograph for the front page of a Christmas card, as I recall. The cover of a Christmas card.

Q: Did the issue of Palestine and Israel come up often in the International Peace Bureau?

Weiss: Often, I’m not sure, but it did come up on the day that I was elected president in 2000, in some kind of a statement that they wanted to publish, and I recall asking them to tone it down. I can’t remember what the language was, but it was something that I thought might tie my hands as president. I didn’t want to start out with a deficit, with a difficult situation. Did it come up more often than that? Possibly.

Q: I ask the question because it’s such a divisive issue for many, many, many organizations connected to the peace movement or to social action.
Weiss: I think the war that just took place where Hamas was tossing rockets and may have killed—I don’t remember the number.

Q: 43-something.

Weiss: Oh, less.

Q: Well, that’s a combination of civilians and soldiers.

Weiss: OK. Whatever the number was, it was small compared to the number of Gazans who were killed. I think that experience has moved a lot of people to think twice about the rights of Palestinians to have a state and to not be occupied in, basically, what seems to be a prison. Gaza is a prison and it’s very chock full of people. I hope it works out.

Q: I remember one time, off tape, you were telling me about bringing a resolution for women’s rights to the United Nations when some Jewish group in the United—was opposed to—I didn’t get the full story, but obviously you remember a bit of that. I can tell from the—

Weiss: I’m cleaning out my office prior to its move and I just found huge sheets of paper with copies of photographs of that event. It was 1997. A group of us presented a petition to the president of the General Assembly, who was an east European man and we were opposed by a group of NGOs from the Jewish community. I think they were mostly from synagogues. I’ll get
you a copy of the picture. It’s wonderful. We gave him a rose and the petition, which was signed by thousands of people from around the world. The petition was available in many languages.

Q: The petition was to—

Weiss: This was before [Security Council resolution] 1325, before 1999, before The Hague Appeal for Peace when women came together to say, “It’s time for the Security Council to utter the word ‘woman’ and demonstrate their willingness to show that we have rights to participate in decision making.” So this petition was a precursor to that. It was talking about the rights. I’ll bring you a copy of the petition and you can—

Q: I’m trying to figure out, why would the Jewish NGOs, synagogue people, object to that.

Weiss: That’s a good question, so we’ll find out when I bring the petition.

Q: There must have been something in the resolution—

Weiss: That referred to it. Could be.

Q: Last time we met, you said you wanted to talk about the Nobel Parade.

Q: You said it was such an inspiring moment for you.

Weiss: It was incredible. I mean, if you want to feel humbled, that’s it. In 2001, the centennial of the Nobel Peace Prize, Kofi Annan and the United Nations were the laureates. They invited all of the Nobel Peace laureates to come, both organizations that survived and the living individuals. I represented the International Peace Bureau, which got the Nobel Peace Prize in 1910, and so I was at the head of the parade with a gentleman from Geneva who represented an international law society, which also received the Nobel in the early 1900s.

So the two of us led the parade into the congress hall in Oslo and there was Kofi and there was the then-president of the General Assembly and the representatives of the United Nations’ agencies because the entire United Nations was being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. That was heady. The room was packed. The King and Queen of Norway were there. Ambassadors. It was a very, very moving moment.

Q: What did you think about the recent awardees? The Pakistani woman and the Indian man?

Weiss: I think it’s fine. It’s very controversial. People on the left and on the right don’t agree that it’s fine. A 60-year-old Indian man and a 17-year-old Pakistani woman, both of whom say, “Don’t bring tanks, bring pens. Don’t bring soldiers, bring teachers.” I love that. I love the idea that peace education and education are recognized. It’s not what Alfred Nobel had in mind. But who knows what he would say today if he were alive? There are people who want to stick very literally to his will, which is wonderful and opposes militarism. I’m not sure you could find too
many people in the world today who are trying to reduce military armies. I have a holistic approach to peace, so I appreciated Wangari [Muta] Maathai getting the Nobel because her work with women, especially, around the world planting trees was a very peace-making activity. All the women who have gotten the Nobel have been wonderful, but it remains a controversial issue, which I don’t want to get involved in.

Q: You also told me that you wanted to flesh out your testimony for the Chicago Seven. We touched on it very, very briefly.

Weiss: Eight. It was eight at the time.

Q: Right. How did that originate, anyway?

Weiss: It was January 15, 1970. I had just come back from North Vietnam for Christmas of ’69. I was asked, I guess, by Bill [William M.] Kunstler, who was one of the two attorneys for the defendants, to be a character witness for Tom [Thomas E.] Hayden, because during the anti-war years (which were still on) we worked in the anti-war movement. Not always together, but he had his organization, I worked in the Committee of Liaison and Women Strike for Peace and The Mobilization, so I think that’s how it happened. Didn’t I tell the story? I can’t remember what I read of what I told.

Q: Very, very briefly, just that you—
Weiss: I was called as a witness. My husband came and our oldest daughter, Judy, who took the day off from school, which has since become a national holiday. Was it a national holiday in 1970? I doubt it. Bill Kunstler came to pick us up at the hotel. He had a migraine headache. He tossed his cookies in the spittoon in front of the elevator. I was anxious as all get out because a) I’d never been in a courtroom before, b) I’d never been a witness, c) I’d never had a lawyer who had a migraine.

Q: Had you talked to Tom Hayden before about your testimony?

Weiss: No. No. We got to the courtroom. I was sent up to the witness waiting room where Arlo Guthrie was sitting in a huge Abe Lincoln black hat, which was wrapped in the American flag. Peter and Judy were sitting somewhere in the audience in the courtroom, which was absolutely packed—so packed that when I walked in, Tom came to the door and escorted me down the very narrow aisle to the witness stand. The defendants all rose. I think they sang a song. I sat in the witness chair, which was as close to the jurors as you are to me now.

Q: About three feet.

Weiss: Where the jury was sitting in the jury box. She was a wonderful looking woman, African-American woman, and I think the jurors were as awed and fascinated by the choreography of the courtroom as any of us. There was silence, and I was scared, really frightened. I felt I had to take a little bit of control of the situation, so I said to the judge, “Your Honor, can we have a moment of silence in honor of Dr. [Martin Luther] King?” [Julius] Hoffman was the judge. He was very
short and he wheeled around in his chair, and he said, “The witness from the Bronx doesn’t know that I was the first northern judge to desegregate a school.” And Abbie Hoffman got up and sang “We Shall Overcome.” [laughter] It was a circus.

I had a letter given to me by a young girl, who was a survivor of the My Lai Massacre, whom I interviewed while I was in Vietnam in December ’69. I tried to read it. It was written to “Dear American Aunties,” A-U-N-T-I-E-S, which was a friendly, familiar way of speaking to women. I was stopped by the prosecution, but the jurors were fascinated. I doubt they had met anyone who had been to North Vietnam before. Not an American mother with little kids.

I spoke about Tom Hayden. I answered all the questions that I was asked. “Did I hear him speak? Did I hear him say such-and-such?” Whatever they asked me, I answered. Then I was dismissed and Tom escorted me out of the room and the defendants all rose and sang another song. The prosecution asked that my testimony be stricken from the record and it was. But I believe it’s in a book that was written about the trial. How he got what was on the cutting room floor, I don’t know, but he did. That’s the story.

Q: Did they tell you what the grounds for the dismissal might have been?

Weiss: I don’t remember if they did.
Q: I wanted to ask you about your trip to Cuba. When you were an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin, you went to Cuba in pre-Castro [Fidel Castro] days. What was that like?

Weiss: There were discount rates, I guess is the best way to put it, for students. It was pre-Castro. I went with another friend from University of Wisconsin. We stayed at a fancy hotel. I assume it was a good hotel. It was all part of that airplane ticket. We used to date the bellhops in the evening because we were college co-eds, they were young guys, and we’d go dancing and all of a sudden at midnight, they would say, “We have to go.” We didn’t understand why they had to go. This must have been 1954 or ’55. Not after ’55. We subsequently found out that the reason they had to leave us at midnight was because they were on the night duty to guard the caches of ammunition that were beginning to be collected for what would become Castro’s revolution. We had no idea that that’s what it was all about. How I found out about that—I must have learned about it subsequently.

Q: Where’s your current work?

Weiss: Right this minute?

Q: Yes. Yes, I have here the resolution about this new Vietnam program that the Defense Department is going to—this might prolong—I just got it off the Internet—it’s a critique—but this is the letter that we all signed.
Weiss: Did you sign it?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Weiss: Good for you. So, a group of people have been coming together on the telephone and on email, to do a “lessons learned from the Vietnam War” on the anniversary of the first teach-ins (Ann Arbor and Berkeley) and the first early demonstrations against the war. It was stimulated by the Department of Defense, which has a huge amount of money and a huge number of staff people working on whitewashing the U.S. position in Vietnam. And building up the heroism of the soldiers, which is fine, but without recognizing the tragedy that occurred to so many soldiers. Either they’re dead, or wounded, which may last for a lifetime, or they were exposed to Agent Orange, or they have PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. We didn’t call it PTSD then, I don’t think, but now it’s referred to that way. And the tragic loss of wonderful young people, to say nothing of the tragic loss of the million or two million civilians in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos. So, there’s going to be a positive event of learning the lessons of war. It’ll be April 30 to May 2.

Q: Of 2015?

Weiss: Yes. April 30, of course, is the date of the end of the war. There’s going to be an academic conference because people are concerned about how the Vietnam War is taught. Textbooks, teachers, training. Then there will be a civil society day. All of that is being discussed now.
Q: The critique here indicates that the program that the Pentagon is planning is not going to say much at all about the anti-war protests.

Weiss: That’s why we have to say something for ourselves. The New York Times gave it a front-page story, which was quite remarkable. The woman who wrote it is staying with the issue. We’ll see what she comes up with next.

Q: Is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

Weiss: I just had a very wonderful experience. I was inducted as an honorary member of the International Society of Women Educators that has a Greek title, Delta Kappa Gamma. I always thought it was a sorority with Greek titles, but they insist it’s a society, started by a woman in 1929. I didn’t know until after I returned to the city that the other honorary members include Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Mead, Hillary Clinton. My jaw dropped. That was lovely.

I had to “pay” for the honorary membership by giving a half-hour talk, which included a peace lesson. The audience was a hundred women, half of whom were probably retired educators and the other half of whom were primary and secondary school teachers. I practiced a peace lesson with their permission. I asked them if they were ready to learn a peace lesson and they loved it and it worked. So that was wonderful, I must say. I mean, I’ve gotten awards, but this was a rather nice award. I’m going to be given an honorary doctorate in May, which took my breath away when I was invited. Doctor of Humanities at Adelphi University. That’s quite heady, too, I must say.
Q: That’s going to be next June?

Weiss: May, yes.

Q: May. Terrific. Terrific. I want to thank you for all the time and effort you’ve put into this project.

Weiss: Well, thank you for doing it and for all the research that you did, which overwhelmed me.

Q: Well, sometimes we have people at a disadvantage because we’ve looked over things that they’ve forgotten about years and years and years and years ago and we dig up all these kinds of things that are beyond the pale of memory anymore. But thank you very much. It’s been a pleasure.

Weiss: The pleasure is mine.

Q: Terrific.

[END OF INTERVIEW]