Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

JOAN BALLAS

Interviewed by

LISA SHULKA

November 16, 2008
Northampton, Massachusetts

Narrator

Joan Ballas (b. 1956) grew up in Missoula, Montana. Raised in a Catholic family, Joan struggled with her sexual identity throughout high school. Joan moved to Chicago to pursue access to information and clinics that would offer gender reconstruction surgery, convinced this was the solution to her confusion. While in Chicago, Joan became involved in feminist newspapers and embraced the collective model the women espoused. Joan's first experience at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival introduced her to women with a variety of politics and sexual identities, opening her own eyes to her own lesbianism. Identifying herself as a radical, lesbian, feminist, separatist, Joan immersed herself in organizations and actions that catered to the demands of women's rights. She worked at the Michigan Festival for many years as well as working as an accessibility coordinator for the New England Women's Musical Retreat. Joan helped organize the first Gay Pride Rally in Hartford, CT and continued working with the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Task Force to offer community outreach and activities for the gay community. Her activism turned to the anti-nuclear movement and she joined forces with other women at the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment to protest the growing militarism of the country. Her acts of peaceful, civil disobedience at the Seneca Army Depot resulted in her arrest. Joan continued her anti-nuclear work with the Women of Faith organization where they protested the making of Trident Missile Tubes. Convicted of trespassing, Joan was sentenced to 30 days in a maximum-security prison in Rhode Island where her activism continued.

Interviewer

Lisa Shulka (b. 1967) is currently attending Smith College for an undergraduate degree in history.

Abstract

In this oral history, Joan Ballas describes her exploration of her own sexual identity through various feminist movements. This interview focuses on her work in the feminist, lesbian and anti-nuclear movements and her experiences with each. Joan's history details the personal and political struggles for women during her lifetime and demonstrates the concrete changes that have resulted from the work of women in the feminist movement.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on digital HD Sony Handycam recorder HDR-HC5/HC7. Two 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Lisa Shulka. Transcript has been received and approved by Joan Ballas.

Transcript of interview conducted November 16, 2008 with:

Joan Ballas

Northampton, MA

By: Lisa Shulka

Lisa Shulka: Ok, my name is Lisa Shulka and I am interviewing Joan Ballas. Joan's oral history of feminism and activism will be recorded for future generations in the Sophia Smith Archives at Smith College. So Joan, why don't we start at the beginning. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, maybe about your family upbringing and how that was?

Joan Ballas: I was born in Missoula, Montana in 1956. I come from a very large Catholic family and I was very much influenced by my Catholic education. I went to an all-girl's Catholic high school. And my parents— both my parents were very involved in Catholic education. My mother ran the Missoula county fair booth cooking hot dogs and hamburgers, but it was great because I could go to the fair all the time. My father also served on a lot of boards, so I grew up with parents that were very much involved in education and even though it was based on Catholicism, um, I think very much that it impressed upon me the importance of being involved. But [clears throat] during high school, or as I was growing up, I was also a tomboy and I knew there was something different about me. When I was in high school, I met a woman who was a teacher and we became lovers. But the premise was that I was (pauses) um, transsexual. And so growing up and in high school my thought was that I would someday have a sex change operation. I remember that this was at a time when trans-gendering and sex change was not well known. I read an article in Good Housekeeping about this...written by a mother. Her daughter had a sex change and I thought, That was me, that was me. So, we became lovers and investigated the parts of the country where there would be—where they had sex change programs. One of them was California and the other one was in Chicago. After I had graduated from high school we moved to

outside of Illinois for the purpose that I would start this program. We had no money. I mean, I think I left Montana with five hundred dollars in my pocket and I started working in small, odd jobs, in bookstores and things like this. My lover at the time worked in a community college so I went to community college taking courses off and on and started the program, sort of. But along the way you had to have cash and there was no support. So everything— first thing you needed was a battery of tests and you had to pay for that. So I remember the first time I traveled from outside of Chicago, into Chicago, the first time on the train. Now growing up in Montana, Chicago was a big deal. So, it was very scary for me to make that transition, but I was also intrigued by Chicago and the big city of Chicago. And um, I was also involved— I got involved with a telephone crisis line and so part of training we had people come in and one of the persons who came in was a sex therapist, a woman. And I started seeing her. She was the first person who gave me permission to be able to explore my sexuality as a lesbian. I moved in with two gay men and we started going to the bars. So my coming out as a lesbian was actually in a bar in Kenosha, WI. So, it was one of those you had to know where it was and it was kind of scary to get there —but people drank a lot— but it was still my experience of coming out. We started then going to the bars in Chicago, and I found the women's bars. And I found — one of the women's bars, I met a woman who shared with me about the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. So, I'm getting away from my family but sort of that was my transition from Missoula to Chicago which really then was where my whole exposure to radical lesbian feminist separatists came about.

Lisa Shulka: Now did you kind of separate yourself from that trans-gender identity and go more toward the lesbian identity at that point?

Joan Ballas: Yes. And I think what really helped, what really influenced that was when I went to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. It was an amazing experience. It was all women. Women were walking around naked. I could take my shirt off. I could be butch. I mean, women were doing everything and I remember sleeping on the land and feeling so safe. And feeling that connection with really strong,

powerful women. So that's what really influenced my going down the path and looking to discover more about who I was as a lesbian and rather than a transsexual. I mean, I really thought when I was in high school, I mean, that I was a man, but there wasn't really an alternative for me to think about.

Lisa Shulka: Right, exactly. Ok, lets talk about the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. You went— the first time you attended was in 1979. The festival started in '74, was it?

Joan Ballas: I think it started two years— a year before that?

Lisa Shulka: So you were really at the ground level of it. Did you see it change through the years.

Joan Ballas: Oh my goodness, it changed dramatically. I was— pretty much anything that was started by feminists or lesbians in that time was identified as a collective and even Michigan at that time was a collective so we had long, long collective meetings before and after. Um, and the two women who started, it still was a collective model. As I said, everything at that time— Olivia, was still very much a collective model. And, through the years the two women who ran it really took that from a collective model to a profit business. So you saw that transition. I mean, I could go into that quite a bit. I mean it was painful, very painful to sort of—for that model to change, because–. One of the things is that I think it was, in the late—the late 70s, they wanted to buy the land. So a whole—women throughout the country— we held fundraisers and helped raise the money for that land with the idea that it would be a collective, women's property. Well, that really didn't happen. It's now pretty much probably a, as I said, a for profit business at this time.

Lisa Shulka: During the time you were...you, worked at the festival for how many years?

Joan Ballas: Oh, uh, I would say probably four or five years.

Lisa Shulka: In what...in what capacity?

Joan Ballas: Different capacities. My lover at the time was a doctor and she worked in what was called "The Womb" so she would be in the womb and I was working somewhat associated with security. My responsibility was the communication,

which at that time, was CB radios connected to car batteries. First we would disconnect then from the cars but then we would wear down the car battery. And so eventually then I would have to go collect car batteries from around different business and we would set up CB radios at different security points and make sure that those were functioning because the women who were at the front gates were very far from the rest of the community. And men would drive by so there was often a concern about their safety and making sure they had access to communication. So we had clear nights— when we had clear nights they were brutal because clear nights there would be a lot of frost a lot of moisture and that would wreak havoc for us and the CB radios. And I eventually became a security coordinator and I had the night shift— and I'll tell you stories about that— but so I had the overnight shift and dealing with all of the interesting things that would happen at night after everyone had–

Lisa Shulka: Well, tell me about some of those interesting things that would happen at night. (Laugh)

Joan Ballas: Well, during that time there was a big issue about S/M and [pause] drugs and I mean you know. The festival started having pockets, of S/M area and the DART area and the chem-free area. Then you had to deal with the issue of, well, we have women with disabilities who were also part of the S/M community. So, I remember these two women coming up to me one night, and they were quite upset saying that a woman is getting whipped in the tent next to them. And they were in the DART area and I knew who this woman was because there wasn't [inaudible]. So I walked up to the tent and yelled her name and said, Look, its really late, can you just go to sleep. So you know, that's how I handled it. It's— the thing that happened at Michigan— a lot of things would just get blown out of proportion and huge fights. And another thing, women would come up in the middle of the night and complain that there was a man on the land. Well, there was a man on the land because someone had to come in and pump the porta-potties so you had to deal with those issues that were constant. And we also had an incidence where women who were doing a lot of drugs and things would get

really out of hand. And often times you end up taking women to the hospital and that was a long drive and you had to take them in the van and I spent a whole night and day with a woman who had OD'd and her friends had left her so a lot of, a lot of situations like that.

Lisa Shulka: Now at some point they were excluding women from the leather community or the S/M community from the festival. Did you ever have any experiences with that?

Joan Ballas: I don't think, in my time they were never excluding. In my experience what they did was set up an area that was way far away so it wasn't part of the festival. Yeah, I mean it was on the land but it was in an area where women would go there specifically for that. There were issues with petitions, women would submit petitions to exclude, or only allow women-born-women at the time and I don't know how they resolved that. But that was just starting at about the time I had moved on from the festival.

Lisa Shulka: Right, now there's the transgender issue but I think they're resolving that as well. It's change.

Joan Ballas: Yes, it is change

Lisa Shulka: Is there any memory, one memory from Michigan that stands out?

Joan Ballas: My first year I went up with some friends from Chicago and the first night concert in "The Bowl" we were, it was just an amazing experience. I remember seeing Sweet Honey in the Rock for the first time and uh, just in awe. I thought I had died and gone to heaven. So that was probably my best memory.

Lisa Shulka: Because prior to this you just had bars to go to.

Joan Ballas: Just bars. There were some concerts, you know. Meg Christian was coming around to the coffee houses but nothing like this, you know, in nature, out in the open, it was beautiful night and there was Sweet Honey in the Rock.

Lisa Shulka: Now were you still living in Chicago at this point?

Joan Ballas: Yes

Lisa Shulka: Ok, let's go back to Chicago for a minute. You had worked on some feminist newspapers. Tell me about your work on *The Blazing Star*. Why were you drawn to that paper?

Joan Ballas: Um, well, I was exploring a lot of radical, feminist politics at the time. And *Blazing Star* identified as a Marxist, humanist, feminist paper. And I'm not sure how I got involved, I can't remember exactly how I got involved, but they were calling for help, they needed women to keep the paper going. I had read it and I thought some of the articles were pretty good. I was in a Marxist study group at the time, so I was exploring radical politics. The women who had been running the paper were burnt out so they essentially wanted new women to come in or women to come in and take over the paper. So at the time I had gotten involved, a couple of other women that we were working with, we decided that we didn't really want to go with a Marxist philosophy but we'd rather go with a strong radical feminist philosophy and that's where that paper ended and we started *The Catalyst*.

Lisa Shulka: What were you experiences with that paper, *The Catalyst*?

Joan Ballas: I'll bring up the collective model again; I believe in the collective model very much. I think there is so much it has to offer but people have to be trained in truly what a collective model means and take responsibility of a collective world. And we were all just experimenting with it and we took on the term but really never knew what that meant with a collective model. For so many collectives across the country and within Chicago there was a lot of, of conflict. I think the conflict came from people, women who believed very strongly in certain— and strong disagreements and not— maybe not mature enough to find a reasonable way to resolve those without things again exploding and people getting angry. But on the other hand it was exciting. I mean. it was a lot of work. We had to get advertisers and do distribution and figure out how we're going to distribute the paper. We had a fund raiser, we cooked chili, people, women came to dance, so it was—it was ours, it was something to create and that was just so exciting that we could actually do that in Chicago. I mean, that was just exciting but exhausting.

Lisa Shulka: What was the community like in Chicago—the lesbian community. I mean, did this paper really bring women together or were you able to meet a lot of different women at this time?

Joan Ballas: Absolutely. A lot of— it gave women the opportunity to come in and participate, whether they wanted to write, whether they wanted to be involved with publication— women who were artists, poetry. I mean we, at the time what it did was to provide a forum for women to be able to see their work published when there really wasn't that opportunity. It really opened that up for women. At the time in Chicago, there was so much going on, it was so exciting. This was the peak of Holly Near and starting to do her anti-nuclear movement across the country. One of my roommates was involved in organizing a big Holly Near concert. My lover at the time who was a doctor was involved with Cook County and they were trying to close that down as a public hospital and we had rallies to go to. There was just a lot of rallies and demonstrations, a lot of, a lot of activity.

Lisa Shulka: That sounds fantastic. When did you move to Hartford?

Joan Ballas: I moved to Hartford in early '80s, probably around '79, '80. My lover got a job in Hartford to be closer to her family in New York City. And so, what was happening for me was winding down. The paper was ok, but there was a lot of fighting and issues with it. I was, I was ready to move on. And I thought there would be a lot of excitement going on in Hartford. I thought Hartford would be much a lot like Chicago, I was hoping. But that wasn't the case, so–

Lisa Shulka: Not the case? What was different?

Joan Ballas: Well, [pause] that the main thing was that there wasn't a lot of radical feminist organizing or politics in Hartford at the time. And also as a city it was very different, people they would come to work in Hartford and they would leave. I wasn't used to living in that kind of community. I was used to a vibrant city and I couldn't find work. So, the only kind of work I could find in Hartford was as an electrical drafter at the time. In Chicago, I worked for the Wrigley Gum Company; it was a gum company, I loved it. We got free gum everyday. It was a great job. (laughter) Then I moved to Hartford; I couldn't find any work except

it was either military or nuclear related so that was a real struggle for me that I could not find work that I felt morally or ethically ok about. I started— I worked for the Colt Firearms Company and they made M-16s. I worked in the military division.

Lisa Shulka: How long did you work for them?

Joan Ballas: I would say probably not more than a year. And trying to find other work and couldn't find other work. I left that company and started working for a company called Hamilton Standard and they made mid- range, air to surface missiles. So I was actually a contract so I was— I contracted with these companies, so I would try to tell the contractors don't send me to places that are nuclear or military-related and they had nothing to offer me. So that— so working at Colt firearms really brought to my attention the issue with militarism in America.

Lisa Shulka: So it actually encouraged you to do anti-nuclear activism?

Joan Ballas: Very much so. I couldn't find work and it was so—in Ct the military industry is so proliferated through everything.

Lisa Shulka: Do you remember the political atmosphere at the time. Those were the Reagan years.

Joan Ballas: [Sighing] They *were* the Reagan years. Well, [pause] it was difficult to organize in Hartford, it was very conservative— I thought very conservative at the time and— but Hartford was a city that, it was a very poor city. I mean it has— and I don't know if this has changed but it had a high infant mortality rate. And it had— it was a city of one-third white, one-third Hispanic and one-third black but there was very little cohesiveness within Hartford. So I remember that I just felt like I was in a conservative state and felt very oppressed. I wasn't out at work. I didn't feel like I could be out at work for fear of losing my job. So, at night, I would go to work with the Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Hill Center and Farmington Avenue and by day I was working at Colt Firearms.

Lisa Shulka: Let's talk about the Hartford— you worked for the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Task Force. What were there primary goals at that time?

Joan Ballas: Building community outreach. Trying to create space where people, lesbians and gays would feel safe and comfortable and trying to build a community where it was ok to be out in the community. You know, simple things like organizing dances and organizing lesbian out events were just really important at that time.

Lisa Shulka: How was the gay community in Hartford? Was it pretty closeted or–

Joan Ballas: Very closeted, very closeted. One of the exciting thing about working with the task force, we organized the first gay and lesbian pride rally in Hartford. We also worked on the gay rights bill and even though that failed the year I worked on it, but what do we have today in Hartford? We have, not only do we have gay rights, but the right to marry, so I feel that all of that was groundwork for what has happened today.

Lisa Shulka: Absolutely. You helped organize Hartford's first gay pride. Tell me about that. How large was it, was it–

Joan Ballas: It was, it was pretty exciting. We didn't have a march at the time; I think they now have a march. We were at the State House and it— like many of the things I organized— it was creating from the beginning, so the chance to make it work. It was also scary because we would have to approach the police department you know, approach publications, *Hartford Courant*, and I remember that, it wasn't this event, but I remember calling them and asking to advertise an event, a gay lesbian event and being turned down. So, you know, there were occasions where people would not want to publish— publications would not publish our events because they were gay and lesbian at the time.

Lisa Shulka: How about any negativity from the public?

Joan Ballas: Not that, not that I recall. I recall—I recall it just as joy, just an exciting time of politicizing and energizing people in Hartford who really were out in the suburbs. That was a challenge. Now, Chicago was a city where people lived in the city and you could organize people in a city a little easier than trying to bring people from the suburbs, which Hartford was very much, bringing people from the suburbs into Hartford and showing them that there was a community there that was vibrant and they could belong to.

Lisa Shulka: Ok, at the same time you were, let's see, you were at the University of Hartford?

Joan Ballas: Well, when I realized I could no longer find work that wasn't military or nuclear related I stopped doing that and started working for a feminist bookstore, *The Reader's Feast*. They had a bookstore and restaurant so I started working there waitressing and part-time manager. But knew that's not what I wanted to do the rest of my life so I started going— I went back to school to the Hartford College for Women which is a two year program. And at the time, I was working, I was doing a women's radio show at the University of Hartford. We had a radio show on Sunday night and then on Wednesday we had a women's issue program. So that's my interaction with University of Hartford.

Lisa Shulka: What issues were you mainly concerned with during the music hour?

Joan Ballas: It ran the gamut. Not only lesbian, but women's issue, pro-re productive rights issues, interviewing different organizations. I interviewed the collective of *Blood Root*, which is a feminist restaurant in Bridgeport which still exists today. I don't know if they're still a collective but they still exist today. So there was a lot of interviewing women in the community. Going to political events and taping and interviewing women there and coming back and editing them for the show

Lisa Shulka: How political did you make the program? Did you try to really push issues or really try to get women involved?

Joan Ballas: It was very political. To the extent that—I will bring in the women music hour at the point in trying to bring in new women to help produce the show. I remember there was a woman, this young woman who came in and wanted to play men's music and again this was very strong for me, a very feminist lesbian music hour and the issue for me was that we had one hour. One hour. And the rest of the time nobody was playing women's music and so it's like, we had a discussion. It's like, there are feminist men and great men's music out there but when you only have an hour, let's just devote it to women's music. You know, times have changed, I know, but there still not as much women's music that's being played on the air today. It's a whole lot better, you know we have Melissa Etheridge, we

have k.d. Lang and its not a big deal, but at the time there was no place for, for this kind of programming.

Lisa Shulka: Beside the exclusion of men, was there any other negative feedback about the s how? Did you–

Joan Ballas: We had the programmers in charge— the people in charge at the University of Hartford radio show were so supportive of our programming. I remember they did bring in a new producer and he was a little more conservative and thought, We don't need two hours. But we were able to get enough support to at least keep our two hours for the whole time of the show.

Lisa Shulka: Music seems to be a theme throughout your life. You organized the New England Musical Retreat. Tell me about that.

Joan Ballas: I got involved in that in the second year, actually. The first year I decided not to get involved with it. I knew the people organizing and I wasn't quite sure I wanted to start off for a first year. The first year they held it at a ski resort. And it was pretty impossible for women with disabilities to get around a ski resort. I remember I went to the festival and sitting in with the meeting because a lot of angry— rightly so— women with disabilities. I was a strong advocate of women—of the issue at the time and the producer came to me and said, All right, and if you have such strong— if you care about this, why don't you come join us. So I did. So I got involved as an accessibility coordinator and I think four or five years I did it, working as an accessibility coordinator. So my job was to try to make land, help make the land— I didn't build the ramps, but coordinating ramps, and accessible toilets and accessibility at stages. All across the land, to try to make it as accessible to women with a variety of disability issues as possible.

Lisa Shulka: Now did they continue it at the ski resort or did they–

Joan Ballas: Oh no, we moved it.

Lisa Shulka: (Laugh)

Joan Ballas: Yeah, we moved it. (Smiling)

Lisa Shulka: Any memories of women you saw there or any memories, or any memories that really stand out from the Women's Retreat?

Joan Ballas: I learned so much about the struggles of women, with women with disabilities and with— and made such great, strong friendships at the time. For me it was—I think for me the memory was women who could come to the land and feel safe. Feel that, that if they had physical disabilities that we would respect that and do what we could to make them comfortable and safe on the land. Women with emotional disabilities, women with all variety— food issues or that— the thing is that, I think genuinely those of us that organized really, really cared about wanting this to be accessible to as many women. Not always successful. For me my memories are driving a van back and forth between the concert area and the women with disabilities—we called it Helen's Space—just loving that, having such a good time of being there on the land and that was what I was doing at the moment.

Lisa Shulka: Were there workshops at this festival?

Joan Ballas: There were workshops. Yes. A lot, a lot of workshops.

Lisa Shulka: And they had musical performers and such?

Joan Ballas: Musical performers, they had a day stage, night stage, there were workshops, dances; we had dances after the concerts. It was very much modeled like Michigan, but on a smaller scale.

Lisa Shulka: Any differences from Michigan that you can recall?

Joan Ballas: I think the main difference is that— how do I say this—those of us who organized it were not savvy or didn't care to take it, to take it on a grander scale as Michigan, as Michigan women did.

Lisa Shulka: You weren't concerned with profit.

Joan Ballas: Right, right. And the women who were producing Michigan were also— had been big time associated with Olivia and nationwide women producers so for them, that was a lot of their focus. We weren't focused on— none of us had, I think, that grand scheme in our minds that we wanted to make this for profit. We just wanted to produce this event, so I think that was one of main difference.

Lisa Shulka: I am so interested in your anti-nuclear work. Lets talk about the Seneca Women's Peace Encampment. Tell me how you became involved in that. How did you hear about it initially?

Joan Ballas: Well, it was— I had heard stories about the Greenham Common Peace Encampment going on in Europe. And to me, women who would camp across from an army depot and that would be news to me that was— women who took any action against militarism, violence and would gain national or international recognition for it was significant. So, when I heard about what was going on in Seneca I — I had lost my job, working for Colt firearms, got laid off, knew I didn't want to do that, and maybe it was a way to maybe cleanse my soul, but I— it was right before Michigan so the opportunity to go to Seneca and live on the land and to participate in that and then go to Michigan was a wonderful thing. Of course, it cost me a relationship in the meantime, because that was my focus and I sort of a let go of all my other responsibilities in life and just went to Seneca and lived off the land.

Lisa Shulka: How symbolic was it to be near Seneca Falls, the birthplace of feminism.

Joan Ballas: It was incredibly symbolic, you know, to be in that area and then to be right next to a military base and the land— Seneca Women's Peace Encampment was just farmland, a barn, there was a house, but we pretty much built everything we needed. That was, women built a small building where they could have performance. I think I was a little more radical on the land then many of the women coming from— other peace activists. For me it was a lot like Michigan, so I was walking around without my shirt on and having a great time and I think there was a lot more conservative women coming, but that was ok, you know. There was a mixture of women, a variety of women. And you know preparing for women to come to the land, preparing the meals, preparing the food areas, so you know, that we could have storage of the food. I mean, all of that was just what I was involved in.

Lisa Shulka: You did it all from scratch, though, all the women.

Joan Ballas: (Nodding head yes)

Lisa Shulka: What were the goals of the encampment? What were your primary— what did you guys want to accomplish there?

Joan Ballas: We wanted to call attention to the Seneca Army Depot as a militia base that that was one of the military bases— that was the arms race. It symbolized the arms race for us. This is at a time when Reagan was influencing a change in military— in our military politics. Going from a— going to a first strike position, so that really was changing our position in the world—that we would now strike first if we thought someone would attack us. So it was way to call attention to the Reagan arms race and Seneca was the symbol for that.

Lisa Shulka: So what forms of civil disobedience did you do there?

Joan Ballas: Well, the first time, what we did was in the middle of the night we crossed over, we had to crawl over one of the fences. And now women had been doing different kinds of civil disobedience. Some women had crawled up one of the water towers and sprayed painted there and that was on the army base. Our goal was just get onto the army base and see how far we could get. Just to, you know, to trespass. You know, they were patrolling the base and they had helicopters, so a group of us, we crawled over the fence and they had helicopters now searching for us. And we were arrested. And at the time— I know we couldn't even do this today probably because of 9/11, but at the time we were then taken to— they had build, they had taken one of the army barracks and built— I guess little cell areas, holding pens with chicken wire. They took us there and processed us and then let us go probably about five o'clock in the morning about as far away from the Seneca Peace Women's Encampment— so we had to walk. They were trying to make our life as miserable as we were trying to make their life miserable.

Lisa Shulka: How many women were detained?

Joan Ballas: Well at that time I think there was just six of us. What they were doing at Seneca was— the law enforcement, they had determined if you get arrested once you get a warning, if you get arrested twice you will then be prosecuted. So it wasn't until the— we had received a warning at the time. Then they had the main protest. I think Bella Abzug and there were a number of other prominent women,

politicians who came and we had the huge march and rally toward the base and I hadn't really decided if I was going to trespass then, but I decided to trespass again and got arrested. So that night there was probably about several hundred of us. So they were going and taking pictures and that was when a group of us, another, probably about a dozen, were found out that this was the second time we had been arrested. So we were held a lot longer than everyone else and were since tried and I think that trial, I remember the outcome; it was just a fine. There was no, there was no jail time for that.

Lisa Shulka: How did the local community view the encampment. There was —a newspaper at the time referred to the women as the "witches of Seneca." Did you encounter any negativity from the local community? Any bad vibes?

Joan Ballas: Um, no I don't remember that. Because at that time— what I was really impressed with was women in the community were— I mean the Seneca women, were really doing a lot of positive outreach in the community and— with education, and learning from past mistakes that we really need to do the outreach in the community, to try to educate the people in the community: This is not about you, we're not attacking you, we're not attacking your jobs, this is not about you. This is about the militarism of our country. So I remember that was an important part of it. It wasn't that we were just going there to do civil disobedience; we were there to do education in the community as well. So there were women who were active in that as well.

Lisa Shulka: Now in '83, you became involved in the Women of Faith peace movement. Now how did you— was this— did this lead from Seneca?

Joan Ballas: Yeah. When I came back from Seneca, I thought, I wanted to do something more at home and met up with a group of women; we called ourselves the Women of Faith because we had different spiritualities and— oh, now I remember how I got involved in that. I went to one of their peace rallies and someone had done a demonstration on BBs. If you ever get the chance— what it is, is that you start off by dropping one BB which might represent Hiroshima. And you drop another, which might represent Nagasaki. And then you drop more BBs to represent, you

know, how many trident submarines might have. And then eventually you have hundreds of BBs that represent the nuclear arms that America and the world had. And you got, from that, from that little activity, to me, I was overwhelmed by how many nuclear weapons the world had and how many time over we could be destroyed. That to me was just [pauses] overwhelming.

So from there I got involved with the Women of Faith. There were Christian women, or nuns, or sisters— what they called themselves. There were two women here, Frances Crowe and Victoria Safford who were part of the Unitarian Community and I identified as a radical, lesbian, separatist, feminist and I represented that spirituality because to me, I did feel a very spiritual connection. So we all had our different— we were all coming from different places of spirituality, but we had such respect from one another. We had planned to call attention to the Trident Submarine, which again was a representation or symbolic of the first strike position that America chose to go with. We— our act was, we trespassed on an electric boat shipyard where they were building Trident Submarines.

Lisa Shulka: Where was this?

Joan Ballas: Rhode Island. And we cut into the fence and we—at that time our activities, were— we took yarn and weaved around the missile tubes; we spray painted them with big ghosts. Everything we did was symbolic. The weaving of the web was a symbol of — there was a book at the time, and I forget the woman who wrote it, but talked very much about the web of life. And then the spray painting was symbolic of when people are evaporated by nuclear weapons. What remains is the sort of the outline of their, of their body. We sang songs and just waited to get arrested. And we were arrested and taken to trial

Lisa Shulka: How many women were involved in this?

Joan Ballas: Think there were eight of us

Lisa Shulka: So you were able to sneak on the boat— trespass

Joan Ballas: This was a shipyard, it wasn't a boat, but it was a shipyard where they had —there in the boat yard. Ironically, we did not do any physical damage to the— it was spray painting and weaving yarn.

Lisa Shulka: Right, it was mainly symbolic you didn't, like, destroy anything. So, you were arrested and what was the outcome of your arrest.

Joan Ballas: Well, we were detained and we were charged with trespassing and given trials so we all — well Francis Crowe and I were given the same— well, they decided to try us separately. At first. I went first and Francis Crowe went after me. I went to trial. I was the first one to go to trial. We decided to represent ourselves, which pissed the judge off. The judge was very angry at us anyway, there was a lot of anger. The fact that we decided to represent ourselves just compounded that anger.

Lisa Shulka: Why do you think he was so angry?

Joan Ballas: Because we were women doing stupid things.

Lisa Shulka: In his view.

Joan Ballas: Yes, in his view. So, we wanted to represent ourselves. We had expert witnesses; we wanted to bring— to talk about, you know, the Nuremberg Trials, try to justify our actions as civil disobedience. He would have none of that. It was just evidence-based. So we couldn't present our case in the way we really wanted to. But we were prepared for that. So I went first. I chose my own jury. For me, I knew I was going to be convicted, so my whole goal was to choose people on the jury that would be very challenged by having to go through this trial. So, my jury foreman was a very conservative white man and I mean, I purposely did not want to exclude him because I really wanted this whole–the whole thing was to be about challenging people's views on our military, nuclear proliferation. That was the whole goal, so I knew I was going to get convicted. So the whole purpose then was about education throughout the whole trial.

Lisa Shulka: That is so brave. I mean, your goal was to educate.

Joan Ballas: Right. And, you know, at the time, this was challenging for my family, my very conservative family back in Montana. And, you know, for me, the choice to do

something to this level, this serious level of civil disobedience was taking full responsibility of my actions and to accept the consequences of my action. I think that's very important when people consider civil disobedience, to accept the consequences and not try to get out of it. We didn't want to get out of it. That wasn't our goal. We could have probably had a lawyer. My family was saying, Why don't you get a lawyer? You can get a lawyer and I'm sure they can get you out of this, but that wasn't our goal. We were willing to take it to as far as it would go and that would be accepting the consequences of jail time.

Lisa Shulka: Did your family come out to see the trial?

Joan Ballas: No, no they didn't. The way I came out to my parents about the trial was I sent them a tape and spoke to them about my beliefs, but I also played that BB thing, so they could hopefully get a sense of the magnitude of what I was feeling. They were pretty supportive. My mother was pretty supportive of me; it challenged them.

Lisa Shulka: So, it was a way to educate them as well.

Joan Ballas: Right, yeah

Lisa Shulka: Tell me about the— what was the outcome of the trial?

Joan Ballas: The outcome of the trial was Francis and I were both sentenced to 30 days at the maximum security prison in Cranston, Rhode Island.

Lisa Shulka: Maximum security? [nervous laugh] Do you think that was above and beyond what they should have–

Joan Ballas: Well, some interesting stories about that. We caused a lot of problems for them in prison. We brought attention to the conditions in the women's prison. They didn't want us there. So, eventually the other women who went to trial at the very end, they weren't going into maximum, they were going into minimum. The thing about it, at some point along the way, as I was serving my thirty days, my father was having his 70th birthday. So what I did, I—having an appeal, so I appealed my case so I could go home and be with my family for my father 70th b-day and that was really important as well. My mother had planned a celebratory mass, so we went to mass and behind the altar–now I'm not Christian, but it was

very important for me to be with my family— but behind the altar of the mass was the symbol of the bombs to doves. So for me it was very symbolic to be there. At some point I want to talk about what was hard about this whole, this whole event in my life, was I had— I wanted to do this level of civil disobedience because I wanted to— it was very important for me not to compromise. I didn't want to compromise my ethics and my beliefs. I thought the one action that would not be compromised. I was so wrong. This mass was a good example of that. The priest talked about my civil disobedience, which was very exciting for me. And another chance to educate people about what was going on in the arms race. But he equated my action with those who were fighting against abortion. So, here, I couldn't stand up in mass and go, No, no, no, you cannot use my action to support the anti-abortion movement. I just remember sitting there thinking, Awww [groaning]. It was so painful that my action could be used in support of something I am so against. [Pause] So, there were compromises there. Compromises in prison, with behavior, with following the rules. As I said, we called attention to the conditions of the prison, and what was hard for me about being in prison was that the —in some ways, we were used—it was like we were there for the right reason and women who— and probably women of color— were there for the wrong reasons. That was uncomfortable for me to feel that difference. And humbling. Humbling to be around— to be friends with women, other prisoners. One of the women I got closest to was a lifer there. For life. She was an amazing woman. Marta. She was a little uncomfortable to talk about why she was there, but she was there because, when she was in a drug-induced state, she had murdered one of her children. She knew it, she knew. I mean, she lived with the pain. It was— she was a beautiful person. She had helped start drug rehab in the prison. She was someone who was living with the consequences of her actions. And we became friends. I remember, I talked about the compromises—I got so tired of having to stand up outside my cell and follow the rules. It was very hard for me. So one day, when they told me to stand in front of our cells, I turned my back, I faced the wall. And for that I got two nights. It was

just more and more I was getting pushed, like, I am not ok with being controlled like this.

Lisa Shulka: Explain to me what "two nights" means.

Joan Ballas: That means isolation. You are locked up in your cell for two days. That means you don't get out, your food is brought to you. And what came about was, another event happened— was that they were going to move us to minimum security. Well, that was a privilege. And I only had a short time left and there were other women who had been in that prison a lot longer who were dying— were really wanting to get into the minimum. So I refused to go. By that action, they put me in solitary for the rest of my time in prison. I think I was in solitary for about seven days. So I would get to go out at night. After everyone else was locked up, I could go in the rec room and get books and that's when I could take a bath or shower. I remember one night I was taking a bath and I think Marta got out to use the bathroom. She came in and walked up to me and just gently gave me a kiss. It wasn't a sexual thing. It was just an acknowledgment and I remember Marta that way. And I remember the pain that a lot of us would have liked to have sort of gone in there and rescue those women. I was not in a position to do much except call attention to their conditions. But again it was a compromise. Everything about that act was a huge compromise of many things in my life.

Lisa Shulka: I'm just about ready to run out of time, so maybe we could take a short break and then go back. I would love to hear more about the [tape ends]

End Tape 1

Begin Tape 2

Lisa Shulka: Ok, we're back to recording. Joan, we were talking about your time in a maximum-security prison and you wanted to read something to us.

Joan Ballas: Yes. When I was convicted, I had a chance to make a statement in front of the court and this is what I read and I'd like to read it now: Statement of Joan M.

Ballas at sentencing January 6th, 1984. The day after I was found guilty I was leaving work in my car. I noticed the car in front of me had a bumper sticker. It said, "Let's kill 696 Russians." I wanted to get out and ask the driver, did you mean 696 Russian babies? 696 Russian children? 696 Russian women? 696 Russian men? 696 Russian soldiers? Or just 696 Russian government officials? I'm beginning to understand how slowly the German people became indoctrinated to participate in the extermination of the Jews. And how the world could deny for so long that the Holocaust was happening. I have worked in a place that builds M-16 machine guns to protect our country, but in my heart I knew that too many of these guns are being used to kill children. I'm beginning to understand how Germans could watch out their windows as the Jews marched onto the camps. The German government was doing these acts to build a stronger Germany. We are paying taxes to fund this, to build a stronger America. I understand how the American people depend on their jobs to feed their families to build their American dream. I hear the people around me, at work in the stores, my friends to acknowledge that there is not much they believe they can do. They are watching out their windows watching. But it's not the Jews marching by but all of us. When I acted with my seven other friends I acted without malice or mischievous intent, but with the intent not to stand and watch my world be destroyed by men in power – the men who control the buttons. This court has not allowed my testimony as to why I participated on October 3rd for fear of the truth. This court is the example of power institutions that exist to control the people. It does not allow us to speak, does not allow us to show others that the Holocaust has begun. The Holocaust has begun; it has begun in Greenham Common; it has begun in Groton; it has begun at Quonset Point. The D5 missile tubes are first strike weaponry to make America strong. And our chambers, to be gassed to destroy our cities to destroy our earth. There is no guilt in my mind and heart on my participation on October 3rd. There is only compassion, fear anger and love. Compassion for the women I acted with, anger at the ones who refuse to see their participation in building the weapons of destruction of our holocaust; fear for the

children, the children of my family Reg, Randy, Rena, Ryan, Joanna, Ramona, Joseph and Susan, Michael, Kevin, Christopher and Nicky, Aaron and Andrew, Julia and our newest member, Sarah. And love, love of our planet, the beauty and the creation we must never take for granted, but have. But have created ways of total destruction. There is no guilt I fear for my action but there is my responsibility to say no. No to the court system, no to the patriarchy that stands with the guns marching us down the roads, through the towns, to the gray winter – the winter of our death. I have faith; faith in my friend Francis Crowe who I'm so honored to be standing here with today and with all of the other women who understand the life of the earth and who understand the pain of our tears. There is no plea for compassion in this court, do what you will. You will have your conscience to live with and I have mine. Maybe somewhere there is compassion still. I even have faith that what happens here in this courthouse will bring hope to those who look out their windows and have seen people marching past. It is now 3 minutes to midnight. When the bombs strike will you remember this trial? Will you remember the silence of Francis Crowe? Will you remember the undeniable courage of the true peacekeepers, the non-violent ones who presented themselves bodily, who endure the unjust prosecution to speak the truth? The spirit is here she is all over the land as the song goes "We are old women, we are new women, we are the same women stronger than before."

Lisa Shulka: Thank you that was beautiful. How did the judge react to that?

Joan Ballas: After the trial Francis [Crowe] and I went through, they decided not to let them go individuality but bring them all together. I think that we, Francis and I, by standing up, they realized that that we were there accepting whatever was going to come about and they could not intimidate us. And I think that there was a change; they were just not going to be able to intimidate us.

Lisa Shulka: Yeah, you came right out and said you were not asking for leniency or anything. Those were your beliefs. Want to talk anymore about prison? You talked about Marta–

Joan Ballas: Well, I was the only lesbian going to prison at the time, as one of the women of faith, so my experience was a little bit different in that I had more of a personal connection with a number of women in prison because of the kinds of bonds that women make in prison. I remember I found a Rita Mae Brown book, the tennis book, I forget what it was called, and I was reading it at the time and there was a young woman in prison and she was identified as a lesbian— or gay. In that time it's not really lesbians, but there was more of a gay identification and so we had a chance to talk about—I mean, I could talk about Rita Mae Brown being a lesbian and for many of these women— lesbian, feminist, strong women, political women— they had never really ever met such women, so for me that was a positive experience, to be there along with them and to share with them that there were other ways to be strong women.

Lisa Shulka: Still talking about anti-war work, speaking of like today do you think there is adequate protest against the current wars? How do you feel activism is being played out today?

Joan Ballas: I've given this a lot of thought. Since then we've had Nicaragua and a lot of other conflicts and today with Iran and Iraq. I'm not sure how to answer that honestly. [long pause] I think why it's hard for me to answer is that I no longer am involved in protests as I was back then [pause] Maybe there isn't a need for that kind of protesting at this point, because of — I think as a nation we are much more aware of the dangers of the nuclear movement. I mean, my focus was primarily the nuclear movement, because I felt the proliferation of nuclear arms would really totally destroy the world. I mean, that was my major concern at the time. I think that that it would be— it would be really wonderful to see people out on the streets protesting Iran, I mean the Iraq war. The hard part about that is that we so damaged each other by— in protesting the wars, how that meant on our— the people who serve in the military and I have family that serve in the military. And I'm very proud of that. I'm not against security forces; I want to be secure and protected. So, that's a hard— I'm not coming up with an answer because I don't know. I don't know what the answer is, and I think at the time

when I was young, it was that I didn't know an answer, so my answer is to protest. And I think that's the best I can answer right now.

Lisa Shulka: Do you think it's because we no longer have this everyday fear that the bomb is going to drop on us?

Joan Ballas: Right.

Lisa Shulka: I remember the 80s and it was this sense of fear— TV programs about it and shows—about what to do and it was really in a sense like the 50s again

Joan Ballas: Right. Absolutely. And that may be it. In that the Iraq war is complicated. Just protesting against it isn't going to solve it. I think that politicians are struggling to find a resolution and they know that so many of us are against it. And I'm living in Massachusetts. I mean, at the time I lived in Connecticut where I felt like I didn't— I mean, I wasn't in a community that was so supportive. So part of that was living in Hartford, living in a strong military state and now I'm here in Northampton, I mean Massachusetts, and I feel like I'm in a community that is of like-minded people that we care so much. And that our activism is also through our votes and you hit it right on is that there was such a fear of the destruction that could happen.

Lisa Shulka: Well, at this point is there anything else you want to discuss? Any memories that come up or any–

Joan Ballas: You asked me about my family and you know while I was in prison, I received so much, so many letters and postcards from a lot of people in the community and I remember seeing a letter from my nephew who was in the National Guard. And he was in the National Guard because he needed the GI bill you know, because he needed the money to go to school. And in the letter he was asking me and hoping me not to be angry with him for serving and that was a very important dialogue— letter from him. You know I think to this day I have a good relationship— to the children I mentioned in my letter— my nieces and nephews who understand or who were exposed to an adult in their life taking an action. And that letter was very important to me. It meant to me that what I had done mattered. You know? And I think that having this chance to speak with you brings up a lot of those

memories and a lot of the times and a lot of the hard work. And I want to appreciate in having this chance to participate in this is the hope that all of what I did— but all of us who did all that work made a difference and makes a difference today. And today we are dealing with proposition 8 being defeated in California and I had a chance to speak with my niece who is living out in California who is right now sort of— is discovering more about her identity than she's ever had the chance to and asked me about the Proposition 8 and what I thought about that. And I'm very encouraged that people are protesting, but I'm also— I think throughout all the years of working, throughout all the organizing that I did, is coming to the conclusion that change happens slowly.

Lisa Shulka: Yes

Joan Ballas: It took a number of years in Connecticut for the gay rights bill to come up and to be defeated. And the same thing here in Massachusetts— so that something comes up that is very important for gay rights or gay and lesbian rights or human rights, just because it's defeated does not necessarily mean that that's the end of it. To me, that's the progression that people change slowly and I think that we are there today. The fact that Obama was elected president and I think this is — his election as president is very relative of me today. I was first very supportive of Hilary Clinton because you know, women first, but I had a chance to travel to Chicago last week and what I experienced there is that I really think that this election has had a profound impact across America and whether we are dealing with issues of racism, or sexism or homophobia that each time we succeed at breaking down a barrier in one of those oppressions, we are slowly breaking down a barrier of all of the oppressions. So I am not discouraged that Proposition 8 has failed and I am not discouraged by those pundits that say, Well, the black vote that really caused the defeat. I think this is all a progression and we will see progress in California and across the country with gay and lesbian rights and now more people of color having a sense that they are now part of America. I was at an event when an American flag was brought in and we were singing the national anthem and for the first time in my life I felt proud to be an American. And

during my years of working as a gay and lesbian— you know supporting gay and lesbian rights and organizing and anti-nuclear— and I felt that it was my American duty to do that; I didn't feel proud to be an American as I do today because of all the progress we made.

Lisa Shulka: Do you think people now are getting a new found sense of patriotism?

Joan Ballas: Absolutely. And such a beautiful sense of patriotism to be proud to be an American because we can elect a man of color because a woman can run for president because all of these things are possible that gay and lesbians can marry— okay just in 2 states, but 2 states— we've come along way and I think we are making for me, a tremendous amount of progress because it takes time for people to change.

Lisa Shulka: Do you think you will see it in your lifetime gay marriage across the country?

Joan Ballas: I don't know and I don't know if that matters and I say that because I mean, I think that's just one aspect of human rights that needs to happen. There are so many other just as important issues across this country that we need to be supportive of, not just gay and lesbian rights, but a woman's right to choose and all of these rights that we need to continue—to make sure are safe and we make progress on.

Lisa Shulka: What is the number one issue for you today or is that too broad of a question? Are there too many?

Joan Ballas: Well, [pause] Wow that's a tough one. I guess I could say healthcare. I mean not for me but— well the environment. I mean, one of the reasons why I got involved in the nuclear movement was the fear of the destruction of the planet. With what Bush has done I think the environment would be my major concern for— and a concern that plays out with me making every day choices about how I live and how I consume— so I would say the environment.

Lisa Shulka: Do you think a lot of people are inspired nowadays because of the environment? A lot of people seem to be moving toward a green life.

Joan Ballas: I do and I think that you know, why there may not be a call of arms for a major protest is because I think people in their day to day lives are struggling with these

issues whether it's the environment or health care or, you know, the war. For me what has changed is that in my every day life I can participate fully and I can be out as a normal person. I don't feel like I have to fight these issues in a radical way like I used to but I can fight them with my voting, with my contributions. Just being whoever I am, wherever I am, and to me, that's probably as much as I wanted when I left Montana as anything in the whole world, is just to be who I am and struggle and be part of the fight with my neighbors.

Lisa Shulka: Do you feel as if we have more of a global community now. I mean communication is so easy and that we can do it individually but still feel we are part of a larger group.

Joan Ballas: Absolutely. I'm on Facebook with my nieces and it gives me a chance to sort of build that relationship with them and they are starting to ask me questions about how— what I believe, you know and I'm able to share more and more with them— and I haven't been able to do that certainly, not with my brothers and sisters; they don't want me to talk about politics. But my nieces and nephews want to talk about this stuff with me. They are— they're interested in it.

Lisa Shulka: It's a new generation.

Joan Ballas: It is a new generation

Lisa Shulka: Anything else you'd like to share?

Joan Ballas: Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Lisa Shulka: Thank you, Joan.

Joan Ballas: You know, it's going to Smith and at the time, I was so honored to be at Smith. 'Cause you know, I never thought that I would get to go to Smith. For me to be at Smith and to be part of that community was so important. And still sort of keeping in track what's going on at Smith. I think my fear was that the women at Smith were losing— or not—not caring about women of history, not caring what women have done in the past. When I started coming out as a lesbian, I worked at bookstores; I absorbed everything I could about lesbianism, radical lesbianism, feminism. I would buy the music, you know, I would buy the books, whatever I could. I was just a sponge. To me, I never even realized this world existed.

When I discovered radical, lesbian separatists I was like, Wow! You know, and that there are still women, women at Smith who still care about feminist politics or care about the past. I am very pleased about that. That to me, it recognizes the work that I participated in, that many of us have done, is valued and will be valued as well as the generation— and of feminist or strong women today. Whatever contributions are made, the next generation will want to know about. I think its important as women to want to know about us and the women before us who struggled and paved the way for the opportunity we have today.

Lisa Shulka: Yeah, there's still a sense of progression and you must know the past in order to move forward. How was it at Smith, just to go back to that for a moment. Was there a nice feminist group there? Did you fit in with the feminist environment? Was there one? What year was it again, I'm sorry?

Joan Ballas: It was '91.

Lisa Shulka: Ok

Joan Ballas: I [pause] A little bit of one. Not [pause] I remember an action I took, right or wrong, but there was, one of the professors had, in the course catalog, they had written— this was one of the sociology professors— had written— it was a course on deviant behavior. In the course description, she was tying together or linking together deviant behavior, like criminal and sexual deviance and also in this paragraph identified homosexuality. And I went to the professor, I really did. I was very angry that all that we had fought for— in the catalog and linking— putting homosexuality in a text of deviant behavior. Of course, the liberal view: Well, what I want students to do is take the course and to know that homosexuality is not deviant behavior— and that's ok. I understood that but the thing that Smith gave me was the opportunities to go out and challenge this kind of— this content. And provided a forum of discourse. What I love about Smith and I think is so important today, is an environment of discourse. If you are— if you find something offensive, go after it, protest. Get angry about it. I think as women we need to know, we need to learn how to be angry and be aggressive when something— and event occurs or something in our being in our core that

speaks to us and says, This is not ok, this is not ok. I did a lot of that and its really healthy. And sometimes it wasn't as truly politically incorrect as I might have defined it, but at least it was an environment to be able to speak out when I believe something was not politically correct. It was about learning, it was about communicating in an environment that offers that. So I encourage women; go for it. If you think its wrong, speak out against it and then have the dialogue. The interesting thing about that though— I went back years later for a reunion and this very conservative looking woman comes up to me and identifies herself and says, I just to let you know, you supported Republican— I was on the Smith student council at the time—and there were women who wanted to form the Republican club and I supported it. Because I think it was important to have those kinds of clubs and have that kind of dialogue. She came to me and wanted to thank me for my support. So, I was like, well, I guess that was a good thing; it was a good thing. You have to have that kind of dialogue— you cannot have— I don't think its healthy for Smith to be just supportive of radical women, of radical, lesbian separatist, or however you define it. Just as supportive of just as staunch conservative religious right, it is in those relationships that you build that really impacts change. Then, when people are not threatened by you, but are motivated by compassion for you. Really, that's when change happens. That's when people of California will vote for Proposition 8. When their neighbors and their friends talk to them about how it hurts them, that's what's going to really impact change.

Lisa Shulka: It's all about educating the other side. You need to hear both sides in order to do that.

Joan Ballas: [nodding in agreement]

Lisa Shulka: Anything else?

Joan Balls: [nodding no]

Lisa Shulka: This was amazing. Thank you so much.

Joan Ballas: You're welcome.

Lisa Shulka: Oh my goodness. We've covered a lot of ground. Anything else you want to say. I mean, we've covered a lot, I don't want to put you out.

Joan Ballas: This has been my life. Thank you for letting me share it and the chance to go back and sort of, go back to my history and rethink the things I was involved in and put them in context with today. Which is so exciting.

Lisa Shulka: And you can see the changes; clear changes that we see today.

Joan Ballas: We have. Again I think the profound impact of the Obama election has had on this country, which is an accumulative of all of the work, all of the organizing that people have done in many different ways. That Obama would get up there on the night of his speech acknowledge, straight and gay and lesbians, to me, was huge. And also people with disabilities. All of those things, you know, it was right there in that moment, an acknowledgment of work that many of us have done over the years.

Lisa Shulka: Fantastic. [pause] All right. Camera is off.